

## AN ABANDONED BUNDLE (by Oswald Mbuyiseni Mtshali)

The morning mist  
and chimney smoke  
of White City Jabavu  
flowed thick yellow  
as pus oozing  
from a gigantic sore.

It smothered our little houses  
like fish caught in a net.

Scavenging dogs  
draped in red bandanas of blood  
fought fiercely  
for a squirming bundle.

I threw a brick;  
they bared fangs  
licked velvet tongues of scarlet  
and scurried away,  
leaving a mutilated corpse—  
an infant dumped on a rubbish heap—  
'Oh! Baby in the Manger  
sleep well  
on human dung.'

Its mother  
had melted into the rays of the rising sun,  
her face glittering with innocence  
her heart pure as untrampled dew.

### INTRODUCTION

This poem was written by Oswald M Mtshali, a South African poet born in 1940, and it criticises a morally decayed society living at the White City Jabavu – a black suburb of Johannesburg. The poet shows a mother who gives birth but drapes the infant in red bandanas (neckerchiefs/scarves) and throws it in the rubbish heap (an abandoned bundle). Taking advantage of the morning mist and smoke the mother leaves the scene feeling innocent. The dogs start eating the baby as the persona finds them and feeling sorry for the baby he throws a stone to scare the dogs.



### THEMATIC ANALYSIS

#### MORAL DECAY

The poet pictures a society in which there is no sense of humanity. The mother in the poem has lost her sense of humanity and she dares drape her own baby inside the bandanas making a bundle that she throws in the rubbish heap. The moral decay is shown by the irony that the poet postpones until the last stanza so that it may come as a surprise to us. It is insensible to think that a woman who has thrown her baby to be eaten by the scavenging dogs would leave the spot with:

*her face glittering with innocence  
her heart pure as untrampled dew*

This shows how rotten the society is and perhaps she is used of doing this that is why it comes as no surprise to her. While the readers and the persona feel sympathetic of the whole issue it is surprising to note that the mother has no that feeling.

#### IRRESPONSIBILITY

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**Robin Malan**

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Literature and Development in Africa and she is also author of a collection of short stories Broken Lives and Other Stories and a novel in progress **Nayi Kavita** Ludmila L. Rosenstein,2004 A book that showcases experimentalism in modern Hindi poetry

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## **Table of Contents Abandoned Bundle Poem Notes**

1. Understanding the eBook Abandoned Bundle Poem Notes
  - The Rise of Digital Reading Abandoned Bundle Poem Notes
  - Advantages of eBooks Over Traditional Books
2. Identifying Abandoned Bundle Poem Notes
  - Exploring Different Genres
  - Considering Fiction vs. Non-Fiction
  - Determining Your Reading Goals
3. Choosing the Right eBook Platform
  - Popular eBook Platforms
  - Features to Look for in an Abandoned Bundle Poem Notes
  - User-Friendly Interface
4. Exploring eBook Recommendations from Abandoned Bundle Poem Notes
  - Personalized Recommendations
  - Abandoned Bundle Poem Notes User Reviews and Ratings
  - Abandoned Bundle Poem Notes and Bestseller Lists
5. Accessing Abandoned Bundle Poem Notes Free and Paid eBooks
  - Abandoned Bundle Poem Notes Public Domain eBooks
  - Abandoned Bundle Poem Notes eBook Subscription Services
  - Abandoned Bundle Poem Notes Budget-Friendly Options

6. Navigating Abandoned Bundle Poem Notes eBook Formats
  - ePUB, PDF, MOBI, and More
  - Abandoned Bundle Poem Notes Compatibility with Devices
  - Abandoned Bundle Poem Notes Enhanced eBook Features
7. Enhancing Your Reading Experience
  - Adjustable Fonts and Text Sizes of Abandoned Bundle Poem Notes
  - Highlighting and Note-Taking Abandoned Bundle Poem Notes
  - Interactive Elements Abandoned Bundle Poem Notes
8. Staying Engaged with Abandoned Bundle Poem Notes
  - Joining Online Reading Communities
  - Participating in Virtual Book Clubs
  - Following Authors and Publishers Abandoned Bundle Poem Notes
9. Balancing eBooks and Physical Books Abandoned Bundle Poem Notes
  - Benefits of a Digital Library
  - Creating a Diverse Reading Collection Abandoned Bundle Poem Notes
10. Overcoming Reading Challenges
  - Dealing with Digital Eye Strain
  - Minimizing Distractions
  - Managing Screen Time
11. Cultivating a Reading Routine Abandoned Bundle Poem Notes
  - Setting Reading Goals Abandoned Bundle Poem Notes
  - Carving Out Dedicated Reading Time
12. Sourcing Reliable Information of Abandoned Bundle Poem Notes
  - Fact-Checking eBook Content of Abandoned Bundle Poem Notes
  - Distinguishing Credible Sources
13. Promoting Lifelong Learning
  - Utilizing eBooks for Skill Development
  - Exploring Educational eBooks
14. Embracing eBook Trends
  - Integration of Multimedia Elements

- Interactive and Gamified eBooks

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