

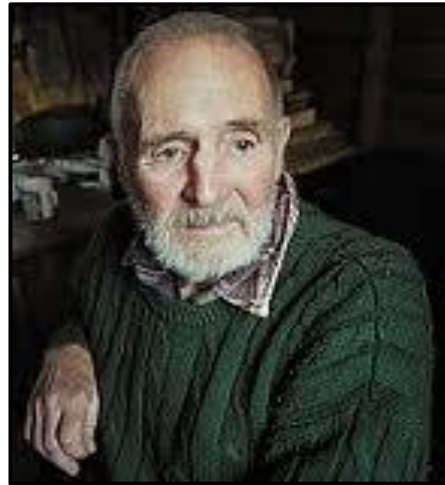
“Trespasser” – Tatamkhulu Afrika

1 I wheel my bike under
2 the cathedral's* dark overhang,
3 Seized by a rictus* of the wind,
4 the trees shed rain.
5 Rain slides down
6 Wale Street's sleek, steep fall:
7 air is an ocean booming round
8 high bare walls.
9 My hands freeze on
10 the bike's crossbar,
11 seek the sodden saddle, toy
12 with the ice-cold bell:
13 I am suddenly fugitive,
14 homeless and cornered in
15 a caprice* of pressure and cloud

16 Then they cough and I know
17 I am not alone:
18 far back, against the great, nailed doors,
19 they huddle: troglodytes*
20 of **night's alcoves,**
21 **daytime's shopping-malls,**
22 **parking lots, sparse green lawns,**
23 **municipal benches where**
24 **lunchtime's city workers, stripping down**
25 **their food-packs, sit**
26 **in sober rows.***

27 I fear to turn around,
28 stiffen in expectation*
29 of the inevitable tugging at my sleeve,
30 wonder of I have any coins
31 wonder why they do not bicker,
32 as they always do,
33 cursing their mother's wombs
34 in tired robots' tones,
35 why only this
36 curious, chuckling, liquid sound
37 drawing me around.*

38 She has the usual wrappings on
39 stick-thin, brittle shins,
40 patchy-purple, quietly rotting
41 methylated spirits skin:
42 doekie of incongruous* elegance crowns*
43 the scabrous, half-bald skull
44 Her man, grotesque
45 as a gargoyle* roused from stone,
46 cradles an infant on his lap,
47 feeds it from a bottle with a teat,
48 makes the chuckling, crooning sounds*
49 that turned me round,
50 that hold me now spellbound.



SACAI ENG FAL Poetry Support Material: Trespasser T Afrika

51 'Good morning, sir,' he says,
52 and his voice is grave
53 as a paterfamilias* in his lounge.

54 Only the odd man out*,
55 leaning against the harsh green walls,
56 looks at me with carefully indifferent eyes,
57 finding me , alien on his home ground
58 wishing the clouds would break and I be gone,
59 ringing my bike's absurd, small bell.

Summary: The poet seeks refuge from the pouring rain under the eaves of St George's Cathedral in Cape Town. There he meets a homeless Coloured couple who are also sheltering from the rain. They are looking after a baby. Instead of begging money from the poet as he expects them to do, they wish the rain would stop so that he will go away and leave them alone.

Background of the poet: *Tatamkhulu Afrika* - born in Egypt in 1920 and given the name Mogamed Fuad Nasif. His parents moved to South Africa when he was two years old but when they both died he was fostered by family friends - changed his name to John Charlton.

He fought in North Africa during World War 2 and was captured at Tobruk. After the war, he decided to leave his foster family and moved to South-West Africa (now Namibia) where he was taken in by an Afrikaans family. He became known as Jozua Joubert.

He converted to Islam in 1964 and changed his name again to Ismail Joubert. He had himself declared to be Coloured rather than White and took up residence in District 6, a well-known mixed race suburb near Cape Town's city centre. In 1967 District 6 was declared to be a White area in terms of South Africa's "Group Areas Act" of 1950. Ismael Joubert took up a fight to save it. He failed. The suburb was largely flattened and became a wasteland for several decades.

Very angry at the Apartheid regime, he joined the banned African National Congress and its armed wing, *Umkhonto We Sizwe*. Because of his age, they gave him the nickname *Tatamkhulu Afrika* (Grandfather Africa). 1987 - arrested for terrorism and was imprisoned. He was forbidden to write but continued to do so under the name *Tatamkhulu Afrika*. He was released from prison in 1992 but he chose thereafter to make his nickname his own.

He published his first novel (*Broken Earth*) when he was only 17 years of age and his 2nd book (*Bitter Eden*) was written when he was a prisoner-of-war. He published his first anthology of poetry when he was 51; won no less than six literary awards. He died in 2002 after being run over in a car accident. He was then 82 years of age.

Analysis: (Note: EVERY English tutor/teacher must study each prescribed poem and also prepare widely in order to teach poetry – There is often more than one interpretation)

5 Stanzas: In the **first stanza** the setting/surroundings/atmosphere is described to the reader. Using alliterations in line 6 (Wale **Street's** sleek, steep fall) and line 11 (seek the sodden saddle, toy) the poet emphasises the perpetual dripping sound of the rain.

2nd stanza: The speaker realizes that he is not alone and he assumes without knowing for sure that it must be beggars. He calls them *trogodytes* (prehistoric cave dwellers), so an euphemism to call them uncivilised bushman. He lists all the places you normally find such hoboos: at night's alcoves, in shopping malls, in parking lots, on sparse green lawns or on municipal benches. By listing all the places where we find such people he creates stereotypes and even reinforces them by emphasizing the **difference** between "them" and the city workers who neatly eat their food in sober rows.

3rd stanza represents the way we all feel when being confronted with beggars. We feel guilty and therefore we don't want to turn around and face them. This is exactly how the man in the poem feels, he fears to turn around for he thinks he knows what will happen. But a *curious, chuckling, liquid sound*

makeshim turn around. What he finds there is described in stanza four. A couple who does exactly what they are supposed to do; they are good parents feeding their baby and nothing else. However, the language he uses is rather judgmental and a bit ironic and by this the reader's image of a typical poor (homeless) family conflicts with the description of the family's behavior. It is quite surprising for the reader to find the father greeting respectfully addressing him as "Sir", almost as if he was welcoming him into his "lounge".

4th stanza: Description of the couple he meets – Look at the wonderful examples of metaphors (patchy-purple; stick-thin; methylated spirits skin etc.), comparisons (grotesque as a gargoye), alliteration (patchy-purple) and even onomatopoeia (chuckling, crooning sounds).

Last stanza: - shows the speaker's hostility. He sees a difference between the homeless and himself but the question remains if there really is a difference? He feels left out, almost as if he himself had **trespassed** whereas in the beginning it is obvious that it is the couple who **trespasses** for the church is a public place and not a home. Feeling as an intruder and thinking that the father thinks he's the "odd man out" he leaves the place.

Generally one can say that this poem makes you question your own stereotypes. We think that beggars are different but really they are not. They are man and woman, father and mother just as any other. The poem is also addressing the inequality in looking at rich and poor people and therefore a very notorious issue in a third world country especially after apartheid.

Style of poem: - the poet focuses on the story and emotion rather than on rhythm and rhyme.

- Free verse
- No Lyrical pattern
- Follows rhythm of natural speech
- Look at the importance of the **title** as a summary of the poem

Some explanations:

Seized by a rictus of the wind (Line 3): rictus = open-mouthed. The wind is open-mouthed – so strong that it appears to be blowing with an open mouth – good example of a metaphor (hidden comparison)

Wale Street's sleek, steep fall (line 6): Wale street passes the Cathedral in Cape Town and is very steep as it goes past the Cathedral; *sleek* – could be wet from the pouring rain.

air is an ocean booming round high bare walls (lines 7-8): **Metaphor** – Air is wet with rain and it seems as if the entire ocean is falling down, so hard it is raining//The noise of the strong winds and the rain could be booming round the tall building – **booming** is a word that imitates the sound of the rain = **onomatopoeia**.

Many references to winter and how cold it is: *My hands freeze on the bike's crossbar (Lines 9-10); ice-cold bell (L 12)* – winter rain in Cape Town

I am suddenly fugitive, homeless and cornered (Lines 13-14): Why is the speaker a fugitive? He is temporarily without a home because he needs shelter to hide from the rain. His own *homelessness* allows him to introduce the **theme of homelessness**.

doekie of incongruous elegance crown the scabrous, half-bald skull (Lines 42-43): **Doekie** – Afrikaans word for a piece of cloth that is folded around the head (in this case); **incongruous** – not suitable or fitting in this situation; **scabrous** – rough surface. Elegance is usually associated with wealth and luxury and using the word in this case is why the poet speaks of an *incongruous elegance* - example of irony.

Explanations of words and phrases (See *)

Cathedral: a place of sanctuary – in this case a sanctuary from the rain

Rictus: open mouth - Appeals to all the senses, exhibits the power of nature

Caprice: Not a comfortable situation; sudden change

Troglodytes: cave dwellers; unconventional dwellings

Lines 20-26: *night's alcoves,*
21 daytime's shopping-malls,
22 parking lots, sparse green lawns,
23 municipal benches where
24 lunchtime's city workers, stripping down
25 their food-packs, sit
26 in sober rows

→
Two groups of people use benches: who has more right to them? During the night, the homeless sleeps on the benches and during the day, the city's workers sit there to eat lunch. **The contrast:** to emphasise the inequalities and divide of post-apartheid. In daytime – orderly and people sit neatly and in sober rows eating their wrapped food parcels; In night time, the park benches become disorderly as homeless people sleep there – often without food and wrapped in anything that gives warmth.

stiffen in expectation: Expecting beggars to ask for money - Sets up usual image of beggars

curious, chuckling, liquid sound drawing me around: Sound doesn't match the expectations

Incongruous: unexpected - one would not expect elegance in such a place;

Crowns: gives images of royalty

Gargoyles: act as guardians of a cathedral, warding off trespassers and evil

Line 48: Sound is fatherly, loving

First section of this stanza: images of decay and dirtiness; Second section: image of family

Paterfamilias: male head of a household

Only the odd man out (Line 55): A trespasser on the family scene, like the speaker



The following has been compiled and added by Imbila:

TRESPASSERS - QUESTIONS

Read all the notes on the web page about the relevant poem.

Answer these following questions.

QUESTIONS:

1. Study the meaning of the word 'rictus' in line 3.
Consider the weather in Cape Town, give a short description of this image by explaining what happens to the trees. 2
2. How is it possible for 'trees to shed rain' as mentioned in line 4? 2
3. What is the purpose of the alliteration in lines 6-11? 1
4. With reference to the word 'freeze' (L 9) and the whole of line 12, give a short description of the reason he is feeling like this. 2
5. Explain the meaning of 'troglodytes' and list where they can be found at night and day as mentioned in the poem. 2
6. Verse 3 starts with a description of the poet's expectations. How has he stereotyped his own behaviour? 2
7. Lines 36 and 37 gives a description of what really made him turn around. Name the figure of speech and what it really was.
8. Mentioning 'patchy-purple skin', give two possible meanings for this description. 2
9. Paraphrase (summarise) the forth stanza in three short sentences. 3
10. Discuss the irony in the following words:
'alien on home ground' (LINE 37) 2
11. Referring to the title of the poem, how do you think the poet felt at the end of the poem? 3
12. Explain the irony in 'incongruous elegance'. 2

Total 25

TRESSPASSERS - Memo

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS:

1. Study the meaning of the word 'rictus' in line 3.
Consider the weather in Cape Town, give a short description of this image by explaining what happens to the trees. 2

rictus: power of nature, as if blowing with an open mouth., meaning that the wind blows very strongly when there is a storm at the coast, and the trees are moving roughly and shaken around.

2. How is it possible for 'trees to shed rain' as mentioned in line 4? 2

To shed means to get rid of – so as the wind blows, the leaves and branches get rid of the drops on them.

3. What is the purpose of the alliteration in lines 6-11? 1

Emphasises the constant dripping sound of the rain.

4. With reference to the word 'freeze' (L 9) and the whole of line 12, give a short description of the reason he is feeling like this. 2

In Cape Town it rains during winter, so his hands are frozen and the metal of the bell is very cold.

5. Explain the meaning of 'troglodytes' and list where they can be found at night and day as mentioned in the poem. 2

'troglodytes' are cave dwellers, and the trespassers or homeless can be found in alcoves (dark holes) during the night and in shopping malls, parking lots, parks and municipal benches during the day.

6. Verse 3 starts with a description of the poet's expectations. How has he stereotyped his own behaviour? 2

His normal reaction to beggars would be to (own interpretation = ignore them or abruptly say no ... etc)

7. Lines 36 and 37 gives a description of what really made him turn around. Name the figure of speech and what it really was.

onomatopoeia

It was the sound of the baby drinking from a bottle.

8. Mentioning 'patchy-purple skin', give two possible meanings for this description. 2

She could be purple from the methylated spirits she drinks or that it is really cold.

9. Paraphrase (summarise) the forth stanza in three short sentences. 3

*The poet/speaker sees a mother dressed in strange clothes.
He then sees the father holding the baby, feeding it from a bottle
The man then greets the speaker as 'sir'.*

10. Discuss the irony in the following words: 2
'alien on home ground' (LINE 37)

The Cathedral is supposed to be a safe place where you can go for protection. Yet he feels as if he doesn't belong there, he actually feels like the intruder.

11. Referring to the title of the poem, how do you think the poet felt at the end of the poem? 3

*The title refers to a trespasser.
At first he thought the couple were trespassing on the church's steps, then when he saw what was happening, he himself felt like a trespasser.*

12. Explain the irony in 'incongruous elegance'. 2

*elegance is associated with wealth and luxury
incongruous – is not suitable therefore it seems out of place that this couple could be described in this way.*

Total 25