

Flying in the face of convention: The Heart of Redness as rehabilitative of the South African Pastoral literary tradition through the frame of universal myth

Anthony Jacobs

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Supervisor: Prof. Peter Merrington

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Abstract

This thesis analyses Zakes Mda's The Heart of Redness in the tradition of South African pastoral and counter-pastoral. It proposes that the novel is a hybrid of both African and European tradition and perspectives. It adduces Northrop Frye's theory of myth and archetypes in literature as a basis for study. It also analyses the novel in its use of irony. The mini-thesis concludes by proposing that Mda rehabilitates the pastoral tradition in and enables a broader reading of literature, history and society in South Africa.



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Chapter one: introduction

This thesis explores the ironic implications of the genre of pastoral in a reading of Zakes Mda's The Heart of Redness. Mda does this through drawing on South African myth while at the same time working within the canon of western literature. It is argued that Mda's usage of the genre, while not necessarily overt or even intentional, responds with revisionary freshness to the concern typified by J.M. Coetzee in his collection of essays White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa, that European pastoral, adapted for settler narratives of the South African land and landscape, entails a 'failure of the imagination' (Coetzee, 1988:71) in its failure to respond, either historically or in utopian terms, to indigenous presence and values. Coetzee concedes that within 'white writing' there is a body of fiction that goes against the grain of sentimental settler representations. This is anti-pastoral or counter-pastoral, exemplified for Coetzee by Gordimer's The Conservationist. He argues that the occlusion of the presence of black South Africans in traditional 'pastoral' or rural novels in South African white writing is an unresolved question that is answered in a fashion by the persistence of the presence of the dead farm labourer in the landscape of Gordimer's novel.

Coetzee concludes his essay on pastoral in white South African writing with the wry suggestion that the spirit of pastoral is unlikely to be exorcised, considering the potential strength of the genre to engage with questions of land, and the politics of land. The existence of a tradition of anti-pastoral (notably Schreiner's The Story of an African Farm, Gordimer's The Conservationist, and Coetzee's own body of work, in particular

Disgrace, In The Heart of the Country, and The Life and Times of Michael K) attests to this strength of the genre. Nonetheless, Coetzee ends with a statement that it would be valuable to be able to ‘hear music as sound upon silence, not silence between sounds’ (1988:81). By this, one might understand Coetzee to mean the emergence of writing of the land and its people that is convincingly and indisputably indigenous in its modalities. I would like to respond to JM Coetzee’s question formulated in White Writing as to “... whether it is in the nature of the ghost of the pastoral ever to be finally laid”, by suggesting that Mda has presented us with a version of the genre that brings new lifeblood to the pale traces of this set of conventions. (1988:81).

This thesis thus argues that The Heart of Redness provides such ‘music’ or such a new indigenous modality of pastoral fiction in South Africa as desired by Coetzee. The argument for describing this novel in terms of pastoral depends, to be sure, upon a theory of literature that stems from outside, from the west, namely Northrop Frye’s concept of mythic archetypes. Frye argues that his concept is universal in its implications, and a consequence to the argument of this thesis is to determine the appropriateness or the workability of this claim to an African application. In Myth, Literature and the African World, Wole Soyinka challenged western culture’s loss of engagement with its elemental and archaic myths, and has argued for the importance of sustained African mythic archetypes in art. (Soyinka, 1976) It is not intended, by drawing on Frye, to suggest that a Euro-centric reading of archetype and myth is methodologically necessary. Rather, Frye’s work is cited in an attempt to indicate within given literary-critical discourse the diverse universality of elemental myths, including indigenous African myths such as

those referred to by Soyinka; and in the case of Mda, to explore the hybridity of his text. This hybridity means a blend of the western pastoral along with local history, indigenous knowledge, and local myth. The local, indigenous, or Xhosa, is offered from an insider's point of view and would, on the face of it, provide that 'music as sound upon silence' which Coetzee speaks of.

It is obvious that The Heart of Redness does indeed contain elements that in the west are traditionally attributed to pastoral. The core event behind the narrative is the tragic 'cattle killing' of the Xhosa people in 1856-7. This core event of Mda's narrative is one that, sadly and perhaps even controversially, might be aligned with the preoccupations of conventional European pastoral: bucolic people in a rural setting; their relation to their livestock, and their concern with restoration and renewal of the land, and the anticipation (as in Virgil's famous fourth eclogue) of a new 'golden age'. The nostalgia of South African pastoral for an idyllic past can be located in the classical idea of the golden age; an age that, since the Eclogues of Virgil, has been anticipated as returning. In this case it is not nostalgia for that putative idyllic past so much as recreation of a tragic event that was intended to usher in a new dispensation. The prophecy of the girl prophet Nongquawuse was intended to bring about a 'cleansing' of the land, its resources, and its people, and the introduction of a new dispensation that might be termed utopian. The idea of resurrection was a strong element of nineteenth century Xhosa spiritual belief. Coetzee's essay speaks of the ahistorical quality of the idyll in the Little Karroo which is set up in the fiction of Pauline Smith. Mda, conversely, for all the magic realism and fantasy of his novel, locates it in a distinct historical context. His pastoral is engaged;

and indeed the quest for restoration and renewal is acted out towards the conclusion of the narrative, in terms of current South African issues of land and economy.

In chapter one I shall look at how the pastoral develops over time and in particular the way the tradition develops in South Africa. The earliest tales of the pastoral were set in an idyllic rural environment and celebrated the pleasures of rural life. The pastoral was often represented as a garden. In South Africa it came to be represented by the farm. The South African farm novel is nostalgic and looks back to an idyllic time of the forefathers or ancestors on the farm. Raymond Williams's The Country and the City is drawn upon in this chapter to explore the ways in which conventional pastoral poetry has been replaced by ruralism in the modern novel.



The second chapter explores ways in which The Heart of Redness may be read in terms of Frye's seasonal myths and archetypes. Frye's analysis of myth in relation to society and literature from a western perspective is not incompatible with the reading of an African text. This does not imply a simplistic universalist reading of Frye's work. The shift in emphasis from a Euro-centric to an Afro-centric perspective in cultural practice in this country is not without its challenges but Mda shows with a light touch how this can be achieved. Mda also explores the idea of hybridity of cultures.

Of course, Mda's treatment is not simply utopian. Nor is it a romanticisation of the topic. It is a wry, at times deeply ironical, novel that confronts the history of the near genocide of his people and the comprehensive immorality of the colonial treatment of the Xhosa.

The treatment, then, of this novel as a version of pastoral that answers Coetzee's query about the possibility of 'music as sound upon silence', takes into account the contrapuntal dynamics of The Heart of Redness, where idealism is matched with brutality, and charming wit with bitter humour. The ironic tensions set up by this combination are the subject of the third chapter. I would like to show how the use of irony in the novel is particularly effective in mediating or negotiating the tensions at play in South African society and history. In Frye's system of genre, irony and satire are associated with emblematic winter, while pastoral in its comedic form is associated with emblematic summer. Mda's novel is hybrid in this sense too, then, as a combination of contrary modes and moods.

In chapter four I shall be discussing the implications of my thesis for conceiving of South African literature which, like everything else in this country, is in a state of radical transformation, eleven years after the first democratic elections. With changes in the political, economic and social systems of South Africa, the imagination cannot remain unchanged either. The Heart of Redness not only reflects the changes but also invites new ways of reading and writing history, the subject, and society in South African imaginative fiction.

Chapter two: the development of pastoral and counter-pastoral

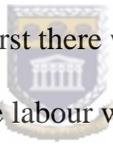
JM Coetzee's "ghost of pastoral" is one that has haunted literature from the earliest times. The pastoral (from the Latin word *Pastor* – meaning shepherd) in English literature, was traditionally a genre that aimed for a highly conventional and artificial effect. The pastoral generally idealized rural, and particularly shepherd, way of life. The pastoral valued a harmonious, idle, simple and frugal way of living where virtue was its own reward. This genre is also variously referred to as the pastoral elegy, idyll, eclogue and bucolic. It is an art form modeled on the Greco-Latin Classical tradition. The convention of the pastoral has, for the most part, been considered to be a form of metropolitan escape literature concerned with the pleasures and idleness of the country.



From the earliest times English writers have conceived of the pastoral as a distinct and narrow genre that was practiced as separate from their other writings, and which were written from the metropolitan centre of the English literary world. Most major writers in English have at one time or the other, written in the pastoral genre. Many major works, still in print today, also stem from the impulse to create drama, prose, mostly poetry, in a vein that stretches from the earliest writing on record.

The pastoral is evoked and exists alongside all genres as the English literary tradition evolves and grows over time. The idea of the Pastoral undergoes change and is revised with each literary age.

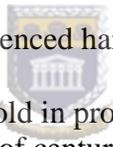
Considered by many to be the first pastoral writer, Theocritus (c. 316-c. 260 B.C.) composed works that celebrated an idyllic, rustic, rural world in Sicily. Theocritus's mythological narratives and poems, though set in nature, were for an urban Greek audience in Alexandria. His shepherds and other workfolk were depicted as loving of music and the attractions of women.

In his study of English literature, The Country and the City, Raymond Williams considers the tradition of pastoral in literature to be much older and broader than that. He looks back to Hesiod whose Works and Days (9th c. B.C.) is an "...epic of husbandry, in the widest sense: the practice of agriculture and trading within a way of life in which prudence and effort are seen as primary virtues" (Williams, 1973:14). Hesiod also fixes the history or genealogy of the world.  First there was a Golden Age, a time long lost where humans lived like gods and where labour was the basis for society. From there humans degenerated through several ages in succession: the Silver, Bronze and Iron Ages with the Iron Age being the present. Hesiod's concerns go beyond shepherds and idle music and love-making. His Works and Days recounted time spent farming as well as herding domesticated animals.

Theocritus's Idylls, however, are nearly all set in the context of herding, except for the tenth which has an agricultural setting. He also uses a sophisticated and artificial discourse within which he frames the pastoral. This is nonetheless still a world that is closely tied to nature and seasonal cyclicity of growth, that is, through birth and death.

Another later, Latin, writer of the genre, Virgil (70 – 19 B.C.) became well known for his Eclogues, modeled on Theocritus, that used the pastoral to pass social comment in an urban *milieu* and to allude to topics of contemporary interest. Swapping Arcadia for Sicily, Virgil evoked a Golden Age of an innocent and ideal rustic world. His Aeneid was an epic with a singular patriotic theme. His Georgics considered the labour that was necessary to rural life.

Williams finds that Virgil's Eclogues maintain a link with society and its material base which is based in country life. The Eclogues also introduce the notion of the Golden Age as being restored to humankind and coinciding with the birth of a child. Virgil invokes the Golden Age as not so much passed but as being on the brink of restoration which will release the subject from presently experienced hard times. In eclogue four he says:

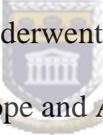


Ours is the crowning era foretold in prophecy:
Born of Time, a great new cycle of centuries
Begins. Justice returns to the earth, the Golden Age
Returns, and its first –born comes down from heaven above. (Virgil, 1966:18)

It shall be a time, according to Virgil, when “[a]ll stains of our past wickedness [are] cleansed away” (Virgil, 1966:18). The spread and growth of Christianity saw a marked Christian and Hebrew influence on the pastoral. The combination of these major themes namely along with those of the shepherd and innocence, to name a few, in the Christian religion meant that literature could easily assume the religious frames of reference and, in so doing, reinforce dominant religious thought.

In his Georgics, though, Williams finds elements of “...idealization, of extended retrospect, which was to become so characteristic” (Williams, 1973:17) of neo-classical pastoralism.

According to Williams, the Renaissance removed the references to ordinary experiences of the latter day subject and “...selected images stand as themselves: not in a living but in an enamelled world” (18). The significance of the pastoral came to lie in the omission of ‘real’ life that was at first exceptional but then came to be the standard for the convention (18). The artificial convention came to characterize the neo-classical pastoral or even neo-pastoral.

The pastoral in the eighteenth century  further changes. It was highly conventional and artificial. Alexander Pope and Ambrose Phillips were two of the major writers of the day. John Gay with his *Shepherd's Week* (1714) burlesqued the refined type of writing and in so doing helped to depict the pastoral in a more realistic manner.

The eighteenth century also saw a new form of pastoral emerge, the topographical which was concerned with place. Wordsworth depicted nature as a visionary power.

Wordsworth was also more realistic in his depiction of the pastoral although he too still emphasized the simplicity and innocence of country life. With his poem *Michael* (1800) he portrayed the end of the rural, idyllic retreat.

George Crabbe with works such as The Village (1783) sought to depict rural life in as true to life a manner as possible, and challenged the artificial convention. For writers

such as Crabbe the rigid conventions of pastoral did not allow for a depiction of the countryside as real. The pastoral became popular motifs in theatre and in the romance. Sannazzaro's Arcadia (1500) had incorporated the eclogue and natural description into an idealized romantic love. Allegory had also become an important feature of pastoral. The pastoral had become a mask for playing out contemporary, mostly courtly, issues and intrigues. According to Williams it is this form that defines the modern pastoral.

With Crabbe the tradition of the counter-pastoral also took shape. In the absence of the ideal in society, the literary tradition cannot hold true and is, rather, a travesty or a parody. It is an irony that the ideal is produced in isolation from the material basis of a society.

Olive Schreiner's The Story of an African Farm is another such work. In the arid semi desert of the African veld and colonial society, the pastoral tradition cannot take root with integrity. The characters in the book are incapable of significant development because the social conditions do not allow it. JM Coetzee makes the point in In The Heart of The Country with his depiction of Magda, one of the "daughters of the colony" (Coetzee, 1976:3) who is trapped in the rural, patriarchal, settler society into which she is born and which 'speaks' her to the extent that she attempts to invent a language that will free her from the constraints of her society.

Crabbe's The Village, according to Raymond Williams, insists on 'truth' and rejects the neo-classic pastoral as a particularly relevant genre for the time and place. The reference of the classic pastoral was to a society that was, in matter of fact, pastorally based. To a society that had as its centre a growing urban and nationalistic metropolis, the pastoral

could not help but become an affectation. The signs of the classical period, and their significance, became displaced by other signs and new sets of meaning in a parallel and counter tradition of pastoral.

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw a contest for the significance of pastoral between two conventions: as an idyllic Golden Age or as idyllic English country life (Williams, 1973:19). This contest again would be played out mainly by genteel writers for a primarily genteel audience. What then occurred was the

...conversion of conventional pastoral into a localized dream and then, increasingly, in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, into what can be offered as a description and thence an idealization of actual English country life and its social and economic relations. (Williams, 1973:26)

Crabbe is seen to be protesting against this as well as "...the conventional simplicities of neo-pastoral" (Williams, 1973:26).



English society was based on the estates of the landed gentry. Pastoral celebrated the prosperity of the independent gentleman of means in a naturalised, idyllic country setting. Pastoral also responded against an England which was changing in response to new ideas. It also reflected a growing consciousness, albeit benign, of the idle ease of consumption as opposed to labouring for sustenance. The role of Christianity which was combined with classical myth further reinforced this myth of the estate as Eden, bountiful and generous to all who subsisted on it. The land, however, was primarily sanctified through those who owned and controlled it. The pastoral in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in England excised the role of labour and the working classes from the rural

economy, society and landscape. The pastoral then succumbed to artifice and elaboration while ostensibly celebrating a rural order. According to Williams the genre of pastoral now constituted "...a social order and a consequent way of seeing, which we are not now likely to forget" (Williams, 1973:34).

Olive Schreiner's novel, The Story of an African Farm, was published in Britain in 1883. As I've noted it was not so much a pastoral as counter-pastoral novel. It configured dissonance. Lyndall's pregnancy, in the book, as an unmarried woman, was considered somewhat scandalous. It was nonetheless widely acclaimed in England on publication. It is counted the first major South African novel, and is considered to be the forerunner of the plaasroman in South African literature. Its themes of the individual in an isolated, rural landscape were to become popular with other major South African writers such as Alan Paton, Sol Plaatje, Pauline Smith, Laurens van der Post, William Plomer, Andre Brink, Nadine Gordimer and JM Coetzee. Themes played out in these writers' works invariably entailed the land and the subject's place in it.

Land, labour and race become conflated as signifiers of identity. In South Africa, the pastoral, and literature generally, reflected the issues of the day. Race, labour and land became significant symbols of class and identity. For each of these there were opposing and contesting positions dominated in the nineteenth century by the jingoist European, largely British, perspective of moral superiority over non-European, colonised people. A racial hierarchy became translated into a materially hierarchic society. While many writers sought to challenge these imbalances, white South African society managed to

hold on to political power until 1994, when the first democratic elections were held. The major writings of the time are, however, and unsurprisingly, dominated by white writers. This is what JM Coetzee is referring to when he talks of the significance of 'white' writing in South Africa.

Writers of the nineteenth century continued to emulate the classical pastoral but from the middle of nineteenth century the pastoral in English literature in the mainstream, too, showed less concern with convention and attempted to reformulate ideas of the pastoral. One example is Roy Campbell whose works include *A Veld Eclogue: The pioneers* and *Jungle Eclogue*.

J. M. Coetzee locates the South African pastoral tradition as a problematic encounter with history and colonisation. In White Writing, he reflects on the development of literature in South Africa. The development and history of, initially, the Cape colony and later, South Africa saw literature, in particular the pastoral, take on a role and character that was appropriate for this context. Of the nature of pastoral in South Africa, Coetzee says that it takes on the task of representing the land as a rural retreat from the city as while also depicting the cycle of growth and decay as opposed to degeneration (Coetzee, 1988:4).

The nature and quality of pastoral changed as it touched South African soil. Sub-genres of pastoral took on another significance as Coetzee states. The idea of physical labour, for example, also assumed a different significance here in the colony. Whereas the convention of pastoral originally celebrated an idle lifestyle and then in a neo-classical

form naturalized ownership as a valid relation to land, denying the role of those who laboured on it, so too in South African pastoral, it is "... the work of hands on a particular patch of earth, digging, ploughing, planting, building, [that] inscribes it as the property of its occupiers *by right*, [original italics] ..." (5). Even then, it is not just the fact of labour that is important but it is also who is seen to be performing that labour. In the colony originally, the settlers were justified in appropriating the land on the basis of developing and improving it, because the natives had not been seen to do so and had therefore had no right to it. In Pauline Smith's The Beadle, for example, the ethos of the settler community is located in honest and hard work, particularly and especially by those who own it. The pastoral in South Africa is therefore characterized by "... the occlusion of black labour from the scene: the black man becomes a shadowy presence flitting across the stage now and then to hold a horse or serve a meal" (Coetzee, 1988:5.). An example of this can be seen in The Story of an African Farm. Schreiner's labourers and slaves occupy an uneasy space in her first novel. They exist as unformed and do not function as an integral part of the narrative. For the writer, in treating of racialised labour in the colony with some sense of verisimilitude, there were contradictions or inconsistencies in the social system that was not easily resolved.

The idea of the land, too, took on another kind significance. The European idea of land, germinating in the colony then at the time meant that land had a commercial as well as sentimentalized value of land. The idea of land existed as an artifact. According to Coetzee "... - the task of the human imagination [in relation to the landscape] is to conceive ... any kind of relation at all that consciousness can have with it" (Coetzee,

1988:7). One important relationship and idea in South African literature has being that to and of land. It is thus that “[t]o the pastoral novel, landscape is humanized when inscribed by hand and plough ...” (7).

According to Coetzee there are no alternatives to writing of the land. Therefore “[t]his landscape remains alien, impenetrable, until a language is found in which to win it, speak it, represent it.” (7) It is certain that “[t]he pastoral tradition could never really take root...” (4).

Coetzee poses the question as to whether there is

...a language in which people of European identity, or if not of a European identity then of a highly problematic South African-colonial identity, can speak to Africa and be spoken to by Africa? (8)

In his novel Disgrace Coetzee goes even further. The protagonist David Lurie notes that

... English is an unfit medium for the truth of South Africa. Stretches of English code whole sentences long have thickened, lost their articulations, their articulateness, their articulatedness. Like a dinosaur expiring and settling into the mud, the language has stiffened. Pressed into the mould of English, Petrus’s story would come out arthritic, bygone. (Coetzee. 2000:117)

This language may not necessarily be one that is spoken or written indigenously and may very well not be English, for the challenge that Coetzee poses is whether it is possible for an African sensibility or narrative to exist in contemporary South African literature and culture.

Where colonisation imposed the values of a foreign culture onto the colony, and while a postcolonial framework insists that all voices that were traditionally suppressed are now

equally valid, it is more true to say that a hybrid tradition is more common than not.

However, the premise of any tradition is that it is authentic for its context, irrespective of its origin, and for Coetzee:

The quest for an authentic language is pursued within a framework in which language, consciousness, and landscape are interrelated. For the European to learn an African language “from the outside” will therefore not be enough: he must know the language “from the inside” as well, that is, know it “like a native,” sharing the mode of consciousness of the people born to it, and to that extent giving up his European identity. (Coetzee, 2000:7)

It is the purpose of this mini-thesis to explore The Heart of Redness as an exemplar of a European mode or tradition, being written from the inside of an African tradition.

Over the millennia the pastoral has undergone many challenges and changes but it has remained as a primary genre through which writers have attempted to depict the human and social condition. The notion of the pastoral over this time has not remained fixed but has adapted and grown to contain the various demands on it.

An attempt to explain the enduring appeal of genres like the pastoral was made by Northrop Frye who also proposed that literary criticism or theory take on the nature of a science that could be systematically and metonymically applied to and make sense of literature. In The Archaeology of Knowledge Michelle Foucault, in a similar vein, said that

... we must grasp the statement in the exact specificity of its occurrence; determine its conditions of existence, fix at least its limits, establish its correlation with other statements that may be connected with it, and show what other forms of statements it excludes. (Foucault, 1972:27)

Frye proposed that literature be viewed as comprising a set of taught conventions that formed a coherent account of the human experience as a work of art. He proposed a structure of literary theory that could explain or contain any fictional narrative.



Chapter three: Northrop Frye's mythologies and archetypes in literature

Northrop Frye's Anatomy of Criticism: four essays proposed that literary criticism "...as a systematic and organized study ..." (Frye, 1963:7) take on an empiric coherence and discipline that was closely based on those of the natural sciences. This methodology was based on the hypothesis that in literature there were archetypes that existed, and were valid, across all cultures and periods. His proposal was novel in that it was an ambitious attempt to offer an account of literature at the time. While his proposal was formulated in the Anatomy of Criticism, he explored this theory over many decades and in many other works. Frye's theory, while first expounded in Anatomy of Criticism, was further developed in Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology. The latter work differs from the former significantly in certain respects. In Anatomy of Criticism he ascribes the archetype of comedy, pastoral and idyll to spring and romance to summer whereas in Fables of Identity he ascribes comedy, pastoral and idyll to summer and romance to spring. For the purposes of this thesis I am using his Fables of Identity, where he clearly tabulates his theory.

Frye's proposal was met with justifiable criticism and the purpose of this paper is not to prove or disprove Frye's theory but to find out how it could be applied usefully to a reading of a postcolonial novel.

According to Frye, myths and archetypes are provided by the collected and experienced memories of society. The myths are played out between subjects as ritual which Frye

defines as “...the deliberate expression of a will to synchronise human and natural energies at the same time...” (Frye, 1963:15). Furthermore ritual is “...a temporal sequence of acts in which the conscious meaning or significance is latent” (15). In addition ritual is based on rhythm that is based on nature and is analogous to art (14).

According to Northrop Frye, literature allows the opportunity for exploring “all facets of a character, [and] of learning something about ... society” (28). Literature thus has a mimetic quality inherent in it that allows one to reflect on society through the fictions that are produced as part of artistic or cultural tradition. The conventions of literature are not arbitrary but are learned through reading and are, in turn, reproduced over time. It is, however, not a simplistic rendering of life that occurs in fiction because then we could easily end up with “... incident for its own sake ...” (28).



Literature is thus seen as having a substantial depth of analysis of human experience. Literature is not necessarily systematic in revealing the full sum of human experience. Frye sees this as residing, rather, in mythology. He sees mythology “... as a total structure, defining ... society’s religious beliefs, historical traditions, cosmological speculations ... [as] the matrix of literature...” (33) For Frye myth is “...a certain kind of narrative” that “... is and has always been an integral element of literature” (21).

Mda is clearly writing not only of Xhosa history but also cosmology and myth. It is my contention that The Heart of Redness by Zakes Mda is a work that locates itself, not only in history, but in mythology and cosmology, of the Xhosa people of the Eastern Cape. It

is the purpose of this chapter to read The Heart of Redness closely in relation to Frye's archetypal theory of literature in order to test whether his theory may hold true for a postcolonial novel and to see how his theory may enable such a reading.

The story of Nongqawuse and the cattle killing of the mid nineteenth century, that forms one of the two main narratives in the novel, is based on real life incident and illustrates Frye's point that myth in literature is a type of story "in which some of the chief characters are ... beings larger in power than humanity." (Frye, 1963:30) Apart from Nongqawuse there are other prophets Mlanjeni and Nonkosi who wielded great influence, not only over the Xhosa people in the Eastern Cape at the time, but over many people in what eventually came to be South Africa, for years after the event. The nineteenth century was also the time of conquest of the Eastern Cape and the Xhosa people by the British who most certainly loomed large in power.



Mda's novel is based not only on real event but is also very closely based on Jeff Peires's work The Dead Will Arise, a study of the cattle killing movement. Mda's work is thus so closely linked to history that it does not allow for a merely mythic or imaginative or unreal analysis of events. Frye says that "...while myths ... are seldom historical, they seem to provide a kind of containing form of tradition, one result of which is the obliterating of boundaries separating legend, historical reminiscence, and actual history..." (Frye, 1963:31).

Apart from inspiring themes, plot and narrative, locating fiction in myth also influences that fiction in a specific way:

The characters can do what they like, which means what the story-teller likes: there is no need to be plausible or logical in motivation. The things that happen in myth are things that happen only in stories (31).

Mda's work has been called Magic Realist for this very reason but he has resisted this categorization of his work for he has said that his works attempt to show the magic as ordinary and as an everyday aspect of life. Whereas Frye sees myth as harking back to classical antiquity Mda, then, sees myth as not so distant and as an ever present reality.

For Zim, one of the characters in The Heart of Redness, the belief of his forefathers is the ultimate truth even as his peer Bhonco's unbelief is his credo. For Bhonco too, his values are a system of unbelief that looks not only to the past but is also capable of shaping the future. For Bhonco his unbelief stands for progress and development, as in the casino and water sports complex that is proposed for the region and which is opposed by the system of the Believers. For Believers and Unbelievers alike then, their respective systems of belief "... show in perspective [their] origin, [their] destiny, the limits of [their] power, and the extension of [their] hopes and desires" (Frye, 1963:32).

The division of their respective ancestors has, of course, been brought about by the prophecies of firstly Mlanjeni and then Nongqawuse who promised a resurrection of the ancestors and a coming of Golden Age where all would be well and people would want for nothing. While outdated history books speak of the 'mass suicide' of the Xhosa people under the influence of their prophets, it is more correct to look for causal factors in the

history of the time. At the time, the British were culminating their conquest of the Eastern Cape and the Xhosa people. The Europeans had also brought disease, as in the lung sickness which was decimating the cattle of the Xhosa people. Frye says that it is the “discrepancy between the world man lives in and the world he would like to live in develops a dialectic in myth which ... separates reality into two contrasting states, [as in] a heaven and a hell” (Frye, 1963:32). The response of the Xhosa people to conquest was directed by their spiritual and religious belief systems. An analysis of this history could be better understood by understanding these belief systems.

For Frye myth “... makes a systematic attempt to see nature in human shape” (Frye, 1963:31). Myth assimilates nature to human along two principles: analogy, by establishing parallels between human life and the natural world, and by creating human identity for those phenomena as in identifying for example a sun-god. (Frye, 1963:32) In The Heart of Redness we find that is so: Zim communes with the ancestors under the tree on his homestead. They are the “... ancestors of the sea, the ancestors of the forest, the ancestors of the veld, and the ancestors of the homestead.” (Mda, 2000:41) For Zim they are as real as the birds that make the tree their home. Frye says that “...every developed mythology tends to complete itself, to outline an entire universe in which the “gods” represent the whole of nature in humanized form...” (Frye, 1963:32). The role of the ancestors is to intercede on behalf of those living in the world with Qamata, the Supreme Being in the afterworld. While not gods themselves they inhabit the divine world and also exercise agency on behalf of their descendants.

Nature is not only humanised in myth but also provides a model for myth. According to Frye

The absorption of the natural cycle into mythology provides myth with two ... structures ...; the rising movements that we find in myths of spring or the dawn, of birth, marriage and resurrection, and the falling movement in myths of death, metamorphosis, or sacrifice.” (Frye, 1963:33)

These two structures are further divided into two each and these constitute the four major phases of Frye’s archetypes of literature, derived, as he believes, from myth.

The motifs that recur across fiction are called archetypes and refer to a sense of pattern or model used in creation. Writers have a stock of archetypes available to them as they are not only derived from myth but have been formulated into conventions (Frye, 1963:25).

According to Frye, myths and archetypes are provided by the collected and experienced memories of society. In fact, “... the myth *is* the archetype ...” [original italics] (Frye, 1963:15) This myth is divided into a table of four phases:

1. The dawn, spring and birth phase. Myths of the birth of the hero, of revival and resurrection, of creation and (because the four phases are a cycle) of the defeat of the powers of darkness, winter and death. Subordinate characters: the father and the mother. The archetype of romance and of most dithyrambic and rhapsodic poetry.
2. The zenith, summer, and marriage or triumph phase. Myths of apotheosis, of the sacred marriage, and of entering into Paradise. Subordinate characters: the companion and the bride. The archetype of comedy, pastoral and idyll.
3. The sunset, autumn and death phase. Myths of fall, of the dying god, of violent death and sacrifice, and of the isolation of the hero. Subordinate characters: the traitor and the siren. The archetype of tragedy and elegy.
4. The darkness, winter and dissolution phase. Myths of the triumph of these powers; myths of floods and the return of chaos, of the defeat of the hero, and Gotterdammerung myths. Subordinate characters: the ogre and the witch. The archetype of satire.... (Frye, 1963:16)

A work of fiction might be able to occupy one or more of these phases. The Heart of Redness while falling mainly into the second phase, as I shall show, is also ironic or more properly, satiric, and might therefore also show elements of the fourth phase.

In The Heart of Redness the events of the nineteenth century prove to be trying, even traumatic. The time of the Middle Generations is only referred to indirectly as a time of even greater hardship. In the portion of the novel that is set in the present time, by contrast, the people of Qolorha, while struggling, are reconciling themselves to democracy and the responsibilities and maturity attendant on it. While the Unbelievers and Believers are contesting the nature of the way forward for the village both camps alike face a future that is actually ‘triumphant’ for themselves. Mda, while looking back to a time of pain, is more forward looking. While there are concerns about democracy and progress there is no doubt that the future of this village is stable in the new South Africa.



The pastoral is also a “[m]yth of apotheosis” (Frye, 1963:16). The character of Camagu could be seen to represent the apotheosis of the individual subject. At first he is a cynic whose main concern is the satisfaction of his ‘famous’ lust. He finds himself in Qolorha after meeting a beautiful woman in Johannesburg and decides to follow her to her home. While he does not meet up with until she is dying, he undergoes a change of attitude towards women. His early feelings of repugnance towards Qukezwa are eventually replaced by an attraction and then a love for her. His libido takes a back seat to his development. He is a reconciled person by the end of the novel. He is reconciled to his past, his nature and his future.

His initial ambivalence and despair about finding employment gives way to excitement over opportunities for sustainable self employment, not only for himself but for the villagers as well.

The land is also seen to undergo a change, from being degraded to being valued as a significant ecological and historical site. The land is thus not only restored but is seen to be in the best state that it can be.

For Frye the pastoral is about "... entering into Paradise" (Frye, 1963:16). The premise of the prophecies of Mlanjeni and the Nongqawuse was that the dead would arise and the cattle and grain would be restored to the Xhosa people. The Xhosa people would have their Golden Age restored to them. They were, indeed, anticipating entering paradise and looked forward to being relieved of their suffering and struggle.

The subordinate characters of pastoral are "...the companion and the bride" (Frye, 1963:16). If Camagu is the protagonist then Qukezwa is most certainly the companion and the bride. Camagu, in fact, sets the entire village abuzz with speculation as to his matrimonial prospects. At first Xoliswa Ximiya is reputed to be his future wife. Her parents, indeed the entire village is most concerned that Xoliswa Ximiya cannot 'find a man.' Xoliswa Ximiya, however is more married to her career and eventually leaves the village to take up an important post in the department of education. Camagu causes great sensation in the village when he starts spending time with Qukezwa. His search for

NomaRussia on the pretext that she worked for him is also seen through by Qukezwa but these are not the major concerns and provide more comic relief in the novel.

In addition, according to Frye “[t]he quest of the hero also tends to assimilate the oracular....” (Frye, 1963:17). The character of Camagu is more of an anti-hero but he could also be said to perform an oracular function. He ends up not only very active in the village but as a vocal opponent of the proposed development. He is able to clarify a way forward for the village that allows them to retain ownership of the area and their lifestyles while creating employment generating income from ecotourism. As a catalyst he allows the women to challenge the patriarchal nature of rural village life.

Frye further tabulates the comic phase which contains the pastoral. He points out the nature of the pastoral (or comic) which is the same as that of the tragic in specific terms which I would now like to explore in relation to The Heart of Redness. Firstly he says that

In the comic vision the *human* world is a community, or a hero who represents the wish-fulfillment of the reader. The archetype of images of symposium, communion, order, friendship and love. ... Marriage or some equivalent consummation belongs to the comic vision; ... All divine, heroic, angelic or other superhuman communities follow the human pattern. (Frye, 1963:19)

I am not sure to what extent the reader’s wish-fulfillment is a desirable end in a post-colonial era. It would be more proper to challenge the reader. Considering the fact that more non-Xhosa people would read this novel not only in South Africa but overseas as well, readers are disrupted from positions of comfort in having to contend with tongue twisting names and concepts.

The novel speaks to a sense of community that is ordered and organized even if along archaic lines. The position of chief, for example, is open to abuse and the positions of women are as dependants of either their husbands or fathers. It is also clearly a time of transition for example when Qukweza challenges the court or the inkundla and says “[i]n the new South Africa ... there is no discrimination, it does not work” (Mda, 2000:246).

As we have seen marriage forms a part of the plot of the novel. It is not always conventional in its treatment of marriage. The consummation of Camagu and Qukezwa’s relationship is even immaculate. Qukwezwa’s singing while they’re on the back of a horse brings Camagu to orgasm and she is unknowingly impregnated in this way.

2. In the comic vision the *animal* world is a community of domesticated animals, usually a flock of sheep, or a lamb, or one of the gentler birds, usually a dove. The archetype of pastoral images. (Frye, 1963:19)

While not domesticated, the birds that inhabit the tree at Zim’s homestead could be said to illustrate this point. Zim and Qukezwa are capable of communicating with the birds and each other by means of whistles. When Zim and Bhonco’s relationship degenerates into aggression Zim is said to send the birds to harass Bhonco.

3. In the comic vision the *vegetable* world is a garden, grove or park, or a tree of life or a rose or lotus. Archetype of Arcadian images, such as that of Marvell’s green world or of Shakespeare’s forest comedies. (Frye, 1963:20)

Apart from the gigantic tree that inhabits Zim’s homestead the entire region is depicted as idyllic. The vegetable world or the natural environment is neither a garden nor a farm in

the sense that it is cultivated. The ecology of the area is not pristine and has been under threat from alien species. Qukezwa serves as a custodian of the environment in that she roots out alien species of trees. The idea of conservation is underscored and the people have to adjust to the needs of the area in terms of exploiting the natural resources. Qukezwa also challenges traditional and patriarchal understanding of the environment when she insists that alien vegetation is threatening the indigenous plants and trees.

4. In the comic vision the *mineral* world is a city, or one building or temple, or one stone, normally a glowing precious stone-in fact the whole comic series, especially the tree, can be conceived of as luminous or fiery. The archetype of geometrical images: the “starlit dome” belongs here. (Frye, 1963:20)

The fig tree on Zim's homestead is a spiritual place. It is said that "[t]he wild fig tree knows all his secrets. It is his confessional" (Mda, 2000:40). Furthermore it is "... directly linked to the ancestors" (40) who are all "... regular visitors to this tree"(41).

5. In the comic vision the *unformed* world is a river, traditionally fourfold, which influenced the Renaissance image of the temperate body with its four humours. (Frye, 1963:20)

In the novel the ancestors and the cattle are said to be coming from the sea. There are visions of them in the sea and the mist. The invaders will also be driven back into the sea on the day of resurrection according to Nongqawuse. It could be said that the sea serves as a spiritual terrain which is separate from the physical. Mda's novel ends on a cryptic note. Qukezwa wants to teach her unwilling son Heitsi to swim. At this point it appears as if the Qukezwa of the past and the Qukezwa of the present time in the novel are both spoken of simultaneously. Qukezwa reflects “Oh this Heitsi! He is afraid of the sea. How

will he survive without the sea? How will he carry out this business of saving his people?” (Mda, 2000: 319). Qukezwa drags him into the water but he pulls away, screaming “No mama! No! This boy does not belong in the sea! This boy belongs in the man village!”(320) The two women both are represented as spiritual, almost priestly figures. If the sea is seen as the place for the unformed then this ending might suggest that women are the keepers of it. When Camagu wants to harvest mussels from the sea it the women teach him how.

Frye’s theory, comprehensive as it appears, does allow for a nuanced reading of Mda’s work. It is not to say that myth and culture are universalised, only to say that literature and myth can only show that while traditions may be similar or common across cultures, they also reflect these traditions in very different ways.



Chapter four: the role of irony in Zakes Mda's The Heart of Redness

Irony is defined as " ... a subtly humorous perception of inconsistency, in which an apparently straightforward statement or event is undermined by its context so as to give it a very different significance" (Baldick, 1990:114). Apart from the humour that usually accompanies it the use of irony also allows one to reassign significance to not only events but people and traditions as well. In this chapter I would like to examine the use of structural and verbal irony in The Heart of Redness and show how this allows new ways of reading South African literature.

For Frye irony may be read as one of the "... attempts to give form to the shifting ambiguities and complexities of unidealized existence" (Frye, 1957:223). Furthermore "... the central principle of ironic myth is best approached as a parody of romance: the application of romantic mythical forms to a more realistic content which fits them in unexpected ways" (223). While I propose to analyse The Heart of Redness from the perspective of Frye's phase of summer, it may be noted that The Heart of Redness may also be read from the perspective of Frye's phase of winter in which his myths of satire and irony are located.

In setting the story in the Eastern Cape, Mda revisits the nineteenth century colonial landscape while creating a narrative that is different to both official historical texts and also the remembered past. Mda's work goes counter to the historical text, concerning South Africa, in imagining historical contexts and scenarios. A society and place that has

seen itself conquered now also sees itself reborn and restored through the interweaving of a text that draws heavily on history and myth.

The Heart of Redness uses structural irony in order to tell of a painful past without resorting to tragedy. The history of the nineteenth century in the Eastern Cape is, of necessity, one of imperialist expansion, oppression, famine and death. Mda's treatment of it, while sticking closely to history, robs it of its sting. In J. M. Coetzee's work from Dusklands, published in 1973 to Disgrace published in 2000, for example, one is discomfited by the violence and degradation inherent in the colonization and apartheid occupation of South Africa. Mda, however, is able to represent the moment of colonization rather wryly without shock or sentiment. Xikixa, the headless ancestor, is said to have "...ended up as stew in a British pot" (Mda, 2000:26). The characters are presented from within their own frames of reference, which is a non European one. They maintain an integrity that firstly colonization and then apartheid ostensibly sought to rob them of. Mda's work is no less capable of undermining history than is Coetzee's.

The fact of the disintegration of the nation of the amaXhosa is what underpins this novel. The events of the nineteenth century, starting with colonization and culminating in the cattle killing saw the destruction of a proud nation. The events of the present day in the book tell of a renewal and regeneration of the people of the Eastern Cape. The pastoral themes of regeneration and renewal, however, underpin and highlight the original state of defeat of the amaXhosa. The nineteenth century saw division in the ranks of the

amaXhosa and the disintegration of their society. It is a tragic irony that in order to celebrate this renewal, the defeat past has to be acknowledged.

It is, of course, the narrator who sets the tone of the novel and asserts the irony in it. In The Heart of Redness the narrator is omniscient and all seeing. The narrator is intrusive on the characters and the plot yet s/he is rendered impersonal and objective through the use of irony. The narrator does not does not claim to be authoritative as in the traditional natural realist text. S/he "... restricts his [or her] knowledge ... out of rhetorical considerations..." (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983:79). The narrator thus, while external, intrudes on events within the novel, to the extent that s/he comments on the irony of a situation or statement.



There are also straightforward comic incidents as in the school concert which degenerates into chaos as the villagers play up to each other and the tension escalates to a fever pitch between Zim and Bhonco who carry their feud to new heights. It is at the concert, too, that Camagu, too, makes a fool of himself by pursuing Qukezwa in front of the entire village.

For the most part verbal irony is employed not only by the narrator but by the characters in the novel. They serve as focalisers not only in their individual capacities but as a community as well. We read, for example that it is "... uncanny how the people of Qolorha-by-Sea know things about their fellow citizens that the unhappy compatriots do not know about themselves" (Mda, 2000:205). Camagu also finds that they communicate

with him "... by completely ignoring him and addressing each other about him, and supplying the answers on his behalf" (197).

One major aspect of the novel is, of course, the role of past trauma, or history of violence, as it affects the present. The villagers of Qolorha and their ancestors were conquered, firstly by the British and then by the apartheid state of South Africa. Very little to nothing is said of the time of apartheid except that it was a time of "... surviving and overcoming ... oppression" (4). It was "[o]ften like a nightmare" (1). The trader Dalton, the narrator says has a skin that is "...white like the skins of those who caused the sufferings of the Middle Generations" (7). Of Dalton himself the verdict is that "...his heart is an umXhosa heart" (7) The novel, while pondering the complexities coming from a racialised past, is clear not to perpetuate any racial stereotypes itself.



Of colonization the novel is fairly ambivalent and tongue in cheek. Colonisation is not so much tragic as it is absurd. When confronted by the sons of Xikixa, demanding to know why their father's head is being boiled, John Dalton the colonizing ancestor of John Dalton the latter day trader in Qolorha, replies "... in his perfect isiXhosa. 'We are civilised men, we don't eat people.' ... '[t]hese heads are either going to be souvenirs, or will be used for scientific enquiry'" (21). The contradiction of the statement is clearly lost on the nineteenth century Briton. The brothers do not know what to make of this savage behaviour by the British.

During the "...Great War of Mlanjeni..." (19) a frustrated Sir Harry Smith is reported as saying "I have loved these people and considered them my children. But now I say exterminate the savage beasts!" (20). Again the contradiction between the two sentences and the irony therein is not considered out of place for the times.

In exhorting the amaXhosa to accept British rule Dalton exclaims: "Land is a small price to pay for a gift that will last you a lifetime ... that will be enjoyed by your future generations. The gift of British civilisation!" (141). The value of that gift is best determined by the state that they left the place of their rule in. The Eastern Cape Province is the poorest in South Africa today. The governor Sir George Grey may not be well aware of this at the time but in the novel he introduces a new judicial system that he hopes



... will gradually undermine and destroy Xhosa laws and customs, ... 'European laws will, by imperceptible degrees, take the place of their own barbarous customs, and any Xhosa chief of importance will be daily brought into contact with a talented and honorable European gentleman, who will hourly interest himself in the advance and improvement of the entire tribe, and must in process of time gain an influence over the native races. (154ff)

The motives of the conquerors are therefore not as altruistic as it is initially claimed to be. The use of the words 'barbarous' and 'honourable' in relation to the amaXhosa and English respectively to ascribe character to each is ludicrous, most certainly by today's, and arguably any, sort of standard. The tone is not so much offensive, again, as over the top, almost absurd in its logic. The context that a contemporary reading would provide to that statement today assuredly undermines it of the authority that it would have had a century and a half ago.

It is not only through military occupation that the British conquer what is to become the Eastern Cape. Religion plays no small part in the colonizing process. Of Dalton the trader it is said: "...his grandfather was a trader of a different kind. As a missionary he was a merchant of salvation" (7). Mhlakaza, said to be the first convert to the Anglican Church changed his name to Wilhelm Goliath and he

...used to give the people a lot of pleasure. They watched him carry Merriman's baggage, trudging behind the holy man across vast distances. ... Occasionally when Goliath lagged behind because of the heavy load, Merriman cautioned him against the sin of laziness. When they came to a stream, Goliath washed the holy man's clothes, and while they were drying he preached to whoever was in sight. (53)

It is an extreme irony, pointed out by Mda, that the Christian religion which purported to bring salvation to the people was merely a reinforcing appendage of the colonising mission.



The story of colonization as it is told in The Heart of Redness is also not necessarily one of uniform and unified resistance against the coloniser. Twin-Twin, for the sake of restoring order among his people, is forced into colluding with the very people, who killed and beheaded his father, against the Believers in the cattle killing movement.

Twin-Twin, along with other councilors, is placed on the payroll of the government as a means of seducing their loyalty from the chiefs to the British Government. This is not necessarily true of Twin-Twin but it was certainly the case that:

Colonial money was reputed to be very powerful in the purchase of goods that could be brought only in the trading stores that were emerging through kwaXhosa. Many people bought such goods with grain. But those who had colonial money, the very money adorned with the image of her Britannic majesty, were men of status (154)

Over time the British became accepted as the dominant power in the land of the amaXhosa. The irony is, of course, that the British were not superior at all except in terms of their might of force and capital. They were not necessarily more progressive or advanced in any other sense. An exchange between Sir George Grey and Twin-Twin illustrates this:

... even those amaXhosa who benefited from ... medicine continued to go to their own traditional doctors as well. 'It is because Fitzgerald heals only the ailing body,' explained Twin-Twin. 'But our amaXhosa doctors are also spiritual healers. They are like priests in your churches They don't only end there. They heal the head and the mind.' 'That is precisely what we must change,' said the governor. 'We must get rid of all the superstitions. That is what civilization will do for you. (145)

What we now realize is that the traditional views of healing from many parts of the world are now recognized as being more progressive or holistic than that of the western ones.



With such a deeply divisive history, South Africans have, since 1994 had to grapple with the truth of the past and to get beyond that. One of the questions that The Heart of Redness poses is whether it is possible to be reconciled to the past. Bhonco demands the head of his ancestor from Dalton, whose ancestor was responsible for removing it. The comic absurdity of Bhonco's demand is apparent as is the vehemence and urgency of his demand that leads to him attacking and seriously assaulting Dalton. This attack happens after Bhonco's hopes are dashed when the proposal for the casino and water sports complex is rejected. He feels that "[t]he village ... lost a glittering gambling paradise that would have changed life for everyone. Instead it got a rustic holiday camp that lacks the glamour of the gambling city" (314). While Camagu is the main opponent to the proposed development, Bhonco chooses to vent his spleen on Dalton. The past and its

perceived injustice is insurmountable for Bhonco whose headless ancestor is held responsible for sufferings of the Believers and their descendants.

While democracy has been achieved it is not one that Camagu feels is quite what was intended. He feels that “The whole country is ruled by greed. Everyone wants to have his or her snout in the trough” (319). Camagu’s disenchantment initially stemmed from the fact that, having grown up overseas, he returned in 1994, to find himself “...an exile in his own country” (28). Having gained a doctoral degree in communications he found himself unable to find employment in four years except for part time teaching because it was felt that he “...never learnt the freedom dance” (31), the toyi-toyi, the dance of the struggle against apartheid. Because he refused to trade on his connections with people in power he found that despite being qualified for all the jobs that he had applied for



“[t]he broadcasting corporation did not respond, the Department of Health merely acknowledged his application and forever held its peace, the government information service called him for an interview and then forgot of his existence” (32).

Apart from merely stating that he was unsuccessful Camagu also manages to imply a that these organizations behaved in a way that reflected badly on themselves. Camagu found that even the private sector and the parastatals had no place for him:

He discovered that the corporate world did not want qualified blacks. They preferred the inexperienced ones who were only too happy to be placed in some glass affirmative-action office where they were displayed as paragons of empowerment. ... The beautiful men and women in glass displays did not like the Camagu’s of this world. They were a threat to their luxury German sedans, housing allowances and expense accounts. (33)

Democracy in South Africa, Camagu finds, is an idea that does not match up to its ideal: “[a]ll along he had operated under the misguided notion that things happened for you

because you deserved them, not because you had the most influential lobbyists” (35). He had not advanced in his career because he was not a member of

... the Aristocrats of the Revolution, an exclusive club ... composed of the ruling elites, their families and close friends. Some of them were indeed leaders of the freedom struggle, while others had used their status and wealth to snake their way into the very heart of the organization. (36)

Through Camagu we find that democracy in South Africa is not ideal.

The proposed development constitutes a new kind of settlement or colonization of the area. In addition to the proposed casino the developers, a Mr Smith and Mr Jones even consider a “... retirement village for millionaires ...” (234). The two argue the merits of “... creating a beautiful English countryside versus that of constructing a crime free timeshare paradise” (234). Mr Smith wants to call it “Willowbrook Grove” to which Jones responds “How can we call it a grove when we’re going to cut down all these trees to make way for rides?” (234). Smith’s solution to this is simple “We’ll uproot a lot of these native shrubs and wild bushes and plant a beautiful English garden” (234).

The idea of development that Camagu, himself, initially subscribes to is one that supports the idea of a casino and water sports complex for Qolorha. It is only when Qukezwa spells out the implications for the residents of the proposed development that he begins to realise how dependant sustainable development for rural communities are on sound ecological practice. The proposed development would entail razing the entire region to the ground. The villagers would lose their land, access to the sea, have no guarantee of employment except as menial labour and would then have to pay to gain access to the area they currently live in.

Even though Camagu is successful in his campaign to prevent the development there is a plenitude of issues over which to disagree. Even ecotourism does not come without its controversies. The villagers set great store by their alien vegetation because it is foreign. They take for granted that the environment is theirs that they may exploit as they see fit. They have to learn to revalue their environment and revise their ideas about what constitutes value to them and their surroundings. Camagu points out that it is precisely because people are not involved in taking decisions that concerns them that causes the failure of development programmes.

It is in much the same way that people have to be revalued. Qukezwa is described by Camagu in unflattering terms when he first meets her. [Insert quote] The clothes and the description signify someone who does not have status. Camagu detests Qukezwa on sight. He finds, however, that she possesses a great many skills and values that wins him over ultimately.

The devaluing of culture is also apparent attitudes displayed to Xhosa tradition in the novel. People who follow tradition are accused of embracing redness or of stepping back into savagery and barbarism. Camagu observes that few people wear traditional dress.

It is sad, he thinks, that when nations of the world wear their costumes with pride, the amaXhosa people despise theirs. They were taught by missionaries that it is a sign of civilisation, of ubugqobhoka, to despise isikhakha as the clothing of the amaqaba – those who have not seen the light and who still smear themselves with red ochre. (61)

Even within an African context, the idea of an African identity is still defined through an ‘other’ mode. Camagu finds that

Even today the civilised ones condescendingly visit the clothes of the amaqaba, and wear them as curiosities during special cultural occasions. As their everyday attire the civilised ones wear German and Java prints that are embroidered in the West African tradition, but they still boast that they are in African dress. To them, African fashion means West African, and never the clothing of the amaXhosa or some other ethnic group of South Africa. (61).

The traditions of the people of South Africa have thus been devalued to the extent that people are seen to take no pride in it and are eager to take on the traditions of societies that are seen as more ‘civilised’ or modern, be it Europe or Africa. It is therefore ironic when the archaic fashions of the older villagers becomes all the rage in the cities and becomes a source of income for them.

While the latter day villagers are not in agreement on these and many other issues, they are agreed that their life as they know it, albeit on different terms, is worth preserving.

They do not consider that they live on the margins in this country or even the province.

While they are far away from the huge cities, they consider themselves to be at a centre that constitutes the metropolitan centre. Qolorha with its history and location is

appreciated and valued. NoPetticoat and Bhonco for example, remonstrate with their daughter Xoliswa Ximiya who wants to move to Pretoria

... or at the very least ... Bisho. ‘Bisho! Do you know where Bisho is from here? And Pretoria! Pretoria! No one in our family has ever been there,’ cries Bhonco. He is choking with anger. ‘You want to kill your father?’ asks NoPetticoat. (11)

NoPetticoat tries to strike a compromise: “If you like towns and cities so much, my child, we have never stopped you from visiting Centani or even Butterworth...” (11) to which

Xoliswa Ximiya responds “...Centani is just a big village and Butterworth is a small town” (11)

The feud and opposition between Belief and Unbelief show that divisions in society in South Africa occur not only along racialised lines. Divisions exist along many lines and even within homogeneous ethnic societies there are distinctions in traditions, religious and cultural practices. There are many fine differences that complicate a simplified ‘us’ and ‘them’ understanding of society and people. Dalton, for example, is an isiXhosa man of British colonial descent. He is married to an Afrikaner woman and is therefore also affiliated to an Afrikaner ethnicity albeit to a lesser extent than his Xhosa and English ethnicity. The land is said to hold many nations. Alliances are made between in and between clans and nations and change over time. Divisions also happen in clans and communities. The lines are also crossed and recrossed in many ways. The Khoikhoi people abandon their traditional alliance with the British, for example, and ally themselves with the amaXhosa against them.



Mda is gently ironic in his treatment of the Believers. Of the prophetess Nonqawuse it is said that “... she seemed confused and disorientated most of the time” (59). The conversion of the people to Belief in this time of stress is also not without its comedy:

[t]he fact that only Nongqawuse, Nombanda and Mhlakaza could see or speak to the new people enhanced the prestige of the prophets. Many of those who were tempted not to believe were converted by this fact.

Paradoxically, the lack of evidence was a persuading factor for many who were actually tempted to not believe.

The Unbelievers are also depicted in a comic fashion. Bhonco as an Unbeliever cannot believe in anything, he can only unbelieve. The ritual ceremony of sadness is based on a

dance borrowed from the Khoikhoi people. These people ask for their dance to be returned and the Unbelievers are no longer able to perform their ritual of sadness. Bhonco's own wife deserts him, he believes, to join the co-operative. When Bhonco breaks down he starts laughing which is uncharacteristic, his normal way of showing happiness is through crying.

Mda's use of irony is indeed humorous but could be argued to have a more serious intent. Colonisation, war and radical social change over the previous one hundred and fifty years have marked the people of Qolorha in profound ways. The use of irony allows one to read the disjuncture between the changing signs of South Africa and their significance. The disjuncture reveals an ideal or principle that underpins the beliefs, rights and privileges of people in society.



Chapter five: new ways of reading and seeing in South African literature

In The Heart of Redness Zakes Mda explores ways of representing, subject, community, country and history. Issues that are raised share the concerns of traditional South African Literature and criticism in representing a South African experience. From Olive Schreiner's The Story of an African Farm writers in the liberal tradition have challenged the South African social and political systems.

The pastoral tradition fails according to JM Coetzee, in that it does not always live up to the liberal humanist tradition of the West and it is the counter-pastoral or story of the "anti-garden" that prevails with integrity in the South African narrative. Coetzee says that



The literature of white pastoral ... marks off for itself, and defends, a territory "outside" history where the disturbing realities of land and labour can be bracketed off, and questions of justice and power translated into questions of legal succession and personal relations between masters and servants. (Coetzee, 1988:11)

The pastoral, in a new age, will respond to new conditions in society. The pastoral of democracy in South Africa will allow for a revising of the pastoral. It is not to say, however, that a new tradition is separate or removed from a previous one or is written on its own terms. The ideas of the past are very much a concern of the present as Mda shows in his novel.

The political landscape of South Africa is represented as a caricature. Indeed Camagu is cynically critical and direct to the point of bluntness about the party political machinery

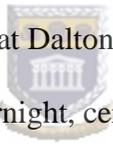
and collaboration of corporate capital in the exploitation of the people in the country. Mda's criticism of developments in an age of democracy show, certainly, that the present government is not without its faults and that the transition from apartheid to democracy is not clear cut. It is of note that JM Coetzee came under fire in parliament for Disgrace because it was felt that he was critical of the new South Africa. Mda by contrast does not hold his punches about life in that same new South Africa but did not elicit as strong a response.

The Heart of Redness shows how identities may still be reified in society. Mda challenges reification of identities and ideas. He presents traces of the outmoded concept of racial identity. He explores more complex issues of cultural and belief systems and hybrid ethnic identities within a perceived heterogeneous section of society. Mda does not subscribe to the old nineteenth-century biological definitions of race, on which apartheid was based and he interrogates the old concept of racial difference. The character of Jim Dalton, whose ancestor is the settler-soldier turned trader in the novel, presents an opportunity to do so.

Dalton is represented as a member of the community. Dalton's ancestry makes him the butt of village jokes but he was born in the region, attended initiation school with the boys of his age and is considered a Xhosa man. He is said to speak better isiXhosa than anyone else in the village. He is considered an umXhosa by the villagers. Dalton's role in society, however, is not that clearly and simplistically depicted because he also has an allegiance to 'liberal' white people as well as his wife's (Afrikaner) people. Dalton's

identity while hybrid and fluid across ethnic categories is still complicated by a racist nomenclature.

Mrs Dalton clearly represents an outdated racialised perception of identity and power. She, for example, refers to Xoliswa Ximiya as “Koliswa Kimiya” (Mda, 2000:256). The fact that she cannot correctly pronounce the name in Xhosa let alone communicate in the language suggests that she is unlike her husband in that she does not value Xhosa tradition and culture. She is patronising in her relation to the villagers when they enter the store.

Even Dalton himself, because “... customs do not die easily” (162), offers Zim a ride in the back of his bakkie despite the fact that  Dalton is by himself in the vehicle. Mda suggests that change is not wrought overnight, certain things might not even change consistently or uniformly. He seems to be saying that communities need to be in charge of the nature and pace of change. He also suggests that people are capable of achieving change through reskilling and re-educating themselves.

The traditions of the Believers and Unbelievers also show how identities may still be reified in society. The cult of Belief and Unbelief originated in the strife of the nineteenth century Eastern Cape colony. The times have changed but their traditions have not. Bhonco and Zim the two who uphold the traditions and the feud refuse to consider that changing times call for changes in cultural practice. On the contrary, Zim takes to reviving certain practices of the Believers such as shaving of eyebrows and

purging. He even takes to looking out for the Russians who were supposed to defend the amaXhosa against the British in the nineteenth century.

Mda's humorous depiction of the traditions of Believers and Unbelievers undermines that reification. He does not favour one side over the other, in the same way that he does not take an ideological position on colonisation. He relates history in a way that is almost lifted off the pages of Jeff Peires's work about the cattle killings. It is clear that he does this with the intention of showing that history is perceived differently from within various frameworks of belief. Mda is looking at history from the framework of an African system. He also offers an inclusive way of looking at South African society. The Heart of Redness could be seen to reclaim the pastoral from the preserve of 'white' writing, not as 'African' or 'Black' writing, but as South African writing. This novel, then, meets Coetzee's condition for authenticity in text, in a South African context, that it be written 'from within' an indigenous perspective.

The allusion to Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad is another pun of Mda's. Conrad's modernist journey into the dark psyche of the colonial adventurer is rendered as gothic compared to The Heart of Redness. This other journey could be seen as a rather facetious one towards political correctness but could also be read as a journey towards humanness; a journey towards healing. The concept of Ubuntu is never mentioned by name in the novel but is a focaliser through which the novel can be read. The community of Qolorha may well be decidedly split in opinion over a great many issues but Mda's narrative emphasizes the humanness of its characters with an affectionate, objective eye that

locates the characters as unbroken after a time of great change and dislocation. Despite trauma people celebrate rather than mourn life. If the Unbelievers in the book are to be believed sadness itself becomes the basis for celebration. The people of Qolorha seem to have achieved that regeneration prophesied by Nonqawuse in the middle of the nineteenth century. The humour that obtains from the narrative is located in the humour of the community represented in the novel.

Apart from the values, this community is represented by the outward practice of culture. These practices, that are inimical to Xoliswa Ximiya, serve as examples of the backwardness or 'redness' of this community to her. Redness is initially a symbol or an icon of a culture that has been devalued not only by the past but by an industrialized, consumerist, capitalist culture. This redness, however, is found by Camagu to be, not only preferable to city culture, but also the basis for successful business enterprise in the form of a co-operative that he establishes along with some women in the village. The clothing styles of the rural community become fashionable to the people in the city. The redness of the ochre represents more than the pristine earthiness of a bygone era. The redness is permeated with the values and memory of a community that could be said to finally be coming into its own, or could also be said to be coming of age. In the novel this redness is associated by Xoliswa Ximiya with people who refuse to move with the times. Through The Heart of Redness it may be that the times are finally beginning to move with the community of Qolorha.

The novel allows for challenges to dualistic thinking. It might be that dualisms are constructed not only by the colonizers and the settlers but by the colonised and postcolonial democrats as well. An 'us' and 'them' mentality is evident in the way that favours are dished out by the political elite. It is also evident in the way that development initiatives do not take into account the views or the will of the people as in the water project that was started in the village without consulting the villagers.

In the novel the land is represented not as a clearly demarcated and individually owned space but as an organic communal and liminal *milieu* albeit in a hotly contested and politicized environment. People lay claim to beliefs and ritual practices but the land is undeniably possessed by all who live on it. The land, while sensitive to the human predator, is elastic in the way that it accommodates instead of excluding people from itself.



JM Coetzee in In the Heart of the Country and in Disgrace attempts to disrupt the relationship between the individual and the land, indeed attempts a disavowal of land as an instrument of white (particularly Afrikaner) identity. The conventional pastoral tradition in South Africa selectively applied romantic views of nature within the colonial and apartheid situation.

The Heart of Redness does not fall into an oppositional way of representing the land or of contesting dispossession. It, however, reflects an attitude to land that could be non-possessive, non-invasive. It certainly shows a corruption in the way that communities

relate to the land in a contemporary context. The notion of settlement is also one that is shown to be not a peculiarly western concept. The move to settlement is seen as a universal impulse among people and an inevitable outcome of a mixed farming economy, be it in a Euro-centric or Afro-centric society. This is a crucial factor because one of the key arguments of European colonists was that they would bring progress and development to the people of the Eastern Cape. Mda shows that development is a crucial concern to the people, not only in present time but also in the past. Colonial perceptions of Africa as undeveloped are thus also challenged.

The novel also has ecological concerns. Development of any kind places demands on the land and the novel suggests that models of development take into account the needs of the environment. The proposed golf estate development constitutes a new kind of settlement or colonization of the area. Camagu opposes this with a sound proposal for ecotourism which respects the environment while also empowering the people in it. This is hotly contested not only by the people who live there but also by the people who govern them from afar.

Camagu's move to the rural areas is derided by the schoolmistress who yearns for the big city but has no experience of it. Her desire is nonetheless valid for her in pursuing her professional career. For Camagu the move from the big city is the making of him both professionally and personally. The issues of finding work, love and pursuing a political struggle with integrity appear to collide for him in the village to his own great advantage.

JM Coetzee in In The Heart of the Country depicts that heart as a desolate, isolated space without a sense of community. The heart of Mda's country, by contrast, is a space that is located in a lively sense of community. The city, while of interest, is not the centre of interest. The village of Qolorha is not only the heartland in The Heart of Redness, but arguably the metropolitan centre as well. Bhonco and NoPetticoat, for example, cannot understand Xoliswa Ximiya's desire to leave, not only the village, but the province, for Pretoria. Wendy Woodward, in a study of the comic mode employed by Mda in The Heart of Redness, argues that Mda challenges dualistic thinking (2003). She finds that "“Jim” does not go to the metropolis to become urbanised and street-wise; instead, Camagu, the exile returned from the United States, leaves the “deadly streets” of Hillbrow for the Eastern Cape Village ...” (Woodward, 2003:174). Camagu's decision to stay and participate in the growth of the village can therefore also be seen to challenge the idea that the movement away from the rural area to the city is inevitable as a result of the pressures of capitalism that was introduced with the imposition of British colonial rule. In the aftermath of the cattle killings it was relatively easy for the government to use the people of the Eastern Cape as a cheap pool of unskilled labour in the developing industry driven economy in the emerging South African State.

The communion with the environment and animals is another theme in common with the work of JM Coetzee. Mda's treatment of the relation between Zim, Qukezwa and the animal world is more in keeping with a magic than a realist tradition. Zim and Qukezwa speak in whistles, the language of the birds, not only to each other and other Believers but

to the birds as well. Zim is able to send birds to continually Bhonco. Qukezwa's relationship with her horse is also out of the ordinary:

Whenever the horse has had its fill of grazing, it comes looking for her everywhere. If she is not at the cottage, it goes to Nongqawuse's Valley. If she is not there still, it goes to the sea, particularly the lagoon. She is sure to be there. They love each other, Gxagxa and Qukezwa. It was her father's favourite horse. Her father lives in this horse. She wouldn't dare do anything shameful in its presence, nor utter words she would never have uttered in her father's presence. She gives it the same kind of respect she gave her father. (316)

The horse and birds are invested with an agency that renders them as individual as the humans in the novel. Mda thus challenges a dualist way of thinking of and representing animals in a manner that is direct and imaginative.

Dualisms in gender are also challenged here Mda. Xoliswa Ximiya inherits the scars of history that have been passed down from father to the "... first boy child ..." (12) in the Unbeliever's line from the time of her ancestor Twin-Twin's flogging at the hands of the followers of the prophet Mlanjeni. Xoliswa Ximiya's inheritance, as a female, of the scars of history could be seen as the breakdown, in the novel, of a gendered world view and tradition. Women in the novel are depicted as independent, strong willed people. Qukezwa, as another example, is clearly the one who exercises power and control in her relationship with Camagu.

Language is another terrain where defamiliarisation in the text occurs. The language used in the book, in particular the non-western language - that is the use of Xhosa names and terminology without a glossary appended could be argued to discomfit a non-native audience. Mda has a substantial audience overseas and also teaches and resides in the

United States of America. One could argue, however, that the non-Xhosa reader is rightly decentred in this way. This technique, if intentional, is apt in underscoring the reader's relation to narrative that is rooted in power discourse. This could be seen also to be directly responding to Coetzee's appeal that a South African narrative be characterised in a medium that is not bounded by the use of the English language. The novel is in written in English but the narrative is a South African one. Coetzee's concern then about English as irrelevant to Africa is also addressed by Mda who shows that the English language may well be an authentic language for relating South African narrative.

The narrative also succeeds in situating the reader in the liminal terrain that exists between the distant past and the present. In the final chapter the narrative does not distinguish between the time of present and the time of the past. There is no fence or border between the past and the present. History is one of many themes that layer the novel. It is rather an endless present that is evoked by the narrative. This, however, does not allow for easy disavowals of the past. Characters are burdened, literally, with the scars of history as in the case of the firstborn line of the Unbelievers.

The distinction between life and death is another example of disruption in the novel. The ancestors are dead but not removed from society. They are said to be not only interested but influential in the affairs of their descendants. After their lifelong feud Zim's death represents defeat for Bhonco, for Zim

... is now venerated as an ancestor. The Zim for whom the living slaughter animals so that he may communicate their messages to Qamata, while Bhonco languishes on earth. The Zim who is capable of telling lies about him to the other ancestors, and of influencing them to distance themselves from him. (315)

The Heart of Redness as a form of pastoral thus incorporates African values into a literary tradition that has originated in ‘settler’ origins. The Heart of Redness, in fusing the tradition of the plaasroman with that of Xhosa tradition is thus a literary hybrid. Hybridity is o part and parcel of the human condition according to Mda. He also fuses cultures: The San or Khoikhoi and the Xhosa traditions meet at one point in the story and that hybridity becomes a characteristic of the descendants. The cross pollination of myths and practices is seamless and opens up not only a dream world but also opportunities for survival through collaboration between people of differing and at times even opposing traditions. Twin and Qukezwa’s union is that of a man and a woman; it is a union between two distinct cultural and linguistic traditions. The two traditions have a shared history by nature of proximity. The respective traditions are not mutually exclusive. The Khoikhoi people and the Xhosa do not always fight on the same side. In the portrayal of the relationship between the two, difference is seen as not only existing on the planes of culture and language but on many more complex planes.

Chapter 6: conclusion

The Heart of Redness can be read as a successful response by the writer to the plight of a subject and community, dislocated by history and modern western culture; to compose a democratic South African narrative.

Communities are represented as fragmented by the past (not least by race) and also fragmented through beliefs and practices. In and through representations in art and particularly literature one could possibly be able to conceive of a unity that constitutes South African traditions, a unity that was not present under colonialism and apartheid. Colonialism and apartheid created superficial descriptions (of history, people, traditions) rooted in race and serving as narrow definitions as well. Zakes Mda's The Heart of Redness is an example of a work that goes counter to these early traditions in South Africa.

The novel is important because of its own imaginative strategies, which opens up new ways of looking at the individual subject and society. The use of irony and humour allows for new conceptions of history, land and even business.

The Heart of Redness, while its concerns are pastoral, is an example not so much of the pastoral, as the counter-pastoral novel. The novel depicts a society that was disrupted in the past. The disruptions have damaged society. The novel challenges popular ideas of

the gendered individual, land, history and culture in South Africa today. It is not a utopian view and seeks, instead to relate a narrative that runs counter to it.

The novel responds to Coetzee's desire for an authentic narrative in very interesting ways. It is, for example, the language in which a "... highly problematic South African-colonial identity, can speak to Africa and be spoken to by Africa" (Coetzee, 1988:8) that is spoken of by Coetzee. It is also a narrative that is written 'from the inside' of the African experience. Mda is clearly saying that English may well be a fit medium in which an African narrative may be expressed. He is also saying that although one may have a European origin, it is possible to adapt to an African experience.

I adduce Frye's ideas about the universality of pastoral myth in order to offer a more nuanced reading of pastoral than perhaps Coetzee can give in his essay. Frye's scheme is an interesting and apt way of re-reading Mda. Frye bases his scheme on the anthropological insight that certain myths are universal, in particular myths of the regeneration or renewal of a community, and myths of a 'golden age' and the organic whole, wholesome relation between a community and its natural resources, habitat, environment, and so on, including livestock.

Against the backdrop of the social confusion, misunderstanding and failure of the Xhosa nation in the nineteenth century we have the initial response by a society to this disruption and defeat. We also see now, one hundred and fifty years later, a possibly successful completion of this response in fiction. The novel in our contemporary world

argues a modern negotiation of transformed society and settlement and development. It is a modern negotiation of communal integrity against a tragic historic backdrop. The use of universal myth is particularly apt as an application to an African literary imaginative engagement with a people's tragic history of their own quest for social regeneration that was perceived in the nineteenth century as unsuccessful. The story becomes not one of defeat but one of empowerment. It is not a story of defeat but a story of the people of Qolorha. They are able to rehabilitate their tragic status. Universal myth allows one to look at the human experience as larger than life and certainly larger than history.

To my mind Mda successfully blends both Afrocentric and Eurocentric perspectives in this tradition of the pastoral that is common, certainly to these two cultures. In the same way that he blurs distinctions between the past and the present he also blurs distinctions between European and African subject positions in this country. He offers a frame of reference rooted, I argue, in the spirit of Ubuntu and which alludes to both European and African oral and literary traditions in imagining South Africa.

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