

CHAPTER THREE: CONCLUSIONS

I hypothesised that:

(i) The *writing* of a whole dramatic *story* including implicit and explicit discourse expressed in critical notes – largely the symbolic - and (ii) the staged *performance* of moments in a theatrical *plot* – largely the *chora* / *semiotic* - can be in an aesthetically satisfying dynamic interplay and can deconstruct and reconstruct each other in so doing. Further (iii) it is through transference relationships and the mechanisms of defence that this interplay can be observed “within” the received “text”. (iv) De-positioned otherness emerges from the interactions in the text and the inter-texts of the author and critic as suggested by Freedman quoting Kristeva and Féral.

If we look at each play separately we might summarise as follows: in *The First South African* (i) the *story, the symbolic chain of signifiers and signifieds* is: a child; then a man; looking white; being of mixed-race; and socialised as his African mother’s and African stepfather’s son; in a largely urban African working-class society; with some connection to traditional rural Xhosa culture; becoming marginalised; ending up as a poor white protected by apartheid’s labour laws. In genre this is hybrid theatre – part township-theatre, part-social realist black consciousness theatre: - a tragic story of his and the regime’s moral failure given all their and all his partly-determined but not quite “necessary” betrayals. In terms of critical psychoanalytic theory: he ends up spiritually castrated by the so-called phallic signifier of all signifiers yet a survivor in such a system. He is signified as a castratee but lives to tell the tale in a poor white, twilight world which literally drives him mad at the end. He

also functions as a Chorus in the beginning of the play foretelling poetically his potential redemption almost as a pseudo-messiah, a black Ham/Christ defying the white God of Noah, Shem and Japhet concerning his destiny and sin. In this interpretation of the myth the only sin committed was just being different. At moments in the (ii) *plot* it turns out that he is at least treated as having redemptive *value for himself*, for his (criminal) *friends*, his non-criminal *girl friend* – a school-teacher - for his Christian *mother* and for his *step-father*. This redemptive value is *not realised* but is potentially there if not for his tragic “life-sentence”. The twists and turns in the plot between scenes and within scenes act as a rhythm, a *semiotic/choral* pulsation. The deconstruction of the Chorus marks emotionally the way the story *could* happen for *another* second or third or *n*th South African. The dialogue between Freda and the interrogating location superintendent pulsates. Max the *tsotsi* friend pulsates in doing his pitch as a shoplifter selling a jacket. One ruse follows another to catch his customer. The fight with Solly is a choreographed pulsation of jealousy, taunting and violence. Thembi’s rejection of Solly and love for Rooi is orchestrated dialogically. Freda’s and Austin’s reminiscences and foreboding and warnings of the dangers threatening the deviant young man who later tries to pass for white operate as a hidden pulse of tension.... And so on... Although reported here analytically the troping of her desire comes from a buried source of rhetoric in Freda enacting the pre- and post-Christian myth of the morally Virginal mother receiving and giving, who dies in her attempt to protect her far-from-divine, her heedless Son, literally the product of her pulsating and carelessly conceiving womb. This desire is endless and unnameable and in no way phallic or merely Imaginary. It is set in the context of the Real and the True. But Freda’s desire is entirely at

odds with the way the system of apartheid and white supremacy is set up. The frustration of all desire does call into question how and why such a tragic story could be created in the first place – and yet it is totally feasible. *There they all are there in a living reality in which all of them are at odds with what constrains them.* This is the play's aesthetic/dialectic: Rooi could be the first South African. Will he be? The negative answer deconstructs the very question itself: what is a South African? Yet he tries in his deviant way to cross racial boundaries via sexuality and attempts at loving and so *does* appear ironically to indeed be an *attempt* at a reconstructed first South African sharing all the characteristics of the major ethnic groupings but ultimately failing to satisfy anyone least of all himself – hence his final descent into a kind of madness.

At key moments (iii) this comes about partly through transference relationships: Dike's good God-The-Father is in The Son, the black Christ, a fusion into one image, perhaps, in part stemming from her convent education in the 1960's, and in the 1970's, a black consciousness insight mapped onto the play: Rooi fails but lives when the Son's Mother succeeds morally even as she dies. Rooi as unrealised Chorus messiah lives on.

(iv) De-positioned otherness is to some extent present rather than (a) woman in the female characters. Thembi and Freda are utterly different from each other and play roles that testify to a fluid *alterity* although in a broad sense stereotypes. Thembi remains her father Hlazo's daughter but also her lover's girl-friend until he is faithless. Freda is respectful to the powerful superintendent but defends her child against him, against the threat of the other township

women and against the predations of the white girl who rejects Rooi. The men persist and persevere in criminal and patriarchal careers.

In *Have You Seen Zandile?* (i) the story, the symbolic chain of signifiers and signifieds is: a child; then a young woman, “illegitimate” by European convention, a “lovechild” of a Zulu father who is urban, and a rural Xhosa mother, a domestic servant, cared for by her beloved paternal grandmother; socialised in modernising urban Zulu culture but also through her grandmother’s traditional Zulu tales; is abducted by her biological mother or collusively “relocated” through an underhand family decision against the wishes of her now-frantic grandmother who is not told where the little girl has gone; and from 8 years old bullied and cajoled into accepting her new status as a peasant in the Transkei to await a forcible arranged marriage which will bring her mother bridewealth. These prospective chain of events Zandile resists with all the power of her considerable reason. She is “saved” at a Bantu education school by teachers (in “real life” Mhlophe’s school chaplain) who recognise her literary ability. She becomes a praise poet. She has a loving girl friend and through her discovers her true identity in Durban. On her return to her grandmother’s place she finds the old lady has died but has left sets of clothes for her growing-up. She weeps in recognition of this love and respect. In genre this is *naïf* children’s, young people’s and populist adult theatre. It reacts against the roughness and male stereotypes of both township-theatre, and social realist black consciousness theatre. Yet at the centre of the play there is the biological mother’s description of her plight as a domestic worker in Durban: she is in flight from a cruel husband and poverty in the Transkei; she finds a Zulu boy friend whom she

supposes will look after her but becomes pregnant and loses both her domestic work and her future as a singer in a band:- again a tragic story of a family's and the regime's moral failure, given all their and all her partly-determined but not quite "necessary" betrayals of love, trust and a decent future for women and black women in particular. In terms of critical psychoanalytic theory: the mother ends up spiritually castrated by the so-called phallic signifier of all signifiers, the white man's apartheid system, an impoverished survivor in such a system: the mother is signified as a castratee or rather not so much a raped woman but one who allows another daughter, portrayed by Mhlophe as Nokulunga her biological half-sister, to suffer marital rape through an arranged marriage which brings the mother bridewealth. Not only Nokulunga but "My Dear Madam" and the white householder in "The Toilet" *speak through Have You Seen Zandile?* as inter-texts or sub-texts – all three are autobiographical stories by Mhlophe.

If we have read them these intertexts function as collective Choruses at the beginning of Dike's and Mhlophe's plays foretelling poetically Zwelinzima's and Zandile's potential redemption almost as pseudo-messiahs for quite different causes: he for a black Ham/Christ defying the white God of Noah, Shem and Japhet concerning destiny and sin; and she as a newly resurgent woman praise-poet transcending her extreme traumata of separation and cultural dislocation: in this interpretation of the myth and the curse of apartheid, the only sin committed was just being socially or ethnically different and being too intelligent to take all the racist, gender and class discrimination coming his/her way from her vengefully apartheid system/cruel mother.

(ii) At moments in the *plot* it turns out that Zandile is at least treated as having redemptive *value for herself*. *She will be able to redeem herself*, and she has redemptive value for her (imaginary) *friends whom she brings to life*. She has redemptive value for her beloved grandmother who wants to save her from poverty and ignorance. The Gogo is thus *redeemed by her granddaughter as well as redeeming her*. It also turns out that she has redemptive value for her *girl friend* Lindiwe with whom she has a sexual rivalry but who has a redemptive effect on her. Zandile has a redemptive effect on Lindiwe. Above all she has redemptive value vis-à-vis her cruel *mother* whose dilemmas as a poverty-stricken, forlorn and lonely domestic servant in Durban she seeks to understand and forgive. Despite her likely betrayal at the hands of her father and stepmother who must have allowed his former lover to abduct or “relocate” Zandile for her own gain and keep her location secret from the grandmother, Zandile keeps the way open for even their redemption by not condemning any of them. This redemptive value is *not realised* but is potentially there despite their tragic “life-sentences” which cut short or distort their actual redemption: they have all in their different ways betrayed Zandile and themselves by not protesting in time on her behalf. The moral and emotional twists and turns in the *plot* between scenes and within scenes act as a rhythm, a *semiotic/choral* pulsation: the witty appearance and disappearance of the imaginary companion, the games, songs and stories going on between the relatively accomplished child and the proud grandmother, the acting out of the child’s anticipatory, uncanny anxiety about the “white car” coming to abduct her, the incessant, bullying cruelty of the mother in the rural Transkei but then her softening and opening up to her

daughter as she explains her sad story in Durban; the burgeoning of adolescent sexual awareness with Lindiwe; the accidental discovery through Lindiwe's boyfriend Paul in Johannesburg of her true origins (the transformation of Cinderella or Ashputtel from emotionally poor to emotionally rich); and the final, sad recovery of her age-related identities kept in a suitcase of clothes waiting as presents from the dead grandmother which finally brings about the last denouement. Although reported here analytically the troping of the grandmother's vicarious desire for Zandile comes from a buried source of rhetoric in the Gogo enacting the pre- and post-Christian myth of the morally Virginal mother receiving and giving, who dies in her attempt to protect her granddaughter, literally the product of not her but of her daughter-in-law's pulsating and carelessly conceiving womb. This desire is endless and unnameable and in no way phallic or merely Imaginary. It is set in the context of the Real and the True. The mother's, Lulama's and the Gogo's "true" desires are entirely at odds with the way the system of apartheid and white supremacy are set up. The frustration of all desire does call into question how and why such a tragic story could be created in the first place – and yet it is totally feasible. *There they all are there in a living reality in which all of them are at odds with what constrains them.* This is the play's aesthetic/dialectic: Zandile/Mhlophe could be the first teenage or young female South African praise poet. She does not know that there have been many Zulu female praise poets (see Gunner in Cherry Clayton ed.1989). But she is more than that: she is a multi-media theatrical performer working against the background of real struggle and deprivation to get on up out of the African urban working class.

(iii) At key moments this comes about partly through transference relationships: the Gogo draws us into living out a good mother/good daughter relationship with Zandile. Zandile is a focus for us of another image, perhaps in part stemming from the transcendence by a young black woman of Bantu education in the 1970's and early 1980's and her courage in writing a *naïf* play in the midst of the far from charming context of apartheid – a populist play which nevertheless represented women of her generation trying to get away from the life-denying clichés of endless negative protest. We are allowed to hate her mother and become aware of the suffering inflicted by women on women. We are allowed to be seduced by the adolescent love between Lindiwe and Zandile and finally allowed to be sad at the demise of the in some ways foolishly deceived grandmother. But then Zandile has, in the contemporary cant slogan, “got a life.”

(iv) De-positioned otherness is to some extent present rather than (a) woman in the female characters. All the characters in *Zandile* are female and they are all able to resist men through different tactics, tactics so different that they have apparently nothing in common as women, only as people facing a common *phallic* enemy which is also the enemy of some men. Zandile, Gogo the grandmother, Lulama the mother, Lindiwe the friend, the hidden possibly collusive stepmother are all in fluid alliances with or against each other. The ambiguous unstated position of the father Tom allows us to feel pity for his ex-lover although manipulatively she seeks compensation through her daughter Zandile against the depredations of the apartheid state – as if an innocent child is

responsible rather than just a useful pawn. Lulama, wickedly, plays a role that testifies to a fluid *alterity* rather than as a stereotype. Zandile remains her father's naively loyal daughter (is he under the thumb of her stepmother?) Gogo is respectful of western-type education and what "white" professions Zandile might enter and never challenges her son or his wife as to what has become of Zandile.

Thus removing the plays from the avant-garde aesthetic realm and positioning them historically, structurally and psychoanalytically they suggest that our critical hypotheses are proved, although in content, ideologically, they are removed from western feminism. Further *Zandile* is written more within the given gender stereotypes than *TFSA* and certainly more than the avant-garde western feminist play.

That western feminism cannot reach out to subsume these plays in any colonial way is apparent through the underlying scoring of the way in which white women, "madams", exploit black "maids" – totally demolishing any common ideology *in actual practice in a society totally permeated by neo-colonialism*: in the case of Freda in *TFSA* a woman actually dies in part due to overwork as a washerwoman for her "madam" – a cheap and dispensable labourer in an exploited market. The fictional Zandile's autobiographical source the narrator Mhlophe in "My Dear Madam" and "The Toilet" shows through the author's journalistic stories which contrast severely the imaginary girl's benign and reconciliatory presence in relation to white women and the historic actuality of her oppression by them when she was unemployed, and when she was a

factory worker, and a domestic servant in Johannesburg in the late 1970's and early 1980's. To reiterate Jacklyn Cock (*op.cit.*the inscription) there can be no credibility in the whole idea of sisterhood under these conditions.

No doubt in a genuinely new South Africa this will change as poor and well-off politically experienced white women find something in common with black women over *issues* such as HIV/AIDS, and the nature of the Machiavellian patriarchy of the new state, how much of its resources are wasted in corruption and ideological gesturing and preferment. However for this to happen the unhappy heritage of white supremacy will have to be dissolved so that trust may be regained. How bad things are and what hope there is can be judged from one of the playwrights studied, Fatima Dike whom I also quoted in the opening inscriptions:

Many of those black people who encouraged the struggle don't understand about reconciliation *and why whites are not being killed*.[...] I want to *write a play about reconciliation*.[...] Tolstoy wrote about *a man* who spoke to an angel. The angel said: "If you were not born, a lot of things would not have happened." *The angel erased what he did*. We [black writers and black people] have to show that we can make a difference [by writing not erasing].