

**THE TREATMENT OF THE THEME OF CHILDHOOD IN
NJABULO S. NDEBELE'S FOOLS AND OTHER STORIES**

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DECLARATION

This project paper is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university.

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ABSTRACT

The prime concern of this project paper is to give critical attention to Njabulo S. Ndebele's treatment of the theme of childhood in five short stories: "The Test", "The Prophetess", "Uncle", "The Music of the Violin" and "Fools". The stories, making up the book Fools and Other Stories, are a depiction of the world of the child in relation to the adults' in a writer's effort to depart attention from the tense political atmosphere of the time to dwell on everyday township living.

While it is true that this paper adopts a thematic approach to the stories, it does not ignore the relevance of the short story form in the aesthetic realization of the content. This mutual relationship of theme and style is enhanced by the psychoanalytic approach employed in this study, which acknowledges the characters' subconscious drives to behaviour. Further, the theoretical framework lends credence to the artist's creation as a revelation of his and his community's subconscious fears and desires.

This study recognizes Ndebele's portrayal of a different kind of South Africa as well as his belief in childhood as an explorable theme in the art of an ailing nation. Moreover, the author views childhood as a period of immense social and psychological adventures uniquely personal, albeit ordinary. What emerges at the end of the study is the author's artistic worldview: a profound belief in childhood as a period that contributes significantly towards awakening the consciousness of both the child and the adults in his life.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Children, in any society, play a crucial role physically, socially and psychologically. Each day, however, brings with it more and more challenges to them. In Africa, the traditional ties that guaranteed care and a sense of community are gradually being eroded by social and economic factors beyond the average citizen's control. Failure by families to provide protection to children, increased urbanization, breakdown in socio-cultural values, poverty, illiteracy, inaccessibility to quality and affordable health-care are some of the forces that have seriously affected children's well being.

Many organizations and global bodies have put their best foot forward for the child. The Global Movement for Children, in the 'Say Yes for Children' campaign is the current globally vocalized call to action for the child's welfare. Championed by the former South African president, Nelson Mandela, and his wife Graça Machel, the movement asks people of all ages from every part of the society and every political persuasion to join voices in calling for a better world for children -- and for all of us.

There is a special literary and critical voice that has been unrelenting in this *en vogue* focus on childhood, especially on child innocence and on the lessons that adults imbibe to and learn from it. This voice has echoed through the literary terrain of South Africa from pre-independence to the present.

Njabulo S. Ndebele, a South African writer, critic and academician, is a firm believer in change in thematic focus in South African literature. He has advocated for new directions in South African literature -- a literature beyond

the protest we are familiar with. His focus on the theme of childhood as well as the psychological currents that affect the behaviour of individuals in societies is an important change from the loud clangs of protest literature to quieter, more contemplative reading. Through his critical essays and speeches, attention is drawn towards these two crucial themes in literature.

Besides his highly influential essays and speeches, Ndebele has also published poetry and two volumes of short stories: Fools and Other Stories (1983), Bonolo and the Peach Tree (1992), and Death of a Son (1996). For Fools and Other Stories, Ndebele was given the prestigious Noma Award for 1983. The publisher's comments were that:

The thrust of these stories [Fools and Other Stories] stems from the belief that too much of the real and imaginative lives of Africans have been given away to the oppressor and his deeds. The writer, as Ndebele sees it, is engaged in a process of self-definition, which involves giving our lives and our minds to the unlimited inventiveness of the suffering masses...to look for that area of cultural autonomy...that no oppressor can ever get at. (Preface)

This study takes a deep interest in this process of self-definition in both the children and their adults as exhibited by Njabulo Ndebele in Fools and Other Stories. Childhood in the text is looked at in what Mphahlele describes as "solid, vibrant, prose" (cover page). At the end of the collection, the enchanting stories are a thrilling experience taking on a wider, deeper significance than they merely do in print.

Statement of the Problem

The black South African writer writes because there is so much around him or her that hurts and needs to be expressed and exposed. He or she

writes to protest, to hit back, to keep pounding at the clamped door until it opens. In terms of doubts and uncertainties, people search for truth in the written word. They turn to books, the daily newspapers or go to the theatre. Black South African writers continue to probe, to question and to analyze. (Petersen 199)

Much water has flowed under the bridge in South Africa both in the socio-political and literary fronts. Literature is a reflection of society and its role in such a setting cannot be ignored. The probing, the questioning and the analyzing that Tlali talks of goes on in all fronts, and one of those fronts is the focus on the child in South Africa. Women have had voice in South Africa, so have the men. A voice that has not been loud enough has been the voice of the child in this setting. This study samples a writer's exploration of childhood as a theme as brought out by Ndebele in Fools and Other Stories.

The other part of this study stems from this recognition of childhood. Just listening to the black child's voice hardly suffices. The relationship between the child and the adult matters, too. Beyond the social, political, cultural and economic forces that shape society, there are lessons learnt out of an individual's inner orientation that help him come to terms with these outward forces. It is, therefore, crucial to emphasize how individuals are changed or influenced by these outward forces. The stress here is on the theme of rebirth, which comes with the stirring and awakening of individuals' consciousness to the realities around them.

Objectives of the Study

- (i) To critically analyze the depiction of the theme of childhood in Njabulo S. Ndebele's Fools and Other Stories.

- (ii) To explore the wider psychological bearings that this theme has on both the child and society as brought out in the stories.

Research Premises

This study proceeds from the premise that childhood as a theme dominantly runs through the stories, and that childhood as a theme bears wider psychological implications to both the child and the adults around him.

Justification of the Study

Most of the voices that have come out of South Africa in the past have been voices that have witnessed and experienced the destroying effects of colonization and domination. These voices, understandingly, have often been heavy and depressed, even despairing. Many such sensitive voices could no longer stay in Africa; they exiled themselves from their motherland to express themselves. These voices -- both exiled and not -- have explored various concerns in their art. Protest has been the dominant tone. Pictures or scenes that tended to dominate the literature of the sixties, seventies and eighties were those of the ruthless policemen and their cowed, bewildered prisoners; brutal farmers and their exploited farm hands; cruel administrative officials and the bewildered residents of the township; crowded trains and the terrible violence that goes on in them among the oppressed, and a variety of similar situations. (Petersen 209)

Njabulo Ndebele's collection of short stories in Fools and Other Stories is an example of advocacy for new, post-protest concerns. The title story "Fools" has been commissioned into film, and "Uncle" has had a theatrical production, both in South Africa. However, no systematic, in-depth literary study of these and the rest of the stories has been carried out. The themes that are portrayed in the stories form a different type of South Africa. They are an indication of one

writer's attempt to drink what he preaches: and that is for the writers and all concerned to "[free] the imagination in which what constitutes the field of relevance is extended", to pay attention to "what is relevant [to] the entire community of the oppressed"(214).

Talking of the black children in apartheid South Africa, what better time to remember them than now, with the global campaign on for them. Focusing on childhood and its significance to the wider world at this time is a contribution to creating awareness to their needs. The Kenyan, award-winning theme song in the "Say Yes for Children" campaign resonates with the cry:

We are children of the land
Hear our voices as we sing
Asking you to give us a chance
To be heard...
I have a dream
That we'll change the world...

A 1980s child may as beautifully sing the words. Literature, like the stories in Fools and Other Stories, becomes one of the many indispensable tools that we use to listen and respond to this cry. This is reason and inspiration enough to study the text.

As a contribution to the continuing process of healing and reconciliation, individual search for identity and direction is important in the overall efforts being made by writers in South Africa to help society live. The themes have tremendous implications for the new society to be born, and their study cannot be justified enough.

Literature Review

Njabulo Ndebele has received high accolades both as a writer and as a critic. Much more attention, however, has been directed towards his highly influential essays and speeches than towards his creative art. Fools and Other Stories has received scant, disjointed reviews and comments.

Lionel Abrahams, quoted on the book's back cover page, has lauded Ndebele's first book as "[a representative of] the kind of beginning in fiction that will prove to have altered the contours of [South African] literature". He describes the author's story telling as "full-fleshed and elegant...of thrilling significance".

Echoing the same sentiments is Ezekiel Mphahlele, also quoted on the back cover page of the collection. He describes the book as "[bringing] with it an exhilarating current of fresh air...solid, vibrant prose".

Both Abrahams' and Mphahlele's comments are succinct. However, beyond the captivating definitions applied partly for marketing reasons, the comments do not give deeper thematic focus of the stories. Abrahams does point out the "significance" of the story-telling and the implication of this word is vague, for it could be quite as ambiguous as it could be subjective. Mphahlele's "current of fresh air" is a beautiful all-inclusive description which does not, unfortunately, specifically indicate the functional import of the theme of childhood and psychology.

As an advocate for changes in South African writings, Njabulo Ndebele's views have been appreciated by Emmanuel Ngara, who, in his response to Ndebele's presentation of the paper "Beyond 'Protest': New Directions in South African Literature", has acknowledged the latter's critical views as indicating his own standpoint as a critic. Ngara says:

Protest literature is a result of protest politics, and revolutionary literature comes out in revolutionary moments. Art also sometimes lags behind the political development so the artist who has not risen to the same level as the combatant is likely to remain with outmoded ways of thinking. However, when the revolution has moved to a higher level the writer is also likely to be affected by it, and I think that the realistic theoretical standpoint is an expression of a new phase in South African politics. This focus is no longer just on the white man and what he is doing, but on a future South Africa, on what kind of South Africa we want to produce and what kind of art should be produced in that situation. (Petersen 217)

Ngara has given a general overview of Ndebele's theoretical concerns; the latter's concerns some of which have been infused into fiction in the text under study.

Kirsten Holst Petersen, in the introduction to the book she has edited, highlights the major concerns for the South African participants at the Second African Writer's Conference in Stockholm in 1986. She points out that ideological issues were in the forefront almost to the exclusion of personal ones in the South African session. Writers like Sipho Sepamla, Wally Serote and Miriam Tlali discussed the problem of censorship, and although they agreed that censorship had become less harsh at that time, they also agreed that things in general had become worse. Sipho Sepamla added Bantu education, self-exile and the work of the security police to the list of grievances. Protest and revolt, as asserted by the writers, were still the dominant tone, and the writer then was more actively involved in the fight than before, mainly through public poetry readings and participation in demonstrations about and burials of victims of apartheid.

Wally Serote who was the cultural representative for the ANC then, was the most prescriptive in his views of what South African literature should be about. To him if it did not inspire, give hope and optimism to the people in the fight it was "irrelevant". He shared with Njabulo Ndebele a writer's fascination with the phenomenon of "wearing the necklace". He feels that the burning to death of perceived traitors as a result of street justice contains all the most painful elements in the South African situation. Wally Serote wanted to make political sense of it, and Njabulo Ndebele to understand the psychology of both the informer and his killers.

As Petersen contends, in this lies a difference between the two writers, not in terms of their aim, for the aim for black writers in South Africa has mostly been the same, but in terms of literary approach. In his paper, Ndebele argued convincingly that protest literature had run its course. He saw it as tied to a specific situation of near total helplessness, which existed in the 50s. The situation in the 60s, 70s, and 80s, was radically different, the blacks no longer powerless, and the new balance of power had to be reflected in a change in the orientation of the literature, away from the protest and the obsession with the whites and their power mechanisms and towards an affirmation of black culture and an exploration and discussion of the new structures of a future independent and black South Africa. Peterson reviews Njabulo's paper thus:

He suggested that one way of carrying out this psychological liberation would be to write about hitherto unexplored areas in the lives of blacks such as the relationship between the oppressed and the tools of science, the psychology of stooges, the changing role of the family, the world of sport and fashion and rural life. He suggests that the writers leave out any references to the white dominant culture and concentrate on an exploration of their own culture, a practice which he himself has followed in his award-winning collection of short stories Fools and Other Stories

which celebrates aspects of township life. His paper constituted a major contribution to new thinking in the field of South African literature. (15)

Petersen is limited to reviewing Ndebele's paper only without further exploration into the text. She glancingly mentions the collection of stories as a celebration of aspects of township life. These aspects may be in reference to the thematic contents of the stories, which are broad, and which she falls short of categorically pinpointing. Childhood, as one of those aspects of township life that Petersen may be referring to, is missing in the review.

Jane Wilkinson has also reviewed and quoted Njabulo Ndebele's 1984 Noma Award acceptance speech as providing a manifesto for succeeding African writing. She says:

'An act of knowledge through self-confrontation' is how Njabulo Ndebele describes his notion of art whose value lies in 'inventiveness of treatment, in sharpness of insight and in the deepening of consciousness'. (146)

Wilkinson describes the author's speech as calling for "a new formal articulation" for the material life of Africa in order to "enlarge intellectual interest and expand the possibilities of the imagination", and for an engagement with the "complex totality of life". (146)

It is this "complex totality of life" in Ndebele's work that draws the attention of critics like Wilkinson. Simply mentioning the complexity of life in itself accounts for part of the understanding of the stories. In terms of breaking down that complexity into its individual components, Wilkinson offers no further directions.

This study sets out to identify and analyse specifically, childhood as one of the events that contribute to making life complex. Each of the stories in Fools and Other Stories is uniquely put together, and each one of the stories is interwoven with themes and sub-themes that need detailed scrutiny and not just an acknowledgement of their existence. Once again, Wilkinson is interested enough but limited only to having a look at Ndebele's speech and not the collection of stories under study.

Ghana Review's comments on Ndebele's now undisputed belief in new African literature are a highlight of the author's campaign that African writers should shift themes and now focus more on creating new value systems and exploring the continent's past that has been ignored for a long time. The standpoint is that with the demise of colonialism, that provided themes for African literary works, African countries are now faced with the challenge of managing their own affairs. Further, the abolition of apartheid has shifted the themes of writings to the people's way of life and how to keep South Africa together.

In the same edition of the review, Mr. Atukwei Okai, Secretary-General of Pan African Writers Association (PAWA), observes that under Professor Ndebele, writers in South Africa played a tedious part in awakening the peoples to the call of the day and the South African spirit heard them through their [writers'] creations.

Both *Ghana Review* and Mr. Okai are aware of Ndebele's concerns and how these concerns have influenced other African writers' thematic shift. These sweeping though correct observations touch on the theme of awakening the people's consciousness to the realities around them, and it is a theme of concern to this paper. Most likely, though, these comments are in reference to Ndebele's influential essays and speeches. The insightful remarks fail to mention

Fools and Other Stories in which Ndebele's critical ideas have been incorporated.

It would be erroneous to assume no other South African short story writer has written on the theme of childhood or psychology. There are examples of short stories and poems that have children as lead characters. A few of these will be looked at, namely, "Boy on a Swing" by Mbuyiseni Oswald Mtshali; "One Small Boy Longs for Summer" by Mafika Gwala, and "A Walk in the Night" by Alex La Guma.

"Boy on a Swing" describes a seemingly natural scene of a young black boy on a swing. His blue shirt is described as billowing in the breeze as is perfectly normal in such a case. In the last two verses, however, the shift moves from the physical description of the scene to a more contemplative one, where "the world whirls by and the four cardinal points meet in his head". The boy's confusion and sudden desire to scream out his inner turmoil come out.

Mother!
Where did I come from?
When will I wear long trousers?
Why was my father jailed? (Malan 23)

The last line holds a lot of connotations as to the setting of the poem and the situation. We deduce that this is a boy living in South Africa under oppressive elements, a state of things he can hardly grasp. These oppressive political forces, forces he yearns to understand, jailed his father. He is a boy in search of himself and of understanding and he turns to the only adult round him in the home: the mother.

The poem has wider implications inspite of its short form and the sub-text. We rely on the extra-textual knowledge to get more of the thematic message. Although the child has been focused on here, the form limits the writer to foreground less of the important matter of childhood in oppression that a longer form would actually do.

In another beautiful poem this time by Mafika Gwala, "One Small Boy Longs for Summer", the focus on the child is still evident. It is the child silently voicing his thoughts, which form a catalogue of his various winter discontents. In the kitchen setting where Mother is making coffee for her two sons and their father, the boy's mind wanders from movement to movement, as though searching for an outlet. He feels caged in, which is the case, for he cannot go out to play.

We can't play outside – I must not go, I know.

How we danced in the rain. We are so tired
of the winter: It's so dingy outside.

We can't play inside – I'm so tied up
It's so boring, I feel like bursting into
a cracking laughter; but father,
he'll go mad.

It's so steamy inside

I feel I could bite the walls down.

If only it makes the winter pass.(Malan 23)

Summer for him means sunshine, laughter and freedom, away from the house and the father. All these are an integral component of child growth and development and forces denying a child these freedoms are forces denying a nation its future. We deduce these and more from the poem. It is a bitter-affectionate tone of an idle boy. Once more, the poem form denies the writer

access into the characters' inner makeup, limiting him to dwell only on the outward, physical events.

Alex la Guma's "A Walk in the Night" portrays what life and death mean to many of the people of South Africa. In "A Walk in the Night," a policeman shoots down a boy; there is no sympathy or remorse on the part of his murderer; there is only fear, tension and inhumanity. As reviewed by Wilfred Cartey, in the story and its setting:

...fear and tension lurk beneath everything: the earth, the asphalt streets, the cold tenements. They lurk until they cannot be contained anymore and then explode in acts of violence and destruction. Even the South African family of the boy killed is affected by this environment of harsh brutality. This is pointed up in the mother's slap and whistling crack of the father's belt. In such an environment all things begin to break down. (Cartey 129)

This domination and inhumanity from without seep into the home and corrode family relationships. They corrode the warmth and security known to Africans in their natural situations. The dull, formless pain of death coming on in the body of the young boy is the individualized pain in the whole society, the sickness unto death, which permeates the whole society in South Africa.

What is focused on in "A Walk in the Night" is more of the violent and the confrontational way the blacks and whites in the land lived. The pain described by the writer is physical, leaving out an equally important area of the psychological pain of both the helpless victim and the oppressor.

Further, both "Boy on a Swing" and "A Walk in the Night" place their limelight onto the child who is in direct confrontation with apartheid forces. These forces

have for a long time given rise to a thematic field of protest in the literature of the region. It is this protest literature and the helplessness mood that pervades it, which Ndebele seeks to depart from in Fools and Other Stories.

Malcolm X once said:

A race of people is like an individual man; until it uses its own talent, takes pride in its own history, expresses its own culture, affirms its own identity, it can never fulfill itself. (quoted in Levine, 6)

Perhaps one of the most striking resemblances in historical experiences of both the African-American and the South African black is the contact with racism in its bland manifestations. While the African-American has experienced slavery and tasted the debasing Jim Crow rules under white majority rule, the South African black, under the white minority rule, has felt himself suffocated under apartheid laws.

Racism, in its bland form, creates tense relations between the ruler and the ruled. The oppressor creates and enacts laws that are intended to keep the oppressed in check, and the later has little choice but to find ways and means of surviving the trauma.

The Negro in America has over time strove to adjust himself to the harsh reality through masking and countering invisibility by wanting to be recognized as people. Religion, politics, cultural practices including music and the "secret code" are some of the ways they adopt to the situation. But still, within them, the pain never abates. A feel of this pain and anger is discerned in their protest literatures and fiery speeches of the kind of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Junior.

South Africa has also produced protest literature born out of more or less similar experiences in the form of colonialism, slavery, apartheid and incarcerations. The eighties was a time when writers in South Africa were still groping for answers to their tragic existence, and demanding an end to inhumanity. But out of this clamour for freedom emerged a writer who clamoured for a forgotten group: the child. Very few or scant attention is directed at the child during this time in both regional literatures. This study intends to narrow the thematic discrepancy evident in South African literature.

Studies in child psychology have generally revealed that a child's growth and development is influenced by many factors, both in-born and from the environment.

Jemmimah Mwakisha, in the *Daily Nation* Column "Parenting", focuses on raising children within the family circle -- that the underlying truth is that every child is unique and should not be or should not feel judged or perceived as failures because they do not meet their parents' expectations.

Psychologist Mary Runo says both the inborn traits (personality) and the environment play an important part in making a person. She says the in-born traits can, however, be interfered with or enhanced by the environment. A child with a positive personality can change when they are exposed to a bad or negative environment, she adds. "Schools, neighborhood or community can wreck one's personality" and a trait can be suppressed or controlled.

In more general psychological studies, it has been agreed that psychology plays a very important role in national development, besides and beginning with individual growth and development. In their foreword to "Modern Psychology and Cultural Adaptation", the Organizing Committee, University of Nairobi, have

pointed out the need for psychological knowledge, especially to improve the relevance and impact of the effectiveness of solutions to the personal and communal problems, which accompany social change (Okatcha). The committee further justifies the need for expanded support for psychology in Africa as a key element to alleviating development problems. One way of supporting psychology in Africa is through its integration into art, an exciting attempt done by few African writers, including Ndebele. This study studies psychology in the collection of fictional short stories as a way of exposing a writer's need for understanding a long-suffering humanity.

Looking at the position of the short story as a form in psychology, insightful researches have been done by various scientists and scholars. Martin S. Lindauer has studied the status of the short story in the psychology of literature. He has identified the gap in the study of the relationship between literature and science. He says:

Psychologists have...slighted the short story despite its historical priority, its popularity, its uniqueness among literary forms, its established critical tradition, and its attractiveness to nearly all major authors. Despite this neglect, there are important reasons for investigating the short (aside for its own sake). (Halász 130-131)

Lindauer then discusses the factors that increase the possibility of scientific activity in the field of literature. These factors are brevity of the short story as a methodological virtue and the emphasis on the reader, among others.

The distinguishing feature of the short story is its shortness. Brevity separates the short story from other literary forms. A good deal of psychologically relevant content, characterization, and function are packed into very few words (usually less than 3000 and sometimes as little as a few hundred). The writer strives for, and the reader expects, a

self-contained, central, pivotal, unifying, and single effect -- the so-called "psychological moment." This is accompanied by focusing on one character, event, crisis, emotion, situation, scene, or time period. (131)

Lindauer highlights aspects of the short story and its advantages to psychological study. Expanding on brevity, he notes that brevity makes the short story physically manageable for purposes of manipulating the text. In a nutshell, the short story, as Lindauer states, offers technical advantages not to be found in other literary forms. The effective stimulus, intervening process, and literary response are more easily identified, tracked and measured. "As a literary event, the short story is compact: it begins and ends within a fairly circumscribed time period, and has a limited number of characters."

On the emphasis on the reader, the short story bears a special bearing on the psychology of the reader of literature. There is a curiosity on the part of the short-story reader, like any reader, about what is going on: in matters of what will happen to the main characters and why they do act the way they do (or don't).

In the novel and play the reader is led through a gradual development and unfolding of major, minor and opposing characters and themes; and these are repeated with variations over an extended period of time. But in the short story, there are greater demands placed on the reader because of its brevity. The reader's curiosity must be aroused and resolved quickly. (Halász 133)

From a reader-centred psychological approach, the short story then becomes fragmentary, incoherent, and indirect, so that in some therapies, the reader is not told what's happening, but must find out for himself. Consequently, readers must constantly work hard in order to find out what is going on, as they fill in

and search for the point. These reasons perhaps, explain why the readers of the short story become intimately involved with its character.

This closeness, according to O'Connor (1962), is highly intellectual: The reader's identification with a character is abstract and impersonal (aided by the fact that so little time is given for character development). A character in a short story therefore represents persons in general, or an ideal (e.g. suffering man). On this basic level, O'Connor suggests, we are able to learn a great deal. Hence the attraction and hold the short story has on its readers. (133)

However, there have been criticisms leveled at the short story's claim for uniqueness. Complaints have been raised about its commercialization, artificiality, absence of depth, rushed quality, and over cleverness. Lindaeur acknowledges that readers have also found it difficult to identify with short story authors, since many have made their reputation in other mediums. One critic has also charged that the short story runs "a poor fourth to the novel, poetry and drama." There is also some uncertainty over allowable maxima and minima. To distinguish the short story from a story that is merely short (and presumably not "literature"), Lindaeur points out that some critics place a "dash" (-) (sic) between the two words. Even the virtue of brevity has been criticized for omitting too much and not allowing the reader "to warm up" (Halász 129).

The review on the short story and its place in psychology offers deeper insights into the advantages and relevance of this form in literary studies. While Lindaeur has identified the gap in the study of the relationship between literature and science, Njabulo Ndebele, through his stories adds credence to the short story's importance and adequacy as a medium for psychological themes and interests.

Although this paper's attention is directed more at the content than at its form, the important information gathered above on this form aids in grasping the content of the text under analysis better. Since form and content are closely inter-related, it would not have been scholarly to shove aside the important branch of form in literature.

Up to this point, therefore, this review reveals various things: First is that Njabulo Ndebele's Fools and Other Stories has not received enough attention as a text with immensely rich themes. Secondly, the themes of childhood and awakening consciousness are important themes in South Africa that has to move on beyond protest. Important in literature as well as to societal well being, we have gone further to explore currents in child psychology as an important concept in any form of human development. Finally, we gave chance to the short story form and its important, relevant relation to a reader's psychology of understanding the content. It is also important to appreciate that the short story form and the contents under study in this paper may not be new in Africa or South Africa as a country. This is only part of the never-ending contribution to knowledge that such an opportunity offers.

Theoretical Framework

The analysis of Fools and Other Stories employs Psychoanalytic Criticism as its theoretical framework.

Psychoanalytic criticism is a form of literary criticism, which utilizes some of the techniques of psychoanalysis in the interpretation of literature (Barry 96). Psychoanalysis itself is a form of therapy whose aim is to ease mental and emotional distress through investigating the interaction of the conscious and the subconscious elements in the mind. The classic method of alleviating mental tension using psychoanalysis is to get the patient to talk freely, in such a way

that the repressed fears and conflicts, which are causing the problems, are brought into the conscious mind and openly faced, rather than remaining 'buried' in the subconscious. This practice is based on specific theories of how the mind, the instincts, and sexuality work. The Austrian, Sigmund Freud (1856 – 1939), developed these theories.

Talking out a problem or a repressed fear; letting it out through crying or "hitting the pillow" have been acknowledged as some of the methods employed in helping people diffuse their inner turmoil. Psychoanalysis lays emphasis on the importance of this diffusion of tension, for it is a therapy that relieves mental discomfort in form of worry and other factors.

In Fools and Other Stories, the theme of rebirth and renewal is a motif that shows how the child-characters grow from a state of being the oppressed to one of being the liberator and the liberated. They overcome hardship out of a will-power that arises from deep within them. It is a will-power they never knew to possess in the first instance. With this view, it would be safe to state that the subconscious part has a role to play in influencing their own process of liberation. This study probes whether the actions in the stories follow this postulation.

In assessing the moments that drive the characters, the study evaluates the Freudian premise that actions are driven by primitive immoral impulse "id", which is counterbalanced by the "ego" and the "superego". By laying emphasis on the centrality of the unconscious part -- the hidden thoughts and aspirations in the human mind -- in determining human behaviour, Freud says that the unconscious fears and aspirations of an individual artist are expressed in a sophisticated way through artistic creations.

To the artist of the stories under context, as an individual, the literary work is a representation of his desire for childhood in the land to be a joyous period. He is aware of the harsh times and circumstances that threaten to crash the fragility of his characters. He, therefore, aspires to create gay moments for them that they, too, may get to taste the happier alternative of childhood. The artist may not categorically state his fears and desires in his work, but at the subconscious level, the currents can be discerned from the pages,

The author's subconscious is not the only one represented in the art. The community's is, too. Carl Jung, another proponent of psychoanalysis, sees collective fears and aspirations of a community to be expressed in the artistic creation of that community. An artist is a member of a wider social and psychological community. He shares their fears and their dreams. He is a representative of that community. Njabulo Ndebele tries to capture his community's collective fears in his art.

Psychoanalytic criticism, however, has taken many forms and continues to undergo radical and frequent re-evaluation. There is a growing consensus today that the therapeutic value of the method is limited, and Freud's life work is seriously flawed by methodological irregularities (Barry 96). All the same, Freud remains a major cultural force, and his impact on how we think about ourselves has been incalculable.

Suffice it to say, what is appreciated in an artist's creation as true and real is due to the writer's ability to utilize realism to its fullest. Though it may be fiction, a work of art that is accepted as psychologically true or possible is also dependent on autobiographical elements. The author has an eye for detail, and he is able to look back to his own life and recreate his own experiences in an artistic medium.

The psychoanalytic theory could be expanded into literature and psychology or "psychology of literature". Psychology of literature as classified by Warren and Wellek, may mean the psychological study of the writer, as type and as individual, or the study of the creative process, or the study of the psychological types and laws present within works of literature, or the effect of literature upon its readers (audience psychology). This study uses the Psychoanalytic Theory, which probes into the mind of the narrator of the stories as well as other characters.

Methodology

In a bid to fulfill our objectives and research premises, the study of Fools and Other Stories has relied heavily on library research. Ndebele's biographical data has been availed both through library research as well as on the Internet.

The study has employed a comparative as well as individual focus on the stories to help in deeper understanding of the issues brought forth. The analyses have been structured in chapter form.

Finally, the study has relied heavily on textual evidence more than mere speculation. Extra-textual input only comes in to compliment the evidence in the primary text.

Scope and Limitation

This study limits itself to Njabulo Ndebele's Fools and Other Stories, a collection of five fictional short stories: "The Test", "The Prophetess", "Uncle", "The Music of the Violin", and "Fools". This study does not include Ndebele's critical essays, speeches, poetry or the children's book Bonolo and the Peach Tree. These are secondary reference material mentioned where need demands to compliment the primary text.

Fools and Other Stories, as prose work, offers more depth in terms of characterization and thematic loci than the other alternatives by the same author, and the short story as a form lends itself to ease of manipulation and limit to a manageable number of characters.

Lastly, Ndebele as a South African writer propagates a different yet equally vital thematic direction in a nation's literary art, beyond the familiar themes of protest against the white oppressor. The author under study seeks to help his people live on beyond bitterness.

CHAPTER TWO

NJABULO NDEBELE: A LITERARY BIOGRAPHY

Njabulo Simakhale Ndebele was born on 4 July 1948, in Johannesburg, in what was then the Western Native Township, occupied since then by what are called "coloured" people. Ndebele believes the last of the African people moved out around 1960 or so which he says turned out to be very ironic to him because they [the Ndebele family] moved to the town of Nigel in 1952, which is 33 miles east of Johannesburg. He says the township there -- in the African section -- was called Charterston location. That is where he grew up and went to school and that is the setting of his stories in Fools. He says of his childhood:

The irony that I was referring to is that from the late 60s we were moved to a new location called Dudusa -- which [had] been very much in the news in South Africa during the [previous] few years, it was one of the 'hot spots' -- because our township was also given over to the so-called "coloured" people. So I have a very practical, concrete experience of being part of these Government resettlement schemes. (Wilkinson 148)

That practical, concrete experience comes out in Fools and Other Stories, where the author's childhood years could be seen to inform the characterization of his characters.

In relative terms, Ndebele speaks of his being a very sedate family environment. His father, Nimrod Ndebele, was a teacher and his mother, Makhosazana, was a registered nurse. His childhood was relatively trouble-free. It was a fairly comfortable environment with plenty of books in the house, plenty of music, and plenty of culture. At that time professional people -- the teacher and the nurse in his case -- still commanded a lot of respect and had a tremendous

leadership impact on the communities. In this township, they had neither a doctor nor a lawyer so that the most influential people were teachers, nurses and priests "and what you'd call 'Board members' ", he says, " who were part and parcel of the civic structures. For that reason he got used to a lot of people coming into his home for this and that so they were never closed off from the community.

Once again, this close association and integration with the community comes out especially in the story "Uncle" where the characters are portrayed in close association with each other.

Ndebele views their moving to Nigel as one of the problems about the new policy that the South African government was busy trying to create: a middle class. He is of the opinion that they did not foresee a situation where they might have needed to do so. What they ended up doing was to bunch everybody in the townships, with the result that the residents of those neighbourhoods did not, as it were, develop a middle-class consciousness that would totally shut out other people. That, in more than one way, enabled them to live in a socially rich environment. He says:

I had access to the world of the mind and the world of music in my family, but at the same time there were the social contacts within the township, so one had a bit of everything. It was that kind of environment. (148)

Influenced by the rich socio-cultural experiences in his childhood, Ndebele offers the reader a chronicle of township life as a child in its complexity and variety. He relies on experience to create art, which reads as convincingly as life itself.

Very early in his life, Ndebele became aware that his father had been a writer, a playwright, and had published what was the first published Zulu play in South Africa. This realization went a long way towards making him aware of possibilities of becoming a writer. His sister was a very talented musician. She had a fine voice and was a good actress, but it was not possible for her to exploit her talents because in the townships, being an actress or a singer was not considered a worthwhile profession. "There was supposed to be something socially wrong with people who did these things", Ndebele says. "It was a tainted profession." One was of course allowed to enjoy listening to music and singers "as long as you did not become one of them! I suppose it's not entirely true to say that it was socially tainted." He believes it was a middleclass view: his father insisted on his daughter having a profession -- and she went on to do nursing. Ndebele however always looks back and thinks she would have been a very successful musician. His younger brother was a talented artist, but again Ndebele was the only one who made it because writing -- in which he took a lot of interest from a very early stage -- went hand in hand with education, so he could go further, read books and acquire more education and become better at writing. He acknowledges he made it because his profession was closely allied to education and advancement.

Ndebele grew up in a multi-lingual environment where he spoke several languages: Zulu, which was his own; Xhosa, which was the predominant language in church, and Sesotho, among others. In the township churches the sermon was always translated. Translations happened all the time, even in concerts, in the halls and other social places. On average everybody in the Johannesburg area can speak at least four languages. Ndebele quips:

Now that I'm more conscious of the value of this I enjoy flipping from one language to another. Sometimes you discover that the person you're

talking to in another language actually speaks the same language you do, but you only discover it later! (148)

His schooling was in the mother tongue from kindergarten right up to Standard Six, but from around Standard Four English would begin to be used. English would entirely be used from Form One onwards. In more accurate terms, the first three years of school were entirely in the mother tongue and in the rest of the years English would be used as the medium of instruction. Afrikaans was also learnt as they went along in their education.

At home, the language spoken was Zulu, but with a mixture of languages: English would crop up all the time, particularly from the parents. He says of the reading materials, the magazines:

I grew up reading *Drum*, *Bona*, *Zonk* and others like *Africa South*, *Classic* and *Sketch* that were lying around in the house since my father subscribed to them -- and the newspapers *The Star*, *The Rand Daily Mail*, these were all in English, so my practice in English took place informally inside the house. (149)

The outside world was also influential. Advertising, for example, was almost invariably in English. Later adverts in Zulu or Sesotho would appear, depending on where one was. Basically then, English was the dominant medium. Inevitably, it influenced Ndebele's choice of language in his writings. He admits, however, that he "didn't really choose to write in English, it was the force of circumstance". In fact, he started writing in Zulu, but abandoned it because all the people who fired his imagination, the poets he discovered on his own, he read in English. His poetic imagination was influenced by much of the reading that he did and there was no similar fascinating imaginative world that he was exposed to in his own language. There lacked that degree of experimentation

and play with ideas and language reinforced by extensive study in the schools. A writer then would find himself writing in one language rather than another because it seemed to offer more in terms of what his imagination is ready to absorb at a particular point.

Njabulo Ndebele's writing began during the early years. He was exposed to writing by African authors through the magazines. In *Africa South*, for instance, he would come across the "odd" short story, the writings of Nat Nakasa, of Ezekiel Mphahlele and others like Lewis Nkosi who wrote in *Drum* magazine he read while in secondary school. His father also had a lot of banned books that were "hidden away somewhere" so he was able to read Nkrumah's autobiography and several writings of a political nature by West Indians. He also read Peter Abraham's Wild Conquest and Tell Freedom. There was a book called Splendid Sunday that he remembers also, Down Second Avenue, Harry Bloom's Episode and many others.

Ndebele was well known as a poet before his stories and critical essays began to appear. He had started writing poetry though he also wrote and produced several plays when he was at school in Swaziland, the manuscripts of which got lost. Basically though, he wrote a lot of poetry at this time, which was published in the anthology To Whom It May Concern (1973) and in journals such as *The Classic*, *The Purple Renoster*, *Izwi* and *Staffrider*.

When he went to university, he still continued to write poetry, but that is where he started writing fiction. The book We Killed Mangy Dog by Honwana fascinated him. Most of his published work as he points out, deals with the theme of childhood, and when he came across Honwana's collection, particularly the main story, "We Killed Mangy Dog" he was really fascinated. During the Black Consciousness period (he was recognized as one of the Movement's

leading literary theoreticians) he edited the student literary journal, *Expression*, from the University of Lesotho. It was a magazine that was sent all over the world to other universities and Ndebele wrote a story for it modeled on "We Killed Mangy Dog". From that time onwards -- around 1970, 1971 -- he indeed continued to write poetry, but he became more fascinated by fictional form because he felt it allowed him a lot of room to explore things in a more explicit manner and to examine relationships more fully between individuals and communities than he ever could with poetry. He observes:

I felt poetry was somewhat an insulting medium. It begins from the inside and I felt I needed a form that would prompt me to grapple with adjective reality a lot more explicitly. It's always very difficult to talk about why you choose one form rather than another. It's difficult to reduce it to a series of rules. But in general I found that the fictional form helped me more. (Wilkinson 149 -150)

Njabulo Ndebele is better known today for his short stories, critical essays and speeches. As mentioned earlier, he is the author of poetry that has appeared in many anthologies, and several volumes of fiction, including Bonolo and the Peach Tree and Fools and Other Stories, a chronicle of life in a black township under apartheid. His highly influential critical essays are published in a collection called South African Literature and Culture: Rediscovery of the Ordinary.

His work has been published in literary and scholarly journals and anthologies in South Africa, the United States, and Europe. Some recent publications include "Of Lions and Rabbits: Thoughts on Democracy and Reconciliation" in *Pretexts; Literacy and Cultural Studies*, Volume 8 No. 2, November 1999 and "Creative Instability: The Case of the South African Higher Education System" in *The Journal of Negro Education*, Volume 66 Number 4, Fall 1997.

Ndebele holds honorary doctorates in Literature from the University of Natal (Durban), Vrije Universiteit (the Netherlands) and Soka University (Japan) and in Humane Arts from Chicago State University. His writing awards include the Noma Award for Publishing in Africa, the SANLAM first prize for outstanding fiction and the Pringle and Mofolo-Plomer Awards.

Ndebele also had chance to talk about his art. Interviewed by Jane Wilkinson in Talking with African Writers, he talks of the autobiographical element in his art, the use of children or adolescents as protagonists in Fools and Other Stories and also in some of his poetry, and on his choice of the short story form, especially for Fools and Other Stories.

Asked about the relation between autobiography and fiction in his stories he says:

I have been at great pains to explain this relationship, because what I have taken out of my experience is really the form rather than the content. The fact that the father of the main characters in the stories is a teacher and the mother is a nurse; in one story the children are two whereas in my family we were actually three: these are little things, but actually it's mainly the quality of experience in a middle-class African family. It is really that rather than the things that actually happen. (Wilkinson 152)

Using "The Music of the Violin" as an example, he talks of the story's inspiration:

We were just talking with some friends and somebody came up with this story of some children in the townships who have middle-class African parents and are harassed by them. It never happened to me, but it fascinated me and I took that up and wrote about it. What writers rightly

fear is that it will be thought that all that happened in the stories is actually there. I think there always is something of the writer's life in whatever he writes, but it's always mediated by other things. So there's a lot that is fiction and as I said that the form of experience is autobiographical. (152)

He justifies the relationship between the two as a necessary one because one has got to inject into his fiction a certain genuineness of experience, otherwise there is a risk of artificiality, so that what goes through, what one feels, the quality of that experience can enable him to write a story set anywhere out of his mind, totally coming out of his imagination but yet coming out of his experiences. "I think it is an unavoidable relationship", he concludes. It is this artificiality, which Ndebele seeks to tame through his reliance on autobiographical elements.

In response to his interest in child protagonists in Fools and Other Stories and some of his poetry Ndebele finds it very difficult to rationalize what one might call an instinctive, imaginative preference. He says: "I have always been fascinated by children, by the sufferings of children"(154). He recalled one poem that he wrote: he had just seen a horrible thing, a woman who was totally drunk in a *shebeen*. The child was trying to get her breast to suckle and she was just lying there. He observes:

There were flies all over the place. It's scenes like these that excite my sense of indignation and, I suppose compassion. I've seen many: I was just giving you one little example. Later, much later in my life, I was reading Johnson I think it was, Johnson or Boswell. Somewhere he says you measure the success of a civilization by how it treats its young and its aged. You measure the extent of its sensibilities, its compassion, its values through how it takes care of its weak. And now in South Africa

children are actually being detained and tortured. That, for me, more than any other thing indicates the nature of the South African problem, which basically people who are in power have no alternative vision to what is now reproducing itself, beyond what they can control. (154)

Having children of his own, Ndebele admits that very often one does something or says something to a child and later because they are looking at the world around them throw, it back at you. He uses the scene of child play, where they may be playing father and mother, and there the adults' or parents' utterances come back as said and that is when one realizes what a mistake one has made.

Ndebele has attempted to get this innocent but deeply ironic point of view in his art. He says:

The children reflect the adult world exactly as it is without intending to be judgmental on it, yet the fact that they throw it back like that is a drama of recognition. So I wanted to explore this point of view to its fullest: how children's fears interact with the adult world -- with the fears of the adult world -- and how very often children reflect it back better than any adult ever could. So I was looking for that genuineness of reflection, that innocence. I think it is possibly also a point of view that assists one in coming to terms with the relationship between reportage and fiction. There you have the children saying their bit, throwing the world back exactly as it is but in a way that is devastating in its silent judgements. So there's a moral to it as well as the potential I recognized later on from the point of view of technique, when I felt one could capitalize on this interest in children by turning it into a technical victory. So I think when I look back that is possibly why my interest in children was so intense. (156)

Later on, he says, he merely wanted to make greater use of this interest by putting it to good technical ends. He has attempted to move away from that and write about adults. In 1987, when the interview with Jane Wilkinson took place in Rome, he was working on a novel about a completely adult world, which he felt he needed to do in order to get away and consolidate his own voice, he says. But his interest remained. At the same time, he was also writing a children's novel, which he hoped to complete before the end of 1987. He had started writing it about two years earlier, but he got bogged down with voice again, as he says, "certain parts were not really well imagined and I needed to give myself more time to let the imagination flow more naturally." He is confident that his interest in children is an abiding one; one that he believes would continue to remain for a long, long time, "well into the future". This means he may be writing specifically for them as well as engaging in various kinds of social action on their behalf. But as he says, he also needs to explore other worlds.

The short story, it has been said, like the poem, has been popular with South African writers because they need a very immediate mode of expression. This, Jane Wilkinson points out, seems to have been connected with another commonplace about writing in South Africa: its alleged "journalistic" tendency. Ndebele's feelings about the short story in particular stem from sociological and political backgrounds. Then, most African writers who wrote in English had a problem of breaking into the white world. All the established magazines were white-owned. So there was the idea at a certain point that it was unthinkable that a black person could write a novel or a story, hence the growth of writing for newspapers. The climate was generally not favourable for novel writing by blacks, while it was tolerable to accept short pieces. People were writing stories for the newspapers like the *Bantu World*, and then came *Drum* and magazines

like *Africa South*, *New Age*, *Zonk* and *Bona*. The short story became the dominant form.

Ndebele further elaborates that later, people who wrote the short stories wrote them because other people had been writing them before: it had become a tradition. "I think that is the main reason why the short story became so prominent," he says and asserts:

It has less to do with the feeling that we are too angry so that we don't have time to contemplate the kind of leisure that is required for writing. My major reason is that people who write in African languages for publishing houses controlled by and large by Afrikaners and aimed mostly at the school market were free to write novels, so there were very, very few short stories written in the indigenous languages: people go for novels all the time. And we can't say these people were less bitter than those who write in English, or that they suffered less, or that the pressures on them were less. So I feel an explanation in terms of availability of publishing outlets is a much more acceptable reason for the dominance of the short story, at least in English. But the situation is changing now, because again there are publishing houses who are more willing to accept novels. More novels have been produced in the last ten years than from the beginning of the century. I haven't got the figures, but certainly since 1976 novels are beginning to come out more and more. I expect that to continue and I want to make a contribution to it. (Wilkinson 150)

Chapter Two has traced Ndebele's literary journey in order to get a closer understanding of the contents of his work. There is an undeniably influential connection between his own childhood experiences and the depiction of the characters and situations in the stories. It is these autobiographical elements

that intimate his work to his readers. Childhood relived in the writer's memory and recreated as a theme in his fiction, is given closer attention in the following chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

PORTRAITS OF CHILDHOOD

In this chapter, the study presents some theoretical arguments in the field of child growth and development. These arguments partly comprise the historical and contemporary influences in areas of child study, and they will form a theoretical grounding to understanding the dynamics in child growth and development. Consequently, the grounding would offer a departure point to an understanding of the stories under study in which the writer portrays the child in different social environments.

Child behavior and development, as an area of study, is not just a single "subject" but also a field which draws upon such varied sciences as biology, physiology, pediatrics, sociology, anthropology, and psychology in an effort to understand children. In this attempt to understand children, such questions arise: How do children grow and develop and behave? Under what conditions do they grow and develop and behave in any particular way? What is their nature?

The field of child behavior and development therefore represents a body of knowledge, culled from many sources. As a body of knowledge, it is not prescriptive. But it does provide guidelines and a basis for understanding children.

Research has revealed a considerable body of information that attempts to answer questions about the normal expectations of children in any given age group. Information about the physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development of children is indeed vital for all those interested in tackling issues

that deal with children. To literary artists and critics interested in themes and characterization in childhood, the scientific dynamics in child studies comes in to offer ground for the plot and contents of their work.

Descriptive studies in child behavior and development have attempted to determine not only what children are like at a particular age in respect to a particular characteristic but also how they change with time in respect to this characteristic (Martin, vi-vii). Thanks to what descriptive studies have revealed to us, our expectations of children have definitely become more realistic. If we observe a certain behavior in a child of a certain age, and we know the general expectations and characteristics of children of that age, we would label that behavior normal and would not be greatly disturbed. Similarly, noticing an unexpected trait would fill us with apprehension.

The descriptive approach to the study of child development therefore has resulted in a great amount of information about children and how they grow and develop. It has also provided norms or standards against which we can evaluate the behavior of children at any given stage of development.

In the cross-cultural approach, studies of children in different societies reveal the problem of defining normality, for what one observes to be typical behavior in his society is often found to be unusual behavior in other societies. In this approach, Martin et al observe in Child Behavior and Development, differences in the behavior of children can be attributed directly to the differences between the societies in which they grew and developed (x).

Development then is more than the unfolding of a predetermined design, as is implied in some descriptive studies. It is a process that is influenced to a

considerable extent by the social conditions under which it takes place. What a child is and does is determined largely by the nature of these conditions.

A branch in psychology, called developmental psychology, is concerned with the processes and stages of growth, and with changes in physical and psychological functioning from conception across the lifespan.

In Psychology and Life, Zimbardo posits that until recently, developmental psychologists limited their domain to three periods of major growth -- infancy, childhood, and adolescence. Adulthood, it seems, was long considered to be primarily a period of stability between the growth of youth and the decline of old age (35). Zimbardo clarifies that this assumption has, however, been challenged by the new view that development is a lifelong process beginning at conception and ending at death. New tasks, different challenges, and characteristic sources of delight and frustration mark each period of our lives.

The English Philosopher John Locke (1632-1704) believed that children were born into the world as *tabula rasa*, or blank tablets. Locke made the conclusion after extensive observations, saying:

There is not the least appearance of any settled ideas at all in them; especially of ideas answering the terms which make up those universal propositions that are esteemed innate principles. (Morrison 28).

Locke's belief was that children's experiences, through sensory impressions, determined what they learned and consequently what they became. Morrison, in Early Childhood Education Today, expounds on Locke's ideas, saying the blank tablet view presupposes no innate genetic code or inborn traits; that is, children are born with no predisposition toward any behavior except what is characteristic of human beings. The sum of what a child becomes depends on

the nature and quality of experience; in other words, environment is the primary determinant of what a person becomes. (28-29).

This view has several implications for influencing child development. Since it presupposes a blank tablet, the child is therefore seen as an empty vessel to be filled by the experiences and learning he undergoes in his environment. The family's and the wider society's influence imparts a lot on the child. What the child learns and gets in solely determines his character and behavior. As a result, children learn what is taught and become what their adults make of them.

This view of children puts little, if any, emphasis on individual innate uniqueness. The outcome is that children exposed to the same environmental and learning influences turn out similarly in matters of behavior and thought.

Locke's view places greater emphasis on environmental significance on child growth and development, developing and laying the foundation for environmentalism. According to Locke, environment forms the mind.

Another historical view envisages children as growing plants with the educator or parent acting as gardener. Still recorded by Morrison, this view categorizes classrooms and homes as "greenhouses" in which children grow and mature in harmony with their natural patterns. Like a blooming flower, similarly, the children unfold under the right conditions. This means that what children are to become results from natural growth and a nurturing environment (29). Two key ingredients of this natural growth and unfolding are play and readiness. This means children become ready for learning through motivation and play.

Two other historical views see children as property of parents or institutions, and as investments in the future. These views are still held even today.

Piaget's views best represent the contemporary influences on how we look at children. He has contributed to our knowledge of how children think, reason, and solve problems. For nearly fifty years he devoted his career to observing children's intellectual development. Piaget started by carefully observing the behavior of his own children from an early age. He was interested primarily in the changes that take place in a child's mental processes during the course of cognitive development. How does a child transform specific, concrete information gathered through sensory experience into general abstract concepts that are not limited to any immediate stimulus situation? To answer this question, Piaget studied how children perceive certain situations and how they come to "think about" and "know" about physical reality. His interest was not in how much children knew but in how their thinking and inner representations of outer reality changed at different stages in their development.

According to Piaget there are two processes at work in cognitive growth. He called the first process assimilation, in which we fit new information into what we already know, modifying it as necessary. He called the second process accommodation in which we restructure or modify what we already know so that new information can fit in better.

Piaget saw cognitive development as the result of the constant interweaving of assimilation and accommodation in an upward, spiraling process. Assimilation keeps and adds to what exists, thereby connecting the present with the past. Accommodation results from problems posed by the environment, perceptions that do not fit with what we know and think. These discrepancies between our ideas and what we see are an important influence in cognitive development. As

Zimbardo goes on to elaborate, they force the child to develop more adaptive inner structures and processes, making possible creative and more appropriate action to meet future challenges. So both assimilation and accommodation are needed, but in balance (51).

Through these two processes we become increasingly less dependent on perceiving and more dependent on thinking. Mental growth always includes going from reliance on appearance to reliance on rules.

According to Piaget, the earliest mental structures which he called schemes, simply guide sensorimotor sequences such as suckling, looking, grasping, pushing, and so forth, probably with little or no "thought" as we know it. These sensorimotor sequences are dependent on the presence of classes of objects. But later mental structures increasingly incorporate symbolic representations of outer reality, which in turn make possible increasingly complex mental operations.

Piaget identified four qualitatively different stages of cognitive growth in the continuing upward spiral of assimilation and accommodation. He believed that all children progress through these stages in the same sequence, although they differ in their rate of development. He called the four stages the sensorimotor stage (infancy), the preoperational stage (early childhood), the concrete operational stage (middle childhood) and the formal operational stage (adolescence). Distinctive styles of thinking emerge at each stage.

Piaget's contributions could be summed up thus: that children play an active role in their own cognitive development. Those mental and physical activities are important for children's cognitive development, and that experiences constitute the raw materials children use to develop mental structures. Children

develop cognitively through interaction with and adaptation to the environment. That development is a continuous process, and that it results from maturation and the transactions or interactions between children and the physical and social environs (Morrison 73).

From the information above there is no question of the importance of Piaget's contribution in focusing attention on the development of cognitive processes in children. The questions he asked, the phenomena he studied, and the conceptual insights he offered remain significant. His theory of the dynamic interplay of assimilation and accommodation is generally accepted as valid account of how a child's mind develops. Independent investigators have also supported the general features of his cognitive stages.

Up to this point, cognition is understood as the action or processes of acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought, experience or the senses. With this in mind the following part delves into assessing the character formation of the child characters as placed in different social milieu.

The Family Child

The family acts as the initial agent of socialization, and its influence to a child's development and view to life cannot be underestimated. Ndebele includes a family structure in all the stories, and this in itself indicates the importance he attaches to this social unit, especially with regard to its significance to the child in a hostile South African setting.

While it may be assumed that every parent wants the best for his child, and that every parent would want to give his child a good start to life in the best possible way he can, sometimes this desire does not get to be fulfilled. For those whom it does, the commitment to caring for and bringing up young ones into

appreciable human beings becomes in itself a lifelong process of loving and learning for both the child and the adult.

William E. Martin, in Child Behavior and Development, reveals that each home has a “personality” of its own. He goes on to outline that whether that “personality” is warm, harsh, indulgent, or democratic, it is determined by the parent-child interactions. Parents are faced with the continual responsibility of making decisions about how to handle child behaviors. They will make their decision in each case in the light of what they know about growth and development and the kind of person they want their child to be (313).

“The Music of the Violin” is the story of Vukani, a young boy who rebels against his parents’ aspirations to become “prosperous”. The setting of Vukani's young life is in Dube, a black urban township familiar in setting to the author and similar to the settings in the other stories in the collection. He and Teboho, his elder sister, are children born into a black middle-class family aspiring to acquire elitism in South Africa. It is a social class of the black elite whom Mpiyakhe, in “The Test” labels “softies...to higher-up”.

Vukani’s and Teboho’s story is a tale of rebellion and yearning for freedom from the suffocating, discomfiting impositions from their parents. It is a rich family by average standards of the town, times and circumstances. Vukani himself has a cozy bedroom of his own; a room luxuriously furnished with items many of which most of his friends like Doksi can only dream of. He seems a well-cared for and loved child. His parents have, in all fairness, tried to give him a good life, and the home environment seems okay for a child to grow up in.

When we first meet Vukani he is doing homework in his bedroom as voices in the living room slowly drifted to his room. His parents are entertaining family

friends -- Mr. and Mrs. Zwane. The hum of conversation is now and again broken by peals of laughter as the four adults chat about this and that, from the father's school inspection encounters to its wider implications to the black education system. They also talked about the wives' league and culinary art. All this talk reveals the nature and class of these two families. The content of their conversation reveals their snobbish view of fellow blacks. To this group of individuals, white is superior to black, and it is this notion that they aspire their children to reflect.

Vukani is a deeply troubled and lonely boy. With all the goodness around him, it becomes complex to understand why he is unhappy. He cannot concentrate on his schoolwork because of a turbulence whirling in his head. He lacks the peace and innocence of childhood because of one item in his room: the violin.

The violin -- a classical, stringed musical instrument -- is held under the chin and played with a bow. Its music is sweet and soothing. More of a Western than an African instrument of music, the violin in this story stands for urbanization, westernization, modernity, superiority and prosperity. Admirable attributes, yes, but only as far as subjectivity goes. To Vukani, the violin represents pain, fear, alienation, loneliness and all disorienting qualities a rich teenage boy could feel in an average township like Dube where most of his friends and peers belong to the lower social ranks. The violin fills him with dread every time he sees it or feels its presence.

In his bedroom, Vukani is like a caged kitten. He is restless and frantic, yearning for a route of escape. To him, escape would mean freedom. Unfortunately, he cannot have that now for he is unable to get out of his room without getting noticed by the adults in the sitting room. He wished he could talk to his equally unhappy sister.

He wondered where Teboho his sister, was. Probably in her bedroom. Teboho and their mother were having too many heated exchanges these days. Their mother tended to make too many demands on them. Vukani wished he could go and talk to Teboho. They had grown very close.(127)

Vukani's imprisonment is both physical and psychological. Unable to get away from the room, he has to brace himself for interruption from the adults. From his mother's adulation of his son's prowess in playing the violin, Vukani knows without doubt that his moment of ultimate unhappiness is about to happen. By praising the violin as "a most wonderful instrument", Vukani's mother is in essence adulating foreign culture and a lifestyle she yearns for herself and her children to assimilate. It is a culture and lifestyle that, unfortunately, sounds and fits so wrong to Vukani and Teboho.

Painfully anticipating the inevitable interruption, Vukani begins to feel very lonely and notices he is trembling. He knows the interruption is coming.

Then he thought of Doksi, his friend. He wondered where he was and what he was doing at that moment Friday evening. Probably watching his father cutting the late evening customers' hair and trimming it carefully while he murmured a song, as always. Doksi had said to Vukani one day that when he was a grown-up, he would like to be a barber like his father. (130)

The contrast in the two boys' lifestyles is apparent. To Vukani, Doksi seems happy and content to be a barber's son. He does not have Vukani's kind of luxurious life but he is a free and happy boy. This is how childhood, according to child studies, is meant to be: a carefree, vibrant period in life, full of easy laughter. It is, in essence, a period when the foundations of trust, love, and esteem are built. Inhibiting these normal expectations results in a setback in

childhood development. Fear, low self-esteem and mistrust could easily develop in a young, unhappy child like Vukani because of being forced to do things against his will just to propagate a selfish image of the family. The violin more than does this to Vukani. Every time he sees it he is filled with dread and a sensation of fear creeps deep within his breast. It reminds him of the red dress which Miss Yende, their class teacher in standard four, occasionally wore:

'When I wear this red dress, children, know that I will not stomach any nonsense that day. Know that I will expect sharp minds; I will expect absolute seriousness. And I shall use the stick with the vengeance of the God of the Old Testament.' That dress! It was a deep, rich, velvety red that gave the impression that the dress had a flowery fragrance. Yet, because it signaled the possibility of pain, it also had a dreadful repulsiveness. (131)

The violin, too, symbolizes something that could bring both pain and pleasure at once. Such a fear could easily develop to a phobia. Vukani's intense dread for the violin could be a phobia, which has developed because of the pain and agony that the instrument has brought him, both in the house and outside. Playing it, carrying it around to school, displaying his skill in it are all done by an unwilling victim of social prejudice.

In search of a foothold and for truth within the family, Vukani must bear the agony of the moment. Entertaining visitors with violin music in his room is what he has to put up with, always. And yes, to him, "it was always an agonizing nuisance to be an unwilling entertainer"(132). Vukani's situation was not hopeless, though. He could rebel and say no. But the question is: what would happen if he did refuse to play, if he rebelled? He could guess what his mother would say. His mother never tired to tell him how lucky he was:

"There is not a single boy in the whole of Soweto -- including here in Dube -- who has a room like yours. Can you count them for me? Never! This room is as good as any white boy's. Isn't it exactly like Ronnie Simpson's? You yourself, you ungrateful boy, have seen that room when we visited the Simpsons in Parktown North. Kaffir children! That's what. Always ungrateful!" (132)

Vukani's mother is portrayed as insensitive to her children's needs. Blinded by her obsession for "prosperity", she believes her son is ungrateful whenever he shows any slight indication of hesitation to obey. This kind of rebellion on Vukani's part is condemned by a tirade of admonitions from his mother. To her and her husband, instead of their children counting their blessings, they are rude and unappreciative. They are blessings that come laden with strings. It is understandable that the parents want what is best for their children: best both materially and in human abstract ways. Very few parents would give up on their children in the name of prosperity and classism. What the author's subtext or question is: Is prosperity about selfishness and insensitivity, even to one's own children? Through Teacher Maseko, the answer is found:

'Children, I would rather be a hungry dog that runs freely in the streets, than a fat, chained dog burdened with itself and the weight of the chain. Whenever the white man tells you he has made you much better off than Africans elsewhere on this continent, tell him he is lying before God!' (132)

Vukani's parents believe the contrary. To them, what the white man brought to their land: his culture, his way of living and all he symbolizes represent prosperity. The black Africans who succeed to live such a life, somehow, are civilized and prosperous people. Vukani and Teboho do not share their parents' aspirations. They yearn for freedom from the chain of pain and loneliness in

their home. They feel imprisoned and suffocated by all the hullabaloo of their parents' aspirations. It becomes ironical but truly so when such a rich, posh material setting gives rise to poverty and a state of disarray in basic humanity.

The physical pain that both Teboho and Vukani experience cannot compare to the social, emotional and psychological torment they have to put up with everyday. Vukani remembers the humiliation he had experienced a year before. Some naughty students at school had stolen his violin only for it to be returned to the doorstep of the house the following morning. This incident had enraged his mother. She never bothered to know what had happened and she seemed not to care. She had stormed into Vukani's bedroom, black with anger, pulled the blankets of his still sleeping son, then glared at him, holding the violin in one of her hands.

Vukani had felt so exposed, as if his mother would hit him with the violin...

'Vukani!' she shouted. 'What desecration is this? What ultimate act of ungratefulness is this? Is this to spite me? Is this an insult? Tell me before I finish you off.' (136)

She never gave her son time to explain. Vukani had nothing to say, apart from telling his father the truth: that he hadn't put it there.

The deep feeling of having been wronged could only find expression in tears. He heard the violin land next to him and he recoiled from its coldness. He also heard his mother leave, saying that he was crying because of his sins. (136)

Humiliation number two occurs today when Vukani is attacked in the streets. A gang of boys who always stood under the shop veranda at Mapanya's shopping complex attack Vukani on his way from school. Chiding him with calls and

shouts of "Hey music man!" they finally manage to stop him today, surrounding him and blocking his path.

Vukani wanted to run, but he was not going to give himself away. If he ran and they caught up with him they could do a lot of harm to him. He had had that feeling once -- of wanting to take advantage of something weaker than him -- when he'd found a stray dog trying to topple a garbage bin. If the dog had stood its ground and growled, he would have been afraid. But the dog had taken to its heels, tail tucked between legs, and Vukani had been filled with the urge to run after the dog, catch it, and beat it to death. A fleeing impala must excite the worst destructive urge in a lion. (138)

He learns a cruel but important lesson in survival. He learns not from his parents but from his own experience outside of home. It saves him in the end. The gang manhandles him and verbally abuses him and his absent sister, Teboho. They chide him for his not knowing how to play a current local hit. Vukani's inability to play local music on his violin shows his unwilling detachment from his African culture and lifestyle. His inability to be in touch with the happenings in the local music scene is of no fault of his own. His upbringing and education has had more to do with Mozart and the rest of the names in European classical music than with his own local type of music and culture.

The street incident greatly unsettles Vukani. It fills him with an even deeper fear of the violin and all that it stands for. Yet he isn't brave enough to throw the violin on the garbage heap. The incident, however, does not kill this child's spirit. Instead, it gives him impetus and resolve to act.

Back to the present, in the house, Vukani finally gains courage to defy the norm. He dares to rebel and the after-feeling is so exhilarating. Ndebele captures the moment in such a way that the reader can feel the exhilaration in Vukani's voice and in every movement of his body.

Vukani trembled. He felt his head going round now. He did not know what to do to escape from this ordeal. The tears come back, but this time he did not stop them. He felt them going down his cheeks, and he gave in to the fury in him: 'I do not want to play...I do not want to play...not any more!...' Then he choked and could not say anything more. *But what he had said had carried everything he felt deep inside him. He was free. He could fly into the sky.* (150, emphasis mine)

Vukani's feeling of release and consequently, freedom, is part of the tenets of the psychoanalytic theory. Out-letting his inner tensions forms the beginning of his journey into finding his unpretentious self. Young and bound as he is, as though in a terrifyingly numbing nightmare, Ndebele gives Vukani the power to summon just an iota of his inner will to free himself. Vukani's letting-it-out is the therapy that will begin to heal him, and it is what explains the feeling of flying into the sky.

While all this is unfolding in Vukani's bedroom, Teboho is in the kitchen. She is the more defiant and the more vocal of the two children. When she accidentally breaks one of her mother's expensive dishes, all hell, as it were, breaks loose. Mother pours forth a tirade of insults and reproach at a shocked Teboho. A bitter exchange of words between mother and daughter follows, ending in insults and physical confrontation. This exchange brings out the exact atmosphere of the home: tense and charged. Teboho yells at her mother:

'You're always telling us not to break dishes, not to scratch the furniture, not to break your house plants, there are so many things one cannot do

in this house...Haven't you been showing more interest in your dishes than in your children?' (148)

It is through Teboho accusing her mother being "a white black woman, a slave of things" that the children's role in "The Music of the Violin" is manifested. They become the tellers of truth. They hide nothing from themselves and their adults and they lash back the truth into their adults' faces. The adults justify their actions towards the children in the name of love but they know, just like Mrs. Zwane, deep down, that the unsettling truth lies somewhere raring to stick its ugly head out.

Labeling those not like them as "not people but animals, absolutely raw ...savages" is a masking technique to the adults' own incapability. They coat their fear and weaknesses and project them to weaker ones. To Vukani and Teboho, however, their parents' attitude only instills in them the will to rebel. Vukani would rather be like Doksi than what he is now. The culture and advancement Dr. Zwane talks of does not sound so admirable to Vukani and Teboho anymore. The acute disappointment in her children and in her own efforts to influence them builds a fire in Vukani's mother. She feels like a total failure, an attribute she dreads. She reacts violently to her son's unexpected refusal to play.

She let go at Vukani with the back of her hand. Vukani reeled back and fell on the bed letting the violin drop to the floor. It made no noise on the thick carpet. Then she lifted him from the bed, and was about to strike him again when Teboho rushed into the bedroom and pulled her mother away from her brother. (150)

The situation has grown so bad and so shameful as to be tragicomical; for the mother cannot take it any more. Still not comprehending what it is she cannot

see, she painfully bewails her fate. Believing she has been bewitched, she moans her loss. The family aspirations, the social position, the wealth all do not at all register to her as the problem. Her children's inability or rejection to see the world through her narrow lenses is too much to bear. Her husband's admonition is the last nail on the coffin.

'Dorcas! That's enough now,' said Vukani's father with calm, but firm finality. Vukani's mother looked at her husband with disbelief, a wave of shock crossing her face. She looked at the visitors who stared at her. Then she turned for the door and went to her bedroom, banging the door violently. Soon there was bitter sobbing in the main bedroom. Then it turned into the wail of the bereaved. (151)

The shock and daze of dawning truth is painful. The feeling of being abandoned after a long time of companionship in ideology and worldview is what the mother felt at that moment when she looked at the adults in the bedroom. They did not share her approach any more. She felt they were all against her and she felt betrayed. But in essence, she never was able to see the other side of life where the truth lay. She had been oppressing her children all this time. Someone in the name of Mrs. Zwane, had to see this and send out an appeal for the sake of the children: 'Please, dearie, please...There is no need for all this. How can you do this to your children?' (150)

Mrs. Zwane's question remains the echo that resonates in the silence of our thoughts as we read the last line of the story. Both the parents and the children are yearning for liberation. Liberation, which Paulo Freire acknowledges, is childbirth, and therefore, a painful one. The man who emerges is a new man. (25). Vukani's liberation as an oppressed does not come easy. It takes many moments and experiences of anguish before he is finally able to say no. His mother's liberation is the more painful. As the oppressor, it would take a heavier

task to influence and change her mindset. To humanize her it is only the oppressed, her children, who, by freeing themselves, can free her. For a child in a situation like this, the dilemmas are enormous. His role in such a setting is much more profound. But laden with the unique individualism and frail voices Ndebele has given them, they do make a difference. They possess and offer freedom.

The Peer Group

In this section the study gives attention to the child among his peers and the part the peer group plays in defining the theme of childhood in the book Fools and Other Stories.

Parents and teachers are powerful influences upon a child's growth and development. Parents generally support teachers and the objectives and practices of the school, while teachers generally support the parents and the objectives and practices of the home. The child finds it difficult to escape the influence of this more or less united group of adults.

But the youngsters also face demands and expectations that come out from adults, his superiors, but from other children averagely his own age -- his equals. These "other children" constitute the peer group whose influence grows stronger and stronger as the child advances in age.

Peer group in action is the picture we encounter when we first meet the boys in "The Test". The peer-group activity going on in the story is a game of "tennis-ball" soccer being played in the street. Thoba, the lead character in the story, is among this group of boys.

In Africa, street games are a typical occupation for most boys after school. No one would deny the importance of such play activity. It is, as Martin says, a normal outlet for energy and sheer "animal spirits". He goes on to say:

Children need to have their work periods interrupted from time to time with play. From this point of view, play seems to meet certain basic needs of children -- such as the need for activity -- and is therefore essential. (380)

Normal expectations of childhood involve play and a bit of naughtiness. Thoba is presented as an ordinary teenage boy, in an ordinary, typically African setting, participating in an expected activity for boys. His indecision to leave the game and rush home before it starts raining shows his consciousness to the situation. He is aware of what he ought to do in a situation like his. He had felt the first drops of rain on his arms. Torn between the game and dashing home, he has to make a choice as to what would be right for a boy of his age and upbringing.

But the ball decided for him when it came his way accidentally, and he was suddenly swept into the action as he dribbled his way past one fellow. But the next fellow took the ball away from him, and Thoba gave it up without a struggle. The trick is to keep playing and be involved, he thought. (1-2)

Haunted by the dread of rain, Thoba's interest in the game is diminished. His spirits are, however, buoyed when his team scores. It becomes a brief but joyous celebration, for no sooner are the yells in the air than it begins to pour. The rain cuts short the game and the boys scatter and scamper for shelter. Thoba, in a bid to do what should be right begins to run home, hesitates, and changes direction to follow a little group of boys towards the shelter of the walled veranda of Simangele's home.

Thoba found only Simangele, Vusi, Mpiyakhe, and Nana on the verandah. He was disappointed. In the rush, it had seemed as if more boys had gone there. Perhaps he really should have run home, he thought. Too late though. He was there now, at the veranda of Simangele's home, breathing hard like the others from the short impulsive sprint away from the rain. (2)

Simangele, Vusi, Mpiyakhe, Nana and Thoba form the group that shelters in this veranda. In these boys are revealed characteristics of the peer group that help define childhood. Thoba is sensitive, compassionate, timid and peace loving. Nana is the frail one -- poor, sick, and deserving in special attention. Simangele has an ill temper and he exhibits traits of violence and that of a fricative bully. He is feared for this. Vusi, however, is the "only boy in Mayaba street who could stand up to Simangele...He was a wonder". Besides, he "was one of those boys who were good at many things. He was very inventive" (12). He was most famous in soccer and his dribbling prowess and scoring tactics made him the darling of his teammates. Thoba belonged to the "higher-up" social class; a class Mpiyakhe labels so because they are "softies" who, instead of eating *papa* and beans, they have sandwiches. And both Thoba's and Mpiyakhe's feet were smooth unlike Nana's, Vusi's and Simangele's which were cracked.

Just as their backgrounds and upbringing are varied, so are their interests. These are boys who find themselves together under the roof of the veranda, and whose personalities differ in many aspects. There is bound to be tension and clash in interest. This is especially through the vanquished likes of Vusi and Simangele. Vusi is angry and his anger is justified. He was let go when it began to rain and the game ended. The boys who had lifted him up in jubilation and victory had suddenly dropped him "like a bag of potatoes". He is angry, and to heighten the tension, Simangele jests him: "what if your are a bag of potatoes?"

...What do you think fellows?’ (3). But it would have been risky for them to take sides in a confrontation like this. It gets colder, the rain pours incessantly and the atmosphere in the veranda is charged. All the more reason Thoba should yearn for the comfort and security of home.

From the comfort and assurance of home to the uncertainties of the outer world, the veranda scene becomes of childhood significance. This peer group becomes a society in embryo. Thoba and his friends today, as peers, will constitute tomorrow’s adults, as peers. But societies do not spring into being fully formed. The adults of tomorrow will be able to work together to achieve their common purposes as a society to the extent that they have learned in the past to work together as peers, says Martin (381).

Children, as potential adults, can and do learn a lot both at home and in school. But in the home within the family setup they learn how to live and work with other persons with whom they enjoy a very intimate relationship. In the peer group, except with close friends, what takes place is nurturing and building less intense relationships. Thoba is not Simangele’s best friend; neither is he Mpiyakhe’s. His childhood among his peers involves less intimate and less personal interaction. As a child, he learns to behave differently with people outside the home, away from his mother and father. It is this yearning for the comfort of home that signifies Thoba’s attempt to grow to be himself as an individual, and to learn that this group of boys is as vital to his well-being as his mother and father.

What the veranda episode clarifies is that it is normal for peer conflicts to occur in childhood. The children -- Thoba, Mpiyakhe, Vusi, Simangele and Nana -- cannot learn everything that they must learn solely from the interpersonal relationships available in the home. A question to pose: how does a boy learn to

behave like a boy? Society teaches him. Thoba learns to behave like a boy through his interaction with society and his peers. He is a child, but a child who is growing up. He is a teenager whose worldview is being influenced, changed and expanded with every new social experience at life. But he is also aware that experiences even with peers can be cruel. Martin states that child's severest critics are his peers and they grow even more severe and powerful with advance in age (384). An argument about illness suddenly turns onto Thoba when he innocently declares that his father didn't just get ill.

There was a brief silence after this and then the others began to laugh. And Thoba felt how terrible it was to be young. Whatever you said was laughed at. It was a deeply indulgent laugh that helped to blow away all the tension that had existed just before. They just laughed. It was always the case when you are not very strong, and you have to say something.

The incident makes Thoba feel uneasy. He had not expected the conflict to shift down to him and Mpiyakhe. Does it squash his spirit? How does he feel after such an attack, sensitive as he is? It becomes an experience very much similar to Vukani's when he was attacked in the street. He couldn't fight back, but it becomes a latent period of inactivity and dilemma.

Why should a simple truth about one's father lead to ridicule and then to a fight? Thoba looked at Mpiyakhe and had the impulse to rush to him. Should he? What would be the result of it? But the uncertainty of the outcome made Thoba look away toward the rain. He squeezed his shoulders, and felt deeply ashamed that he could not prove his worth before Vusi and Simangele. *He had to find a way to deal with his rival.* (15, emphasis added).

An important thing is about to happen. Thoba's inner yearning to prove his worth is the prelude to the contest in the rain; the horse in the rain challenge.

The horse in the rain challenge in "The Test" brings to the fore another characteristic of a childhood peer-group situation. It is a crucial testing ground for what has been learnt elsewhere and also a setting for new learning. Each child, then, uses the peer group situation as a test of the "worth" of an idea, a skill, or an act. An invitation from Vusi to Simangele to "be a horse in the rain" becomes a challenge of brains rather than of brawn. Vusi would like to know just how tough Simangele truly is.

Vusi becomes a horse in the rain when, shirtless, he flings himself into the cold and rain. He runs fast up the streets and not once does he look back. Simangele cannot stand the embarrassment and indignity of having been beaten to it by Vusi. Vusi, the inventive one, had done it this time to the chagrin of Simangele. And Thoba knew how Simangele felt.

...he [Simangele] looked at the small figure in the rain. It was so far now that it did not even seem to be moving. He looked at the two boys, again. Thoba cringed, and looked well into Simangele's eyes. *And then suddenly Thoba did not feel afraid any more. As he looked into Simangele's eyes, he felt a strange sense of power over Simangele.* Simangele did not want to go into the rain, but he would go, because Thoba was looking at him. Mpiyakhe was looking at him. Nana was looking at him with those large eyes. And they had all been there when Simangele was challenged. He would have to go. (18, emphasis added)

Thoba must have felt like the world's greatest. He must have felt like something just snapped right in him. It is that great feeling of realization; of a burst of truth that all along had never occurred to him. It is Vukani's feeling of newness and freedom in "The Music". And what a great feeling it is! To a boy who all this time has been groping for an answer to his sense of powerlessness and fear, this sudden feel of victory and power over none other than Simangele replaces

his feelings of shame and inadequacy. Lay Psychology would call it "therapy"--direct confrontation with the source of fear. The answer reveals itself hidden deep within Simangele's eyes.

Children in a group such as this influence each other tremendously. Besides providing models, rewards, an identity and support, the childhood peer group may have adverse effects ranging from rejection to negative influence and to parent-child conflict. But there is a lot of learning in the group. Thoba has all along been trying to seek the approval of the group. In the process he acquires a drive. He develops certain subsidiary motives. He wants to get along with them. Above all, Thoba wants identity, derived from his achievement as an individual. So what does he do to achieve this? He has found a way to deal with his rival:

Slowly and deliberately, and with a gleam in his eye, Thoba unbuttoned his shirt, and as he pulled it over his head, he felt the warmth of his breath on his chest. And that gave him a momentary impression of dreaming for he had a clear image of Vusi taking off his shirt. But the image did not last; it was shattered by the re-emergence of his head into the cold. He shivered as goose pimples literally sprang out on his skin before his eyes. But he would have to be reckless. That was bravery. Bravery meant forgetting about one's mother. (20)

Thoba finds a way to deal with his rival, and consequently with his feelings of inadequacy and powerlessness. It is not just a physical challenge but a psychological one, too. What drives him to be reckless in the name of bravery is his desire to overcome his fear and sense of powerlessness. He would like to prove to the world and to himself that he can; that he is brave. "The Test" becomes the defining moment, the rite of passage for Thoba to prove himself worthy first to himself and secondly to the gang. Experiencing the cold and the

rain on his bare skin takes on new meaning for him. He feels different. He is free. He is happy. He epitomizes the unoppressed spirit of childhood. No longer bound by fear, he feels powerful in the rain. He feels in control of his fragile life, and for the very first time in his young life, he is a hero to himself.

Later, when it had stopped raining, it is a different Thoba who emerges through. He is feeling worn out, cold, and hurt, and the matriarchs at the bus stop embarrass him, but Thoba bears it all bravely. He is, however, disappointed that the other boys could not see him shirtless in the cold and the rain. "They were sitting round their kitchen stoves, taking no challenges." In spite of everything, Thoba gets home content though in physical pain. There was no one at home and Thoba decides to get into bed, defying his duty to make a fire. In his bedroom,

he took off his trousers, and left them in a wet little heap on the floor close to his bed. He felt dry, but cold, as he slipped into the blankets. He felt warm, deep inside him. And as he turned over in bed, looking for the most comfortable position, he felt all the pain. But, strangely enough, he wished he could turn around as many times as possible. There was suddenly something deeply satisfying and pleasurable about the pain. And as he slid into a deep sleep, he smiled, feeling so much alive. (29)

This is Thoba reborn. What happens to Thoba is what happens to Vukani in "The Music". Thoba, as an individual motivated by his peer group, finds ways to grow. He learns a lot about others and about himself, too. His childhood and his childhood peers provide the best opportunity for him to develop the requirements for living with his fellow men, not just only now, but more importantly, in the future. Play as it began in "The Test" and as one of the most important forms of peer-group activity, is an integral part of the process of socialization. It is more than relief from work. It is more than an activity

designed to keep Thoba from being a dull boy. It is necessary to make Thoba a full man. In the larger view, it is not an escape or vocation from reality; rather, it is a rehearsal for reality -- the reality of the future.

The Child in the School

"The Child in the School" draws light to the role formal schooling plays in influencing the socio-psychological development of the child in Fools and Other Stories. As an integral part of childhood, the school does offer an opportunity for experience in the kinds of social skill in extra family group relationships, which the child will eventually require as an adult. Moreover, formal education exposes the child's mental faculties or cognition to the greater issues about the world.

Martin W.E. points out what formal school does:

Formal school may bring with it feelings of increased self-importance, self-esteem, and ego-identity. Indeed, school, might be likened to the initiation ceremonies at puberty in some tribes. School is stimulating; it provides a host of new experiences which may come as a welcome relief to a home situation which has ceased to be challenging to the growing intelligence of the child. Like the family, the school seeks to induct children into culturally accepted ways of thinking and behaving. (382)

"Fools" is the story of fifty-five year old Teacher Zamani and the young, vibrant student, Zani Vuthela. Both differ over socio-political ideologies. A bitter Vuthela spills teacher Zamani's shame-laden past. He is "the brother of that bright little girl whom [the teacher] subdued with the story of [his] misfortunes". And Teacher Zamani himself admits: "So my life was bare now. Not just my crime against his sister, but the whole of my life" (168).

Teacher Zamani narrates the story in the first person. Our first impression of this man is of a careless, bored old man. In comparison, the young man he watches pacing up and down in the waiting room at Springs Stations is a dandy, with a restless spirit. Vuthela's behaviour seems snobbish and detached towards the old man seated on the bench. The teacher, despite his interest in him, gradually begins to feel vaguely resentful of Vuthela's stolen bits of attention. The teacher muses: "Surely there was no need for this kind of behaviour, considering there were only two of us in the waiting room that early morning" (153).

An understanding of Zani Vuthela's past and present places him in context. He is from school in Swaziland. His uncle had sent him to Swaziland to get "a better education...a good education" as Teacher Zamani puts it. It is an observation vehemently affirmed by Vuthela who strongly believes that their country's education system has been damaged, a damage done way back in 1953.

'...Yet, we keep complaining as if the injustice began yesterday. The obviousness of analysis! The lack of new insights! Old complaints uttered as if they were revolution itself! And now, November 30, 1966: yet another summer, and our minds continue to languish in an eternal winter. It saddens me.' (156)

Vuthela is a politically impassioned man. From the kind of education and exposure he's had, his worldview has developed into a politically conscious one. He is articulate and fearless and his outburst toward Teacher Zamani rather overwhelms the old man who believes Vuthela is out to defy or humiliate him. But he was wasting his time according to Teacher Zamani, for the latter had had so much abuse heaped on him in the previous few years that he persuaded himself he could only be more fascinated than annoyed by Vuthela's attitude.

Teacher Zamani may be worth of humiliation. Besides his careless physical appearance, his moral and ethical standards are revealed as highly questionable. Vuthela recognizes Teacher Zamani because of an embarrassing event that had occurred some time back in the school where he was teaching. Vuthela finds it difficult to give his teacher the respect he deserves because of a misdeed the teacher committed that tarnished his name.

Generally, teachers are expected to be upholders of high moral and intellectual values. Society entrusts them with the lives and well being of young, innocent children. When they betray this trust they become a disappointment to and a shame of society.

To many school children, teachers serve as models. Sometimes children pick up rather superficial mannerisms as they imitate the teacher. One example of childhood behaviour in school is that of nicknaming their teachers. Teacher Zamani was nicknamed "Panyapanya" because his eyes kept blinking continuously. Important also about childhood is the notion that children tend to copy some of the teacher's attitudes. This could be detrimental to the child as he grows up and becomes a socialized member of society.

Teacher Zamani was the terror of school children. Vuthela knew about him long before he set eyes on him.

That was when I was a mere seven-year-old at Emzimkhulu Lower Primary School. That was, let's see... eleven years ago. Time flies! And you were there at the higher primary: Zakheni Higher Primary School. You were teaching there. And I know you are still there, you know, whenever we thought of you, us toddlers at Ezimkhulu, we dreaded the possibility of passing our exams and moving up towards you. It was said you could beat a child until his skin peeled off. (F 161)

As a teacher he was doing his disciplinary job then. He had since then stopped that kind of severe punishment. His encounter with Vuthela jolts him, for this young man comes out a different kind of student. He is the articulate, fearless type and this makes it very difficult for Teacher Zamani to deal with him, for, as he says;

It is harder to deal with words. You don't see them. They may infuriate you, frustrate you, move you to tears; but you cannot handle them and throttle the life out of them. (F 162)

Vuthela is described as the political type, the type of youth that turn everything into politics. He is, but he knows and he has seen as he says, Teacher Zamani's type, too. He calls them "Masters of avoidance" who refuse to see connections between things. They, Vuthela says, have been destroyed by their own fear of living. 'Some of them like you, are paid to be killers of dreams, putting out the fire of youth, and to be expert at deflowering young virgins sent to school by their hopeful parents.' (F 164)

The great sin committed by the old man comes out finally. Zani Vuthela's pain, contempt and bitterness are real. Young and hotheaded, he bears a heavy cross within him. Teacher Zamani, to Vuthela, doesn't come close to being described as a role model. He embezzled church funds from the Anglican Church where he was once a treasurer. Protected by the priest of the church, Teacher Zamani, then a young handsome man of thirty-two, married the Priest's daughter. Their marriage, as though cursed, is childless. Not done yet, Vuthela's anger and bitterness and contempt spew out when he finally reveals the exact connection and source of his hatred for this fifty-five year old man.

'Do you see this brief case, Teach? In it is her letter, I received it two years ago, a year after she bore you child. In it she was letting out to me, for the first time, the tragic poetry of her disillusionment. She has

such a beautiful way with words! You did not completely destroy her.
What a terrible lesson you are! (F 168)

Mimi's childhood has been violated by an unfortunate act of a man in the name of Teacher Zamani. School, to her, was supposed to have offered her opportunity to learn and acquire an education. It is ironical that school snuffles out her dreams and hope in education. She was supposed to learn important lessons in friendship, respect, responsibility, group or team co-operation, competitiveness, and general social skill development. The children who are in school gain a lot of knowledge concerning them. Individual constitution put into consideration, each child is given a chance to expand his worldview.

Mimi's pregnancy forces her out of school. She becomes society's "rejected" child. Were she to go on in school, she would lack inner feelings of security and adequacy. Her self-esteem is injured; so is her future. The author, however, gives her a strong and stoic character trait. Her innocence has been violated, and it takes time for the whole misfortune to sink in for her. But the letter to her brother reveals her resilient spirit not to despair and give up. It is what redeems her back to her true self.

Behaviour therapists argue that behaviours that are deemed abnormal are acquired through a learning process. They assert that all pathological behaviour, except where there is established organic causation, can be best understood and treated by focusing on the behaviour itself, rather than by attempting to alter any underlying "disease core" (Zimbardo 539).

Further, Zimbardo elaborates that the term "behaviour" is used by contemporary behaviour therapists to include all reactions that are influenced by learning variables -- thoughts and feelings as well as avert actions (539). Zani

Vuthela's behaviour as a young man is not at all delinquent. In an attempt to capture his personality in the school setting, it would be prudent to understand his early childhood as well as the environment in which he lives.

By all standards, Vuthela was a bright and charismatic schoolboy. He came out top of his class, he had broken the school's record in the hundred-yard dash, and he had scored a goal in a soccer match. He was skilled in debate and he loved poetry, science and mathematics. He had wanted to study nuclear physics and astronautics. All these admirable scholarly virtues may have seemed nothing more than flights of wild ambition to Teacher Zamani, but in encountering Vuthela he was made to think twice about the actual heavy possibility of achievement in the young man. As a child in school, Vuthela had the achievement dream and motive, an expected thing in childhood and early adulthood. This is how Teacher Zamani, the narrator, remembers Vuthela as a boy:

There was something painfully immediate yet strangely liberating about him. It was as if he plunged me into experiencing the purest of sensations, the most uninhibited of impulses. That boy! He was pure fear, pure concern, pure indignation, pure conceit, pure profligacy, pure reason, pure irrationality. He seemed like a child who was trying everything because it was everything. (F 196)

As a boy, Vuthela was the essence of the free and wild spirit of childhood. Ironically though, he wasn't really as free. He opens up to teacher Zamani about his more recent past years. For a long time, he had hated women, hatred that originated from early childhood games. The hatred finds explanation in Sigmund Freud's definition of the period as the latent period in human growth and development. But in adolescence the growing child realizes the need for the very girls and women he had no interest in during latency.

Vuthela's adolescence was a little exceptional from the norm. Instead of seeking the company of girls, he directed his time and energies to educational matters, wanting to learn about the world and life. He found the things he discovered in books much more worth pursuing. So, as he says, he 'spent hours and hours reading and thinking. And all that work of preparation seems doomed to come to nothing' (F 206). He is convinced of the futility of book education. It is an education that to him is too slow to effect change in the circumstances of his life and environment.

Something Vuthela does not realize is that he has the raw material to influence change. His formal education is a vehicle with which to bring about change for the better in his land. Sadly, though, he is unable to synthesize his formal education into practical results in his circumstances. Coupled with his impatient, rash nature, it comes as no surprise when he gets into problems with the local inhabitants of Charterston, both in the streets and in the classroom.

The classroom for a child is an enormously influential but enormously complex social milieu. Children can be naughty in class and the way a teacher handles discipline holds influential consequences in the later development of the child. Rewards and punishments are continually used in the classrooms to make some ways of behaving pleasurable and other ways painful. Both punishment and reward can be defined as something the teacher does or gives to a pupil in response to particular pupil behaviour; reward, however, is something that gives the pupil pleasure. Punishment is whatever brings him discomfort or pain. Thus a nod of approval, a reassuring smile and a frown are subtle ways in which the teacher rewards or punishes a particular act.

The author of Fools and Other Stories is an academician by profession, and he is familiar with classroom situations. His portrayal of Teacher Zamani's

classroom comes out as prescriptive as it is descriptive. Daniel, the naughty boy in Teacher Zamani's class brings into the classroom a paper poster written: DAY OF THE COVENANT: STAY HOME AND THINK. Such a thing was new in town. But Daniel's poster had something more drawn on it. Behind it was an explicit and elaborate drawing of human sexual organs in coitus. This must have unsettled Teacher. The way he punishes Daniel is a prescriptive example of how misconduct in class could be handled by a teacher. Psychologists and behavioral therapists advocate that for behaviour in children to be effectively modified, rewards must be used more often than punishment. This means teachers must work with pupils rather than against them. Martin (350) points out that evidence of the importance of working positively with children can be found in studies of the relationship of teachers' classroom personalities to pupils' behaviour.

Both Teacher Zamani and Daniel learn a lesson from the way the otherwise embarrassing poster is handled. This is what transpires in front of the class:

'Daniel', I said, 'wouldn't it be nice if I showed this to the whole class?'

Daniel looked down at his feet.

'No sir', he mumbled.

'Why not, Daniel?' I asked.

'Just, sir', he said.

Poor fellow! At his young age he already thought sex was some disembodied obscenity.

'Sit down, Daniel', I said. He shuffled away in shame. (F 212)

Cognitively, the boy has not mastered the concept of sexuality in its totality. Relying on their limited level of comprehension of complex abstract realities around them, Daniel and the other pupils came to learn proper behaviour and conduct from such an incident. Teacher Zamani's skin-peeling approach would

not have been the best option. Were he to have used domination in such a conflict, non-conformity on the part of the pupil would be a possible result.

A child in the classroom depends on his teacher for education and imparting of knowledge. One important observation comes to our attention. Paulo Freire, in Pedagogy of the Oppressed brings out a crucial concern concerning the nature of education. He says:

A careful analysis of the teacher-student relationship at any level, inside or outside the school, reveals its fundamentally narrative character. This relationship involves a narrating subject (the teacher) and patient, listening objects (the students). The contents, whether values or empirical dimensions of reality, tend in the process of being narrated to become lifeless and petrified. Education is suffering from narration sickness. (45)

Freire laments about this passive nature of students or pupils in education. He calls this relationship "the banking concept of education" with the students acting as the depositories and the teacher as the deposition in this act of depositing.

Zani Vuthela makes an example of a depositor teacher. Lacking in basic teaching skills, and with passion and impatience to change the world single-handedly and within a day, Vuthela comes out a pitiful young man.

He invites himself into Teacher Zamani's classroom that same afternoon of Daniel's case. He wants to address the class "about life". Teacher Zamani's protest that these were mere primary school children are met with 'That's the point. They must be caught young' from Vuthela.

He appears on this hot Monday afternoon feeling as important as a politician, ready to sell his grand political ideologies to these ten-years-olds. His entrance into the room is very interesting. For when the children chant their greetings, Vuthela is flustered and gives Teacher a sheepish look. Teacher observes:

I don't think he had ever been respected like that. I think that for the first time in his life he was confronted with the reality of growing up. The children had stood up for him. The full impact of his young adult shocked him and left him confused. And the children stood there looking at one who did not know as yet how to handle the demands of his age. Like a horse, they knew the climber had no experience of controlling. I motioned them to sit down. (F 213)

It is an amusing picture the way Vuthela carries himself around. He is neatly dressed and was the very picture of coolness in that heat. "His well combed hair seemed to have been brushed back by the breeze." The little children, little innocent people, are by now no doubt eyeing this visitor with acute interest, ready and eager to absorb whatever comes out of the mouth of this babe.

Vuthela had been denied audience at the secondary school. Teacher Zamani's primary school, as Vuthela moans, was his only hope. We learn later that it was the desperation in him that compels him to rely on ten year olds as hope. Exactly what did he want to talk about to these children?

'What else can one talk about in this country?' he said. 'Look, every minute, every second should be an instance of struggle.' His voice was beginning to rise and with it the curiosity of the children. (F 214)

Vuthela argues that young as they are, it is an important age for the sowing of political consciousness. Though they may not really understand what is said, they would remember it one day, so goes the argument.

Soon, heavy politics begins to rain in this class of ten-year-olds. Mr. Zani Vuthela is not just a young adult bubbling with political energy to change the world; he becomes a teacher impatient to impart knowledge far above and beyond his pupils' capability to understand. His grand lecture about the politics and history of South Africa is an urgent message for the wrong audience at a wrong time as it were.

'... Yes, ladies and gentlemen, the Church of blood and death, a country of fear and oppression, when evil becomes a philosophy or a religion, it becomes rational or spiritual malice: the highest forms of depravity. Do you hear what I'm saying? Do you understand what I'm saying? (F 216)

Did they? Could they? Their young minds cannot yet grasp the grandiose ideas being lashed out at them. This is a critical stage in their life when their attitudes towards themselves and their lives are determined. It is during this stage, the primary school years, that children encounter failure, grade retention and negative attitudes besides new revelations unfolding in their lives. Whatever their experiences during this period, whether negative or positive, profound effects are felt in their effort to develop self-image. Zani Vuthela's lofty speech may not quite sink into the minds of these children. His very language, as Teacher observes, was evenly serious. This is the point when his vain inability to reconcile classroom education with the reality on the ground is manifested. Teacher Zamani says:

He had become his books, and when he moved out of them he came out without a social language. He spoke to me in the same way he spoke to those children. (F 217)

What Vuthela lacks is the ability to communicate. Freire reminds us that it is only through communication can human life hold meaning. The teacher should create an open and free interactive formula for learning. He cannot think for his

students, nor can he impose his thought on them, Freire states. "Authentic thinking, thinking that is concerned about reality, does not take place in ivory-tower isolation, but only in communication" (50).

Towards the end of this school scene in "Fools," Ndebele manages to draw our sympathies towards the old man, Teacher Zamani. He may have done a lot of wrong in the past, but his close concern and association with his pupils is touching. Children seem to be his only source of joy in his impotent life. He is filled with the profoundest affection for the little faces looking up to him. Before the final bell rings, he has a chance to communicate them one last thought concerning Vuthela's speech:

'My children... you have just had your first real lesson since you came to school. And from today onwards, you know that when you come in here to open your books you are like someone writing at the railway crossing for the train to pass. But the train before you is a very long one; it is made of years, and years, and years. And while it is passing, know that the real school is outside there, and that today, that school was brought into this classroom for a very brief moment. And one day when that school out there is finally brought into this classroom forever, you will know that the train of years has finally passed, and it is time to go on with your journey. (F 220)

And when the final bell does ring, Teacher Zamani knows he has to let the spirit of childhood free.

The Child in the Community

Every child grows in some kind of community. Every child lives in some kind of shelter, on some kind of terrain, surrounded by some kinds of physical structures. This open changing, global environment is often taken for granted as

a background in the child's growth. It is the neighbourhood, analyzed here in relation to its influence on the child in Fools and Other Stories.

Newman and Newman, in Infancy and Childhood, give us an overview of the neighbourhood as a context for development of the child. They say the neighbourhood contributes immensely to the child's development. It is a primary setting in which children spent unstructured time. This means that the neighbourhood will be a setting in which children's experimentation, curiosity and desires to experience competence will be openly expressed in interaction with naturally occurring social and physical phenomena (503). As a result, the neighbourhood that one lives in poses a variety of challenges that have the potential for increasing one's skills.

They go on to explain that children form habits through daily interaction in the neighbourhood that direct their choice of living arguments in adult life. If children took pleasure in solitary walks and quiet moments by a stream, they will seek these experiences in adulthood. If children took pleasure in the colourful displays of shops and signs on the way to school, these sensations will be sought in creating an adult lifestyle. As adults, we try to provide for ourselves and for our children the best of what we can remember of our childhood neighbourhood. Some people also try to eliminate the worst of what they remember.

In the neighbourhood, children have opportunities to discover their own selfhood. The power of roles like son or daughter, brother or sister, and student are not as important outside the immediate context of home and school. In shops or on the street, children are availed the chance to direct their behaviour and to observe the consequences in encounters that are comparatively undefined in contrast to the interactions at home and at school. This means that

away from school and home where more or less set recommendations for behaviour are in effect, the streets and open society influence a child's conduct.

It is noteworthy that the variety of settings in which people spend their infancy and childhood are enormous. There are many images that can be evoked that reflect qualitatively different neighbourhoods. Each one provides a somewhat different context for the development of motor skills, social relationships, play behaviour, peer interactions, and a sense of physical space such ecological factors affect a child's development. In Fools and Other Stories, the setting runs similar throughout the five stories. The neighbourhood and community reside in a small black township similar to the author's own childhood township of Charterston. It is this township and its inhabitants of all ages and class that provides the communal influence to the child characters in the stories.

It is important also to appreciate the psychological meaning of the neighbourhood to the child. The psychological meaning of the neighbourhood changes at each stage of development of the child. As a child gains increasing mobility and a more complex cognitive representation of the concept of community, the child's appreciation of the neighbourhood will change (Newman 526). Three concepts that emerge as a result of neighbourhood encounters include learning the territorial boundaries that have been created through ownership or dominance of space, learning which settings do or do not permit children, and acquiring an emotional commitment to the neighbourhood. Commitment reflects the enthusiasm of adults towards the community itself and the openness of adults toward the participation of children.

In "Uncle" we see the role community plays in a child's life. "Uncle" incorporates the greater issues of family, peer, school and community in a setting that is rich and rewarding to a child.

The uncle introduces his *mshana*, the child narrator in the story, to an exciting world beyond the home. Physically, he is up and about town with his *mshana* perched high on his shoulders. Mentally, he opens up to the child the world of music, politics, geography, sociology, philosophy and history. He teaches the boy about his country, his family roots, his music and introduces him to meditation. Boyhood to this *mshana* becomes a whole new experience with the entrance of Uncle into his life. It is enriched by his interaction not only with the extended family he is exposed to, but also with his friends Doksi and Wanda, the school, and the people in the township as a whole.

The township community in "Uncle" is made up of all classes and ages of people. Through the boy narrator, the author presents the big brothers that like sitting under the big cotton wood tree on the corner, playing dice and gambling.

An encounter with the two Boer policemen hints to the reader the apartheid powers that this township is in constant touch with. Their reckless charging down the dusty streets of Batho Township is an act of terrorism in the name of fun for the children. To the adults who understand well the amount and kind of power the whites wield, they know the Boer policemen are a force to be reckoned with. Even the braves like Nzule, who is famed for fighting the white policemen, has to scatter off for dear life when the van goes charging after the group of big brothers. The little boys find it to be a game of brawn to fight the power of the oppressor. When Wanda hits the van with the crushed tin he was playing with, he wants to be praised by his friends. His desire is to hear how brave he was. To validate his bravery, he boasts about what his uncle says: "when you see a chance, use it". He acts partly because of his uncle's influence.

There are the people milling the streets on Sunday with the women carrying Bibles and hymnbooks, going to or coming from Church. The way they

exchange greetings and niceties with Uncle and his *mshana* shows a close and amiable community.

Many women would stop us, saying to Uncle: 'Hello, Lovely!' And he would say: 'Hello, my darlies!' And they would say: 'What's this little picture of you on your shoulders?' And he would say: 'This little picture on my shoulders is my *mshana*.' And they would say: 'Oai! What can you tell us? You've been hiding your child and then having a free ride on us!' And then they would say: 'You do look like your uncle. Look at those lips.' And Uncle would say: 'What's the use of looking at lips from a distance?' Then he would bend his knees, and I would be kissed so many times. And after kissing me, some would say: 'Oh, Lovey, how I miss you! How about a little loving?' And Uncle always said: 'Okay, darly, I'll come round sometime this week.' And they would say: 'I can't wait.' And he would say: 'All good things have to be waited for!' (F 70 - 71)

Still perched high up on his uncle's shoulders, the *mshana* and his uncle continue making the rounds in town. They pass the men sitting on benches close to the walls of their houses. The men would be reading the *Golden City Post* or the *Sunday Times*, and Uncle and the men would exchange some political chitchat of the day. The shoeshine would polish Uncle's shoes.

What is painted of this community is a picture of a people closely associated with one another. There is an air of ambiance and friendliness and kindness. It passes as an open and loving community. To the child, it becomes the kind of free community he grows up knowing and feeling comfortable with. This is the image portrayed of the community in the stories as a whole. It is an image that the *mshana* carries with him in his mind, perched high up on the shoulders of his drunken Uncle as the pair stumbles back home at twilight.

It is however not always a calm and loving township. As is always the case in society, conflict is inevitable. It does exist in this dusty township. Courtesy of Uncle, the streets are treated to a spectacle of stone throwing between two adults. Uncle courts disaster when he sleeps with Nzule's woman, and what ensues is an exciting showdown for the children. Even more exciting is Uncle's victory over Nzule. Nzule is vanquished. He no longer is the township hero of bravery to the children. A new hero has been crowned, and he is Uncle.

Uncle's heroism is exhibited better when he rescues his sister and his *mshana* from a bee attack at church. He manages to get Mother and the boy away from the confusion of bees and people. He further tries unsuccessfully to rescue a boy from a mob that was attacking him for being the cause of the bee attack. The bees in the process sting uncle, but then, many acts of heroism are accompanied with risk of pain.

Uncle's presence in the boys' lives means a whole lot of new experiences to the children. Notwithstanding the ripples he causes in this small township he comes out a hero. And so do the people. Pooled together by Uncle's music and his infectious, extrovert personality, the township becomes one huge gay family to the children. It is a jubilant scene as the curtain falls on this society. For a child, it is a happy moment, a carnival, when he cannot hide his joy and exuberance. Narrating the events unfolding before him, the child's perspective in this case is apparent, and this technique employed by Ndebele gives the child the upper hand in telling out as he sees it. He describes the last scene in "Uncle":

The bride and groom are out of their car. And the bridesmaids and their escorts are out of their cars. They bring their heads together. When the heads part, a wedding song has started. And there is the gramophone, the trumpet, the concertina, the guitar, the mouth organ, the hooting cars and the wedding song. And Mother is passing cool drink.

The sun is going down.

Oh, Uncle, everybody is here. (F 123)

There couldn't be a lovelier mood for a child. There couldn't be a happier community. This community provides a laboratory of human relations for the child. Within this laboratory he can learn that people are different, that these differences make for conflict, that man must ever search for better ways of resolving conflict.

Physical freedom or a minimum of adult restraint will hardly suffice as the sole criterion of the good community seen in "Uncle" nor will experiences with nature, rewarding as they may be. The good community for children offers much more. The physical settings of behavior are important, but even more important are the social interrelations within that habitat. The "good" community, through its members, takes over the job of socialization where the family leaves off.

Hart, quoted by Martin, puts it thus:

In the good community no family ever brought up its own children. After they were six or seven years old, they were the responsibility of the whole community. Through interaction with others outside the family, the child learns the wider community. He is exposed to a complexity of interests and activities, to diversities of economic conditions, religion, education, social conditions, and politics. Through exposure to the problems and conflicts of the community, his social and intellectual development is enriched. (418)

Religion and church and matters of spirituality are an integral part of communal life. Their special function is to deal with problems of good and evil. We should

expect to find that religion or spirituality significantly affects the moral development of children. It becomes conceivable then, that when the moral teachings of the home are reinforced by spiritual sanction, the internalization of controls of conduct will proceed very efficiently.

In the setting of the stories in Fools and Other Stories, spirituality is part of the people's lives. Both modern and traditional religious beliefs come out in the text. The child in the story of "The Prophetess" has been socialized to believe in the power of the prophetess to heal. It is a communal thing. His mother does believe in it. So does most of the community. But while the adults revere and have no doubt in the prophetess' powers, the boy's feelings are more of fear, dread and intrigue.

There was something strangely intriguing about the prophetess and holy water. All that one was to do, the boy had so many times heard in the streets of the township, was fill a bottle with water and take it to the prophetess. She would then lay her hands on the bottle and pray. And the water would be holy. And the water would have curing powers. That's what his mother had said too. (F 30-31)

He grows up knowing that the prophetess is to be respected because of the curing powers she possesses. She is capable of punishing naughty and disrespectful children and even adults, and it has been said in the township.

The church and the institution the prophetess represent are generally supposed to help bring up children who are to be God-fearing, respectful towards parents and others, and generally good mannered. Religion is also supposed to influence character because of the rules therein, most of which are beyond a child's comprehension sometimes. Bad behavior like abusive language,

disrespect towards parents and authority, lying, stealing, dishonesty and unkindness are discouraged through church and through religion as a whole.

For a child, however, some of the tenets of religion are bound to fill him with fear and confusion. Things and beliefs he cannot yet conceptualize in his mind come to represent mystery and wonder. With his still immature cognitive understanding of abstract ideals, he is yet unable to reconcile the limitations religion imposes on him with his nature to be free.

The fear of the prophetess is community grown. From the stories the boy hears both at home and away, the fear becomes to him a truth. His timidity and unease at the start of the story show how imperative the community's force is on him. But his fear is justified. The prophetess and anything associated with her evoke the unknown to a boy so young. That is why the myth of the vine is real to the boy.

'Don't touch that vine!' was the warning almost everyone in Charterston township knew. It was said that the vine was all coated with thick, invisible glue. And that was how the prophetess caught all those who stole out in the night to steal her grapes. They would be glued there to the vine, and would be moaning for forgiveness throughout the cold night, until the morning, when the prophetess would come out of the house with the first rays of the sun, raise her arms into the sky and say: 'Away, away, sinful man; go and sin no more!' suddenly, the thief would be free, and would walk away feeling a great release that turned him into a new man. That vine; it was on the lips of everyone in the township every summer. (F 32)

This is good enough reason for the boy to keep off the vine. What goes on in the bus however brings up urgent questions for him. Is all this talk about the

prophetess really true or is it mere superstition? Has anyone ever seen a person caught there or is it just adult fabrication? "The truth", as a man on the bus said, was that none had any proof. "It's all superstition. And so much about this prophetess also. Some of us are tired of her stories" (F 35).

The boy is filled by a certain fascination for this prophetess. Her powers have been extolled in the township. His physical encounter with her fills his mind with fantastical imaginations. Her every movement, her every sound made and created, and her every item in the house hold some mysticism to the boy whose keen mind magnifies all that is and that happens around him. He misses little.

The boy has been sent by his ill mother to get some holy water from the prophetess. The encounter with the prophetess becomes a whole new intriguing experience. The symbols, the chants, the hymns and the prayers of the prophetess show how serious an occupation her profession is. The child in the story sees it differently, for to him, the superhuman and the supernatural become areas of intrigue and even doubt. During the performance of the last ritual upon him, the boy does not still give it the seriousness it deserves. He is hyperconscious of the warm hands over his head. The experience takes him away from the present to a world of childhood fantasy. Not in a trance, the boy wonders whether the prophetess could see with her soul inside of him -- his lungs, his stomach and his kidneys. Could she? Just how powerful was she, this prophetess?

The hairs at the back of his neck standing, the boy leaves for home in the darkness. He has the blessed holy water, the water that is to heal his mother. His love for his mother motivates him to run on home. The streets are dark and dangerous, and "even with the spirit of the prophetess in him", he has it to trust reality. Danger is danger; you don't just walk into its jaws.

What trust and faith in the prophetess powers mean to this boy is greatly questioned when he loses the holy water. He is shaken. He has to do something, yet he cannot go back to the prophetess; neither can he go home without the holy water. His mother is counting on him to deliver the healing water. He fills up another bottle with ordinary unblessed water from a tap in the street. He cannot bear to disappoint his mother, but he can dare challenge the prophetess' powers.

When he gets home, his mother is ever so glad to see him with the water. She drinks the water and its coolness in her throat is a satisfying experience for her. Seeing his mother happy diffuses the boy's fears.

There was such a glow of warmth in the boy as he watched his mother, so much gladness in him that he forgave himself. What had the prophetess seen in him? Did she still feel him in her hands? Did she know what he had just done? Did holy water taste any differently from ordinary water? His mother didn't seem to find any difference. Would she be healed? (F 52)

She is healed. She feels better after taking the cool water. It is soothing as she claims, deep down. This becomes a case of irony in the story. It also becomes the defining moment for the boy. "He had healed his mother. He would heal her tomorrow and always with all the water in the world. He had healed her". It becomes the answer to all his uncertainties about the prophetess and her powers.

The story of the prophetess and the boy bring out salient issues about the child in the religious setting. There seems to be no direct influence of the superhuman over reality to the child. Concept formation for abstractions and relations of things has not yet developed in this boy. His innocence and inhibited

choices against matters beyond his grasp excuse him, for he is more in touch with the physical, practical truth.

Chapter Three gives analytical insights into the social and psychological complexities faced by the child and the adult alike in a society that longs to find its autonomy. This chapter reveals the psychological make-up of the child in relation to his socio-cultural milieu. It is a relationship, which explains the nature of childhood as a period of a myriad of experiences. Ndebele examines childhood in a black township as an intriguing and captivating period with bittersweet implications. However, the basic revelation lies in the fact that the child characters do not succumb to the forces to become victims; rather, they together with their adults are reborn out of inner willpower.

Images of childhood go with an understanding of how concepts are manifested in children. A deeper critical analysis into the forces that make the child characters is an essential sequel to the portraits of childhood. This critical look is provided in the next chapter where the characters made complete, and therefore relevant in their setting.

CHAPTER FOUR

SOCIAL EXPERIENCES AND THE FORMING OF ATTITUDE

Chapter Four takes a closer study at the child-character in Fools and Other Stories. In this chapter, the study proceeds from the assumption that experience informs attitude. It discusses how the child-character's experiences influence his apprehension of his worldview. Developed from Chapter Three, Chapter Four explores this development of the child character's attitude about himself, about those around him, and about the world he lives in.

Literature is a product of creativity of writers sensitive to the issues of their time. It is a powerful tool in the writers' attempt to make known their vision of life. Writers in South Africa have primarily and firstly been dealing with social and political themes because of apartheid in their country. In later South Africa we are beginning to see literature that deals with the human spiritual issues. Characters are depicted in the way they see the world, and in the way they attempt to deal with human problems.

The stories in Fools and Other Stories have dealt with psychological realism, presenting the human inner world in an almost direct projection of feelings and expressions of the characters, more so the child characters. These expressions have an impact on the readers who tend to identify themselves powerfully in emotion with the children. No much factual history of the characters is shown; rather more of the spiritual world of the characters is revealed. The stories deal with the characters' spiritual growth where their past and present social life experiences inform their spiritual growth, and consequently their formulation in their life. The stories tend to have a universal appeal since all humans share the same spiritual experience.

The presentation of each child-character in each story in Fools and Other Stories is uniquely individual. Individual in the sense that each stands out from among other characters. By elevating each child character, the author intends to use the character to present a certain view about him and about circumstances surrounding him.

Developing attitude about self is a gradual and chronological occurrence in human development. The child-characters in Fools and Other Stories grow from a state of relative peace and tranquility through a motivational phase of learning to a state of self-confidence, self-assurance and near self-actualization.

Before experiencing attitude-changing incidents, the child characters are allowed to feel one with the world. In their state of innocence, they initially do not distinguish the difference of their immediate setting from the wider divided world of their land. In their limited world, what exists and what the author allows to matter to them is the presence of friends, family, teachers, men and women with whom they come into contact. Ndebele does not let the trauma of apartheid crush the fragile individuality of those characters. Instead, he lets them live through their childhood in a most ordinary, if not redeeming, manner.

Thoba and Mpiyakhe in "The Test" are portrayed as higher in social class than Vusi, Simangele and Nana. They are, however, painted as the weaker in brawn of Vusi and Simangele, for they belonged at "the lower end of the pecking order among the boys of Mayaba Street" (14). Thoba and Mpiyakhe had fought each other a few times and it was never clear who was stronger. He would win one day, and Mpiyakhe would win the following day. The narrator echoes: "That was how it was among the weak; a constant unresolved struggle" (F 15).

Thoba sees himself as weak and incapable of doing what some of the other boys can do. This feeling of being unable to stand up against others puts him down and seriously affects his esteem. He dreads quarrels and fights because he knows he cannot win in them.

Something happens to him that influences changes in opinion about himself. When he looks deep into Simangele's eyes he is inspired to change. He finds a way to beat Mpiyakhe by going in the rain. His uncomfortable experience in the cold rain becomes to him a learning and discovery process, for he is able to master his body and his fears about his helplessness. At home, he is a different boy. He comes out a daring and rebellious character when he deliberately shuns his duty to make the fire. "Let his mother do whatever she liked with him. He would not make the fire"(F 29).

Thoba's opinion about himself has changed from that of self-depreciation to that of self-love. His notion of bravery includes "forgetting about one's mother", -- rebelling and doing what he's not been daring enough to do. As a growing up boy, Thoba gradually becomes aware of the need to assert a little bit of his own independence and individuality. He becomes not the boy who feels helpless in his mother's arms, but one who can from now on challenge the rules in his life. His esteem is elevated to a state where he feels he can take on the world. That is why he feels good about himself; so much alive. He develops a positive and an inspiring attitude about himself.

So does Vukani. Although his experiences are more traumatic, his ability to reject oppression changes him and those around him. A streak of weakness, fear and docility dominates the initial personality of Vukani. He is a boy who suffers loneliness in the process of being respectful towards his parents. His being obedient in silence and his inability to stand up for himself exhibit his low

self-esteem. For example, when his violin is stolen at school, he and Doksi suspect some people in class to have taken it. Knowing he can't do anything, Vukani feels lost and helpless. Doksi understands this trait in his friend and it irritates him. He admonishes Vukani.

'The trouble with you, Vukani, is that you are too soft. I would never stand this nonsense. I would just face the whole class and say: 'Whoever took my violin is a coward. Why doesn't he come out and fight?' I'm sure it was taken by one of those big boys whom everybody fears. Big bodies without minds! They ought to be working in town. Just at school to avoid paying tax. But me, they know me. They know what my brothers would do. My whole family would come here looking for the Bastards.'

'Let's go and tell the principal; suggested Vukani. The principal was one of those Vukani had entertained one day in his bedroom. 'But maybe we shouldn't,' said Vukani changing his mind. (F 134)

A low and unstable attitude about himself puts Vukani down. His indecision and self-doubts inhibit his happiness and freedoms. But the encounter with the gang in the street motivates Vukani to say no to the violin, a decision that shocks his mother. He feels different after saying the words, though it takes a lot of time to muster enough courage to say so. This is what transpires between him and his mother:

'What is it Vuka?' asked his mother. 'Is there something wrong?'

'Nothing wrong, Ma,' said Vukani, shaking his head. He had missed his opportunity. Why was he afraid? Why did he not act decisively for his own good? Then he felt anger building up in him, but he was not sure whether he was angry with himself, or with his parents together with the visitors, whose visit was now forcing him to come to terms with his hitherto unexpressed determination to stop doing what brought him suffering. (F 144-145)

His suffering eventually ends, and he is able to find himself. His feelings of lightness and flying away are similar to Thoba's, for these feelings come with the realization of their possession of inner strength. From this moment on, their worldview will change because they realize they do not have to be slaves of their fears. From now on, they will learn to love themselves.

There is a child character in Fools and Other Stories who comes out sad, but stoic. His character is presented as one of a child who behaves the way he does to redeem his image. This is Simangele. Simangele is described as a boy a year or two older than the other boys on Mayaba Street, and by far the tallest. His body is lean and strong and it was said he was like that because he was from the farms, "and on the farms people are always running around and working hard all day, and they have no chance to get fat" (12).

Simangele has lived in the township for two years now, but people still knew him as the boy from the farms. He is characterized as stubborn, arrogant and deadly because as a farm person in town, he does not understand things and people laugh at him. Being made fun of is hardly a pleasant experience, and the victim could either retract into himself or let out his anger by being violent. Simangele fights back when people laugh at him as his way of protection and redeeming his ego. His aggressive nature becomes a cover for his feelings of alienation. Not being accepted by his urban friends causes him to be a fighter in order to get noticed and to improve his image.

When Vusi beats Simangele to a challenge, his already pricked ego is further deflated. He is embarrassed and becomes languid when Vusi defeats him in a game of wits before Mpiyakhe, Thoba and Nana. Eventually managing second position, victory by now has already been claimed by Vusi. In the rain, Simangele's strides are much less confident than Vusi's magnanimous strides.

He “jumped over puddles where his challenger had just waded in an out of them like a galloping horse”(19). And as Thoba and Mpiyakhe watch him in silence as he vanishes into the distance, something rings in them: that this is one boy who is trying hard to measure up to himself and to the gang.

Attitude about the people around the child-characters develop through socialization in form of interaction and education. The way each child-character sees others around him depends largely on the influence of attitude about themselves over how these characters will view others, and consequently how their behaviour will be shaped.

Annette Horn, in her paper “Childhood Lost and Regained: Njabulo Ndebele’s *Fools and Rediscovery of the Ordinary*” captures the relationship between uncle and his *mshana*, saying:

There is a special relationship between the mother’s brother and her son in African society. The uncle treats his nephew both with generosity and as an equal...it is the uncle who introduces his nephew to the wonders of the soul on surprise visits. (Horn 2)

The uncle in the story ‘Uncle’ plays a crucial role in shaping his *mshana’s* attitude about the family and his lineage. Uncle, while helping his nephew with his geography homework, reveals the family’s history and lineage, information the little boy would use to better understand his people and his world. His worldview is enriched. This is what happens between the two.

‘Do you know that what comes out of that piano can take you places?’ uncle laughs and then says: ‘Bring your atlas here and let me show you some of these places.’ Uncle comes to sit next to me and we look at the map of South Africa. ‘Show me Bloemfotein...yes...That is where your grandmother and grandfather are. Your uncles. Your younger mothers.

They are all there. That is the center of you life too. Your mother had to come home before you were born because you were her first born. And that is where I buried you umbilical cord. Right there in the yard. Wherever you are in the world, you must return to that yard. Now show me Johannesburg ... yes ... that is where uncle bought his trumpet. Now look at this: Ladysmith, Pietermaritzburg, Durban, East London, Port Elizabeth, Cape Town, Kimberley Pietersburg, Middleburg, Wit bank, Pretoria, Springs, Germistan. All foreign names; but that will change in time. This whole land, *mshana*, I have seen it all. And I have given it music. You too must know this land. The whole of it, and find out what you can give it. So you must make a big map of the country, your own map. Put it on the wall. Each time you hear of new place, put it on the map. Soon you will have a map full of places. And they will be your places. And it will be your own country. And then you must ask yourself: what can I give to all those places? And when you have found the answer, you will know why you want to visit those places.' (F 66)

What comes out of this uncle-nephew session, and many others like these, is the revelation of a rich relationship in a close family setting. What these encounters mean to the little boy is that they help influence and develop an attitude of pride not only in family and heritage, but also pride in himself and in knowing his nation. His horizons about the people in his life are broadened when he learns of his babyhood, his roots and all the people who help shape his personality. His sense of belonging, of being loved and being important to his adults boost his esteem. Consequently, he is able to reflect this positive attitude to those around him, like his friends Doksi and Wanda.

The *mshana* loves his uncle because of what uncle does and brings into his life. It is uncle who brings music in the house, music that draws the *mshand's*

friends and school children to their home, music that will eventually draw the town into their front yard as the sun goes down. It is uncle who thrashes Nzule, the hitherto known township hero-cum-terror, although the *mshana's* sensitivity evokes his sympathies for Nzule. And it is uncle who opens his *mshana's* eyes and mind to the immense possibilities of education. He teaches the little boy a lot of geography, history, Egyptian language, mediation, philosophy and music.

However, the *mshana's* relationship with his uncle is not always filled with the excitement of books and music. A harsh experience befalls the boys when his uncle angrily screamed at his *mshana* to leave him alone one afternoon. This unexpected incident violently unsettles the boy who had never imagined an adult whom he loves so much could hurt him. He recounts the incident to his mother: that he had cried immediately uncle had screamed at him. He had felt so ashamed and when brother Mandla had asked him why he was crying, the boy could not answer him. "How could I? My heart was sore, and my spirits were low, for I had been let down by an uncle" (112).

It is Mother's soothing words and touch that calm down the boy and puts things in perspective. Her support and loving nature pacifies things for the *mshana*, for at the end of the warm moment with his mother, his comrade feelings towards his uncle had been restored. He understands when his mother explains to him the need for adults or people being alone. She says:

'...Sometimes, when you do something that you really like, something important, you want to be alone. It's not that you do not love people any more, but because you want to prepare yourself to love them more and better. So you have to be alone. Your uncle then wanted to be alone so that he can make us better music. That's why Mandla was smiling; he understood what your uncle was doing.'" (F 113)

The child narrator understands, and trusts once again. He lets out his concluding thoughts:

And as I am sinking further into sleep I embrace my mother around her waist, and I'm thinking that wonderful; and I wouldn't have wanted us to be disturbed. (113)

As child-character of eleven years old, *mshana* has already developed an attitude of love, warmth, trust, dependability and security towards family due to mostly the efforts of mother and uncle. By learning tolerance and understanding, he is sensitive towards Doksi who admits to feeling lonely when his friend laughs with the others just the eleven-year-old *mshana* sees his community as happy people full of joy and zest for life.

From Mother's role in "Uncle" we become aware of the importance of the women in these stories of everyday life. Often they have been presented as the breadwinners, as in "Uncle" and "The Prophetess". While the men -- uncle and the fathers are portrayed more as artists and fighters, the women on the whole play a more supporting role. The power of the prophetess to heal and to foretell the future by invoking the spirits of the ancestors instill fear and respect in the boy fetching healing water for his mother. She represents the authority of tradition. Her description of the boy's mother as having 'a heart of gold' may seem insignificant in everyday life. But when she talks to the boy about the need for him to love his mother, for a boy growing up, the words unconsciously contribute to the shaping of the boy's view about the women in his life, not just his mother. She says to the boy:

'You are very fortunate, indeed, to have such a parent. Remember, when she says, "My boy take this message to that house," go. When she says, "My boy, let me send you to the shop," go. And when she says. "My boy, pick up a book and read." In all this she is actually saying to you, learn

and serve. Those two things, little man, are the greatest inheritance.”(F40)

The boy learns what is expected of him towards not just his mother but also toward the women in society. Having lived with them and seen how hard they work, and having felt the tender care of their hands and the soothing tone in their voice, the boy appreciates them by respecting them. He is proud of them. That is why when he heals his mother with ordinary tap water, the joy that fills his heart cannot be contained. He would heal her again and again. He, too, echoes the narrator’s thoughts in “Uncle”: “Oh, what can I do for mother?” This is a boy’s love for his mother.

Not only does experience inform attitude about oneself and about others, but it also does help shape the way we view reality and the world beyond familiar grounds. Attitudes about the world are formed still through experiences in education, social interactions and others.

Njabulo Ndebele deliberately and carefully clears evidence of apartheid from the child-characters’ pathway. Although he is aware of the country’s socio-political situation, he does not place his child-characters in the tumultuous arena of the harsh social laws sweeping the country. The adult characters are aware of the reality of their life: they know why they live in a black urban township called Charterston because of the segregation laws of the land categorized them as the bonafide inhabitants of that setting. But not so the children. They are not yet aware of a life beyond Charterston. The cognition level is not yet fully developed to fit in and be affected by the painful reality of their existence. For most of them, notions of class and colour differences are just beginning to be questioned out of curiosity and a desire to learn. Vukani may have been introduced to white Simpson’s lifestyle but all the idea of race, colour and class

did not to have had any direct influence on his life of anguish. It would take some time for him to understand why that people are different and individually unique in many ways.

School and book education in Fools and Other Stories is used as an aggrandisement tool by the whites. In this respect, it is a service to the whites and a disservice to the blacks. To the black children like Vukani in "The Music of the Violin", book learning is one of the strategies used by the forces in power to subdue the blacks, and to propagate a negative concept formation in the minds of the children.

We meet Vukani for the first time when he is revising, or rather grappling with his history homework in the form of a question:

'Answer the following questions: How did the coming of the whites lead to the establishment of prosperity and peace among the various Bantu tribes?...' But the peace had gone out of his head. (F 124)

Ndebele uses the question to mock the bias and the irony present in the contents of the texts used by black children in school classrooms. With the coming of the whites came social disintegration of the black people, as well as an impact on their culture. Prosperity to the kinds of Vukani's parents is synonymous to white culture, and this choice removes them from fellow blacks, leaving a yawning social gap between them and the likes of Doksi's family. On the contrary, no peace was ever established by the coming of the whites to South Africa. In the simplest description, their coming only contributed to the lack of it, both individually as in Vukani himself, as well as communally.

Children need one clear set of directives. Splitting them into two is one of the most painful cruelties that they could be subjected to. Formal education is

therefore used by Ndebele to show how deception thrives and the possible impact of this deception on young minds. Vukani is torn apart psychologically because he is not yet sure of what is right and what is unacceptable.

The *mshana's* dream and desire to travel to lands far away has been created by his uncle's sessions of learning. Mentioning lands and towns beyond Charterston becomes to the narrator a seed that will slowly germinate into a flower of dreams and infinite possibilities to experience the wonders of the world. Eleven years old for the narrator in "Uncle" is an eager year; a time when the mind and heart become impatient and restless for some new things. For *mshana*, the goodness that has filled his young life is enough to move him to believe: "The world is so wonderful!" (F 109), and we pray that he never gets to say it hurts to grow up.

Perhaps "Fools" of all the stories best brings out a young man's opinion about the world. "Fools" is the most overtly "political" of the stories and yet the political content is embedded in a complex storyline that includes troubled relationships, drunkenness, misunderstandings and personal defeats.

Vuthela is a student activist who has had a chance to study way from home, and who is knowledgeable and quite informed in the events of his country. Book education, social encounters and exposure have opened his eyes and mind to the truths in life. His enlightenment shapes the way he sees and understands people and things. His eagerness to right the conditions of his people is met with reluctance and enthusiasm from the people in town. Filling children's minds with his political beliefs is a case of a restless young man whose desire is to see blacks living a better life. His is a hopeless and lone fight against a powerful monster, for black policemen break up even his demonstration.

The disappointing encounters Vuthela has had with politics become lessons for him. While talking his heart out to a patient and empathetic Nosipho, the narrator's wife, Vuthela's feelings about life come out in an emotional manner. He wishes for a better world, for a change in the circumstances of his people's lives. This yearning for change is the echo of his great concern to answer the call of duty in the liberation struggle. He tells Nosipho:

'But seriously...Sometimes I wish I was God in person. Be everything. Everything. So that with just a single act of mind and body, just one flash of lightning, I could remake our lives entirely. Just start a fresh. A new world could even take a much shorter time than the making of the world by Christians.'" (F 230)

A little too wishful maybe, but for someone who has studied politics, the status quo in the world is unfair, unjust and inhuman especially towards the weaker ones. His dreams of being a scientist rather than a political activist never fade and his experiences with politics, he admits, become a strong part of his worldview. He says:

'But I learnt one lesson out of all this. It is that we should have stuck to our science. You see, too much obsession with removing oppression in the political dimension soon becomes in itself a form of oppression. Especially if everybody is expected to demonstrate his concern somehow. And then mostly all it calls for is that you thrust an angry fist into the air. Somewhere along the line, I feel, the varied richness of life is lost sight of and so is the fact that every aspect of life, if it can be creatively indulged in, is the weapon of life itself against the greatest tyranny.'" (F 236)

Vuthela develops a negative attitude toward political activism in the sense that it becomes a waste of youthful time and energies. For him, it is a futile occupation

because he achieves very little by being an activist. All in all, Vuthela, as a young idealist activist, presents the potential of new life and a new society.

Chapter Four has dealt with experiences and how they influence the formation of attitudes in the child-characters of the stories under study. Parents and the family's extended form, school, friends, men and women in a child character's surroundings shape each attitude. What these people teach the child and what they mean to the child also influence how the child character sees himself, others and the world.

Although the narrator in the stories making up Fools and Other Stories has outgrown his childhood views and feelings, he has sufficient empathy to recreate them. Ndebele focuses on the formative experiences of childhood: the child-heroes grow facing the "outside" world. Through psychological realism, the child characters grow and gain access to discovering that which lies inside their strong minds and fragile hearts and learn them as they battle to comprehend the immense and complex life around them.

CONCLUSION

This study has been an appreciation of the theme of childhood in Fools and Other Stories. The stories are a refreshing depiction of childhood in different social settings, and Ndebele accesses the minds of the characters in an adventurous manner. His decision to shift attention from the spectacular victories and defeats of the oppressed to their daily fight for survival reveals the resourcefulness, laughter and spirit, the active and life-affirming qualities at the heart of resistance.

Ndebele affirms that children are not alike in all ways; there are important differences not only from society to society but also from individual to individual. Growing up in a particular society, like Charterston Township, influences the course of development, and the first thing we note about the influence of society is that it is growing in a society that makes us human.

But it is not the mere presence of other human beings that makes man human. It is only as other human beings teach us the ways of their society that we become human. For the child, learning the accepted ways of behaving for each of the accepted ways of behaving for each of the categories of behaviour makes the child a member of society. Ndebele has brought out the child in the troublesome setting of the time and given him an identity as an individual in his own right.

This study has proven that childhood is indeed a dominant theme in the stories. We have proven that the situations that happen in Fools and Other Stories reveal the author's conviction in the freedom and respect of the child. Ndebele has relied on the nuances of the children's unique individuality to create different images of childhood.

Furthermore, Ndebele has used childhood as the platform from which the subdued consciousnesses of the characters are revived. This reawakening of both the child and the adult lends credibility to the tenets of psychoanalysis which relies on unearthing the suppressed from within a person's subconscious with an aim of gaining relief. Ndebele's art is a harmonious integration of form and content, as well as the social and the psychological.

Childhood and rebirth are merely two of the themes the author has addressed in Fools and Other Stories. The other themes that have been not discussed in detail in this study exist side by side as complimentary themes with the chosen themes to form the content of the stories. Childhood and rebirth have therefore been discussed as an integral part of what forms the content of Ndebele's fiction.

The stories examined in this paper are a projection towards the future emergence of a more close-knit family comprised of both the oppressed and the oppressor. Little significance has been tied to whether the differences are within or without a racial, age, class or gender group. What has been produced is a redeeming literature: literature aimed at exposing the hitherto uncelebrated vibrant lives of victims of prejudicial, man-made laws. Ndebele's stories aim at restoring the dignity and esteem of South Africans. His work is positively prescriptive as it offers an alternative to protest literature.

Childhood and rebirth are themes, which could be studied further. They could, for instance, be given a racial and cultural reading. An in-depth analysis of style and language use in relation to content is also another possible area of exploration.

Njabulo Ndebele's stories are also subject to further criticism using a sociological realist or new historicism approach. In the context of this study, we have been able to meet our objectives and prove our hypotheses using psychoanalytic criticism.

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