

“Trespasser” – Tatamkhulu

Afrika

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

Then they cough and I know
I am not alone:
far back, against the great, nailed doors,
they huddle: **troglydites**
of **night's alcoves**,
daytime's **shopping-malls**,
parking lots, sparse green lawns,
municipal benches where
lunchtime's city workers, stripping down
their food-packs, sit
in sober rows.

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

She has the usual wrappings on
stick-thin, brittle shins,
patchy-purple, quietly rotting
methylated spirits skin:
doekie of **incongruous** elegance **crowns**
the scabrous, half-bald skull.
Her man, grotesque

Cathedral as a place of sanctuary; seeking
sanctuary from the rain
Rictus: open mouth
Appeals to all the **senses**, exhibits the **power
of nature**
Not a comfortable situation
Caprice: sudden change

Troglydites: cave dwellers
Unconventional dwellings
Two groups of people use benches: who has
more right to them?

Expecting beggars to ask for money
Sets up usual image of beggars
Sound doesn't match the expectations

Incongruous: unexpected
One would not expect elegance in such a
place; **crowns** gives images of royalty

as a **gargoyle** roused from stone,
cradles an infant on his lap,
feeds it from a bottle with a teat,
makes the **chuckling, crooning sounds**
that turned me round,
that hold me now spellbound.
'Good morning, sir,' he says,
and his voice is grave
as a **paterfamilias** in his lounge.

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

Gargoyles act as guardians of a cathedral,
warding off trespassers and evil
Sound is fatherly, loving
First section of stanza: images of **decay and dirtiness**
Second section: image of family
Paterfamilias: male head of a household

A **trespasser** on the family scene, like the **speaker**