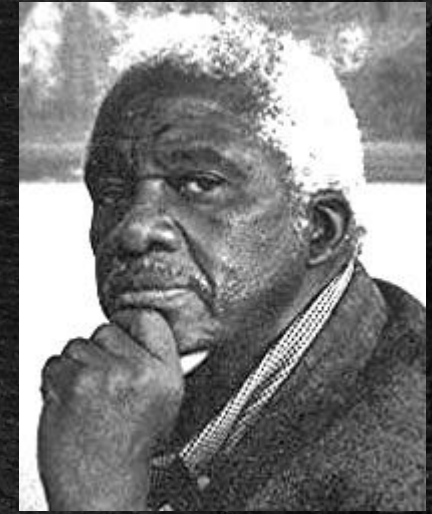
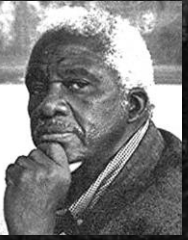




First Day After the War

Mazisi Kunene



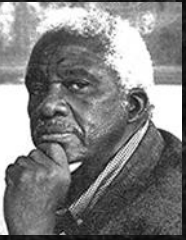


We heard the songs of a wedding party.
We saw a soft light
Coiling round the young blades of grass.
At first we hesitated, then we saw her footprints,
Her face emerged, then her eyes of freedom!
She woke up with a smile saying,
"What day is this that comes suddenly?"
We said, "It is the first day after the war."



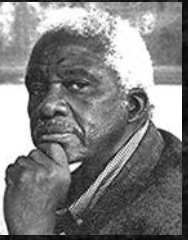
Then without waiting we ran to the open space
Ululating to the mountains and the pathways
Calling people from all the circles of the earth.
We shook up the old man demanding a festival
We asked for all the first fruits of the season.
We held hands with a stranger
We shouted across the waterfalls
People came from all lands
It was the first day of peace.
We saw our Ancestors travelling tall on the horizon.





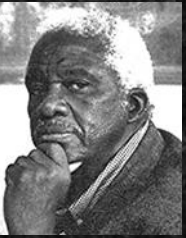
Mazisi Kunene:

- 12 May 1930 – 11 August 2006
- Kunene was born in Durban.
- From very early he began writing poetry and short stories in Zulu, and by age eleven he was being published in local papers.
- He later undertook a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Natal in Zulu and history and later a Master of Arts in Zulu Poetry.
- His Master's thesis was titled *An Analytical Survey of Zulu Poetry, Both Traditional and Modern*.
- There he criticized the changing nature of Zulu literature, and its emulation of the Western tradition.
- He won a Bantu Literary Competition in 1956 and left for London to study at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London in 1959



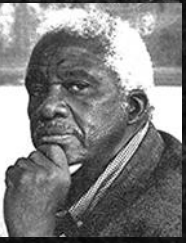
Mazisi Kunene:

- He opposed the apartheid government as the head of the African United Front.
- Fleeing into exile from the country in 1959, he helped push for the anti-apartheid movement in Britain between 1959-1968.
- Kunene was closely affiliated with the African National Congress, quickly becoming their main representative in Europe and the United States in 1962.
- He became a Professor of African literature at the University of California, Los Angeles in 1975 after lecturing in a number of universities as a cultural advisor for UNESCO.
- He remained at UCLA for nearly two decades, retiring in 1992



Mazisi Kunene:

- Kunene returned to South Africa in 1992 where he taught at the University of Natal until his retirement.
- UNESCO made him Africa's poet laureate in 1993 and in 2005 he became South Africa's first poet laureate.
- He died 11 August 2006 in Durban after a lengthy bout of cancer.
- He was survived by his wife and four children.



Summary:

- This is a celebratory poem which places itself squarely in the ambit of Zulu culture and focuses on celebrating the freedom that comes to a people after oppression.
- The war is the struggle for freedom of those who were oppressed .
- The poem focuses on the celebrations that occur amongst the victorious immediately after the struggle.
- The wedding is a celebration of a new unit in society that is formed by the joining together of two individuals. It is a new beginning.
- The metaphorical wedding is the creation of a new society brought about by the struggle.

The use of "*we*" to ensure inclusion of the reader in the action and ideals expressed in the poem.

A celebration taking place and the sound of jubilation are heard

We heard the songs of a wedding party.

We saw a soft light

Dawn/ early morning

Coiling round the young blades of grass.

At first we *hesitated*, then we saw *her* footprints,

Why hesitate?

Who is she? The bride in a literal sense? The new nation in a metaphorical sense?



Her **face** emerged, **then her eyes** of freedom!

She woke up with a smile saying,

"What day is this that comes suddenly?"

We said, "It is the first day after the war."

Archaic syntax, highlights the formality associated with the traditional literature.

Gradual unveiling of "the bride". Footprints, face, eyes. Ties in with the gradual emergence of freedom, took time to achieve.

Why does she "wake"? Is this to do with gradual emergence of freedom? Look at the concept of waking in context of the poem.

The poet identifies the "we" as those who have been involved in the struggle.

Is the bride part of the struggle? Or does she symbolise the new and uninitiated who are removed from the hardships involved, the "virgin".



The response to the news that the war is over and peace and freedom have been obtained.

Then without waiting we ran to the open space
Ululating to the mountains and the pathways
Calling people from all the circles of the earth.
We shook up the **old man** demanding a festival
We asked for all **the first fruits of the season.**

The news is so momentous all the world must know and celebrate

The "old man", is "he" the elders who accepted the oppression? Is it the past government? Is it the new government of "elders"?



*Are they asking for equality? For the injustices to be addressed?
Are they wanting all the "promises" made to be fulfilled
regardless of the consequences?*

*All the world is present,
those involved and those
who are unknown, "a
stranger".*

We held **hands with a stranger**

We shouted across the waterfalls

People came from **all lands**

It was the first day of peace.

We saw our Ancestors travelling tall on
the horizon.

*New beginnings,
feelings of
expectation and
excitement*

*The "Ancestors" are present and by being present show their
acceptance and support of the events that have taken place
and the celebrations being held. Are they supportive of the
future? (They are not present but on the horizon?)*



Questions:

1. Discuss the analogy that underlies this poem. (3)
2. How does the poet show the gaining of freedom has been a gradual rather than a revolutionary process? (2)
3. In your opinion what is meant by "First Day After the War"? (2)
4. What do the people demand, both literally and figuratively? (4)
5. Discuss why, in your opinion, the "ancestors" are mentioned at the end of the poem?
6. What is the message of this poem? Give quotes to support your answer. (4)