

A Red Blanket Addresses Christians

The poem can be found on page 91 of "The New Century of South African Poetry".

Please also refer to pages 3 - 5 of your study guide.

The author was a Xhosa poetess who published between 1920 - 1929. This was an amazing feat for a black woman at the time.

She was a campaigner against the lack of morality in the city and how it affects woman, particularly the school-educated youth. There is evidence in the poem to show this.

She creates a type of urban poetry.

This poem, in my opinion is a brilliant example of a postcolonial narrative. As your study guide states on page 2, the colonised people of South Africa continued to practise the language and values imposed on them by the coloniser, such as English, Christianity and Western education – the things the speaker in the poem seems to be against.

The speaker identifies as a red blanket. This refers to traditional Xhosa dress. From this, we can deduce that the speaker respects traditional values and the indigenous religion.

She pits herself and her traditional values against the black, educated youth who she believes have fallen into moral degradation after appropriating white culture.

Read stanza 7 as an example of South Africa as a "contact zone":

**You Christians are suckers for every fad,
You disregarded skin garments and dressed up like whites,
Your ears ring for white man's booze,
But whites won't touch a drop of yours.**

She "others" the Christians, separating herself from them. Look at stanzas 6 – 8. She repeatedly says, "You Christians". You can almost hear the disgust and disdain in her voice. She is judging them. She believes she is different and seeks to distance herself from Christians. She becomes inclusive when referring to her own community, "We red blankets" in the last stanza.

But trying to separate herself from the Christians actually has the opposite results, making the poem ironic.

Use your study guide and explain why you think the poem is ironic.

Also, think about why the speaker dislikes the Christian youth so much.

Are there other examples in the poem of SA being a contact zone?

I think the biggest irony is that the author, a staunch Methodist and member of Manyano, berates other Christians for behaving like the colonialists. Not only is she also a Christian, she is a Xhosa who has taken on a religion of the colonialists - Methodism was brought to South Africa by British soldiers.