ARTIFICE AND SIGNIFICATION IN SOUTH AFRICAN ENGLISH POETRY

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by

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Abstract

This thesis examines contemporary South African Poetry in English. South African post-Sharpeville poetry is fraught with peculiarities of style, form and subject-matter, and the thesis primarily focusses on revealing how the poets' techniques bring out the messages. The approach will in the main be both centripetal and centrifugal, and depth of coverage may in some instances compromise breadth of coverage, or vice versa. Special attention is given to the poetry of Oswald Mtshali, Sipho Sepamla, Wopko Jensma and Peter Horn. Space and time constraints have imposed some limitations as to the inclusion or non-inclusion of poets' works, and consequence has not been the sole consideration.

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INTRODUCTION

South African poetry is inexhaustibly diverse, and its range is as wide as the corpus of the poets is huge. The seventies and the eighties have witnessed an unprecedented escalation of interest in writing poetry by both black and white South Africans. The common denominator of the poetry written during this period is a proclivity to counter the political agenda and social status quo put in place by the South African establishment. Consequently, a discussion of this period that ignores the inherent socio-political realities will be wanting in many respects.

The utilitarian value of South African poetry is usually overlooked, and the craftmanship of the poets is often underrated. The reasons for this are obvious. In evaluating African poetry, critics apply Eurocentric standards that not only miss the boat but are also dependent on an entirely different frame of reference. When Tim Couzens says "to understand a poem we must understand it in its context", [1] he is thoroughly convinced about the uniqueness of South African post-Sharpeville poetry. The majority of the poetry produced since then is overtly or covertly political in context and overtly or covertly radical in tone. Notwithstanding the fact that Mtshali, Sepamla, Jensma, and Horn have their individual stylistic idiosyncrasies, their poetry displays strong affinities in thematic concerns and is therefore mutually inclusive.

The poetry discussed in this work is characterized by seriousness and purposive direction. Suffice it to say that this is by no means "Grub Street poetry",[2] but poetry that contains aesthetic and epistemological value. The poetry is thoroughly indigenized, and its primary objective is aptly summed up by Mongane Serote in a poem called "There will be a better time":

> and from the dark of the past we create a better time
> bright like a brand new day
> a day we make
> a better time
> ah
> there will be a better time made by us.[3]

Serote is contemporaneous with the poets discussed in this study, and his poetic philosophy marks an artistic, philosophical and aesthetic confluence that unifies a salmagundi of their views vis-à-vis the South African socio-political reality. These poets are all characterized by an unqualified aspiration to facilitate the establishment of a new dispensation whose primary focus is the creation of a new, just and human-dignity oriented system of government. As Michael Chapman states in his discussion of Mtshali's poetry, the poet assumes the role of "poet-victim",[4] and functions as a communicative instrument who attempts to establish a psychological liberatory creed that will disengage the oppressed from passivity, resignation and self-deprecation. It is in place to refer to Serote's poem, en route to a fuller discussion of the issues involved in this thesis. An inference once can draw from this excerpt is that the poets' intention is in the main to work collectively and severally towards the creation of a new society; a society whose vision prompts Serote to exclaim "ah/there will be a better time made by us". This

better society can be realized if the poets are bent on "fearlessly embarking on a course of protest, social criticism and the raising of consciousness among the people".[5]

It is appropriate at this time to map out briefly the society that these poets are intent on transforming. The poetry of the seventies and the eighties is revolutionary. The poets use art as a medium to protest against the dehumanising apartheid[6] policies in South Africa. There is, of course, no reason to doubt that racism predates South African history, but the country attains global uniqueness by being the only one practising legalised and institutionalised racism. The poets examined in this study make concerted efforts to effect a radical transformation of South African society. Maano Tuwani, a relatively lesser-known South African poet, makes a very subtle summation of the effects of apartheid in a poem entitled "Learning to drive".

> They sit in groups
> Under the shade of Misuma trees,
> Old men and young men,
> Sixty or more,
> Talking,
> The truck roaring and groaning unceasingly
> While each unmindful takes his turn.
>
> They are not talking of bantustan politics
> Nor of women like migrant workers,
> They are talking of driving —
> Of rude traffic cops,
> Of those that conduct
> Oral tests for a learner's licence
>
> Come Thursday
> It's off to the testing ground
> And the dusty streets of Sibasa:

Half of them will go through for sure
(A green note can take care of that)
But....what will they drive?[7]

This poem clearly depicts the extent to which blacks bear the brunt of apartheid repression. Tuwani suggests that the men suffer under apartheid without being aware of it. They are taking driving lessons, and their main ambition is probably to work as drivers. The second stanza introduces the machinations of apartheid. Bantustan politics is one of the cornerstones of apartheid, designed to marginalise blacks to homelands, where they would live as tribal entities. The primary consideration on the part of the South African government was to implement a policy of divide and rule. Tuwani's men are, however, not talking about this. This is in the main a domain of the erudite. Their discussions revolve around the tortuous process of going through oral tests and the rude traffic cops who conduct them. A driver's licence is very important to each one of them, because it can secure them a decent job. The men finally go to the testing ground and half of them go through.

The poem raises very paramount issues pertaining to the South African political situation and its ramifications. It introduces the segregatory political categorization and hierarchization that are the order of the day in South Africa. The situation is very succinctly depicted by Tuwani in the first stanza. The men sit in groups, and they wait for their turn to take driving lessons. They are brought together in groups not necessarily because of the lessons but primarily because they are culturally and naturally disposed to the spirit of communality. The poem

also introduces bantustan politics and this is very subtly linked to the migrant labour system. The first two lines of the second stanza describe the negative effects of apartheid on people. The homeland system makes allowance for bantustan politics and homeland citizens have to enlist as migrant workers in South African cities, where they legally do not have citizenship.

The last stanza of Tuwani's poem depicts the seriousness of the South African government's commitment to the homeland policy. The authorities are serious about establishing homelands but wanting in seriousness to see to the welfare of the blacks that they have sidelined to these homelands. For instance, Sibasa, the erstwhile capital of the Venda homeland, used to be a dusty village with poor infrastructure, and very little was done to improve this situation. "Learning to drive" also introduces the themes that are the preoccupation of the poets discussed in this study. In various ways Mtshali, Sepamla, Jensma and Horn hint at the average South African's complicity in his domestication and oppression. In I Write What I Like, Steve Biko addresses this issue thus:

> But the type of black man we have today has lost his manhood. Reduced to an obliging shell, he looks with awe at the white power structure and accepts what he regards as the inevitable position. Deep inside him anger mounts at the accumulating insult, but he vents it in the wrong direction — on his fellow man in the township, on the property of black people... In the privacy of his toilet his face twists in silent condemnation of white society but brightens up in sheepish obedience as he comes out hurrying in response to his master's impatient call.[8]

The last line of Tuwani's poem is a rhetorical question encapsulating immense suggestibility. The events leading to the climax of this poem include, inter alia, poor training of drivers who may in future be entrusted with the safety of the public. The ill-trained drivers obtain licences through bribery, and the open-endedness of the last question calls a number of possibilities to mind. This is Tuwani's characteristic way of putting the entire South African socio-political system into question. When he asks "But... what will they drive", he allows the reader to assess the ability of the men to drive efficiently in view of the poor training they have received. Alternatively, the reader looks into their economic situation and finds that the possibility of their driving their own cars is virtually non-existent. It then becomes evident that the men are trained for service, to be employed in white South Africa. Apartheid therefore thrives on the labour force that it draws from the homelands, and this is a state of affairs that Tuwani purports to depict. The last stanza also reveals the moral decay that manifests itself through corruption in the homelands.

Stylistically, Tuwani's poem is effective in its evocation of visual and auditory images. The situation is very adequately sketched, and it comprises men that one can easily visualise sitting under the shade of trees, waiting for their turn. The apparent spontaneity of the discussions is juxtaposed with the cacophonic sounds occasioned by the truck that is "roaring unceasingly." In spite of the disagreeableness of the sound of the truck, the men continue to learn to drive it. Tuwani shows how westernisation has taken over black culture by changing the

black man's way of life. In the second stanza, the poet says the men "are not talking of bantustan politics/nor of women like migrant workers." Tuwani manages to introduce political elements into the poem in a clandestine manner. By mentioning what the men are not talking about, he indirectly suggests that there are some people who talk about homeland politics, or that homeland politics is one of the issues that generate discussions. In addition, when Tuwani says they are not talking about women like migrant workers, he wishes to highlight the plight of migrant workers who live without their families in the cities. Apartheid prevents them from living with their families, and this leads to family disintegration. Through this poem, Tuwani introduces the fundamental human experience of a black man in South Africa, and the poem serves as a fitting introduction to the poetry that this work sets out to explore.

The better part of South African poetry produced in the seventies and the eighties displays a distinct inclination towards using art as a medium of social scrutiny. The pressures of the moment and the desire to establish a vehicle of conscientization of the people disinclined the poets from the philosophy of art-for-art's sake to the art-for-life philosophy. This is by no means to suggest that aesthetic considerations are sacrificed at the expense of social considerations, but that art is used to reflect the social reality of the South African society. Talking about Marx and Engels and their forbears, Terry Eagleton says:

> These men saw literature as social criticism and analysis, and the artist as a social enlightener; literature should disdain elaborate aesthetic techniques and become an instrument of social development. Art

> reflects social reality, and must portray its typical features.[9]

Save for a noticeable disposition to categorical subjugation of art to social considerations, this view about literature relates favourably to the South African poetry covered in this study. South African poets are possessed with a strong determination to reflect their social reality as it is shaped by the political decisions of the authorities. Their concern for the welfare of their people encourages them to take a stand, and in spite of and perhaps also because of the authoritarian attitude of the government, these poets decided to use verse as a medium of protest. Speaking about East African literature, Gecau says:

> This means, in effect, calling for a commitment and a moral stand. It means a genuine concern with what is happening to people around them and a moral stand connected with human issues such as love, hatred, betrayal, and intrigue... This calls for an incisiveness and "an unflinching grappling with what we appear to have done to ourselves as men".[10]

Consequently, if South African literature seems to be political in nature, it is because it reflects the "nature of the society from which it springs".[11] A different representation of this society would be either a naiveté or a deliberate falsification. Peter Horn dispels the charge of politicisation of literature in a poem entitled "A Vehement Expostulation".

> So what do you expect Meddem? That I write soothing verse
> to send a few million trusting souls to sleep?
> Do you imply that I don't do my duty,
> if I am desperate? Or that I should write about daisies?
>
> Or do you, Meddem, under these circumstances expect me
> to write well balanced, polished verse? About what?

> Armies, Revolutions? Bloodshed? Apartheid?
> Or a hilarious sonnet about our impending peace?[12]

The stylistic, linguistic, cultural and semantic peculiarities of the poetry discussed in this thesis are evident. It is of singular importance to realise that this situation could not have been otherwise. The society from which this poetry springs is radically different from British and American societies from which their respective literatures have evolved. As Laura Holland suggests, Oswald Mtshali, Sipho Sepamla, Wopko Jensma and Peter Horn, amongst others, "attempt to produce politically and culturally meaningful poetry".[13] It is significant to note, though, that this political and cultural meaningfulness attains great intensity in their society first. These poets are cognizant of the need to make their works intelligible to their people, hence the occasional use of regional slangs and the indigenization of the materials they use in their writings. In this sense, therefore, Eurocentric aesthetics should not automatically preponderate over black writing without proper consideration of the forces that come into play in black writing. Edgar Wright talks about the criticism levelled against African writing with regard to aesthetics.

> The problems referred to are aspects of a general problem of evaluation. Is this new body of writing to be judged as an extension of literature in English, and by the international standards associated with it; or does it, for cultural and linguistic and possibly other reasons, require some quite different critical basis?.... But at least we should try to be aware from what point of view and by what standards an author is being judged, or would wish to be judged.[14]

In a similar vein, Anne McClintock says:

> Standards are not golden or quintessential; they are made according to the demands different societies make on writers and according to the responses writers make to those demands.[15]

The foregoing is not an attempt to claim critical immunity for the poets but an effort to show the futility of attempts at global compartmentalisation of literary standards by which any literature can be judged. Although evaluation per se is not a fundamental issue in this work, it is obviously undeniable that a discussion of artifice would occasionally have recourse to it. It is therefore imperative to note that Eurocentric standards are important in and of themselves, but that if they are to be applied to South African poetry, the desired objective should be to enhance the signification rather than to play it down.

Another singular aspect of South African poetry of the seventies and the eighties is linguistic peculiarity. A characteristic feature of this poetry is a tendency to inwardise expression so that it reflects human experience in South Africa. Jensma and Sepamla can, for instance, use informal expression heavily loaded with patois with as much adeptness as when they resort to formal expression. When poets like Sepamla resort to deliberate ungrammatical use of language, the intention is to provide a realistic delineation of the state of affairs, and to create an illusion of reality. It is for this reason that Sepamla says, "If the situation requires broken or 'murdered' English, then for God's sake one must do just that."[16]

South African poetry of the seventies and the eighties, and in particular, the poetry covered in this study, has been given a blanket characterization of Soweto poetry or Black poetry. This is neither to say that all the poets come from Soweto

nor that they are all black. It is rather because Soweto has become a symbol of resistance because its existence is a reminder of the Group Areas Act, one of the pillars of apartheid. Also, some of the poets may not even be black, although their poetry is unmistakably protest in nature. It is however important to stress that these poets are unified by a desire to depict the condition of the disenfranchised in South Africa. To this end Mtshali says:

> As I have said before, black poetry depicts the black man's life as it is shaped by the laws that govern him. He has no hand in the making of these laws, but he must abide by them. Black poetry is the mirror that reflects the black man's aspirations, his hopes, his disappointments, his joys and sorrows, his loves and hates.[17]

NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

1. Tim Couzens, "Black poetry in Africa," Poetry South Africa, ed. Peter Wilhem and James A. Povey (Johannesburg: Ad. Donker, 1976) 50.

2. Martin Gray defines Grub Street as a "London Street (now called Milton Street) which during the eighteenth century was populated by poor authors prepared to write anything for money. Hence the word applies to needy authors and hack writers, and the kind of work they do," in A Dictionary of Literary Terms, (Essex: Longman, 1984) 95.

3. Mongane Wally Serote, "Excerpts from There will be a Better Time," Selected Poems, ed. Mbulelo Mzamane (Johannesburg: Ad. Donker, 1982) 142-144.

4. Michael Chapman, South African English Poetry — A Modern Perspective, (Johannesburg: Ad Donker, 1984) 185.

5. M. K. Malefane, "The Sun Will Rise: Review of the Allah poets at the Market Theatre, Johannesburg" Soweto Poetry, ed. Michael Chapman (Johannesburg: McGraw Hill, 1982) 91.

6. Afrikaans for "Apartness" or "Separateness" — a political system that allows for racial discrimination in South Africa. Officially adopted by the Nationalist Government in 1948.

7. Maano Dzeani Tuwani, "Learning to Drive," Ten Years of Staffrider, ed. Andries Oliphant and Ivan Vladislavic (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1988) 201.

8. Steve Biko, I Write What I Like (London: Heineman, 1978) 28.

9. Terry Eagleton, Marxism and Literary Criticism (London: Methuen, 1976) 43.

10. James Kimani Gecau, The Growth of East African Literature in English (M.A. Thesis) McMaster University, October, 1975, 97.

11. Ken Goodwin, Understanding African Poetry (London: Heinemann, 1982) X.

12. Peter Horn, "A Vehement Expostulation", Poems 1964-1989, 75.

13. Laura Holland, A Critical Survey of Contemporary South African Poetry (M.A. Thesis, McMaster University, September, 1987) 16.

14. Edgar Wright, "Problems of Criticism," Readings in Commonwealth Literature, ed. William Walsh (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973) 156.

15. Anne McClintock, "'Azikwelwa' (We Will Not Ride): Politics and Value in Black South African Poetry." Critical Inquiry 13.3 (University of Chicago Press, 1987) 599.

16. McClintock, 619.

17. Chapman, ed. Soweto Poetry, 106.

CHAPTER ONE

Mtshali's art can be said to serve a significatory function through protest statement - making in Sounds of a Cowhide Drum, and to spur the reader into active resistance in Fireflames. The earlier Mtshali is an "interpreter" [1] who does not necessarily inflame his reader into action. Njabulo Ndebele maintains that through Sounds of a Cowhide Drum, "Mtshali has merely confirmed the fact of oppression without offering a challenging alternative".[2] Mtshali does offer this alternative in Fireflames, by radicalizing his approach to the point of encouraging people to take action in improving their condition. While Mphahlele is critical of Mtshali's craftsmanship in Sounds of a Cowhide Drum,[3] a sentiment I take exception to, he enthusiastically expresses his admiration for Fireflames. Mphahlele sees African poetry as having taken on a hard apocalyptic tone, and says the later Mtshali should be seen in this light.[4]

In her introduction to Sounds of a Cowhide Drum, Nadine Gordimer says that Mtshali's "verbal magic" enables blacks to recognize their fate, and provides a revelation for whites of "a world they live in and never know".[5] Gordimer's assertion is particularly pertinent, for one of the primary functions of poetry is to inform people about their world. Through an interplay of linguistic and stylistic devices, Mtshali reveals things as they are and lays bare the discrepancy

between what is and what ought to be. In "Art as Technique", Shklovsky propounds that "art exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony."[6] To a large extent, Mtshali strives towards achieving this end in Sounds of a Cowhide Drum. It is for this reason that John Povey observes that "the themes of Mtshali's poetry derive inevitably from the deepest and bitterest personal experience of his life as a messenger in Johannesburg".[7] This is, however, not to suggest that Sounds of a Cowhide Drum is a simple documentation of daily events in South Africa. Such a standpoint would be a far cry from the truth. Mtshali has ingeniously and artistically fused his experiences and observations into the kind of poetry one cannot afford to ignore.

Mtshali's "Boy on a Swing" has been hailed as one of the most successful poems in Sounds on a Cowhide Drum. The poem is artistically well-controlled, and Mtshali uses metaphor, imagery and symbol to good effect. "Boy on a Swing" is a deceptively simple poem.

Slowly he moves
to and fro, to and fro,
then faster and faster
he swishes up and down.

His blue shirt
billows in the breeze
like a tattered kite.

The world whirls by:
east becomes west,
north turns to south;
the four cardinal points
meet in his head

Mother!
Where did I come from?
When will I wear long trousers?
Why was my father jailed?[8]

The setting of this poem is a black township in South Africa. The action of swinging is by no means limited to South Africa, or to black township life only. In this instance, however, Mtshali has manipulated an overtly universal situation to fit his own purposes, namely to bring the incongruencies of township life to light. In a word, the action comprises the geographical disorientation of a young boy, which serves as a figure of his emotional, psychological and social disorientation. The boy makes seemingly unsuccessful attempts to make sense of his situation.

In the first stanza Mtshali relies heavily on visual and auditory imagery. The poet concentrates on engaging the reader's attention without revealing the boy's material conditions. By means of lexical inversion the adverb "slowly" precedes the verb it modifies, thereby allowing the focus to fall on itself. What the reader is made to visualize is primarily not so much the movement as its manner. A visual image is evoked and the reader sees the boy moving slowly "to and fro, to and fro." Without disengaging the reader's attention, the movement gathers momentum and the onomatopoeic "swishes" intensifies the fast movement.

The poet concentrates in the first stanza, one might say, on describing the boy's movement as seen from a distance. In the second stanza we move closer to the boy. Instead of merely seeing him on the surface, attention is drawn to his clothes, which in turn reflect his poor material background. Mtshali employs the plosive b - alliteration in "blue", "billows" and "breeze" to good effect. He proceeds to hit the nail on the head by extending the visual image synaesthetically through the addition of a simile in "like a tattered kite." The image evoked hereby

is particularly apt. The primary purpose of an interplay of images in this stanza is to make a covert suggestion of the humble material background of the boy. His clothes are tattered, and they are billowing in the air.

The third stanza presents the effect of swinging on the boy. The stanza serves to illustrate Shklovsky's assertion that "a satisfactory style is precisely that style which delivers the greatest amount of thought in the fewest words".[9] In this stanza the poet has succeeded in having the reader identify with the boy. The whirling movement suggested by the w-alliteration in "world whirls by" is clearly visualized and imagined by the reader. In other words, the reader empathizes with the boy at this point. As mentioned earlier the effect of the swinging on the boy results in a sense of geographical and physical disorientation that a child would be subjected to. In point of fact, it is not the world that whirls by, it only seems to whirl by. East does not become west but only seems to. The four cardinal points seem to meet in the boy's head because he is trying to make sense out of a hopelessly senseless situation. On a deeper level, Mtshali is suggesting through this stanza that the situation surrounding the boy and circumstances in the country in general are in a hopeless disorientation. Povey says the questions, though different and unanswerable, are equally "unamenable to the process of human logic, for there is no 'reason' appropriate to this society".[10] A situation is projected in the stanza in which sense degenerates into senselessness, reason into unreason and the normal into the abnormal.

The last stanza is stylistically and semantically plurisignificant. The stanza presents a volte-face whose effect is one of capturing the reader's attention. The reader is carefully led to look at the questions asked by the boy.

But what the poet wishes to point towards are the conditions that necessitate the asking of such questions. The last stanza is structurally deviant from the preceding ones. The first line of the stanza is composed of one word, and the exclamation mark suggests the desperation of the boy. The word "Mother" is placed at the center of the line, suggesting the centrality of the mother on the boy's life. The boy asks three questions of his mother in rapid succession. The first two questions are typical of what young people would ask but the last question is cardinal and central to the entire poem. The poem as a whole hinges on the last question. Mtshali wishes to expose a system that disorganizes and destroys family life.

Mtshali's technique in this poem is very subtly developed. He moves progressively to the attainment of his primary objective, which is to expose the gruesome role of apartheid laws in the running of his country. The poet moves from a description of the boy at a distance, to a description of his clothes and how they evidence his poverty, to what goes on in his (the boy's) mind and to a sudden outburst of questions which reflect the boy's exasperation and call for justice. The boy on a swing is then a boy trying to escape from his world but who is trapped in inescapability. The poet wishes the reader to identify with the boy and ponder on the probable reasons for the father's arrest.

In "Nightfall in Soweto", Mtshali projects two things of equal significance. He draws the reader's attention to the effects of the Group Areas Act on the residents of Soweto, and the violence that man metes out to fellow man in Soweto. The blame for the moral catastrophe yielded by a sense of criminality is imputed as much to the political system as it is to the people themselves. Mtshali

points out in this poem that man is acting in concert with the political system that seeks to destroy him, to design a Frankenstein's monster that will gradually annihilate his sense of purpose.

Nightfall is projected as an occurrence that wreaks havoc and strikes timidity into Soweto residents.[11] Through the use of a simile in the first two lines, Nightfall is compared to a "dreaded disease." A dreaded disease is usually incurable and terminal; it instills fear because of its ineluctability. The simile is extended to the rest of the stanza and it interacts with the visual image suggested by "seeping through the pores" and "ravaging it beyond repair" to create a sense of helplessness. Nightfall conjures up darkness in the reader's mind. Darkness, being a symbol of evil, is conspicuously juxtaposed as it were, with daytime, which is a symbol of virtue, in the last line of the poem.

Of particular importance in this poem are instances where the first person pronoun is used. In all cases the speaker is on the receiving end of the cruelty perpetrated by the attacker, and his inability to defend himself intensifies an already prevailing sense of helplessness. The speaker is "the victim", is "slaughtered", is "the prey", is "the quarry", he barricades himself, trembles and quakes. All this melee is occasioned, Mtshali suggests, because

> Man has ceased to be man
> Man has become beast
> Man has become prey.[12]

The foregoing lines evince Mtshali's attitude towards man. The lines are central to the poem and Mtshali ensures that the reader's attention is captured by putting the lines in parallel construction. In a word the three lines show that man can be human if he wants to, but that it is a tragedy that he has chosen or

has been driven to become bestial, and that he then preys on those who do not make a similar choice. Mtshali projects a situation in which vice preys on virtue.

The speaker realizes that in Soweto, protection from thuggery as symbolized by nightfall is virtually chimerical. To the questions "Where is my refuge?/Where am I safe?" the answer is "Not in my matchbox house." This answer is a non sequitur: because it negates the possibility of an appropriate answer ever being found. The answer is as a matter of fact not an answer at all, but a putting into question of the housing system for blacks in Soweto. The use of the word "matchbox" is singularly significant, since it is used out of its normal linguistic context. This is a deliberate employment of the poet's artistic device. "Matchbox", by being used as an adjective, draws the reader's attention to itself. The poet wishes to focus the reader's attention on the ridiculousness of providing flimsy little houses, which Sowetans pejoratively refer to as matchboxes, to accommodate entire families.

The poem seems to shift its attention from the attacker to the victim. However, there is no hint whatsoever that the attacker is being exonerated. On the contrary, this is merely an artistic device, intended to make the reader identify with the victim and empathize with him. Identifying with the victim means disassociating oneself from the victimizer, which in this case is the South African political system, or those who answer for its design. The penultimate stanza clearly demonstrates the association of the system with nightfall:

> I tremble at his crunching footsteps,
> I quake at his deafening knock at the door,
> "Open up!" he barks like a rabid dog
> thirsty for my blood.[13]

This stanza is a dramatization of what happens when police officers raid houses in Soweto, more often than not, to arrest occupants who do not have permission to live and work in the urban areas. The emotional disparity between the victim and the victimizer is evidenced by the words attributed to each of them. The words "tremble" and "quake", which are used to refer to the victim's emotional state, are used in contradistinction to the "crunching footsteps" and "deafening knock" associated with the attacker. The sense is in this instance intensified by the vivid auditory imagery. The loudly uttered "Open up!" works conjointly with the verb "barks" and the effect of the simile "like a rabid dog" to depict a situation best characterized as indicative of a world gone awry. The simile creates a microcosm inhabited by the hunter and the hunted. It is this unsavoury situation, then, that Mtshali wishes to expose, a situation that holds not only the hunted prisoner, but also the hunter, a situation in which the hunter has even more need to see the light of day than has the hunted.

"An abandoned bundle" is a highly descriptive poem. In this poem the poet sets the scene very graphically by giving a vivid description of a morally diseased township. It is a poem about an infant child left to die by its mother. The reasons for the mother's heinous actions are not given, but it can safely be conjectured that the pressure she anticipated would be brought to bear on her vis-à-vis caring for the child would be inconceivable. She then decides to dispose of the baby, partly to save it from hardship but primarily to liberate herself, as it were. The poet sees the baby in terms of human sacrifice, because of the fact that it dies innocently. Situations like these are legion in a system that selfishly breeds immorality and reduces people to nonentities.

Microcosmically, the episode is limited to White City Jabavu and exposes the vices that issue from the township. On a macrocosmic level though, the poem is an uncompromising diatribe on a system that reduces human beings to rubbish heaps. This system drives people to pretence, and leads them to make strenuous efforts to conceal their real selves, even at the expense of infanticide. It is certainly not far-fetched to suggest that the title of the poem has deeper and more far-reaching connotations than just an abandoned infant. A whole racial group is reduced to a bundle that is abandoned and is either unwittingly or unwillingly made to abandon itself through its actions.

Through a heavy concatenation of visual images in the first stanza, Mtshali sets the scene of the poem very graphically. To anybody well acquainted with the South African township setup, this scene will ring a bell. Township dwellers use coal and wood as their primary source of fuel, and the smoke emitted from the combustion would hover like a dark cloud over the township. In this instance, the cloud covering the township is a combination of mist and smoke. The image is made more graphic by the use of the verb and adjectives in the expression "flowed thick yellow", and further reinforced through an interplay with a cinematic and visual image introduced by a simile in "as pus oozing from a gigantic sore." This scene leaves the reader unambiguously convinced that there is something diseased or deadly about White City Jabavu. Mtshali wishes to highlight the irony built into the name of the township. Perhaps the best characterization of White City Jabavu is that the township is anything but white, both in the literal and symbolic sense. Mtshali's intention in depicting the irony is to offset the western cultural connotations of the word "white," which is associated

with moral and spiritual purity. Alvarez-Pereyre suggests that the whole township "seems to secrete misfortune."[14] The "little houses" seemed trapped in the smoke and the mist. The aptness of the simile used in the second stanza cannot be overemphasized. It highlights the helplessness of the occupants and their unsuccessful attempts to escape from their condition.

The third stanza subtly suggests that the South African socio-political system is capable of the most insane form of brutality. It is a system that produces scavengers which feed on human beings. The visual images in this stanza are particularly captivating. The adjective "red" in "draped in red bandanas of blood" has a triple focus. It encapsulates the biblical association of red with sin, the secular association of red with danger, but it also covertly bespatters with "blood" those who make those gory situations possible. There is also a suggestion here, as in "Nightfall in Soweto", of a marauder and a prey, of an attacker who is powerful and the attacked who is helpless.

Mtshali appears in this poem and in many others, as an active observer of events. This is evidenced by his constant use of the first person, a technique he employs to good effect as in the fourth stanza of the poem:

> I threw a brick
> they bared fangs
> flicked velvet tongues of scarlet
> and scurried away,
> leaving a mutilated corpse—
> an infant dumped on a rubbish heap—
> "Oh! Baby in the Manger
> sleep well
> on human dung."[15]

This stanza is both dramatic and pathetic. The speaker is propelled into action, and he reacts spontaneously to what he considers to be inexcusable behavioural

aberration. The dynamic verbs used in the first four lines (threw, bared, flicked, scurried) work conjointly to create a spectacle of a person trying to halt this savagery, because his exasperation has reached fever pitch. The climax of the stanza, which is incidentally the climax of the entire poem, is in the last three lines of this stanza. The quotation, with its strong biblical connotations, sends spirals of emotions and strong feelings of unspeakable frustration through the reader. There is an overt reference to Jesus Christ in this biblical allusion and the mutilated corpse of the infant is likened to Him. The irony built into the words "sleep well" is subtle, extremely acrid and sarcastic. In a particularly apt irony and a metaphor, the child is told to "sleep well/on human dung." The poet attributes this extremely appalling action to an uninvolved and complacent society. He is also mounting a virulent attack on a system designed to channel people to rubbish heaps. An overriding substance of Mtshali's import in this instance is to thrust the blame away from the mother as an individual, and to commit the whole society to trial for allowing conditions that make for such appalling acts. The mention of the baby in the manger attains ironic significance from the sharp disparity between a South Africa that professes Christianity and a South Africa whose moral tenor falls short of this profession.

The last stanza is an understatement and stands in sharp contrast with the preceding one. The poet holds the mother culpable for dumping her baby, and the description of her departure from the scene contrasts with oozing pus, "gigantic sore" and "mutilated corpse". The stanza emphasizes the destructive impact of society's laws on human life. It is a system that breeds all kinds of moral inadequacies and ineptitudes, a system that drives its people to pretence

and appalling acts in life-and-death attempts to beat it, because it is primarily seen to be brutal and illegitimate. The stanza is heavily piled up with irony, because its essence is everything that the poor mother is not. This throws a spotlight on those who design racist laws that govern people, and still pretend that all is well, even though it does not necessarily end well.

While Sounds of a Cowhide Drum can be seen to be a book suffused with observational statement-making, Mtshali's second volume, Fireflames, is apocalyptic. Mphahlele maintains very appropriately that Mtshali's role in Fireflames should be viewed in the context of "poet-priest-prophet."[16] This is because there can be little reason to doubt that Mtshali's prophetic poems in this volume are forceful and dazzling, and these qualities leave the non-prophetic poems playing second fiddle. Mphahlele states that Fireflames' verse is moving, if only "to the extent that poetry is powerful words expressing powerful feelings, the 'powerful' word also meaning the beautiful."[17]

The title of the poem, "The dawn of a new era" is by its very nature prophetic. It could at best be asserted that the title intimates the arrival of a new political dispensation in South Africa. This poem is characterized, as are indeed several others, by an unclouded perception of the immediate circumstances with a clear and sharp focus of the future. Fireflames was published in 1980, and the poems, including this particular one, must have been written not long before then. This was immediately after the 1976 Soweto uprisings which led to the notorious shooting of school children. The disturbances and pandemonium that ensued altered the course of South African history.

The first lines of the poem give an impression of pandemonium sweeping throughout the world. However, this sense of confusion is counterpointed by the second and third lines, "History is spring cleaning/ the cobwebbed corners of the earth." The two lines are transported by very graphic imagery in "spring cleaning" and "cobwebbed corners." The words "swishing" and "rattles", which are onomatopoeic, work conjointly to reinforce the idea of renewal suggested by the second line of the poem. Lines 5-9 work jointly to show nature's participation in ushering the old era out. The history Mtshali talks about in the poem is not history created but rather history in the making. Mtshali creates a somewhat preternatural situation by projecting the moon behaving like a frightened dog, birds flying "off from treetops" for fear, and the sea becoming turbulent. What can logically result from this situation is "confusion", as Mtshali suggests in the last line of the first stanza. Rather than using single word-units to bring his point home, Mtshali employs a cluster of images to depict blatant rejection of the old 'apartheid' era. History is anthropormophized and cinematicised so as to bring it into harmony with the natural phenomena in the rest of the stanza. The result of his endeavour is a depiction of rejection of the appalling apartheid system.

If the first stanza is daunting, the second one is even more so. The stanza introduces a confrontation between the new and the old. The "bear" is an embodiment of the new and the "eagle" of the old. The new (the bear) is presented as an extremely forceful phenomenon. The adjectives "big" and "grisly" describing the bear suggest that one look at it would strike horror in the beholder. This is further compounded by the b-alliteration in "Big Grisly Bear

brandishes". The verbs attributed to the bear in this stanza are "brandishes", "flashes," "flicks," whereas no verb is attributed to the eagle, suggesting that it is neither acting nor reacting to effect change, but helplessly witnessing the process as it sweeps across. It would suffice to dwell on the manner in which the eagle is described. As already pointed out, verbs are not used with respect to the eagle but adjectives as in "at the ruffled and ailing Eagle,/ whose beak is blunted, whose wings are clipped/ it casts rueful eyes,". These adjectives suggest that the old system of oppression has outlived its welcome, that the patience of the victims is wearing thin, the rug is being pulled from under its feet, willy-nilly.

The penultimate stanza calls attention to the cry of the "masses" for their freedom. Mtshali relies heavily on the impact of his language on the reader's imagination. Auditory and visual images come into play in the first line in "strident cry" and "shackled masses." In the second line of the stanza, rage is concretized to give it immense dimensions. Mtshali sees the death of the old system as a foregone conclusion. There is in this stanza a heavy concentration of words associated with death, and this suggests that there is something funereal about the situation. Such words are "dirge," "demise," "cortege," "graveyard," "entomb" and "decaying." Apartheid is characterized as a monster, only this one is decaying. The statement that the poem puts forth is unmistakable: society has lapsed into moral decadence and must be rescued.

The poem ends with a beautiful lyric whose intention is suggested by the refrain:

Down with the old in Vietnam!
Down with the old in Cambodia!
Down with the old in Guinea Bissau!
Down with the old in Mozambique?!

Down with the old in Angola!
Down with the old in...?[18]

This is a lyrical refrain that articulates a universal rejection of oppression. The language denounces the old colonial mentality that seeks to reduce the indigenous inhabitants of a country to sub-human beings. The entire stanza is characteristic of a revolutionary chant whose primary import is to communicate the verity that when the old goes down, something new must come up in its place. In its incompleteness, the last line suggests that the uprooting of the old has yet to be completed. It is therefore left to the reader to fill in the blank. The next country in which the old will exit to make room for the new is still indeterminate, hence the open-endedness of the line. It is clear, though, that in this context South Africa is implied.

Hector Peterson, a young Soweto teenager, was the first to fall when the police opened fire in Soweto on June 16, 1976. His name remains inscribed in the annals of the South African struggle for liberation and self-determination. Mtshali sees Hector Peterson as having been martyred by the 'system' and he wrote the poem "Hector Peterson — the young martyr (WHOSE DEATH TRIGGERED THE SOWETO UPRISING)" in his honour. The poem is a dramatic re-enactment of some of the events of the day.

Mtshali relies on his descriptive abilities in depicting the brutal actions perpetrated against school children by the authorities. To this end, the first two lines are a case in point. The lines, "The guns blazed,/fired at unarmed school children" show the helplessness of the children and the apparent impregnability of the forces arrayed against them. Mtshali appeals for sympathy in favour of the school children by stating that they were "unarmed," covertly pointing out the

senselessness of shooting at them. The verb "blazed" as used in the first line suggests a continuous release of a volley of bullets. "Blazed" is a bit clichéd, and is possibly used deliberately to stress the horror of the next lines. This is however not just wild shooting, because in the last line the speaker says "the bullets hit their targets." Mtshali's intention is to highlight the fact that the shooting was deliberate and calculated. Mtshali's art is employed to good effect in this stanza. He activates the reader's imaginative capabilities by putting a number of visual images into play. These images enable the terrible deeds to cross and crisscross the reader's mind. Mtshali talks of shattered skulls, splashed brains, "severed limbs", "singed hair," scattered eyes and ears, and "hearts torn to shreds". These images combine to create a feeling of abhorrence for a system that allows free rein to perpetrators of naked violence. Mtshali continues in the same stanza to jeer at the reader's sensibilities by piling up visual, auditory, and cinematic images evoked by "buzzing greenflies jostling with ants/for blobs of dried-up blood, a tug-of-war for a tendon and ligament." This leaves the reader with a feeling of exasperation and disgust. It is made clear though, in the stanza, that the disaster is not only physical but emotional as well. In a metaphorical expression that is particularly apt, the poet says that tender young hearts were torn to shreds. This is to indicate that the young children, who were still full of life and promise, suffered immense emotional disillusionment.

The second stanza delineates the destruction of a society in the making. Mtshali suggests, or seems to suggest, that every nation depends on its youth for survival on the face of the earth. Youthfulness is more than mere physicality, it has to do with a sense of national identity, ambition, and zest for life. All these

things have been destroyed because the young people have been killed, and those who survived had their lives completely devastated. They have no sense of purpose, and they are ruled by fear. This is, however, described in brilliant poetry, which attests to Mtshali's artistic mastery. As in the first stanza, Mtshali makes generous use of imagery. Whereas the line "acrid fumes from teargas canisters" evokes an olfactory image, sounding a familiar note to those who have at some stage been caught in a similar situation, the rest of the stanza reveals the malevolence of the perpetrators of this catastrophe. "Undefiled genitalia" is a metaphor for youth who were virgins or who had not yet had any issue. Sexual imagery is used in this stanza to show that the massacre deprived the society of its reproductive potential, physical and otherwise.

When Mtshali says in the third stanza that Hector Peterson was a "victim of wanton savagery" he is pointing out the obvious fact that there can be no victim without victimizer. The poet endows the scene of the shooting with dramatic immediacy by addressing the young martyr as if he is a physical presence. In the second line of the stanza, "rivulets" suggests that the victims were numerous, but every young person killed is foregrounded against the first person to die. There is a sudden change of perspective in the fourth stanza. The first three stanzas are narrative and descriptive, but an overriding factor seems to be the fact that the fourth stanza is an official government explanation for the calamity. As if it is obvious that the police actions beg an explanation, the official statement is:

> 'There's no crisis in the land.
> There's no cause for panic;
> We are not Guilty!'
> Guilty of what?

'It's only a bunch of young Black Power fanatics,
who are fanning the flames for a polarization of races.'[19]

The statement spills out three negatives in three concurrent sentences. By so putting the sentences, Mtshali wrings any sense of conviction out of them. Considered against the backdrop of the action in the preceding stanzas the sentences affirm the very facts that they pretend to negate. In the manner of an intrusive narrator the poet steps in and ask the question "Guilty of what?", because in the circumstances, the statement, "We are not guilty" begs the question. In their defensiveness the last two lines of the stanza are characteristic of statements issued by South African officials, and Mtshali wishes to expose the absurdity of their substance. The word "bunch" suggests that the government's attitude is not only dismissive but also contemptuous. The young school children are regarded as a "bunch" of "fanatics," which is tantamount to saying they do not know what they are doing. These so-called "fanatics" are said to be fanning the flames for racial disunity in the country. This is a perfect example of embedded irony. Whereas it has been the official position of the government to promote separate development for blacks, blacks are said to be polarizing the races when they reject any accentuation of tribalism by working towards black unity.

In the fourth stanza, Mtshali invokes nature, as in "The dawn of a new era," to participate in the rejection of an unjust system of government. Whereas in the previous poem nature participates actively, in this poem nature participates by freezing action. This has an effect of highlighting the violation of the laws of nature through bloodletting. The action or reaction of the wolf, the dove and the hyena bode ill for the "system", they portend its demise. In typical tongue-in-

cheek style, Mtshali says "the demise of hallowed ideologies has begun". The emphasis is on "hallowed" which, because of its irony, suggests the absurdity of ideologies designed to give to one race of people a false sense of superiority. Describing the impending collapse of the system, Mtshali says:

> the battering-ram of time and history is
> pulverizing the edifice of vaunted granite;
> it creaks at the seams as it crumbles.[20]

These lines are stylistically and semantically impressive. Time and history, which are abstract qualities, are metaphorized into a battering ram, a concrete piece of destructive equipment. The battering-ram is demolishing and annihilating the very foundation and structure of a vainglorious and hoodwinked ideology. The lines are significant in a number of ways. Mtshali is suggesting that time and history are proving that apartheid as a political and ideological system has run out of time and has been proved by history to be untenable. The word "pulverizing" indicates that the forces arrayed against the system are unstoppable whereas "vaunted granite" suggests that, contrary to what its proponents believe, the system of apartheid is not built on a rock-solid foundation, but on shifting sand. The last line of the stanza is an interesting display of imagery. There is an impressive employment of visual and auditory images, evoked by words such as "creaks," "seams" and "crumbles". The line facilitates the reader's visualization of a structure falling, but this structure is a physical manifestation of a system that seemed impregnable. Mtshali is possibly suggesting the massiveness of Nationalist sculptures like the Voortrekker Monument.

The first line of the penultimate stanza is a representation of nature joining with humanity to protest the shooting of the children. The ocean waves

seem to be supportive of the parents as they bewail their children, and the people's "cries of anguish" seem to deal the pillars of apartheid a heavy blow. This is because in their anguish the people are propelled into action, and they take it upon themselves to challenge the system in any way they can. Soweto is metonymically referred to as "the ghetto" and is said to have been "ablaze". The word "ablaze" as used in this instance is ambiguous. It refers to the time when everything was set alight in Soweto as blacks were giving vent to their anger after Hector Peterson was killed. On another even more important level it refers to the rage sweeping through every black person's consciousness when young innocent lives had been mowed down. Their feelings could at best be equated to fire flames. The actual flames were so immense that in describing them, Mtshali says the "the rising flames were gigantic tongues/licking the soft bellies of hovering helicopters." There is subtle irony in the foregoing; the flames are said to have been licking the soft bellies of hovering helicopters. These helicopters are in fact messengers of chaos and death. They are police helicopters whose purpose is to monitor the situation and give directions to police officers on the ground or to fire teargas canisters. The phrase "licking the soft bellies" is strongly evocative; it makes the helicopters seem like vulnerable and harmless creatures, and this is an example of Mtshali's use of irony.

The last stanza draws the reader's attention to the cruelty of the system by pointing out that the victims of police brutality were young:

> When the young corpses were buried
> the buffalo horn rang louder than the church-bell,
> the world heard the booming tom-tom above the tumult;
> 'Today we bury our beloved children;
> tomorrow is our enemy's turn.'[21]

In this stanza Mtshali falls back to his tribal roots in an attempt to depict the situation. After appealing to the reader's sympathy by stating that the victims were only young people, he talks about the ringing of the buffalo horn, a practice reserved only for occurrences of some national importance in most South African black tribes. The booming tom-tom is reminiscent of an earlier poem, "Sounds of a cowhide drum", in a collection of the same title. The last line of the poem articulates, one might say, what Mtshali feels the parents of the children might have been thinking about. The poem considers the present but looks forward to the future. It is in this sense then, that the poem could be said to attain prophetic dimensions.

"Abraham Ongkoepoetse Tiro, a young black martyr" is a brilliant poem dedicated to a young man whose spirit fought dauntlessly for the liberation of his people. He was killed at the early age of twenty-eight by a parcel bomb when he was in exile in Botswana. The poet's intention is to expose the criminal acts of a racist system struggling for survival. As indicated under the poem, it was read at a memorial service held at the Regina Mundi[22] church in Moroka, Johannesburg, on 17 February 1974. The poem is an ode to Tiro.

The first stanza derives its forcefulness from the internal rhyme in "linger longer" and the d-alliteration in "when dastard deeds are done". It is the memories of "dastard deeds" that will "linger longer." Another interesting feature is the kind of alliteration selected to fit the two different but related situations. The soft l-alliteration in "linger longer" is associated with the victim and is juxtaposed with the plosive d-alliteration associated with the perpetrator of these "dastard deeds." The d-alliteration intensifies a feeling of repulsion generated by the deeds.

Mtshali goes on to suggest that there has to be something wrong with his world; it can only be in a "decaying world" where such "dastard deeds" can be found to exist. There is an ominous sense of decay, suggested by such words as "flaccid," "decaying," 'scabby" and "acrid." These words provide a fitting background against which the nature of the system can be measured. The poet employs locomotory, gustatory and visual images in 'hobble," "acrid" and "raging flames" respectively. The attention of the reader is not only sustained but also directed at a careful consideration of what the stanza signifies, which is that the old system is being driven out and that people are incensed by its aftermath. As Chapman correctly maintains,[23] Mtshali encourages active confrontation in Fireflames, and this is his intention in this poem when he talks of flames raging for vengeance.

The next two stanzas are both prophetic and declarative:

> A new order will be forged
> on the anvil of our sorrows:
> the flame in our furious hearts will flash
> all the nocturnal conspiracies
> at which deadly devices are made and sent,
> to wound, to maim, and to kill,
> and spatter your sacrificial blood
> on the door to freedom.
>
> But no bomb can ever kill
> the spirit of a fearless fighter,
> no gun can shoot it
> no jail can hold it,
> not even the grave will seal it off
> from a people aroused to action.[24]

The second stanza introduces furnace imagery evoked by "forged" and "anvil." Forging involves a tremendous amount of work and determination, and the underlying notion is that creating a new, just order will be a mammoth task. The

f-alliteration in "the flame in our furious hearts will flash" casts attention on the "nocturnal conspiracies". Interestingly, it is these "nocturnal conspiracies" that the flames will be exposing. Mtshali's artifice is evident in his apt juxtapositioning of light and darkness suggested by "flash" and "nocturnal," in his attempt to show that there is a violent confrontation between the forces of light and forces of darkness in his social and political order. The "deadly devices" are a concretization of plans concocted "to wound, to maim, and to kill". The focus naturally falls on the verbs in this collocation of infinitives, because it is on them that the stress falls. Even more significant is the manner in which the seriousness of the vile actions increases from the first verb to the third. The first word is "wound", which has physical and metaphysical connotations; the next is "maim," which suggests physical disablement, and the last is "kill," which entails complete physical annihilation. Mtshali then suggests that people may as yet not have the means to put an end to these brutalities, and those who are killed should be regarded as a sacrifice. Mtshali is calling on his audience to refrain from doubt and discouragement and to look forward to their liberation, he sees his verse as "poetry committed to their struggle to be free." [25]

The poet adopts an oratorical tone in the third stanza. The function of the negatives in the stanza is to disprove what might otherwise be considered a truism. In their negation, the statements affirm the existence of attempts to do that which they negate. The poet is artistically and covertly inferring that bombs and guns have been used, and that people have been incarcerated in a vain effort to silence them. The ultimate intention is to arouse people to action, as the last line of the stanza seems to suggest.

The last stanza is a direct address to Tiro. The accolades "crown of glory," "garland of honour" and "endless praises" make Tiro both martyr and hero. The poem is an extolling of the young man's contribution to the betterment of his society, but it simultaneously wakes the young people up to the kind of honour awaiting them if they, like Tiro, commit their lives to the struggle. The last two stanzas have a lyrical quality which is in consort with a memorial service.

"The raging generation" is an address to young people who are supposedly raging to secure a new dispensation by ridding their society of the old. The speaker in the poem assumes the role of a distanced but neither disinterested nor inactive observer. The first three lines suggest that Mtshali has a futuristic outlook. There is a depiction of the inevitability of the passage of time represented by babies who become children who, in turn become adults, and this is solidified by the past, present and future perspectives in yesterday, today and tomorrow. The fourth line, though, brings shocking insights to parents vis-à-vis what is happening under their roofs, as it were. There is a brilliant fusion of metaphor and simile in the line. The young people are said to be ripening overnight, which is to say that they attain political and social precociousness, and this process is likened to grapes which ripen unnoticed. The line is a eulogy to the youth. Mtshali resorts in the remainder of the stanza to conventional African idiom in expressing his admiration for the youth's bravery and determination. The diction is characterized by words like "calabashes" and "goatskin purses," which have a strong affinity with Mtshali's cultural background. Of importance is the fact that Mtshali uses the words metaphorically. A calabash (in South Africa) is a container made from a dried pumpkin shell, and is used to keep water or home-brewed beer. A calabash

is associated with nourishment and continuation of life, and as used here it refers to the zest for life. The "bitterness in the calabashes" does not diminish the zest for life from the youth, rather, it accentuates it.

The second stanza of this poem is by and large structured on metaphors:

> Menchildren in the promised land of your forefathers,
> returning swallows who presage the coming of our summers,
> the bane of the receding winters of our oppression,
> unbroken steeds, whose hooves raised the dust
> of Soweto streets,
> where your maimed bodies were cut down by doom-primed fireshells
> from depraved barrels,
> little girls, budding flowers of youth,
> your tight inviolate virginal veil torn asunder
> by the wanton penis of the monster.[26]

A parallel is drawn in the first line of this stanza between the struggle for freedom and the Israelites' quest for freedom from captivity. An oxymoron, "menchildren", is used to signify that the children may be young but they are assuming adult responsibility by striving to attain harmony and peace in their land. In the same breath the speaker makes it clear that the land is theirs by virtue of inheritance because it belonged to their forefathers, and this reinforces the biblical allusion to the promised land that belonged to the Israelites' forefathers. The possibility of racial harmony is eventuated, Mtshali assumes, by the children whom he metaphorically refers to as swallows who intimate the dawn of liberation (summer). Summer implies its opposite, which is winter, and summer's entry implies winter's exit. There is a hint of optimism in the line, for Mtshali speaks of "receding winters." In an unremitting piling up of metaphors, the poet refers to the young protesters as "unbroken steeds", and the pandemonium that resulted from their protests in Soweto is attributed to their determination. Mtshali continues to dwell

on the physical brunt they had to bear by equating the young girls to flowers which have been cut short, and he reinforces the idea by employing sexual imagery in the last two lines of the stanza. The little girls, too young for any experience of sex, are raped; this rouses feelings of sickened disgust that are commonly felt when one hears of the violation of children. These feelings are intensified by the t-alliteration in "tight" and "torn" which frames the v-alliteration in "inviolate virginal veil" in the line "your tight inviolate virginal veil torn asunder". The apartheid machine is monsterized, and thereby deprived of any semblance of a human face.

Mtshali addresses himself to the young children in a confidence-instilling and morale-boosting manner. They are "mothers and fathers" of the days that lie ahead. This manner of address undoubtedly endows them with a sense of responsibility and direction. The simile in the second line of the stanza introduces a vivid visual image which makes the addressed see their future as rosy. The poet says the children have been beyond their troubled times, and he does this by employing a maritime image in "the swirling streams of scarlet waves."

Mtshali devotes the whole of the fourth paragraph to extolling the young children. The language he uses suggests that he is paying homage to them. The nouns attributed to the children are "fearlessness", "bravery" and "steadfastness", and they are intended to inform them about their characters from a second person's perspective. It is because the children's characters are what they are that the speaker salutes them, stands in awe of them and bends his knee at their shrine. The poem ends with the revolutionary war cry of "Amandla! Amandla! Amandla! Ngawethu!/ Power! Power! Power! To the People!". This

war cry has the effect of charging the crowds with emotion. The audience shout after the speaker to express their agreement with him and their commitment to the struggle. The chant is itself a poetic expression that encapsulates ideological positions that are cardinal to the struggle for freedom. The chant suggests that political power should be given to the people, which is to say that it is not with the people as yet. The word "ngawethu" is not a specific reference to a group of people but involves a concept of democracy as a government of the people for the people by the people. By using the chant in the poem, Mtshali articulates the aspirations of freedom-loving citizens of his country, which amount to the formation of a participatory democracy. Mtshali uses a persuasive style in this poem to encourage the young people to strive towards attaining a noble end. The last stanza of Sepamla's "A Man for the land" is perhaps the most precise poetic expression of the essence of the slogan, 'amandla'

amandla is an assertion of beingness
amandla is a plea for peace
amandla is an evocation to the gods
amandla is a cry for justice
amandla is a shout for freedom
amandla is a commitment to the land
amandla is an affirmation of resilience
amandla is my embrace of you.[27]

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

1. Chapman, South African English Poetry — A Modern Perspective, 192.
2. Chapman, ed. Soweto Poetry, 193.
3. Chapman, ed. Soweto Poetry, 89.
4. Chapman, ed. Soweto Poetry, 90.
5. Mbuyiseni Oswald Mtshali, Sounds of a Cowhide Drum, (Johannesburg: Ad. Donker, 1971) 9.
6. Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique", Contemporary Literary Criticism, ed. Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleifer (London: Longman, 1989) 58.
7. John Povey, "Review Essay: On Oswald Mbuyiseni Mtshali's Sounds of a Cowhide Drum," Ufahamu (Vol. 4, No. 1, 1974) 151.
8. Mtshali, Sounds of a Cowhide Drum, 17.
9. Davis and Schleifer, eds. Contemporary Literary Criticism, 57.
10. Povey, 154.
11. Jacques Alvarez-Pereyre, The Poetry of Commitment in South Africa (London: Heinemann, 1984) 174.
12. Mtshali, Sound of a Cowhide Drum, 58.
13. Mtshali, Sounds of a Cowhide Drum, 59.
14. Alvarez-Pereyre, 174.
15. Mtshali, Sounds of a Cowhide Drum, 79.
16. Chapman, ed. Soweto Poetry, 90.
17. Chapman, ed. Soweto Poetry, 89.
18. Oswald Mtshali, Fireflames (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter, 1980) 17.
19. Mtshali, Fireflames, 29.
20. Mtshali, Fireflames, 30.
21. Mtshali, Fireflames, 30.

22. A church in Soweto that has hosted many political meetings and commemorations.

23. Chapman, South African English Poetry — A Modern Perspective, 193.

24. Mtshali, Fireflames, 31.

25. Chapman, ed. Soweto Poetry, 103.

26. Mtshali, Fireflames, 33.

27. Sipho Sepamla, From Goré to Soweto (Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1988) 51.

CHAPTER TWO

Clive Wake mentions, in a discussion of Wole Soyinka's Poems of Black Africa, that even though an element of protest underlies most African poetry, a large body of this poetry points "to a more positive desire to recreate the unity of the world from the pain and suffering that men inflict upon one another."[1] This is a characterization from which South African poetry cannot be excluded. Sipho Sepamla is one of the most prolific black poets in South Africa today. Like Mtshali's, his work is built on irony, satire and extensive use of imagery but unlike and perhaps more than Mtshali, a strong element of humour suffuses his poetry. Sepamla spares not efforts in his endeavour to expose the inadequacy and imbalance of his society. He does this on occasion with seriousness, at times with humour, and at yet other times with his tongue in his cheek.

In an introduction to A Century of South African Poetry, Chapman suggests that Gwala conceives of art as a quality having a utilitarian purpose of conscientising a communal black audience, and "that the function of the artist is actively to help change a world that has pluralistic possibilities."[2] Sepamla writes from within a politically and socially unbalanced society, and his primary purpose is to give some sense of sanity and direction to his society. Along with other poets, Sepamla believes a poet can help to forge a society that will take care of

its own. In this he can be seen to be a "maker" in the Shelleyan sense.[3] In a multiplicity of ways, Sepamla directs his voice to those who wish to see the establishment of a just and society in South Africa. Sepamla's poetry can be said to convey a distinct element of protest. He maintains that protest should be understood in the sense of self-consciousness, which is what he believes Albert Camus means when he says, "We must protest".[4] Sepamla's protest finds its expression in his exploitation of the effects, on black people, of the Bantu Education Act, the Group Areas Act, the Immorality Act, Separate Amenities Act, and other apartheid laws.[5] His poems directly or indirectly attest to the brutality generated by apartheid through its laws.

It is not outrageous to suggest that Sepamla's poem, "To Whom It May Concern", is a testimony of the manner in which apartheid laws affect blacks from the cradle to the grave. The first three lines are "Bearer/Bare of everything but particulars/ Is a Bantu". The emphasis falls on the b-sound in these lines. Sepamla talks about a bearer who bears nothing at all because he is bare of everything. It is suggested that because he is a Bantu he must bear particulars, as required by the law. It is in place to explain that blacks were required to carry an identity book, which was so bulky as to be an encumbrance. As a "Bantu" one had to carry this book or face incarceration. Sepamla very cleverly mentions that a variety of conditions affect a black person's freedom of movement. The absurdities of the legal system are put under the poet's artistic spotlight when he talks about the effect of the various laws on the people. "The Bantu" lives, for

instance, not subject to the right live, but to the Urban Natives Act of 1925. Sepamla satirizes the judicial system of his country, which clings dogmatically in the sixties to laws that were made as far back as 1925. The Bantu "may roam freely within a prescribed area." The ridiculousness of this provision is evidenced by the manner in which it is "self-destructive". If freedom comes with conditions, it is not freedom at all but a restriction in another guise. In the line quoted above, the words 'freely' and 'prescribed' are antithetical and mutually exclusive.

The next instance of the absurdity of the system is reflected in the line "Free only from the anxiety of conscription." Military training is not mandatory for blacks in South Africa, but whites have to undergo compulsory military training. The essence of the line is that this freedom from the anxiety of conscription is yielded by the absence of freedom to defend one's country, a country in which one is not free. The bearer is only known as a number; his name and other personal particulars are immaterial. The words temporary and permanent as used in this poem shed light on each other. A permanent measure of law makes the "Bantu's" stay in the prescribed area forever temporary. The law makes the Bantu's temporariness permanent in the urban area. His stay in the prescribed area is desirable only insofar as he is able to provide services that guarantee comfort and security for the white man. The rest of the stanza is a brilliant display of the fact that in life or death, a black man is never free from the shackles of apartheid. Apartheid laws not only prescribe where a "Bantu" should live, but also where he should be buried. The system of separate development is perpetuated

even after life, and according to this system, this particular Bantu should "be laid to rest in peace/ on a plot/ Set aside for Methodist Xhosas". Sepamla's mention of Methodist Xhosas in this instance is not without point. He shows the hypocrisy of the church in practising religious segregation, thereby identifying with the state in the public eye. A consequence of this practice, in Sepamla's view, is that the ordinary religiously unenthusiastic person faces some form of double discrimination. Secondly, a Methodist Xhosa has become so religiously dogmatised that he now feels he occupies a station a level higher than the hoi polloi.

In his typical tongue-in-cheek style, Sepamla says segregated burials are carried out "at the express request of the Bantu/ In anticipation of any faction fight/ Before the Day of Judgement". Sepamla sarcastically jabs at the legal system that promotes tribalism and factionalism. The system creates a political and a social climate that is conducive to tribal differences, and then uses the victims to perpetuate injustice. This leads the original instigator to appear as an angel of peace, who in turn says the solution is separate development. Sepamla satirizes the system by saying that separate burials ensure peace after death. The reference to Christianity is also intended to cast a moral shadow on the government that espouses Christianity. Sepamla seems to be pointing out that concern for peace after death is a mockery of peace in life, which all those who control the fate of blacks should be concerned about. The poem shows, as Robert Kavanagh suggests, that "the major social forces operative were those of race,

class and nationality".[6] The poem is a brilliant satire of a system that discriminates against a group of people in a country, on the basis of race, to a point of dehumanisation. Alvarez-Pereyre states that "the poem is a corrosive attack on white society".[7] In its complacence, white society allows these humiliating practices to prevail because it stands to benefit. Sepamla's style in this poem issues from resorting to things that his reader will relate to. The various segregatory laws are not new to blacks, but the poet exposes the naked cruelty that they inflict upon black South Africans.

The influence of jazz music on Sepamla's poetic creativity has been monumental. Younger poets like Mtshali and Serote inspired Sepamla to write poetry, but it was jazz music that provided the basis for his creativity.[8] Some of Sepamla's lyrical poems display a strong affinity with jazz rhythmical patterns. To this end, "The Blues Is You In Me" is a case in point. The first stanza of this poem is deliberately misleading. One gathers the impression that the poet is speaking to his loved one who has been giving him the cold shoulder. On the contrary, this is a poem about feelings and thoughts and how, when they are adversely affected, the poet is led to dejection. The first stanza seems directed at the poet's lover, but this misunderstanding is dispelled when, in the next lines, it becomes clear that the blues is the South African system of government. The poem is an expression of disgust with an unlivable situation. Through the poem, Sepamla poignantly registers his exasperation at conditions that have been prescribed for black people, and fact after fact rattles out in attestation thereto:

I want to say it louder now
I want to holler my thoughts now
for I never knew the blues until I met you

the blues is you in me

the blues is the clicks of my tongue
agitated by the death I live[9]

These lines are a vehement articulation of the poet's feelings and sentiments. Initial attempts to publicise his fate have been muffled, and he now wants to make a louder attempt to draw the world's attention. The word "holler" as used in the poem is of singular significance. It means to cry out as if in pain or to attract attention, but the word also refers to "a freely improvised American negro work song".[10] The poem is structured on throw-away lines that appear to be devoid of seriousness. This is because of the poem's song-like quality. The lines, simple as they might appear, carry a lingering sense of seriousness. The poet makes it apparent that the misery caused by the South African situation is incomparable to anything he had encountered before. A number of fitly used artistic devices come into play in this poem. The word "clicks" evokes both auditory and cinematic imagery. The click itself is a protest against conditions imposed on the people, and is, according to Sepamla, agitated by "the death he lives". It is paradoxical, as Sepamla suggests in the foregoing line, that life has lost all vestiges of zest and vivacity. Apartheid conditions give to life a semblance of death, which is tantamount to saying that life is worthless, and not worth living any more; it has become a foretaste of death. The lines "The blues is my father's squeals/every Friday in a week" is a brilliant ensconcement of what might otherwise take much

longer to elaborate. Unskilled labourers used to get weekly wages,usually on Fridays. Paradoxically and for a variety of reasons, Fridays were bad days for workers. Their wages would invariably remind them of their insignificance, because they would be grossly disproportionate to their labour. Their woes were compounded by the possibility of their not getting their meagre wages home, on account of criminals that are bred by the socio-political system. The demands of family life always resulted in expenditure exceeding income, and this caused misery. Any number of these situations, or a combination of them would result in the poet's association of the blues with his father's squeals every Friday. Sepamla is subtly pointing away from the father to the cause of his misery.

The poem makes a pertinent reference to the practice of censorship. Sepamla has suffered under South African censorship, and some of his books were once banned. The censor's pen is graphically portrayed as a destroyer, and has a screeching sound attributed to it. Sepamla has not taken censorship lying down. At the London conference on censorship, Sepamla spoke alongside Breyten Breytenbach and said of South Africa:

> "South African society is a sick society, but it is not only the black people who are ignorant - although their ignorance is more dismal than that of whites - the white people are also quite ignorant and not aware of what they're missing by allowing the government to continue its censorship practice".[11]

Through the two lines about censorship, the poet is mounting a protest at this heinous practice; heinous, he believes, because it promotes ignorance at the expense of knowledge. Sepamla describes the anthology that falls victim to

censorship as his "sensitised pad". The qualificative "sensitised" suggests vitality and lifelikeness. The ultimate implication is that the poetry is so charged with ideas that it sensitizes whoever peruses it. The exasperation and dejection that befall an artist when his work is censored is prodigious and equatable to the blues in him.

Sepamla spares no effort in his attempts to expose the logical incongruities inherent in the South African social scenario. One would think that Sepamla wishes to point out that calling an act that prohibits mixed marriages the "Immorality Act" is to be guilty of deliberately using a misnomer. Those who make the laws in South Africa want to put this practice within a religious framework, but give it their own racially biased interpretation. It is no longer love that matters in a union of two people but race. Marriage across the colour bar is demonised, its issue bastardised, and the entire process is religiously contextualized, thereby giving it a false legal basis. Sepamla has expressed his views pertaining hereto in a very concise manner. The Immorality Act is qualified as a jitterbug. The word refers to a jive which is a kind of dance popular in the forties and fifties, characterised by forward and sideways jerky movements. An underlying and perhaps more important meaning of the word makes itself felt. Jitterbug can also be slang for nonsense or balderdash, which is probably the meaning Sepamla intended. The latter meaning would imply that Sepamla considers the Immorality Act to be not only a confused and confusing law, but also a product of a displaced sense of morality. Mothobi Mutloatse considers the

couplet "the blues is the shadow of a cop/dancing the Immorality Act jitterbug!" to be the best couplet of the poem.[12]

Sepamla continues to harp on the most glaring apartheid laws, and this time the Group Areas Act and the Bantu Education Act are singled out. He talks of the "Group Areas Act and all its jive", the word jive being a variation of jitterbug, and like it, suggesting resolve on the part of the government but absence of seriousness on questions of moral justice. McClintock states that the Bantu Education Act "was a crucial event in the history of Black culture", primarily because it "parcelled out the various ethnic groups to different institutions".[13] She quotes the architect of Bantu Education, Dr. H.F. Verwoerd, who said: "The Natives will be taught from childhood to realise that equality with Europeans is not for them ... There is no place for him [the Bantu] above the level of certain forms of labour".[14] Sepamla himself, addressing a conference on censorship in London said:

> "... this man called Verwoerd ... introduced an Act which was to prove most damaging to the development of Black people - the Bantu Education Act, ... One of the objectives of the Bantu Education Act was to develop the black man in a way that would make him suitable for certain jobs. Dr. Verwoerd made it quite clear that it was pointless to educate a black man for green pastures he would never be able to enjoy; instead, he was to be educated to remain a hewer of wood and a drawer of water".[15]

It is this situation then, that Sepamla is artistically and musically depicting through poetry. He refers to the implications and ramifications of the Bantu Education Act as "all its jive;" and these bring the blues in him.

The penultimate stanza encapsulates the toll that people have to pay for perpetuating the system of apartheid.

> I want to holler the how-long blues
> because we are the blues people all
> the whiteman bemoaning his burden
> the blackman offloading the yoke.[16]

The "how-long blues" is a tacit suggestion of the question uppermost in the minds of many a frustrated South African bearing the brunt of all the discriminatory laws. Sepamla is asking how long this will go on for. It is as if he is finding consolation in the blues music, but the music itself is an expression of his discontent and his gradually swelling impatience. The second line above suggests that everyone, irrespective of their race, is deprived of happiness by the status quo. The futility of all these acts is exemplified by the white man who is complaining about his burden of enforcing these laws, and the black man who is vehemently resisting them. There is an allusion to slavery in the last line, introduced by the word "yoke". Black people are in an immense struggle to unyoke themselves, whereas the whites have a task of maintaining the perpetual enslavement of blacks. For white people, this has become a burden.

The poem is very brilliantly structured on refrains. The continued refrains - "the blues is you in me" and "the blues is ..." give the poem a song-like quality which substantially engages the reader's attention. The repetition of "I never knew the blues until I met you" intensifies the unmistakability of the fact that whites have been riding roughshod on the backs of blacks. The poem is effective

in its directness and factuality. Sepamla uses the common, everyday bread and butter issues to mount a scathing attack on a seemingly intransigent government.

Sepamla started his teaching career at the Vereniging township of Sharpeville. He consequently developed a strong affinity with Sharpeville. The 1960 Sharpeville shootings were a cataclysmic event in South African politics and would have been very catastrophic for Sepamla, because of his consanguinal bond with the victims. A few years after the massacre, Sepamla, having taken up employment in Johannesburg, met a young man whom he had known from Sharpeville. The young man had been severely crippled from the shootings. Sepamla spent a lot of time talking to the young man and was so emotionally touched that he went home and started a poem entitled "I remember Sharpeville".[17]

The poem is an artistic reconstruction of the Sharpeville massacre. This is protest poetically historicised. The first stanza is highly descriptive. The 21st of March 1960, is said to have been "wrath-wrecked" and "ruined-raked", and this introduces an almost ominous atmosphere to the scene. This is intensified by the repetition of the r-consonant in the compound words quoted above. People marching forward to a police station are described as "a black sea" that surged onward. This descriptive technique evokes a visual image, and one visualises a single huge group of people, almost threatening like an angry sea. Sepamla suggests that black people had become so obsessed with giving vent to their feelings that they did not consider the immediate consequences of their action.

They simply wanted to make a political statement by leaving their identity documents at home and volunteering arrest. A colloquial expression is used in "it had downed centuries-old containment". An analogy is drawn between this situation and a work-place situation in which disgruntled workers "down" tools. In this case however, the people down centuries-old repression, and their intention is "to shed debris/on an unwilling shore". There is extensive figurality in this poem. Sepamla uses the sea as representing people marching, and the group grows bigger as the young and the old join in. The group finally grows into "a solid compound/of black oozing energy". The last line above suggests a lively throng of people that seem energetic in their resoluteness. Their white adversaries are an "unwilling shore" and are averse to what they see. They therefore react tragically.

The second stanza is the most critical and the most stylistically impressive:

> in a flash
> of the eye
> of gun-fire
> like spray flayed
> they fled, they fell
> the air fouled
> the minute fucked
> and life fobbed[18]

In this stanza, Sepamla dramatizes the shooting which lasted only a few minutes. The lines are united by the repetition of the f-consonant in every line, and this results in a distinct and unmistakable alliterative effect. The line "like spray flayed" demonstrates the hullabaloo eventuated by the gun-fire when people had

to flee. The comparison between trees that have their barks removed and the physical mutilation of people is facilitated by the apt use of the simile. On a deeper level though, Sepamla directs our attention to the fact that the shootings redounded negatively and had unfathomable spiritual and emotional repercussions. The line "they fled, they fell" conveys impressive visual images, and the reader sympathises and empathises with the victims. It is not only human beings who express their disgust and detestation of this calamity, but, as in Mtshali's poems, nature also participates in this disapproval. Nature disapproves in this instance by letting the air "foul" and the minute "fuck". The words "fouled", "fucked" and "fobbed" are used outside their normal linguistic contexts. This is a deliberate stylistic technique employed by the poet to express the extremity of the action taken by the police at that fateful moment. The language in this stanza is devoid of the slightest respect for the perpetrators of such reprehensible acts.

The next stanza dwells on the effect of the shooting on the survivors. Sepamla works by covert suggestiveness in this stanza. The mourners do not bow their heads out of shyness but out of respect for the dead and the wounded. They also bow their heads to express the unthinkability of what they have just witnessed. It could also be argued that when their heads are bowed they lapse into deep thought and fail to find any justification, moral or otherwise, for the shootings. Their shame is aflame not because of what they have done, but because of what had been done to them, and primarily to expose the absurdity of the lack of compunction on the part of the perpetrators. Their faith is shaken

because their attempts to mount a formidable protest have fallen on deaf ears and have been calamitous. Sepamla makes it clear, though, that they have suffered a setback only insofar as their resolve has been shaken, but not dashed. The overall intention of this three-line stanza is to make the reader identify with the transgressed and thereby make the transgressor's position conspicuous.

The next two stanzas complement each other semantically. The dead are heroes because they died for heroic intentions. Sepamla qualifies the word "heroes" with "fallen"and thereby evokes a military setup. The people that die can be equated to soldiers at war, fighting for the welfare of their country. Considered in the South African context, this situation is made all the more ludicrous because it amounts to a civil war. Sepamla wishes to satirize the South African white society by pointing out that, considering the bone of contention in this particular instance, the whole exercise was a storm in a teacup that could have been resolved amicably. The following lines, recreating the burial scene as they do, could not have been more relevant:

> for orations we had the religious
> for gun-carriers we had a string of hearses
> for flags half-mast tear-soaked hankies[19]

These lines recreate a funeral service with full military honours, similar to that of a respected soldier or statesman. They only half-dramatise the situation though, because they pinpoint that the practices attendant to such occasions were not carried out in the normal acceptable manner. This is Sepamla's artistic way of highlighting the gross inadequacies of a political system that feigns perfection.

Instead of having orators at this mass funeral, they could only have the religious conducting the funeral. Military gun-carriers would be the ideal mode of transporting the dead but they could only have hearses. Although they could not have flags flying half-mast, their wet handkerchiefs took their place. The qualificative "tear-soaked" reveals the emotions and boiling discontent that possessed the people at the mass funeral.

The actual burial is vivified by the use of visual images in "craned necks"and "them that lay row upon row crammed". Even in death, Sepamla still refers to them as a regiment, intensifying the notion that they were soldiers fighting for freedom in their lifetime. The noun-phrase "blazing bloodied sun", is made effective by the use of the plosive b-alliteration and its suggestiveness. The word "blazing" suggests that the sun was burning brightly, even to the point of sultriness, but "bloodied" suggests that the redness of the sun is attributable to the action of man. A link is somehow made between the sun's redness and the blood spilt when the people got shot. The sun is simultaneously a subject (blazing) and object (bloodied) of action. Whereas the former adjective can be taken to be an attestation of nature's conjoinment in the protest, the latter implicates man as the initiator of the object of protest.

The penultimate stanza amply demonstrates the disgust, dismay and discontent running through the survivors. It also suggests the extent to which the people were struggling to suppress their anger. To this end the poet says "the dust grit we ground as we gnashed teeth". The g-alliteration in this line facilitates

the maintenance of the reader's attention. This is also intensified by the visual image evoked by "gnashed teeth". Sepamla appeals to the reader's capacity for pity by resorting once more to the repetition of the hard g-consonant in "the groan and grouse of aggrieved relations". This artistic technique evokes auditory imagery which is effective in generating sympathy in the reader. In this case, as in many others in Sepamla's poetry, sympathy for the victim is concomitant with disapproval of the victimiser.

The last stanza reveals that Sepamla's real intention in writing this poem is to eternalise the contribution of the 'fallen heroes' to the struggle for liberation. In this vein, he can be seen in the same light with Shakespeare in his (Shakespeare's) attempts in Sonnet 18 to eternalise his mistress by writing a poem in her honour.[20] In this instance, however, Sepamla's intention is to convey the idea that the people who die might have been considered non-entities, but their contributions were monumental. The poet also emphasises that the fallen heroes' ideals were commendable to the extent that they will never be obliterated. The desire to fight for one's freedom and demythologize one's oppressor is, according to Sepamla, "Africa's priceless heritage to mankind". The poem is both a remembrance of the Sharpeville massacre and an appreciation of the valour of the victims of that massacre. But it would be an oversight not to observe that the primary intention of the poet is to satirize the South African political system.

Sepamla uses poetry to delineate the extent to which apartheid laws affect urban blacks with regard to domicility. In his well constructed poem, "The

Will," he poetically demonstrates an episode he read about in a Sunday paper in the sixties. A story was written, says Sepamla, of a woman who had a house repossessed by the government because her husband had died.[21] This was a pathetic case and it made the headlines in sympathetic newspapers. Through a stroke of the imagination, Sepamla artistically documents the case in beautiful poetry. "The Will" is strictly speaking about a will or testament written by a man either in anticipation of his death or who has been pensioned and has to leave the urban area, now being dispensable.

Sepamla makes pointed use of irony in this poem. The poem is well structured on syntactical parallelisms, and there is extensive use of allusion. The first stanza is directed at the testator's wife.

> The house, by right
> you will have to vacate
> surrender the permit
> and keep your peace[22]

Of the articles mentioned in the will, the house is the only fixed property and does not form part of the will. What should happen to the house is unalterably pre-determined by the government and the testator has no absolute control over it. It is interesting that he should say the house should be vacated "by right". There is a ring of irony in this because this "right" deals sadness out to the testator and his wife. It is "right" only insofar as it accords with the legal system which protects the rights of the whites by giving houses to blacks only for as long as their services are still indispensable. There is a tone of finality in the imperative "you will have to vacate". This is compounded by the word "surrender" in the

next line, which has a connotation of choicelessness. The stanza is completed by the irony in the suggestion that the legatee must keep her peace whereas there is nothing for the legatee to keep peace about.

The rest of the articles mentioned are either portable, movable or uprootable. These articles form part of the will and the testator can deal them out freely and confidently. It gives the testator a sense of pride to divide his humble belongings among his family because this asserts his individuality. In spite of the hardships mounted against him by the system, there is still a corner of his life where only he can exercise some control, although it is precisely this corner that Sepamla explores to reveal the fundamental restrictions of apartheid. The repetition of "will go to" in three consecutive stanzas contrasts sharply with "will have to" in the first stanza. This sheds some light on the items mentioned. The fourth stanza is particularly significant in its demonstration of the absurdities of laws governing the housing of urban blacks. African culture would dictate that the eldest son receive a lion's share, but in this case norms that apply are extraneous to its frame of reference. The bedroom suite and the couch go to the testator's younger son, and this is because he is married. The bedroom suite and the couch are likely to remain in the house. The law required that if a man was no longer in a position to keep the house, it must be taken over by his son who must be married. In this particular case, the younger son gets the bedroom suite and the studio couch and possibly takes the house over because he is married and not necessarily because it is the father's will for him to have them. Sepamla is

showing through this stanza the extent to which personal will can be dictated to by political realities.

When urbanisation rose as a result of industrialisation in South Africa, there was an influx of blacks from the homelands to the cities. Most of them were accommodated in compounds, and those who had families, in the townships. The peach tree was to be found in almost every yard in the townships. Sepamla associated the peach tree with westernisation, and viewed it as a deculturising object.[23] It is for this reason that his reference to the peach tree is devoid of any certainty.

> the peach tree uproot
> it might grow in the homelands
> so might it be with your stem[24]

Since the uprooting of a fully grown tree for re-implantation is ridiculous, the tree is made to serve a symbolic function here. It represents western culture or more precisely, an alien culture. The word "might" as used here suggests possibility, but not necessarily probability. Sepamla is expressing his doubts regarding the feasibility of western cultural values surviving in the homelands. He is protesting against the perpetual uprooting of families from one cultural frame of reference to another. The family was uprooted from the homelands, and it is now going to be uprooted from the city and taken back to the homelands. The obnoxious aspect of the whole process is that the family has now matured, the children have grown and are perhaps struggling to attain urban cultural fixation. The family will now move from deculturalization to cultural disorientation.

Sepamla makes references to Christianity in the last two stanzas of the poem. This is one of the various ways in which he satirizes the South African society by exposing shortcomings in its social and political fabric. South Africa is constitutionally a Christian country, and Sepamla purports to show that its moral code is conspicuously at variance with Christian precepts. As in the first stanza, the imperative "will have to" is used, but in this instance it is to impress the seriousness of unity as opposed to disunity. Sepamla is therefore using this single family unit to demonstrate that countrywide unity will depend on strict observance of biblical principles. The word "light", capitalised as it is, suggests guidance. In addition, it presupposes a confrontation of the forces of evil and the forces of good, which is probably a situation Sepamla wishes to postulate. The last stanza complements the sense developed in the penultimate one. The cat spotted black and white is a symbol for the country inhabited by black and white people. Sepamla is making a unifying political statement when he says to live alongside one another, black and white people will need God's guidance. The word "divide" seems to counterpoint the notion of unity. Conversely, it solidifies this unity, because it is division or sharing which respects God's guidance. Sepamla's primary import in this poem is to make the reader conscious of his world, so that disunity is superseded by lasting unity. Sepamla has a clearly defined understanding of what the effect of his writing should be on people. To this end, he says "We should be shaking them to a deeper self-consciousness ... We should hope that the liberal white is made aware of something by black writing".[25]

Holland suggests that Sepamla's "Civilization Aha", "reveals the ideological collusion between the explicitly racist policies of the government and Christianity".[26] The poem reveals Sepamla's satiric mastery:

> i thought of eden
> the first time I ate a fig
> i though of a whiteman
> the first time I saw God's portrait
> I thought of a blackman
> the first time I met satan on earth
> i must be honest
> it wasn't only bantu education
> it was all part of what they say is western civilisation.[27]

The structure of the poem resembles the writings of the American poet, e. e. cummings, but the sharp, biting satire on white culture is typically Sepamlan. The fourth and sixth lines are in parallel construction, and reflect the poet's reaction to impinging stimuli which have received conventional acceptability. His reaction is in terms of the mental processes generated by what he sees. He sees "god's portrait" and thinks "of a white man": he meets "satan on earth" and thinks "of a black man". "Satan on earth" does not only refer to satan's portrait, but to all the criminal acts committed in South African cities where blacks are generally considered capable only of devilish acts and whites of angelic ones. Sepamla is using the poem to challenge the authenticity and impeccability of these beliefs, and it is not difficult to see that his opinion is that they are hopelessly fallacious. Sepamla feels that at times people erroneously lay the blame for all the wrongs and ills in the South African black society at the door of Bantu Education whereas there is global contempt for blacks which dates back to the colonial period

and beyond. In South Africa, where Christianity is the state religion, the government has always sought religious justification for apartheid, and has misconceived religious discourse as being in accord with their political philosophy. Sepamla's intention is to dispel this misconception. Holland is right in her assertion that "even Christianity, the most well-intentioned aspect of white culture, is viewed as detrimental to Black Consciousness and culture".[28]

The poem "Statement: The Dodger" typifies life in a black township like Soweto in the sixties and the seventies. This is one of the most light-hearted of Sepamla's poems to date. Chapman talks about the "tsotsi-taal"[29] rhythms of this poem, and says they complement the jazz-inspired numbers in Sepamla's poetry, of which "The Blues Is You In Me" is a case in point. In "Statement: The Dodger", Sepamla makes liberal use of township slang, sometimes referred to as "tsotsi-taal" or the patois. This is a language generally used by the township proletariat, or township dwellers who make pretences of elitism. The poem is episodic and narratorial. The language has gained regional understandability but is extremely incomprehensible to the uninitiated. The story that the poem unfolds is local colour, and reflects the regional peculiarities of a black urban township.

In a nutshell, Sepamla tells the story of a man who borrows money and evades paying back, and of an exaggerated to-do that the failure to refund the money stirs up between the borrower and the lender. The persona is the lender, who starts by complaining that this world is too complex to understand: which is tantamount to saying that human nature is incomprehensible.

he comes to me one day
You know nge-same way
Ka-I'll be alright tomorrow Jack
He says ndimthi-borrow i-five bob
Uzandithi-fixup on a Friday
Xa sithi-meet again on the way[30]

The stanza reflects that this money-borrowing practice is not unusual, and that there is a particular manner of approach when the transaction is handled. In Xhosa, nouns are usually prefixed by the letter "i", and in this case the first language interference is deliberate. "I'll be alright tomorrow" is a metaphorical expression for "I'll be having money tomorrow", which is an attempt to win the favours of the lender. "Uzandithi-fixup on a Friday" means he will pay back on Friday. This again is an attempt by the borrower to lend credibility to his efforts. Friday is "pay day" for most township dwellers and if it is only the next day, the waiting on the part of the borrower will not be unduly long.

The transaction goes through because the lender feels pity for the borrower. He says "Ndamthi-pity umntu ka Thixo", which is to say he pitied this poor child of God. This is a typical expression in most South African black languages, but in this instance it is fused with religious thinking. It is the notion that "blessed is he that gives" that decides him in favour of lending the money. The attitude of the lender now borders on self-approbation, and the irony of the situation lies in that the biblical reference cited is with regard to giving as opposed to lending. The word "borrow" is used here confusedly for lend, and in these social circles it is used freely for both the borrower and the lender. The visual image evoked by "Ndathi rwaa i-five bob out of my pocket" dramatises the

situation. The word "rwaa" refers to the swift movement in taking the money out, and the speaker, though relating the incident, would physically demonstrate it. The next stanza starts with a throw-away line:

> Two three weeks go by
> Le chap ithe-disappear
> Not a ghost sign of him anywhere.[31]

The line suggests that time moved very quickly. It calls for the exercise of the imagination to capture the quick passage of time. The persona is now concerned that there is no sign of the borrower, and is almost on the point of giving him up when he appears. The scene of this chance meeting is very graphically set:

> One Saturday afternoon
> Ndisathi-relax ne-friends of mine kwa-Mrs. January
> Yi-next door neighbour ka-Mrs. May
> We were doing woza-2 woza-4
> I-session yamadoda ane-public opinion
> In walks this fellow
>
> Ndiphi by then
> Kwa-Love and Peace
> Axilanga ndiyashusha
> Drunk as a sailor I tell you.[32]

The names of the two ladies mentioned reflect a trend prevalent at the time of foregoing one's African name and assuming a European one. When the pass system was introduced, the white pass officers would just give any English first name that crossed their mind to any African applicant who did not have one. Sepamla wishes to point out, however, that in spite of the uncalled-for manner in which these names were acquired they were by no means detested. Instead of saying that they were gambling by casting dice at Mrs. January's house, the

persona says they were doing "woza-2, woza-4," which is a typical way of calling the combination of numbers to attain a win in this game. To anybody familiar with this setup, the combination of visual and auditory images would produce a distinct cinematic effect. This game is said by the persona to be a session of men (madoda) with "public opinion". Sepamla is resorting to code language, one might say, in an effort to make a succinct depiction of the behavioural peculiarities of this area. In this instance to have public opinion is to be big bellied, and this in turn symbolized economic prosperity, feigned or real. It is at this point then, that the persona's borrower makes an unexpected entry. The last line of the first stanza above suggests that he was walking superciliously; whereas "I tell you" is an Anglicised Africanism used for emphasis. The next stanza is a rhetorical question essentially meaning, "Where was I at that time?". This rhetorization is intended to capture the attention of the reader. The next line is baffling, because it needs to be decoded. In this setup to be "at Love and Peace" is to be completely drunk. The next line is a Xhosa version of the preceding statement, and intensifies its effect. The last line completes the sense introduced and intensified by the second and third lines respectively, and compounds the sense by the pertinent use of the simile in defining the degree of drunkenness.

The climax of the story conveyed by the poem is in the actual confrontation between borrower and lender. This violent confrontation is a far cry from the first meeting which was characterised by amity and understanding. It is

the borrower's attitude, which suggests to the lender that he has become an ingrate, that provokes the latter's ire and elicits the following behaviour.

> Ndathi-take five!
> A helluva clap leyo
>
> Women started to scream
> Ndathi: take six!
>
> A clap plus ndamthi-point nge-one finger.[33]

The first line above is a verbal recreation of a dramatic encounter, in which the persona slaps the borrower on the face. The persona says "I said — take five" which is to say he hit him with a palm, the five representing the five fingers on a hand. "Take six", on the other hand, is a slap complemented by pointing with a finger, and this latter action is a warning to the recipient of the punishment not to try anything lest he get a severer punishment.

Through this poem Sepamla has established himself as a poet interested in a variety of human behavioural tendencies, and not merely as a protest writer. The poem indicates that more than seeing his people as helpless victims of apartheid, Sepamla acknowledges their existence as a distinct society and the graphic detail in the poem attests to his immense observational capacity. The language of the poem shows the influence of westernization on a culture, which does not necessarily entail adverse deculturalisation of the African, but the African's capacity for participation in a cultural evolution.

"Dear Lovely" is a playful love poem, which is akin to "Statement: The Dodger" in its regional peculiarity. This poem is different from "The Dodger"

because its diction is exclusively English. However, "Dear Lovely" is grotesque in its unpretentious disregard of grammatical rules:

> My heart cough little bit
> Minute I touch touch for you
> This here and that there
> Oh my mostest beautifullest.[34]

This stanza calls for the reader's imagination. The first line expresses the joy the speaker derives from this indulgence in amatory ventures with his beloved. The word "heart" is pertinently used here, as it represents the seat of sentimentality and emotionality. The second line gains its effectiveness from the reader's capacity to visualise the persona's movements, and this hypothesis is borne out by the third line; the "This here and that there" that is being touched. Sepamla's verbal manipulation achieves humorous effects in the fourth line with his use of the superlative with grammatical unconventionality. The words "mostest beautifullest", altered from "most beautiful" are designed to lend more superlativeness to the beloved's beauty. The third stanza brings a culmination of the poem's humorous intensity:

> But you must listen here:
> Is one thing I never ask it:
> Apologies to be poor
> So now
> I buy you most of all
> A first class train
> Complete of head-rest
> And cushions and all
> And everything.[35]

Sepamla's lyricism in this poem, and more so in this stanza is, as Alvarez-Pereyre suggests, associated with humour which blends "emotion and laughter".[36]

Whereas the stanza discussed above deals more with emotion than anything else, this one is extremely mirthful. "Apologies to be poor" is a pompous way of displaying his wealth, which in this case may be imaginary rather than real. The stanza contains its own undoing, because the items he professes to buy for his beloved are simply out of his reach, the amount of wealth he can command irrespective. The irony of the situation gives the poem a double focus. It transports the poem from social considerations to political statement making. The persona wants to buy his beloved a first class train at a time when blacks are not allowed to board first class on a train. Sepamla is talking about a first class train which only whites can board, and which blacks know is "complete of head-rest/And cushions and all/And everything", the everything supposedly referring to anything else inside the train which blacks don't know about, never having been inside.

In "Sounds" Sepamla establishes himself as a master of lyricism. The beginning of the poem bears some resemblance, in the beating of the drums, to Mtshali's "Sounds of a Cowhide Drum", but this poem achieves remarkable onomatopoeic intensity as it progresses. Sepamla mimics the sounds that affect black people in their lives, diurnally and nocturnally. Of significance in this poem is the juxtapositioning of harmonious sounds and discordant ones. A comparison is also drawn between the child's ignorance in life and how this gives way to sorrow in adulthood. The poem makes an abundant display of the mechanising effects of industrialisation on human life:

touch button one touch button two
g-rr-ring cha
g-rr-ring cha
touch button three release button two
cha-boom-boom
cha-boom-boom
hey boy don't sleep on the job
touch button four touch button five
chum-chum-chum-chum
chum-chum-chum-chum
nyakaza wafa wena of hoe se ek.[37]

In this passage Sepamla depicts a work-place situation in a factory where deafening sounds are the order of the day. The sounds dramatise the exertion that is brought to bear on the persona as a physical and psychological entity. Sepamla shows how blacks toil in these conditions, boosting the economy of the country in which they are disenfranchised. He also shows that, in spite of the mammoth tasks they carry out, they still don't earn the respect of their white supervisors, for they are still referred to as "boy", although they may be bearded men.

The next part of the poem introduces the disillusionment of the factory workers after leaving their factories in the cities for the townships, as required by the Group Areas Act. The sounds of gunfire are a final straw on a camel's back, and the workers succumb to pressure, there being no recourse to anything else. Sepamla reproduces a multiplicity of sounds in an effort to depict a variety of ways in which blacks are brutalised and humiliated. He gives instances of these situations in what happens to prisoners:

Yo - na - na - yo
yo - na - na - yo

they are killing me
metal on flesh
the vicious grip of pliers on testicles
they are killing me.[38]

This display of incomparable uncouthness is unparalleled. Sepamla's language attains some verbal magic, as in the case of Mtshali's. The sheer descriptiveness charges the reader with emotion that sends spirals of feelings receding into his innermost being. The torture suggested by the penultimate line above evokes gruesome tactile images.

The poignancy of "Free Speech", from Sepamla's latest collection, is unmistakable. The poem encapsulates and ensconces a political message that the bulk of his poetry strives to do, with great precision. The light-heartedness of the poem renders the vulgarity of the language mirthful rather than offensive. The downright directness of Sepamla's approach in this poem is stunning. The essence of apartheid is highlighted in unembellished terms, and this allows it to be revealed for what it is, and for Sepamla, there is no better word for it than 'kak'. In a concise enumeration of apartheid laws, the poet succeeds in informing the authors of these laws about their products.

One of Sepamla's intentions in this enumeration of the laws is to satirize the South African legal system by exposing the foolhardiness of the legislators. The poems show that all apartheid laws have a prohibitive rather than a facilitative function, and that this is inhibitive rather than progressive to the success and welfare of the entire country.

The lyricism of the poetry, with its overt display of the blues' influence is rhythmically reminiscent of the earlier "The Blues Is You in Me", and relates to the jazz rhythms of Wopko Jensma:

> I look at the Bantu Education Act
> kak
> I look at the Group Areas Act
> kak
> I look at the Population Act
> kak
> I look at the Citizenship Act
> kak
> I look at the Separate Amenities Act
>
> I look at the Mixed Marriages Act
> kak
> I look at the Liquor Act
> I look at the Influx Control
> kak
> I look at the Internal Security Act
>
> I look at the Riotous Act
>
> I look at the Publications Act
> kak.[39]

The extract is a mixed bag of confusing acts designed to disadvantage a section of the population in perpetuity. The syntactical parallelism of the extract gives it a distinct lyrical quality, but it is the staccato-like rhythms which add to the desolation of the poet. The poem ends by suggesting that the failure of apartheid does not stem from the inefficiency of its administrators, but from the fact that it is an untenable system. It is the fact of its untenability that makes its demise a necessary end.

Apartheid may be bleeding
but the very idea has been
kak kak kak.[40]

Sepamla adopts a more serious and somewhat bitter and obstinate tone in "Tell me news". This poem from "The Soweto I love" anthropomorphises Soweto, so that it becomes "people" and not just a geographical location. Sepamla sees Soweto as people, some of whom have suffered at the hands of the security police. Some of these people have died under mysterious circumstances, and official inquests have "buried the truth" even deeper as Christopher Hope suggests when he says "official inquests are the funeral of truth"[41] When Soweto burst into flames in 1976, Sepamla "escaped" into Swaziland where he started writing "The Soweto I Love",[42] and the poem "Tell me News" is a fitting exposition of conditions in the country as he saw them. In an introduction to Sipho Sepamla's Selected Poems, Mbulelo Mzamane says Sepamla's "biting satire, a characteristic feature of his poetry, is in evidence".[43]

There is subtle irony in the title of this poem. The news of the death has already been released but Sepamla's skepticism regarding its veracity is apparent. The official explanations have been given as the turth, but Sepamla wants the other truth to supplant what has been given. The poem has a song-like quality which it derives from the structural repetition of the first line, and the lexical repetition in the second line of each stanza. In the first stanza, Sepamla suggests that it needs excessive gullibility to accept that a sober person in his normal senses would commit suicide in prison, especially when he has a point to prove.

The rhetorical question "was he punchdrunk" should focus the reader's attention not on the brother who "hanged himself in prison", but on those responsible for his custody. Something must have gone terribly wrong, Sepamla seems to suggest, for a man to die under those circumstances.

The cardinal point in each stanza is conveyed by the substance of each rhetorical question. Each question contains within itself, an unmistakable sense of doubt, so that the statement becomes self-critical and self-interrogative. The fourth stanza ends with a question that shows that apartheid laws fly in the face of justice because what counts is not which law has been contravened, but who contravened it:

> Oh, tell me of a sister
> who returned home pregnant
> from a prison cell
> has she been charged under the Immorality Act.[44]

The last stanza is significant in a number of ways. The repetition of "tell me" in the first line of the stanza suggests the urgency of the situation. The second and third lines evoke visual images that contradict the notion that the injuries could have been self-inflicted. But the ultimate statement Sepamla attempts to make in this stanza is that every human being has a conscience. Justice officials may dispense justice as they see fit and to whomever they wish but we all have a conscience that sits in judgment over us. If we refuse to listen to our consciences, then we have taken the first step towards a denial of our humanity.

The absurdity of apartheid is revealed conspicuously in a poem written in what Sepamla calls "murdered English". This is Sepamla's artistic way of

showing that it does not necessarily need sophistication to know and tell the truth, but pure common sense. He puts ideas in the mouth of an unlettered persona in order to heighten their effect, and the result is phenomenal. Malan says Sepamla is in fact relating "the story of a Malawian cook in a Johannesburg canteen who talked of the strange ways of Southern Africans."[45]

> I mean for sure now
> all da people is make like God
> an'da God I knows for sure
> He make avarybudy wit' one heart
>
> for sure now dis heart go-go da same.[46]

Sepamla is intelligently turning the Christian teachings around to those who brought Christianity to South Africa and effected discriminatory practice in its name. In this poem, Sepamla dwells on the "common biological identity shared by all the poeple of his country",[47] and subtly questions the authorities' obliviousness of this fact. It is Sepamla's characteristic way of challenging society to concentrate on the things that count in life. It is the heart, and not the skin that should matter, and Sepamla intensifies this notion towards the end of the poem when he talks about the similarity of blood.

> I doesn't care of say black
> I doesn't care of say white
> I doesn't care of say India
> I doesn't care of say clearlink
> I mean for sure da skin
> only one t'ing come for sure
> an'da one t'ing for sure is red blood
> dats for sure da same, da same for avarybudy.[48]

The sense of the poem is facilitated by its lyrical structure. The repetition of "I doesn't care" impresses with its ungrammaticality, but the reader is chastened by the external truth supposedly issuing from a nonentity. The poem succeeds through its unpretentiousness, but more so through its happy-go-lucky tone characterised by such words as "avarybudy", "anader" and 't'ing".

Sepamla's poetry is unique in its effortless use of the language of the ordinary person. He has an extraordinary ability to attain simplicity of expression, but this simplicity is always concomitant with an underlying seriousness which highlights the social, economic, and political disparity that prevails in South Africa. Sepamla's poetry conveys sharp biting satire, and his flair for the use of irony enables him to make an accurate depiction of living conditions under apartheid. The poetry displays Sepamla's acute awareness of the gap between racial groups in South Africa, and he wishes to play a participatory role in bridging it.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

1. Chapman, ed. Soweto Poetry, 213.

2. Michael Chapman, ed. A Century of South African Poetry (Johannesburg: Ad. Donker, 1981) 26.

3. In "A Defence of Poetry," Percy Bysshe Shelley says poets are legislators. He sees a poet's role as that of helping to shape the direction of society.

4. Chapman, ed. Soweto Poetry, 121.

5. Sipho Sepamla, Selected Poems ed. Mbulelo Mzamane (Johannesburg: Ad. Donker, 1984) 11.

6. Robert Mshengu Kavanagh, Theatre and Cultural Struggle in South Africa (London: Zed Books, 1985), 5.

7. Alvarez-Pereyre, 217.

8. This emerged during an interview I had with the poet in Johannesburg on June 26, 1991.

9. Sipho Sepamla, The Blues Is You In Me (Johannesburg: Ad. Donker, 1976), 70.

10. Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, (Springfield: G & C Meriam Company, 1973), 546.

11. "Writers and Repression" Index on Censorship 13.5 (1984): 28-29.

12. Chapman, ed. Soweto Poetry, 81.

13. McCLintock, 608.

14. McClintock, 608.

15. Index on Censorship 13.5 (1984) 28.

16. Sepamla, The Blues Is You In Me, 70. See also the semantic relationship between the poem and Rudyard Kipling's "The white man's

burden", in A Choice of Kipling's Verse, edited by T. S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1941) 136.

17. From an interview with Sepamla in Johannesburg, on June 26, 1991.

18. Sepamla, The Blues Is You In Me, 21.

19. Sepamla, The Blues Is You In Me, 21.

20. Shakespeare concludes Sonnet 18 by writing lines that immortalise his mistress:
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st.
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

21. See 8 and 17 above.

22. Sepamla, Selected Poems, 30.

23. See 8 and 17 above.

24. Sepamla, Selected Poems, 30.

25. Chapman, ed. Soweto Poetry, 118.

26. Holland, 71.

27. Sipho Sepamla, The Soweto I Love (London: Rex Collins, 1977), 27.

28. Holland, 71.

29. Tsotsitaal is the language originally spoken by tsotsis (young thugs who usually travel in groups and who are extremely dangerous) but subsequently spoken or understood by many people in the townships, especially young people. It is formed from English, Afrikaans and indigenous languages' word roots.

30. Sapamla, The Blues Is You In Me, 28.

31. Sepamla, The Blues Is You in Me, 28.

32. Sepamla, The Blues Is You in Me, 28.

33. Sepamla, The Blues is You in Me, 28.

34. Sepamla, Selected Poems, 39.

35. Sepamla, Selected Poems, 39

36. Alvarez-Pereyre, 223.

37. Sipho Sepamla, Children of the Earth (Johannesburg: Ad Donker, 1983) 28.

38. Sepamla, Children of the Earth, 28.

39. Sipho Sepamla, From Goré to Soweto (Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1988) 23.

40. Sepamla, From Goré to Soweto, 23.

41. Christopher Hope, "Notes for Atonal Blues" In the Country of the Black Pig (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, n.d.) 45.

42. During my interview with Sepamla on June 26, 1991 he related how the Soweto uprisings affected him personally. He was so touched by the events that he decided to write about them, but in order to do so effectively, he had to leave South Africa temporarily. In his own words he said "I escaped to Swaziland."

43. Sepamla, Selected Poems, 15.

44. Sepamla, The Soweto I Love, 30.

45. Robin Malan, ed. Ourselves in Southern Africa (London: MacMillan, 1988) 8.

46. Sepamla, The Blues Is You In Me, 11.

47. Alvarez-Pereyre, 223.

48. Sepamla, The Blues I You In Me, 11.

CHAPTER THREE

Wopko Jensma's poetry is characterized by an extraordinary eclecticism. He has an unparalleled capacity to yoke and fuse together an odd assortment of situations in a multi-pronged approach and is capable of flouting conventional poetic expectations without alienating his reader. In a diversity of ways, Jensma's poetry marks a clear divestment of traditionalism, and attains paradoxicality by displaying clearly definable South African characteristics that are concomitant with a certain un-South Africanness. The heterogeneity of his poetry evidences multi-layered protest: socio-political, traditional and conventional. As a white South African, he has had the advantage of knowing about the other side of the fence, and his association with other races informs him of the spiritual and material conditions of the oppressed. Jensma's poetry evidences an unmistakable influence of jazz music, and this has equipped him with a strong improvisational capability. The upshot of improvisation has been that amongst the body of his works there are some poems displaying absence of logical connectedness, but whose sections work conjointly to create a vision he wishes to put forward. "Joburg Spiritual" is one such poem. The diction in the poem is both jazzy and slangy. This is borne out by words such as "roun", "faia", "squadcar", "cops", "holler", "da", "bitchy"and "Lod" in the first section. The words give a certain lightheartedness

to the entire section, but their connotative and denotative implications resulting from their interplay with the rest of the section suggest the contrary. It is the rhythm which, by repeatedly flowing and halting, suggests the topsy-turviness of the society portrayed. The first line, "we all sat roun a faia" introduces a harmonious atmosphere. This is immediately undermined by images evoked by "his head a ball o' blood." Harmony has now given way to disharmony, concord to discord, and these lead to the final exclamation "... O Lod" which Gardiner says is suggestive of helplessness and hopelessness.[1] The mood at the end of the first section is sombre, and contrasts sharply with the convivial mood at the beginning of the stanza.

The second section presents a completely different but apparently equally significant setup:

> i saw her sit on a sidewalk
> i saw her spit blood in a gutter
> i saw her stump for a foot
> i saw her clutch a stick
> i saw her eyes grin toothless
> i saw her thorns in her burnt flesh
>
> i see her cut her own throat
> i see her corpse lie in Dark City
> i see her save a multitude[2]

The repetition of 'i saw her' in this section has a double focus. It simultaneously draws attention to the persona and to the woman. This artistic device portrays the persona as a discreet observer and recorder of facts. He

observes and follows every movement, but there is a curious ambiguity as to the identity of the 'her'. The reader may find this baffling, because there is a certain inconclusiveness. By portraying a variety of situations in which a woman is objectified, Jensma attains complete representationality. This situation can be seen on two levels. There is one woman used by the poet to typify a cross-section of women in her situation, or there are many women whom the poet is using as types to represent this cross-section. Whatever the situation, Jensma is using these multi-impersonations to make this woman truly representative. Of primary significance is the progression of the woman figure from a street dweller to a multitude saver. The second line suggests the termination of life. The flow of blood that is spat in a gutter suggests the condemnation of the woman's race to a "gutter". The line "I saw eyes grin toothless", baffles all attempts to put it in logical perspective. The verb "grin" relates to eyes, and so does the adjective "toothless." The normal logical order is hopelessly upset here because eyes do not grin, and even if they did, the word "toothless" does not accord with the action. By presenting this situation, Jensma portrays a lopsided society. The hopelessness in this society is not final, though; the possibility of redemption is vaguely suggested by connotations of "thorns", and "save a multitude". The structural difference between the two stanzas of section two lies in the past and present tense of "I saw" and "I see". The first stanza is mainly narrative and descriptive whereas the second is reflectively recollective. The Dark City

mentioned by the poet is not a tangible one like Mtshali's White City Jabavu of "An Abandoned bundle", but a symbolic dark city crying for salvation from a calamitous abyss.

Section three depicts the ambiguities inherent in the system of apartheid insofar as black housing is concerned. The sign "WELCOME TO SOWETO" is juxtaposed with St. Peter's Gate, to contrast the despicable living conditions in the township with the religiousness of the government. The regime, being a Christian government is only too willing to allow the church to see to the spiritual welfare of the township dwellers but is not as willing to see to their material needs. In fact, the last line of the section, "We can recommend the soap" is an allusion to the capitalistic nature of the society. The juxtapositioning of religiosity and secularity generates associations that receive full exposition in section four. Paradoxically, the two stanzas of section four display both complementarity and mutual exclusivity.

he sits in glory
a red robe
a golden throne
a thorn crown
the halo
the cross
the works

on his farm
khaki shorts
chev truck
barbed wire
smoke ring

fencing pole
the works[3]

Gardiner suggests that the neat arrangement of the stanzas and their swift correspondence are indicative of the fact that this section is about institutionalized power, and in this case "its manifestation in the religious sanction of control of the land".[4] Jensma succeeds in doing this by placing a spiritual figure and a secular figure in juxtaposition, and by maintaining a connection between them through the words, "the works". By placing the secular figure below the spiritual, Jensma presents a situation in which the farmer believes he has sempiternal authority invested in him by religious sanction. This should give the farmer a sense of security; oppositely, there is a pervading sense of insecurity, in spite of the sanction; hence the barbed wire and the fencing pole which should keep the unwanted in check.

The final section of the poem begins by a naming of the days of the week; a suggestion that they should perforce follow a consecutive pattern, one that they have been following from time immemorial. Against this background, Jensma suggests that this monotonous consecutiveness is indicative of what Alvarez-Pereyre calls "the dark tunnel of identical days which are never lit except by the celebration of war".[5] Like Mtshali's invocation of nature to participate in protest, Jensma invokes nature in the form of the sea to signal the lifelessness suffusing existence. The difference between Jensma's evocation of nature in this instance

and Mtshali's is that the latter portrays the sea as a dynamic, vivificative force. Jensma's portrayal is particularly apt, in that it projects a vicious cycle generated by state-church collaboration, which leaves everything deadened. The last two stanzas of the poem attest to the foregoing:

> time after time our prime
> minister proclaims lasting peace
> and nails sharpeville on
> another burning cross
>
> today is dingaan's day
> yesterday was republic day
> tomorrow will be an ordinary day
> after that a similar day[6]

The first stanza displays the rulers' blatant deprecation of peace while at the same time professing it. The prime minister's proclamation of peace is continuous, but is interspersed with and foregrounded by incidents that undermine it. Every now and then, incidents transpire which are reminiscent of the horrors of Sharpeville. Whereas Sepamla wishes to keep memories of Sharpeville alive in "I remember Sharpeville", Jensma suggests that the authorities wish to cast the Sharpeville massacre into oblivion as a non-event. The last stanza demonstrates the irony of celebrating bloody anniversaries while professing peace, as though violence breeds peace. By selecting Dingaan's day for mention in this poem, Jensma might seem to be highlighting the victory of the Afrikaners, but there is a sting in the tail. Dingaan stood up to the challenge of the Afrikaners; the outcome of the battle is inconsequential, of importance is that he mounted a courageous

resistance. The holiday consequently gains binary significance, depending on an individual's vested interests. Whereas the whites would see the holiday as a remembrance of the severe discipline of a restive "savage", the blacks see it as a reminder of their resistance to oppression, and the fact that it is named after their black predecessor is an acknowledgement of black resistance on the part of the white legislature.

Finally, it is in place to discuss briefly the structural and linguistic aspects of this poem. Holland suggests that Jensma "uses language to flout authority, in this poem the authority of the police" and that he "uses slang to recreate the atmosphere of a township street in which the violence of the police occurs almost as casually as slang does in general conversation".[7] Slang and colloquialisms are indicative of a desire for free expression and a divestment of the trappings of imposed formality. It is not by happenstance, then, that there is a juxtapositioning of formality and informality of expression in "Joburg Spiritual". Additionally, structural inorganicity and semantic non-conformities in the poem are reflective of general societal disconnectedness in matters of culture and world view.

Jensma does not underestimate the vastness of the work involved in taming South African society. He sees beyond the ordinary, and concludes that a larger-than-life dimension will have to come into play so that a radical overturning

of the status quo can be effected. This is suggested in a poem called "Sometime Next Time":

i plant my corn on the rocks
    it does not grow
i plant my corn on fertile land
    it does not grow
    next time i plant
    i'll start beyond
i'll start beyond the bread[8]

This poem derives its artistic forcefulness from the strong biblical allusions to the story of the sower. The intensity of the poem is enhanced by the contrast with its biblical blueprint. In this case all efforts to plant the corn the normal way yield nothing, and the persona resorts to unconventional and radical means. A distinct illogicality is evident in this process, and this is a result of exasperation and frustration. The poem is built on parallel structures and incremental repetition, and the final two lines cement the persona's resolve. The poem is an abstruse warning to those responsible for frustrating peaceful attempts to effect a just society.

"Our Village" is reminiscent of Chinua Achebe's novel, Things Fall Apart.[9] The poem displays the tension generated by the encounter between the old and the new. Put differently, the poem is an exposition of the tension created by a clash of cultures. The opening line, which also closes the poem, has impressive visual qualities. The "two gents" are singular because they both have white suits and they "roll up". The word "white "is used symbolically for purity,

with ironic implications. The words "roll up" suggest swift mobility, even unstoppable movement, as if a motorized vehicle is being used. The connotations and denotations from the first line are so telling that the village is no longer its former self.

The structure of "Our Village" is very tightly controlled. The poem is short, but its connotations and inferences are legion.

> since two gents with white suits rolled up
> our village is not the same anymore
>
> they pumped our chief full of bullets
> they bumped off all our elders
> they started raping our womenfolk
> they keep talking of a new life for us
> they say this thing is also elsewhere
> they have our whole country tied up
> they have come a long way to help us
> they want us to have faith in them
>
> our village is not the same anymore
> since two gents with white suits rolled up[10]

The first two lines are repeated at the end of the poem, but with the order inverted so that the first line of the poem becomes the last line. The two gentlemen are the subject of every action in the poem. They seem to serve a catalytic function because they effect change in the village without noticeably undergoing one themselves. Jensma shows, by making the "gents" enclose the only big stanza, that they are responsible for all changes mentioned in the stanza. The repetition of "they" in all lines of the middle stanza suggests that the "gents"

are in complete control of the situation, and that the villagers are helpless and have no recourse to anything.

The words "pumped" and "bumped" in the third and fourth lines respectively have very strong acoustic effects, and they reflect the violence occasioned by the arrival of the two gents. There is an uneasy unrelatedness between the verbs "pumped" and "bumped" on the one hand, and their objects, "chief" and "elders" on the other hand. The chief and the elders are traditionally responsible for the maintenance of peace in their village, and if they are the first targets, all prospects of peace in the traditional sense are annihilated. It is interesting to note that the first two lines of the middle stanza are in violent contradistinction to the last two lines. The people who cause distress and cultural disorganization maintain that their primary purpose is to help and that the victims must have faith in them. Jensma wishes to highlight through this contradiction the inherent inexplicabilities of self-styled good Samaritans who encroach on peaceful communities under the guise of civilization. The third line of the middle stanza generates repugnant sentiments which in turn undermine all prospects of trust between the "two gents" and the villagers. The raping of the womenfolk raises far deeper significations than can ordinarily be supposed. The act of rape is in this instance used symbolically to signal forcible entry into a tranquil cultural situation. In African culture, women are associated with peacefulness, regeneration and orderliness. It is suggested by this third line that African culture has been raped,

which is tantamount to saying it has been ravaged and plundered. The next line is singularly important because it raises a number of pertinent questions. The "two gents" "keep talking about a new life for" the villagers, but it is apparent that this life is curiously new. It undermines the integrity of the villagers and marks a sudden and dramatic departure from what they are accustomed to. The encounter between the "two gents" and the villagers marks a confrontation between culture and culture, each of which is new to the other. It is ironic that the survival of this new life in the village will depend solely on the demise of the old, since the new always supersedes the old. In a word then, the new life is the new death, and this new death manifests itself through deculturalisation. Gardiner is right in saying that "the village is simultaneously a human community and a state of being" [11]

"Misto 3" is one of the poems in which Jensma uses a telegraphic style[12] to express frustration and disgust.

lets
spit
lets
spill our names on blank walls
lets spell it out: we have no future
lets
bolt
lets howl for their waste blood, yes
lets
slit our throbbin human vein
guts
guts
guts
(big boss, my lord, may i vomit,
i mean, my bitter, bleedin heart

(flippin fool
drum
guts
drums, hear our drippin pleadin
when will our black christ die
guts[13]

The persona in this poem is described as a "misto"; and the word is "colloquial Portuguese for a person of mixed blood".[14] The poem was probably inspired by Jensma's experiences during his stay in Mozambique, a former Portuguese colony. The first part of the poem is, according to Walter Saunders, "an expression of disgust, bitterness, frustration and despair".[15] These emotional outbursts are suggested by verbs like "spit", spill" and "spell". The expression "spell it out" is suggestive of a strong determination to express one's feelings. In this case the word "spell" is the third of verbs starting with the s-sound, all acoustically affiliated and expressing related sentiments. Suffice it to say that the expression "spell it out" suggests that the persona is at the end of his tether and this is because of the unpredictability and uncertainty of the future. A variety of reasons can lead to this state of affairs, but the overriding one could be the discrimination he has to face because of his race. The frustration becomes so intense that the persona says they should bolt, but the next section of the poem introduces an unexpected turn of events. The persona says they should howl for their blood, in other words they should attack and dismember their opponents. The poem takes curious twists and turns because after this, the persona speaks

of committing suicide. This sudden change in the contemplated course of action suggests the emotional disorientation caused by confusing events the people have to deal with every day.

The persona is on the point of being totally dispirited when a sudden realization of how to deal with the situation dawns on him. What is needed is "guts", courage and determination. The word "guts" is repeated three times, and each repetition intensifies the resolve, suggesting the guts to stand up to the challenge, to have the guts to stand one's ground and be a force to reckon with. At this point, the persona has enough guts to talk down to the boss who is the cause of his misery and the attitude is unambiguously contemptuous when he calls him "flippin fool". The penultimate line clarifies the cardinal issues involved in the situation. The biblical Christ died to redeem humanity from slavery, consequently there should be a black Christ who should die to save blacks from white domination. This is a reminder to the white government that its espousal of Christianity binds it to act in concert with it. The poem satirizes the status quo and encourages the victim to have guts to shape his destiny instead of resorting to self-pity.

An apparent dichotomization of the sense of the self by interventionist influences is evidenced by Jensma's "Not Him 3". The extrapolations deducible from the poem's title reveal the existence of a divided self. "Not him" suggests that the man's character has undergone a radical transformation or that his

behaviour has now become so queer as to be mindboggling. The poet speaks in this poem, of a man who is no longer his former self:

> he forbids us to dance
> he always leads the church service
> he has a stable job
> he is always on time for work
> he never gets drunk
> he has respect for most people
> everybody respects him
> we love our daddy
> but sometimes i notice
> when a kwela blasts from the radio
> he wiggles his toes[16]

Jensma uses this poem to give a portrait of a man who, through religious conditioning, has been programmed to behave in a way that is compatible with his new station. This man's acquired personality enables him to bring some influence to bear not only on his family but also on the entire community. He lives a respectable life, and he earns the respect of his people. However, Jensma's intention is to show that the man is used as an ideologizing agent by forces extraneous to his culture. Two worlds are implied in the poem, the world of the community of which the man is a member, and the world that is new and foreign to the man's community, and the man is straddling both worlds. It is this kind of behaviour that leads the persona to say his father is "not him " anymore.

The purpose of the poet is in the main to show the impossibility of complete assimilation into an alien culture. The man's real being, his inner feelings and sentiments run counter to the "gospel" he spreads. He forbids his

children to dance, he has assumed a position of leadership in church and must therefore behave according to a certain moral code. The last three lines of the poem undermine this code of behaviour. When a kwela (some kind of township music) blasts, the respectable father is unable to resist it. The man spontaneously dances to the tune, although not without some conscious resistance to it. The poem indicates that it is impossible to extirpate a person completely from his roots, and Jensma strives to show the impossibility of the impossible.

Another white South African who has added his voice to the shaping of a new South Africa is Peter Horn. He has vehemently propounded change, and has refused to turn a blind eye to anomalies in his society.

Alvarez-Pereyre says Horn "has chosen to be on the side of the oppressed, on the side of the future, of the dream of a multi-racial society; in short, on the side of freedom".[17] Ignorance of Peter Horn's poetic output might lead one to suppose that Alvarez-Pereyre's characterization is overstated. Quite the contrary. In an introduction to Horn's Poems 1964-1989, Njabulo Ndebele says "Horn's poetry consolidates an emerging transcendence of enormous significance: the sense of a dead past and our readiness to accept it and in doing so, learn from it".[18] In his attempts to satirize the South African pecking order, Horn creates his own aesthetic, and puts his verbal facility to good use.

"I'm getting famous sort of" displays a certain lightheartedness that Horn shares with Jensma. The poem has a striking free-flowing tone, but this tone

transports veiled satire. The object of the satire is a liberal who is hoodwinked by the success with his inroads into the writing fraternity. This upstart positions himself on a higher social hierarchy, supposedly fitting his new station in life, and pretends to be against the government when in fact he refrains from anything that might jeopardize his privileged position. The second stanza shows evidence of the persona's self-esteem.

> I rehearse dignity
> in front of a mirror
> I receive visitors
> young poets
> present to me
> their first attempts
>
> say: not too bad[19]

The situation portrayed here is of one who pays attention to his manner of dress because he wishes to impress people. The publication of his first poems has earned him some publicity, and he has now become a centre of attraction, something he obviously relishes. His comments on the works of the young poets are dismissive. Instead of offering guidance and encouragement he simply dismisses them with an unconvincing "not too bad".

The persona is cognisant of the fact that he should maintain the respect and adulation of people from both sections of the socio-political spectrum, which is why he should say he is for peace and against the government. The parenthetical expression in the third stanza allows a number of issues to spring to

mind. The statement suggests that all people do what they do because they want peace, but also that they think their mode of pursuit for peace is the only right one. The word "peace" has many nuances and can be variously interpreted, depending on one's point of view. For repressive governments, peace entails the successful suppression of dissent, whereas for the oppressed, peace is linked to justice.

The poem builds towards a climax from the beginning to the penultimate stanza. The last stanza very severely offsets the mood of the rest of the poem, and through it Horn reveals his persona for what he is, a conceited person who must be kicked "in the arse".

> it is time
> somebody
> kicked me
> in the arse[20]

This stanza represents a confrontation between the poet and his persona. The poet creates his persona, a self-hoodwinked liberal, and then foils him. The statement is in fact a double entendre, whose basic essence is that the persona's genuine nature must come forth, or that the persona must truly discover what it means to be what he purports to be. The poem is an attack on uninvolvement that masquerades under the guise of involvement.

Like Sepamla, Horn deals with the problem of censorship in "Inevitable". The poem is blatantly uncompromising in its disapproval of censorship.

they did get me
after all
they summoned the
village idiot
to be censor

he decided
that my poems
were different from those
in the first grade reader
and thus dangerous to the state[21]

This poem indicates that censorship is an affront to South African society. The poet is concerned that society is disadvantaged by being placed in a position of ignorance. The first stanza does not reveal the identity of the village idiot's employers, but this is clarified by the last line, when it becomes clear whose interests are safeguarded. The poem displays an unhappy set of circumstances. It is a situation in which the exercise of free will is held at bay. The village idiot is summoned and does not necessarily like what he does, although he incurs the wrath of the people. To be good to the state, the poems should be similar to those of the first grade reader, which is as much knowledge as the government wants its people to have. The irony of the situation is that the welfare of society is sacrificed at the expense of the survival of the government. It is the title of the poem that best illustrates the poet's intention. The state imposes censorship because they wish to halt change, but the inevitability of change is far more overwhelming than censorship, and censorship may inevitably produce idiots,

which will be a tragedy for the state. In a word, the point that Horn brings to bear is that the inevitability of change is inevitable.

Horn's poetry reveals that he has an analyzing and synthesizing mind, and he is convinced that the role of poetry in the struggle is immense. Horn's analytical potential enables him to see that at issue in the South African struggle is not or should not be a malicious vengeful intent for whatever reason, but the identification of the root cause of political problems. In the poem "Afrikaans is rubbish, blacks are not dustbins", Horn suggests that the basis of the struggle should be founded on the primacy of mind over matter. It is through rigorous political dialectics that the struggle will gain its focus, which is that of a confrontation not of person and person, but of mind and mind.

> It wasn't the Afrikaans of Leipoldt they rejected
> who mourned the Dimbazas of his time,
> nor the Afrikaans of Eugene Marais
> who knew what pain is and anguish,
> this drug addict, intellectual, compassionate
> chronicler of baboons and termites,
> nor the Afrikaans of Breyton Breytenbach,
> who languished in our jails.
>
> It was another kind of Afrikaans.
> The thoughtless order:
> "Skiet die vuilgoed". This barbaric language of race hatred
> and legalized violence.[22]

The first stanza of this poem eulogizes three Afrikaners who have made positive contributions to South African society. They have individually and in various ways made paradigmatic strides, but they are made to represent all like

minded Afrikaners in this poem. Leipoldt mourned people of Dimbaza's stature, and Marais's life earned him the respect of people whereas Breytenbach earned the wrath of the government because of his writings. Horn points out that some Afrikaners suffered under the regime because their political ideas run counter to the accepted political idiom.

The kind of Afrikaans that is objectionable is, according to Horn, one that is a manifestation of erroneous political convictions. It is not the real Afrikaans but "another kind of Afrikaans" which is based on thoughtlessness. It is the Afrikaans that is hellbent on the destruction of the other which is not itself. In this short stanza, Horn shows that this Afrikaans is capable of extreme brutality and would "skiet die vuilgoed", which means shoot the bastards. The expression is used in the poem to shed light on this other kind of Afrikaans, spoken by the other Afrikaner, as it were. The language reflects on the speaker, and the reader is made to understand that the overbearing problem is one of political primitivism. The "vuilgoed" is a person with a different pigmentation, and instead of securing peace, this language only fosters social hatred and violence.

Horn's style evinces a strong affinity with Sepamla's and Jensma's in a poem like "Slang". By a generous use of the patois, this poem displays a remarkable proclivity towards trivialising serious issues, but with serious satiric intentions. The poem displays a strong sense of insecurity on the part of government strategists, and an unfettered dislike of communism as a political

alternative. In the following stanza Horn blends English and Afrikaans freely, and the result is a street language of the township rank and file.

> Just like die bad ouens
> you see in die flicks on TV,
> daai terries, and Commie bastards
> daai ouens van die Total Onslaught
> wat onse land verwoes met hulle bomme
> net omdat hulle freedom wil hê,
> I mean we should get together
> en nog n plan uitwerk
> oor daai stooges of Russia
> what's their name, daai ANC,
> en daai UDF, ennie Civics,
> jy weet, wat PW van praat.[23]

Horn resorts in this extract to the use of "tsotsi-taal" to express apartheid ideas. The ideas are typical of the Afrikaner oppressor mentality but the language has been artistically manipulated to be accessible to the oppressed. By so doing, Horn succeeds in putting the oppressed wise to the machinations around the apartheid drawing board. The thinking in the stanza is self-deconstructive, because ideas negate what they purport to affirm. Line three refers to terrorists (terries) and commies (communists), but line six states a fact which the speaker seems to be convinced about; that blacks are struggling for freedom. The last line indicates that the speaker has no opinion of his own regarding this matter, but that he blindly follows what his president, P.W. Botha, talks about. Horn uses poetic art to show the effects of ideological indoctrination.

One of the shortest poems in Horn's Poems 1964-1989 is "Explaining my new style". The poem is surprisingly substantive and encapsulates two experiences which, by their dissimilarity, shock the reader into profound consciousness of the South African socio-political reality. A prima facie understanding of this poem is of two experiences, one a pastime, and one an enforced degrading ritual. However, a careful unpacking of the poem's semantic layers reveals that there is more to it than meets the eye. The poem is Horn's characteristic manner of signposting his reader to the essence of this poetry, which is its engagement with the thrust and counter-thrust of ideas in a country undergoing social and political flux:

> I do not walk in the forest
> admiring flowers and trees
> but among policemen
> who check my passport
> and my political background[24]

The experience gleaned from the first two lines is in stark contrast with that of the last three. The first two lines show a usual way of passing time in western culture, going for a walk. The exercise is voluntary and hassle-free and at times leads to the enrichment of the soul. A person going for a walk may admire the surroundings and natural objects such as trees and flowers, or may walk past these things in deep thought, entirely incognizant of their existence. The basic characteristic of this kind of walk is not only freedom but also the possibility

of spiritual refreshment. Compared and contrasted to this is a diametrically opposite kind of experience introduced by a volte face. The panoramic landscape in the reader's eye is immediately peopled by "policemen". As Ndebele states, the situation has come to represent the "replacement of beauty with pervasive ugliness".[25] The juxtapositioning of the two experiences foregrounds the political realities of a country characterized by two different existences, one privileged and respected, and the other deprived and humiliated. Dealing with these issues, describing the endemic physical and psychological violence of apartheid is Horn's preoccupation, it is his style.

Both Jensma and Horn succeed in advancing a vivid portrayal of social conditions in South Africa. They both indicate how these conditions are dictated by political realities obtaining in the country. Whereas, Jensma is less formal and more avant-garde in his approach, Horn's patterns are more consciously formal.

NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

1. Michael Gardiner, "'Funking the Jive': the poetry of Wopko Jensma" English Academy Review, vol. 3, ed. Martin Orkin. English Academy of Southern Africa, 1985, 117.

2. Chapman, ed. A Century of South African Poetry, 290.

3. Chapman, ed. A Century of South African Poetry, 291.

4. Gardiner, 119.

5. Alvarez-Pereyre, 107.

6. Chapman, ed. Century of South African Poetry, 291.

7. Holland, 9.

8. Stephen Gray, ed. Modern South African Poetry (Johannesburg: Ad. Donker, 1984), 115.

9. In Things Fall Apart, Chinua Achebe shows the disintegration of African culture as a result of colonialism.

10. Gray, 115.

11. Gardiner, 121.

12. Alvarez-Pereyre, 105.

13. Chapman, ed. A Century of South African Poetry, 291.

14. Peter Wilhelm and James Polley, eds. Poetry South Africa - Selected Papers from Poetry '74 (Johannesburg: Ad. Donker, 1976) 80.

15. Wilhelm and Polley, eds. 80.

16. Gray, 116.

17. Alvarez-Pereyre, 96.

18. Introduction, xii.

19. Horn, 14.

20. Horn, 14.

21. Horn, 18.

22. Horn, 65.

23. Horn, 132.

24. Horn, 5

25. Horn, Introduction, xiii.

CONCLUSION

South African poetry of the seventies and the eighties displays a serious engagement with practical, day-to-day aspects of life in South Africa. Black and white poets examined in this study use a variety of stylistic modes in their verse to articulate their perspectives regarding the social and political conditions designated for the black man by the South African establishment. A meticulous examination of the signification of the poetry covered in this study will reveal, amongst others, what Alvarez-Pereyre considers to be the fundamental objectives of the poets. He says that black poetry in particular, "has given itself the triple aim of informing, accusing and exhorting", and that there is a meeting point with some South African white poetry in the pursuit of these objectives.[1]

Mtshali, Sepamla, Jensma and Horn occasionally use similar approaches but at times employ different stylistic techniques to attain the same objectives. These poets, and many others like them, are intent on depicting what they consider to be the real state of affairs regarding the condition of those who bear the brunt of apartheid repression. Their endeavours are expressed by Horn in a precise qualification of any committed poet's intentions:

> I write poems in a situation where most of the masses live in dire poverty and under inhuman conditions of injustice and exploitation. Unless my poetry had some relevance to this

> situation, I would feel a parasite of a state and a social system which I abhor. My poetry is thus squarely located in the struggle of the masses against Apartheid and capitalist exploitation in South Africa and elsewhere in the world.[2]

Horn states the same concerns expressed by the other poets through their poetry. Different poets would, of course, use different modes to express similar sentiments and conditions. Mafika Gwala, for instance, posits a dramatic situation in which a black man is arrested for failing to produce an identity book in a poem called "Kwela-Ride."

> Dompas!
> I looked back
> Dompas
> I went through my pockets
> Not there
>
> They bit into my flesh (handcuffs).
>
> Came the kwela-kwela
> We crawled in
> The young men sang
> In that dark moment
>
> It all became familiar.[3]

This poem dramatizes the manner in which the pass laws affected black people in the cities. Whereas whites had freedom of movement, blacks had to suffer the humiliations of the Influx Control Act, which restricted their movements to the cities unless they had legal cause to be there. This poem's success derives from the poet's evocation of both auditory and visual images, and from the poet's ability to shock the reader by presenting an ostensibly unlikely situation. An

instance of this is when the detainees sing "in that dark moment". Contrary to expectations, the young men sing in order to brighten their spirits and avoid dejection. This exercise has become a ritual to them, it has become a way of life. This situation relates very strongly to the one depicted by Horn in "Explaining my new style".

Sepamla examines a similar situation to Gwala's, but he uses a different set of circumstances. He shows through his poem "Zoom the Kwela-kwela" that the pass laws drive people to pretence. People realise that the system is brutal and dehumanising and that the onus is upon them to beat it. They consequently resort to any means necessary to survive in a system that seeks to reduce them to subhumans. In this poem Sepamla talks about a young man who hobbles on crutches at the sight of a police van but walks unaided when the van disappears:

> like that one I saw the other day
> hobble on a pair of crutches
> the length of a Reef road
> lean them on massive pillars
> of a "native" shop
> that has often heard pitched cries
> of hustled customers
> and began to play football
> on sound agile legs
> the very moment after
> the kwela-kwela had zoomed by.[4]

Like the young men who sing in Gwala's poem, Sepamla's young man acts spontaneously. His behaviour has now become part of his life. The two

poems are an artistic projection of the effects of apartheid on the lives of black people. The setting in both poems is a black township. Horn's "Hide and seek" is semantically congenial to Sepamla's "Zoom the kwela-kwela". Horn projects the same situation from the point of view of a privileged white South African who is aware that blacks should find unconventional ways to rid themselves of docility.

> Take care in the night and
> hide behind straw huts and bushes
> hide behind drums and guitars
> hide behind laughter and tears
> hide behind singsong and sunshine
>
> Take care in the night
> I have seen a red eye
> and an iron net to drag the slums
> a net of darkness and cunning
>
> Take care in the night and
> hide behind yes baas and no baas[5]

By using symbol in his approach, Horn transcends the physical and moves into the metaphysical. The night mentioned by Horn is a state of being, it is the night that is South Africa. Horn suggests that where human rights are involved, South Africa has yet to see the light of day. The first stanza enumerates an array of things behind which the addressee should hide. In effect, the stanza exhorts people to project a falsified image of themselves. This necessarily entails a replacement of the self by the non-self, so that the second person takes the non-self for the self. In this manner, blacks can get around the complex web of apartheid legislation.

Mtshali's poetry informs and exhorts, and encourages people not only to know their world, but to initiate and direct the course of events. Mtshali is more at home with the use of the simile than with any other stylistic device, and he occasionally draws from his cultural and traditional background as in "The Birth of Shaka" to attain full expression. Sepamla is more relaxed than Mtshali in his use of verse and is more adept at employing humorous satire than most of his contemporaries. His poetry derives a distinct peculiarity from his use of township slang, and in this he is equalled only by Jensma. As indicated in chapter four, Jensma is a master of innovation, and is as far as this is concerned, a nonpareil. For a white South African, his poetry is radically uncompromising. One of the common qualities of these poets is that their verse is by and large anisometric, although, of course Horn's is less so. Horn's depiction of the social ills of his society is thorough, but his verse is ostensibly consciously formal. These poets usually indigenise their poetic expressions, albeit not always liberally, in their attempts to deal with the anomalies of their social system.[6]

South African poetry is still very experimental and, therefore, still charting its own direction. The task of the poet is odious because his society is constantly in a state of flux. Received notions of aesthetic decorum are also imposed on the poetry without due regard to the country's uniqueness and its cultural specificity. Pio Zirimu's comment is very fitting and compatible with South African post-Sharpeville poetry:

The authentic critical standards must be born from the works of specific societies and their representative creators. That is where it all begins, criticism. Not in Aristotle's Poetics. The Poetics was written from Greek dramatic performance and experience, it is a distillation and a summation of what appeared to be the operating principles from observed plays; it did not predate, precede the actual plays, the performers and the dramatic spectacle and the audience "viewance". Our plague has been to think that Greece was the universe and Aristotle was the world's oracle.[7]

NOTES TO CONCLUSION

1. Alvarez-Pereyre, 251.

2. Horn's sidelights comments in Contemporary Authors, Vol. 101, ed. Frances Locher (Detroit: Gale, 1982) 213.

3. Chapman, ed. A Century of South African Poetry, 351.

4. Sepamla, The Blues Is You In Me, 52.

5. Horn, 9.

6. Goodwin, Introduction, XIII

7. Chapman, ed. Soweto Poetry, 50.

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