

Tsotsi
Chapters 1-3

Critical issues

1. Assess the characters of the four gang members. How does the writer reveal character?
2. Tension leading up to the murder of Gumboot Dhlamini – techniques used by the writer to create and relieve tension.
3. Relationship between Tsotsi and Boston. What are Boston's feelings towards Tsotsi? Why does Tsotsi beat up Boston violently?
4. The theme of decency. What does Boston mean when he uses the word "decency"? Why is Tsotsi unable to understand what it means to be decent?
5. Tsotsi's actions soon after he beats Boston. Why does Tsotsi run when he leaves Soekie's? Comment on his thoughts as he sits beneath the trees. Critically analyse the spider anecdote.
6. The brief interlude with the woman with the box. Tsotsi thinks about raping the woman but eventually doesn't – why doesn't he attack the woman?

Analysis

Characterisation

Their actions, thoughts and what they say reveal a great deal about the characters of the four gang members.

Tsotsi is the least communicative but most contemplative – there is a quiet assurance about him. He knows that he is feared and loathed but this gives him a sense of satisfaction as he realises he has power over those around him. He makes the decisions for the gang. His thoughts about the other gang members reveal his feelings towards them. "You I can trust...smile hides fear." p.7

Butcher is described as ruthless and dangerous – "small, dangerous eyes...but with impatience" p.6. Tsotsi's thoughts about Butcher reveal that he cannot be trusted and that he hates Tsotsi (hates him perhaps because of Tsotsi's position of leadership and the power that Tsotsi has over him).

Boston is the most sensitive of the four. He is the most civilised and has a keen sense of decency – he is opposed to violence and murder. He tries to delay the gang from going on their usual spree of robbery and violence – note: "Why?" he asked, and played...hands...Sometimes you pick one and he's got nothing." p.7 Boston also gets physically sick after the murder of Gumboot.

Die Aap, as his name suggests, is not of first rate intelligence. He is powerfully built and perhaps stronger than two men put together but can be manipulated easily because of his lack of intelligence and that's why Tsotsi trusts him completely.

Control of tension

There are two distinct periods in the first chapter where tension is generated. The first when the gang members are walking through the township to the train station. Their intentions, it seems, are

very clear to other residents of the township. The mothers pull their children indoors and there are anxious stares from windows. The street becomes silent and deserted. This being a Friday – payday – there is obvious anxiety over the safety of husbands returning home from work with their pay packets. The next period of tension is the moment before the murder of Gumboot – the writer plays out the scene where he zooms in on the three mistakes that cost Gumboot his life. Tension is relieved when the writer flashes back to Gumboot leaving his home for the goldfields p.9 and the description of the train pulling into the station after Gumboot’s murder p.12/13

Relationship between Boston and Tsotsi

We are told in chapter two that Tsotsi hated being asked questions and Boston asked him a lot of questions. Why does he not like to be asked questions? Boston’s questions force Tsotsi to recall his past which he does not want to remember – as long as he submerges his memories he is at ease. Boston also taunts him about his lack of decency. Tsotsi beats Boston not because Boston had done something wrong but because Boston makes him confront the wrong that he has done, and also makes him aware of his pitiful lack of human identity and glaring lack of decent human values.

Theme of Decency

Boston has a keen sense of what decent human behaviour means and is therefore repelled by the mindless violence perpetrated by the gang. He is deeply affected by the murder of Gumboot which makes him physically and emotionally sick – he vomits in the gutter and ponders over what they had done when they are drinking at Soekie’s. The murder as well as the rape of the drunken Rosie prompts Boston to question the gang’s lack of decency and particularly Tsotsi’s inability to understand what decency means. This, in a sense, is a foreshadowing of Tsotsi’s moral growth later in the novel when he begins to learn to behave in a decent way and when he seeks out Boston to question him about moral issues.

Tsotsi’s thoughts and actions after beating Boston

Tsotsi runs after he leaves Soekie’s because in a sense he wants to run away from Boston’s words “Your folks Tsotsi...a dog” p.23/ “You must a soul...got a soul!” p.23 “One day..that day” p.27 – words that dredge up his sordid childhood past, words that remind him of his lack of humanity and decent human values. Tsotsi’s thoughts, as he sits under the trees, once again dwell on Boston and his words and he begins to question why he had chosen Boston for the gang – it soon becomes clear that Boston’s cleverness was why he was chosen – his penchant for detail had saved the gang on many occasions but it was the same intellectualism which results in Boston’s questions and stories (with morals) that Tsotsi resented. Tsotsi also had irrational fears – the phobia for spiders for example. Why was he terrified of spiders? Did spiders and their webs remind him of his own entrapment? Why did Tsotsi not help the handcuffed man being led off by the policeman? This man, like Boston, reminded him of a past he did not want to remember – the man called out his name, David.

Tsotsi and the woman

The meeting is a critical moment in the story – it marks the beginning of Tsotsi’s moral transformation. Looking after the baby gives Tsotsi a sense of purpose and raises his moral conscience. Tsotsi had every intention of attacking the woman but she is saved by the box and the crying baby inside it.

***Tsotsi*: Chapter 4**

Critical Issues

1. Impact of Gangsterism on township residents

How is Cassim and his family affected by Tsotsi's presence in the shop? What does the following line reveal about the reaction of other residents to Tsotsi's presence in their midst: "On Fridays they opened up and made a path for him." (p.39)

2. First turning point in the novel

Tsotsi is presented differently for the first time – he is not confident and cocksure anymore. Provide evidence of this from this chapter. Provide evidence of Tsotsi becoming more sensitive and responsible. What are the implications of Tsotsi consciously attempting to remember his past? In this regard, discuss the link between the baby and the "yellow bitch".

3. Social inequalities in apartheid South Africa

How does the writer explore the unequal lives of blacks and whites in this chapter? What are the links between apartheid and the story of Tsotsi?

Impact of Gangsterism on township residents

Once again the reader is shown how Gangsterism dislocates the lives of township residents. Their fear is so palpable that the reader can, in a sense, feel and taste it.

Note Cassim's reaction. When he notices Tsotsi for the first time in the doorway of his shop, he quickly counts in his mind the number of people in his shop. When he realises there are eight people, he feels slightly more comfortable as this number of people might deter the gangster from attacking and robbing him. Still he feels nervous and his nervousness increases when Tsotsi returns again and again, and when Tsotsi returns the third time and the shop is empty of other customers, Cassim is positively terrified – the bravado is gone ("I fixed him" p.36) and now he is farting and repeating himself. The relief he feels when Tsotsi asks for milk is so palpable, the reader can feel it. Cassim's wife is just as affected. She is nervous, and later cries in the back room when she thought that Cassim had been stabbed. The children also cry hysterically. Not normally generous, Cassim asks his wife to give the old man an extra inch of chew tobacco and asks her to talk to the old man to drag out the sale so that the old man can be detained in the shop longer and they don't have to be alone with Tsotsi. He also switches to Tamil when he talks to his wife knowing that Tsotsi may not be able to understand the Indian vernacular.

A similar fear grips other township residents when they encounter Tsotsi and his gang members. This is evident in the first three chapters when mothers pull their children indoors in the growing darkness of the Friday evening as the men walk with intent to the railway

station. In this chapter it is evident in the way they open a path for him as he approaches them. They don't want to antagonise him or give him an opportunity to rob or attack them.

First turning point in the novel

An early turning point is reached in this chapter when Tsotsi is presented very differently from the way he was presented in the first three chapters. Initially he is confident and self-assured and commands respect, fear and perhaps hatred among his own gang members. He speaks only when necessary and then to issue orders to the rest of the gang. He is decisive and deliberate. Now he is portrayed as vulnerable and impotent in an unfamiliar world and unfamiliar role. We notice this when he has to return three times before he can pluck the courage to ask for the milk. One can argue that he didn't want others to see him in a domesticated role, which he wanted to maintain the strong, fearsome persona that he always portrayed, but there is clear evidence of change. He speaks to Cassim in an uncertain manner and we notice that he cannot read, which allows Cassim to con him. Cassim knows that he can get away with selling condensed milk as baby milk. For all of Cassim's terror, the reader cannot help thinking that the gangster is not the aggressor but the victim. The change in Tsotsi is evident in his new-found sense of responsibility and sensitivity. The baby's survival is first priority now. He not only feeds but cleans up the soiled baby and finds a "safe" place for the baby. Perhaps he doesn't want others to know that he has become soft and hides the baby but already there is a change from the cold, callous figure Tsotsi cut in the first three chapters.

The baby also prompts Tsotsi to recall his past and the yellow dog. The dog is a link to his own childhood when he was a baby. Perhaps he is able to feel a connection with this baby who was abandoned as he had felt in an abusive home. Perhaps he wants to prevent this baby from suffering the same fate as him. What is clear, though, is that the baby gives Tsotsi, for the first time, some purpose and real direction in life.

Social inequalities in apartheid South Africa

The tearing down of Sophiatown and forced removals are very evident in this chapter in the description of the workmen and the ruins of former homes. The reader is told about the "impatient white suburb" p.43. "Suburb" suggests a lifestyle far removed from the squalor and poverty imposed on blacks by the white apartheid government. Whites live in plush suburbs with well-manicured gardens by comparison to blacks. This is evident in the first three chapters in the world beyond the blue gums. "impatient" here carries connotations of whites impatient to occupy the best residential areas at the expense of non-whites who were forcibly removed from places that they had lived in for generations and which carried deep sentimental value for them.

There are clear links between the life of crime that Tsotsi chooses, the Gangsterism which is pervasive in this township, as in others during apartheid times, and the policy of apartheid. Tsotsi, like many young black men in apartheid SA, has very few opportunities for self-improvement and social mobility and is forced into a life of crime.

Tsotsi: Chapter 5

Critical Issues

1. **Fugard's socio-political comment** (p.48/49 "In the time...He was sorely disturbed")

The apartheid government had made no provision for a cemetery for black people in Sophiatown – "the cemetery was really an accident". What does this reveal about the position of black people in white South Africa and how is this idea extended by the burial that Gumboot Dhlamini receives? Comment on the attitude of Reverend Henry Ransome towards Dhlamini and the pauper funeral he receives?

2. **Boston's condition when he regains consciousness** (p.49/50 "Boston awoke...utterly finished.")

What are the implications of the theft of his trousers while he was unconscious? How did Boston feel about the possibility that he might be expelled from Tsotsi's gang forever?

3. **The lack of purpose in the lives of Butcher and Die Aap** (P.50 – end of chapter)

How does the reader gather that Butcher and Die Aap have no life beyond the gang? Explain. Comment on the repeated use of the word "clung" to describe their disposition in Tsotsi's absence? What is Tsotsi's initial reaction when he sees them outside his room? Account for his reaction. Why does Tsotsi ask the two men where Boston is?

4. **Tsotsi's new pre-occupation** (p.52 – end of chapter)

"I have fed it...worked that way." P.54. How is the reader made aware that life for Tsotsi cannot be the same again since he took possession of the baby? In this respect comment on Tsotsi's changed attitude towards Butcher and Die Aap and his inability to make a decision regarding their next robbery. Comment also on the implications of "Up to that moment...inhibiting its function."p.55.

Analysis

Fugard's socio-political comment

No concern shown by the apartheid government for blacks – basic necessity like a cemetery was not supplied – the cemetery for blacks living in Sophiatown was established by accident – the dead were buried in that plot out of sheer necessity and only then was it declared a black cemetery. This lack of regard for the dignity and humanity of black people is also evident in the pauper burial given to Gumboot Dhlamini – the priest didn't even know the name of the deceased but went on with the funeral ceremony. While he appeared troubled,

it is perhaps fair to say that he didn't really care – clear example of the dehumanisation of black people in apartheid South Africa.

Boston's condition when he regains consciousness

The theft of Boston's trousers speaks of the lack of decent moral values among the township residents who would steal from one beaten so badly that he might be on the verge of death. The decent thing would have been to find urgent medical help for the injured man. However, the reader has to balance this reaction with an understanding of the position of want of township residents forced into that position by the apartheid government. The thief might have reasoned that the trousers was of more use to the living than one who might possibly die. This "survival of the fittest" instinct characteristic of the animal behaviour once again recalls the dehumanisation of blacks in apartheid South Africa.

When he regains consciousness, Boston appears to be relieved at the thought of his permanent expulsion from Tsotsi's gang – evident in "It's all finished now. At last." The words "at last" suggest the relief he felt – Boston had always been uncomfortable with the violent behaviour of the gang and had been especially disturbed by the killing of Gumboot Dhlamini. The reader might recall how he had vomited in the gutter and had questioned Tsotsi's lack of decency.

The lack of purpose in the lives of Butcher and Die Aap

It is evident from the idleness of Butcher and Die Aap that without Tsotsi and the gang these men have no real purpose or direction in life. The reader notices this in their aimless drinking and gambling. In addition, while they give the impression of not being bothered if Tsotsi doesn't want them anymore, they are pleased and relieved when they see him return to his room. The repetition of "clung" emphasises the purposeless throwing of stones at the lamp post symptomatic of an idle mind. Tsotsi is annoyed by their presence because unlike Boston, they add no real value to his life. Now that there is a conscious change in Tsotsi as he begins to embrace decency, he is in need of Boston's guidance. This explains why he asks for Boston.

Tsotsi's new pre-occupation

It is evident from Tsotsi's obsession with the baby – his need to constantly protect and nurture the baby – that he is changing. No longer does he see women as sexual objects or playthings as Butcher suggests. Tsotsi's interest in the comely woman with the baby is sparked by the possibility of finding a woman to help him feed and care for the baby. Gone is the self-assured gangster who plans decisively and purposefully. Butcher and Die Aap are impatient with Tsotsi's lack of intent – note: "What we do...speak man" (p.55). Note also "What he realized...inhibiting its function." – that which tampered with his functioning as a cold and indifferent thug is the baby, who now gives him a new purpose and direction in life.

Tsotsi: Chapter 6

Critical Issues

1. Social inequalities in apartheid South Africa

Differences between Tsotsi's "city" and the "real" city. How does the writer convey the sharp contrast between the black and white man's worlds? What are the implications of the close description of the first black workers bussed into the city (p.56-57)? Comment on the differences between Terminal Place during the day and at dusk (p.57)? What is the writer's point in highlighting the differences? How are the black mineworkers portrayed (p.58-59)? How are the white motorists passing through Terminal Place portrayed (66)? Comment on the description of the Bantu Eating House.

2. Morris Tshabalala

Describe the character of Morris Tshabalala. How does he feel about his mining accident and what has become of him? Why is there constant reference made to his manhood? What feelings towards Morris does the writer wish to elicit from the reader? Why does Morris initially throw away the money people give him? How does the rain imagery (p.63) affect our understanding of Morris' feelings about the coins tossed at him? How does Morris react to Tsotsi following him? In this respect comment on:

- "Please God, let a policemen stop him and ask for his pass." (p.67)
- The contrast between "I want to live ...wants to live." (p.71) and Morris' earlier "Why do I go on...What is there to live for now?" (p.61).

Analysis

Social inequalities in apartheid South Africa

The black man's city is a poorly developed, dimly-lit, restricted space near the bus terminal. By contrast the white man's city is more expansive, well-lit and a pleasure to shop at. The black man's 'city' (note the use of quotation marks) was merely an 'open space formed by the junction of two streets' and was variously termed 'Terminal Place' (found at the end of the actual city), 'the shopping centre' (one could buy anything there – there were no speciality shops for black people), or 'the backyard' (shabby space behind and hidden away from the white man's city). The sharp contrast is clearly conveyed by: 'A few blocks away...was the 'real' city, the illuminated, glittering arcades of the white man's world. It might just as well have been on the other side of the earth.'

Once more Fugard underscores the social inequalities that existed between blacks and whites in apartheid South Africa. The inequalities are reinforced by the close description of the black workers arriving at Terminal Place early in the still dark and bitterly cold winter

morning. Their lives are a far cry from the relatively comfortable 8 to 4 white office workers' existence – note the cheap fare the black workers dined on: 'a tin of hot coffee and a vetkoek'. They talk sleepily because they are exhausted – they hardly get a good night's rest before they are back at work.

More evidence of the depressed quality of black people's lives in apartheid South Africa is found in the description of the Bantu Eating House. The place was dingy and sparsely furnished and the food sold there might be filling but hardly nutritious – it was all that poor black people could afford – note: 'It was a cheerless room, and reflected the poverty of a people who measured their essentials and excesses in the smallest unit of the white man's money.'

Social inequalities are also revealed by the hard life of the black mineworkers – every time they went down the mineshaft they were unsure of coming back whole or alive. Besides they worked for a pittance while whites enjoyed the fruits of their labour. By contrast to the hand-to-mouth existence of black people who were forced to live on the fringes of civilization, whites lived a carefree, frivolous existence as is evidenced by the behaviour of the white occupants of the car that stalled on the busy street (see p.68).

Morris Tshabalala

Morris Tshabalala is a crippled, old beggar who used to be a strapping man before his mining accident. Morris lost both his legs when a section of the mine shaft collapsed on him. His life changes dramatically afterwards; he is forsaken by his girlfriend and people look at him with a mixture of pity and revulsion as he drags himself on his hands around the city, begging for alms. Morris is bitter and angry at his loss of masculinity – while he insists he is still a man, it irks him to admit that he is literally and figuratively half a man. He hates his life and questions his persistence with such an existence. Morris looks and feels like dog. Note: 'Why do I go on? He asked himself. I am not better than a dog, and slower.' & "What is there to live for now? The beam that had fallen on his legs had also come down like a guillotine on his life, severing him from all the purposes, the plans, the places he had known as a full man." (p.61).

At first when he is given alms, he throws them away – accepting the money would be an acceptance of his diminished and devalued status. Besides, the money thrown at him, which the writer compares to rain falling on him, failed to fulfil the promise they initially held; the small coins, like fine rain, would hardly succour one.

However, when Morris is relentlessly pursued by Tsotsi and realises that he is going to be killed by the gangster, there is a dramatic change in his attitude to life. Then he begins praying to God that a policeman would stop Tsotsi and ask for his pass, giving Morris time to scurry to safety. While at the beginning of this chapter Morris felt he had nothing to live for anymore, in the latter part of this chapter he expresses a deep and fervent desire to live. He says: 'I want to live. I didn't know it. I want to be on the streets again tomorrow.' Here, the reader becomes aware of the greatest instinct that both man and beast share and that is the will to survive regardless of how ignominious that existence might be.

Tsotsi: Chapter 7

Critical Issues

Tsotsi's attitude towards Morris Tshabalala

Why does Tsotsi choose Morris as his next victim (p.75)? Why does Tsotsi compare Morris to the yellow bitch of his childhood (p.76)? How does Morris' deformity remind Tsotsi of "the basic horror of existence" (p.77)? It appears that Tsotsi deliberately allows Morris to get away, and this is linked to the "feeling" (p.78) that welled up in Tsotsi – what feeling is this which Tsotsi experiences for the first time? How is this new feeling linked to Tsotsi's evolution? What is the connection between this feeling and Boston's "illness" after the murder of Gumboot Dhlamini? Despite this new feeling, why does Tsotsi still pursue Morris relentlessly (p.81)? Why does Tsotsi kick the pile of coins that Morris uses to bargain with for his life?

Conversation between Tsotsi and Morris

"Morris Tshabalala saw...nothing mattered" (p.85) What is this "truth"?
"Yes man I am telling you...with you." (p.85) What new meaning of life does Tsotsi learn from Morris? "Mothers love their children" (p.86) What does Morris mean by this assertion? How does Tsotsi respond to this assertion? What are the implications of his response? Why does Tsotsi change his mind about killing Morris?

Tsotsi's thoughts after leaving Morris

"But each time...*control of his thinking*" (p.87)
Why is Tsotsi incapable of holding on to one thought long enough to avert the onset of the next one? Why is he bombarded by thoughts of his experiences in the last 24 hours? What is the significance of the monotony of blank walls/the monotony of the night/the repetitive patterns of the buildings in the city? In answering this question consider how in finding his way out of the maze of the cityscape, Tsotsi finds a direction out of the labyrinth of his mind. How does Tsotsi's meeting with the woman (who gives him the baby) and Morris Tshabalala transform his life (p.89/90)?

Analysis

Tsotsi's attitude towards Morris Tshabalala

Tsotsi chooses Morris because the beggar swore Tsotsi for stepping on his hand – he was also reminded of the yellow bitch of his childhood when Morris called him the "whelp of a yellow bitch" – later in the novel we realise that Morris reminded Tsotsi of the yellow bitch who was crippled by the cruel kick of his father – she also dragged herself by her forelegs. The cripple also reminded him of the ugliness of life for people like the cripple and perhaps black people in apartheid South Africa in general.

For the first time in his life Tsotsi, as he pursued the beggar relentlessly, feels pity for another human being – he is both confused and fascinated by this new feeling – the feeling of mercy which prevents him from killing the beggar. This is the beginning of Tsotsi's moral growth. This feeling is similar to Boston's illness after the murder of Gumboot – Boston, then, couldn't accept the ruthless, merciless actions of the gang. He still pursues Morris to explore this new feeling further – his kicking of the coins, however, is an expression of anger at the act of Morris using the pile of coins to bargain with for his life – it diminishes the enormity of the new feeling Tsotsi was experiencing.

Conversation between Tsotsi and Morris

The new meaning of life Tsotsi learns from Morris is that life is precious and one needs to hold on to the beauty of life – for Tsotsi life was meaningless before this and so he had attached no importance to his or anyone else's life. Morris' assertion about mothers and their love for their children is refuted by Tsotsi because he cannot or will not remember his childhood – later when he does remember his mother, he remembers the warmth and love from his mother which made him feel secure and happy as a child.

Tsotsi changes his mind about killing Morris because he has experienced new feelings – feelings of sensitivity towards another human and the feeling of mercy.

Tsotsi's thoughts after leaving Morris

The experience he has had in the last 24 hours are significant in the evolving life of Tsotsi – the beating of Boston and Boston's questions, the baby and now the experience with the cripple all bombard him simultaneously and he finds it difficult to process all of this. The imagery of the maze reinforces the idea of entrapment – the entrapment of a life of darkness which Tsotsi now wants to break free from. When he exits the city maze and shows mercy towards the beggar, it is like breaking free from his inner world of darkness. Both, the meeting with the woman who had given him the baby and Morris give him a new direction in life.

Tsotsi: Chapter 8

Critical Issues

Role of apartheid in the lives of township residents

Comment on the daily ritual at the single tap in the township (p.95-97). Comment on the effectiveness of the repetition of “all it gave was water”. What is implied by “That stocky length of wood and gurgling pipe was rooted in their lives”? Comment on the irony implicit in the third paragraph (“In the church of Christ the Redeemer...cut off.” p.96). Discuss the personal tragedy of Miriam Ngidi and her husband, Simon. How does this tragedy illustrate the impact of racial inequalities on the lives of blacks in apartheid South Africa? Comment on the suggestiveness of the penultimate paragraph in chapter 8.

Tsotsi, Miriam and the baby

What prompts Tsotsi to seek out a woman to help him with the baby? Why does he choose Miriam? What are her initial thoughts when Tsotsi bursts into her room? What are Miriam’s initial reaction to Tsotsi’s “baby” and how does her attitude to the baby change. In this respect, comment on the following: “A bitch...look after her puppies better.” (p.103)

Analysis

Role of apartheid in the lives of township residents

Conditions in the township clearly reflect the social inequalities prevalent in apartheid South Africa – piped hot and cold water received inside their homes was taken for granted by whites – by comparison, for the residents of Sophiatown, the single communal tap was considered a necessity and a boon – the tap becomes the busiest spot in the township with long, winding queues the entire day – the stoic patience of the township dwellers must be admired but the writer unconsciously questions why human beings should be treated in this unfair and inhumane way. The repetition of “all it gave was water” is a clear indication that water is a critical commodity for survival and so the tap and the pipe bringing water into the township become intricately linked to the lives and survival of the township residents.

There are several levels of irony associated with paragraph 3 (p.96) – firstly, the name of the church is ironic – it does not offer succour or salvation for blacks, let alone redemption for wayward blacks like Tsotsi. Secondly, black children were baptised in the church but soon had to labour for the church and white people (“as soon as they could walk and carry, were sent into servitude”). Thirdly, Ransome preached to the black people to be patient when the water was cut off – but it is easy for him to speak from a position of comfort and privilege.

The personal tragedy of Miriam is that her husband, a mine worker who justly joined the bus boycott against commercial exploitation of the poorest of the poor, disappears and Miriam is left without her man, a provider and a father for her child. The tragedy of the Ngidis is reminiscent of Morris’ tragedy and the tragic plight of many black men and women

forced into a life of desperate poverty and faced with crime and instability every day of their lives.

The penultimate paragraph in this chapter goes deeper than a winding down of the weekend – the weekend comes to symbolise just a brief episode of happiness in a general drama of pain for black people in apartheid South Africa (a theme that Thomas Hardy explored in his novels about poor country folks in pre-industrial England).

Tsotsi, Miriam and the baby

Tsotsi seeks out a woman to feed and help him care for the baby – he realises he needs someone who can breast-feed the baby, someone who has a baby and therefore is producing breast milk – hence, his choice of Miriam. When Tsotsi bursts into her room, her initial thoughts are that he wishes to harm or even rape her. Her initial reaction when asked to feed the baby is one of revulsion because of the filthy condition – later she tells Tsotsi she was jealous over her milk, wanting to reserve it only for her baby. However, her maternal instinct soon kicks in and she feels for the baby and wants to help the vulnerable infant. It is her maternal instinct that causes her to condemn the baby's mother for her lack of maternal feeling for her baby and makes the claim that a dog will show more concern for her litter than this woman who has abandoned her baby.

Tsotsi: Chap 9

Critical Issues

Tsotsi's childhood experiences before the police raid

Describe Tsotsi's mother's attitude to her son whom she calls David? Is her attitude consistent with Morris Tshabalala's assertion about mothers? Comment on the granny's attitude towards the young David? Why does she behave like this? What can you gather about the whereabouts of Tsotsi's father from the mother's excitement early in the chapter? What perception is created of the father from the mother's description of him?

Tsotsi's experiences after the police raid

What happens to Tsotsi's mother during the police raid on the informal settlement? Is the granny sympathetic to Tsotsi's plight soon after the raid? Support your response by reference to relevant extracts in this chapter. Comment on Tsotsi's father's behaviour when he returns to his home? Why is he so ruthless towards the yellow bitch? How is Tsotsi (young David) affected by this incident at the time and afterwards? How is this incident linked to him joining the street kids? Comment on the familial relations that exist among the street kids.

Police brutality during apartheid South Africa

Comment on the harsh treatment meted out to black people during police raids on informal settlements? How do the arrests, and police killings during the raids and while suspects are in custody disrupt black families? How does this impact negatively on the psyche of young black men? Does it contribute to the phenomenon called “Streets Kids” in South Africa? Substantiate.

Analysis

Tsotsi’s childhood experiences before the police raid

In this chapter the writer flashes back to Tsotsi’s childhood. Evidently Tsotsi, for the first time, is making a conscious effort to remember his childhood past (probably as a result of his experiences in the last 48 hours/of his moral growth). What he remembers is warmth and love generated by his mother. This is evident not only in warm manner in which she talks to the young David (Tsotsi) but also in her defence of him when the granny is critical of Tsotsi. It is also evident in her protective attitude, love and comfort she displays towards the little David when they are sleeping together – they share a bed in the tiny shack. Note: “They lay close together...effortless and soft” (p110). David’s mother’s attitude to her son is consistent with the beggar’s assertion earlier that all mothers love their children. At the time Tsotsi had refuted it because he remembered only the trauma associated with his father’s angry outburst and brutal kicking of the yellow bitch. When Tsotsi consciously calls to mind his childhood past in this chapter, his perceptions change and he realises that as a child he had had the love of his mother – thus he tries to recreate that moment by affording the baby the love that was snatched from him by the police raid – he even names the baby, David.

The old woman’s impatience, abruptness and sometimes harshness towards Tsotsi are not borne out of any malice towards the boy – this is partly prompted by the difficult life she and other blacks have had to endure which understandably makes her bitter – she wants the little boy to be strong to withstand racial discrimination, poverty and disadvantage. Perhaps she is hard with the boy also because she didn’t want him to turn out like his father – she clearly resents her son-in-law for “abandoning” her daughter when he was sent to prison for ten years– she didn’t want David to be reckless and irresponsible like his father.

Tsotsi’s mother’s impression of the father was that he was a warm, loving and protective father who was coming back after ten years to rescue from their poverty and suffering. The ten years and the mother’s obvious excitement suggests that the father was probably being released from prison where he has been for the last ten years. The mother’s impression of the father as a protective and loving person prompts David to dream of his father being a great bird carrying them away from their unhappy. However, the vision ends with the father being struck on the head by a huge hailstone; there is a terrible thunderstorm and in the

gathering darkness after the father is struck, the family falls from a great height towards the ground. This vision, in a sense, suggests that the mother's perceptions of the father were not entirely correct as is evidenced by his angry and harsh behaviour later in this chapter.

Tsotsi's experiences after the police raid

The police raid disorientates David and violently disrupts his humble but contented life. His mother is taken away by the police to be detained for not producing a pass – she promises David to wait for her and not go anywhere saying she would be back. In David's moment of bewilderment, his granny offers no real comfort. Instead she is not sympathetic to his plight – when he cries she says coldly: "A fine one you are...you'll make." Implying that he is weak and undependable in a crisis – however, he is still a child. Once again we realise that the old woman's attitude is not borne out of malice nor is she angry with David. She is angry with the system of apartheid which dehumanises and humiliates them and against which they (black people) are helpless. She feels that even God has abandoned them: "Where is God in heaven!"

When David's father returns, David is terrified as his father is nothing like the picture his mother had painted of the man. The father is furious to find that his wife was not there and he screams out for her incessantly which causes the yellow bitch bark at him uncontrollably. All the while, David is hiding in a tiny fowl pen hysterical with fear. The father kicks the dog brutally breaking its hind legs and causing it to give birth to a litter of stillborn puppies – she dies soon afterwards. Sometime after his father leaves, David flees from the yard like a "little animal being hunted". He meets a group of little boys – street kids – who take him in and offer him some comfort in his time of need. He stays with this River Gang who had suffered the same fate as him and learns to survive on the streets. He renames himself "Tsotsi" and as he grows older, joins other older boys and becomes a proper tsotsi, not out of choice but the need to survive.

Police brutality during apartheid South Africa

A lot has been written about police brutality during the apartheid era by several authors – the focus has always been on the insensitivity and callous behaviour of the police tasked with enforcing segregation, and disadvantage towards people of colour. Fugard provides graphic descriptions in this chapter of police brutality: "Voices were calling, crying...herded inside" – the use of the word "herded" captures the dehumanisation of black people – they were treated like cattle. The intrusion into the privacy of bedrooms and the indecent attitude shown by policemen who drag half-clothed women (and men) to waiting vans are captured in the treatment meted out to David's mother. The trauma experienced by young children as their mothers are forcefully separated from their young ones is painful and pathetic. Note: "Don't cry, David...", "Listen David...I will come back."

In the aftermath of the police raids, not only are the victims brutalised by the raids but more especially, the survivors left behind, traumatised and broken like their homes and possessions. However, broken doors and furniture can be fixed but not broken lives cannot be mended, like the life of young David – the trauma he had experienced most probably precipitated his life of crime.

Tsotsi: Chap 10

Critical Issues

Tsotsi's changing psyche

Comment on Tsotsi's reception of Die Aap and account for his attitude towards Die Aap? How is his attitude reflective of the changing psyche of Tsotsi? How is the change in Tsotsi reflected in his changing relations with Miriam? How is the change conveyed by Tsotsi's attitude to the baby? What are the implications of Tsotsi naming the baby David? Why is he resistant to leaving the baby in Miriam's care?

Tsotsi's flashback to his childhood

How does Tsotsi react to memories of his childhood (p.126)? Is this flashback easy or difficult for Tsotsi to adjust to? What is the deeper significance of Tsotsi's childhood game with the other street children in the rusty, abandoned vehicle?

Analysis

Tsotsi's changing psyche

Is cold and unresponsive towards Die Aap – annoyed at his presence – gets rid of him quickly – indifferent to his pleas. Tsotsi's dismissive attitude towards Die Aap is reflective of his changing psyche – Tsotsi is turning his back on his old life. There is a sharp contrast between the Tsotsi of chapter 3 and Tsotsi in chapter 10 – here he wants to connect with his childhood and mother – when Die Aap asks “Why?” (i.e. why has he changed?), Tsotsi replies “My mother” (p.126). Tsotsi's attitude towards Miriam also changes – he is more observant of her physical features and is able to read her body language – he begins to admire her ability to persevere in trying circumstances – making a life for herself and her baby despite the disappearance of her husband – he acknowledges her decisiveness and admires her adept handling of the baby. The change in Tsotsi is also reflected in his attitude to the baby – the baby takes precedence over everything else – the baby signifies a connection with his childhood self – hence his naming of the baby “David” – through the baby he appears to want to recapture the warmth and security of his early childhood with his mother as his anchor. While he trusts Miriam, he does not give her the baby – he decides to keep the baby in an effort to find goodness, the goodness he felt as a little boy, the goodness he had lost when his mother was taken by the apartheid police.

Tsotsi's flashback to his childhood

His flashback becomes more and more coherent – he is able to connect his mother, his father, the yellow bitch, playing with Petah and the other street kids by the river like a spider spinning a web – now “a clear image formed in his mind” (p.126). However, recalling his childhood is emotionally draining and difficult for him – he struggles to adjust to this phenomenon in his life; hence, he gets rid of Die Aap quickly so that he can focus more clearly on his past – besides, as was expressed earlier, Die Aap who represents his life as a tsotsi is distracting and no more appealing to Tsotsi. A recurring image of playing in the

rusty car by the river forms in his mind – while the image suggests that the street kids, devoid of even the basic needs, use whatever they can to entertain themselves, on a deeper level, Tsotsi realises that this desperation had led to the onset of his darker purpose – hence, once again, we see apartheid as having accelerated Tsotsi’s deterioration and being responsible for the anti-social behaviour of many black youths.

Tsotsi: Chap 11

Critical Issues

Tsotsi and Boston

Discuss the tragedy of Boston’s life. Is there any indication of Boston returning to his old life – to the green fields of his youth? What are the implications of Marty’s anger and bitterness towards Tsotsi (p.136-137)? Why does Tsotsi want to speak to Boston? Comment on Tsotsi’s attitude towards Boston in this chapter compared to chapter 3. How is the changing psyche of Tsotsi reflected in his attitude towards Boston in this chapter? How does Boston react to the change in Tsotsi?

Analysis

Tsotsi and Boston

For the first time the reader becomes aware of Boston’s personal tragedy – a promising future as a teacher who might have uplifted the youth in his community is shattered by an incident in which he appears to be the victim than the aggressor – clearly the girl led him on and then cried “Rape!” – she herself was an attention seeker but her actions cost Boston and his aging, hopeful mother a promising life – once expelled from the training college he has to seek work but like many black youths during apartheid there were no job opportunities for him and so he fell into the clutches of gangsters, conmen and fraudsters – once again the reader sees apartheid implicated in the criminality of black youths.

When Tsotsi goes to Marty’s shebeen to find Boston, Marty is understandably very angry and bitter at how Tsotsi had used, beaten and discarded Boston – she had become very close to Boston physically and emotionally and had come to appreciate Boston’s superior intellect and gentlemanly behaviour.

Tsotsi’s changing psyche is evident in his changed attitude towards Boston as well. He carries Boston to his room with the same tenderness shown to the baby, cleans him, and offers him a clean pair of trousers. He relates his experiences with the beggar Morris S. to Boston and Boston soon realises that Tsotsi has learnt the meaning of mercy and what it is to be decent and urges him to embrace this change without fear. Where he had previously seen darkness in Tsotsi’s eyes, he now sees light. Boston realises that the change in Tsotsi goes beyond behavioural modification – he realises that Tsotsi’s growth is moral and spiritual as well when he says to Tsotsi: “You are asking me about God.” (Boston realises that God is working in Tsotsi’s life and tells him so). Then Boston says: “I must get going

Tsotsi. I tell you it was green, green man, the grass in the fields of my youth. I must, man.” - this is a suggestion that he is returning home, to his mother. The chapter ends with “It was a new day” – perhaps a new start for both Tsotsi and Boston.

Tsotsi: Chap 12

Critical Issues

Isobel Marriot, Father Ransome and Isaiah

Comment on Isobel Marriot’s attitude towards Isaiah? How is he affected by her attitude? What feelings does Fugard elicit from the reader towards Isobel Marriot and Isaiah? Comment on Father Ransome’s attitude towards Isaiah.

Tsotsi and God

Why does Tsotsi go to the church? Comment on the final change in Tsotsi as evidenced in the following:

- His new relationship with Miriam
- Tsotsi changing his name back to David Madondo.
- Tsotsi telling a passer-by: “Peace be with you”
- Tsotsi’s attempt to save the baby and the smile on his face when his body is recovered.

What is your reaction to Tsotsi’s death? Do you think that the novel ends on a note of despair and pessimism? Explain.

Isobel Marriot, Father Ransome and Isaiah

Isobel Marriot’s patronising and disrespectful attitude towards a man many years her senior speaks of the arrogance of whites in apartheid South Africa towards blacks – what is especially distressing is the treatment of an old man as if he is a child – more than once she calls him a naughty boy – Isaiah is understandably stressed whenever Isobel is near him and scolds him. It is ironic that Isaiah should experience tension in a place where God ostensibly is being served. Father Ransome is equally patronising towards Isaiah, making him feel that he is doing something significant by ringing the church bell – he has made no effort to teach Isaiah about God and equates the ringing of the church bell to coming closer to God.

Tsotsi and God

When Boston makes Tsotsi realise that God is responsible for change in him, Tsotsi naturally goes to the Church of Christ the Redeemer to learn more about God. It is interesting that Tsotsi should learn

more about God and the need to be God-fearing from Isaiah than Father Ransome or Isobel Marriot – Isaiah is the true prophet (not Father Ransome) who spreads the word of God and urges Tsotsi to repent (p. 159) - the writer is suggesting that while there is redemption for Tsotsi, Isobel Marriot and Ransome are beyond redemption. The final change in Tsotsi comes with his new attitude of respect and gratitude towards Miriam, and especially the deliberate way in which he declares that his name is David Madondo. It is evident also in the way he wishes that peace be with the milkman, and ultimately in his act of martyrdom at the end of the novel when he attempts to save the baby by risking his life. Tsotsi dies at the end of the novel, but he dies a more fulfilled and happier man than he had been as a tsotsi.