

OXFORD | southern african fiction

The Heart of Redness

STUDY NOTES

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The Heart of Redness Study Notes

ISBN 0 19 578012 4

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First published 2004

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Cover photograph © Gerald Cubitt

Published by Oxford University Press Southern Africa

PO Box 12119, N1 City, 7463, Cape Town, South Africa

Set in 9.5 on 11.5 pt Minion by Elbert Visser

Printed and bound by ABC Press, Kinghall Avenue, Epping Industria, Cape Town

Introduction

With his third novel, *The Heart of Redness*, Zakes Mda has confirmed his position as the foremost black novelist of the post-apartheid or 'transition' period. The title of the novel recalls Joseph Conrad's classic short novel *Heart of Darkness*, which has for almost a century been a focus of controversy about how Africans are represented in Western literature. Mda's themes continue this 'dialogue' about Western representations of Africans in history and fiction.

Nongqawuse's prophecy

The novel revisits the mid-nineteenth-century tragedy when the amaXhosa followed an order by the fifteen-year-old niece of Mhlakaza, a respected adviser and traditional healer, to slaughter their cattle and destroy their fields. Nongqawuse, the girl prophetess, claimed that the ancestors had communicated the message to her.

If the order was followed, she said, the dead would arise with new crops and cattle, and would drive the white invaders away. Prosperity and renewal would come for those who were alive; the lame and the sick would be cured; the aged would have their youth restored.

When the resurrection prophecy failed to materialise, a chain of tragic events was set in motion: an estimated 40 000 people died of starvation, and more than 150 000 flocked to the colony to sell their labour to the white settlers and the amaMfengu. Thus, the prophecy managed to achieve the subjugation of the amaXhosa, a feat that had eluded the British through nine frontier wars.

Divided views on the cattle-killing

Like the *mfecane*, the great Xhosa cattle-killing is one of the most significant episodes in the shaping of South African society as we know it today. Like all histories, it has drawn and divided scholars from different backgrounds throughout the ages.

The Unbelievers: anti-Nongqawuse

Many, including Unbelievers of the time, the amaMfengu and the settler-colonists, dismissed Nongqawuse as nothing but a fake prophet. This view, represented in the novel by the character of Xoliswa Ximiya, paints a picture of a teenage girl who destroyed the superstitious, naïve

amaXhosa nation. Within this group, some reasoned that Nongqawuse was manipulated by the advancing British colonialists, who were frustrated by the resistance of the amaXhosa. According to this line of thinking, it was Sir George Grey himself who spoke to Nongqawuse, and later, in similar circumstances, to another young girl named Nonkosi.

The Believers: pro-Nongqawuse

There is another view that holds Nongqawuse in high esteem. In 1935, H.I.E. Dhlomo wrote a play that portrayed the girl prophetess as ‘the liberator’, as can be seen in its title, *The Girl Who Killed to Save*.

More recently, the black-consciousness storyteller, Mtutuzeli Matshoba, in his *Three Days in the Land of the Dying Illusion*, depicts Nongqawuse as a highly intelligent young girl who was greatly affected by the hardship and dispossession caused by colonial aggression and by the mysterious cattle disease, lungsickness.

Matshoba’s Nongqawuse is concerned about the growing apathy among amaXhosa warriors who believed that their last general, Nxele, would return to lead them as he had promised when he was captured and confined to Robben Island by the British. While looking at the distorted image of her face in the water of the Gxarha River, Nongqawuse is reminded of the role of girls and their mothers in traditional Xhosa society, where they could act as ‘counsellors who fan the flames of resistance in the hearts of the warriors’.

However, she soon realises the limitations placed on her as a young girl who is neither a seer nor an *igqirha* [traditional healer]. Fearing that her message of unity and resistance might be dismissed by the elders of the council, she resolves to ‘say that I received the message from *amathongo* [ancestors], while I was alone in the river. Alone I am indeed, and it will be hard to prove that I did not see the ancestors. In my soul I feel them, in my mind I envision them and see their voices’.

So, in Matshoba’s narrative, Nongqawuse deliberately sets out to deceive the nation for the greater good of mobilising them against the colonial onslaught.

The colonial perspective

Parallel to this view of the cattle-killing episode as a form of resistance is the view expressed by colonial administrators of the time, including John Maclean and Charles Brownlee, who were mystified and alarmed by the events. They suspected that the whole affair was the brainchild of

King Sarhili (Kreli) of the amaXhosa, whose strategy was to forge a grand alliance against the white settlers of all amaXhosa clans with the northern baSotho and amaZulu tribes.

This suspicion was strengthened by messages intercepted between Sarhili and King Moshoeshe of the abaSotho. There was also the danger that the amaMfengu, who had helped the British in their previous military encounters with the amaXhosa, might abandon them and join the other African tribes as they were in a rebellious state because their lands were being taken by white colonists.

The Russians are coming!

At about this time, news that the Russians had defeated the British in the Crimean War started circulating in Xhosaland, and, as it was assumed that all enemies of the British were black, the Russians were assumed to be black. Because of this, there was great anticipation that Russian troops would land and liberate the amaXhosa from British subjugation. Some even identified the Russians with amaXhosa ancestors. Thus, the ground was well prepared for the illusion of amaXhosa ancestors who would rise from the dead to protect their people, their children.

- Consider the various viewpoints on the cattle-killing episode and critically analyse them. You can do this by breaking them down to their simplest form, and then evaluating each one.
- Which one makes the most sense to you, and why?
- Write a definition of a historical novel.

The novel's relevance today

The most immediate effect of Nongqawuse's prophecy was the division of the amaXhosa into two antagonistic groups: the Believers, represented in the novel by Twin; and the Unbelievers, who are represented by Twin-Twin. As the term suggests, the former believed and followed the instructions of the prophetess, while the latter dismissed them as the dangerous hallucinations of a disturbed young girl. Two generations after the tragic episode, Zim and Bhonco, the respective descendants of both men, successfully revive the old division as religious sects, and thus the dawn of the new South Africa finds the

community of Qolorha-by-Sea still embattled by a division that is more than a century old.

In fact, Mda is explicitly making the point that the amaXhosa have been divided since their initial encounter with colonialism. In an interview with Yazeed Kamaldien of *The Big Issue* magazine, Mda asserts, 'This novel states that history is relevant, that we cannot have collective amnesia about it... The prophecies devastated a whole nation, we still feel the effects of the past... We are still battling with these issues.'

It is for this reason that Mda feels that the 'eastern frontier' society with its characteristic instability is relevant to contemporary South Africa, caught up as it is in the uncertainties of the process of transition from apartheid to democracy.

Let's say the cattle-killing did not happen. How do you think the situation on the eastern frontier might have unfolded? Give reasons for your answer.

Time and place settings

Using flashbacks, flashforwards, and the present tense for the present and the past tense for the past, Mda weaves a narrative that combines past, present and future into a single imaginative reality.

Contemporary Qolorha-by-Sea has lost none of its bewitching beauty, which inspired the loyalty of its original inhabitants and lured the British colonialists. The power of its attraction is demonstrated by Camagu's radical decision to abandon life in America and Johannesburg in order to settle in the place. The casino development companies also see commercial opportunities in the irresistible beauty of Qolorha-by-Sea. In his novel, *Ways of Dying*, Mda lamented the terrible tragedy of rural depopulation and underdevelopment. It is no coincidence that in *The Heart of Redness*, Mda suggests that another process is at work. Instead of belonging to the city, the power to lure young men is now restored to the village.

The story begins at Qolorha-by-Sea, where the battle between old rivals Zim and Bhonco takes a new turn with the promotion of Bhonco's only daughter, Xoliswa Ximiya, to the post of principal of the local secondary school. At about the same time, in Hillbrow in Johannesburg, Camagu encounters the lovely and mysterious

NomaRussia on the eve of his planned return to America, and he is so fascinated by her that he decides to follow her to her home in Qolorha-by-Sea.

Through Camagu we unravel the complex, colourful social life of the modern village, while the flashbacks to the era of Nongqawuse offer a background that illuminates current events and connects the present to the past.

The modern Unbelievers

While the old distinction between Believers and Unbelievers rested on their attitude to the prophetesses, particularly the girls Nonkosi and Nongqawuse, the contemporary differences are a lot more complicated. Bhonco, the leader of the Unbelievers, refuses to believe in anything that cannot be seen and proven, and reacts to joyful tidings with tears. The sufferings of the middle generations are so entrenched in the minds of the Unbelievers that they refuse to celebrate good fortune or allow themselves the luxury of hope or faith.

Through their customary trances, the Unbelievers are able to transport themselves to the sad world of the aftermath of the cattle-killing and re-live the suffering of that time. When they return to the real world from one of these trances, the narrator observes that their bodies are drenched with the sadness of the past (p. 216). They look to the past with grief, and lament their present state of 'backwardness'. They tend to support modern ideas of progress, especially if these appear rational and practical.

The modern Believers

Instead of lamenting the sufferings of the past, the Believers, led by Zim, celebrate the end of that suffering. Unlike the Unbelievers, the Believers enjoy their moments of silent meditation and, the narrator tells us, they 'talk among themselves in the language of the birds' (p. 42). They revere their traditions and value the past, celebrating a time when they were at harmony with one another and nature. They cherish the intangible (unseen) ideas of faith, hope and pride in their community, and tend to be sceptical of so-called 'modern progress'.

The novel's themes

The major differences between the two groups are dramatised during the debate about the development of Qolorha-by-Sea. Bhonco and his followers support the proposed modernising developments on the basis

that 'if it is something that brings civilisation, then it is good for Qolorha' (p. 230).

Earlier, Xoliswa Ximiya gives voice to the position of the Unbelievers in her sarcastic comment on the revived interest in traditional *isikhakha* dress. She says, 'It is part of our history of redness. It is a backward movement. All this nonsense about bringing back African traditions! We are civilised people. We have no time for beads and long pipes' (p. 184).

Believers, on the other hand, are consistently shown to be highly conscious preservers of tradition and nature. Both Qukezwa and Zim are very close to nature, as suggested by her free disposition and character and his communion with the large fig tree and the birds. Their characterisation – their dress, their home, their views – is directly opposite to that of Bhonco and his daughter. It is significant that the two other major characters, Camagu and Dalton, increasingly support the cause of the Believers, and that it is this cause that ultimately wins the day.

The struggle of Qolorha-by-Sea is portrayed as the fight of a small, unsophisticated but resourceful community against the complex machinery of colonialism and capitalism. The community's opponents are both powerful and cynical.

Ironically, it is only sacrifice that guarantees victory for the people. As Zim puts it, 'I knew that Nongqawuse would one day save this village' (p. 233). Indeed, one could argue that it is Nongqawuse who saved it from the mid-nineteenth-century colonialists as well.

- In this novel, the story is told by a nameless voice, seldom mentioned, that somehow sees and knows everything, and can travel back and forth in time. This is a very common narrative or story-telling technique, often described as a 'third person omniscient narrator' ('third person' because this narrator is referred to as 'one', if at all, and 'omniscient' because this means all-seeing and all-knowing). (In grammar, 'first person' means 'I', 'second person' means 'you', and 'third person' means 'he', 'she' or 'one'.) In groups, discuss the strengths and weaknesses of using this kind of narrator to tell a story. What other narrative techniques can you think of? For example, what does it mean if you start a story with the words 'I did...' or 'I saw...'? Ask your teacher for help if necessary.

- In his writings, Mda is very sensitive to issues of gender, and affirms the dignity and independence of women. All his novels carry the message that both men and women are responsible for creating a society in which all are equal. In *The Heart of Redness*, why do you think the author gives Bhonco and Zim daughters as their remaining descendants? What are the implications for the two families (and the sects they represent) of having no male heirs?

The political themes

In explaining the relationship between politics and the South African novel, Christopher Hope asserts that what makes a novelist political is precisely that he or she writes about life in South Africa. Write about South Africa, he argues, and you write about politics (*English in Africa*, May 1985, p. 41). This issue has been hotly debated. The central place of politics as the major theme of the South African novel has divided literary experts into two antagonistic camps since the 1970s. Some people think this may have changed over the years since 1994.

We are introduced to a major political theme at Twin's wake in Hillbrow. The deceased is described sentimentally as a 'simple, upright citizen' (p. 28) who is mourned by the aged and the forgotten. These marginalised people are not only 'swallowed and spewed out shrivelled' (p. 30) by the forces of urbanisation or capitalism associated with the city, but by favouritism and corruption in the ranks of the post-apartheid black elite.

Interestingly, the dispossessed groups are not only the 'simple, upright citizens' but also include former exiles, dagga-smokers, township comrades and educated blacks such as Camagu. Those who benefit from liberation are the 'Aristocrats of the Revolution', against whom Mda directs his scathing satire.

- Popular names for the revolutionary township youth of the 1980s were Maqabane, Comrades, and Young Lions. What do you think of the way Mda portrays the Comrades? Is he stereotyping them, even demonising them?
- Can you point out the irony in the term 'Aristocrats of the Revolution' (p. 36)?

- Draw up a list of the accusations levelled against the ‘Aristocrats of the Revolution’, and say if each is a valid criticism.
- Read pp. 37–8. What do you think of the education minister’s conduct? Do you agree with Camagu that the students were engaging in a criminal activity?

Characterisation

Add other names in the ‘Character’ column below and fill in the table to build your understanding of the novel’s characters:

Character	Time	Position in society	Characteristics, nature	Views on Nongqawuse	Comment
Xikixa	Pre-1850s	Patriarch, Army-General	Fair to his sons, patriot	Died before Nongqawuse’s time	He is an important character, though absent from the events of the novel
Sarhili	1850s	King of amaXhosa	Thoughtful, fair, angry, superstitious	Supported the cattle-killing	Difficult to figure out, seems weak as a king

Important issues in the two South African societies in the novel

How is each society affected by the following, and how does it react?

- Western civilisation
- Modernisation
- Development
- Political transition
- Economic transition
- Violence
- Crime
- Disease

Magic realism

The role and effect of magic in real life is a controversial issue and the term 'magic realism' captures the contradiction. Many people think it naïve to expect solutions to real life from magical powers. But it is unwise to dismiss the importance of magic in the African belief system. The important question is: how does such a concept empower or disempower people in real-life situations?

Make a list of some of the areas where magic and reality appear side by side, and answer the following questions using examples from the text:

- What do you think is the purpose of the magic in the particular scene?
- How can you characterise the relationship of the magical to the real?
- Do you believe in the magical events described by the writer?
- Does the writer appear to believe in the fantastic occurrences he describes?
- What do you think of the use of the magical and the real in the novel?

Some general questions

- 1 Look at the opening sentence of this novel:
‘Tears are very close to my eyes,’ says Bhonco, son of Ximiya.
Is this a good opening sentence? Why or why not?
- 2 Now look at the opening sentences of some other South African novels:
 - a Something terrible happened. (Nadine Gordimer’s *The House Gun*)
 - b So, when she and I walked into the house after we had been in the street for so long, I knew that another time was coming when we would have to be in the street again. (Mongane Wally Serote’s *To Every Birth its Blood*)
 - c My son killed your daughter. (Sindiwe Magona’s *Mother to Mother*)
 - d Sergeant Konyana clears his throat with his characteristic forced cough. (Gomolemo Mokae’s *The Secret in My Bosom*).
 - i Which of those opening sentences do you think are good ways to start a novel, and which are not?
 - ii In each case, why do you think so?
 - iii From just the opening sentence (and, to a certain extent, from the title), can you guess what sort of a novel each will be, or what each will be about?
- 3 Before you do this exercise: do *not* read what is printed on the back cover of the book!
A ‘blurb’ is a short description of a book, usually printed on the back cover. It is usually written by the publisher, not the writer. Its purpose is to interest casual readers enough to make them buy the book or take it out of the library to read.
 - a What should go into a blurb? Should it say anything about the events, the characters, the flavour of the writing, for instance?
 - b Write your own blurb for this novel.
 - c Now read the blurb on the back cover. Is it a good blurb? Why or why not?
 - d Is your blurb better? Why or why not?
 - e In groups, share your blurbs.

- 4 The 1850s and the present day:
- What do you think of the different time-settings? Is it easy to keep jumping between them? Do you know where you are? What helps you and what makes it difficult?
 - Some of the names occur in both time-settings. Which of the following are in both?
 - Qukezwa
 - Dalton
 - Twin
 - Camagu
 - Zim
 - Heitsi
 - Nongqawuse
 - Bhonco
 - Take those character-names that occur in both time-settings. Draw up a chart, giving their relationships in each time-setting. (*A fictitious name and character are used in the example below.)

Name	1850s	The present
Funani*	Eldest son of Sandile, friend of Twin	Camagu's schoolfriend, Xoliswa's younger brother

Chapter 1

Divide into at least seven small groups (more if you like, or depending on numbers). Number the groups from 1 to 7 (if you have more groups, start again from 1). Each group should tackle the question below that is headed by its number. If time allows, move on to some of the other questions. Leave time for all the groups to come together and have a report-back on each question, so that everyone hears all the group reactions.

1 *Circumcision*

- a Who could not do what 'with a dangling foreskin'?
- b Who went to initiation school and was circumcised against his father's wishes?
- c Who were circumcised with the son of the chief?
- d Who was the incgibi when Mlanjeni was circumcised?

2 *Word-meanings*

- a Find the meaning of each of the following words and use each in a sentence:
 - i stoicism (p. 1)
 - ii stupor (p. 1)
 - iii sombre (p. 1)
 - iv alma mater (p. 11)
 - v patriarch (p. 13)
 - vi patrician (p. 13)
- b Explain the difference between the Believers and the Unbelievers.

3 *The narration*

- a Comment on the narrator and the use of the present tense: how does it help the telling of the story?
- b 'It is cast in cold iron that does not entertain rust' (p. 1). What is the narrator referring to here? What are the larger implications of this statement?
- c Comment on the characterisation of whites on p. 7.
- d From whose point of view is Dalton presented to the reader?

4 *Bhonco and family*

- a What is hinted at or implied by the public display of love by Bhonco and NoPetticoat?

- b* What is unusual about Xoliswa Ximiya? Comment briefly on her character.
- c* How would you characterise her relationship with her parents?
- d* What is your impression of present-day Qolorha-by-Sea?

5 *Marks of destiny*

- a* Explain Bhonco's scars. What is their significance as a metaphor?
- b* Explain the tragedy that befell Xikixa.
- c* Who suffered the same fate in real life at about the same historical period?
- d* What is the significance of the love affair between Qukezwa and Twin?

6 *Mlanjeni*

- a* 'But the prophet Mlanjeni got it all wrong. Twin-Twin was not a wizard' (p. 12). Whose point of view is this? What are the implications of this statement, given the importance of prophets in Xhosa society at this period?
- b* Compare and contrast Nxele and Mlanjeni.
- c* Discuss the consequences of Mlanjeni's prophecies.
- d* Describe the twins' reaction to prophets after the War of Mlanjeni.

7 *The British*

- a* Describe and comment on the behaviour of Harry Smith.
- b* Why did Maqoma and his warriors surrender to George Cathcart when they had held their own against Smith?

Chapter 2

- 1 The following words from this chapter all describe what people are or do. See if you can give a definition of each; then look at how they are used in the chapter, and see if the context helps you. Try this exercise in small groups of three or four.

<i>a</i> fogies (p. 27)	<i>n</i> oppressed people (p. 32)
<i>b</i> makoti (p. 27)	<i>o</i> avid reader (p. 32)
<i>c</i> the deceased (p. 27)	<i>p</i> the private sector (p. 33)
<i>d</i> pimps (p. 28)	<i>q</i> paragons (p. 33)
<i>e</i> fastguns (p. 28)	<i>r</i> the old guard (p. 33)
<i>f</i> prostitutes (p. 28)	<i>s</i> mentor (p. 33)
<i>g</i> upright citizen (p. 28)	<i>t</i> bureaucrats (p. 33)
<i>h</i> orphans (p. 28)	<i>u</i> tipplers (p. 34)
<i>i</i> a regular (p. 28)	<i>v</i> homeboy (p. 34)
<i>j</i> rejects (p. 28)	<i>w</i> cannon fodder (p. 35)
<i>k</i> mourners (p. 29)	<i>x</i> aristocrats (p. 36)
<i>l</i> bachelors (p. 30)	<i>y</i> sycophants (p. 36)
<i>m</i> interviewers (p. 32)	<i>z</i> aspirant performer (p. 37)

satire *n.* the use of humour, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize people's stupidity or vices.

satiric, satirical *adj.* **satirically** *adv.* **satirise, satirize** *v.*

South African Concise Oxford Dictionary (2002)

- 2 This chapter is full of satire about the behaviour of people in the new South Africa. By quoting the actual words that hold people up to ridicule, point out examples of satirical writing in the following passages:
- a* starting 'He must have been a simple upright citizen...' (p. 28)
 - b* starting 'He discovered that the corporate world did not want qualified blacks...' (p. 33)
 - c* starting 'Join the Aristocrats of the Revolution...' (p. 36)
 - d* starting 'Why don't you talk with the minister...' (p. 36)
(NB: Both the current [2004] female Speaker of Parliament and a female former Minister were poets in exile during the years of the anti-apartheid struggle!)

- 3 Divide into small groups of four or five. Choose any one of the situations described in the above four passages. Make up a short scene with dialogue of your own by acting out the situation. Then play it in different ways:
- a* naturally and realistically
 - b* satirically, by exaggerating people's behaviour
 - c* cartoon-style, with slapstick physical humour
 - d* as an animated cartoon mime, with no spoken words at all.
- 4 Link up in pairs, and, using the text, work out the answers to these questions about the wake. Then link up with another pair and compare your responses. If you can't agree, then link up with another foursome and see if you can reach consensus.
- a* Discuss the significance of the wake in traditional African society. What do you think of the Hillbrow wake in relation to the tradition?
 - b* How and why does Camagu end up at the wake?
 - c* What makes Camagu so certain that the makoti is not the widow?
 - d* Comment on the way the deceased is introduced – what kind of person is evoked in your mind? Using the text, draw up a detailed description.
 - e* How is the makoti presented against the world around her: in relation to Camagu, Hillbrow, the deceased, and the other people mentioned in the wake scene?
 - f* What does toyi-toyi mean?
 - g* What is the effect of its first being mentioned in association with the dagga-smokers?
 - h* What is meant by the statement that 'its political fervour has been replaced by a religious one'?

Chapter 3

- 1 Write a poem about Zim and his wild fig tree. Remember, it 'knows all his secrets', and it is 'directly linked to the ancestors'. So it could be a serious poem. But remember, also, that Zim is 'rudely awoken by a nest that falls on his head'. So it could also be a comic poem.
- 2 Re-read pp. 45–6, concerning Zim's son called Twin, who left for Johannesburg. Then look forward to pp. 307–8 and read about Twin's end. Now write a short biography of Twin, filling in the missing period by using your imagination to recreate the kind of life he would have had in Johannesburg.
- 3 Compare and contrast Xoliswa Ximiya and Qukezwa. Do this by drawing up a side-by-side chart:

	Xoliswa Ximiya	Qukezwa
Similarities	1	1
	2	2
	etc.	
Differences	1	1
	2	2
	etc.	

- 4 Do a similar chart for Bhonco and Zim.
- 5 Now draw up a similar chart to show the relationship between Qukezwa and Zim, and that between Xoliswa and her parents:

	Qukezwa and Zim	Xoliswa and her parents
1		
2		

- 6 Summarise Nongqawuse's prophecy in your own words.
- 7 A quick mini-debate: The description of Qukezwa – is it sexist or stereotyping? Discuss with examples from the text.
- 8 A quick check-up on details: Sit in circle-groups of about eight people. Throw a ball or a woollen cap from one to another. The receiver must answer the next question as promptly and briefly as possible.
 - a What causes the fight between Qukezwa and the girls at Dalton's shop?
 - b Describe the process by which the girl became ill.
 - c Can you identify her? (This will become clear as you read further.)
 - d What, in your opinion, is suggested here regarding the conduct of amagqirha?
 - e Comment on the position of inkamnkam in the village economy.
 - f Explain why Mhlakaza called a meeting at his homestead.
 - g Why do the twins decide to trek away from their village?
 - h What is the common understanding of the causes of the lungsickness?
 - i Describe Camagu's initial impressions of the village.
 - j Why does he lie to people like Dalton about the reasons why he is searching for NomaRussia?
 - k Explain the mutual fascination between Camagu and Dalton.
- 9 Make a list of all the white characters you meet in this chapter, and write a brief introduction to each of them.
- 10 Comment on the significance of the last paragraph of the chapter.

Chapter 4

1 Here you have a question a page. You decide:

- how many to deal with orally
- how many to answer as written exercises
- how many to discuss in small groups
- how many to tackle individually.

p. 65 What sent Camagu into exile in his late teens?

p. 66 When he woke up, why was Camagu exhausted?

p. 67 What are 'village bumpkins'?

p. 68 Who was 'the original Unbeliever'?

p. 69 Who was 'the headless ancestor'?

p. 70 Why are supermodels in fashion magazines 'hungry'?

p. 71 What do these adjectives (applied to NoPetticoat and Xoliswa) mean?

a sonsy

c grave

e elegant

b willowy

d severe

p. 72 What is a 'track record'?

p. 73 Why is Xoliswa Ximiya embarrassed? Why do her colleagues enjoy this?

p. 74 What do the words 'giggling', 'whispering', 'ticklish', 'flirtatious' suggest is going on?

p. 75 What does the phrase 'a very strong anti-Nongqawuse sentiment' mean?

p. 76 Why does the chief call his daughter NoCellphone and his child-to-be Satellite or NoSatellite?

p. 77 How did the old man put the Minister of Health in his place?

p. 78 Xoliswa Ximiya is embarrassed by the fight between which two villagers?

p. 79 Who want the people to 'stay in the darkness of redness'?

p. 80 Why do NoPetticoat and Camagu converse in whispers?

p. 81 Who is 'the carrier of the scars'? Which scars?

p. 82 The elders' trance-ritual is 'inducing sadness in their lives'. Why do they do this?

p. 83 Who became 'stew in a British pot'?

p. 84 What is a 'milksoy'? Whose brother is one?

p. 85 How is the word 'medium' used here? What else can it mean?

- p. 86 Who shipped whose head to Britain?
- p. 87 Who cried in pain, 'Where is my father?'?
- p. 88 Who talked of 'the beautiful life', 'the Strangers', and 'the Otherworld'?
- p. 89 Who sent out imiyelelo that all amaXhosa should obey Mhlakaza's instructions?
- p. 90 Fill in the blanks: 'T____, who was gaining prominence in the homestead of M____, was asked to accompany them to the mouth of the G____ River, where N____ and N____ were already communing with the new people.'
- p. 91 Who went home to slaughter two of his best oxen?
- p. 92 Who were Nxito, Ned, and Mjuza?
- p. 93 Who was killed by whom in which European war?
- p. 94 Who did Mjuza say had not drowned escaping from Robben Island?
- p. 95 Who was The Man Who Named Ten Rivers?
- p. 96 What did Ned and Mjuza want him to be called?
- p. 97 What are you if you are 'in cahoots' with someone?
- p. 98 What are 'spouses' and 'siblings'? What gender are they?
- p. 99 Who threatens, against whom, 'I will give it to her so hard that she will stop spreading lies!'?
- p. 100 'You actually propositioned me, naughty girl!' Who is talking to whom?
- p. 101 'Oh, I forgot, she was working for you and left with your passport.' Who are 'I', 'she' and 'you'?
- p. 102 What do you do if you 'emit' a whistle? And 'brandish' a panga?
- p. 103 Who is the 'panga-wielding girl' in whose dreams?

Chapter 5

- 1 'Such are the ills of democracy!' remarks Bhonco (p. 108). This could be the title for an argumentative essay. (That is one in which you argue for or against something, or present both sides of an argument.) Write such an essay. Your thoughts about the ills of democracy could go beyond what is said in the novel.
- 2 Follow Camagu's reactions to Qukezwa through pp. 114–5. In the space of these two pages, he calls her 'foolish girl', 'irritating girl', 'a nuisance', refers to her 'acerbic tongue', and calls her a 'witch'. On p. 118, he is 'grudgingly developing some admiration' for her.
 - a In small groups, talk about what happens to bring about this change.
 - b Then write a joint account of Camagu's change of heart.
- 3 The public meeting:
 - a Write a paragraph describing Bhonco's mental state as he prepares to go to the public meeting.
 - b Why is Xoliswa proud of her father on this day?
 - c How differently does Zim present himself at the meeting?
- 4 Eco-tourism versus cultural tourism:

Try getting to the heart of this debate by visual means. Below are four questions around these two potential plans. Instead of writing them up in the form of a conventional essay, try doing so big, bold and in colour. This is how:

 - Stick two big sheets of newsprint (a printer or a newspaper office might supply you with some) onto the classroom walls. Devote one to eco-tourism, and the other to cultural tourism.
 - Use photographs, drawings, diagrams, and coloured felt-tip pens to present the following questions in graphic form on these two sheets.
 - Design and layout are all-important in this assignment. Pay close attention to them.
 - See if you can interest all your teachers or lecturers in what you are doing.

- a* Discuss the real issues at stake in the eco-tourism development debate.
 - b* Describe and evaluate Dalton's cultural tourism.
 - c* What are the reasons Zim gives for his opposition to the proposed development?
 - d* Why is Xoliswa opposed to Dalton's cultural tourism?
- 5** 'Men are more at home with the kind of woman they can trample under their feet' (p. 111).
- a* Whose sentiment is this?
 - b* What causes this sentiment?
 - c* What are your views on the matter?
- 6** 'Women were the leaders of the cattle-killing movement' (p. 126). Discuss this statement. Do you agree with it?
How does it contrast with the statement in question 5?
- 7** Some quick questions:
- a* Why does Camagu oppose the killing of the snake?
 - b* What does Camagu's attitude towards the snake tell us about his future allegiances?
 - c* What is the immediate consequence of his attitude?
 - d* Discuss the implications of the decision by the Believers to harass and raid the Unbelievers.
 - e* It turns out that the NomaRussia that Camagu is looking for is a well-known figure who has had a scandalous affair with Zim. Why don't the villagers simply tell Camagu where she is?
- 8** Two written exercises:
- a* Write a paragraph about the gossip stories circulating about Camagu.
 - b* You are Twin-Twin. Write an entry in your diary describing your feelings about the situation that has chased you into exile in the mountains.

Chapter 6

- 1 Look at what Sir George Grey says of Sarhili (Kreli) on pp. 144–5: ‘I am going to hold him fully responsible for anything that happens as a result, and I will punish him severely. ... he shall find me a better enemy than I have been a friend.’

Now look at what Sarhili says, as quoted in Jeff Peires’s book *The Dead Will Arise*: ‘I have done nothing against the British Government, but should the Governor attempt anything against me, I have dogs that will bite.’

Write a short essay about this head-on collision between these two strong characters. Had it not been Grey and Sarhili who were involved, might the situation have turned out differently? In what ways?

- 2 ‘What is land compared to civilisation?’ asked Dalton (p. 141).

Twin-Twin has a different view of civilisation from Dalton’s, and it is based on experience. During the 1850s, these views were sharply antagonistic towards each other. In pairs, see if you can work up a dramatic scene using Qolorha in the 1850s as your setting, and yourselves as two imaginary characters debating the importance of civilisation versus land. Decide who would be arguing which side of the debate.

- 3 Work in groups of three, and number yourselves 1, 2 and 3. Each take the corresponding numbered cluster of questions below, work through your cluster on your own, get together again, and let each person in turn take the other two through the issues.

3.1

- a Discuss the differences between Twin-Twin, on the one hand, and Mjuza and Ned, on the other.
- b What was Twin’s dream about, and what do you think it meant?
- c In what physical and spiritual condition were the Believers a few days before the full moon of June 1856?
- d Discuss the effects of the first disappointment.

3.2

- a* Describe and comment on the local administrative government structure on the eastern frontier in the 1850s.
- b* There was a rumour about Grey circulating among the Unbelievers. What was it?
- c* What do you think about Grey's policy of governing the amaXhosa? Was it a good policy? Was it workable?
- d* Describe Grey's strategy concerning the Maori people. Did that work?

3.3

- a* What was the effect of the second disappointment on Sarhili?
 - b* Describe Sarhili's visionary experience at the mouth of the Kei River.
 - c* What do you think was actually at work there? Do you accept the account given?
- 4 Discuss these questions about Dalton and his friends in small groups.
- a* 'Sins committed in good faith' (p. 157): What sins are these? Who committed them? Why do these people think they were committed in good faith? What do you think about this?
 - b* What is the occasion for the party or braai?
 - c* What makes Dalton different from his friends?
 - d* What attracts them to Australia?
 - e* How does Dalton view his friends?
 - f* What are liberals?
 - g* How do Dalton's friends view him?
- 5 Write a paragraph on each of the following:
- a* Compare and contrast Camagu's interaction with Xoliswa and with Qukezwa.
 - b* Make a list of the clashes between Zim's Believers and Bhonco's followers.

Chapter 7

- 1 Read from the middle of p. 177 to the middle of p. 178 to find out how Sir George Grey used the ship *HMS Geyser*. Now read Jeff Peires's account of the same incident in his history book *The Dead Will Arise*, as given below.
 - a Whose re-telling do you enjoy more, Mda's or Peires's?
(Remember there is no right or wrong answer to this question!)
 - b Who do you think makes better use of the incident?
 - c Do you think writing history is as exciting as writing fiction?
Give the reasons why.

He engaged *HMS Geyser* en route from Natal to Cape Town to call in at Kei mouth and see if it was possible to land men and supplies there. ... The plan miscarried to a truly spectacular extent. The acting commander was drunk and did not stop at East London to pick up the pilot he required. The *Geyser* entered the Kei by the wrong channel. After sailing a little way up the river, it sent out a boat, which promptly overturned, nearly drowning the five men in it. One of these, a Mr Upjohn from Cape Town, flatly refused to get back in the boat and walked all the way back to East London. As soon as the *Geyser* entered the river, the Xhosa sounded the war cry and gathered in great numbers. They had no way of knowing that the ship was instructed only to make a survey and, given the very recent hostile exchange between Grey and Sarhili, they naturally assumed that the *Geyser* had come to attack them. When the boat capsized and the *Geyser* sailed tamely away without apparently achieving anything, the Xhosa were deeply impressed. The news soon spread that the new people had destroyed a ship ... As the rumour circulated, it grew in stature until it was commonly believed that Sarhili's father, the martyred Hintsu, had destroyed the *Geyser* with a wave of his hand ... Cattle were killed 'more madly than ever' and within two weeks of the *Geyser* incident their numbers had visibly decreased.

- 2 The aftermath of the *Geyser* campaign:
 - Convene a 'council of war'. Appoint about six people to sit

around a table after they have read the section of this chapter from p. 176 to p. 183 really carefully.

- Each person should represent one of the interested parties, e.g. the British administration, the British military men, the Believers, the two camps of Unbelievers, the prophets themselves – and anyone else you think has a stake in the military situation on the frontier.

Let this council of war or forum discuss the issues listed in questions *a* to *e* below. The participants should stay in character throughout. Note that this is not a formal debate, but a more informal, though focused, conversation among interested parties.

- a* Why does Twin disapprove of Qukezwa's presence at the war front?
- b* Describe the consequences of the victory over the *Geyser* among the amaXhosa Believers.
- c* How did the Unbelievers feel about the *Geyser* incident?
- d* Account for the two camps within the Unbelievers.
- e* Compare and contrast Nongqawuse and the new prophetess Nonkosi.

3 Camagu's house-warming party:

- a* What opportunity is presented to Camagu by President Mbeki's African Renaissance movement?
- b* The technicalities of buying a sea cottage (p. 18):
What is a bond? What is surety? What is a deposit? What is a mortgage?
- c* A topic of conversation at the party was the recent local elections. Why did some villagers refuse to vote? Describe the expectations of the villagers as they voted in the local elections.
- d* Why did the villagers laugh at Zim when he arrived?
- e* What became a general complaint about Camagu at his party?

4 All the words listed below occur on p. 195. What is the meaning of each in the context in which it is used? You may need to look up some of them in a dictionary.

- | | |
|---------------------|------------------------|
| <i>a</i> uxoriously | <i>d</i> pretext |
| <i>b</i> harangue | <i>e</i> purge |
| <i>c</i> orgastic | <i>f</i> contamination |

Chapter 8

- 1 Treat these questions as an individual (not group) written exercise:
 - a What, for you, is the highlight of this chapter, and why?
 - b Comment on the way in which Zim perceives the Russians.
 - c What do you think of his revival of the wait for the Russians?
 - d Who are pining in this chapter and what for?
 - e Explain the commercial activities of Camagu and Dalton.
 - f Why is the water project failing in spite of the village's need for water?
 - g Explain Nxito's complex position or situation.
 - h Where do you stand in the debate between Ned and Mjuza, on one side, and Twin-Twin, on the other? Explain your position.
 - i Why was rumour so important in the context of the events of the 1850s?
- 2 Focus on the concert:
 - a Why is Bhonco fuming as he enters the concert hall?
 - b Why is Camagu called a dirty old man by Xoliswa Ximiya?
 - c What happens in this confrontation?
 - d Write a short summary of the significant events that happen during the concert.
 - e Write a short summary of the significant events that happen after the concert.
- 3 Do some research on Saartjie Baartman. Who was she? What happened to her? Try to see the documentary film on her, *The Life and Times of Sara Baartman* (Film Resource Unit), directed by Zola Maseko. Once you've gathered all your material, write the story of Saartjie Baartman.

Chapter 9

- 1 In the first section of this chapter, from p. 236 to p. 238, the following words appear:
 - a *ramblings* What is the meaning, as used here? What is another meaning?
 - b *exhaustive* What does this mean, and how is it different from *exhausting*?
 - c *magisterial* It's clear this word has something to do with magistrates. Can it mean something else? Can you use it in a sentence that demonstrates this second meaning?
 - d *moulder* What does it mean, and how is it different from *moult*?
 - e *oblivion* Give its meaning. What is the adjective?
 - f *stronghold* What does it mean, as distinct from *strongroom*, *strongbox*, *strong-arm*?
 - g *tongue* We all know what a tongue is, but the word can be used (as it is here) as a synonym for what other word?
 - h *augurs* Look up its meaning, and – while you're doing that – check on the meaning of the adjective *august*.
 - i *rendered* The Concise Oxford Dictionary gives six different meanings of the verb *render*. Which one is meant here? Can you give another meaning?
- 2 Imagine you are John Dalton. You've just sat through the scene described in the first section of this chapter, with Sir George Grey and John Gawler in Grahamstown. You go back to your lodgings, and, still very angry, you write a letter to your wife to get things off your chest. In particular, tell her what you think of these two men.
- 3 Read through the flashback section from p. 238 to p. 244. Then get together in pairs, and sit facing one another. Very quickly, alternate asking one another the following questions, i.e. A asks B Question 1; then B asks A Question 2; etc. See if you can get into your answer quickly, but then take your time about giving your answer fully.
 - a Why do the plans to arrest the prophetesses have to be delayed?
 - b What do you think of the excuses that Mhlakaza puts forward for the failure of the dead to arise?
 - c Why did the people congregate at Butterworth?

- d* What were the problems that arose at the Gxarha River at this time?
 - e* How did these problems affect Sarhili, the person and the ruler?
 - f* What rekindled Sarhili's spirit of hope?
 - g* What happened on 16 February 1857?
 - h* What was the effect on Sarhili?
 - i* What do you make of Sarhili and his character?
 - j* 'I'll see what I can do,' says Dalton to Sarhili. Why is he not sure about passing Sarhili's message on to the governor?
- 4** Use the case against Qukezwa at the inkundla as a chance for some class drama.
- Read through the section from p. 244 until the inkundla is broken up by the fire (pp. 250–1).
 - Work in groups of about eight people.
 - Recreate the setting and determine the cast of characters.
 - Then try out the scene. Use Mda's dialogue if you like, but feel free to improvise your own dialogue as well.
 - Follow the outline of the action as given in the text.
 - When you have polished your scene, show your scene to the other groups, and watch theirs.
 - Have a discussion about which group handled the situation successfully and effectively. (Don't attempt to recreate the fire!)

Chapter 10

- 1 At the start of this chapter, Bhonco is not a happy man. He is especially angry with Camagu. Let's look at this, and also at some of the words that express his anger.
 - a Draw up a list of all the things Camagu is or has done to make Bhonco so upset with him. Beside each, write '(Reasonable)' or '(Unreasonable)' or '(Not sure)', depending on how you see the situation between the two men.
 - b In line 3, Mda writes that Camagu 'imprecated himself upon this village'. According to the Concise Oxford Dictionary, there is no such verb as 'imprecate'. But there is the noun 'imprecation', which the dictionary says is 'a spoken curse'. So, what does Mda mean when he makes up this verb?
 - c Next, Bhonco says Camagu 'became the bane' of Bhonco's family. The Concise Oxford Dictionary gives an example of its definition of the word 'bane': 'the telephone was the bane of my life'. Can you work out a meaning for 'bane'? It also says an archaic (old, no longer used) meaning is 'poison'.
 - d In the second paragraph, he then calls Camagu both 'detestable' and 'spineless'. How strong are these words? How much force do they carry? Can you think of words that are less forceful? And more forceful?
 - e On p. 260, Bhonco complains that Camagu 'cast his evil shadow' on the village. Go back to the list you drew up in a) and decide if these reasons warrant this very strong attack on Camagu.
 - f Bhonco's anger spills over to others:
 - i What adjective does he use for Zim and his Believers?
 - ii What adjective does he use for the hadeda birds?
 - iii What adjective does he use for their laughter?
 - iv On p. 262, what adjective does he use for his own daughter, Xoliswa Ximiya?
- 2 At the bottom of p. 261, Bhonco is attacked and stung. There is a very interesting exchange between him and Xoliswa:

He sits on a chair and moans, 'How can the ancestors do this to me?'
'It's the bees, father, not the ancestors,' says Xoliswa Ximiya.

In this brief exchange we can see one of the great debates, one of the major themes of the novel. Write a short essay on this theme saying what you think the debate is about.

- 3 Give written answers to the following, either on your own or in pairs.
 - a Mjuza is a very interesting character. Write a paragraph describing his personality. What's your opinion of him?
 - b Describe what happens at Mhlakaza's homestead during the police raid.
 - c Discuss the symbolic significance of Bhonco's finally finding it too difficult to be serious all the time and bursting out in laughter.
 - d What are the irregularities in Camagu's marriage proposal delegation?
 - e 'Qukezwa is a child of the spirits. Each head of cattle is worth a thousand rand.' What do you think of this statement about Qukezwa? Is she really a child of the spirits?
 - f Why is Bhonco angry at the death of Zim?
 - g How far should we accept Dalton's statement that neither he nor Camagu are on the side of the Believers (p. 281)?
- 4 Imagine that you work as a copywriter in an advertising agency. Camagu is your new client, and he wants you to produce a half-page ad for the Sunday newspapers, extolling (praising) the virtues of his cultural-environmental tourism project. Write the copy (the text) for this ad, and say how it could be illustrated. Remember to bear in mind your target-audience. To earn your salary, you have to be persuasive! And you have to use language cleverly!
- 5 Use the issue of lobola as the basis for a general group debate.
 - First, formulate a motion – in other words, the issue to be debated. This can be specific – 'That lobola no longer has any merit and should be discontinued' or more general – 'That traditional customs like lobola keep a community together.'
 - Then decide who will argue for the motion (a proposer and a seconder), and who will argue against it (an opposer and a seconder).
 - Prepare detailed notes for the speeches on either side. Those who are not the main speakers should also do this, so that they are

ready to contribute 'from the floor'.

- When everyone is well prepared, stage a full and formal debate, observing the procedures and discipline of debating. If you are not sure about these, ask a teacher or lecturer to help explain them.

Chapter 11

- 1 By now you should feel ready to tackle the ‘redness’ issue of the title and the novel. It is the focus of discussion on pp. 300–301. Xoliswa Ximiya finds her mother has ‘gone back to smoking her long pipe’ and ‘wearing her traditional isiXhosa costumes of umbhaco and beads’. There are three references to redness:
- ‘Xoliswa Ximiya finds these habits disgusting. She had successfully weaned her parents from redness...’ (p. 300).
 - ‘They will wallow in redness together’ (p. 301).
 - ‘The sooner she leaves this heart of redness the better’ (p. 301).

Add to these the references you can find throughout the novel. Here are some:

- ‘To remain red all our lives! To stay in the darkness of redness!’ (p. 79).
- ‘That will bring modernity to our lives, and will rid us of our redness’ (p. 105).
- ‘The problems of redness!’ (p. 183) and ‘The curse of redness!’ (p. 184).
- ‘[Zim] has cocooned himself inside a red blanket...’ (p. 190).
- ‘Xoliswa Ximiya does not stop nagging him about his encouragement of redness in the village’ (p. 195).
- ‘They dressed up in their red ochre costumes and beaded ornaments’ (p. 212).

Looking at all of these references in their contexts, try to answer these questions:

- a What is the actual, historical ‘redness’ that is being referred to? What was and is red?
- b In the novel, what does ‘redness’ in and among the people represent or stand for?
- c Who advocates it, and who opposes it?
- d Which development schemes fall into the parameters of the ‘redness’ debate?
- e Is it possible to say who wins in the end?
- f Does Xoliswa Ximiya escape from redness? If so, how?
- g Has Camagu embraced redness? If so, can you suggest why?

h Joseph Conrad's novel, *Heart of Darkness*, is about a journey up the Congo River. This becomes symbolic of a much deeper exploration into human nature. In alluding to this famous work, is Mda trying to do something similar? Or is he making a different kind of comment? It will help if someone you know has read the book – or try looking it up in the encyclopaedia, or a companion to English literature.

- 3** Draw a chart or table summarising the attitudes of the main characters to George Grey:

Character	Opinion of Sir George Grey

- 4** Quick questions: answer orally or in written responses.
- a* Comment on the effect that the developments have on the relationship between Qukezwa and Twin.
 - b* Weigh up the options open to this couple and their son Heitsi.
 - c* What opportunities were presented to the settlers as a result of the cattle-killing spree and its aftermath?
 - d* What differentiates Twin-Twin from his allies?
 - e* How does Xoliswa make sense of her loss of Camagu?
 - f* Comment on Camagu's reaction when he discovers NomaRussia.
 - g* What does NomaRussia believe caused her illness?
 - h* What do you think of Zim's process of dying?
 - i* Comment on how Xoliswa acquires the 'scars of history'.
 - j* Why is Bhonco enraged at the news of Zim's death?
 - k* Describe the events that happen at the meeting to announce the approval of the casino development project.
 - l* What do you think of Dalton at the end of the chapter?

Chapter 12

- 1 In small groups of three or four, use your texts to find the answers to these questions. Finish with jointly agreed written answers.
 - a 'From the day he was born to ululations and heckling...' (p. 312)
 - i Who was born to heckling and ululations?
 - ii What does his name signify?
 - iii Who was ululating and heckling? Why?
 - b What are the two main regrets that Twin-Twin has after the death of his twin?
 - c Why is Bhonco dissatisfied with the turn of events at Qolorha? Discuss.
 - d What is his reaction to the situation?
 - e What do you think of the way Bhonco handles his frustration?
 - f What is unusual or odd about the treatment of the present and the past in this chapter? Provide detailed comments.
 - g What developments have taken place in the village? Comment on them.
 - h Discuss the affair between Camagu and Qukezwa.
 - i What do you think of the circumstances surrounding Qukezwa's pregnancy?
- 2 Sir George Grey: Use the following questions as the basis for a fairly extensive essay on him, his policies, and his actions.
 - a Why did The Man Who Named Ten Rivers want to pacify Xhosaland so badly?
 - b Did he succeed? If so, how?
 - c What are the results of the pacification? Use evidence from the text.
- 3 Read from the top of p. 317 ('It neighs again') to the end of the fourth paragraph, ending '*We all fall down.*' Answer these questions orally:
 - a What neighs again?
 - b Who tells it to go and graze some more?
 - c Describe the relations between Qukezwa and Gxagxa.
 - d Who is a strandloper and beach scavenger?
 - e Who must learn to harvest the sea?

- f* Who 'can't get the hang of the simplest of games'?
- g* Describe all the characters involved in this passage.

- 4 For Bhonco, if not for all the characters, this final chapter is overwhelmingly bleak and unhappy. Account for each of these three statements on pp. 314 and 315:
- a* 'Bhonco thinks he has nothing to lose. He has already lost everything.'
 - b* 'To Bhonco, all these things represent defeat.'
 - c* 'Bhonco feels that everything has gone wrong for him.'
- 5 For which characters are things more cheerful, more hopeful? Why? Can you quote words that make this clear?
- 6 What do you think of the last six lines of the novel (pp. 319–20)?
- 7 What are your feelings about the final chapter of the novel? Do you like it or not? What about it works and what doesn't? Think about the following:
- Bhonco's 'taking revenge' against Dalton and so reversing one of Twin-Twin's big regrets
 - The treatment of the prophetesses at the hands of Mrs Gawler and Dr Fitzgerald
 - The 'pacified Xhosaland'
 - Heitsi's fear of the sea.

Zakes Mda's novel, *The Heart of Redness*, is based on a catastrophic event in the 1850s, when the sixteen-year-old Nongqawuse instructed the Xhosa nation to kill their cattle and destroy their crops to ensure an abundant future. The novel is a unique exploration of history, a celebration of love and nature, and a profound comment on our future. In 2001, it won the Sunday Times Fiction Award, and the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Africa.

These Study Notes have been written to help students and teachers explore and extend their understanding of Mda's great work. They are an invaluable guide to preparing for examinations, and include an introduction that:

- summarises the historical background
- discusses the novel's relevance today
- introduces the main themes and characterisation
- explains the 'magic realist' style

as well as chapter-by-chapter questions and activities, focusing on

- understanding the vocabulary
- getting to grips with the characters
- clarifying the story, with its flashbacks and flashforwards
- understanding and analysing the novel's deepest themes.

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ISBN 0 19 578012 4



9 780195 780123

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