

**Classic Poetry Series**

**James Matthews**  
**- poems -**

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## James Matthews(29 May 1929)

James Matthews, poet, writer and publisher, has produced seven books of poetry, a collection of short stories, a novel and an anthology of poetry which he edited. Most of his work was banned under the previous government and was translated and published overseas. For 23 years he was denied a passport and was placed in detention from September to December 1976. Solitary confinement was widely used during the apartheid years; its purpose being to disorient, to dehumanise, to undermine the detainee's sense of self-identity.

James Matthews waged a struggle against this agenda with the one weapon the jailers couldn't take away from him - his ability to turn words into poems. In 1980 Matthews participated in the Frankfurt BookFair, and in 1982 he participated in the Cultural and Resistance Conference in Gaborone. He was awarded a Fellowship at Iowa University, U.S.A. and was the Founding member of the Vakalisa Art Association and Founding member and Patron of the Congress of South African Writers.

James Matthews is the first Black person to have established an art gallery (Gallery Afrique) in South Africa, and is the first Black to have established a publishing house (BLAC Publishing House 1974 - 1991). The publishing house closed in 1991 due to constant harassment by the previous government. Matthews is the recipient of the Woza Afrika Award (1978), Kwaza Honours List - Black Arts Celebration, Chicago, U.S.A. (1979), and the Freeman of Lehrte and Nienburg, Germany (1982).

### **<b>Awards</b>**

Woza Afrika Award (1978)

Kwaza Honours List - Black Arts Celebration, Chicago, U.S.A. (1979)

Freeman of Lehrte and Nienburg, Germany (1982).

National Order, South African government (2004)

# Bartholemew

John Eric Morcambe died  
and with him 29.8 million  
of the nation, as was the ratings  
that Christmas special  
he was special, ratings don't lie  
Heart attacks and heart bypasses  
he was the epitome of success  
and none of it grudged, not like today.  
The nation still mourns because his  
Christmas shows are still shown.  
Good show, good Christmas  
Bad show, bad Christmas  
that's how the festive season was judged  
that is a lot of pressure.  
I suppose heart attacks were inevitable  
there weren't many bad shows  
he tried fly fishing to relax  
too little too late, he was a performer  
and fish don't clap.  
I feel for the family, having to share,  
I don't know what that could be like.  
I couldn't do it, I couldn't begin to understand.

May 1984, I was Eleven.

02/04/02

James Matthews

# The Midnight Hour

the midnight hour  
has a special quality  
a stillness of graveyards  
after hours  
am I the only one  
alive to hear the dead  
astir in their grave?  
perhaps, I am dying  
and now aware  
only when the midnight hour  
had passed  
will my spirit depart  
to take solitary walks  
along the stars  
and rest in the moon's crescent  
sipping moondew  
from translucent goblet  
seeking traces of others  
who had wandered this way  
ears strain to capture  
echoes of conversations  
of the past  
refreshed, i continue passage  
along heaven's breadth  
dawn finds me  
blanket-wrapped entombed  
on the cement floor  
of my cell

James Matthews