

Commentez en anglais le texte ci-dessous.

The narrator, a white woman who is terminally ill, writes a letter to her daughter who now lives in America. The scene takes place during the Apartheid.

I try to sleep. I empty my mind; calm, begins to steal over me. I am falling, I think, I am falling: welcome, sweet sleep. Then at the very edge of oblivion something looms up and pulls me back, something whose name can only be *dread*. I shake myself free. I am awake in my room in my bed, all is well. A fly settles on my cheek. It cleans itself. It begins to explore. It walks
5 across my eye, my open eye. I want to blink, I want to wave it away, but I cannot. Through an eye that is and is not mine I stare at it. It licks itself, if that is the word. There is nothing in those bulging organs that I can recognize as a face. But it is upon me, it is here: it struts across me, a creature from another world.

Or: It is two in the afternoon. I am lying on the sofa or in bed, trying to keep the weight off
10 my hip, where the pain is worst. I have a vision of Esther Williams¹, of plump girls in flowered bathing costumes swimming in effortless backstroke formation through sky-blue, rippling waters, smiling and singing. Invisible guitars strum; the mouths of the girls, bows of vivid scarlet lipstick, form words. What are they singing? Sunset... Farewell... Tahiti. Longing sweeps through me for the old Savoy bioscope, for tickets at one and fourpence in a currency gone forever, melted down
15 save for a few last farthings in my desk drawer, on one side George VI, the good king, the stammerer, on the other a pair of nightingales. Nightingales. I have never heard nightingale-song and never will. I embrace the longing, embrace the regret, embrace the king, the swimming girls, embrace whatever will occupy me.

Or I get up and switch on the television. On one channel football. On the other a black man
20 clasping his hands over the Bible, preaching to me in a language I cannot even put a name to. This is the door I open to let the world flood in, and this is the world that comes to me. It is like peering down a pipe.

Three years ago I had a burglary (you may remember, I wrote about it). The burglars took no more than they could carry, but before they left they tipped out every drawer, slashed every
25 mattress, smashed crockery, broke bottles, swept all the food in the pantry onto the floor.

'Why do they behave like this?' I asked the detective in bewilderment – 'What good does it do them?'

'It's the way they are,' he replied. 'Animals.'

After that I had bars installed on all the windows. They were fitted by a plump Indian man.
30 After he had screwed the bars into the frames he filled in the head of each screw with glue. 'So
that they can't be unscrewed,' he explained. When he left he said, 'Now you are safe', and patted
my hand.

'Now you are safe.' The words of a zookeeper as he locks the door for the night on some
wingless, ineffectual bird. A dodo: the last of the dodos, old, past egg-laying. 'Now you are safe.'
35 Locked up while hungry predators prowl outside. A dodo quaking in her nest, sleeping with one
eye open, greeting the dawn haggard. But safe, safe in her cage, the bars intact, the wires intact:
the telephone wire, down which she may cry for help in a last extremity, the television wire, down
which comes the light of the world, the aerial wire, which calls in music from the stars.

Television. Why do I watch it? The parade of politicians every evening: I have only to see the
40 heavy, blank faces so familiar since childhood to feel gloom and nausea. The bullies in the last
row of school-desks, raw-boned, lumpish boys, grown up now and promoted to rule the land.
They with their fathers and mothers, their aunts and uncles, their brothers and sisters: a locust
horde, a plague of black locusts infesting the country, munching without cease, devouring lives.
Why, in a spirit of horror and loathing, do I watch them? Why do I let them into the house?
45 Because the reign of the locust family is the truth of South Africa, and the truth is what makes
me sick? Legitimacy they no longer trouble to claim. Reason they have shrugged off. What
absorbs them is power and the stupor of power. Eating and talking, munching lives, belching.
Slow, heavy-bellied talk. Sitting in a circle, debating ponderously, issuing decrees like hammer
blows: death, death, death. Untroubled by the stench. Heavy eyelids, piggish eyes, shrewd with
50 the shrewdness of generations of peasants. Plotting against each other too: slow peasant plots
that take decades to mature. The new Africans, pot-bellied, heavy-jowled men on their stools of
office: Cetshwayoⁱⁱ, Dinganeⁱⁱⁱ in white skins. Pressing downward: their power in their weight.
Huge bull-testicles pressing down on their wives, their children, pressing the spark out of them.
In their own hearts no spark of fire left. Sluggish hearts, heavy as blood-pudding.

J.M. COETZEE, *Age of Iron*, 1990.

ⁱ Esther Jane Williams (1921 – 2013) was an American competitive swimmer and actress.

ⁱⁱ Cetshwayo kaMpande was the king of the Zulu Kingdom from 1873 to 1879 and its leader during the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879.

ⁱⁱⁱ Dingane ka Senzangakhona Zulu (c. 1795-1840) – commonly referred to as Dingane or Dingaan—was a Zulu chief who became king of the Zulu Kingdom in 1828.