

POETRY – TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Discuss how the theme of identity is explored in the poem 'To Whom It May Concern' by Sepamla. The context(time and place/ period) is crucial in understanding the poem. Write a paragraph and share with other students in order to begin a discussion.

The poem *To Whom It May Concern*, was written by Sipho Sepamla in the 70's during Apartheid in South Africa. Sempala's poetry was aimed to call fellow Africans together in a spirit of resistance against oppression. (www.antiessays.com) Most of his work had a political undertone. The Urban Natives Act of 1925 and the Passes act, give us the necessary background information, to understand the context of the poem. The Natives Act of 1925 made the local authority responsible for the blacks in its area. The Pass laws were intended to force Black people to settle in specific places. (www.sahistory.org.za)

The writer uses sarcasm throughout the poem. The heading is sarcastic, it sounds very appropriate and correct, but in fact it indicates that no one in particular wants to take responsibility for the content of this letter. Again this person in the letter is not considered important enough. The letter is addressed nameless like the person in the poem.

This nameless person in the poem is described with different names, to emphasis that this person has not his own identity, he is what the government wants and allows him to be. He is called repeatedly a subject (line 7, 9 and 13), a person under the rule of the government. He is called sarcastically a bearer, although he is bare of everything, and can only bear his particulars (line 1-2). His name is Reference number 417181 (line 19, 27), which is not a name but purely a number.

We see more of this mockery, when this no-name person is allowed to roam freely, but only around a given area (line14). Strictly speaking, there is no freedom about that. He can update his sophistication, but only to the provisions of the Act (line 12-13). He can acquires a niche, but only for a temporary stay. The government even has as a permanent measure of law and order, directions where this person one day will be buried.(lines 25-28). The writer shows us satirically on the generosity of the government to this Bantu.

The identity of this poem would be about how the government had used his power in different ways to suppress and rule a specific part of the population.