

Thirteen Cents by K. Sello Duiker: Exposing Street Child Reality in South Africa

by

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Abstract

This research paper aims at carrying out an in-depth analysis of the street kid phenomenon in the new South Africa. Even though no country worldwide is spared by the unsightly spectacle of grungy children in rags roaming the streets, holding a begging bowl and touting passers-by for alms, there is no denying that street life in South African cities has picked up steam in the rainbow-nation since the demise of apartheid. On that score, we thought fit to single out a postliberation novel that portrays in no uncertain terms the hardscrabble existence of South African street youths: *Thirteen Cents* by Kabello Sello Duiker (1974-2005). The relevance of this novel to our article is two-pronged. Firstly, it offers a scathing critique, through a daring and unsparing as well as blow by blow description, of what it means to be a street boy in post-racial South Africa. Secondly, *Thirteen Cents*, to be sure, is an indictment of South African society, not least powers that be.

Keywords: street children, exploitation, violence, maternal care, broken family, fear

Kabello Sello Duiker (1974-2005), also known as K. Sello Duiker was a post-apartheid novelist. His debut novel, *Thirteen Cents* (New Africa Books, 2000) won the 2002 Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best First Book, Africa Region. After the fashion of Zakes Mda, Phaswane Mpe, Mark Behr, he ploughs his own furrow in the fictionalization of the societal scourges and travails plaguing democratic era South Africa. Much as his fictional writing bears the hallmarks of postliberation South African Literature, K. Sello Duiker sort of breaks the mold in that he broaches taboo issues that no novelist has dared grapple with before as he brings up homosexuality, graphic depiction of sex scenes, and the phenomenon of street kids. Short though his life was — he committed suicide back in 2005 in a bout of depression—, his artistic creativity shines through two prize winning novels (*Thirteen Cents* and *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*) which pack a punch in terms of subject matter and felicity of style in literary circles.

The first book of Duiker's fictional opus is *Thirteen Cents* on which this research paper is based. The story is recounted in the first person by a child-narrator, named Azure so called because of his "blue eyes" (TC, 1). He is portrayed as a gritty survivalist in the South African city of Cape Town, going all out to walk a tightrope between pandering to the demands of hard-nosed gangsters and indulging the lustful whims of philandering white folks who use him for oral and anal sex in return for money. Needless to say that Azure is a street boy who makes no bones about dropping out of school upon the cold-blooded assassination of his parents. He asserts: "*I came back to our shack only to find them [the mother and the father] in a pool of blood. That was three years ago. That was the last time I went to school*" (TC, 2). This twin demise represents a gruesome game changer in Azure's life as he falls prey to sexual exploitation and abuse of any ilk, wanton violence, breach of trust—you name it. The downbeat, nay apocalyptic note on which the novel ends buttresses our surmise that Sello Duiker does not feel sanguine about the successful addressing of the fate of street children in South Africa.

The travails besetting street children worldwide are so upsetting, not to mention multifarious, that there is a handsome body of literature on the life of those "nobody's children"¹. The business of getting into the specifics of that literature would not only be arduous but, more importantly, would be irrelevant to the purpose of this paper. Still, with a view to putting things into perspective, we cannot help but go through a set of definitions as to what is meant by "street children". Back in 1983 the Inter-NGO Programme for Street Children and Street Youth attempted to describe "street youths" as follows:

*Street children are those for whom the street (in the widest sense of the word: i.e., unoccupied dwellings, wasteland, etc....) more than their family has become their real home, a situation in which there is protection, supervision or direction from responsible adults.*²

Thus, the United Nations Organization recast, as it were, the above definition by defining a street child as "any boy or girl...for whom the street in the widest sense of the word...has become his or her habitual abode and /or source of livelihood and who is inadequately protected, supervised, or directed by responsible adults"³

Here, both definitions have a commonality, namely that a street kid lives and sleeps in the rough besides being left at the mercies of cut-throat adults. Another feature that the UN's and Inter-NGO's descriptions of "street children" share is the fact that they eke out their living from the street. In this regard, J.G. Cosgrave seemingly downplays several drivers that factor into the phenomenon of street youth and elects to emphasize their estrangement from social norms. He defines a street child as "any individual under the age of majority whose behavior is predominantly at variance with community norms, and whose primary support for his/her development needs is not a family or a family substitute."⁴

Arguably, there is more to 'street youth' than sheer deviance. It stands to reason, indeed, that such elements as parental neglect, economic necessity, and an unfriendly family setting go a long way towards accounting for an underage boy's ill-advised choice to run away from home. Either way, a terse study of the literature about street children brings to light the fact that defining in a clear-cut way what a street child means, is not a cinch by any stretch of the imagination. The hassles standing in the way of a consensual description may be in line with University of Pretoria teacher J. Le Roux's theory that "The street child phenomenon presents a complex issue resulting from a diversity of integrated factors."⁵ If anything, as Lewis Aptekar points out "Street children do not form a homogeneous group, nor do their life circumstances remain constant."⁶ Street children are as diverse as their individual experiences, and behind every street child there is a traumatic ordeal to tell. The intricate and convoluted nature of the street kid phenomenon as well as the diversity in their individual experiences serve to substantiate the different street lifestyles of these drifters. Furthermore, children do not enter street life on the same grounds. And it was in the spirit of having a better grasp of the street kid phenomenon that UNICEF, in a document dated 1986, carried out a classification of street children: 'children on the streets' and 'children of the streets'. Catherine Panter-brick explains that this distinction "is between children of the street – who have a family accessible to them but who make the street their home – and children on the streets – who return at night to their families."⁷ Nevertheless, that typology was found wanting on the ground that "children defied these generalizations."⁸ As part of the continuing drive amongst psychologists and child welfare pundits to make sense of the ins and outs of the street child phenomenon, L.E Homer devised new "typological systems of runaways"⁹ and broke them down into two classes: the "running from" and "running to" trends. According to J. Le Roux, "Running from" refers to children who are essentially escaping from unresolved and /or family problems, while the "running to" class is motivated by pleasure-seeking and an urge for independence and adventure.¹⁰ For all the classifications mapped out to have a corrective as to the upsetting and disorderly street youth phenomenon, the results remain dim. Street children live, to all intents and purposes, in a world of their own. Thus, understanding the workings of the street kid phenomenon will require more than a mere set of typologies. As a matter of fact, the intricacies of street life and its multifarious drivers don't pander easily to classifications.

Yet, a flick through the body of literature about the issue of street children has lifted the lid a little on the complexity of the phenomenon and, more significantly, on the multifaceted hardships facing street youths. Nowhere are the life and times of street youngsters more excruciatingly and despondently exposed than in the fictive world of *Thirteen Cents*. There, the novelist, with a consummate bent for informative description, takes us into the underworld that epitomizes a family and home of sorts for children cast adrift by society. Even though it is the lead character, Azure, who bears the brunt of harrowing maltreatment at the hands of adult ringleaders, the fact remains that his fellows also have their taste of what it feels like to be a street kid in South African cities. From the early pages, we learn that Azure's parents' assassination marks the ground zero for his entry into street life. He eschews school and runs away from the family seat.

Consequently, the street becomes his abode. To get a glimpse into the beginnings of his new life as a street youth, let's hear the child-narrator:

I walk a lot. My feet are tough and rough underneath. But I'm clean. Every morning I take a bath at the beach. I wash with seawater. Sometimes I use a sponge or If I can't find one I use an old rag. It's just as good. Then I rinse off the seawater at the tap. It's not that bad washing with cold water. It's like anything – you get used to it. (TC, 2)

Surprisingly, Azure takes the new twist in his life in stride. He has not hitherto gnashed his teeth about his new situation. Seemingly, he has it in mind to make a departure from the traditional paradigm of street youth life. He is mentally prepared to live up to the challenges attendant upon his job as a traffic warden of sorts:

...So during the day I help car park in Cape Town. It's not easy work. You have to get there early. Sometimes you have to fight for your spot. The older ones leave us alone, they get all the choice parking spots in the centre of town. It's like that. I don't ask questions. (TC, 3)

A measure of Azure's gutsy intention to put himself out of harm's way and steer clear of the underworld shows in his move to "sleep in Sea Point near the swimming pool because it's the safest place to be at night. In town there are too many pimps and gangsters" (TC, 3). By the same token, he is equally minded to earn his keep with dignity and genuineness: "I don't want to make my money like them [the pimps and gangsters]" (TC, 3). The sobriety that he displays regarding his new plight and his strait-laced attitude reflect a youngster's desire to be a child 'on the street' as opposed to a child 'of the street'. The nasty stock-in-trades associated with street life are anathema to Azure. For example, he does not have any qualms about preaching at his friend, Bafana; and, when push comes to shove, about physically disciplining him in order to help him keep on the straight and narrow. He says:

My friend Bafana can't believe that I saw my dead parents and didn't freak out....And he is naughty. He has a home to go back to in Langa but he chooses to roam the streets. He likes sniffing glue and smoking buttons when he has money. I don't like that stuff, it makes my head sore....So whenever I see him smoking that stuff I beat him. I once beat him so badly he had to go to Groote Schuur to get stitched. I don't like that stuff. It does terrible things to your body. (TC, 3)

Azure is on moral high ground; however, that does not conceal the fact that as he finds his feet and settles into his new street lifestyle, his initial mindset alters for the worse. The paucity of gainful jobs coupled with the individualistic environment he lives in, compels him to climb on the bandwagon of earning easy money. The child-narrator recounts his first encounter with a white man and the alacrity with which he joins him in his flat. Azure is not caught off guard by the white man's lustful intention. He goes through the motions of turning over in his mind what is in store for him once he is alone with the white man:

Soon I'm walking back with a white man to his flat. When we get inside the lift he tells me to take off my shoes. I know the routine. Once inside his flat he will expect me to strip off at the door. We go in and I begin to take off my clothes at the kitchen door. (TC, 8)

Once he and his partner are alone inside the flat, the child-narrator recounts brazenly the bedroom scenes:

...He takes off his clothes and his piel bounces in front. I shudder to look at it and wait for him to lead me into the shower....He rubs the soap quickly between his hands and slides his hands on my back and bum. I'm forced to smile. Grown-ups, I know their games. I smile. He slides his hands around my waist and touches my belly. (TC, 8)

Duiker deftly encapsulates in Azure's sudden and dismal change his theory that street life is a most treacherous vortex. Once you get embroiled into it, there no doing things by numbers. The nature of street life is not commensurate with moral considerations and self-righteous articles of faith. Two academics from the University of Pretoria who have worked at length on street child phenomenon, Johann Le Roux and Cheryl Sylvia Smith, debunk the belief that the street is a hotbed of crime and that no street kid can escape the unflattering fate of being a criminal. Notwithstanding, they emphasize that a long spell spent on the street as a tramp has the potential for exposing the child to bad habits with unintended consequences:

The longer children spend on the streets, the more likely it is that they will become involved in criminal activities, but the popular beliefs that the streets are "schools of crime" and that all children inevitably becomes criminals are not true. However, they are often guilty of anti-social or self-destructive behavior. This self-destructive behavior frequently results from a lack of knowledge, rather than from negative and fatalistic attitudes.¹¹

Over and above the dearth of knowledge, the aforementioned self-destructive behavior can stem from the reality on the ground, from pragmatism. Another aspect that factors into the occurrence of self-destructive behavior of street children is their impressionable age. Most of them have not come of age; so, they can be easily swayed towards wrongdoing.

Harking back to Azure's transformation, there are psychologists and child development experts who regard the arrival of a child into street life as being studded with processes. Harriot Beazley, for one, underscores socialization as being instrumental in the child's construction of a new identity: "...once on the street, children engage in specific social processes that socialize them to street life."¹² Beazley views street life as a 'subculture' and "*the socialization to the subculture as a 'career' that can be understood as a solution to a child's personal troubles.*"¹³ Similarly, in L. Visano's estimation, the intention to steer clear of any deviance goes with the territory of being a new street child. Visano writes "*...initially, newcomers experience considerable hardship in trying to fit into the street environment. They exist on the border of conventional and deviant worlds.*"¹⁴ The full measure of Azure's halting steps towards a full-blown street child is only grasped against the backdrop of the set of phases that stagger their acceptance into the mold. Even his change of name from Azure to Blue is in sync with kind of the prerequisites for inclusion into the street child outfit, a practice about which Harriot Beazley says:

“Almost all street boys are given nicknames by other children, which they accept as part of their inclusion into the social group, even if they do not especially like their nickname.”

Either way, the harshness of street life and the dangers to which children living on the streets are exposed make it a necessity for them to dance to an adult’s tune in return for protection. As it happens, Azure has found in Allen, a guy who “works as a pimp”, a guardian, a shield against harm. Thus, he stands in awe of Allen in that he “know [s] his temper” and, more significantly, “he’s killed someone before and I saw the whole thing happen” (TC, 13). Speaking to an aunt of his, Azure says how lucky he is to make Allen’s acquaintance, stating that “Knowing him has helped me a lot on the streets. I can’t say that we are friends. But if I’m ever in trouble I just have to say that I know Allen and I’m usually left alone.” (TC, 13). But being under the protective wing of such a supercilious and haughty man as Allen comes with a huge price. The “protection money” that he pays to Allen is hard-earned. Yet, by his own admission, he can’t help it: “...I have to do it. It’s the only way I can be safe on the streets. There are too many monsters out there” (TC, 16).

Azure has gone gay overnight out of the masterly necessity to stay alive in an excruciatingly ruthless environment, and in this regard, the proceeds that he gets from his first sexual activity are divided in three parts: one for his protector, one for himself and finally what he keeps for a rainy day, i.e. that which he entrusts with his aunt Joyce. Having learned from Allen that “*money is everything...because you can get a house and call the shots*” (TC, 16), Azure is on a slippery slope towards anal and oral sex at full throttle, and even if what one of his clients pays him falls far short of his expectations, he wisely knows better than to vent his disappointment:

With a wallet in his hand we go to the kitchen.

“You did good,” he says and hands me a twenty-rand note. Peanuts. I’ve earned fifty bucks from a single trick. But I know not to get greedy. He could become a regular. I get dressed quickly and let myself out. (TC, 10)

Scarcely is he done with that client when “*another white man looks at me with come-to-bed eyes*” (TC, 10). The harshness of living on the streets, whose hallmarks among other things are sleep and money deprivation to say nothing of dilapidated wear, compels kids to go down the path of prostitution, theft, homosexual practices, and into other nefarious activities. Be that as it may, they are said, by all accounts, to be conspicuously riveting when it comes to devising survival game plans. The case can even be made, indeed, that in the world of *Thirteen Cents* all children living on the streets do their level best to adapt themselves to their environment. What makes them tick is that they are not spoiled for choice, all the more so since failure or inability to contrive coping strategies is a recipe for disappearance because “*the streets, they are not safe. They are roads to hell, made of tar. Black tar*”(TC, 66). This is perhaps why street youths answer aptly to the description of “*alloplastic*” and “*autoplastic*” adaptation models.

According to psychoanalyst Heinz Hatmann, in an explanatory context, adaptation stemming from “the capacity to cope appropriately and advantageously with one’s environment to meet his needs is called ‘alloplastic’¹⁵. In the same breath, he says: “When, however, the individual modifies himself in response to the environment, the adaptation is called ‘autoplastic.’”¹⁶ Indeed, it’s no exaggeration to make the contention that street life calls for once ‘alloplastic’ and ‘autoplastic’ adaptations, both of which Azure is an example as he says, in his opening gambit to tout a client “I’ll *do anything for fifty bucks*” (TC, 20). The reader can’t help being astounded by the amount of brazenness and prudence that tinges his haggling with a client. Hence, in plain English, he states:

“I’ll do anything for fifty bucks,” I whisper to him.

“Anything?”

“Anything that I can do.”

“And what is it that you do?” he said softly in a mocking voice.

“Depends on what I’m asked.”

“What if I wanted to fuck you?”

“I can do that.”

“You mean I can do that.”

“Ja, you can do that if you want for fifty bucks.” (TC, 29)

Azure may get paid beyond his wildest dreams for his nefarious sexual activity, but he’s embarked upon a self-destructive path. At the rate of his sexual practices he is riding for a fall from both a health and human point of view. Witness his comment after being paid for sex: “My face lights up even though my asshole is sore” (TC, 30). Life on the streets is pretty much a dog eat dog world that allows no room for the expression of humanity. Oftentimes, humanness is smothered on the altar of self-serving ends from adults who stop at nothing to ride roughshod over kids. The end point of the raw deal meted out to street boys, not least Azure, by the likes of Gerald, is to break them down psychologically and physically. And little wonder the most important bugbear in the world of *Thirteen Cents* is that children have to live with fear. Unsurprisingly, at one point in the narrative Azure admits with glaring gravitas:

I know what fear is. I know what it means to be scared, to be always on the lookout. I know what it means to hear your own heartbeat. It means you are on your own....I know what it feels like to bite the insides of your mouth to control the fear. I know what it feels like to bite your nails till your fingertips are raw and sensitive to everything you touch. I know fear. And I hate it. I live with it every day. (TC, 66)

That fear is embodied by Gerald and his henchmen, a gang of trigger happy folks who makes no bones about doing away with whoever is so foolhardy as to be in their boss’s face. The police are privy to their criminal scams but prefer to turn a blind eye. Gerald, for instance, is charged with killing a prominent family and get away with it because: “*He did them [police] a favour. He took out a powerful drug lord.*” (TC, 59). Here, the police’s connivance at the underworld’s shenanigans provides Duiker with a platform to lay bare the scourges that cripple the job of South African police: bribery, corruption, graft, and homosexuality.

Accordingly, Azure's one-on-one with his friend Vincent not only encapsulates Duiker's disappointment and bitterness about the police, but it also outlines the long way they have to go to spruce up their image:

"... Which planet are you living in? This is South Africa. The police were also in it. Times are shit. They also want a slice of the action...."
"so the police are also in it."

"Of course. Ba Batla Boroto.

They want to eat well. Streets are hard, hey. We give those assholes a rough time. Half of them are fucked on crack and buttons when they go to work."

"So that's why I saw Gerald talking to the cops."

"He has to. He can blow their whole cover. So they give him breathing space under the bridge. That's his castle." (TC, 59)

The image of the police as a corrupt institution is a reproach to South African powers that be and, in turn, constitutes a drag on the fight against the child street phenomenon. The fact that Gerald and his lackeys are allowed free rein to wreak havoc unfazed makes a mockery of the sanctimonious discourse on the driving necessity to grittily address the plight of 'homeless' children. This collusion between the underworld leaders and the police lengthen the odds on successfully getting to grips with the eye sore that represents the sight of children in rags, with runny nose, panhandling all day long on the street of the new South Africa.

At one point in their one-on-one, Azure expresses to Vincent his bafflement as to the total impunity with which the likes of Gerald trample underfoot people's rights in a country whose article of faith is the rejection of human rights violation. In a manner that shows admirable bluntness and outspokenness, Vincent makes a point of disabusing him of the sanctity that he seems to view democratic South Africa:

"Azure, this isn't hard, man. Shit, you think life is 1+1=2. Well, it's not. People have been doing this shit for ages. Let me tell you something. If you've got enough foetsek so, it is I who underline] in you and you know the right people, with a bit of money you can do anything. And that's what Gerald did. He's T-rex. He's fucking destruction. And the police know it. (TC, 63)

Assuredly, the sheer evocation of Gerald's name sends shivers down residents' spine, as he rejoices in the name of T-rex, a nickname which he didn't pluck out the air, but which stems from one of the dinosaurs in a movie called *Jurassic Park*. Those dinosaurs "were monsters as big as the Cape Sun that used to eat each other" and "one of them was called T-rex." (TC, 60). If the residents speak of him with awe, it is as a result of the fear and terror that he's implanted in them. Either way, Azure is justified in giving a wide berth to Gerald. The fear that he harbors vis-à-vis T-rex is what is termed in Freudian psychoanalysis "real fear".¹⁷ "The external danger" as far Azure is concerned is represented by Gerald: "I think of Gerald and my heart begins to race. How will I ever face him? Death would be easier. He frightens me" (TC, 66).

He wraps up learning the hard way what it means to fall foul of such a cut-throat ringleader like Gerald when he, on one of his 'friends' suggestion, makes the misbegotten call to sort of beard the lion in his den in the spirit of asking for mercy.

Not only did he get emotionally broken down by Gerald but he got manhandled by the latter's henchmen, and during a long and psychologically painful one-on-one with Azure, Gerald drops a bombshell on him: "I brought you here. I stole you from your parents. I killed them." (TC, 68). Additionally, he goes out of his way to have Azure buy into the fallacy that "you didn't your mother. You feared that she would say no to anything you did. You did everything to please her. Your father hated you for that. He was going to kill you." A measure of Azure's sorrow upon these preposterous disclosures show in this direct interior monologue:

Why do I feel sad? I ask myself. Because my mother didn't love me. Gerald is cruel. That is the ugliest thing anyone has ever said to me. It is more than having a bus crush you. I think of my mother and feel confused. No. She loved me, I tell myself. And I loved her, no matter what Gerald says. He is just like Allen. He wants to control me. (TC, 90)

Gerald is manipulative in his strenuous effort to make Azure draw a line under anything that connects him to his late parents. Hence, his aim is to enjoy full-scale dominance over Azure and his fellows. By taking Azure's parents' name in vain, Gerald is spot-on. Here, it would not be something of an exaggeration to make the contention that Sello Duiker critiques parental neglect through Gerald's derogatory words directed at Azure. This action thus relates to John Bowlby's attachment theory via the paramountcy of mother-child relationship wherein the mental health of both child and mother are pegged to their interwoven, intimate relationship, with the father acting in a supporting role. What's more, in Bowlby's estimation, the personality and psychological development of the child require foolproof maternal care, and children who are not lucky enough to bask in this joy of maternal care may later develop a psychological disorder. Bowlby asserts:

Just as the baby needs to feel that he belongs to his mother, the mother needs to feel that she belongs to her child and it is only when she has the satisfaction of this feeling that it is easy for her to devote herself to him. The provision of constant attention night and day, seven days a week and 365 days in a year, is possible only for a woman who derives profound satisfaction from seeing her child grow from baby hood, through the many phases of childhood, to become an independent man or woman, and knows that it is her care which made this possible.¹⁸

On that score, the mother is everything to her child and vice versa. When Gerald remarks on Azure's lack of maternal love, he seeks to highlight the mainspring of Azure's plight. Here in recognizing parental neglect in street life phenomenon, Duiker, through the child-narrator's reminiscence, exhorts parents not to play fast and loose with their kid's upbringing. In a telling moment in the narrative, Azure remembers burning unwittingly his parents' bed which he shared with them. He said: "I was playing with matches and somehow the bed caught on fire. I tried to put it out...but the fire had its own mind" (TC, 47). With the benefit of hindsight, he can't seem to know why his parents failed to make him face the music:

My mother cried that day. She sat outside the shack and cried while my father tried to put out the flames. I think she cried because I was a naughty child. I remember how we had to sleep on the floor because I burned the bed. Not once did they hit me. Not once.” (TC, 47)

This revealing flashback begs the question whether a child can be raised successfully without, from now and then, some physical discipline, especially when throughout the storyline the child-narrator has expressed his astonishment at getting scot-free from burning his parents' unique bed. This thinly veiled reproach of his parents is all the more mind-boggling since it happens at a time during the narrative when Azure goes through a very bad patch, teetering on the brink of snapping. And, as part of the fallout from his tussle with Gerald, he is put on solitary confinement, constantly feeling the pangs of hunger as food is rationed out to him:

When it dark and the moon is out Richard opens the door and gives me a loaf of white bread wrapped in newspaper and a pint of milk. I eat half a loaf and drink half of the milk. I save the rest for the morning. About an hour later my stomach starts grumbling like something is cooking and boiling inside me. (TC, 50)

As a rule, street children are viewed by society not as part and parcel of the citizenry, but as a bunch of waifs and strays who stymie its drive towards well-being. In hospitals they are treated like dirt; on the streets they are on the receiving end of jibes as well as disparaging comment on their plight; they are not considered as victims of family breakdown or the ravages of individualism for that matter, but as a liability to society in that they bring nothing to its enhancement. In the novel a hospital worker sums society's mindset as regards children on the street, stating:

...Problem with these kids is that they want everything now. They won't wait for anything. Have you seen how they harass you in town begging you for money after they nearly make you crash into the car you're supposed to park behind? I don't trust them. And I never give them money. What for? So that they buy drugs. (TC, 43)

Sex, sodomy, violence, theft, crime are, in popular imagination, the staple diet of street kids: “Ja, they are just problems. People talk about crime. These kids are crime,” asserts Richard, unmindful that there are children on the streets who are genuine breadwinners. There is, at bottom, more to the life of street boys than meets the eye: “On the streets boys my age support their families. They give their mothers money so that they can buy drugs and feed them nothing”(TC , 142), says Azure. Although the latter's gut-feeling needs qualifying, due to the fact that many street children “break into cars and steal small change from dashboards so that they can needles to inject themselves with poison”, it still remains that they are the butt of rejection, nay animus even from their own families. Here's how Sello Duiker intimates the situation through the technique of direct interior monologue in response to Azure's despondency and grief at being sort of cast adrift by his own flesh and blood:

What's there to think about? My mother died. My father died. I hiked to Cape Town with Mandla, Vincent. And now I'm here. There is nothing much to say. There is nothing much to think about. I can't write. I can't phone my relatives. They don't care about me anyway. And I don't miss them. I don't miss them because they never gave me anything. And that's all right, at least they didn't give me bullshit like Cape Town grown-ups. I feel better when I say this. You see sea Point. I'm getting stronger. (TC, 90)

Unsurprisingly in this matrix, street children use drugs as a form of escapism. Caught between the rock of family breakdown and the hard place of street life, they need a safe valve for the miseries of their existence. And in Azure's case, his lack of family connection and the pains that he suffers from being ditched by his relatives are an offshoot of his experience of parental death during childhood. Interestingly, his mantra all through the storyline is "My mother has died. My father has died," and then he adds this rider: "I say to myself. I say it over and over like a song, a chant" (TC, 154).

What compounds his predicament in the world of *Thirteen Cents* is his so-called 'auntie' Joyce, the woman whom he considers as a confidant although she lived a lie by intimating to Azure that "she ordered a banking place for [him] at First National bank and that all [his] money is going to be safe" (TC, 12). When it comes time to get the money, Joyce shows herself in her true colors, to wit, a trickster, withholding Azure's savings and, to twist the knife in the wound, physically manhandling him:

"Joyce, I need my money. I'm in trouble," I tell her.

"Hey, don't call me that," she says and slaps across the face. "I'm old enough to be your grandmother." I look at her with surprise.

"Auntie, please can you call the bank? I need my money."

"Your money? After all I did for you? You can't get that money. The bank won't give it to you," she says with cold eyes. (TC, 75)

Thus, the much-touted bank account turns out to be a fake. Here, the breach of trust, albeit unwarrantable and treacherous, underscores the perception of street children as mere ciphers, but also Azure's lack of schooling (his dropping out of school at the age of thirteen comes home to roost). Come to think of it, what happened to him was not quite unexpected as, from the outset, he showed unquestioning trust in Joyce while confessing ironically to his own shortcomings when it comes to education, saying "Joyce understands banks and how they work. Me, I have forgotten even how to hold a pen, so how can I go to the bank myself" (TC, 11).

When all is said and done, the life of a street kid is once squalid and harrowing. As it happens, the unsparing and blow by blow portrayal of street boys' existential distress, not least the lead character's, is meant by Sello Duiker as a gruesome reminder that postracial South Africa has reneged on its promise of social equality and regard for human rights. In Duiker's estimation, children sleeping and living in the rough are robbed of the joys of childhood. The worst of it is that their future is regrettably bleak as the grim phenomenon of street kid seems to get short shrift from South African powers that be.

Yet every city has an unspoken side, and Duiker shows Cape Town as a place of trouble and dislocation focused on street children, the innocent victims of South Africa's acute poverty, HIV/AIDS pandemic, community breakdown, not to mention endemic violence (Durban, South Africa, has the highest population of street children). Notwithstanding, the general public view the children as criminals, making them easy game for hostile treatment by the authorities.

Thirteen Cents highlights this tragedy; however, there is hope for optimistic solution centered programs. For example, the Umthombo Street Children project in Durban hosts a wide range of programs and services for street children that provide social work support, a mobile health unit, a 24-hour drop-in center, football, arts, and surfing programs which run alongside the social work team helping each child to leave the street permanently; and where possible they try to enable children to return home or live with a relative supported by an after care team that helps the family to find support so the children do not end up back on the street.

Added to that The Homestead (www.thehomestead.org.za), a non-profit organization in Cape Town South Africa established in 1982. Since then it has been working "to get and keep children off the street and reconstruct their shattered lives." Thus, Homestead is based on developmental principles, realizing that there is no single solution to the challenge of children living, working and begging on the street. They offer a continuum of services, both on and off the street which address the needs of both the child and their families through which children can grow towards competence and self-confidence. Thankfully, Homestead has successfully prevented children from drifting towards the street through early intervention programs in communities/ families of origin; provided transition and stable environments for children; reunified children coming into the Homestead directly back to their families with ongoing family preservation support; provided every day shelter, therapy, education and long-term residential care and development for vulnerable and traumatized children, and ultimately given street children the hope, care and protection they need to restructure their shattered lives and to build a positive future away from street life.

Perhaps the gritty detail of life so vividly and masterfully describes in *Thirteen Cents* by Duiker will become a situation of the past via the full implementation of programs like the one mentioned above which may lead to other social-political novels that question human rights and social justice in South Africa, and around the globe.

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¹ In *Abandoned Children*, an informative book co-written with Malcom T. Smith, Catherine Panter-Brick bemoans in her introduction the utter rejection that street children are faced with. In her estimation, "*They [street kids] appear to be 'nobody's children: in limbo, denied their proper place in the family or society, children deprived of a proper childhood.*" Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p.1.

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⁵LE ROUX, J. « Street children: “Running from ” or “running to”? In *Koers*, 62 (3), p.346.

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⁷PANTER-Brick, C. “Street Children, Human Rights and Public Health”, op.cit., p.150.

⁸Ibid., p.150.

⁹Quoted by J. Le Roux in “Street Children : « Running from » or « running to?”, op.cit., p.347.

¹⁰Ibid., p.347.

¹¹LE ROUX, J, & SMITH, Cheryl Sylvia. “Causes and characteristics of the street child phenomenon: a global perspective.” In *Adolescence*, Vol.33, No.131, p.684.

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¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Quoted by Harriot Beazley, op.cit.

¹⁵AKHTAR, Salman. *A Comprehensive Dictionary to Psychoanalysis*. London: Karnac Books, 2009, p.11.

¹⁶Ibid., p.11.

¹⁷In the twenty fifth lesson of *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, the prime mover of Psychoanalysis deals with Anxiety and Fear. Oftentimes used confusedly, the words anxiety, fear and fright are explained at length by Sigmund Freud. Speaking of anxiety he says: "I think that anxiety is used in connection with a condition regardless of any objective." Addressing the notion of fear (on which he elaborated the most) Freud starts by saying that "it is certain that the problem of fear is the meeting point of many important questions, an enigma whose complete solution would cast a flood of light in psychic life." (p.340) He describes it as being "essentially directed towards an object." When it comes to fright the renowned psychoanalyst contends that "it seems really to possess a special meaning, which emphasizes the effects of a danger which is precipitated without any expectance or readiness of fear." (p.342). More significant is the fact that Freud, in his analysis, came up with a typology of basically two three types of fear: "real fear, neurotic and moral fear." In his estimation, "real fear seems quite rational and comprehensible to us. We may testify that it is a reaction to the perception of an external danger, viz., harm that is expected and foreseen. It is related to the flight reflex and may be regarded as an expression of the instinct of self-preservation." (p.340). As regards neurotic fear Freud asserts that it is "psychologically more circumscribed and bound up with certain objects or situations. It is the fear of the manifold and frequently very peculiar phobias...: darkness, open air, open squares, cats, spiders, caterpillars, snakes, mice, thunderstorms, crowd, passing over a bridge." (p.344). To recap, S. Freud feels that "the development of fear is the ego's reaction to danger, the signal for preparation for flight, and from this we are led to believe that in neurotic fear the ego attempts to escape the claims of its libido, and treats this inner danger as though it came from without." (p.350). *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*. Translated by G. Stanley. London: Boni and Liveright, 1925.

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¹⁹SCHOPENHAUER, Arthur. *On Human Nature: Essays in Ethics and Politics*. London: Swan Sonnenchein & CO., LIM., 1902, p.50.

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²¹*On Human Nature: Essays in Ethics and Politics*, op.cit., p.120.

²²*Ibid.*, p.120.

²³*Ibid.*, p.121.