

'The Loneliness Beyond' by Sipho Sepamla

Seasons Come to Pass explains that Sepamla is known for writing poetry that 'described the lives of black South Africans with uncompromising realism, and was deeply critical of apartheid' (Moffett, 2013: 213). Bearing this in mind, answer the following questions on the Sepamla's poem, 'The Loneliness Beyond' (*Seasons Come to Pass*, page 213).

-
1. *Like raindrops pattering*
 2. *They come singly an in pairs*
 3. *Then as a torrent the rush of feet*
 4. *Shuffles onto platforms*
 5. *Dragging the last strains of energy.*
-

6. *I've seen hearts palpitating*
 7. *Behind a single maskless face*
 8. *Tired from the hurrying of the city*
 9. *Spirits maimed by commands.*
-

10. *I've heard the clicks of tongues*
 11. *Laughter rising above the grouse of mouths*
 12. *That never rest*
 13. *From grinding complaints.*
-

14. *Like sheep herded in to a kraal*
 15. *They crowd numbered coaches*
 16. *Hopeful of a safe landing.*
-

17. *I've watched the multitudes rub shoulders*
 18. *And I've wondered what they do*
 19. *With the loneliness beyond;*
-

20. *I've seen throngs of people*
 21. *Disappear into little holes of resting*
 22. *And I've pondered what might be happening*
 23. *With the loneliness beyond.*
-

1. Who or what is being compared to raindrops in the first stanza? What figure of speech is used? What is the effect of the comparison? (Use page 50 of your *Introduction to Literary Studies* text to identify the figure of speech.)

The speaker compares the raindrops to class working people, or cattle. He observes the commuters/cattle/humans arriving. The working class are just like cattle. Slowly at first but then, much like raindrops that begin to intensify before a heavy downpour, "as a torrent". The speaker uses a simile to create the effect of rushing of people on a train station (like herding cattle into their post) and being forced to do work (let the cattle eat to produce food.).

2. In the second line of the second stanza, the speaker talks about a 'single maskless face'. What is he referring to? Why do you think the poet chose this image (what idea does the image convey)?

The speaker is referring to a communal loss of identity under the exhausting demands of the white system and reinforces the dissonance between black subjectivity and urban landscapes. The images here seem to evoke a homogenous, undifferentiated mass, a "single maskless face"; the black body is mechanized by the white state as a labouring object. Sepamla's stress on the workings of the black body (palpitating hearts, clicking tongues, laughter, and grousing mouths) asserts its humanity.

3. Who do you think issues the 'commands' that the speaker refers to in the last line of the second stanza?

The white state as a labouring object.

4. In stanza three, the speaker talks about 'grinding complaints' (line 13). This is a rather odd choice of diction (or odd choice of words). What tone (mood or atmosphere) is evoked by this choice of diction? (See page 47 of your *Introduction to Literary Studies* for a discussion of tone.)

The tone changes to desire to escape and anger. It is never ending although the poet wants it to end. The poem works against the reduction of black selfhood by gesturing towards its multiple meanings. The train's trajectory may be limited and circumscribed within the linear movement between point A and point B, but its existence also implies change, flux, and shifting interactions between groups of people who might not otherwise encounter one another. The train is not simply a weapon of control over black selfhood but is also *embodied* by it; that is, made representative of and defined by the individual and collective functions of the black body.

5. There is another comparison in the fourth stanza of the poem. Identify the figure of speech, and discuss why the comparison is effective.

When the train arrives and they start climbing into the coaches, he is reminded of "sheep herded into a kraal". The train's comparison to an animal carrier is counter-balanced by the poem's awareness of the possible reorientation of black identities.

6. In stanza 6, the speaker refers to 'little holes of resting'. What figure of speech is being used, and what is the speaker comparing to a hole?

He stands there observing this moment and wonders at the lives these people live beyond this train station when they "disappear into little holes of resting". The speaker uses a metaphor to compare the train tunnels to the oppressed black people going to their very small hovel or shacks.

7. Consider the denotation and connotations of the word 'hole'. What is the effect of this choice of diction? (Use page 54 of your *Introduction to Literary Studies* for a discussion of denotation and connotation.)

The hole can literally mean that their traveling home after work. Through the tunnel. The poet can also compare the "hole" to depression. The poem subtly implies that black bodies are defined above and "beyond" their physical oppression. For there to be a "beyond", the poet implicitly suggests the black community's potential to transcend the fear instilled by the white state. This suggestion relies on an inward movement that recognizes individual alienation and its communal nature, the singular and the "multitude". What prevents the members of the multitude from becoming anonymous symbols of black suffering is Sepamla's attentiveness to their everyday interiorities — their laughter, clicking tongues, and disgruntled chat.

8. The poet makes use of repetition in the last two stanzas of the poem. How does the repetition affect the tone of the poem?

The tone is fearful, that the way black people are being treated and how their being oppressed may never end. He wonders at "the loneliness beyond". The imagery and the dehumanisation of these people, their lack of individuality. The constant use of the word "I've" serves to separate the speaker from the crowd he is observing - think about the possible significance of the fact that while thinking about "the loneliness beyond", he too stands alone. he loneliness evoked by Sepamla may be figured as a catalyst for self-recognition and change. The movement from an exterior to an interior contemplation of apartheid's effects on black subjectivity and Serote's depictions of the everyday articulate notions of blackness which counter white definitions.