HE IMPETUS BEHIND THIS BOOK for the editors was to focus a full-length study on Lewis Nkosi, the South African writer exiled from South Africa for thirty years. One of the few surviving Drum journalists of Sophiatown of the 1950s, Nkosi has been a constant, if faintly heard, voice in literary discussions, both in South Africa and abroad. As a writer, he has achieved that brave crossover from critical to creative writing, the results of which then stand to be judged by his own exacting standards. His oeuvre is unusually diverse, including as it does plays, novels, short stories, critical essays and reviews, poetry, and even a libretto. For these individual reasons, combined with a sense that there is at present in South Africa a nostalgic mood that harks back to the Drum days, and even the Sophiatown days (witness the recent film on this era, plus Lionel Rogosin’s book on the making of Come Back Africa, a film whose script was co-written by Nkosi), it appears that Lewis Nkosi’s time might finally have arrived locally.

In an attempt to provide both a critical perspective on Nkosi and a source-book useful to researchers, the present volume contains both commissioned chapters by academics currently engaged with Nkosi’s work and a section that reprints important critical essays by Nkosi, together with an extensive bibliography and timeline for this writer. These last two sections gather together, as in a jigsaw puzzle, pieces of Nkosi’s prolific writing-output; given the scattered and ephemeral nature of many of his publications over four decades and as many continents, this has been a daunting yet rewarding task.

Still Beating the Drum is not proffered as the definitive conspectus on Lewis Nkosi, but as a first step in assessing the importance of his writing over a good number of years against the tectonic shifts in South African political history – his is a voice that has been critical and criticized; it has not always been an easy one to listen to, but the fact that it has endured and continues to speak gives the literary critic ample scope for a timely consideration of what he has had to say to us collectively.