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Literature**

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QUESTION 1: POETRY

do not use 'you' in formal essays

When you look at the poem of William Plomer 'Johannesburg' (Chapman: 85) and the poem by Mongane Wally Serote 'City of Johannesburg' (Chapman: 199) taken from The New Century of South African Poetry edited by Chapman, Michael (2002), you are drawn to the imagery they paint of the place and their interpretation of it. William Plomer's focus for his poem is on the men who worked there and the lack of their moral compass, including the government that exploited these men, whilst Mongane Wally Serote's poem is on his personal experience as a black man in the city of Johannesburg as 'a product of racial control' (Dambe, S, Dr. *et al.* 2013: 11). His poem also 'immerses the reader in the history of oppression through the graphic images of entrapment' (Dambe, S, Dr. *et al.* 2013: 12). Between the two poems, the things they have in common is that they were both based on Johannesburg and its 'urban development' with its 'polluted ecosystem' (Dambe, S, Dr. *et al.* 2013: 9) with its 'underlying dominant economic order' (Dambe, S, Dr. *et al.* 2013: 9), similarly both poems were post colonial poems and spoke about mining in South Africa. In this essay I will compare and contrast these poems. I will briefly discuss the poet's background, then explore how both poets used literary devices to paint their personal pictures of imagery about Johannesburg, including their poem structure.

William Plomer, was 'born in the Northern Transvaal in 1903 and died in 1973' (Colcampus. n.d. https://www.colcampus.com/courses/23/pages/william-plomer-1932-1996?module_item_id=840). He was white and 'wrote during the British reign' (Dambe, S, Dr. *et al.* 2013: 2). He was 'influenced in different ways by the romantic-symbolism and imagism of Euro-African modernism' (Chapman: 494) but 'sought local identifications' (Chapman: 494). Plomer left South Africa but still 'retained a concern for South African political and literary matters' (Chapman: 494). 'Mongane Wally Serote was born in Sophiatown on 8 May 1944, just four years before the National Party came to power in South Africa' (Poetry International Web. 2009. <http://www.poetryinternationalweb.net/pi/site/poet/item/15594>). He was a black man and 'The New Black Poetry, or Soweto Poetry found purpose in the opposition to apartheid' (Chapman: 494). Mongane Wally Serote and 'others represented a powerful movement in the 1970's' (Chapman: 498).

Punctuate title

expression

not quite

coörd

comma splice

not so

You do not need to give this kind of background - it is good for your research but the essay requires only an analysis of the poems themselves

The place, the time and the setting all seem to have some relevance to both William Plomer and Mongane Wally Serote, through their words you also get to understand what was happening and how these places spoke to them. The title of the two poems tells us that both writer's are writing about Johannesburg. Plomer describes it as a city that came 'into being from nowhere' (Dambe, S, Dr. *et al.* 2013: 10) 'Along the Rand in eighty-five' (line 1) and that the 'city developed on gendered terms' (Dambe, S, Dr. *et al.* 2013: 10), 'In champagne baths men sluices their skins' (line 5) 'and conditions' (Dambe, S, Dr. *et al.* 2013: 10), 'Grimy with auriferous dust' (line 6). We see in line 1 that the speaker has also written in the time-frame of 'eighty-five', though the poem is written in two time-frames. The first is during the period of the gold rush. According to the Wow web page (http://www.wow.com/wiki/Union_of_South_Africa) gold was founded after the 1880s. His second time-frame reference is in stanza 5, from line 18 'As lordly anarchs of the veld' this gives reference to the war that was also fought during the period of '1899 until 1902' (http://www.wow.com/wiki/Union_of_South_Africa). In line 13 'Greybeards who now look back' the speaker further feels that it 'exploited these men and left them out in the cold on their retirement' (Dambe, S, Dr. *et al.* 2013: 10). the speakers setting of the poem is one of richness where 'Fortunes were founded overnight' (line 2). 'And mansions rose among the rocks' (line 3) and debauchery 'New orgies from new veins of ore' (line 12). 'Then oiled and scented, fought to enjoy What young men must' (lines 7 and 8). Their level of pollution was in the 'auriferous dust' (line 6).

expression
Your task is to show how the words and images convey their ideas - not just list them

Again - this is good for your research but not required here - you need to analyse how the way in which the poem is written conveys the ideas in the topic

unclear - you are not analysing the text in terms of the topic

On the other hand, Serote's experience of the 'City of Johannesburg' is in stark contrast to this as he describes 'the city as a product of 'racist control' (Dambe, S, Dr. *et al.* 2013: 11). We see in line 13 that the speaker is male 'My hand pulses to my back trouser pocket' (line 2) and travels to and from work by bus, 'When I run out, or roar in a bus to you' (line 13). It can be assumed that he is African when the writer mentions his 'pass' in line 4, this tells us his poem is written during the apartheid period. African men had to carry passes during this time whilst travelling. According to the website of South African History online the pass was instituted in the early 1800's it was the government's way of controlling and restricting movement, including segregation (<http://www.sahistory.org.za/article/pass-laws-south-africa-1800-1994>). Through the use of 'my' in stanza 1 line 2 you see that the poem is based on the speaker's personal experience, the speaker is speaking directly to the City of Johannesburg 'This way I salute you' (line 1), and his setting of Johannesburg is one of

You need to analyse how the text conveys ideas - what the effect of the images is in terms of the topic - not present an overview of the content

harshness 'Jo'burg city, you are dry like death' (line 39). and polluted ' your thick iron breath' (line 20). The speakers constant reference to 'Jo'burg City' could also be his subtle way of using it as a reference to the government of the time.

You need to explain how you come to this conclusion through analysing the text

The syntax and diction of the writer's helps you understand the imagery of the poems more distinctly and how each speaker felt about their ordeal or story, with the underlying tone being one of sarcasm and mockery. Both poet's speak of life and death in various ways and this sets the tone for the poems.

Your task is to analyse the text

The poem written by William Plomer starts off glitzy and loud and then moves off into a more serious state, where the speaker questions the view of the country. The poem is set in quatrain stanzas and is a narrative poem. The writer also uses a rhyme structure of ABAB. The poem has a great deal of punctuation, the writer uses commas and semi-colon which slows down the rhythm of the poem making it serious. The writer uses highly intellectual words 'auriferous' line 6, 'anarchs' line 18 and line 24 'Swashbuckler', these words slow the poem down even further.

expression

You need to show this through analysing the text and then link it to the topic

Mongane Wally Serote's poem is a 'spoken word poem' (Dambe, S, Dr. *et al.* 2013: 11). The speaker 'expresses strong feeling and emotions' (Learn.Lexiconic. n.d <http://learn.lexiconic.net/elementsofpoetry.htm>) and is very descriptive about his plight 'My hand pulses to my back pocket' line 2 and surroundings 'ever whirling dust' (line 15). The writer uses no stanza's, which has a 'musical' (Dambe, S, Dr. *et al.* 2013: 12) effect and the writer frequently uses repetition in both the word and place as he addresses the city 'Jo'burg city' in lines 5,9,12. The speaker makes use of colloquial language (line 5) 'Jo'burg city' and uses word contractions, 'Don't' (line 11) and 'That's' (line 17). This shows that the speaker wants the reader to be able to identify with what he is writing about. The speaker also uses literary devices to allow the reader to picture what he experienced. The writer further uses a lot of punctuation.

You are making vague, general comments and not analysing how the text effectively conveys the writer's views

In the first 3 stanzas of 'Johannesburg' the speaker first speaks of the initial rise of Johannesburg 'Along the Rand in eighty-five' line 1 and the men who worked there within the mining industry and how they squandered their money 'Or meet the most expensive whore And conjured up with cards and dice,'. The words that rhyme are also contradictory

You are relating the content not analysing the text in terms of the topic

to each other as in line 2 'overnight' and line 4 'light'. In stanza 4 the speaker starts to look at the men within their retirement. The writer is 'watching or imagines retired mine workers' (Dambe, S, Dr. *et al.* 2013: 10), 'Greybeards who now look back' (line 13). These men were happy with and proud of what they had achieved, (lines 15 and 16) 'Find little, in their past to blame And much to praise-', For the speaker, life is depicted in line 2 as it was the beginning of the 'fortunes' (line 2). We see in line 3 their living conditions was also one of decency 'Mansions rose overnight' with enough food for everyone 'Venison feast' (line 19) whilst the writer's sarcasm is noted in line 8 'What young men must'. The writer makes it seem as it is a way of life for these gentlemen. The writer shows you that the men also had a lot of freedom 'to blaze with girls and light' (lines 9 and 10) where they 'Took opportunities to cheat or meet the most expensive whore' the writer speaks of 'champagne baths' (line 5), this could be representative of a party life.

You need to analyse the text

Exprtess ideas formally

Mongane Wally Serote dives right into his poem with 'This way I salute you' (line 1) which shows some level of respect. The speaker immediately contrasts this with 'My hand pulses to my back trouser pocket', usually when your hand pulses it is out of fear and the writer tells us what his fear is 'For my pass, my life', (line 4). Whilst the writer says the 'pass' is his life it is said in a mockery as it has also limited the speaker's movements and brought a lot of unhappiness 'There is no fun, nothing in it' (line 36). The speaker shows you that his life is less than happy as there is starvation 'My stomach devours coppers and papers Don't you know?' (lines 10 and 11). The speaker further makes you aware of his hunger in line 8 ' While my stomach groans a friendly smile to hunger'. (Line 15) 'My comic houses' shows you the writer's living conditions which was atrocious. The speaker is also plagued with unhealthy living conditions 'ever whirling dust' (line 15) and death 'Where death lurks in the dark like a blade in the flesh' (line 30). The speaker is very aware of the disparaging differences between his home for African people 'My comic houses and people, my dongas and ever whirling dust' (line 15) and the white community 'I travel on your black and white roboted roads' (line 19) and ' When your neon flowers flaunt from your electrical wind' (line 24). You are starkly reminded of the white community who had better living standards with tarmac roads and electricity while Africans had nothing but dust roads and criminal activity 'Where death lurks like a blade in the flesh,' (line 30). As you can see the speaker depicts very different types of lives between black and white communities in Johannesburg.

You are not analysing the text - you are making general comments about it

In stanza 5 of 'Johannesburg' the writer paints a picture of the what was happening within the government and the country. Here speaker shows how the government had much wealth and control (lines 17 and 18) 'Riding bare under stars As lordly anarchs of the veld,'. The writer constantly shows the contradiction, this could be representative of the propaganda they proclaimed. Always showing one thing and doing another 'Venison feasts' contrast 'the tribal wars' (line 19). On the one side there is a victory party and on the other war. Like as if the war was nothing to them and they came home to feast whilst men died. The 'free cruelty and cartridge belt' shows you how these men were treated. Cruelty was dispensed with no thought of repercussion and the 'cartridge belt' shows you the fear they imposed with their weapons. In as much as these men were white, they were not Afrikaans.

Not exactly - he is referring to the settlers of the area

unclear

In contrast to Plomer's poem, Serote's use of literary devices reflects how personal and real this journey was for him. The speaker uses a simile 'My hand like a carved snake rears my pockets For my thin, ever-lean wallet' (line 6 and 7) shows how the writer felt. He likens his hand to a snake. The speakers wallet is also 'ever-lean' (line 7) which shows that he is unable to meet his financial obligations even though he is working long hours, 'That is the time I come to you, When your neon flowers flaunt from your electrical wind,' (lines 23 and 24) and when he leaves at night, 'That is the time I leave you, When your neon flowers flaunt their way through the falling darkness On your cement trees' (lines 25 and 26). The speaker also uses personification when the city breathes 'Through your thick iron breath that you inhale At six in the morning and exhale from five noon' (lines 20 and 21). The 'thick iron breathe' in line 20 could also representative of the air pollution within the city. The speaker uses a metaphor in line 26 ' On your cement trees'. This shows how the city changed. Cement shows that the city was industrialised and that the nature was not real 'cement trees' (line 26).

Which is?

You need to analyse each image you mention and discuss it separately in terms of the topic

vague

From stanza 6 and 7 in 'Johannesburg' the speaker shifts focus partly from the men to the state and their lack of morals (line 23) 'Respectability has turned'. The writer shows how these men went from being mine workers to respectable men (line 24) 'Swashbuckler prim and scamp sedate;'. The speaker sounds pleading in a sarcastic way when he says in line 21 'Pioneers, O pioneers' as if the speaker is asking them to reflect. The speaker also refers to the 'Grey pillars of a Christian' state (line 22). Here the speaker is showing the

collusion as the lines are blurred 'Grey' (line 22) yet they declare themselves a 'Christian state' (line 22), once again showing how contrary their actions were. In the final stanza the speaker shows how the state is colluding by 'Protecting in the brain's recesses' (line 25). They were seeking to influence the next generation 'Seek now the nuggets of your prime' (line 26). Here the writer is again being sarcastic. The writer first says 'nuggets' (line 26) and then 'dust' (line 27) and the 'sands'. Almost like an hour glass the picture gets smaller and smaller until it is reduced to nothing. The speaker is constantly showing the contradiction and 'collusion between the capitalism, Christianity and patriarchy' (Dambe, S, Dr. *et al.* 2013: 10),

vague

ambiguous
expression

Similarly Serote also shifts his focus to what the city is doing to him and how it could possibly be draining him and his livelihood' I can feel your roots, anchoring your might, my feebleness In my flesh, in my mind, in my blood,' (lines 31 and 32). The speaker further depicts this in lines 37 and 38 'When you leave the women and men with such frozen expressions, Expressions that have tears like furrows of soil erosion'.

vague

In conclusion whilst both writers have written about the Johannesburg through their imagery of literary devices and they have painted in some areas some very stark and contrasting views on it. William Plomer's "Johannesburg" is a representation of South Africa's urban development and its underlying dominant economic order' (Dambe, S, Dr. *et al.* 2013: 9). There are elements of collusion between capitalism, Christianity and patriarchy as depicted in the poem (Dambe, S, Dr. *et al.* 2013: 10). 'City Johannesburg' is about Johannesburg during the apartheid era and Mongane Wally Serote's experiences there. That is why there is a sense of suffering and oppression in the poem. It is a reflection of his reality at the time' (MyUnisa. Behari. J. 2017).

<https://my.unisa.ac.za/portal/site/ENG2603-17-S2-1E/page/185d7049-3c57-4c3a-b630-a44d932cdb1e>

Resources

Chapman, Michael (ed). 2002. *The New Century of South African Poetry. William Plomer, Johannesburg*. Johannesburg and Cape Town. Ad Donker Publishers. Pages 85, 86, 494 and 495.

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Poetry International Web. 2009. Viewed on 15 August 2017 from <http://www.poetryinternationalweb.net/pi/site/poet/item/15594>

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Wow. 2017. Viewed 21 August 2017 from http://www.wow.com/wiki/Union_of_South_Africa

You have presented a very long essay but have not come to terms with the gist of the topic. Poetry analysis expects you to show how the images and devices effectively convey the ideas and impressions raised in the topic. You present a broad outline but do not analyse the way the poems are written.

PLAGIARISM DECLARATION

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ASSIGNMENT TOPIC: COLONIAL AND POST-COLONIAL AFRICAN LITERATURE

ASSIGNMENT NUMBER: 723061

I declare that this assignment is my original work. Where secondary material has been used (either from a printed source or from the internet), this has been carefully acknowledged and referenced in accordance with departmental requirements. I have not allowed anyone else to borrow or copy my work. I understand what plagiarism is and have read the university's policy in regard, available at:

http://www.unisa.ac.za/contents/colleges/col_grad_studies/docs/Policy_copyright_infringement_plagiarism_16November2005.pdf

Signature: ANTOINETTE JOLENE KHOMO

Date: 22 August 2017