
by Mashudu Churchill Mashige.

Dissertation accepted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Magister Artium in the Faculty of Arts (Department of English) of Rand Afrikaans university.

Supervisor: D.C. Klopper, D Litt et Phil.

Johannesburg
August 1996
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to

* Dr D.C. Klopper, my supervisor who, through his patience, knowledgeable guidance, enthusiasm and interest motivated and assisted me beyond the call of duty. May the good Lord bless him abundantly.

* My wife, Mpfariseni Edna, for her unwavering support.

* My daughter Rotondwa.

* My mother, Mrs A.T. Mashige for urging me to see this dissertation through.

* God the Almighty, for His grace and mercy, without which this dissertation would not have been a reality.

* Family friends and acquaintances, for their prayers and encouragement.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chapter 1: Introduction: Aims; Objectives; Hypotheses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aims and Objectives</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hypotheses</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chapter 2: A Brief History of Written African Poetry; Protest and Resistance poetry in South Africa; Trends and Developments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A Brief History of Written African Poetry</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Protest and Resistance poetry in South Africa</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trends and developments</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chapter 3: An Analysis of a Selection of Poems in Mtshali's Sounds of a Cowhide Drum and Serote's Yakhal'inkomo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Analysis of Poems from Sounds of a Cowhide Drum</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Analysis of Poems from Yakhal'inkomo</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chapter 4: A study of a Selection of Poems by Hlatshwayo, Qabula and Malange in Black Mamba Rising and Izinsingisi: Loudhailer lives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Analysis of Hlatshwayo's poetry</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Analysis of Qabula's poetry</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Analysis of Malange's poetry</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chapter 5: Contemporary Socio-political Relevance and Literary Significance</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chapter 6: Conclusion</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT.

In this dissertation an examination is made of the different strands of contemporary South African protest and resistance poetry. This is done by way of analysing selected poems to highlight the relationship which exists between politics and aesthetics and to illustrate that the two concepts are not mutually exclusive.

A brief history of written African protest and resistance poetry is provided in an attempt to put this poetry within its historical context and to trace its influences and development. The poems are then examined with the express aim of identifying and understanding their themes and the socio-political contexts from which they emanate. These contexts are then shown to have important implications in so far as the aesthetics of protest and resistance poetry is concerned.

The dissertation highlights the fact that for this poetry to be fully appreciated, there is a need to recognize the particular circumstances which surround it. This recognition is essential because these circumstances are instrumental in the shaping of the poetry and the formation of an aesthetics of protest and resistance.

An examination of whether this type of poetry has any socio-political relevance and literary significance to contemporary South Africa is made.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: AIMS; OBJECTIVES; HYPOTHESES.

The debate on whether literature (art) should be independent of political influences has long pre-occupied the minds of critics. One can argue that the debate thrives because there are two fundamental schools of thought which strive to define what literature (art) is and the purposes which art should serve. On the one hand is a school of thought which perceives literature as an artistic creation whose worth is to be derived from the aesthetic appreciation of its inherent value(s) alone, what has come to be known as "art for art's sake". On the other hand is another school of thought for which literature (art) is a vehicle of social criticism, a means for social development which in the end should mirror all the realities of society seen through the eyes of the writer (artist).

The title and the very nature of this study implies the existence of a definite relationship between poetry (art) and politics. The definition of this relationship between poetry (art) and politics is not, however, without controversy. This is made evident in Geertsema's contention that in South Africa it has been a pertinent issue in the last few decades — for obvious reasons, two of which pertain to the role of the artist in an unjust society, and the role of culture as a "vehicle" for or "condition" of social change (1990:1).

The protest and resistance poetry that has emerged in South Africa, particularly from the nineteen sixties to the nineteen
eighties, evidences the inclination to use art as a means for social scrutiny and political change. The urgent message which poets of this era aim at conveying, to whomever cares to listen to them, is characterised by a proclivity to conscientise and sensitise the audience to the realities that face the disadvantaged people of South Africa. Over the years, protest and resistance poetry have come to mean different things to different people, depending upon one's convictions and political inclinations. On the one hand, to poets and enthusiasts of poetry in the camp of the struggle against apartheid, protest and resistance poetry is amongst other things poetry which is against repressive police activity, the squalor of urban slums, the indignities of migrant labour systems and of passes, and the more absurd feature of racial classification ... (Royston, 1973:08).

To supporters

and architects of apartheid protest poetry may mean, amongst other things, insubordination, ungratefulness, subversive and even "ungodly" propaganda (Chapman, 1982:66).

These opposing interpretations of protest and resistance poetry, and the constant refrain from some academic quarters about resistance poetry being "overpopulist and without any 'artistic' merit worth mentioning" (Mattera, 1991:18), make it necessary to interrogate the socio-political role poetry plays vis-a-vis aesthetics. Are politics and poetry (art) compatible? Should protest, as well as resistance poetry, as forms of political expression, be evaluated using the same poetic criteria as are used to evaluate other forms of poetry? Does protest and
resistance poetry not create an "own" aesthetic? Flowing from this is the very important question as to whether this poetry does advance the struggle for liberation in terms of this "own" aesthetic without being reduced to sheer sloganeering. Eagleton's contention about the aesthetics of Marx and Engels is relevant here:

These men (Marx and Engels) saw literature as social criticism and analysis, and the artist as a social enlightener; literature should disdain elaborate aesthetic techniques and become an instrument of social development. Art reflects social reality, and must portray its typical features (1986:43).

Notwithstanding its very powerful attempt to make art completely subservient to socio-political considerations, Eagleton's contention about Marx and Engels has implications which are pertinent to South African poetry in general and protest and resistance poetry in particular.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This study seeks to provide answers to the questions which have been raised above, through an analysis of the different strains of contemporary South African protest and resistance poetry. Furthermore, the researcher will indicate the need to identify the origins, methods and audience of protest and resistance poetry so as to show its literary validity and aesthetic authenticity. Poets to be discussed in this study are imbued with a very marked will to mirror their social circumstances. These circumstances are largely shaped and instructed by political decisions enforced in the communities which these poets are part of.
Protest poetry can be defined as poetry which aims at the exposure and critique of the psychological and physical effects of a dominant socio-political and economic ideology. In the South African context the object of protest poetry has been to expose and comment on the effects of apartheid, thereby indicting the status quo. Protest poetry aims at making the reader aware of the racial incongruities that characterise the system of apartheid and the detrimental and turbulent effects these have, particularly on the black community.

Resistance poetry on the other hand does not only aim at exposing "the roots of the dominant ideology of apartheid" (Frielick, 1990:34), but also aims at the rejection of the socio-political status quo so as overtly to mobilise collective responses to suffering and oppression. As Frielick correctly contends, resistance poetry is characterised by a confluence and mutual reinforcing of aesthetic and political ideologies, and would play an effective part in the context of broader political initiatives (1990:38).

In essence where protest poetry is limited to the critical observation of and social commentary on the status quo, resistance poetry actively agitates for change by wrestling with ideological issues which form the basis of a racially divided South Africa.

The researcher's intention is to point out that poets, in response to their conditions of existence, and their concern for society's welfare at large, have taken a committed stance to
inform, accuse and exhort, that the poets make conscious, deliberate and purposeful efforts at reflecting the very nature of the society from which their poetry emanates. These efforts have significant implications for both the aesthetics as well as the content of contemporary South African poetry. Against this background it becomes futile, to say the least, to embark on any examination of protest and resistance poetry without recognising the need to hammer out a critical structure which will take into consideration the many forces and factors, politics being the prime mover, which are at work within the body politic and poetic production of South Africa. Frielick agrees that there is a need for an "own" aesthetic for protest and resistance poetry when he posits that

   perhaps the most important is the need to construct a critical approach to South African resistance literature that can come to terms with both its aesthetic qualities and political effect (1980:Abstract).

The above contention has far-reaching implications for the study of protest and resistance poetry. The contention presupposes the shifting of focus from the largely Eurocentric and academically biased canons when one deals with protest and resistance poetry. The reason for proposing this shift is rooted primarily in the belief that "while the western literary tradition has, in the past thirty odd years or so, seen a gradual withdrawal of the poet from communal, social and political involvement, the same cannot be said of South African post-Sharpeville poets" (Chapman, 1982:144). These poets began to question the role of literature in general, and poetry in particular, in the face
of the political realities unfolding before them. The dilemma facing poets is perhaps best enunciated in Mafika Pascal Gwala's "In Defence of Poetry" when he asks

What's poetic about long-term sentences and deaths in detention for those who "threaten state security"?
Tell me What's poetic about shooting defenceless kids in a Soweto street?
Can there be poetry in fostering Plural Relations?

The above poem was published in a collection entitled *No More Lullabies* in 1982. However, the questions it poses transcend time and are as relevant today as they were then. The issue is not whether protest and resistance poetry are still relevant. The issue is what role should poetry which protests against and resists socio-political injustice play in the light of the changes that have occurred in South Africa since February 1990.¹

It is hoped that this study will disprove the sometimes generally held view that protest and / or resistance poetry is devoid of any aesthetic qualities of note. As this study proceeds to analyse the works of different poets, it will become more evident that political conflict, discontent and tension can be sustained through artistic dexterity, and that through protest and resistance poetry these tensions may be expressed effectively and spectacularly without the poetry being reduced to sheer political sloganeering.
The above contention will be arrived at through the examination of the different strains of protest and resistance poetry in an endeavour to vindicate the hypothesis that poets, under any given situation, are engaged in poetic activity as a result of a very particular set of circumstances which provoke a certain degree of urgency and the desire to address pertinent issues prevalent at any given moment. That contemporary South African poetry in English is political in nature is attributable to the context within which it is produced. Munro contends that

we need to know (and also understand) more about the South African political and literary scene, the poet's condition of existence and what happened to him and under what circumstances (1981:43)

if we are to understand South African protest and resistance poetry, how it functions and the position it occupies within the larger South African tradition. Responding to charges of the politicisation of literature, in a poem entitled "A Vehement Expostulation", another South African poet, Peter Horn, asks:

So what do you expect Meddem? That I write soothing verse to send a few million trusting souls to sleep? Do you imply that I don’t do my duty, if I am desperate? Or that I should write about daisies? Or do you, Meddem, under these circumstances expect me to write well balanced, polished verse? About What? Armies, Revolution? Bloodshed? Apartheid? Or a hilarious sonnet about our impending peace?

The inherent message in this poem is clear. The poem illustrates the political and socio-cultural characteristics to be found in the poetry that will be analysed in this study. It portrays a society entirely different from either the British or American or
It can be argued that South African poets will produce poetry which will attempt to be as politically and socio-culturally meaningful as possible, and that this "meaningfulness attains great intensity in their society first" (Nemadzivhanani, 1991:09). From all this, one can infer that although Eurocentric aesthetics are important in themselves, they should not be applied to protest and resistance poetry without taking into cognizance the many forces that are at play in the production of this type of poetry. Anne McClintock reinforces this fact when she contends that standards are not golden or quintessential; they are made according to the demands different societies make on writers and according to the responses writers make to those demands (1987:599).

The above, however, should not be construed as an attempt to seek global critical immunity for protest and resistance poets, but rather as an endeavour to illustrate that it is sometimes ineffectual to assume that traditional literary canons are the only yardstick through which any literary work is to be judged.

HYPOTHESES.

The dominant notion of "aesthetics" is very exclusive because of its Eurocentricity and dependence upon a framework of reference which, because of its academic bias, does not reflect the spontaneity, vivid immediacy and the particularisation of conditions of existence which characterise South African protest and resistance poetry.
This study will examine a selection of poems from Mbuyiseni Oswald Mtshali's *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum* and Mongane Wally Serote's *Yakhal'inkomo*, as well as a selection of poems by worker poets such as Mi S'dumo Hlatshwayo, Alfred Temba Qabula and Nise Malange in *Black Mamba Rising* and *Izinsingisi: The Loudhailer Lives*, in an attempt to validate the hypotheses that political conflict, discontent and tension can be sustained through artistic dexterity which helps in the effective expression of these tensions;

and

resistance poetry has artistic merits in terms of its own aesthetics.

This study will, hopefully, not only vindicate the postulated hypotheses but also show the continuing socio-literary relevance of both protest and resistance poetry vis-a-vis the socio-political changes that have occurred in South Africa since February 1990.

**METHODOLOGY**

An overview of the different strains of protest and resistance poetry will be made. It is important to understand the conditions of existence which the poets face as these contribute to the shaping of a particular form of poetry. We need to understand these conditions if we are fully to comprehend the essence of the poetry which springs from these conditions. This understanding helps reveal the uniqueness of this poetry, a uniqueness which is summed up by Tim Couzens when he rightly asserts that "to understand a poem we must understand it in its
context" (Wilhem and Povey, 1976:50).

The poems will be examined in terms of their themes and contexts in order to understand better their cultural function. Each poem will be analysed with the express aim of determining its theme(s) and the aesthetics which run through it so as to validate the defined aims of this study.
NOTES

1. On 2 February 1990, the ANC (African National Congress), PAC (Pan Africanist Congress), SACP (South African Communist Party), and a number of subsidiary anti-apartheid organisations were unbanned. This meant that exiled members of these organisations could return to South Africa.

On 11 February 1990 Nelson Mandela, then the world's most celebrated prisoner, was released from jail after 27 years of imprisonment. His release and the unbanning of liberation movements marked the beginning of the end of apartheid. They also marked the beginning of the negotiation process which was to transform South Africa's socio-political order from apartheid to democracy. These changes, which culminated in South Africa's first non-racial democratic elections in April 1994, had great impact on the whole of South Africa. In the end the changes also had far-reaching implications for South Africa's literary production in general and poetry in particular.
CHAPTER 2

A BRIEF HISTORY OF WRITTEN AFRICAN POETRY; PROTEST AND RESISTANCE
POETRY IN SOUTH AFRICA; TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENTS.

The role that protest and / or resistance poetry has played in South African literature warrants an analysis which would be incomplete if its historical background, origins, trends and development within the context of African poetry were not investigated. In any examination of protest poetry and resistance poetry cognizance has to be taken of these multiple factors which have helped in the shaping of these forms.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF WRITTEN AFRICAN POETRY.

While African poetry in English only began to impact upon literary circles during the nineteen fifties, there is enough evidence suggesting the existence of written poetry in earlier times. Written poetry in English has been shaped largely by, and has reacted to, colonial experience which, because of its imperialistic nature, brought with it a great sense of cultural dispossession on the part of the indigenous population.

In the tension between old and new, African poets and other writers in general began to revalue the oral literary traditions of Africa. Ama Aido contends that

From various cultures sacred songs, praise poems, religious chants, funeral dirges have influenced the poets writing in English who have mediated between inherited African modes and poetic techniques and the English language they have acquired. In some cases the poem was first written in the indigenous language - as in p'Bitek's Song of Lawino (1967:10).

Literary production began overtly to acquire political and
ideological ambitions. A figure worth mentioning in this development is Edward Blyden, the nineteenth-century Afro-American essayist who foresaw both the romanticism of enigmatising Black Africa and the tendency by both African Nationalism and Pan Africanism to rely upon the West. As a consequence of the six conferences that were organized by William Du Bois and the inimitable Marcus Garvey between 1900 and 1945, the spirit of nationalism amongst African students who were studying abroad grew. It was at about this time that negritude was appropriated as a literary movement. This was to have far-reaching implications in as far as literature was concerned. Because political leaders and writers in general were inclined to emanate from the literary elite, it became easy for literature to be tied to the struggle for political liberation because as Barbara Harlow aptly maintains:

Poetry is capable not only of serving as a means for expression of personal identity or even nationalist sentiment. Poetry, as part of the cultural institutions and historical existence of a people, is itself an arena of struggle (1987:33).

That written African poetry owes much to, and reflects major influences of, traditional African culture and colonial experience is beyond doubt. Although traditional cultural influences often vary from one region to another, and thus shape the nature, character and identity of a specific regional poetry, colonial experience is a common denominator which is not only shared, but also spans a variety of African cultural experiences. This commonality of colonial experience amongst African people has had significant influence in the development of literature in general and poetry in particular. Nkosi observes that
What linked the various African people on the continent was the nature and depth of colonial experience; and this was the final irony. Colonialism had not only delivered them unto themselves, but had delivered them unto each other, so to speak, with a common language and an African consciousness; for out of rejection had come affirmation (1985:30).

Nkosi emphasises that the interplay between traditional and colonial experiences has made it feasible to divide literature into clearly discernible traditions: East African, West African and Southern African, each with its own distinctive style, themes and experiences dictated by local material conditions prevailing in each circumstance.

The founding of Black Orpheus in Ibadan in 1957 by Ulli Beier and Janheinz Jahn, a journal which became very influential in and greatly impacted on literary circles, introduced the literate English-speaking elite to black literary accomplishment in French by first translating from French to English and later on by publishing inventive work in English.

Beier was also instrumental a few years later on in the establishment of what became known as the Mbari Club in Ibadan, which fostered an atmosphere in which literature in general could thrive by publishing, staging plays and encouraging exhibitions. In the club's publication writers of note such as Dennis Brutus, John Pepper Clark, Wole Soyinka and Christopher Okigbo made a regular contribution. In South Africa and East Africa the nature of events took a different turn. Where West African writers had Black Orpheus as their literary outlet and mouthpiece, their counterparts in the East were largely dominated by Makerere University College - once hailed as the home of Africa's
intelligentsia - until the coup de tat that brought General Amin Dada to power signaled the demise of that institution. The College's demise coupled with Tanzania's policy of promoting literature in Swahili exclusively, left Kenya as a dominant force in East Africa.

PROTEST AND RESISTANCE POETRY IN SOUTH AFRICA.

South Africa has been the region in Africa open to multi-cultural contact for the longest period, and this has had far-reaching implications and ramifications in the shaping of South African literature in general and poetry in particular.

For written poetry by a person of non-European descent in South Africa, the earliest attempt was claimed to be a hymn composed by Ntsikana who has been described by Albert Gerard as "the first African Christian bard" (1971:24). Ntsikana's endeavour offers the first individual composition by a black writer in Southern Africa as well as the first attempt at linking "traditional oral techniques with a new cultural situation" (Jones, 1973:35). Ntsikana was rivalled by Makana whose brand of poetic hymns emanated from his distrust of the British. This distrust was evident in his propagation of a separatist type of Christianity.

Lovedale Mission station, a product of the 1820 settlers, marked the beginning of what was to be a milestone in South African Black literature in general. The establishment of the Lovedale Press became very significant as this institution became the "hub of African intellectual life". This was clearly "represented in the activities of ... the Lovedale Training Society and the
The influence of the two societies became more and more evident when the educated people also formed the core of the so-called political elite of the day. Proof of this was the delegation of John Tengo Jabavu (1859-1921) and Walter B Rubusana (1858-1918) to Britain in 1901. These were highly educated writers and it was hoped that this could help them influence the British against the enforcement of the colour bar in the Union's constitution. These writers continued to show faith in the customs and established practices of their community with its concomitant traditional poetry and lore. As well as writing articles of a political nature, Rubusana gathered a number of proverbs and praise poems and published them in *Izwi Labantu*. Later on he wrote *A History of South Africa from a Native Standpoint* (circa 1907) and became one of the founder-members of the Native Congress in 1912 (Mphahlele, 1992:43).

When Dr B.W. Vilakazi (1906-1947), a poet and academic, contended that there was a need for Zulu poetry to follow Western devices such as rhyme and rhythm while utilizing the African experience as content (Mphahlele, 1992:49), a fierce debate on aesthetics ensued. Herbert Dhlomo (1903-1956), a poet whose composition *Valley of a Thousand Hills* (1941) is acclaimed as the first sustained attempt by a "black South African at composing a 'serious' long poem in the alien language of a dominant race" (Gerard, 1971:237), differed fundamentally from Vilakazi. To Dhlomo a traditional literary piece had to be seen as "an esoteric item that defied academic analysis". He saw rhyme as a "cold tyrant" (Mphahlele, 1992:49). Any preoccupation with it or
any poetic technique was perceived as undermining the spontaneous nature of poetry by turning it into a self-conscious creation.

Dhlomo's assertion that "rhythm is essentially African" (Mphahlele, 1992:49) invariably puts him in closer to the negritude views of Senghor and Cesaire who strongly believed that there was nothing that African poetry could derive or even learn from European rhyme and rhythm. They believed that within the African context, it was almost impossible to separate poetry and dance.

The coming to power of the then exclusively Afrikaner Nationalist party in 1948, the entrance in the 1950's of the Drum writers into the cultural scene and the political agitation by mass-based organisations had a tremendous impact on the general population. As a consequence of the National Party's ascension to power, suppression, censorship and bannings became the order of the day. Nevertheless Drum writers continued asserting their presence with works imbued with protest and a style which was both racy and impressionistic. But continued suppression and the piling up of anti-black legislation, particularly after the Sharpeville massacre, began to suffocate most writers. After the government had succeeded in rounding up or driving out virtually everybody capable of organising effective resistance, they followed this up by banning the writing of almost an entire generation of black writers.... (Mzamane, 1992:352).

Subsequently South African protest and resistance literature in English thrived only in exile. However, the picture began to change towards the end of the nineteen sixties because of the resurgence of the mood of militancy and cultural revival,
catapulted by the rise of the Black Consciousness Movement. This was helped, in the field of poetry, by the publication of short poems by Dollar Brand in 1967. As Mbulelo Mzamane puts it

_Africa, Music and Show Business: An Analytical Survey_ was the first substantial body of poems by a black to be published in South Africa in the 1960's (Mzamane, 1992:353).

From then on a number of poems by black South Africans began to be published in _The Classic_ and other magazines such as _Contrast, Ophir, Bolt, Izwi Labantu_ and eventually in an anthology compiled by Robert Royston whose tongue-in-cheek title _To Whom It May Concern_ (1973) is the title of a poem, also in the compilation, which highlights the indignities suffered by black people in general in the South African cities. Poetry began to blossom.

This poetry was imbued with freshness and energy which gave it a unique immediacy and vivid intimacy in addressing issues. This can be attributed to the fact that when the poets of the "new era" began to write, most of their predecessors' works had been banned and, therefore, could not be published in South Africa. Thus the poetry produced in this era was without an established tradition or pattern because of the alienation. The direct way in which poets approached issues unsettled those in power and many poets were dragged before the courts to answer charges of instigating violence. As Mphahlele puts it, one African academic gave evidence to the effect that

poetry, unless it was utterly bad verse, could not incite anybody to violence. Then one would have to give it another name and not "poetry" (Mphahlele, 1992:55).

The academic further contended that there were more immediately-felt human constraints that led to violence.
The above is indicative of the anguish suffered by many blacks for daring to antagonize legislated racism. Nonetheless, black organisations such as the South African Students' Organisation (SASO) and the Black People's Convention (BPC) continued to agitate for the psychological emancipation of the black person from the shackles of Apartheid which had virtually emasculated them. These organisations extolled the poets of the Harlem renaissance, espoused the works of Fanon and Freire as well as the negritude ideas of Aime Cesaire. It was, therefore, not by chance that South Africa's poetic renaissance coincided with the advent of SASO as the major proponent of Black Consciousness. Poets had to respond to new urban contexts where almost the whole of Africa was caught in the frenzy and euphoria of Uhuru, South Africa being the only exception. This then served as a backdrop against which poets and writers in general had to look at themselves. It also helped in the furtherance of the dramatic politicisation of creative writing, a movement away from pure entertainment to revealing the brutality of Apartheid, whose roots can be traced back to the days of the banning of the ANC (African National Congress) and PAC (Pan Africanist Congress). Consequently this type of writing, which was to be known as protest literature, received a lot of criticism from the powerful, Eurocentric, liberal establishment which denounced this literature in general and protest poetry in particular as "unartistic, crude and too political", claiming that "there was more politics in it than art" (Ndebele, 1992:437).

In this new poetry blacks began to talk to themselves as opposed to earlier writers who directed their work to a predominantly
white audience in the hope that somehow this would bring about change in the heart of the oppressor. As Watts comments:

Now, however, they recognized the need to direct their work at the black community, and to use it to transform the consciousness of their people, to reverse the process of alienation (1989:30).

This change of focus and attitude has had significant implications in so far as the aesthetics of this poetry is concerned. A further characteristic worth noting is the self-critical nature and the desire to make a thrust at oneself as opposed to the proclivity to blame all things and everything on the "system" and whites, while exonerating blacks on all accounts. This new development is perhaps not far from the attitude adopted by Chinua Achebe in Things Fall Apart (1958), wherein the author painstakingly juxtaposes the merits and demerits of both the African way of life and that of the coloniser. As already indicated, this self-critical process had as its ideological background the Black Consciousness Movement’s clarion call for the black community to rid itself of, and be emancipated from, all forms of psychological and physical slavery encapsulated in the slogan: "Black man you are on your own".

The publication of Mbuyiseni Oswald Mtshali’s Sounds of a Cowhide Drum in 1971 took the South African literary community, starved by years of censorship and bannings, by surprise. Through this anthology Mtshali "confirms the fact of oppression" (Ndebele, 1982:192) and is an interpreter without necessarily inflaming the reader into action. Mtshali employs dry humour as well as satire to bring out circumstances, mental states of being and emotions that help in the shaping of life in the township (Ndebele, 1982: 20
Mtshali's collection was followed by the publication of Mongane Wally Serote's *Yakhal'inkomo* in 1972. In this volume Serote uses unconventional open-ended poetic forms to bring to the reader's attention both the physical and psychological manifestations of apartheid and how individuals respond to these conditions of existence.

In any attempt to trace the different strains of protest and resistance poetry, the name of Don Mattera deserves to be mentioned. Mattera's predecessors include Bloke Modisane and the intrepid Can Themba. While Mattera's writing straddles the period from Sharpeville to the forthrightness characteristic of Soweto poetry, his poetry deals with the dehumanisation inflicted by Apartheid and the culpability of the white community that sustained its perpetuity.

There are numerous additional poets whose contribution to the development of protest and resistance poetry is not any less, but who, because of the limitations imposed by space and time constraints, cannot be discussed at length. These are poets such as Dennis Brutus whose collection *A Simple Lust* (1973) illustrates his deep concern for the misery of oppression and jail, Sipho Sepamla whose publication *Hurry Up to It* (1977) deals with the futility of the fragmentation of the South African society, Jeremy Cronin with his depiction of the dilemma of ideology, commitment, resistance and oppression in *Inside* (1983), Mafika Pascal Gwala, Stan Motjuwadi, Mazisi Kunene, Peter Horn, Wopko Jensma and a host of other poets.

After the Soweto uprisings of 1976 a number of poets emerged on
the poetic scene amongst whom were Farouk Asvat, who despite being banned between 1973 and 1978 for his involvement in the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) completed his medical studies and undertook research into health services amongst blacks which became the backdrop for his poems such as "Ou China en die Amper-Intellectual". Also relevant are Dumakude kaNdlovu and Ingoapele Madingoane. Ndlovu became co-founder of the Azanian Poets and Writers Association (AZAPOWA) which was later renamed MEDUPE when members realised that the word "Azania" would attract the government's unwanted attention. However, this did not stop the government from banning MEDUPE together with seventeen other Black Consciousness organisations. As a consequence of this, most members went into exile. In spite of all hindrances poets of the seventies, and other writers in general, overcame the disadvantages imposed by the absence of a "vigorous and continuous black South African literary tradition, an absence which was seen as a handicap by the inaugurators of the literary revival after Sharpeville" (Chapman, 1982:371).

TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENTS.

Literary developments in South Africa have a complexity to equal the cultural and political context within which poetry has to operate. The nineteen eighties were characterised by a great resurgence of political militancy and unionism as a direct response to the Total Onslaught theory\(^a\) masterminded and championed by the then Prime Minister P.W. Botha and the securorocrats\(^b\). This era was characterised by the banning of public meetings and of persons and also by the union-bashing tactics of the government. Free political activity was totally denied to the black
population, especially opponents of the government and its separatist racial policies. This period became reminiscent of the early nineteen sixties after the banning of both the ANC and PAC. In spite of, rather than because of, this repression which curtailed not only political activity but also freedom of expression, another breed of resistance poets emerged in South Africa. These poets became known as "worker izimbongi" or "worker poets" largely because they were either unionised workers themselves or identified with the workers' struggles and enunciated this in their poetry. These poets gave oral renditions of their poetry during "political funerals", which had become the only avenue in which people could exercise their right to free political activity, albeit in the glaring cameras of police and the media, and also in the very few mass meetings and rallies that were permitted. The worker poet had a significant impact within the trade union movement and beyond:

At first this was a mainly oral movement spread from one performance to another, from trade union meetings to community meetings, through gatherings which became larger and larger. Even through the states of emergency worker poets [have] continued to reach appreciative audiences with their words and performances... (Sitas (ed.) 1988:i).

These poets became very popular and began to occupy centre stage so much that a rally would be "incomplete" without the worker izimbongi's renditions and performances. As already mentioned although the worker-poet movement was essentially spearheaded by organised labour, the upsurge in poetry has generally involved the "non-worker". There are a number of poets who no longer work or have never worked in the factories, who nonetheless have been part of the movement, narrating their poems at worker and
community gatherings. This type of poetry draws on a wealth of poetic traditions and cannot easily be pigeon-holed into any one division. One will detect the influences of

the nguni oral tradition, the Christian Bible, the black-consciousness poetry of the 1970's, jazz poetry just as [one] can pick the rhythms and imagery of street talk (Sitas (ed.) 1986:ii).

These and the fact that this poetry is linguistically "down-to-earth" make worker poetry not only very touching, but also characteristically more accessible to the ordinary audience, to whom it is directed. Worker poetry addresses a wide range of issues from exploitation and poverty to the indignities suffered by blacks in general.

Judging by the great deal of poetry that has emerged during this period of trade unionism and this poetry's raw power of directly addressing issues at hand, one cannot help but revisit the notion of politics and poetry being mutually exclusive. The evidence presented by the effectiveness of worker poetry seems, at least to the researcher, to suggest that the political struggle for liberation, equity and democracy can in fact be a source of good poetry. What also needs to be re-emphasized at this stage is the singularity of purpose which resistance poetry in general adopts in seeking to

transform and redefine the relationships of power as exemplified in the juxtapositioning of the powerful and the powerless, the oppressor and oppressed, the ruler and the ruled (Harlow, 1987:34).

It is a type of poetry which is both assertive and informative in so far as the South African reality is concerned. Its tone
implicitly defies the system and is indicative of the people's steadfastness and courage which, in spite of hard labour and exploitation, have not been dampened. The bravado that is so discernible in the poetry should, therefore, be seen against the background of the urgency with which this poetry attempts to convey its message, and not as an urge to flaunt whatever industrial power workers are purported to possess. The intended message is to show that blacks in general will continue to survive in spite of whatever harsh realities may be imposed upon them. This, broadly speaking, is the inherent message which dominated the FOSATU Educational Workshop in 1985. The declared message is encapsulated in the following statements quoted by Sitas.

Years and years of cheap labour have not numbed our senses, industrial chemicals have not poisoned the souls, our song shall not be muffled

and

Because even if we are culturally deprived as workers, we demand of ourselves the commitment to build a better world (1986:59-60).

The preceding quotations bear testimony to the attitude and determination with which worker poets approach and view their work. Their primary belief is that culture has an indispensable role to play in the workers' struggle and the general socio-political struggle in the wider South Africa. This is a belief that is rooted and enunciated in, as well as permeated through, the poetic works of Alfred Temba Qabula, Mi S'dumo Hlatshwayo, Nise Malange, Mlungisi Mkhize, Sana Naidoo, Ari Sitas, Charles Ngema, Bonginkosi Nzimande, Henry Zondi and others.
The publication of Qabula, Hlatshwayo and Malange's oral poetry, in the collection *Black Mamba Rising* (1986), helped to reinforce this conviction that culture, as represented by poetry, has an extremely important role to play in the socio-political struggle. Furthermore the publication marked the transformation of the traditional oral form of poetry to celebrate both workers' survival and community action in the face of the hardships imposed by Apartheid and

a growing determination not to be hampered by literary conventions or critical demands in the specific task they have set themselves - the furtherance of social and political liberation (Watts, 1989:35).

These poets see themselves as part and parcel of a growing and confident democratic movement in South Africa, a force whose aim is not only to destroy the forces of oppression, but also to build a new order based on human respect and dignity.

The desire for respect and human dignity is a central tenet of Hlatshwayo's poetry. Born in 1951 in Cato Manor in Durban he left school at a very early age because of poverty, while still doing standard seven. Leaving school was for him a hard blow which brought all his dreams crumbling to nothingness. He once told an interviewer:

*Leaving school sunk my dreams. I wanted to be a poet, control words, any words, that I might woo our multi-cultured South Africa into a single society. I wanted to be a historian of a good deal of history; that I might harness our past group hostilities into a single South African history.... After 34 years of hunger, suffering, struggles, learning and hope, I am only a driver for a rubber company* (*Fosatu Workers' News*, 1985, no 35).

Hlatshwayo was catapulted into cultural activism after organising
a strike at Dunlop Sports in 1984. It was here that he met Alfred Temba Qabula, whom he had always admired as a poet, and realised that he did not need formal tertiary education to compose poetry. He teamed up with Qabula and others to form the Durban Workers' Cultural Local, which was later to become a cultural home for worker poets.

Harsh conditions in his early life, the tragic loss of both his parents at a young age and his survival of the Pondoland rebellion before he turned eighteen forced Alfred Temba Qabula to assume adult responsibilities very early in his life. Born at Flagstaff in the Transkei in 1942, Qabula was forced to join the labour force in order to make ends meet.

In 1964 he was employed by a mining construction company in Carletonville. This marked the beginning of his life as a migrant worker and in 1969 he was enticed to Durban by a foreman who had started a business at Redhill. In Durban, Qabula lived with his uncle in the Inanda Reserve. In 1974 he joined the labour force of Dunlop S.A. in Sydney Road. It was here that Qabula started composing songs about things that affected his life and the lives of others in the hurly-burly of mass manufacture of rubber products. In 1983 he joined the Metal and Allied Workers' Union (MAWU). As a shopsteward he participated in the making of the "Dunlop Play". Its reception amongst workers invigorated Qabula and in 1984 he began to perform his "Izibongo Zika Fosatu" compositions at union meetings. He teamed up with Hlatshwayo and others in writing plays, poems and other projects within the Durban Workers' Cultural Local. Qabula, Hlatshwayo and others continue to orate their poems.
Nise Malange has been described as the "wandering youth of the 1976 generation" (Sitas, 1986:4). Born at Clovely near Cape Town, to a "coloured" mother and an "African" father, Malange suffered an identity crisis and great humiliation in race-obsessed South Africa because she was mocked for being neither "coloured" nor "Xhosa" enough. In the Cape she lived through the "faction fights" of the hostel "Witdoeke" and township residents. The above experiences had far reaching implications for her. She joined the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) in 1983. Subsequently she started organising youth groups and wrote drama and poetry for them to perform. She teamed up with Hlatshwayo, Qabula and others in the Workers' Cultural Local's numerous projects. In her creative work Malange mirrors the conditions of workers and their struggle for survival. Her work characterizes the struggle from a female perspective.

With the assistance of Ari Sitas, Hlatshwayo, Qabula and Malange collaborated in 1986 to publish Black Mamba Rising. The publication was subsequently followed by Izisingisi: Loudhailer Lives in 1989.
1. Contact between Africa and the West was initiated by Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama in the fifteenth century. In the eighteenth century the British slavery trade flourished, as did the colonisation of Africa by the British and the French. Afro-American poets such as Phyllis Wheatley and George Horton produced poetry which sentimentally yearned for Africa. This became the background against which African poets voiced their displeasure about colonialism and slavery. However, it was only in the nineteen fifties that African literature in English in general and poetry in particular made its impact on the literary scene.

2. The Boer republics of Transvaal and Orange Free State joined with the Cape Colony and Natal in 1910 to form the Union of South Africa. The Union was based on white exclusivity and the few rights that blacks enjoyed before union were eroded.

3. The National Party, an exclusively Afrikaner Party, came to power in 1948 after it had promised the white electorate the separation of races based on the philosophy of Apartheid. Since 1989, the party has been altering its profile in an attempt to mirror the reality of South Africa's diverse community by opening its membership to all races.

4. The nineteen sixties and early nineteen seventies saw the dawn of freedom (Uhuru) in many colonised parts of southern Africa. This made Black South Africans intensify their struggle for freedom inside the country.

5. The theory of Total Onslaught was masterminded by P.W. Botha when he believed that the then banned liberation movements were bent on annihilating the Afrikaner. The method was to step up security which translated into illegal cross-border raids in neighbouring countries and South Africa becoming virtually a police state.

6. This is a word coined to describe security-obsessed military officials, politicians, and bureaucrats who were instrumental in the maintenance of the Total Onslaught strategy.

7. Freedom of political activity and speech were totally eroded, particularly during the states of emergency which started in 1985. The only platform open for Blacks to raise their concerns was during union rallies and funerals of political activists, most of whom died brutally in the hands of the police. Hence, the Political funeral.
CHAPTER 3.

AN ANALYSIS OF A SELECTION OF POEMS IN MTSHALI’S SOUNDS OF A COWHIDE DRUM AND SEROTE’S YAKHAL’INKOMO.

The work of poets such as Mtshali, Matthews, Serote and Gwala took impetus initially from the Black Consciousness ideals of SASO. Theirs is a poetry which has been instrumental not only in re-establishing a tradition of black South African writing, but in prompting serious, often uncomfortable questioning by writers and critics alike as to the value of, and the appropriate responses to, literature in a racially turbulent society (Chapman, 1982:11).

The above statement encapsulates the essence of the poetry that is to be discussed in this chapter. Both Mtshali and Serote fall within an era in the early nineteen seventies which marked the resurfacing of published South African black poetry. The fact that Sounds of a Cowhide Drum and Yakhal’inkomo were first published by the same company, Renoster Books, in 1971 and 1972 respectively, was perhaps by design and not by coincidence. Both poets write against a harsh background of economic deprivation and racial inequality. But where Mtshali’s protest poetry focuses mainly on the critical observation of the external manifestations of Apartheid, and the psychological effects thereof as experienced by blacks, Serote’s resistance poetry openly and actively agitates for change. This results in the obvious differences in tone, style and poetic forms which characterise each poet’s work. The differences have to be seen as an indication of the development from protest to resistance poetry and this poetry’s aim of redefining the “possibilities of a new, revised social order” (Harlow, 1987:50).
In his study *Themes in South African English Poetry Since the Second World War*, David Adey maintains that although Mtshali's "Songs of Innocence and Experience" [do not] ... place him somewhere along with Blake, and his gifts of colloquial irony with the tradition of Auden, his almost surgical imagery with Sylvia Plath, they galvanise one to a new and perhaps better understanding of what goes on within the mindset of South Africans and their situation (1976:9).

The above contention is of extreme importance, because one of the fundamental functions of poetry is to make people aware of their immediate environment and what takes place around them. Through his use of conventional poetic forms and devices, Mtshali opens up the South African world to the reader, thereby skilfully making the reader aware of the differences between what is and what should be. He engagingly combines his experiences with his observations to come up with a forceful type of poetry that is hard simply to dismiss.

"If You Should Know Me" (p.39) protests against the ideologically-imposed fear, prejudice and suspicion which hamper an open and meaningful human relationship - particularly the relationship between black and white South Africans. These emotions make it difficult, or rather impossible, for people as members of the human race to know and accept others for what they are. Here, Mtshali provides a context which assumes universal proportions to enable the reader to make an analogy with the South African situation which both Mtshali and the reader know so much of through experience. The persona and the reader both recognise that life in South Africa, especially the interaction between black and white people, is dominated and polluted by...
these emotions. These emotions ultimately breed inferiority and paternalism in blacks and whites respectively.

The first two stanzas are pervaded by the familiar allusion to evil and how, from a Christian perspective, sin came into the world through the temptation of Eve by the "serpent" to eat the "apple". The power of these stanzas does not, however, reside only within the subtle rendition of the biblical story. It also lies in the revelation by the poet that he, too, is regarded as a sinner. The degradation that the persona feels is rejected through an open declaration of his innocence manifested in the crisp and ironic image of a flint. Furthermore, a contrast is made between reality and artificiality. The persona contrasts the real image of himself, representing blacks, with the image perceived by his detractors (whites) in their attempt to justify their ill-treatment of blacks in general. This contrast manifests itself in the difference between the "concealment" of the first stanza and the "pullet crawling" out into freedom in the last stanza. Freedom, in this case, needs to be seen from both a literal and artistic point of view. It is freedom from fear, hatred, oppression and poverty which in turn will lead to a more artistic type of freedom in which the poet will be at liberty to develop his craft.

Ironic humour and sarcasm are employed in the third stanza where the persona invites his detractors to

... come search
my soul for non-existent virtues.

He contends that after searching him, they will not care to make anything out of the virtues he has because in their eyes his
virtues are "outnumbered by vices".

The poet's damnation of his adversaries' attitude in the image of "greenflies" is indicative of the nature of the "vices" with which he is now invested. The image of a hatching egg in the last stanza symbolises young virginal life ready to develop to maturity and fulfillment. The eggshell, though it served as a protective cover for the developing embryo at a certain stage, ironically symbolises oppression. The chick forces the shell to hatch for it needs to lead a new life of innocence. It is in this context that the persona pleads to be seen as an innocent person whose spirit of creativity cherishes freedom and nurses no hard feelings. The chick's struggle to hatch becomes the very embodiment of the blackman's struggle not only for political emancipation but also for basic human dignity in a South Africa riddled with oppression and inequality. "If You Should Know Me" can also be said to be Mtshali's attempt at appealing to the "consciousness of those who wield power and could exercise the vote" (Mzamane, 1992:356) to do something in order to change the political and economic system which brings untold miseries to the majority of the country's population. Mtshali does this without openly offering an alternative to the situation.

"Boy On a Swing" (p.3) is a skilfully wrought poem in which Mtshali uses an urban frame of reference to bring the incongruities of township life to light. Although the setting of the poem is a black township in South Africa, the sensations, thoughts and swinging of the boy are not limited to South Africa, or to township life only. Here Mtshali describes the geographical disorientation of the young boy "which serves as a figure of his
emotional, psychological and social disorientation" (Nemadzivhanani, 1991:16) to arrive at poetry which can only be described as "... a historically connected movement, a series of successive integrated manifestations" (Richards, 1959:19). The poem evinces Mtshali's ability ingeniously to develop his skill and style as he constantly moves towards his objective of uncovering the horrible effects of Apartheid in South Africa. There is gradual development in the boy's movements. He starts by moving "slowly" "to and fro" until the movement develops into a faster "swish". At this stage the boy seems to be content and in harmony with nature. But the illusion of contentment and harmony is undermined when one begins to notice the boy's poverty as typified by his "tattered" shirt. The description draws the reader closer to the boy. As a result the reader begins to sympathise and identify with the boy in recognition of the boy's suffering.

The third stanza jostles the reader, because the movements, which earlier seemed to offer the boy a sense of identification with nature, seem to have conspired to confuse him:

The world whirls by:
east becomes west,
north turns to south;
the four cardinal points
meet in his head.

The reader begins to ask why such an innocent boy should be subjected to the harshness of the world which subsequently robs him of his innocence, why he should experience pain so prematurely as to be confused when "the four cardinal points / meet in his head." It is in the last stanza where the reader realises that there is more at stake than the simple swinging of
a young boy. The boy is confused and wants to find his identity within a world that does not seem to be sympathetic. He wants to know why the world is like it is. In his childlike and innocent questions, the reader detects the boy's helplessness, his bewilderment and the great sense of loss within him. When the boy asks the dumbfounding questions

Mother!
Where did I come from?
When will I wear long trousers?
Why was my father jailed?

the symbolic relevance of the swing is brought to light. When the boy swings "to and fro", he wants to soar into mental, physical as well as spiritual freedom. He strives to extricate himself from a cruel world that deprives him of his father for reasons he cannot understand. But like a kite that is bound to its holder by a string, so is the boy bound to the world through the swing and by his dependence on his parents, one of whom is jailed. From the simple sensations of a boy on a swing, the poet communicates a vision that is deceptively simple. The impact of the poem's symbolic significance becomes fully realised only when the poem is experienced in its entirety and within the ineluctable historicity of South Africa's socio-political context. The political implications of the questions

distract attention from the swinging game
and focus it on the problems of poverty,
unsettled family background and repression indirectly suggested. Hence the bitterness of the final stanza belies the apparent pleasure in the first stanza (Shava, 1988:73).

Through this poem Mtshali has skilfully and subtly combined his observations and the daily experiences of black people to protest
against a political system that separates families and subjects young children to untold mental anguish, thereby prematurely depriving them of their innocence. Furthermore Mtshali uses an urban frame of reference and combines this with poetic conventions such as symbolism to produce an artistically satisfying poem. His tone, however, remains relatively moderate as he confirms the external manifestations of Apartheid and the psychological effects thereof "without offering a challenging alternative" (Ndebele, 1982:193). That Mtshali does not offer an alternative detracts nothing from his artistic achievement because his cynical and sarcastic attitude, his oblique and ironic use of vivid, suggestive similes and images, and the profound meaning that lies beneath the apparent simplicity of his poetry, all contribute towards their total effect (Shava, 1989:72).

of making his poetry artistically worthy and stylistically meticulous.

In the poem "The Shepherd and His Flock" (p.1) Mtshali, like Blake, uses Western romantic motifs as a frame of reference, but does so in a way that is relevant to the black man in South Africa. The pastoral convention is used in this poem to protest against the economic as well as educational deprivation of the black child. As the poem opens Mtshali employs his "verbal magic which enhances [his] description of pastoral simplicity" (Adey,1976:10) much in the same way as Blake does in his "Songs of Innocence". The reader is initially enticed by the evident rusticity of the whole scenario as the shepherd seems to be in
harmony with the natural environment. But as the poem progresses it becomes apparent to the reader that the harmony cannot be sustained throughout the poem as it becomes undermined by the shepherd’s frustrations and poverty. The poem eventually transcends the apparent celebration of innocence and the harmonious relationship between the shepherd and the environment to become a scathing critique of the inequality between the shepherd and the farmer’s children. This is evident when the shepherd "dreamily asks"

"O Wise Sun above will you ever guide me into school?"

The morning sun becomes a symbol of hope to the shepherd just as the guiding star was to the magi. The poet also employs a pun to make the reader aware how desperate the shepherd is to go to school. The pun on "Sun" and "Son" has biblical overtones. The shepherd evokes the Son, Jesus Christ (symbolically also known as the Good Shepherd), to guide him to greener pastures. Christ’s help is invoked within the context of shepherdery so as to bring out the intensity of the situation to the reader. As a result, the reader is drawn closer to the shepherd in sympathy. Here the poet uses biblical connotations as a means to draw ironic significance from the disparity between a country that professes Christianity and a South Africa in which young black children are confined to shepherdery while their white counterparts get an education. This is the poet’s way of illustrating to the reader that there are many incongruities that characterise the body politic of South Africa. Mtshali’s skilful use of the pastoral convention helps him develop his craft. From an "ordinary"
description of an apparently "ordinary" and rustic event the poem becomes a biting critique of the deliberate socio-political deprivation of blacks. It becomes a political statement through which the poet attempts to express his anger, pain and frustration against a socio-economic system that relegates black children to shepherdery. There is also an element of protest against the abuse of child labour albeit not in the strength and tone of Blake's "The Chimney Sweepers". Nonetheless the reader becomes aware of the insensitivity of a system in which black children, as represented by the shepherd, are forced to lose their innocence through no fault of their own. The situation becomes the more profound when one realises that the shepherd, just like the farmer's children, would like an education. But because he is trapped in this situation by the necessity for attaining a livelihood, he will probably never get a chance to go to school. When the farmer's children proceed to higher levels of education the shepherd will probably graduate to being a labourer thus remaining economically dependent on the farmer for the rest of his natural life. This is the broader picture which the poet wants the reader to see unfolding in the hope that something can be done to address the situation.

Economic dependence upon whites for survival is not only confined to the farms. In "Going to Work" (p. 50) Mtshali critically looks at the discomfort that the majority of South Africa's workforce suffer as they travel from their urban slums to their places of work in the city. Because of Apartheid, black people in South Africa have for a long time been legally forced to live in the squalid conditions of townships. They were "permitted" to live in
these areas so that they could administer to the domestic, economic, social and political needs of white people. Going to work becomes a struggle for survival because of limited facilities which force workers to be

encased in eleven coaches
that hurtle through stations
into the red ribbon of dawn
crowning the city skyscrapers.

There is a great sense of the depersonalisation of humanity as these "thousand black bodies" are reduced to lifeless things which are packed in cases like objects. The depersonalisation is reinforced by the metaphoric use of "encased" which is indicative of the travellers' discomfort. The situation becomes the more absurd when one realises that these are the same people who are expected to work "productively" in spite of all the discomforts. The whole scenario is reduced to mockery as the train finally reaches its destination. Under normal circumstances "the red ribbon of dawn" would have had romantic qualities. But the "romantic quality is underplayed and the statement becomes ironic" (Muller, 1982:199) because the reader is aware that there can never be anything romantic in the conditions in which these people find themselves. Instead of being a symbol of hope and a new beginning, "the red ribbon of dawn / crowning the city skyscrapers" becomes the workers' symbol of misery. The same skyscrapers are products of these workers' sweat, but in an ironic twist, the workers cannot utilise these. The desperation here is reminiscent of that in Blake's "London" where the

... hapless soldier's sigh
Runs in blood down palace walls
because he too cannot go beyond the walls other than guarding them. The workers cannot be part of the community that utilises the skyscrapers. Excluded like Blake's soldier who guards the walls, the workers, who are black, are only allowed to be within the skyscrapers if or when they have to attend to the needs, domestic and otherwise, of the white community.

When in the second stanza

A commuter mumbles
like a dreamer muffled
by a brandy nightcap

this signifies the worker's dissatisfaction with almost every aspect of his life. He "mumbles" because he has not had enough sleep since he arrives home very late and tired, and has to wake up very early in the morning to catch the train to work. Invariably he attempts to take a nap in the discomfort of the train. The mumbling is an unconscious attempt at subverting a system that imposes such hardships on him. The fact that the attempt is unconscious is indicative of the pervading power of oppression and the apparent permanence of the worker's suffering. He "mumbles" because he finds it hard to pay his rent and his children's school fees, because criminals have robbed him of the little money he had saved to provide for his family. In a nutshell the mumbling represents the anger of the black man in a South Africa that is wealthy but still has an overwhelming number of its black people in enormous poverty.

In the second half of the second stanza the poet uses a rhetorical question to awaken the reader's awareness to the worker's plight and misery. The idea here is to make the reader
recognise the persona as a member of a class of dehumanised workers in South Africa as he later asserts:

I'm a cog in Mr. Jobstein's wheel, and Mr. Jobstein is a big wheel rolling under Mr. de Wiel's oxwaggon.

The three lines are evidence of Mtshali's ability to use metaphor and undertone to underscore the message he wants to drive home. As a "cog", the persona appears to be extremely insignificant within the hierarchy of his place of work. But so too is Mr. Jobstein who initially appears to be the master and in charge. The pun employed in "big wheel" and "de Wiel" helps to reinforce the notion that Mr. Jobstein is not as big as he may purport to be since he is under someone else's control. Invariably one detects the juxtapositioning of the powerful and the powerless particularly in the interplay between employer and employee. The irony here is that the absence of the seemingly insignificant small cog presupposes the failure of the wheel to roll and consequently the waggon's non-movement. Through humour and irony the persona highlights to the reader (and the uncaring employers) that, insignificant as they seem to the employers (whites), the black workers are an indispensable part of the economic machinery of the country and, therefore, deserve to be treated better. The poem is evidence of Mtshali's ability, meticulously and artistically, through irony and metaphor, to combine his experiences and observations to show the black worker as trapped in a socio-economic system which has been deliberately designed to oppress him, "using his resources without providing any human development" (Chapman, 1982:174). This becomes more evident when one looks at the worker's situation against the harsh conditions
he has to contend with. One would have thought that a caring employer would have tried to ease the worker’s burden by providing him with the necessary facilities which would help in improving “productivity”.

Mtshali’s poetry further evinces his understanding of the black man’s existence, particularly in a township situation. Through most of his poetic works he is at pains not only to interrogate the many facets that go into the making of a racially divided and ideologically polarised country, but also to show that he is part of the victim’s world. In spite of all the hardships that are part of his life, he is still able to display not only anger and bitterness, but also wry humour and compassion.

Although Mtshali focuses his attention on the exposure of the hardships imposed upon blacks by Apartheid, he is also very critical of the role blacks play as victims within this system. Much as he imputes blame on the architects of Apartheid, he is also able to recognise how destructive moral surrender to the system can be.

In “Nightfall in Soweto” (p.42) Mtshali draws the reader’s attention to the effects of the Group Areas Act on the residents of Soweto. Instead of arousing romantic hopes of pleasant relaxation after a hard day’s work, nightfall in this township holds terror and the possibility of death. The nights are particularly frightening because they provide cover for criminals to vent their anger and brutality on defenceless victims, as evident in the following lines:

In “Nightfall in Soweto” (p.42) Mtshali draws the reader’s attention to the effects of the Group Areas Act on the residents of Soweto. Instead of arousing romantic hopes of pleasant relaxation after a hard day’s work, nightfall in this township holds terror and the possibility of death. The nights are particularly frightening because they provide cover for criminals to vent their anger and brutality on defenceless victims, as evident in the following lines:
A murderer's hand,
lurking in the shadows,
clasping the dagger,
strikes down the helpless victim.

The situation is very chilling indeed and makes the reader realise the utterly desperate conditions in which people find themselves. The poet does not stop at this. He goes further to give a detailed portrayal of the "emotional disparity between the victim and the victimizer" (Nemadzivhanani, 1991:21) by giving a very graphic description of both the victim and the victimizer. The victim is "slaughtered", "cornered" by, and becomes "the prey" of the victimizer who has become both a "murderer" and "marauding beast". Fear becomes the central theme which governs the lives of people in this situation. There seems to be no refuge from this pervasive fear. Even when the persona is in his "matchbox house" where one at least expects him to feel safe, there is the fear of strangers pouncing on him. In this instance the situation is made worse by the fact that the "crunching footsteps" may be those of ruthless policemen who usually conduct pass raids during the night. That the person is described as being "like a rabid dog / thirsty for my blood" is expressive of the tyranny with which the police act. Thus there is the express fear of the "law", as represented by the police, which pounces on its victims in the thick of night. The dichotomy here is that the "law" instead of protecting ultimately victimises the persona. Thus life becomes almost unbearable under these circumstances.

Through this portrayal of the misery of life in a black township, Mtshali shows that people have been endlessly oppressed, victimised, frustrated and intimidated. Here the poet apportions
blame to both the political system which yields such criminality, and to the people themselves. The poet focuses his attention on the criminals in particular. The message he is conveying to them is that no matter how strong the excuse may be, there cannot be any social, political, economic or even moral justification to vent their frustrations on fellow victims of Apartheid. Here Mtshali is unequivocally demonstrating "that criminal violence does not help change the situation because it is invariably directed towards wrong targets" (Shava, 1989:80).

In an interview with Ursula Barnett, Mtshali said of his poetry:

My poetry embodies many facets of life here. It also captures the moods of such diverse things that I do not only regard it as art but also as a vehicle to carry the message of the people. It is poetry committed to their struggle to be free. As such it has to be committed and carry a message, (Chapman, 1982:103).

Mtshali's contention is particularly pertinent when judged against the simile that is found in the seventh stanza of "Nightfall in Soweto". The simile "he barks like rabid dog / thirsty for my blood" creates a microcosm inhabited by the hunter and the hunted which according to Nemadzivhanani "is the unpleasant situation [which] Mtshali wishes to disclose, a situation where both the hunter and the hunted are held captive, a situation in which the hunter has even more need to see the light of day than the hunted" (1991:21).

Mtshali's close relationship with his immediate world provides him with a canvas on which he paints his observations and experiences in a colloquial manner using wry humour. His stylistic approach is always chosen to suit the particular
subject he wishes to address in any given poem. As a result of
this one recognises both the simple and philosophical as he uses
his "verbal magic" to provide shocking revelations. For whites
Mtshali's experiences provide "a revelation of a world they live
in and never have known" (Gordimer: Foreword to Sounds of a Cown
hide Drum:ix). To this end Mtshali uses his poetry as an
educative force to underline the view that

a black man's life in South Africa is
endlessly a series of poems of humour,
bitterness, hatred, love, hope, despair
and death. His is a poetic existence
shaped by the harsh realities and euphoric
fantasies that surround him (Chapman, 1982:105).

"An Abandoned Bundle" (p.60), described by Shava as "one of the
most shocking poems ever written" (1989:76), illustrates the
poet's desire to take the reader into "the black man's world made
by the white man" (Gordimer: Foreword to Sounds of a Cowhide
Drum:x) in an effort to make the reader gain first-hand knowledge
of what life in a township is like. The poem is Mtshali's
vitriolic attack on a system that reduces people to rubbish
heaps.

Right from the start the persona exposes the irony that is
contained within the name of the place (White City Jabavu) in
which the dastardly act of throwing away a newly-born child
occurs. A closer look at the events in the poem reveals that
there is absolutely nothing white or city-like about Jabavu, both
in the literal and metaphorical sense of the words. The diction in
the first stanza is disturbing for one expects morning to be
associated with hope for a new beginning. Not in Jabavu. Here
morning is associated with "smoke", "pus" and "sore". All these
words have negative connotations which do not inspire hope. Here Mtshali gives a graphic description of White City Jabavu which can only evoke disgust on the part of the reader. The reader begins to wonder if anything positive can come out of such an environment so laden with negativism. The oppressive atmosphere of the place does not confine itself to human beings only. Even the little houses smother "like fish caught in a net." The simile suggests that everything within this township is trapped within a man-made situation.

When in the third stanza the persona observes:

Scavenging dogs draped in red bandanas of blood

the reader cannot miss the serious implications that are loaded within the adjective "red". It immediately evokes the biblical association of red with sin and the secular connection of red with danger. In the end the adjective "red" besmears with guilt those who are architects of and apologists for the situation. The notion of the hunter and the hunted which pervades "Nightfall in Soweto" is also prevalent here for as the dogs fight "fiercely / for a squirming bundle" one gets a sense of a powerful hunter against a meek and helpless prey.

The fourth stanza illustrates that Mtshali is not just a passive chronicler of events. The constant use of visually evocative imagery and the first person "I" indicate that the persona is an active observer. He is an observer who realises the dangers of being indifferent to the situation. The throwing of the brick is not only out of curiosity but an attempt on the part of the
observer to offer assistance, albeit belatedly so. What is then revealed as the dogs scurry away is the shocking realisation that they were fighting over a dead baby. The reader's sense of revulsion is taken to the limits by this realisation. This, invariably, brings an ironic twist to the meaning of the word "bundle". The irony is that an infant is conventionally referred to as "a bundle of joy" and yet in this case the infant has been "dumped on a rubbish heap." The whole situation becomes symbolic in that "a whole racial group is reduced to a bundle that is abandoned and is either unwittingly or unwillingly made to abandon itself through its actions" (Nemadzivhanani, 1991:22).

The quotation in the last three lines of the fourth stanza, which also happens to be the climax of the poem,

```
Oh! Baby in the Manger
sleep well
on human dung.
```

is nothing if not utterly shocking to the reader. It sends a kaleidoscope of emotions and strong revulsion through the reader's mind. The quotation has strong biblical connotations for the mutilated corpse of the infant is likened to the baby, Jesus Christ, alluded to in the quotation. Here Mtshali is at his acerbic best as he sarcastically and virulently attacks the perilous circumstances surrounding the mutilated corpse. The corpse is told, in a metaphoric sense, to "sleep well / on human dung." The metaphor becomes a vehicle through which the persona indicts an indifferent and complacent society. The poet also, indirectly, mounts a scathing attack on a political system whose aim is to relegate people to rubbish heaps. This political
system is seen as motivated by racial greed and selfish ideals which become a recipe for "poverty and hence generate dehumanisation and brutalisation amongst blacks. The frequency with which senseless death occurs in the township is such that one gets the impression that life in a township is cheap" (Shava, 1989:80).

In the last stanza of the poem Mtshali observes that

Its mother
had melted into the rays of the rising sun
her face glittering with innocence
her heart as pure as untrampled dew.

Here the poet criticizes blacks in particular for "giving in" to brutalisation to the extent where a mother throws away a baby and leaves the scene with a "heart as pure as untrampled dew". The reader cannot fail to notice how Mtshali uses both irony and cynicism in the way he depicts the self-satisfied and casual manner of the unfeeling mother. The mother not only lacks compassion but is devilishly cruel. Njabulo Ndebele as quoted in Shava (1989:80) has correctly described this cruelty as "cruelty that shuts the mind / To the discernment of all goodness."

Furthermore the corrosive influence of societal laws and norms is reinforced. Mtshali illustrates that the political system that is enforced is one riddled with moral absurdities, spiritual decadence and political incongruities. It is a system whose victims have hardened their attitude to the extent of pretence. It is a brutal and illegitimate system in which attempts at resistance become a life-and-death struggle for survival. The irony that pervades the last stanza involves everything that the mother is not, but pretends to be. This becomes a moral lesson to
those who are privileged, and are in power, to begin to realise that they should not continue designing racist laws that govern people, and continue to believe that everything is fine, when it is not. Mtshali's objective in this instance is to take the focus of blame away from the mother, as an individual, and thrust it on the whole of society for letting conditions deteriorate to such an appalling state. The poem becomes a diatribe against a system that leads people to pretence, and drives them to attempt "concealing their real selves, even at the expense of infanticide" (Nemadzivhanani, 1992:22). In his characteristically subtle manner Mtshali is protesting against the social, political, economic and educational inadequacies and deprivation imposed on blacks by a system which denies them the chance to have "meaningful role models for the younger members of society" (Shava, 1989:75). In the end it becomes evident to the reader that Mtshali uses artifice - which includes cynicism, sarcasm, irony, vivid similes and suggestive images - combined with apparent simplicity to bring out the total effect of the poem "An Abandoned Bundle". Perhaps Chapman's description best summarises the essence of what this poem is about when he contends that the poem

adroitly juxtaposes myth and social reality, as African and Christian typologies of mother and child presented a shocking, though widely identifiable, indictment of a society which, while professing to subscribe to Western - Christian tenets, had enforced on the majority of the population poverty, family disintegration and the concomitant need for desperate survival (1992:515).

It has been argued right from the beginning that Mtshali, in Sounds of a Cowhide Drum, relies to a large extent on convên-
Mtshali evinces his artistic dexterity in his manipulation of these poetic forms to fit his own situation, namely to expose the manifestations of Apartheid. In most of his poems, he subtly develops his technique progressively towards the achievement of his primary aim, which is to conscientise the reader to the horrible realities that Apartheid imposes on his fellow countrymen and women alike. Although his context is primarily that of the township, Mtshali skilfully combines his experiences and his understanding of Western literary conventions as he urbanely portrays incidents and situations which ultimately assume universal proportions. His use of closed poetic forms becomes a framework in terms of which he satirically portrays incidents and peculiar situations.

In general Mtshali adopts the moderate tone of an observer who does not necessarily inflame his readers into action. While explaining why the anthology is titled *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum*, Mtshali had this to say:

> The cowhide drum is a symbol which can be used to express many moods and different occasions in my life. When war is declared, drums are beaten in a particular way; and when a baby is born, another tune is played on the drum (Chapman, 1982b:69).

Thus Mtshali's poetry should not be seen and evaluated as art only, but also as an embodiment of the many facets of South African life as seen from a black man's perspective under the rule of Apartheid. It is when one considers this and the fact that the volume itself marked the beginning of a "renaissance" in black writing that one realises that the poetry represented a
vibrant new voice.

A lot has been said about the aesthetic quality of Mtshali's poetry and the work of other protest poets. Initially there was general reluctance by the predominantly Eurocentric academic school of thought to accept this type of poetry as "good". Some critics such as Adey even went to the extent of claiming that

[the] work seems to lack the enduring quality of "good" poetry, having an application that draws its immediacy almost solely from its context as a comment on aspects of racial and political structures in South Africa (1976:130).

Statements similar to this, which border on patronage, sparked off an aesthetic debate. However, it became clear that Western critical values were not suzerain, and could, therefore, not be imposed upon protest poetry without understanding the nature of what this poetry was doing and the methods employed.

Since protest poetry in South Africa "has given itself the triple aim of informing, accusing and exhorting" (Alvarez-Pereyre, 1984:251) it becomes important to realise, as Ndebele avers, that the "aesthetic validity of this literature to its own readership lies precisely in the readers' recognition of the spectacular rendering of a familiar oppressive reality" (1992:441).

The implication of this is that protest poetry is functional in that it seeks to convey a particular message with vivid immediacy. The frame of reference of protest poetry is, therefore, also different from that of other forms of poetry. The analyses of Mtshali's poetry above authenticate this contention.
The aesthetic value of Mtshali's poetry lies in his ability to convey this all-important message powerfully. Although the reader cannot ignore the stylistic qualities which derive from Western literary conventions and tropes, it is the message, conveyed in such poetry, which invariably shocks the reader into a sudden realisation of the "hidden face" of South African society. This the poetry does through novel representations of the conditions of existence of black people. As Harlow explains, protest poetry is not only a means through which the poet expresses his "identity or Nationalist sentiment, ... [but] as part of the cultural institutions and historical existence of a people, is itself an arena of struggle" (1987:33).

As an arena of struggle it is important for poetry to remain accessible and also relevant within the context of addressing pertinent issues affecting the day-to-day struggles of black South Africans. This is what Ndebele means when he contends that the aesthetic of reading ... for the black reader, is the aesthetic of recognition, understanding, historical documentation and indictment (1992:442).

If poetry does not fulfil this function, it invariably becomes irrelevant to its black audience. Once this happens poetry loses its mnemonic and didactic importance and fails drastically as a form of social, cultural and political expression.

In conclusion, perhaps the best way of characterizing and describing Mtshali's poetry would be to further quote Njabulo Ndebele's further comments on protest literature:
it indicts explicitly, it is demonstrative, preferring exteriority to interiority, it keeps the larger issues of society in our minds, it provokes identification through recognition, it establishes a vast sense of presence, it confirms without necessarily offering a challenge. It is the literature of the powerless identifying the key factors responsible for their powerlessness (1992:442).

Mtshali’s main concern in his poetry is to accentuate the grotesqueness of the South African situation. This he achieves by skillfully revealing the social conditions of the destitute and the politically privileged. All this is mirrored against a South Africa that is economically able to sustain all its people. But although Mtshali is nauseated by the conditions in South Africa he rarely, in *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum*, becomes a revolutionary. Instead he chooses to rely upon poetic devices such as cynicism, sarcasm, metaphor and understatement as a way of making his socio-political observations forcefully. However, his style does not always inspire affection in those who feel that his “over-reliance” on Eurocentric poetic devices makes his condemnation of the white power structure too timid. In the end his style is considered to be Mtshali’s pandering to the whims and wishes of the liberals “as though bent upon proving to his liberal mentors what a moderating influence he was” (Mzamane, 1992:356).

If Mtshali may be seen as a protest poet, Serote is more accurately a resistance poet. The distinction between protest and resistance poetry is best made by Chapman when he maintains that it has become necessary to distinguish between two major kinds of (Soweto) poetry,
those of "protest" and "resistance". The former may be seen as confining itself to the critical observations of the existing scene, while the later actively demands change (1984:193).

In terms of this distinction the shift from protest to resistance occurs with the publication of Serote's *Yakhal'inkomo* and James Matthews and Gladys Thomas' *Cry Rage* in 1972.1

Resistance poetry according to Harlow (1987:28-30) is a type of poetry which by its nature is both a political and politicised activity. As a result it calls attention to itself as a form of resistance. This poetry views itself as directly involved in a struggle against dominant forms of ideological, literary and cultural production.

The main thrust of Serote's poetry is exposure of the dominant ideology of Apartheid's foundation. This is enhanced by the employment of unconventional open-ended poetic forms which present the poet's experiences in an immediate way. Serote's resistance poems transcend the ordinary observation of the external manifestations of Apartheid. His poetry rigorously focuses on the unseen and the prophetic, the struggle within the individual in an attempt to wrestle with the harsh realities that are imposed by Apartheid. The poems should, therefore, be read as "symbolic acts of resistance"2 where the poet sometimes uses the stream of consciousness technique to bring out feelings and memories which are largely informed by the desire to be spiritually and politically free and emancipated.

As has already been indicated, resistance poetry is overtly political primarily because it focuses its attention not only on
the mental construct of the individual, but also on the social engineering that is informed by the ideology of Apartheid within the body politic of South Africa. This is the reason why Frielick (1990:40) contends that there is a great need for the construction of critical approaches to resistance poetry in South Africa. Such approaches will have to look at resistance poetry both in terms of its aesthetic qualities and political importance because of the dual function this type of poetry sets for itself.

Serote's work has politics as its central tenet because it emerges from a context which is determined by the struggle against oppression and the desire for freedom. The poem "The Actual Dialogue" (p.9), which is also the first poem in *Yakhal'inkomo*, shows an attempt to overcome the fear of whites and the discovery of the black self. The poem evinces resistance in that from its beginning we see the reversal of roles, at least within the South African context, where the black persona seems to have usurped the dominant conversational role from the "Baas", who usually holds it. The constant repetition of "Do not fear Baas" inevitably places the persona in the role of the reassurer.

In reassuring the Baas by saying

Do not fear -
We will always meet
When you do not expect me.
I will appear
In the night that is black like me (my emphasis)

the persona also emphasizes his blackness, thereby implying that he is no longer frightened of the baas and is confident to confront the baas with his new attitude of struggle against oppression. This attitude is also one of effecting psychological
emancipation on the part of the persona. The tone of resistance is sustained further in the warning "when you do not expect me". This implies that the baas cannot afford to be complacent as the two "will always meet" in the future. The implication is that the white baas cannot succeed in oppressing the black persona forever. The repetition of "In the night that's black like me" reinforces the notion that the white baas cannot wish the black persona away as his presence is as permanent and inevitable as day and night. The persona continues to undermine the power of the baas through the juxtaposition of "heart" and "mind", "sea" and "earth". The fear of the white baas is ascribed to the heart whereas that of the persona is ascribed to the mind. The implication is that the fear of the baas will take longer to heal as the heart is very fragile. In opposition to that, the persona asserts that his own fear can be actively supplanted as symbolically signified by his brash tone within the poem. In ideological terms the implications are that no matter how strong the ideology of Apartheid appears to be, it cannot, and will not, withstand the determined power of the black person's quest for freedom and emancipation, both spiritually and mentally. The poem in essence becomes an expression of the feelings, experiences and aspirations of the socially and politically oppressed, and their determination to be self-reliant and independent. What is implied is that although the baas holds political and economic power, it the persona who holds the ideological and moral high ground to survive. The poem is also significant in that it foreshadows the "actual dialogue" that resulted in the ideological shift of South Africa from Apartheid to democracy³. As early as 1972, through
this poem in particular and *Yakhal'inkomo* in general, Serote was already giving the "impression that negotiations between whites and blacks in order to bring change [were] ... possible" (Shava, 1987:83). In this sense the poem is not only symbolic but becomes prophetic as well, as this is the course that South Africans eventually followed in their quest for democracy.

The poem does not only evince political resistance but also evidences aesthetic resistance particularly when the persona in the end says

> It's awright Baas  
> Do not fear.

The deliberate switch to the use of "awright" indicates a linguistic shift from the traditionally acceptable Standard English to township jargon. Aesthetically it is a declaration by the poet that from now on the "actual dialogue" will "be held in the persona (Serote)'s own turf, in his way of using language, and on his own terms" (Frielick, 1990:58). This is an open declaration on the need for the transformation and redefinition of the relationship between poetic language and message, the need for "a new language and a new aesthetic, one that is capable of rendering reality in a form that everybody, not just the privileged few, can master" (Frielick, 1990:17), an aesthetic relationship that does not remain intact, but is influenced by the very aim that resistance poetry sets for itself, namely, to liberate the mind of the black man from patterns of "a society built upon the alleged aesthetic, moral and intellectual superiority of the white man" (Chapman, 1982a:193).
Frielick avers:

Resistance is also evident in the process of Serote exposing and undermining the ideological structures of government (1990:63)

by his portrayal of the effects of Apartheid in spiritual and moral terms as evidenced by the destruction and moral breakdown witnessed by the township dwellers.

"City Johannesburg" (p.12) is one such poem which reflects a cry of suffering, the frustration and indignities of the black man. Although the poem is intensely personal, its stature grows and it becomes a representation of the miseries of the suffering people in a society plagued by racism and inequalities. The South Africa described by the persona is one where there is a ritualistic dehumanisation of blacks as evidenced in the daily suffering the persona has to endure. It is a country in which Apartheid policies dictate where a black man can and cannot be. The poem further analyses the machinations of capitalism within a society in which Apartheid reigns supreme. The dry humour that the persona employs as he derides the situation and the colloquial simplicity of presentation in

My hand like a starved snake rears my pockets
for my thin, ever lean wallet
while my stomach groans a friendly smile to hunger

has serious undertones. The poet is making a political statement against an opulent city that has inevitably and inextricably become part of the dominant political ideology of Apartheid, a city in which blacks toil incessantly to make ends
meet, sometimes with no idea where their next meal will come from. The city, which stands metonymically for all South African cities, is juxtaposed with the surrounding townships. The stark differences in the lifestyles and opulence are expressive of the unequal, repressive society of South Africa. It is, therefore, not surprising that the persona describes the city as a place of death: "Jo'burg City, you are dry like death". The city is not only seen as a place which symbolises spiritual death, but also as a secluded and exclusive place of utter repression in which black people need their "pass" not only for identification but as a means of survival against repressive and peculiarly South African laws such as the Influx Control and the Group Areas Acts. Thus a "pass" becomes the very essence of survival as signified by the following lines:

Or into my inner jacket pocket
for my pass, *my life*
Jo'burg City

(My emphasis)

Furthermore Serote uses metaphors to illustrate the all-inclusive repressive character of this city. In a metaphor that likens the city with a beast, the city "inhales" the mass of black workers in the morning only to "exhale" them in the afternoon. The inherent image here is that of a black man trapped within an economic system which only exploits his resources but never provides him with any recourse to his own human development. The social implications of the exhalation are that black people are only good for labour and nothing else. Technology - the very epitome of scientific development in its political, intellectual and economic senses -
is represented by "neon flowers", "electrical wind" and "cement trees". This is contrasted with the sinister situation of the township characterised by "dust", "dongas" and "death". The development that characterises the city has destroyed that which is natural to the extent that the city itself, as Frielick points out, "parasitically embeds itself onto the consciousness of the poet in a totalitarian way" (1990:66). Here the reader cannot fail to compare this totalitarian oppression with the Orwellian world of Nineteen Eighty Four as the poet complains

I can feel your roots, anchoring your might, my feebleness
In my flesh, in my mind, in my blood,
And everything about you says it,
That, that is all you need of me.

Frielick further maintains that "the binary opposition between death and life, repression and resistance takes root in this poem" (1990:65). However, stress is not only on this opposition, but rather on the exposure of the root causes of the oppressive system, a system which in the end the persona equates with the all-powerful and destructive death:

Jo’burg City, you are dry like death,
Jo’burg City, Johannesburg, Jo’burg City.

By naming as death symbols of technological development, Serote once again ascends the moral pedestal. By equating the literal presence of death in the township with the death-like qualities of the Johannesburg, he "begins to bring the marginalised zones of black experience into the light of discursive analysis" (Frielick, 1990:67) thereby reclaiming a dialogical space for
the repressed black voice. It is in this dialogical struggle similar to that of "The Actual Dialogue", that the poem becomes a socially symbolic act of resistance. On a more literal level the reader realises that the poem is an attempt by the poet to mirror the lives of blacks with their aspirations, hopes, fears and hatred in the face of well-calculated manoeuvres to frustrate and repress them. A sense of rage pervades the poem. The surging anger the persona is at pains to restrain becomes the basis on which the poet wants to mobilise collective responses to oppression and repression. The poet's tone and attitude in this poem highlight the desire of the poet to do away with the "artistic" notion of "poetry" and replace it with a functional one. Furthermore the relationship between language and power is also revisited. Once a dialogical space is reclaimed for the repressed black voice, the persona implicitly suggests that in resistance poetry the poet has a primary and political function of conscientising people to stand up and fight against oppression. Neither the poet nor the critic can be a spectator. The poet uses poetry to serve the need for political and economic emancipation because, as Achebe rightly contends,

Art (poetry) is, and always was, in the service of man .... There is no rigid barrier between makers of culture and its consumers. Art (poetry) belongs to all; and is a "function" of society (Achebe 1968: 19).

In his preface to Yakhal'inkomo Serote writes:

the sculptor, told me that once in the country he saw a cow being killed. In the kraal cattle were looking on. They were crying for
their like, dying in the hands of human beings ... The cattle raged and fought, they became a terror unto themselves; the twisted poles of the kraal rattled and shook.

This informs the reader about the type of poetry to expect from the anthology. The cattle in the kraal are representative of black people of South Africa. Just like the cattle which rage and fight in the kraal for survival, so do black people struggle, sometimes with tragic consequences. That the cattle become a terror unto themselves is symbolic of the harsh terror that blacks live with in the townships, particularly the terror imposed by criminals. The poet feels that there is a dire need for change. This is best illustrated in the poem "My Brothers in the Street" (p.27) in which the poet gives an elaborate depiction of life in the township. Again there is a recurrent reference to "black" and "night". The persona calls upon his brothers to begin to re-evaluate their way of life which adds to the terror imposed by Apartheid on the "ordinary" township resident. These brothers "holiday in jails" and "rest in the hospitals" yet they "smile at insults" from and fear the whites. Through this open-ended prosaic description of these brothers, the poet wants to present to the reader, in a vivid and immediate manner, how these criminals live.

Towards the end the reader is shocked upon realising that these "brothers" vent their anger and frustrations on defenceless victims. When the persona declares, "Who’ve tasted the rape of mothers and sisters", the reader is jolted into utter revulsion.
The state of affairs has degenerated to beastliness. The persona deliberately portrays a background of moral and spiritual decadence to depict to the reader that people are trapped within a system ideologically designed to reduce them to beasts. Through this depiction of the spiritual and moral decay as well as the physical destruction of the townships, the poet seeks to expose the ideological structures of the government.

Although the voice of resistance is not always audible, the poem and its content reveal the persona's political thinking. It shows to the reader that, to the poet, the primary ideological function of resistance poetry is to "probe out and raise up the repressed content of the politically unconscious onto the realm of conscious awareness" (Frielick, 1990:63). In this poem the poet's purpose is to make even the "brothers" consciously aware that there is something politically and morally better they can fight for instead of unleashing terror on people who are also victims of the very system which condemns these "brothers" to "jails", "insults" and "hospitals".

In the end it becomes even more evident that Serote is concerned with the conscientising of fellow blacks to the realisation that nobody but themselves will liberate them economically, politically, culturally, spiritually and otherwise. In the poem "My Brothers in the Street" (p.27), Serote launches a vitriolic attack especially on those who vent their economic, criminal and political frustrations on their fellow blacks. Serote's stance is that these criminals have no business in terrorising their "own". Instead, Serote implicitly suggests, they should channel their
energies into fighting against the white oppressor whom they, ironically, are afraid of.

What Serote is intimating is that the black man's fate is in his own hands, that only the black man can batter down the immediate obstacles to freedom which hamper his own emancipation from a "colonised" mental state to a spirituality that is a concomitant part of psychological freedom. He suggests that blacks should stop being a terror unto themselves, like the cattle that rage and fight in the kraal. Instead, Serote implicitly suggests that blacks should actively involve themselves in the struggle for freedom from Apartheid, which will restore to them the moral values and norms that held them together as decent human beings. The poet also aims at the liberation of the minds of the "black brothers" from patterns of imposed thoughts of inferiority. These patterns stem from a society built upon a false sense of moral and political superiority by whites, as made evident in the poem when the poet contends:

Who smile at insults,
Who fear the whites.

The revelation here is that the Apartheid society that South Africa is, becomes a Manichaean society in which whites feel that they have a divine calling, as God's chosen nation, to delimit the freedoms of the African people who are "demonic agents". What Serote highlights through his poem is that the totalitarian nature of Apartheid has been so overwhelming that Africans fear the white man. This fear is reinforced by Africans' experiences of brutality at the hands of agents of the
state such as the army and the police. In the end Serote wants the reader to realize the hypocrisy of Apartheid and the selective morality which underpins it. The reader invariably realizes that Apartheid, far from being biblically justifiable, is perpetuated by whites out of social, economic, political greed and fear.

"What's in this Black 'Shit'" (p.16) is a powerful poem in which Serote continues in his inward-looking process in an attempt to arrive at self-knowledge and psychological liberation. Serote opens the poem by attempting to describe what the "black shit" is. The description is of something that is very nauseating and this is exactly what Serote wants the reader to feel. This way, the poet creates an atmosphere which evokes a sense of disgust so that whatever he associates with the "black shit", the reader will be able, by means of association, to reject outrightly.

After the description of the "shit", the poet begins to expose the different forms which it takes. Invariably the reader realises that the life of blacks has a "shitlike" character typified by the negative self-concept that the system promotes amongst them. This is the reason behind the old woman cursing in the discomfort of her "match-box". She is not satisfied with her conditions. But because society has consistently promoted a negative image of her, she endures the humiliation of serving tea to a "rich young woman" who is still in bed at 10 a.m. There is an implied message to the woman to resist a society that subjects blacks to the status of being servants. When in the third stanza the "shit" takes the form of physical punishment, the poet hopes
that the reader will realise the overwhelming misery brought about by a system in which a father becomes unsympathetic to his own daughter. On another level, the poet aims at making the reader more aware that the oppression under which blacks live is all-consuming. The father unleashes his anger and vents his frustrations on his daughter. When judged against the mistake the daughter has committed, the punishment is unjustifiably extreme to say the least. Here Serote is giving examples of black people's social, political and economical plight. In the end it is these socio-political and economic problems that make Serote take a defiant stance against those who wield power and authority, the whites. "Shit" in the poem signifies white racists' reference to blacks; since the old woman and the father internalise this "shit", they accept it as a natural part of their lives, thus accepting their oppressed position.

Serote is, however, not content with the situation as is evident in the last stanza. The "pass office" to which the persona goes to "to get employment" symbolically becomes the very seat of the "shit" because it represents the white man's triumph in his attempt to delimit the movement of blacks and subjugate them through a legislated process of pass laws. To add insult to injury the persona is endorsed to Middelburg, a place very far away from his residence in Alexandra. This fills him with anger and unlike the old woman and the father, who resign themselves to the acceptance of their oppression, the persona spontaneously adopts a defiant attitude towards the white officer as he says:

So I said, hard and with all my might, 'Shit!' I felt a little better....
That the persona spits out the word "shit" with all his might is indicative of his innate desire to rid himself of all things associated with oppression. His action is both symbolic and literal. On a literal level the action represents his disenchantment and anger against a system that arbitrarily endorses him to a place far away, a system deliberately designed to inflict pain, impose indignity and make even dreams of liberty seem impossible. On a symbolic level the act becomes a resolution of the political contradictions which characterise the world he describes in the poem. This invariably frees him from the victim mentality which the old woman and his father suffer, the stress that the appalling physical conditions imposed upon them bring, the psychological emasculation and the results of this stress on both communal and family lives and co-existence.

Aesthetically, with powerful "anti-poetic resonance the word 'shit' becomes a weapon with which to undermine middle-class conceptions of poetic register" (Chapman, 1988:24). The forceful nature of resistance inherent in the poem depletes the word "shit" of its power as a white man's insult. Invariably the word is hurled back at the white man with all its expletive force as an indication of the emergence of a "conscientised man" who will stand his ground and challenge the status quo.

The deliberate undermining of the concept of poetic register, the emphasis on the repetition of the word "shit", and the usage of free-verse lines to express an underlying swell of emotion, Serote seeks to "convey the impression that he is imparting his message of consciousness-raising and race-pride to a black
communal audience in the first instance, rather than to a white 'literate' readership" (Chapman, 1984:195).

"Motivated to Death" (p.50) is a scathing attack on the system which breeds suffering and inequality. In the poem Serote places the final responsibility for both the "hunter" and the "hunted" squarely on the doorstep of the government's racially exclusive and discriminatory policies. This is encapsulated in the poem as follows:

The R.S.A. condemned him  
Not Alex - where he died, where his killers exist.  
No!  
His Crime? (Thanks he's beyond this now).

He had no pass. Didn't work, had nowhere to stay.  
His meals? He shared beer with friends.

The poet vividly portrays a situation which at best can only be described as desperate and at worst tragic indeed. The situation as described becomes a microcosm of life as led by blacks in a South Africa riddled with repression and inequalities. The situation has degenerated to a state where people become killers of their own in their struggle for survival. Human life is reduced to mere existence. This has far-reaching implications in so far as the moral and spiritual contentment of the people is concerned. Both the "hunter" and the "hunted" are victims of the system. Both are condemned to living in a state of depravity and violence which not only breaks them spiritually, but becomes the very recipe for the breakdown of family life and societal values and norms.

Consequently these people are forced into a type of jungle
existence where survival depends on who has more weapons and the
greater will to kill. Brutal repression and confinement of the
black population to specific areas, through the ruthless
enforcement of both the Group Areas and the Influx Control acts,
reduce them to an apathetic state. In this apathetic state they
become indifferent to their own plight and that of their fellow
beings. They are, as it were, reduced to a state of inaction as
the "might" of Apartheid appears to have totally subjugated and
emasculated them.

It is this sense of impotence on the part of the oppressed which
Serote wants to bring out, in the hope that it will galvanise the
reader into an active change of attitude. As far as the poet is
concerned the sense of impotence and apathy has to be turned
inside out so that people can begin to assert themselves.
This implicit message is encapsulated in poems such as "Burning
Cigarette" (p.20) and "What's Wrong with People?" (p.17).

In "Burning Cigarette" the poet uses the cigarette as a metaphor
for the exploitation that blacks are subjected to as he says:

This little black boy
is drawn like a cigarette from its box,
Lit.
He looks at his smoke hopes

That twirl, spiral, curl
To nothing.
He grows like cigarette ashes
As docile, as harmless;
Is smothered.

Watts argues that the "deceptive calmness of tone and the
apparent naivety of the image mask an embittered encapsulation
of an entire life-cycle of shattered hopes, despair, impotence and death" (1989:171). The prosaic and simple manner of presentation that Serote uses enables him to depict the type of life that Apartheid South Africa offers to its black youths. With his engaging casualness, Serote draws an analogy between a cigarette and the life of black youths as a means of working upon the reader's consciousness. The reader realises that life is not only difficult for the black youth, but is also punctuated by despair, hopelessness and sudden death. The poet also makes the reader aware of the casual attitude the oppressor adopts as he systematically frustrates whatever little hopes the oppressed may cherish. This frustration is inflicted in a "gentle" manner, as gently as a smoker draws a cigarette from its box. The simple but engaging style Serote employs is significant in that it helps in revealing the harshness meted out to the "black boy". This is made evident by the harsh brevity of the third, sixth and last lines of the poem.

What Serote wants the reader to understand through the poem is that South Africans (whites in particular) cannot afford to continue being oblivious to the suffering of their fellow countrymen. Furthermore, the poet is subtly urging his readers to do something to change the situation. The poet wishes to see the restoration of hope amongst people, the return of a zest for life and a willingness to stand up and change things for the better.

The poem is also an indictment of the South African population for allowing such a state of despair. The poem is not only a diatribe against the system of Apartheid, it also serves as a
mirror in which society has to look at itself, an attempt at a self-evaluative process in the hope that people will take action to redress conditions which allow for such despair. Through the poem, Serote agitates South Africans against inactivity and their resigned acceptance of suffering as an acceptable condition of existence. What Serote suggests is that there can be change only when people who need it most take action. This ties in well with the ideology of Black Consciousness which urges the oppressed blacks to stand up and rid themselves of mental and spiritual oppression by asserting their blackness and being proud as a people. This ideology, to which Serote subscribed in the early nineteen seventies, was encapsulated in the slogans: "Black is beautiful" and "Black man you are on your own", the latter message being a clarion call to black people to batter down the immediate obstacles to spiritual, psychological and physical freedom.

Political ideology becomes the central theme on which Serote expounds because he realises that the aesthetic act of poetry production "is itself ideological, and the production of aesthetic or narrative form is to be seen as an ideological act in its own right, with the function of inventing imaginary or formal 'solutions' to unresolvable social contradictions" (Jameson, 1983:79).

In "What's Wrong With People" (p.17) Serote once again attacks human apathy as is evident in the lines:

I saw a man
Come. Walk. Limp.
Fall.
Like a branch being sawn.
His eyes flickered like flame blown by wild wind.
People stood to look.
I was among them.

The poem interrogates the attitude of people in the face of a violent death. The poem presents, in uncomfortably terse terms, a murder victim's death and the spectators' inaction. When in the end the persona asks what is wrong with people, he also asks what is wrong with himself as he is part of the crowd that is inactive. What Serote does with the presentation is to interrogate his own and the community's conscience and consciousness. The poet wants the reader to realise that conditions have become so mentally oppressive that people simply accept the death of a murder victim as an inevitable, almost natural, course. What becomes extremely disturbing in the poem is the overwhelming tendency of people just to watch the death of a fellow being and do nothing about it. As far as the poet is concerned this state of affairs is symptomatic of society's tragic indifference. That the persona is amongst the people who only watch but do nothing is also an indication by Serote of the need for self-analysis. The implied message is that people have lost their milk of human kindness and sympathy, what is known as "Ubuntu" in South African parlance. What the poet presents to the reader are unpalatably true facts pertaining to the degradation of humanity in the face of the oppression that Apartheid imposes upon its victims. People have succumbed to oppression and this is what Serote attempts to change through his candid portrayal of some truths about people and the communities in which they live.

Through this revealing poem, Serote hopes to spark off a
regenerative process which will restore people's kindness and sympathy towards each other. There is also an implicit message that unless people are prepared to undergo this radical regenerative process, the black community will be doomed to subjugation and poverty. Here Serote defines his role, through the presentation of his poetry, as "a writer in a revolutionary struggle to 'conscientise' the subordinate classes into an awareness of the passive acceptance of a dominant ideology or hegemony and to replace old hegemonic forms with new ones more appropriate to liberation and equality" (Frielick, 1990:42). Liberation in this sense should be seen both in the psychological and spiritual sense. Only then can physical, economic and political emancipation effectively take place. Serote does not not only see his role as a "conscientiser" but also as an "Ofay-watcher", a community watchdog who raises various concerns that touch on the many aspects of life. Serote's role as a guardian of the community links up directly with his deliberate consciousness-raising process. The mutual inclusiveness of the process brings together the poet's "instinctive and detailed emphatic social response with his need for close observation of the readership whose consciousness he seeks to raise at the same time as he is raising his own" (Watts, 1989:175).

_Yakhal'inkomo_ depicts the human struggle inherent within Serote. The volume also successfully exhibits Serote the poet experimenting with rhythm and word-play as he explores forms and mechanisms which may carry out his message well. Serote does this without sacrificing his "ordinary voice" which serves as a
link between him and the people he writes about. It is through this voice that Serote successfully translates and transliterates, in simple language, the everyday life experiences of ordinary people. As a result his poetry becomes the very embodiment of their everyday existence (Watts, 1989).

That Serote seeks to analyse problems of people he writes about through a process of consciousness-raising eventually makes him adopt a radical tone. This stems from the fact that as a poet and member of the very community he writes about, he experiences frustration and humiliation which he puts on the powerful and emotion loaded words he uses to express his rage.
NOTES

1. The change from protest to resistance poetry corresponds contemporaneously with the change in focus within the political arena. For a detailed and insightful discussion of this period consult Tom Lodge's Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945 (1983).

2. In his study Aesthetics and Resistance: Aspects of Mongane Wally Serote's Poetry (1990), Frielick contends that one of the actions of Serote's poetry is to resist the "monologism of Apartheid" and ultimately reassert the suppressed voice of the silent majority of black South Africans. The assertion comes through the identification of root causes of the oppressive system and then making a deliberate effort to extirpate these causes. This way the poetry becomes a social activity.

3. The transition of South Africa from Apartheid to democracy was a result of tough negotiations (dialogue) between the then government, led by F.W. de Klerk, and the liberation movements after both sides had realised the futility of protracting the low intensity "war" that had been going on since the banning of the ANC, PAC and SACP and subsidiary organisations in the early sixties.

4. Of all the myriad laws enacted to enforce Apartheid, the Influx Control and the Group Areas acts were amongst those laws deliberately made to oppress the black people by making them carry the "Pass" and restricting them to live in a particular area demarcated for blacks.

5. The totalitarian state which George Orwell depicts in this novel is one in which all aspects of human life are controlled. State control is pervasive to an extent that fear reigns supreme. Oppression and fear of the "Big Brother" become part of the mental construct of the individual.

6. For a long time the Afrikaners justified Apartheid biblically. To them Apartheid was a system designed by "God" for them. They invariably saw themselves as "the chosen people of God" sent to "civilise the demonic and savage African" who to them was a quintessence of evil.

The emergence of worker poetry in the nineteen eighties signalled the revival of an era in which traditional oral forms of poetry were harnessed to commemorate and celebrate the workers' struggles. However, it needs to be emphasised that this movement should not be seen in isolation from the broader democratic struggle within South Africa because workers and worker poets alike see themselves as part of the larger movement committed to building a better world. It is within this movement that worker poets began to assert themselves as a force to be reckoned with in the sphere of South African poetry production which, to them, is part of the larger socio-political exploitative profit-making machinery. This invariably led them to declare:

This makes us say that it is time to begin controlling our creativity: we must create space in our struggle - through our own songs, our own slogans, our own poems, our own artwork, our own plays and dances. At the same time, in our struggle we must also fight against the cultural profit machines (Sitas, 1986:60).

The above quotation is an embodiment of the worker poets' desire to free themselves from the shackles of exploitation, their quest for the destruction of institutions of oppression and their wish to build new institutions which will embrace democratic principles. These are objectives enunciated in the poetry of, amongst others, Mi Hlatshwayo, Alfred Temba Qabula and Nise Malange.

Hlatshwayo's poem "The Black Mamba Rises" (p.25), from which the first anthology derives its name, opens cryptically with the
description of "victors of wars" who "desert" and "leave the
employers / unnerved". The black mamba that rises in the poem
invariably symbolises the re-emergence of the black workers' Trade Union movement. The sudden revival of the unions after they had been crushed by the Apartheid government is paralleled with the revival of the mamba:

It was stabbed good and proper
During the day,
At Sydney Road right on the premises,
To the delight of the impimpis,
And the delight of the police
There were echoes of approval there on the
TV at Aukland Park saying:
Never again shall it move,
Never again shall it revive,
Never again shall it return,
Yet it was beginning to tower with rage.

The rising of the mamba which was supposedly dead creates a problem to those who were relieved by its death for they now have to contend with its revived might. That the mamba represents workers becomes more evident when the reader realises that the mamba has now risen with more than one head in the form of MAWU (Metal and Allied Workers' Union) branches all over the country. This invariably sends a cold shiver down the employers' spines. In the end the employers realise that they cannot diminish the workers' desire for democratic representation. Even the most stubborn of employers, as represented by Sikhumba who is ruthless and unscrupulous to the point of stabbing

... an old man and
A young man alike,
Using the same spear
Who stabs a man's bone,
Inflicting pain in the heart,

realises the unstoppable might of the resurrected unions:
[But] he is now showing a Change of heart
Let's sit down and talk, he Now says.

What must be borne in mind at this stage is that the bravado with which the persona narrates the events represents a bold declaration by the workers that they will continue asserting their human dignity through their fight against exploitation and deliberate dehumanisation by the employers. This is underlined by the persona's depiction of the employers' resentment of the workers' action encapsulated in the following lines:

Today you are called a Bantu,
Tomorrow you are called a Communist
Sometimes you are called a Native,
Today again you are called a Foreigner,
Today again you are called a Terrorist,
Sometimes you are called a Plural,
Sometimes you are called an Urban PUBS.

The above description of the workers is typically South African and reflects the political ideology of the time. In an attempt to exclude blacks from political and effective economic control the National Party government fragmented the country into satellite tribal homelands from which they could tap the cheap labour of blacks to administer to the economic, political and domestic needs of the white population. Subsequently many blacks were deprived of their South African citizenship and thus alienated. But because the captains of industry needed blacks for labour, the government created all kinds of laws to enable blacks to be temporary sojourners in areas that had been declared white. Hence the use of the word "Foreigner". The persona is furthermore ridiculing the powers that were for their inability to address
issues pertinent to workers. Instead of addressing the workers' grievances and demands the employers, together with the government, simply branded all those who fought against oppression and exploitation either as Communists or Terrorists. Their political and economical agenda, which was by no means a hidden one, was to use this as a red herring to derive votes from ignorant white people who feared the advent of blacks taking over the running of government. When the "swart gevaar" myth could no longer be economically sustained a law was passed acknowledging the existence of "Permanent Urban Residents" or PURS for short.

Throughout the poem the persona portrays the dichotomies inherent in the desire of whites to continue exploiting and oppressing black people. The persona, however, does not stop at this but continues to narrate the background of the black worker's struggle from the early days of black trade unionism to date.

Towards the penultimate stanza the persona again sounds a warning about the inevitability of the rise of trade unions as symbolically represented by the black mamba. That the persona employs the black mamba as his metaphor is not accidental. The intention is to enable the reader to infer the militancy and vigilance of these trade unions by associating them with the vicious qualities of the black mamba. The re-emergence of trade unions is seen by the persona as a signal of emancipation to the oppressed and exploited workers. However, this emancipation is not confined to workers only but transcends the barriers of the labour movement to represent the broader emancipation of society in its struggle for political and economical liberation from Apartheid. In the last stanza the persona retreats to a local
situation as he pays tribute to workers at Dunlop for their contribution to the re-emergence of trade unions which signalled the rising up of workers in their pursuit of human dignity, democracy and a better life for all.

The poem is written in a simple prose style which is immediate and accessible. This, however, does not undermine its worth as an artistic piece. That the poet has personally been involved in the struggles narrated in the poem and has first-hand experience of the oppressive forces that are unleashed within the labour environment makes his work creditable and credible. The reader recognises this peculiarly South African situation within which worker poets "seek to redefine through their poetry the possibilities of a new, revised social order" (Harlow, 1987:50) based on human dignity and freedom for the individual.

"Worker's Lamentation for Ancient Africa" (p.29) is a poem that can, on the surface, be read as a romantic yearning for the days of yore as the persona pines for the days when Africa was still a virgin continent. The poem, however, has a more intense meaning from which the reader detects not only socio-political resistance but environmental protest as well. The poem opens with the persona commenting on the abduction of the African continent by Western powers which has left the indigenous population poor and exploited. The persona then portrays a scenario in which people have become accustomed to ruthless exploitation at the hands of those who are chasing profit. The poem immediately assumes not only continental proportions but universal significance as well. This is made evident where there is a description of workers who have been turned petty-bourgeois by the bourgeoisie in an attempt
to alienate and isolate the workers. The persona complains that
the advent of capitalism has transformed not only the agrarian
nature of African society but also the humanism that was an
essential characteristic of its people. This is clearly
represented in the following lines:

Even the "better off"
Of our own kind
Now form alliances
With our exploiters!

What this stanza conveys is that the struggle is not only for
human dignity and survival. The inherent message is that the
struggle is also political, economical and social. This is
evident when the persona bemoans the fact that a few fellow
blacks have been co-opted into the capitalist class. By forming
alliances with exploiters this "better off" class of blacks
inevitably identifies itself as exploiters as well. Here the
persona implies to the reader that although the struggle, to a
large extent, is between blacks and whites it is neither racist
nor racial as far as workers and worker poets are concerned.

In a metaphor that has biblical overtones the persona describes
workers as

Hungry lambs
In an Africa of shrubs
Craving for shelter
To protect us from assailing storms
In an Africa
Of caves and eroded gorges.

The symbolic innocence inherent in the use of "lambs"
accentuates the idea of workers as innocent victims of a
situation not of their making. They become, as it were,
sacrificial lambs in the exploiters' quest for wealth. The workers offer their labour but in return they are offered wages which are not commensurate with their labour. This is symptomatic of the dichotomy inherent within capitalism. These incongruities become characteristic of an Africa whose human and natural resources have been plundered leaving it a very poor continent. The very essence of life, the moral foundation on which society hinges, has been defaced.

The persona further depicts a situation which indicates that destruction of the rusticity of African life is pervasive indeed. This the persona does by giving an account of how Westernisation has profaned African culture in the name of modernity and development. The persona regrets the fact that in a world that is dominated by Western values, the African invariably finds himself being called "civilised" for abandoning his culture. The persona counters this by pointing out that Africans also had and still have a civilisation. He rejects the notion of equating civilisation with Westernisation. This is an attempt on the part of the persona to assert the African way of life and to reveal to the reader that oppression has not confined itself to the factory floor but permeates all aspects of life. Furthermore the persona implicitly suggests that it is time Africans stood up to fight capitalism, cultural imperialism and economic disempowerment. In an elaborate description of customary rituals and ceremonies that formed part of the cultural diversity of Africa, the persona implies that Africans, particularly the workers, should not fold their arms and let Western exploiters perpetuate the myth that they hold the copyright of decency and
all that is virtuous. The poet urges the workers to stand up and resist the deliberate misrepresentation of issues about Africa and its inhabitants. This, to the persona, is a ploy to foster a sense of inferiority amongst Africans so that European values and norms may be promoted at the expense of African ones. Invariably the poet sees this as part of a greater conspiracy to plunder, exploit and deliberately underdevelop the continent so that the indigenous population remains forever dependent on the "goodwill" of whites. Thus colonialism and its concomitant exploitation inevitably leads to the alienation of the African from his own continent and culture. This message is explicit in the lines:

They call you now
"late comer"
And "uncivilised"
And "under-developed" continent
This mockery
Swells our anger

and the lines:

They educate us in the destruction
Of our culture
Africa, our mother
Now stands distanced from us
We are confused
We lament and plead
Arise real Africa!
Real Africa arise

But when one approaches the end of the poem, one realises that all the oppression and alienation have not dampened the spirit and theme of resistance inherent in the poem. The persona asserts that it is only through resistance to the status quo that a new democratic order will be forged. Out of this new order will come a new historicity from which the African will not be alienated.

In this poem Hlatshwayo displays his propensity to oscillate
between ordinary language and rhetoric as he portrays a local environment which assumes both continental and universal proportions. In this poem, as in other poems by Hlatshwayo, the reader recognises the importance of context in bringing out the urgent message of resistance. As a result the poem is hardly adorned with artistic embellishment, primarily because it asserts a brutally aggressive transformation of the relationship between the employer and the employee within the broader democratic movement of South Africa's struggle politics.

By persuading the audience to recreate in his mind the context within which worker poetry operates, the worker poet implicitly reminds the reader that "literature, whatever the degree of meditation on the part of the author cannot [entirely] avoid its diachronic responsibility" (Chapman, 1982a:165). That worker poets take this responsibility very seriously is represented in the following quotation from a speech made at FOSATU's Educational Workshop, Durban, in 1985:

YES - we are ready to fight for better living conditions, for better wages and to end injustice and exploitation. But we have also gathered here to begin giving shape to a world we would like to live in. A world without exploitation, without discrimination and fear. In this struggle cultural work has a crucial role to play. (Sitas, 1986:60).

This is evidence of the role that worker poets feel they have to play within the democratic struggle. Thus their poetry becomes a vehicle through which they popularize their campaigns and demands within the context of worker politics. This is the context within which one has to appreciate the works of worker poets.
The poem "Praise Poem to Fosatu" (p.8) is an artistic piece in which Alfred Temba Qabula pays tribute to the workers' federation. In this praise poem, the poet seeks to make the reader aware of the workers' desire to shape new socio-political and economic conditions which will give way to a democratic and just South Africa.

The poem opens with a typically workerist stanza in which the persona wastes no time in introducing the audience to the suffering of the workers. The persona finds

Industrial workers
Discussing the problems
That affect them in the
Industries they work for in Africa.

The situation as presented by the persona is typical of exploited South African [black] workers who share a common identity firstly as [black] workers and secondly as a group of exploited abourers. That they are brought together to discuss issues of common concern injects that feeling of camaraderie into their association, which is essential for purposes of uniting them to wage a concerted campaign against exploitation and for better living conditions. That they console each other on their miseries and hardships in the second stanza underpins their will to survive and further strengthens their resolve. Here one almost detects the message that a pain shared is a pain lessened. There is already at this stage an underlying tone of defiance and agitation for militancy as a pre-requisite to involvement in this struggle. The union is seen as the only refuge in which workers can find solace. Once again there is an overt reference to the
theme of the hunter and the hunted. This theme, which was discussed in the preceding chapter, emerges this time in the context of the employer and the employee. The employers, with their lackadaisical attitude towards their employees, are seen as powerful and very vicious hunters who will stop at nothing to ensure that they get their prey (employees and their unions). Workers, therefore, unite for their own survival within the trade union movement. A point worth noting is that the union's protective attitude towards its membership is equated with the maternal instincts of a hen protecting its chicken. This metaphor becomes more vivid and apt when one imagines it against the background of the throngs of workers who would be listening as Qabula orated his poem. It is a metaphor meant to make the workers realise that their only hope lies in joining the union. This is a type of metaphor that will send the audience into a frenzy of joy as they relish the apparent power the union possesses. Within this protective power of the union everybody is made to feel free as made evident in the lines:

Protect us too with those
Sacred wings of yours
That knoweth no discrimination
Protect us too so that we gain wisdom
Militant are your sons and daughters
One wonders what kind of muti they use
Sprinkle it too on us that we take
After them and act likewise.

What one infers from the above stanza is a message directed to workers that none of them can afford to be complacent in the struggle for better socio-political and economic conditions. There is also a sense of urgency within the message that the persona conveys which makes it more immediate and the more
touching, particularly to those affected.

But towards the middle of the poem there is also a warning to Fosatu to beware of the strategies the employers use to destroy unions in general. This warning brings with it another dimension to the whole scenario of struggle politics, that the struggles of workers in their work place cannot be separated from the broader struggle to end Apartheid. Thus the persona warns the union that employers will use the same tactics that the state employs in crushing whatever form of resistance people used against the status quo. Within the labour movement there are impimpis who have been promised monetary rewards in order to spy against the union. This is the reason the persona exhorts Fosatu to be ever vigilant of these impimpis if it is to survive. Union bashing tactics were not used only by the state but also by the employers sometimes in collusion with the security forces.

Fosatu is further metaphorically likened to a lion

That roared at Pretoria North
With union offices everywhere.

The symbolism of the lion is quite remarkable. In the struggle for democracy, equity and justice the lion came to represent the vigour and ferocious power with which South Africans, particularly the oppressed blacks, fought the system of segregation and racial exclusivity. Thus the youths in the struggle against Apartheid were invariably referred to as "Young Lions". However, in the context of the labour movements the lion represents the fearlessness of the workers to demand what is rightfully theirs, that is, better treatment as human beings and a living wage.
Consequently the lion symbolically suggests that the workers are the vanguard of the struggle to "shape radically new socio-economic arrangements in South Africa" (Chapman, 1992:524).

The third last stanza of "Praise Poem to Fosatu" offers new insights about the nature and aim of labour movements during the era of Apartheid as the persona pleads:

Teach us about the past organisations
Before we came
Tell us about their mistakes so that we may not
Fall foul of such mistakes.
Our hopes lie with you, the sambane that digs
Holes and sleeps in them, whereas others dig
Holes and leave them.
I say this because you teach a worker to know
What his duties are in his organisation,
And what he is in the community
Lead us Fosatu to where we are eager to go.
Even in parliament you shall be our representative
Go and represent us because you are our Moses
through your leadership we shall reach our Canaan.

The stanza has had to be quoted at length because the persona makes a number of interesting observations about Fosatu as a labour movement. These observations are extremely important to discuss because they lead to a better understanding of the aims of the labour movement within the ambit of South Africa's struggle politics. The persona encourages Fosatu to teach its members about past organisations so that they can learn from the mistakes of these organisations and avoid making similar mistakes. This is suggestive of continuity and an admission that the struggle that Fosatu wages was started by others before it.

In other words the persona wants workers to understand their struggle within a historical continuum so that they can feel that interconnectedness which is so essential in their pursuit of freedom from exploitation. There is also a prophetic
message about South Africa's political development. Fosatu was a precursor to Cosatu and the reader cannot miss the prophecy in "Even in Parliament you will be our representative" for this is exactly what happened in 1994 when members of COSATU were voted into parliament as part of the ANC / SACP / COSATU tripartite alliance. Whether the representation is effective or not is another question. The fact is that Qabula foresaw this representation as early as 1984. This is what makes workers see Fosatu symbolically along the same lines as Moses, the biblical liberator whom God sent to release the Israelites from the bondage and exploitation of the Egyptians led by their king Pharaoh. The inclination to associate South Africa's struggle for freedom with the liberation of the Israelites has always been made because there are some parallels between the two. In the nineteen fifties Chief Albert Luthuli, then President of the ANC, wrote a book about his perception of South Africa's liberation struggle. The book derived its title from the story of Moses and the Israelites in bondage. It was aptly titled Let My People Go. It is in this very vein that workers see Fosatu as a liberator who is to take them to their Canaan, the land of milk and honey. It needs to be emphasized that to workers Canaan represents a South Africa in which they will be treated fairly and justly, a country in which they too will enjoy basic rights, a country in which they will not be discriminated against either because of the colour of their skin or their gender. This is what Canaan means to workers and worker poets.

The penultimate stanza of the poem illustrates the nature of Fosatu's objectives, that employers should also consider the
interests of the workers when they do their planning. Failure to do this leads to confrontation and polarisation. It is also of interest to note the difference in approach and attitude between the employers and the workers. When Fosatu walks out of meetings with management because of management's failure to address the need of the workers, Fosatu is branded disruptionist. But as far as workers are concerned the union's actions are laudable. Employers are seen as parasites who are bent on exploiting workers at all costs. This is evident when the persona addresses to Fosatu to

\[
\text{Hero deal with them and throw them into the Red Sea.}
\text{Strangle them and don't let loose.}
\text{Until they tell the truth as to why they suck the Workers' blood.}
\]

It is evident that the struggle becomes one of survival, revenge and power. It is power that workers demand for they feel that through the process of deliberate exploitation they have become economically disempowered, socially and politically emasculated. This is precisely why the poem closes with a powerful and resonant "Amandla kubasebenzi!", which literally translates as "Power to the workers!"

Qabula's poetry also portrays the pain of migrancy, which he in particular experienced at an early age. In his poetry he depicts the suffering that the migrant labour system imposes on families. Families are fragmented because of the inevitable separation brought about by the departure of menfolk in search of work. The hurt that workers suffer and the pain that the poet, in particular, experiences is best translated by the poem whose title, "Migrant's Lament - A song" (p.14), makes its content easily
inferable. The poem depicts the pain, hurt, misery and frustrations that migrant workers have to contend with and the trouble they go to at times to secure employment. The poem starts with a line in which the persona exhorts the Lord to forgive him. This appears to be very incongruous as in the subsequent lines the persona shows that he has lost his livestock. One begins to wonder why such a person should ask for forgiveness under such conditions. The answer becomes apparent later on when one discovers that the persona has had to leave his rural environment in search of employment. As the poem progresses the persona gives a litany of woes as he moves from one job to another. In the process the reader gets to see the other face of South Africa through the depiction of the migrant labour system. The persona is expelled from his first job in the sugarcane industry because he does not have the requisite experience. Consequently he leaves his wife and children to search for a job in Egoli - place of gold. This place of gold proves to be no different from any other part of the country because he spends months on end before he gets employed. But in an ironic twist of fortunes no sooner has he got the job than he loses it because he does not have a "SPECIAL", a permit for blacks to be in certain areas. His situation becomes desperate because events seem to conspire to prolong his misery.

However he does not give up as he later on gets a casual job which for a while allows him to earn enough to sustain his family back home. But as if to add injury to insult he is arrested by the blackjacks (policemen) for not having the necessary stamp to
be in that area. His problems seem endless for as soon as he gets out of jail he gets another job but needs a permit to hold it. When he goes to migrant labour offices for assistance he gets no sympathy but further exploitation as made evident by:

But the Clerk said: "I can't see the paper",  
And added "You must go in peace my man".  
So I had to buy him beer, meat and brandy  
For him to "learn" to read my piece of paper.

That the persona has to resort to bribery in order to get his permit is indicative of society's moral decadence. State officials as represented by the clerk are corrupt to the extent of using other people's miserable circumstances to their personal material benefit. This is proof of the moral bankruptcy that underpins the whole system of Apartheid which reduces people to levels such as these. There can be no doubt that under such conditions the persona feels that he is a victim of a system deliberately designed to frustrate and alienate him. In the last stanza where the persona tells his reason for joining the union, the exercise becomes a mere academic one to the reader, who by this stage has been suffocated by the trail of misery and suffering the persona has gone through.

Needless to say, one sympathises with the persona and invariably realises how inhumane the migrant labour system is. In the end one begins to understand that this system cannot be effectively condemned in isolation. It needs to be viewed within the broader system of Apartheid which has imposed untold misery on millions of people. The obvious conclusion to which one readily assents is that because of this system, families have been fragmented, parents have been marginalised and children have been displaced.
It is against this background that one realises the significance of the persona's determination to stand up and fight against the employer. What the poet achieves through this poem is to manifest a consciousness of the context within which it is written so that in the end the reader can fully comprehend reasons for waging the struggle on the political, economic, cultural and artistic fronts.

It needs to be emphasized that worker poetry essentially employs an oratorical style. Thus when it is on the printed page it demands of the reader to recreate, in the mind, the conditions which motivate the poet to such utterances. This, in the end, helps one to appreciate the urgency of the need to create a new social, economic and political order (Chapman, 1992:524). Once the context has been recreated, one is in a better position to construct a mental picture of the physical gestures and actions which are a concomitant part of this poetry.

Nise Malange's poetry can be described as poetry which dissects facets of life in South Africa. It depicts life from a number of perspectives ranging from the squatter camp, unemployment, single motherhood to the state of emergency. As a woman, she gives to her poems an added dimension of interest. Although, like Hlatshwayo and Qabula, she focuses her attention on the trials, tribulations and tragedies that unionised workers face, she brings into her poetry the struggle of women within the labour movement in South Africa. Her poems reveal another ugly face of South Africa's discriminatory policies of Apartheid, that of discrimination against women. This Malange effectively does through poems such as "Nightshift Mother", "Long Live Women"
and others.

In "Nightshift Mother" (p.18) Malange portrays the daily activities of a single mother who resorts to taking a "nightshift" job because she has no other training. In the poem we see the persona's instinctive maternal care displayed by her determination to take a hard job that pays very little. Her desire to protect her young ones makes her contend with the harsh conditions of her work situation. The situation is further worsened by the fact that while at work the mother is constantly anxious about her children who have been left alone. The reader realises that the situation is a precarious one for the mother because she cannot afford to get someone to look after her children while she is out at work. Invariably one sympathises with both the mother and the children in this case, primarily because they find themselves victims in a situation not of their making. This is worsened by the persona not deriving any satisfaction from the work she does. This is apparent when the persona says:

My boss insists we should
Be grateful for the opportunities
He gives women to be exploited.

That these women are exploited by a person who still insists they be grateful is an indictment of the social engineering that has gone into ensuring that black women remain subservient and oppressed both by Apartheid and society at large. The poet, tongue in cheek, implicitly alludes to the boss's supercilious attitude reminiscent of the Pumblechookian "Be grateful, boy, to them which brought you up by hand" to a mystified young Pip in
Dickens's *Great Expectations*. As a reader one is bound to deduce that the boss, just like Mr Pumblechook in *Great Expectations*, utters the statement as a matter of course without any understanding of its implications. That the persona and other women have to be grateful for a job whose rewards are a pittance is representative of the general attitude adopted by white employers towards their black employees. Instead of trying to improve the workers's lot the attitude has always been a patronising one. In the end this attitude is geared to make the employees feel not only helpless, but also that they are employed because of the mercy and goodwill of their employer, that in reality they do not deserve whatever job it is they are doing. Another aspect which makes these women pitiful is that they are what has become known as single mothers, women who have to take the responsibilities of both parents either because they are unwed, widowed, elderly or migrants. To the persona, reasons for their single status become immaterial because they are united by the fact that they are exploited women and mothers who care about their offspring, harsh material conditions notwithstanding. In the last stanza the persona once again asserts the determination of these women. They lift each other out of their suffering both in the literal and metaphoric sense. In the literal sense this implies helping each other in times of physical weakness without expecting any pecuniary gain from a colleague. In a metaphoric sense it means facing whatever harsh conditions reality brings them and the determination to help each other spiritually and morally. This eventually results in their being united and thus presenting themselves as a united front in their fight against harassment and exploitation. Consequently the reader cannot fail
to contextualise this determination within the broader struggle in South Africa.

In "Long Live Women" (p.20) Malange continues with her mission to assert the role played by women in the struggle for democracy and equity in South Africa. The poem is dedicated to "all women who are tried, charged and sentenced for treason, to the working women who are robbed of their birthrights in the factories and outside, to the women who are busy ploughing in the farms, and to all the women of our land" (Sitás, 1988:20). This tribute reveals much about the patriarchal nature of South African life. That the poet dedicates the poem to women is not only an acknowledgement of the role played by women in the democratic struggle but also implicitly reveals the hidden face of sexism in South Africa. Women are acknowledged to have played a crucial role within the struggle and it is through poems like these that this role can be immortalized in South Africa's history. This becomes the more relevant when one considers the fact that within the political sphere at least, there seems to be a tendency to underplay the role of women which almost borders on political amnesia. It is when the persona asserts that women are the mothers of the earth that one is invariably reminded of the sacrifices that women have made, particularly when most men had gone to exile. Women became the very pillar of society and through their support of the youth the struggle was sustained within the country.

It is ironic that these mothers, whose hands have rocked the cradle, do not rule the world but become victims as evident in the lines...
You have given birth to the leaders of this earth,
And they have robbed you of your rights.

It is this denial of rights and the exploitation that goes on in the country that women are against. The tone of the poem is one of defiance. When the persona contends

We cannot fold our arms and pray whilst our country is in a state of collapsing.
We cannot sit behind whilst our kids, brothers and sisters are dying in the street.
Whilst our mothers and sisters are sentenced to long term imprisonment

one is invariably reminded of the 1956 march\(^5\) in which thousands of women demanded the abolishing of the pass laws. At the time women declared to the then South African Prime Minister Mr J.G Strydom that the law that required women to carry passes was a declaration of war against them. As a result they marched to the Union Buildings in Pretoria chanting "Wathinth' abafazi wathinth' imbokodo"\(^6\), a song which showed that they were not going to sit down, fold their arms and watch as their rights were being eroded. Although not in the same tone, this message is also inherent in the poem.

The poem is not only a tribute to women in the struggle but also a means of conscientizing people in general, and women in particular, to stand up and fight against all forms of oppression and exploitation. This is made against the background of women being exploited in the different sectors within which they work. From the factory floor to the kitchen, from the confines of the farm field to the corridors of power, women, as the persona rightly maintains, have sacrificed a lot for the country.
In conclusion one can justifiably maintain that worker poetry has essential characteristics which separate it from the other streams of poetry. It is a kind of poetry which is motivated by activism for a defined course. This is a quality which helps this type of poetry retain its identity and artistic merits within a context in which its message could have been reduced to mere political slogans.

That worker poetry is overtly political is attributable to the atmosphere in which the poets work and live. This atmosphere inevitably circumscribes both the content and context of their poetry. Therefore, for the reader fully to appreciate worker poetry as art it is necessary to recognise "that a context can decisively shape our aesthetic appreciation and that the question of art's endurance beyond the living moment might be rendered nugatory by the urgent need of an oppositional code of value" (Chapman, 1992:529). The quoted statement basically affirms the urgent nature of worker poetry and the immediacy with which worker poets wish to convey their message to whomever cares to listen, so that there can be change in South Africa. This invariably narrows it down to the reality that worker poets use their daily experiences within their working as well as their home environment to portray the harsh realities that racism and exploitation impose on them. This is done in a way that will stimulate an active response on the part of the audience, thus the oratorical nature of this poetry.

Finally to underpin the above argument, perhaps it is appropriate to quote Mtshali on the issue of protest, resistance and worker poetry employing everyday language:
the English that we use in our poetry is not the queen's language that you know as written by, say, Wordsworth and Coleridge. It is the language of urgency which we use because we have got an urgent message to deliver to anyone who cares to listen. We have not got time to embellish this urgent message with unnecessary and cumbersome ornaments like rhyme, iambic pentameter, abstract figure of speech, and an ornate and lofty style. We will indulge in these luxuries which we can ill afford at the moment when we are a free people, (Barnett, 1982b:110).
The concept of "swart gevaar", i.e. Black danger, was dominant during the reign of P.W. Botha as Prime Minister and later on as President of South Africa. It was a concept predicated on the deliberate distortion of the truth about blacks to their white countrymen, that if blacks were allowed to take over the running of government, there would be a general decline in standards and breakdown of law and order. This proved to be a particularly effective tool for the National Party to remain in power, unchallenged in parliamentary politics, for forty five years as they continuously exploited this fear of blacks by whites to perpetuate their policy of Apartheid.

Short for Permanent Urban Residents. This is a term used in Minister Piet Koornhof’s Bill in which recognition was given to blacks who resided in the urban areas so as to reduce some of their restrictions as temporary sojourners in the cities.

A rubber product manufacturing factory at Sydney Road, Durban, where the formation of the Metal and Allied Workers’ Union in 1973 marked the resurgence of trade unionism.

Although the poem has socio-political resistance as its main theme, there is also an audible tone of protest against the destruction of the environment and the deliberate plundering of Africa’s natural resources for monetary gain.

The Federation Of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU), a forerunner to COSATU (Congress Of South African Trade Unions), was seen by workers as the protector of workers’ rights and an avenue through which workers could advance their struggle for democracy and dignity within the broader context of the South African liberation struggle.

The theme of the hunter and the hunted runs through worker poetry almost in the same way as it does in both Mtshali’s and Serote’s poetry. However, in worker poetry, the theme is singularly underpinned by the consistent juxtapositioning of the employer as the exploiter and the employee as the exploited.

The word "impimpi" literally translates as "sellout", which within South Africa’s liberation politics could mean anything from a police informer, community councillors to a “bantustan” homeland leader. However, in the context of the poem it specifically refers to those workers who have been enticed by the bosses to spy on the activities of unionised workers, in the hope that whatever information they provide to these bosses will help the employers in their annihilation of the trade unions.

Security forces (the police and the army) played a pivotal role in the perpetuation of Apartheid and oppression. To
supporters of Apartheid and securocrats, they were seen as forces to maintain "law and order". But to the majority of oppressed blacks they were seen as bloodthirsty murderers bent on the maintenance of Apartheid even at the cost of human lives. This perception was reinforced by the deaths of activists at the hands of the police and the subsequent unconvincing and often ridiculous explanations of their deaths by the police.

9. This word refers particularly to youths who were members of different youth congresses affiliated to the UDF. Their tenacity and uncompromising attitude in the struggle for democracy earned them this title. This reference to youths as young lions is also evident in Mtshali's "Birth of Shaka".

10. As far as the workers are concerned, it is of great importance for unionists to understand the history of South Africa's trade unionism so that they should not fall into the same traps which earlier unions suffered.

11. The alliance of the three organisations, the African National Congress (ANC), South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Congress Of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) presented a formidable challenge to the National Party-led government which resulted in a negotiated settlement in South Africa.

12. The contexts of worker poetry are the many rallies in which unionists and worker poets in general orated their poems and also the hurly-burly of the factory floor as worker poets observed their harsh working and living conditions.

13. One of the cornerstones of Apartheid philosophy was to make blacks feel incapacitated to the extent of believing that their very survival depended upon the "goodwill" of the white man. Thus they had to be grateful.

14. Unity has always been one of the desires of the liberation movements. The United Democratic Front was launched in 1983 to "intensify" the struggle within South Africa by uniting the different sectors to present a unified force in the struggle for freedom and democracy.

15. The march, which was led by leading anti-Apartheid activists such as Lilian Ngoyi and Helen Joseph, culminated in the formation of the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW).

16. The words of the song literally translate, "You strike a woman, you have struck a rock".
CHAPTER 5.

CONTEMPORARY SOCIO-POLITICAL RELEVANCE AND LITERARY SIGNIFICANCE.

In the previous chapters poems were analysed with the aim of determining their themes and contexts, both literary and political. In this, the penultimate chapter, the focus will be on the socio-political relevance and literary significance of protest and resistance poetry since 1990. Does protest and resistance poetry still have a role to play within the body politic of South Africa? Does this type of poetry have any significant literary role to play now that the struggle for liberation has been successfully completed? Only when these questions have been addressed will one be able to put protest and resistance poetry within its proper perspective within South Africa's literary production.

In the preceding chapters analyses of different strains of protest and resistance poetry were made in an attempt to understand their content and the role they play within society. Subsequently it became clear that protest and resistance poetry, within the South African context, have a proclivity to counter the socio-political status quo put in place by the powers that were. This inclination needs to be examined so as to determine whether the dawn of freedom in South Africa has militated against the continuous production of protest and resistance poetry or not. Ultimately, a need arises to revisit Mtshali's contention that

poetry embodies many facets of life [here]. It also captures the moods of such diverse things that I do not only regard it as art
but as a vehicle to carry the message of the people (Barnett, 1982:103).

The implications of Mtshali's statement are that poetry has to communicate the aspirations of the people if it is to be considered relevant. Furthermore, it suggests that the attainment of freedom and democracy does not imply the demise of protest and resistance poetry since people still have expectations that yet have to be fulfilled. One invariably realizes that the statement points to the fact that poetry and poets need to continue being the conscience of society by constantly protesting against social ills, and that this type of poetry should continue serving as an educative force. When placed in the context of the socio-political changes that have taken place in South Africa, the statement becomes more forceful and points to the need for protest and resistance poetry to continue exposing the stark inequalities which persist in spite of the positive political changes that have taken place. Thus protest and resistance poetry will have to continue with its political function of focusing on the development of society.

Wole Soyinka, in a television interview for the Africa 95 Arts Festival, maintains that protest and resistance are essential components of literature and society. He further contends that the focus and levels of struggle may change, particularly in a society like South Africa which has moved from Apartheid to democracy. His argument is that the struggle simply changes its focus from a struggle against colonialists to a struggle against neo-colonial petty bourgeois dictators (BBC interview). The implication of Soyinka's contention for South Africa is that
protest and resistance poetry will not fade away from the socio-political and literary scene but will have to change its focus from Apartheid to issues pertinent to the new order such as poverty, unemployment, homelessness, gender discrimination and even vestiges of corruption within the new ruling class.

The complexities of the South African society are numerous and the greatest challenge, amongst many, that faces the new democratic order is the disparity between the socio-economic conditions of the majority of the people (black) and the minority (white). This is the arena in which the majority of the population (poets included) will continue to wage the other level of the struggle. This ties in with the fact that poetry, politics and social institutions are inextricably interwoven. It is, therefore, not surprising that protest and resistance poetry evinces an inclination to be a means for social scrutiny and change. This proclivity cannot be and is not limited to one form of political system or another. For this reason even when South Africa has been transformed into a democracy, protest and resistance continue to thrive.

Protest and resistance within the new South Africa are not only limited to socio-economical conditions and institutions. The diverse character of South African society implies very divergent political and economic ideologies. As in the past protest and resistance will filter into both the political and literary arenas as the new order unfolds. Politics has always and will continue to permeate many aspects of human life. In carrying out their function as watchdogs and the conscience of society, poets will inevitably address political issues. As Stendal, cited in
Michael Wilding, avers:

Politics in a work of literature is like a pistol-shot in the middle of a concert, something loud and vulgar, and yet a thing to which it is not possible to refuse one's attention (1982:8).

Stendal's contention reinforces the fact that politics in literature in general and poetry in particular cannot be wished away primarily because political protest, resistance and aesthetics have a dialectical relationship in the social world. As a consequence poets have the unenviable responsibility of being the voice of society and the downtrodden. As Soyinka rightly contends, the poet as a creative person is universally involved in a subtle conspiracy, a tacit understanding that he, the uncommissioned observer, relates the plight of man, his disasters and joys, to some vague framework of observable truth and realities (1976:44).

It is against this background that protest and resistance poetry in South Africa should redefine its position vis-a-vis whatever new challenges faces it. However, the poet will have to assert this redefined position in a way which will not undermine the educative and consciousness-raising objective of this type of poetry. At times this will mean the abandoning of populist views in the quest effectively to represent and evaluate socio-political reality and the desire for collective ideological responses to social ills. This is, perhaps, best summed up by African-American author, Alice Walker, when she maintains that the writer (poet) - like the musician or painter - must be free to explore, otherwise she or he will never discover what is needed
[by everyone] to be known. This means, very often, finding oneself considered "unacceptable" by masses of people who think the writer's obligation is not to explore or to challenge, but to second the masses' motion (1995:66).

Walker's contention has great literary significance for protest and resistance poetry in South Africa. It cautions writers in general and poets in particular that the need to convey the plight of the masses should not override the quest for truth and the critique of the role each member of society plays. It is a realization that for protest and resistance poetry to have enduring qualities of literary significance within the contemporary context, poets will have to be deeply committed and extremely steadfast in their determination to represent socio-political and economic reality as it unfolds. For protest and resistance poetry to thrive poets should spare no effort in their "uncommissioned" task of exposing whatever ills there are within the society from which they write.

Rather than fading away into obscurity, protest and resistance poetry thrives because the democratization of society opens up more avenues, which has not been the case in the past. Protest and resistance need no longer be seen within the narrow political sense of Apartheid, whose consequences were obsessively all-encompassing, but as media through which society reflects on its development, including social, economic, political and literary development. As Watts appropriately contends, the consequences of Apartheid have been so obsessive in the South African situation that they dominate all literature, and leave any writer who attempts to think about something else
open to the charge of irrelevance, of failing to grapple with the only important issues of the day (1989:13).

Against the background of the above the researcher contends that since the dominant system of Apartheid has been done away with, the function of protest and resistance poetry has to be to ensure that "checks and balances" are maintained to help redress the inequalities of the past. Since the Apartheid atmosphere in which creativity was stifled has been done away with, avenues for free artistic development have been opened. It is thus the responsibility of protest and resistance poets alike to make use of this opportunity to develop their artistry. In other words poets have to take advantage of this new openness to develop further the socio-political function of protest and resistance poetry which, in the end, will validate the aesthetic authenticity of this poetry. The political nature of protest and resistance poetry should not to be seen as sheer political sloganerising but as a committed consciousness-raising process aimed at the exposure of the continued suffering of a large number of South Africans in spite of political change.

Although the political scenario of South Africa has changed, there are still hurdles which need to be overcome, particularly within the fabric of society. A poem such as Mtshali's "An Abandoned Bundle", with its cryptic description of a baby's corpse, is as relevant today as it was in the Apartheid era. One can even hasten to add that the poem is, perhaps, even more relevant to our present circumstances as we are daily inundated with horrible news reports of infants who are found dumped in toilets and sewage dams (Sowetan: 11 September 1995). Within this
context the poem becomes an indictment against the perpetrators of these heinous acts, and society at large for allowing such appalling acts to continue unabated. The act of throwing away an infant in this age makes a mockery of South Africa’s newly found democracy and is an indication that the foundation on which this society is based has been destroyed. The destruction is so great that infanticide has become something people (as represented by the mother) are no longer pulsed by. The poem eventually becomes a cry for the restoration of sound morals, values and norms which should form an indispensable part of the reconstruction of a truly South African society, a society based on respect for the sanctity of human life. With its shocking effects, brought about by the poet’s skilful employment of sarcasm and irony, the poem exhorts the reader, and society at large, to undergo a process of re-examination with the aim of redefining the values that hold people together as decent, compassionate and sympathetic beings.

Against the background of the above it becomes obvious that poems which help the reader to be self-critical form an integral part of the consciousness-raising process which is essential for the building a new social order to match the political developments that ushered in a democratic order in South Africa.

Mongane Wally Serote’s “My Brothers in the Streets” is a poem whose message touches on the sensitive issue of crime. Although Serote’s poem tends to concentrate on crime as experienced by black people in the township, one can extrapolate from it to interrogate the level of crime that is bedevilling South Africa today. Crime has reached alarmingly high proportions in the new
South Africa with car hijacking making the Gauteng Province the crime capital of the world. Although Serote's poem does not deal with car hijacking per se one cannot help but draw parallels between the fear which the "brothers" in the poem evoke and the fear evoked by hijackers in ordinary citizens of South Africa today. The inference the reader makes is that what the persona is trying to portray is the very urgent need for concerted efforts, by all South Africans, to rid society of these ruthless and terror-inspiring criminals, and that rehabilitating the criminals is necessary so that they can focus their misdirected energies on the reconstruction of the country.

Moral decadence and crime are not the only things which buttress the continuing socio-literary relevance of protest and resistance poetry. Black economic empowerment and the improvement of living conditions for the majority of blacks are thorny issues which still need to be contended with. This is best illustrated by the following quotations from the Sowetan newspaper:

Mbeki said the management of South Africa's economy remained in predominantly white hands, adding that whites dominated many professions, including journalism ....

and

The homeless, unemployed and illiterate remained predominantly black and the realities of apartheid's legacy were still experienced by most (11-09-1995:06).

What the above quotations suggest is that despite the political changes that have taken place, the socio-economic status quo has remained intact with blacks still disadvantaged. This obviously is another arena in which resistance will continue to assert
itself, evident by the many demonstrations, protest marches and strikes for better wages which are still part of the new South Africa. Protesting against the continuing inequities in a democratic South Africa, Archbishop Ntongana of the African Apostolic Methodist Church maintains:

Despite what the book of Revelation says about the new world, one finds it hard to relate to South Africa as a new world. Nothing has changed drastically to give us hope that we are about to reach the promised land (Sowetan 11-09-1995:03).

Ntongana further considers the constant reference to black South Africans as "previously disadvantaged" as a misnomer as there is nothing previous about their poverty, homelessness and unemployment. The Archbishop's sentiments are shared by the majority of blacks who have not experienced any change for the better since the dawn of the "new" South Africa.

Although much has been achieved on the labour front by way of the passing by parliament of what is considered to be the single most important piece of legislation (the new Labour Relations Act), with its strong emphasis on social democratic principles, the labour force, from which most worker poets emanate, is still restive in the face of proposed rationalisation and privatisation of para-statals. Furthermore, the essentially capitalist nature of South Africa's economy seems to be a tailor-made battleground for continued strife between unions and the employers as employees demand more wages. Consequently as more emphasis continues to be put on rationalisation, this will inevitably bring industry and the unions on a collision course. As a result one expects more poetry to emerge from this quarter.
which will reflect this reality from the worker's perspective against the background of developments within this sector. It is not too far-fetched to posit that the tensions between labour and the government will invariably cause workers continue to accuse government of betraying the workers.

Analyses of both protest and resistance poems in this dissertation reveal the interdependence of political message and literary aesthetics. The two concepts become integrated as poets forge ahead with their aim of raising society's socio-political awareness. In the end one realises that the aesthetics of protest and resistance poetry actually arise from the message the poets are trying to convey to the reader, that to try and separate the two is to undermine the essence of this poetry.

Resistance and protest poetry integrate the aesthetic and the political by way of bringing out the urgent message that is inherent within the poetry itself. In a poem such as "The Shepherd and His Flock", for example, the poet adapts Western romantic motifs in a way which makes the poem relevant both to the South African situation and universally. The deceptively simple style of this poem, as in many of Mtshali's poems, evidences the poet's mastery of style. His use of cynicism, sarcasm, suggestive similes and vivid images helps in bringing out the urgent message of protest against Apartheid in a profoundly simple way which has the effect of making the poetry very accessible to the ordinary person. The simplicity of style evident in Mtshali's poems is representative of the styles of many of his contemporaries who choose this aesthetic approach to suit their message. One cannot ignore the inherent literary
significance of this approach within the broader body politic of South Africa's literary production. What makes protest poetry even more significant within the contemporary literary scene is the ability, by poets like Mtshali, to manipulate conventional poetic forms and techniques to suit their aim of exposing the evils of Apartheid, without letting the poetry degenerate into mere political sloganeering. This artistry injects a freshness which makes protest and resistance poetry even more relevant to the contemporary literary scene.

Furthermore, it is necessary to indicate that the context within which the poetry discussed in this dissertation is produced plays a significant role in bringing both socio-political circumstances and literary aesthetics together. In the analysis of worker poetry it was evident that worker poets adapted techniques such as mimicry from Africa's oral tradition to make the rendition of their poems more forceful. This technique has the effect of making the audience part of the spectacle while at the same time raising their consciousness. As Ndebele correctly puts it:

it is the aesthetic of recognition, understanding, historical documentation and indictment (1992:442).

Although the technique discussed above is different from the more forceful aesthetic techniques that resistance poets such as Serote employ, it has the same effect of raising consciousness about the socio-political conditions of black South Africans. Where worker poets such as Hlatshwayo, Qabula and Malange rely on a prosaic style to deliver some home truths about labour issues, Serote employs unconventional open-ended poetic forms to present
in a vivid and immediate manner his experiences. Serote adopts a defiant attitude both in tone and poetic style. The aesthetics which runs through Serote's poetry is one of open resistance. His defiant and deliberate switch from formal language to Township jargon in poems such as "The Actual Dialogue" and "What's in this Black 'Shit'" is not only a declaration of a need for new aesthetic but also an suggestion for the redefinition of the relationship between poetic language and message.

This approach ultimately brings one to the understanding that literary aesthetics and political message in protest and resistance poetry cannot be separated. This is likely to remain intact even within the new socio-political and literary atmosphere which exacts relevance from poets and visible change from the socio-political role-players.

Against the background of the above one is persuaded to conclude that within the socio-political and literary development of South Africa, protest and resistance poetry still has a prominent role to play in helping to shape the new democracy. One also realizes that for political changes to have significant relevance to the majority of South Africans, these changes need to be accompanied by visible and effective socio-economic changes which will have a major impact on the lives of ordinary people in the street. Poets needs to remain the conscience of society by constantly portraying to the rest of society, and the world at large, through their art, the different aspects that go into the making of the South African community through poetry which continues to evince artistic dexterity. Poets will achieve this only if they remain steadfast in their resolve to continue using their
artistry as "uncommissioned" observers who relate the plight, expectations, hopes and experiences of the ordinary person. In this way protest and resistance poetry will continue to have enduring relevance within the ever-changing South African socio-political and literary environment.
CHAPTER 6.

CONCLUSION.

Analyses of the different strains of protest and resistance poetry in this study have supported the notion that there is an existence of mutual interdependence between politics and literature. It has also become evident that protest and resistance poetry find contemporary relevance by expressing the needs of a people in a context in which most aspects of human life are dictated to by political realities.

As a result of the above it becomes important, from a literary point of view, to recognize the need to redefine the critical criteria to be employed in the appreciation of protest and resistance poetry, primarily because of its very functional, goal-oriented nature. Furthermore it is evident that in order to do justice to protest and resistance poetry one must of necessity apply critical approaches which will recognise its dual nature, expressed both through its aesthetic qualities and political effects.

The spontaneity, vivid immediacy and the particularisation of the context from which protest and resistance poetry as forms of socio-political expression emanate, suggest the need for an "own" aesthetics which accommodates the symbiotic relationship between literary and political expression in this poetry. As Harlow correctly observes, protest and resistance poems... are part of a historical process [and] neither the self-satisfaction of aestheticism, of a belief in art for art's sake; nor theoretical claims to scientific and
The earlier part of the above quotation implies that protest and resistance poets are engaged in poetic activity as a result of a very particular set of conditions which imbue their poetry with a sense of urgency to express their message effectively. Since the South African context has been dominated by the ideology of Apartheid, it becomes protest and resistance poetry's prime concern to take a committed stance in exposing and representing the evils of Apartheid. Hence the poetry's overt political nature and tone.

To reinforce the notion of protest and resistance poetry's need to be appreciated in terms of its own aesthetics, it is appropriate to conclude with this quotation from Njabulo Ndebele:

The fact of the matter is that once we begin to see an artistic convention emerging, once we see a body of writing exhibiting similar characteristics, we must attempt to identify its origins, its methods of operation and its effective audience. Such factors will establish the validity of the writing. The writing will validate itself in terms of its own primary conventions, in terms of its own emergent, complex system of aesthetics (1992:440).


Aido, A. 1967. *Interview in Cultural Events in Africa*.


121


124.