

*Johannesburg* by William Plomer and *City of Johannesburg* by Wally Serote are two contrasting poems written about the same city. Each of these poems both portray different imagery as William Plomer, a British man in South Africa during the apartheid era wrote as an outsider looking in, how the mineworkers and government have lived and what he sees as he observes these men's actions and way of living whilst showing signs of sarcasm and a provoking tone towards them. William Plomer portrays an image of the British men's riches and wealth. Mongane Wally Serote speaks from a more personal note as he addresses Johannesburg directly. He writes about his personal experiences and emotions with regard to his life during this time and as an African male mineworker in the apartheid era. Wally Serote is writing about a time of poverty, that affects his way of living as apartheid was a racial discrimination towards the Africans. The two poems show two different ways of living in the same period, in the same city but the poems also have similarities, such as they are in the same era, both poems are of a postcolonial period, they are both based in the same city and both poems are of the mining industry. The differences outweigh the similarities which is due to the different races that each poem focuses on and it being of the apartheid era. Wally Serote pulls on your emotions in his poem *City of Johannesburg* as he uses descriptive similes and metaphors to describe his hardship as an African male working in the mining industry as well as his standard of living that was forced upon him by the colonial government.

William Plomer speaks about the wealth that the British mineworkers have, he writes "In champagne baths men sluices their skins" which projects an imagery of wealth and money by the word "champagne" which in itself is an expensive product but also how he says "sluices their skins" as if they had an abundant amount of champagne to be able to form a stream of it to bathe and wash themselves. Plomer also goes on to say "Or to meet the most expensive whores" suggesting that money is not an issue and it is almost used to be thrown around at materialistic things and for their own pleasure. Plomer uses words such as "auferious dust", "venison feasts" and "mansions" to describe the copious amount of money that is consumed by these men. Wally Serote on the other hand speaks about his poverty suggesting that he is starved and his wallet is empty, he writes "my hand like a starved snake rears my pockets" "For my thin, ever lean wallet" which portrays an appearance of a thin body due to starvation and a thin wallet which depicts no money to put into this wallet. Serote plays with the imagery of sight and touch by using the words to compare his thin hand to a starved snake as a simile. "While my stomach groans a friendly smile to hunger" Serote writes to suggest again that he is starving yet has portrayed his emotion towards his feeling of starvation as if his stomach has let him down, it teases him with hunger, he almost gives his stomach or his hunger personification by it provoking him with this anguish feeling yet there is no food to satisfy the hunger pains, he feels tormented by his hunger as if he is being mocked. Serote also portrays an imagery of distastefulness when he writes "my stomach also devours coppers and papers, don't you know?", it suggests an unpleasant taste describing eating money but he is suggesting again that his stomach has let him down, food costs money and this is what he means when he says that his "stomach devours coppers and papers".

Throughout the poem Wally Serote is revealing a snarky tone towards Johannesburg, he is personifying the city as if he was speaking directly to a person, a person of authority by saying "I salute you" and "Johannesburg, I salute you" as if the city itself has picked him up and spat him out. He exposes feelings of betrayal and helplessness, and is sarcastically blaming Johannesburg the city as if he personally feels that the city has kicked him to the curb. "Through your thick iron breath that you inhale at six in the morning and exhale from five noon." Suggests the strict curfew hours that Wally had to endure in apartheid. "When I run out, or roar in a bus to you, I leave behind my love". Serote writes about working

long hours and having to leave his loved one behind, He gives the reader an image of having to walk to work or get onto a bus, which again portrays an image of having little to no money to have his own transport whereas in Plomer's poem he describes the freedom and lavishness of the Pioneer's lives, he writes "riding bareback under stars" "as lordly anarchs of the veld" which describes an image of freedom of any time of the day or night and being able to ride horses which is a luxury. Where he writes "took opportunities to cheat" suggests that these men/mineworkers had the time to have these sort of opportunities whereas Serote suggests that he had minimal time to spend with his loved one and his hours consisted of working. William Plomer writes "Venison feasts and tribal wars" as a sentence to expose an image of going out to war and having no emotion about the lives that were taken as these wealthy, British men are able to sit down and feast on expensive meats as a celebration of their victory. He pronounces the collusion of their actions by saying "Grey pillars of a Christian State" which projects these men's thoughts that they depict themselves as Christian yet their actions are of wrongful doings, as stated in stanza 3; "meet up with the most expensive whores", "and conjured up with cards and dice, new orgies from new veins or ore". Plomer sarcastically writes "what young men must" as if to say that this is what these men actually think they need to do, emphasis on "must".

With regards to the two different ways of living, Plomer writes "and mansions rose among the rocks". He sees Johannesburg as a wealthy place, he sees "mansions" coming from nothing, as if it was built up overnight, after the colony had taken over the country it is almost as if all the industries, housing and British ways of living was figuratively thrown onto Johannesburg and built up before their eyes, before the Pioneers could remember the land before the colony. Serote Here Serote again uses a metaphor to compare his home to a comic, he writes "My comic houses and people, my dongas and my ever whirling dust" suggests that the speaker works in the city but does not live there, he referring to his "ever whirling dust" as if to say that he is always leaving behind a dust trail, to his people and his loved one, his dust trail from the roads in his community that are made of dirt and is not built up like the city's "black and white roboted roads". He uses the word "comic" to refer to his home, suggesting that it is amusing in a sarcastic way that he has been given these conditions to live in compared to the city. He thinks of it as a joke. Toward the end of the poem, Serote suggests feelings of death and anguish towards the city and has a hard time hiding his emotions, whereas the end of Plomer's *Johannesburg* poem he reveals how these men have wasted their lives on materialistic pleasures, describing an hour glass and referring to their time as "gold" to how they treated it as "sand".

In the two poems, *City of Johannesburg* and *Johannesburg* the writers both portray different imagery on their view of life during the ethnic oppression of apartheid, the two diverse situations have both contrasting thoughts and emotions. Wally Serote feels personally victimized and helpless towards his living conditions and he has portrayed this through his poem by his sarcastic tone in the beginning and slowly ending off with exposing his feelings of anger toward the city. William Plomer sarcastically and lightly ridicules the white British men of their way of thinking and living with all their wealth and riches, he portrays them in a foolish manner and reveals to the reader that these men think themselves as "lordly". Both of these poems have reactions of sadness from the reader as it was an emotional era and an emotional subject. Plomer speaks about the British mineworkers in the apartheid era whereas Serote speaks from a personal view as an African mineworker in the apartheid era, both showing the different sides of Johannesburg City.