

Mongane Serote's poem *City Johannesburg* was written during apartheid when the black South Africans were oppressed. There is bitterness, hate and anger found as the theme. The life in Johannesburg is toned down in the poem as compared to the glamorous idea that many people in the rural areas perceive it. The poem will be discussed through diction, syntax, figures of speech and metonymy in the poem.

The poem is written in the first person, we know this because the poet keeps using 'I' or 'my.' Lines such as "My hand pulses to my back trousers pocket" (line 2) and "Listen when I tell you" (line 36) refers to the poet constantly speaking about himself and what he is experiencing. There is a lot of personification, especially since the poet is referring to the city as 'you' or 'your.' "I salute you" (line 1) and "that is all you need of me" (line 34) is showing that the poet is addressing someone/something, City Johannesburg.

The title *City Johannesburg* is giving the reader a place or setting. There is diction present as the poet begins by calling the city Johannesburg and later moves on to Jo'burg. The repetition of "Jo'burg City" (lines 5, 9, 12, 18, 22, 35, 40 and 41) is because the poet is addressing Jo'burg city as though that was a name.

The poet uses diction (choice of words or phrases) to reinforce the theme of bitterness. The phrase 'I can feel your roots, anchoring you might, my feebleness' (line 31) is a diction to create the feeling of bitterness that this place has drained him and he is now weak.

"When your neon flowers flaunt from your electrical wind" (line 24). Phrases such as "neon flowers" "flaunt" and "electrical wind" are all used to create an image. This diction is used because the poet wants the reader to imagine how the city looks at night where the neon flowers are the street lights and electrical wind is the power boxes or electricity. The word flowers paints a pretty picture.

The syntax (the sentence structure of each of the lines within the poem) supports the diction in creating the imagery that illustrates/conveys the theme. The syntactical order, or word order, of the elements within the lines of the poem does this by drawing the reader's attention to the theme of bitterness. (Please note that this was taken from one of Poetry pdf files given on the ENG2602 additional resources). There is use of shortened sentences, rhetorical questions and sentences which are in the middle of the line.

The poem has no definite stanzas as the poem is written with a continuous feel. The poem does not have the orthodox style of what a poem should have such as a rhyme scheme and stanzas.

The poet uses a lot of imagery along with diction to create a tone. Imagery is used in this poem so the reader can envision and uses the readers' senses to create a deeper meaning and understanding of the poem. "My hand like a starved snake rears my pocket" (line 6) "through the thick iron breath that you inhale" (line 20) and "on your cement trees" (line 27) all create this illusion of what the poet is envisioning while writing the poem.

The figures of speech in this poem are many.

Line one is personification and the poem is started using that. However, "while my stomach groans a friendly smile to hunger" (line 8) and "Through your thick iron breath that you inhale" (line 20) are lines in the poem which contain personification. The reason for personification is to create a sense of life and create a relation between the two.

"My hand like a starved snake rears my pockets" (line 6), the word like implies that this line is a simile, the hand is compared to a starved snake. This is done to leave an idea of what the poet is going through and the ugliness of the situation. Alliteration of "starved snake" works with the tone of the poem to create a hating and bitter feel as it is not a pleasant sight.

Other similes in the poem such as "expressions that have tears like furrows of soil erosion" (line 39) and "Jo'burg City, you are dry like death" (line 40) also prove the theme of bitterness which the poet portrays over and over.

In line 36, "listen when I tell you" the poet is even beginning to give advice to this "City Johannesburg." The entire poem, there was a tone of anger, hate and bitterness toward the city where the poet listed all the evils of the city such as death, hunger and theft. However, in this line, the poet seems to surrender and indirectly advise others who want to come to the city that there is "nothing fun" in the city.

"Don't you know?" (Line 11) is a rhetorical question because the poet does not expect the city to reply and has a mocking feel because the line before that explains the poet's hunger. The poet wants his bitterness to be felt and understood and used

sarcasm to do that.

“Where death lurks in the dark like a blade of flash” (line 30), the word blade is referring to a cut and “death lurks in the dark” are the murderers. These metonymies are used to make the reader feel the pain which is inflicted by City Johannesburg. This refers to murders which happen when people are going home from work after dark.

In conclusion, the entire poem led back to one main style, the theme of bitterness and hatred toward this city. The poet used all styles of writing to portray these emotions using the diction and parts of speech to express the emotions.