

**IMAGINED PASTS, SUSPENDED PRESENTS: SOUTH
AFRICAN LITERATURE IN THE CONTEMPORARY
MOMENT**

by

WAMUWI MBAO

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

In the

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

at

RHODES UNIVERSITY

DECEMBER 2009

Supervisor: SJ MARAIS

ABSTRACT

Scholarship on Post-Apartheid South African literature has engaged in various ways with the politics of identity, but its dominant mode has been to understand the literature through an anxious rupture-continuation paradigm in which the Apartheid past manifests itself in the present. However, in the contemporary moment, there are writers whose texts attempt to forge new paths in their depictions of identities both individual and collective. These texts are useful in contemplating how South Africans experience belonging and dislocation in various contexts.

In this thesis, I consider a range of contemporary South African texts via the figure of life-writing. My analysis demonstrates that, while many texts in the contemporary moment have displayed new and more complex registers of perception concerning the issue of 'race', there is a need for more expansive and fluid conceptions of crafting identity, as regards the politics of space and how this intersects with issues of belonging and identity. That is, much South African literature still continues along familiar trajectories of meaning, ones which are not well-equipped to understand issues that bedevil the country at this particular historical moment, which are grounded in the political compromises that came to pass during the 'time of transition'. These issues include the recent spate of xenophobia attacks, which have yet to be comprehensively and critically analysed in the critical domain, despite the work of theorists such as David Coplan. Such events indicate the need for more layered and intricate understandings of how our national identity is structured: Who may belong? Who is excluded? In what situations? This thesis engages with these questions in order to determine how systems of power are constructed, reified, mediated, reproduced and/or resisted in the country's literature.

To do this, I perform an attentive reading of the mosaic image of South African culture that emerges through a selection of contemporary works of literature. The texts I have selected are notable for the ways in which they engage with the epistemic protocol of coming to know the Other and the self through the lens of the Apartheid past. That engagement may take the form of a reassertion, reclamation, displacement, or complication of selfhood. Given that South African identities are overinscribed in paradigms in which the Apartheid past is primary, what potentials and limits are presently encountered when writing of the self/selves is attempted?

My study goes beyond simply asserting that not all groups have equal access to representation. Rather, I demonstrate that the linear shaping of the South African culture of letters imposes certain restrictions on who may work within it. Here, the politics of publishing and the increasing focus on urban spaces (such that other spaces become marginalized in ways that reflect the proclivities of the reading public) are subjected to close scrutiny. Overall, my thesis aims to promote a rethinking of South African culture, and how that culture is represented in, and defined through, our literature.

CONTENTS

Introduction	1
1. Chapter One: Signs Taken For Wonders: The Politics of Publishing in South African Literature	2
1.1 Fractured Literacies	7
1.2 Imagined Communities: Contemporary White Writing	11
1.2.1 Shaun Johnson's <i>The Native Commissioner</i>	12
1.2.2 Tim Ecott's <i>Stealing Water</i>	15
1.2.3 Diane Awerbuck's <i>Gardening at Night</i>	17
1.3 Black Writing and The Language of Transition	19
1.3.1 Phaswane Mpe's <i>Welcome To Our Hillbrow</i>	21
1.3.2 Fred Khumalo's <i>Touch My Blood</i>	24
1.3.3 Sandile Memela's <i>Flowers of The Nation</i>	26
1.3.4 Kopano Matlwa's <i>Coconut</i>	29
1.3.5 Trajectories of the Blurb	32
1.4 Conclusion	38
2. Chapter Two An Excess of Belonging: Achmat Dangor's <i>Bitter Fruit</i>	41
2.1 Silas	43
2.2 Lydia	45
2.3 Mikey/Michael	52
2.4 (Dis)Locating History Within The Narrative	54
2.5 The Hegemony of Confession	58
2.6 Retribution-Reconstitution?	63
2.7 Conclusion	66
3. Chapter Three: Inscribing Whiteness and Staging Belonging in Contemporary Life-Writing Forms	69
3.1 Shaun Johnson's <i>The Native Commissioner</i>	72
3.2 John Van de Ruit's <i>Spud: The Madness Continues</i>	82
3.3 Troy Blacklaws's <i>Karoo Boy and Blood Orange</i>	85
3.4 Tim Ecott's <i>Stealing Water</i>	93

4. Chapter Four: Writing Anxiety: Some Directions in the Contemporary South African

Novel	101
4.1 Timothy Keegan's <i>My Life with the Duvals</i>	103
4.2 Ian Martin's <i>Pop-Splat!</i>	112
4.3 Kgebetli Moele's <i>Room 207</i>	120
4.4 Zukiswa Wanner's <i>The Madams</i>	128
4.5 Kopano Matlwa's <i>Coconut</i>	135
4.6 Conclusion	144
Conclusion	146
Works Cited	150

INTRODUCTION

“...as though coinciding were the ultimate secret of communication, and as though truth were only disclosure” – Emmanuel Levinas. (“Substitution” 109)

In a polemical essay on the South African imaginary, Ashraf Jamal performs a diagnostic analysis of the contemporary South African cultural imaginary. He finds that present-day South Africa

has failed to access the self-reflexive moment that could allow it to hover between the shadow and the act. Its contemptuous disregard for mystery, its maniacal belief in closure, its festering recourse to pain, its hatred of embarrassment, its toxic pride, has left it standing like the proverbial emperor enfolded in its naked pomp. A soap opera, South Africa is a country that chooses to serialise itself into oblivion. How, then, to commemorate? Where does one begin? The fact is one doesn't, for South Africa, irrespective of the history it has constructed for itself, remains a society that lives with the terrible unease of never having begun. It may suppress this unease; indeed, it would seem that South Africa's finest talent is its ability to draw a rabbit out of a hat and call it history. Such is the perversity of this nation that its pain has become a mockery, its hopes mere baubles. (“Bearable Lightness” 102)

Jamal's paradigmatic depiction of South Africa is crucial as an entry-point into how the South African culture of letters views itself and its place in the contemporary moment. That contemporary moment is one in which attempts to speak against/outside the restrictive paradigms of the 1950s Population Registration Act meet with the continuities of oppression that exist between the Apartheid past and the present. However, if that past can be said to still have repercussions in the present, it could be argued that the manner in which those repercussions manifest themselves has altered in ways both subtle and dramatic. If it can be said that there is a need for literature to access the space of self-reflexivity, there is also a need to examine who has access to that space, and within what contexts that access occurs. In other words, there is a need to examine the ways in which the politics of freedom and equality visit themselves upon South African society in ways more varied than have been represented until now.

In this regard, I want to ask what is at stake when a large group of contemporary South African writers chooses to centre their fiction on the gesture of writing the self? How does this form of writing, with its emphasis on the self/selves that make up the nation, fit with Jamal's notion of the self-reflexive moment? My thesis examines a very particular manifestation of contemporary South African fiction, tracing literature which engages with the epistemic protocol of coming to know the Other and the self/selves through the lens of the past. That engagement may take the form of a reassertion, a reclamation, a displacement, or a troubling of selfhood in the texts I have selected. Given that South African identities are overdetermined by paradigms where the Apartheid past is primary, what potentials and limits are presently encountered when writing of the self/selves is attempted? And is it ever possible to write out of the dialogical relationship inscribed by Apartheid and those previous works of South African fiction that have grappled with notions of South African culture?

There has recently been a preponderance of cultural enquiries that gesture towards the "self-reflexive moment" Jamal describes above. Sarah Nuttall (2009), Achille Mbembe (2001), Richard Pithouse (2008), Meg Samuelson (2004), and Desiree Lewis (2005) have all written extensively on the need to find newer and more complex registers through which to read culture in the South African contemporary. Beyond the academy, however, South African literature continues to be defined by the need to reconstitute selfhood in the face of traumas and sufferings at both the micro- and macro-levels of experience. In this respect, it is notable that life-writing has been taken up as a tractable means of exploring identity in many texts. Life-writing eludes the open-ended nature of history, by concluding (or appearing to conclude) in the suspended present in which the text is written. It dwells on the past for the duration of its narrative, only to culminate at whatever point the author chooses to signpost as the present. Further, it sustains the illusion of reality through its claims to authenticity: life-writing is constantly at pains to hide the creative nature of its being. That is, it seeks to

present itself as a narrative that emerges ‘naturally’, rather than one that has been creatively and actively shaped. Thus, even when a writer points out that she is performing acts of selection with regard to the direction in which the narrative ventures, that very act is (unwittingly or deliberately) misleading, since it is a gesture which disguises the fact that the entire text is *always already* a work of selection and construction. The illusion of reality serves to disguise many of the epistemological influences which determine how the past and present are imagined and re-imagined.

It is important to clarify what is meant when I speak of life-writing. Life-writing, as I use it here, refers to a literary style which lacks “generic rigour” (Olney “Memory” xv): it is writing that approaches, or attempts to approach, the self/selves of the subject/s concerned. Throughout this thesis, I use various terms as a means of approaching the modes of life-writing depicted in the texts analysed: ‘periautography’ (writing around the self) and ‘autography’ (self-writing), ‘confession’ and ‘autobiography’. To impose distinctions between these terms would be futile: they overlap and interweave with one other, particularly in the domain of fictional writing. The slippage that occurs between and among these terms is indicative of the complex nature of life-writing in general (Olney, “Memory” xv). What is common to all of these terms is a concern with the exploration and mapping of the subjective consciousness either underpinning the representation, or directly figuring in it. Several of the texts featured have introspective writing at their core, while others replicate the form and content of autobiography in their fictionalized expressions. The use of the written self/selves as a site of reference in the contemporary moment is curious: while life-writing appears a hospitable genre “for those who need to assert a voice or claim an identity hitherto suppressed in South African literature” (Driver, “Autobiography” 114), it hides the rituals and methods by which it creates author-ity. We need to be cognizant that what we read when we read life-writing is often formed on the well-rehearsed terrain of previous writing, even as

it presents itself as something new and unseen. With that being said, such texts present themselves as useful media through which to explore the trajectories of South African culture.

In this exploration of contemporary South African fiction, my aim is not so much to problematise the manifestation of these influences in South African literature, as to demonstrate the need for more complex registers of meaning when mapping the nation through the identities of its subjects. Rather than pursuing an instrumentalist argument against the use of 'race', I want to decentre the pertinence and gravity wielded by 'race' in South African literature: my thesis demonstrates that the predominance of traditional methods of reading 'race' in the South African present risks excluding other equally important ways in which people identify with South Africa and being South African. The texts I have chosen to illustrate this argument connect imagined pasts with the contemporary moment, but they do so from differing subject positions.

My thesis is organized into four chapters. The first, "Signs Taken for Wonders", attempts to trace the politics behind the marketing and distribution of works of contemporary South African fiction, through the paratextual information inscribed upon the covers of these works. Utilizing Shaun Johnson's *The Native Commissioner*, Tim Ecott's *Stealing Water*, Diane Awerbuck's *Gardening at Night*, Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, Fred Khumalo's *Touch My Blood*, Sandile Memela's *Flowers of the Nation*, and Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut*, I trouble the sociopolitical assumptions that underpin the marketing and valuation of literature by white and Black South African authors. I suggest that publishers choose easy, near-commonsensical ideas drawn from the country's literary history in order to perpetuate an image at odds with the very sociocultural realities of the contemporary moment which these texts seek to reflect and interrogate. My second chapter, "An Excess of Belonging", deals with the deferment and displacement of 'closure'. Utilizing Achmat Dangor's *Bitter*

Fruit, I ask what it means to revisit the past, and whether that past can ever truly be rehabilitated. Placing the novel within the framework of debates around the TRC, I show that the privilege afforded to certain positions to speak about ‘forgiveness’ and reconciliation risks excluding the very people most deeply affected by the past. In the third chapter, “Inscribing Whiteness”, I describe the problematics of belonging which speak themselves in five recent works by English-speaking white South Africans. These novels, Shaun Johnson’s *The Native Commissioner* (mentioned above), John Van De Ruit’s *Spud: The Madness Continues*, Troy Blacklaws’ *Karoo Boy* and *Blood Orange* and Tim Ecott’s *Stealing Water* (also mentioned above), are all notable for the manner in which they confront ordinary experiences of white existence in South Africa. I investigate what the novels articulate, what they choose not to speak about, and what lies behind these choices. My final chapter centres on the state of anxiety that manifests itself in the fictions of several contemporary South African authors. In a situation in which traditional forms of speaking the self have proven themselves to be limiting, I examine a selection of texts by Timothy Keegan, Ian Martin, Kgebetli Moele, Zukiswa Wanner, and Kopano Matlwa, and find that they employ new and often unconventional forms of speaking to think through the experience of being South African in the present historical moment.

In all, my thesis aims to move beyond the problematic concepts of ‘race’ and racism. I argue that these are not in themselves ineluctable: the concerns that manifest themselves in the texts discussed here are complex, and not singularly informed by the problematic of ‘race’, even if that problematic is often the most salient marker of the difference by which identity is constructed and/or affirmed in the South African context. To say this is not to marginalize the very real material and ideological effects of ‘race’: it is to seek out ways of examining the South African imaginary that demonstrate the “ambiguity, ambivalence and nuances of identity in the new South Africa” (Kosew 100).

Chapter 1: Signs Taken For Wonders: The Politics of Publishing in South African Literature

There is a form of gate-keeping going on in South African literary culture, one that determines who is published, under what conditions, and by which outlets. This is because once the work has been completed, it must be packaged and distributed so as to best show off its attributes and to ensure it is successful in the literary marketplace. In order for this to occur, publishing firms utilize a network of marketers, copy-writers and reviewers to present suitably complimentary blurbs for these works. What does this mean for literature, particularly that from emergent literary borderlines, when it becomes subject to the demands of capital? An analysis of the manner in which publishers inscribe their interests upon a literary text shows that there are many more forces governing the form and style of the work than first appears to be the case.

This chapter examines the ways in which commercial interests play themselves out on life-writing texts in contemporary South Africa. It asks if the submission of publishing to corporate interests affects the quality of information and meaning conveyed on dust-jackets, and whether such marketing does not in fact reduce these texts to advertising in the interest of corporate profits. To make such an inquiry is not to envision the relationship between the production of literature and that literature itself as antagonistic, since to take a stand against a system that enables the production of literature would be counter-intuitive. It is to bring into question the politics of the blurb and the other forms of copy-writing and packaging that are an intrinsic part of the reading experience when it comes to the texts under discussion in this thesis. This chapter, then, will examine the various iterations with which the publishing body corporate inscribes itself on the text.

In examining what strategies and tactics are employed by publishing firms to sell works of literature, it is instructive to begin by looking at the endorsements and excerpts from reviews that publishers print on the covers of such texts. The deployment of these blurbs occurs according to patterns that are conventional and motivated by what the publishing houses deem appropriate for their market. One may read such material, and from its content make deductions about the meanings of the words selected both in relation to one another and in the context in which they are deployed and, by thorough analysis, come to considered conclusions about the ideological positions from which these words emanate.

The sources of examples for this chapter are several novels, published by different South African publishing houses. My analysis of the dust-cover texts of Shaun Johnson's *The Native Commissioner*, Tim Ecott's *Stealing Water*, Diane Awerbuck's *Gardening at Night*, Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, Fred Khumalo's *Touch My Blood*, Sandile Memela's *Flowers of the Nation*, and Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut*, seeks to read the blurbs/promotional material closely, examining and interpreting the rhetoric they deploy according to the understanding that such texts are "complex cultural and psychological products, constructed in a particular way to make things happen" (Potter & Wetherell 3). In other words, it is necessary to see the blurb as being central to the overall image of the text.

1.1 Fractured Literacies

When undertaking an examination that interrogates reading as well as writing processes, one inevitably encounters the question of what type of audience is being addressed. While an in-depth discussion of South African literacies is beyond the scope of this thesis, a brief treatment of the issues of projected audience is essential to a critical understanding of how texts are marketed. The basic principle of blurbs is that they must serve an instrumental purpose. That is, they must induce the potential reader to purchase or peruse the text. But, of

course, for the blurbs to function as the publisher intends there must be readers situated in particular frameworks, who interpret these blurbs and give them meaning.

In arguing that the signs and symbols that reside on the ‘borders’ of the text¹ have an important and often overlooked role in the reading process, it is necessary to point out that the blurb cannot always easily be disregarded by the reader, whether she is sceptical of its intent or manipulated by its machinations. This is because, once one has read the blurb, one is drawn into a reading-relationship that is either complementary or confrontational. One either reads in tacit agreement with the blurb, or reads against it, because one disagrees with its premises.

It is relatively easy to understand why the reader may object to the blurb: this may occur retrospectively after she has read the text itself, or it may occur because she finds the blurb to be little more than pecuniary demagoguery. After all, as Philippe Lejeune asserts, “the real reader can adopt modes of reading different from the ones suggested to him [sic]” (126). But how might one account for the reader who is ‘taken in’ by the blurb? This reader agrees with the premises of the blurb, and judges the book favourably based on the information imparted by the blurb. In this regard, it is useful to invoke Lejeune’s concept of the ‘pact’ that exists between the narrator of the story and the reader.² As an example, the reader of Shaun Johnson’s *The Native Commissioner* trusts, according to Lejeune’s theory, that there is a real author behind the artifice that constitutes the text. That is, the reader assumes that the writer ‘corresponds’ with them in a dialogical relationship that is begun by the writing and completed/realized in the reading of what has been written. For the autobiographical project to be sustained, for the reader to believe that what she is reading corresponds to real world experiences, the writer must establish a certain level of trust. This is done via certain signs or cues in the text (dates of birth, assertions of authenticity, and so on) that establish credibility and make the reader feel that she has been let into the confidence of the writer/narrator figure.

Why should the reader not then trust that a text that speaks on behalf of the author will provide hermeneutical guidance towards the ‘correct’ reading of the book? In a sense, the blurb ignores the potential existence of the dialogical ‘pact’ between writer and reader, interposing itself as though *it* provides the entry point to a solipsistic world.

However, this is not the only way in which blurbs can be understood. Blurbs appeal to particular cultural codes that are drawn from the societies into which texts enter and from which they emerge. Thus, in a society such as Post-Apartheid South Africa, where contemporary white writing is often read in terms of its ability to come to terms with the past and the effect of that past on the individual psyche,³ the blurbs will mirror these tendencies. This reading proceeds according to a praxis that implicitly utilizes the Foucauldian notion of the secular confessional as a lens through which to view and interpret such texts.⁴ That is, white writing is valued for its nuanced and subjective narrative focus, and for its attention to previously marginalized and overlooked sections of white South Africa’s history.⁵ This is a reading that promotes a duality of meaning: white writing is individualized (it is claimed), yet it also aids in the construction of a new national self by dismantling the totalizing and monological narratives that have held sway in the past. Contemporary white writing, as the examples analysed in this section demonstrate, is thus marketed as redeeming South Africa’s past, and reviewers comment on how the nation will identify with these individual portraits of South African life. These statements point to a general assumption that white writing is the universal standard in South African fiction. Despite the interventions of several critics – among them Sarah Nuttall (“Subjectivities”) and Desiree Lewis (“Feminisms”), the assumption that white writing can speak for the nation is seldom questioned, its values rarely held up for questioning. The dichotomy that emerges, then, is one in which white writing does not serve to further understanding of white culture, but simply reflects ‘South Africa’, while Black writing is invariably marketed as being anthropologically intriguing but

intellectually unsophisticated work, full of vivid narratives about the experiences of ‘being Black’ in South Africa. What this might suggest is that academic/literary and publishing disciplines do not engage with one another productively. This is hardly accurate, however, since the writers of the blurbs under discussion are often drawn from academic and/or literary circles. For example, J.M. Coetzee writes the blurb which adorns the cover of Shaun Johnson’s *The Native Commissioner*, while André Brink is responsible for the blurb that accompanies Diane Awerbuck’s *Gardening at Night*.⁶

It is interesting to note that the prevalence of this manner of reading South African literature continues to hold sway in popular media and in the marketing schemes of publishing houses, despite the anachronistic nature of such a reading mode. The examples examined below convincingly illustrate how South African publishing utilizes two different modes of understanding for its blurbs, modes which inform its various marketing strategies: a sympathetic understanding of white writing as complex and complicated, and a sentimental and (as a result) simplified understanding of Black print culture.

All of these points beg the question: who is this writing aimed at? This basic question has been articulated in various forms for decades as critics have attempted to map the ‘intended audience’ of Black writing (Nkosi, “Fiction” 125). Might the same question not be levelled at white writing? It could be argued that the answer is deceptively simple: ruminations on Black life are not new to Black people, since the details of oppression, casual racism, poverty and sexism are available to those who live under such conditions. Yet, in summarizing Black writing, copy-writers and editors make use of signposts that appear intended to guide a white audience unfamiliar with these details. This is peculiar since, in an era in which white writing is disseminated widely,⁷ Black reading audiences are unlikely to be unfamiliar with white writing⁸. A similar approach is not utilized, however, with white writing, since the focus is not on an external audience, but an established one familiar with certain coded meanings. The

reader is unquestioningly co-opted into these viewpoints (the copy-writer is, after all, a reader too), which suggests that the intended ideal reader is one who subscribes to the form of dichotomized reading outlined above.

It will be demonstrated in the following sections that these two particularly distinct marketing strategies are present in the dissemination of texts by white and Black authors respectively. To say this is not simply to reprise the traditional argument⁹ for a binary mode of reading that divides Black and white writing. On the contrary, though the strategies differ in their approaches, both invariably privilege a Western white male gaze in their dialogical relationship with the reader.

1.2 Imagined Communities: Contemporary White Writing

Having stated that writing by white authors is not marketed as though it may provide an external audience with a guidebook to an ineffable culture, how might one account for the marketing strategies employed by publishing houses in the production and dissemination of these works? Later in this chapter it will be made clear that the fetishization of Black writing constitutes a morbid symptom of a system in which whiteness is the unproblematicized 'norm'. The marketing of white writing relies on a reading of white literature as unremarkable for its whiteness: the power of white writing, as Richard Dyer argues, lies in its claim "to speak for the commonality of humanity" (2). Indeed, as the examples below will illustrate, publishing houses go to some length to avoid dwelling on whiteness as a constituting factor in the texts they produce. That is, instead of depicting the positive attributes of white narratives as residing in their ability to faithfully represent white culture, the narratives are praised for their ability to represent South Africa as a whole. What is occluded from view is the blurb-writer's subjectivity in the forming of the paratext. The reader is thus encouraged to read the

pronouncements contained in this paratext as though they are neutral and objective, which of course they cannot be.

1.2.1 Shaun Johnson's *The Native Commissioner*

The front cover of Shaun Johnson's *The Native Commissioner*, for example, bears J.M. Coetzee's assertion that the novel is a "welcome step toward the reconstitution of the South African past".¹⁰ The publisher removes the sentence from this larger paragraph, which may be found on Johnson's website:

In the rural areas of the old South Africa, the law of the land was administered not just by soulless white bureaucrats but also by men like George Jameson, deeply immersed in African culture and African languages, sympathetic to African aspirations. When Grand Apartheid was imposed, some of these men resigned their posts, but others conquered their distaste and stayed on, hoping to soften the impact of Bantu Administration and Development on a subject African population. The story of Native Commissioner Jameson, told for the most part in his own artless words, is a welcome step toward the reconstitution of the South African past in all its moral and political complexity.

Clipping the last few words ("in all its moral and political complexity") produces a punchy blurb that seems to be an outright endorsement from the famous author, J.M. Coetzee. However, this extract also loses meaning without the context of the larger paragraph, and may even seem to mean something completely different. What project is implied by the reference to the need to 'reconstitute the South African past'? How difficult is this process of reconstitution? These are questions the blurb obscures with its seeming simplicity. Then, one might consider that the 'South African past' is far from being a straightforward concept. Yet Coetzee's statement, edited and reduced, appears to assume the normative character of South African historical experience, a sentiment that is in contrast to the tone of the original piece. Moreover, Coetzee's original paragraph suggests that whiteness is not homogenous in

character, a view which the orphaned blurb elides through its silence on the issue of Johnson's whiteness.

Why does the gaze of an academic/author figure like J.M. Coetzee, transfigured and corrupted as it is by the pen of the blurb-writer/editor, bestow legitimacy on the novel in this way? Here, the selective quotation is meant to attract one's interest because Coetzee, so one is led to believe, feels the novel to be a welcome addition towards the reconstitution of South African history. This information constitutes an attempt on the part of the publisher to draw in the reader by linking Johnson's novel to Coetzee. The logic exercised in the service of industry is that if J.M. Coetzee, as one of South Africa's pre-eminent authors, thinks the novel is good then it must be so. The reader is asked to assume an unproblematic world in which 'good' South African writing is writing by white men, and not to question whether there are other ways of reading Johnson's novel that do not simply render it a stepping-stone in the greater reconstitutive project. Indeed, the reader is not even asked to interrogate why reconstruction and reconciliation must occur through white writing, but is seemingly intended to assume nobility of intent.

This last point requires expanding. More than simply connoting authority, the invocation of Coetzee (who functions as an avatar of literary authority) by the publisher begs the question: do publishers believe South African novels of this sort must be linked to established ideas and images from previously successful texts if they are to succeed? Why does the work of a current South African author have to rely prominently on the name of another, older white author whose work has long been incorporated into the South African canon? It could be that the reader is meant to equate the quality of the work with the status of a writer who is seen as being at the pinnacle of South African fiction – a problematic situation since Coetzee is but one author in a vast writing tradition.

Could it be that the opacity of Coetzee's own fiction, with the concomitant expectation that one must be fairly educated in order to grasp the merits thereof, is an attractive lure precisely because it constitutes a marker of erudition and sophistication? The reputation on which Coetzee's writing rests is due in no small part to the complexity of his writing. It could therefore be argued that deploying his authority upon the cover of a particular text implicitly suggests that a sophisticated reader has found the text worthy of his attention. Thus, to read a text endorsed by Coetzee is to engage in an imagined community of intelligent readers. It could thus be that, for the aspiring reader of *The Native Commissioner*, the attraction of the blurb lies in being associated with this imagined community.

This association is strengthened by the claims embodied not only in Coetzee's quote, but also in the short paragraph which constitutes the flyleaf: that this novel speaks to the national imagination. It can be seen here that publishers interpose an ideal reader (in this case, Coetzee) between themselves and their audience. That audience is then encouraged to participate in the experience of the novel (being displaced by the enunciative position adopted by the interposed "ideal reader", the audience takes up a communal position as 'listeners'), and their position together is mapped out as constituting a unified community of witnesses who share in the experience of the novel, using it "to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways" (Anderson 36).

This bearing witness is essential to the composition of the text, for it is the community of readers whom the blurbs attached to Johnson's novel actually address. In what constitutes a narrow textual economy, the reader is either one of the "enfranchised, empowered and usually complicit" masses (Garman 213) who was not aware of the occluded areas that Johnson is writing into being, or the perceptive individual who (along with Coetzee) recognises the subtlety articulated by Johnson's work. In either case, "the politics of

reconciliation” articulated in the positioning of the novel requires in the witness-reader “a subjective identification, contrition, [and] introspection” (Whitlock 210).

If one assumes, then, that there exists a unified community of witness-readers, is Coetzee meant to spearhead this community? And if power determines who speaks and with what authority that speech is vested, what might one make of Coetzee being a white male author who is assumed to be a recognizable figure to the wider audience of Johnson’s work? It could be argued that publishing houses adopt as their model of authority a figure who will best respond to the “horizon of expectations”¹¹ held by their reading public. Accordingly, if that reader is white and educated (one assumes), then their knowledge of Coetzee will draw them to the novel. If this is the case, then it follows that publishers deliberately construct and perpetuate a certain type of readership, by relying on the prior reading practices of the market it targets.

1.2.2 Tim Ecott’s *Stealing Water*

Similarly, on reading the dust-jacket of Tim Ecott’s *Stealing Water*, one is confronted by a series of what Jane Rosenthal aptly terms “shouts”(1) that seem to target a particular ‘horizon of expectations’ amongst its intended reading public. The cover blurb comes from *The Guardian*, and proclaims that Ecott’s work is “the greatest memoir to come out of white Africa since Rian Malan’s *My Traitor’s Heart*”. Not only is there no justification for this questionable claim, but it also speaks in this context to an investment in a particular view of the world where “white Africa” is defined according to a narrow paradigm of male writing. What of the work of Nadine Gordimer, Doris Lessing, or Gillian Slovo, for example? Is the field of writing so narrow that a banal account of a sheltered life abstracted from the political realities of the continent can truly be praised so effusively? The use of the term “white Africa” also speaks from (and reveals) an understanding of the world in which it is possible

to refer to a “white Africa” as though such a thing is an accepted conceptual entity, rather than an invention of the very discourse that describes it.

That this quote merits being placed on the front cover bears analysis too: with what authority is the reviewer of *The Guardian* vested to render this verdict on what is a large and complex body of literature? Ecott’s publishing house arrogates to itself the discursive power to deem Ecott’s work “the greatest memoir” since Malan’s. Is this because *The Guardian* is an English newspaper, with all the implications of figuring Englishness as arbiter of value in a country where the hegemony of the English language has grown instead of diminishing?

In both of the above examples, white male authors function as epistemological mediators. In the first example, the reader is asked (whether subconsciously or not) to read *The Native Commissioner* according to the instructive opinion of Coetzee (and there is little option, due to the prominent display of that opinion). In the second example, the reader is asked to read *Stealing Water* with the heritage of Malan’s work behind it: that is, she is asked to assume that *Stealing Water* is as “good” a work as Malan’s memoir, unquestioningly accepting that the latter is a “good” work. The essential problem of this testimonial blurb is that it functions as a cipher through which one is compelled to read the work. In each case, the paratextual blurbs are meant to create a particular perception, rather than meaningfully inform one about the work. The blurb of Ecott’s book does so by appealing to intertextuality: the reader is meant to take in the authoritative reading of *The Guardian* because they recognise the reference to Malan and, from the placing of that reference, conclude that *My Traitor’s Heart* is a work of “good” literary quality. This strategy leads the reader to accept the premises of the blurb more readily: the codes established by this intertextuality include the reader and leave her feeling as if she is “in the know” (Maclean 275). Further, this strategy shapes its audience as one which places great faith in the credibility of Englishness and its symbols, such as *The Guardian*, revealing the proclivities of those who author it. What does this mean?

If “every text creates its ideal reader by implying the body of knowledge and the expectations the reader is presumed to possess” (Amireh & Majaj 163), then this shaping is clearly problematic, since it perpetuates the tendency to read Englishness as being somehow distinct from racism, and as the desired and sophisticated position from which reading should ideally be carried out.

1.2.3 Diane Awerbuck’s *Gardening at Night*

Compare, then, how the blurb for Diane Awerbuck’s *Gardening at Night* proceeds. André

Brink comments that:

Gardening at Night follows the unfolding of a young girl’s life through a childhood filled with silences, through adolescence and young womanhood. It is about how much people are the total of their longings, how high drama can also be low comedy. It probes how much of the old century a girl should take with her into the new one, and examines the merging of families in the Eighties and their emerging into the florescence of the Nineties and beyond. It is especially the story of a girl’s escape from a ghost town. The South African mining town of Kimberley was created over a hundred years ago when men with buckets scraped out the insides of the earth like a thousand black dentists. Now it is a place where the only tales are those of leaving. *Gardening at Night* is feisty, and funky, and funny. And even in moments of bleakness and shock Diane Awerbuck’s brand of wry humour turns this unusual and amazing first novel into a remarkable reading adventure. This is a South Africa the international reader has not yet seen: the wood of smallness and ordinariness and quirkiness of everyday life hidden behind the trees of politics.

It is possible, given the above description, to suppose that *Gardening at Night* is a work of imaginative fiction (presupposing a distinction between autobiography and fiction writing).

Brink’s blurb replicates all the codes of the traditional *Bildungsroman*/coming-of-age narrative, which is curious, since by Awerbuck’s own admission the work is entirely autobiographical (“Interview” 1). Within Brink’s words one sees how “the discourse of the author is equated with the utterances of a new Adam who speaks as if he [sic] had no predecessors” (Lampolski 125). That is, he presents the work as something completely new and unprecedented. One may note how the historical details (of Kimberley and of the greater

historical period) sit uncomfortably amongst the lighter details concerning the fictions crafted by Awerbuck. It is as though Brink is unable to reconcile the historical moment with the goal of punting the creative excellence of the work. He thus resorts to hackneyed and awkward metaphors (as though miners share the status and privilege that accrue to dentists), which perhaps is in keeping with what he claims the novel does, namely probe “how much of the old century a girl should take with her into the new one”. That is, Brink depicts history as fragmenting the personal, rather than as being inseparable from, and intimately connected with, the personal. Brink thus downplays the historical element, in order to stress the individuality and creativity displayed by the author.

It is noteworthy here that Brink’s own words seems chosen to best show off his own creative attributes, as well as those of the author he is punting. The decision to visit his creative talents upon the reader is a deliberate one that ostensibly suggests that some equal gift of literary creativity will be discovered by the reader upon reading the novel. As with Coetzee in the first example, the literary authority associated with Brink here suggests a certain credibility that must be conferred upon Awerbuck by association. The reader is not given any extra information on Brink himself; certainly nothing to clarify why this author above any other has the authority to refashion historical narrative in this purple prose. It is not farfetched to read Brink’s words as the putative literary authority of a white male author manifesting itself once again. The irony, then, is that the very male authority Brink displays in this blurb is used to bestow a form of authority on Awerbuck as a *female* author. It is of course a conditional authority, for the latter’s credibility rests upon Brink’s reading of her work.

After the blurb has made its claim of authority, the reader is informed about Awerbuck and her achievements: one reads that “Awerbuck teaches high school English and History to Cape Town schoolgirls. She knows that someday she will have to go back to Kimberley.

Gardening at Night is her first novel”. One may ponder whether the rhetoric employed here demonstrates how the conventions of prejudice are drawn into prose. This is because notions of liberalism and freedom are evoked by the linking of the Cape with escape, while the undesirable non-freedom of Kimberley further replicates the mythologizing narrative depictions of the Cape as a space of emancipation from the conservative interior by which English South Africans displace racism onto their Afrikaner counterparts. This facet of the blurb engages in a historical reliance on a view of the English Cape as the centre of Enlightenment and a refuge exempt from oppressive (non-English) values. It can thus be seen that what may at first appear to be neutral and free from value judgement, is in fact deeply invested with ideological significance.

Then, one may note that the references to the author utilise the third-person singular, conveying the individual agency displayed by Awerbuck, who is “placed” next to verbs that further signal agency and independence through their transitive status. The copy is not referenced to any author (in contrast to the paragraph which precedes it), suggesting that the work is a feat of individual success on Awerbuck’s part and foregrounding her as the creative centre of the narrative rather than as being authored by it herself. This surely evinces Laura Chrisman’s assertion that “for white women creative writers it is ... their aesthetic distinctiveness that is commercially paramount” (113), whereas for Black authors, their ability to render realistic vignettes, to depict what is already there, is what publishers push to the forefront of their marketing schemes.

1.3. Black Writing and the Language of Transition

It could be argued that there is, in the marketing of Black life-writing, a parochial and infantilizing insistence on deeming such books as reconstitutive efforts at representing “previously marginalized identities” (Attwell 25). Yet, almost paradoxically, the copy that

accompanies these 'new' texts uses conventions which are drawn from a long history of commonsensical stereotypes concerning Black writing. These conventions present themselves in various forms on the blurbs of Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, Fred Khumalo's *Touch My Blood*, Sandile Memela's *Flowers of the Nation* and Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut*. The reduction of these books' literary complexities to bromides marks these texts and affects one's reading of them. Why should this be so? While the importance of the restorative process cannot be denied, it is only one way of reading a literature that is often more fully engaged with the full range of contiguous contemporary factors that shape identity. To continue to prescribe that such works be read primarily through the guise of what has come before thus becomes part of a restrictive interpretive praxis that, when abstracted from the advertising of these texts, simply re-iterates itself. Why does this particular interpretation of Black literature persist, then? It may be instructive to note Dorothy Driver's observation that

literary movements take decades to develop. They also take decades to be recognized, and to be progressively disentangled from the stranglehold of critical fashions. Even with the best will in the world, those who publish, read, and give awards to literature tend to favour what they can recognize. Even if we do spot in a particular writer a flash of something magically new, it may neither survive nor reemerge. The new becomes seen as new only when it becomes part of a discourse: a new literary language, a new cultural trend. ("South Africa" 1)

It is evident that one of the fascinations of writing and reading on 'race' in South African literature has been the idea of restorative fiction. Once incorporated into the tool-kit of literary criticism, this motif refuses to dislodge itself from the critical imagination. Kelwyn Sole asserts that:

The aesthetic canon remains deeply resistant to innovation and change. For instance: there is little discussion of how the new writing makes use of, fits into or deviates from, metropolitan forms of modernism and post-modernism. There is little precise discussion of the impact of African indigenous forms (whether traditional or recent)

on our writing. There is little discussion of the use of hybrid language forms in our literature. (1)

Ideas about Black writing remain static or unchanging, even as the publishing bodies and media hail the arrival of new voices and new forms of writing – often damning with faint praise as they repeat the tropes that have come to typify commonsensical understandings of Black writing in South Africa. In particular, they suggest that there is an instrumentality to Black literature which renders it largely devoid of the aesthetic intricacy of its white counterpart. The work of the Black writer is thus not read as being a complex and cohesive whole that responds to the socio-political concerns of a particular historical moment, but as a regressive melding of the old and the new for very specific functions. This train of thought condemns those works where the narrative is not simply a vehicle for conveying the ‘reality’ of society to a fate of perpetual illegitimacy in which they are always read against or in contrast to or as unorthodox, where orthodox refers to white literature.

In considering the back covers of the four books I have selected by Black writers, each published by a different South African publishing house, it can be seen how these publishing houses work to downplay “both the creative agency and the personal distinctiveness of these creative writers, preferring instead to present them as documentarists” (Chrisman 112). I will demonstrate how such anachronistic critical views map themselves onto the selected texts in a variety of ways.

1.3.1 Phaswane Mpe’s *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*

The blurb on the back of Phaswane Mpe’s *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* proceeds as follows:

Welcome To Our Hillbrow is an exhilarating and disturbing ride through the chaotic and hyper-real zone of Hillbrow – microcosm of all that is contradictory, alluring and painful in the changing South African psyche. Everything is there: the shattered

dreams of youth, sexuality and its unpredictable costs, AIDS, xenophobia, suicide, the omnipotent violence that often cuts short the promise of young people, and the Africanist understanding of the life continuum that does not end with death but flows on into an ancestral realm.

Infused with the rhythms of the inner city pulsebeat, this courageous novel is compelling in its honesty and its broad vision, which links Hillbrow, rural Tiragalong and Oxford. It spills out the guts of Hillbrow-living with the same energy and intimate knowledge with which the *Drum* writers wrote Sophiatown into being.

The problematics of this prose require serious deconstruction. Firstly, according to whose standards is Hillbrow “chaotic and hyper-real”? One notes how the blurb implies the erotic/exotic location of Africanity, and how it sensationalizes the novel’s setting such that Hillbrow intrigues, entertains, repulses, shocks, and charms, but is superfluous except as exotic background for the crises experienced by Mpe’s characters. Then there are hyperbolic terms such as “omnipotent violence”, where what is treated as fact is deeply invested in masked ideological formations: what exactly does this mean, and in what terms can the violence of Hillbrow be described as ‘omnipotent’? And finally, the reference to how the novel “spills out the guts of Hillbrow-living”, an image that conjures the violent narratives of the “Sophiatown Set”.¹² Why does a novel published in 2004 continue to invoke the cliché of a violent and unpredictable Africa?

The implication here is that, for the readers for whom the novel is marketed, it must somehow present ‘the truth’ in its engagement with this Hillbrow, a truth the author has access to by virtue of some unnamed set of keys. One is prompted to ask whether, had this novel been written by a white author, it would have been advertised in this way. The suggestion, perhaps, is that the narrative requires translation, without which the (presumably white) reader would be lost. Facilitating this translation is Mpe who, by virtue of the unspecified manner of belonging foisted upon him, is marketed as a literary ‘native informant’, providing an ‘insider’s’ account of this unknown and exotic world. Thus,

whether Mpe's work itself speaks to a Black audience or not, it is exoticized according to commodified codes that manifest themselves in the seemingly innocuous advertising blurbs and back-cover précis that are an intrinsic part of the packaging with which the work is disseminated.

It could be argued that the blurb-writer is simply not aware of the effects of the discourse in which she engages. But to argue for such a reading is to ignore the fact that that blurb-writing relies on particular effects and negotiations of meaning to further its commodifying interests. Where the blurb says so much more about the publisher's possessive investment in a particular ideological reading of the world than it does about the text being evaluated, one cannot but conclude that these discourses are negative in their effects even (or especially) when ignorant in their intent.

This is especially true of the choices the publisher of *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* makes. The novel deals with various issues in rather more detail than the cursory listing in the blurb suggests. Xenophobia, for example, is tackled critically and with sensitivity to the politics behind the phenomenon, a fact that surely deserves greater mention given that post-millennial xenophobia has still to be critically and comprehensively researched and subjected to theoretical explication in the public domain – more especially considering events at the current historical moment.¹³ Further, the terms “omnipotent violence”, “inner city pulsebeat” and “*Drum* writers” constitute a form of literary shorthand that is meant to conjure particular stereotypical images, images which tap into the unconscious expectations of Black literature in the mind of the (perceived) white reader. This draws attention to the manner in which Black writing is figured as being ultimately fungible in character: each text is depicted as though it can be substituted for any other.

1.3.2 Fred Khumalo's *Touch My Blood*

The back cover of Fred Khumalo's work features a quote from *Sunday Times* editor Mondli Makhanya:

Fred Khumalo captures an era in South African history that is not celebrated enough. This is a colourful book which makes you cry, laugh and just shake your head at the self-deprecating humour with which Khumalo tells his life story. The viciousness of the time – the blood, the pain and the tragedy – is related with literary finesse and with non-preachy sensitivity. The cultural pulse of the period is captured with elegance. With *Touch My Blood* Khumalo does for the 80s what the *Drum* writers and Sophiatown romantics did for the 50s.

This blurb reveals its strategies quickly. One notes the repeated emphasis on “capturing” – on “relating” objective reality. One might easily deduce from reading these statements that Khumalo's writing consists solely of reporting on facts that pre-exist his rendering of them. The blurb relies heavily on convention to establish meaning: the reader is asked to read the work as continuing in the tradition of much older works established by “The Drum Generation”. These writers – Can Themba, Henry Nxumalo and Bloke Modisane, amongst others – were all writers of journalistic and/or expository prose whose main purpose was to document the hitherto unexposed lives of Black South Africans. The reader of Khumalo's work is thus asked to align it with these modes of writing, and the publisher's discursive strategy relies on another discourse, one that is signposted by the terms ‘Drum’ and ‘Sophiatown’. Makhanya assumes the reader's familiarity with these terms and what they signify, as though their meanings are fixed and static. If there is a danger to this reading strategy, it is that it risks decontextualising the historical discourse on which the blurb relies, essentializing it for whatever textual purpose is at stake.

This last point applies particularly to the use of the evocative “Sophiatown” moniker by Makhanya. Here, Sophiatown becomes “merely a set, a backdrop” (Kruger 83), and is transplanted through time to colour Khumalo's depiction of life in 80s South Africa. It is an

imagined space rather than a historical one. The use of Sophiatown conjures specific images: as an eclectic urban site that was demolished during the process of forced removals, it represents vibrancy, diversity and an almost utopian ideal of advancement that was destroyed by the Apartheid government.

One sees here how Makhanya's blurb relies on this discursive imagining of Sophiatown to authenticate Khumalo's work: the latter is good (the blurb seems to say) because the Sophiatown writers were good. But how is one to evaluate this line of thinking in the light of what is now known about the space? Critics have noted how "[t]he Sophiatown literati represented their world in a romanticised fashion and nurtured the image of a convivial, cosmopolitan township" (Baines 43), whilst collaborating in the subjugation and maligning of women (Rorich 90). One also sees how Paul Gready's formulations on the Sophiatown writers' "fantasies of ferocity" (145) correspond to Makhanya's reference to "the viciousness of the time – the blood, the pain, and the tragedy" and in fact reinforce this reference. It may be instructive to note recent critical injunctions against the "politics of nostalgia" (Wicomb 95): such pronouncements apply equally to the reimagining of Sophiatown as a shorthand signifier of loss and dispossession, particularly when that imagining is shaped by a very particular set of representations of Sophiatown in which violence and the objectification of women are glamourised. Is one then to assume that Khumalo's work participates in a similar glossing over of inequalities and violence? This is surely not what Makhanya means, but it demonstrates that what may appear to be "factual" is actually deeply invested with meanings that may not be desirable and may in fact differ from what the blurb-writer intended.

As with the references (implied and direct) to Sophiatown found in the blurb to Mpe's text, it could be argued that what is going on here is a process in which "the exciting, freely available cultural capital" of Black literature is used by publishers "in a manner that is exploitative, reproducing a colonial relationship in which the symbolic landscape is non-

consensually appropriated, mined, and transported for use elsewhere” (Jayawardane 41).

Drawing on the iconographic repertoire of gangster glamour, the paratext escapes representing the full complexity of the text it surrounds.

1.3.3 Sandile Memela’s *Flowers of the Nation*

Sandile Memela’s novella, *Flowers of the Nation* presents an example of publishers utilizing cinematic codes of narration to achieve their aims.¹⁴ The reader is potentially brought closer to the narrative through the blurb on the back cover, more particularly through the use of a dramatic register that is reminiscent of a cinematic trailer. The reader is given this initial description on the back cover of the work:

Sixteen-year-old Zenzele is not prepared to stand by while her father, Sizwe, dies of Aids. Instead, she and her ten-year-old sister Mpumelelo journey from the townships to an exclusive Pretoria suburb to find their estranged uncle Vusi and ask for his help.

Immediately, the focus of the reader’s attention is angled towards the characters of the narrative. The details of plot and the action sequences are summarised immediately and dramatically, so the reader knows at once what the ‘stakes’ are. The reader is prepared for the idea that the narrative will be about a young Black female coming to understand that she possesses untapped reserves of resourcefulness. Zenzele (the reader is told) is “not prepared to stand by” – she resists passivity, thereby creating the point of conflict in the narrative that must be resolved. The mention of the estranged uncle creates suspense which is heightened as the text proceeds:

Who will they encounter on the way? Will they reach their destination unscathed?
And can the rifts between brothers and within communities be healed?

Now, the blurb has fully taken on the style of the film trailer: these questions pose further problems that apparently require resolution, and encourage the reader to participate in the

narrative whilst divorcing the author from his artistic work. In other words, they translate the personal into the communal. In order to do this, the blurb must conceptualize an audience in its address, one that is an active participant in the text itself. Thus, it is not only Memela's characters who ask these questions (if they do so in the first place), but the reader as well. The schematic rendering of the novella's plot provide directives to reading, as though the narrative is a straightforward drama. At this point, the blurb turns to explicitly directing the interpretation of the text:

Flowers of the Nation is a novella about self-empowerment and taking responsibility. It shatters the myth that impoverishment and blackness go together, showcases the new century's renaissance man, and provides insight into Aids policy and other issues. In the beautiful Zenzele and her family, you will find the compelling reality of today's South Africa.

From the 'what-will-happen-next?' approach of the previous paragraph, the reader is now presented with a paragraph that sums up the novella as an exercise in exposition. According to this paragraph, the novella will provide the audience/reader with insights into issues currently dominating the South African social psyche. The use of the imperatives suggests that these conclusions are already a certainty. One notes how the back cover has supplied no information whatsoever about the author of this tale: it is the narrative itself that "shatters", "showcases" and "provides insight", not Memela. Yet the role of the audience/reader is privileged again: a second-person pronoun is utilised in combination with a future-tense form of the verb 'find', suggesting that the resolution of the narrative is solely dependent on the reader.

The blurb utilizes the same discourse of seeking out 'reality/truth' from amidst the disorder and chaos of Black lives that is present in the blurbs analysed above. It paints *Flowers of the Nation* as a guidebook to analysing aspects of South Africa in a particular historical moment: it is very specific about the role of the novel. It proposes that the reader,

having read this work, will be equipped to understand what are complex issues, and this narrows the areas of meaning in which the text can function. Presumably (in the publisher's reading of the work), the reader need not understand the wider concerns of the novel, such as how the neoliberal global economy works to curtail the options and choices available to the poor and destitute.

Alternatively, the discourse of this blurb implies that order can be imposed upon the reality of the novel: if one can make sense of the plot, the blurb implies, one can make sense of the chaos that constitutes life in South Africa. This idea suggests a possessive investment on the part of the blurb-writer in an 'alternative' South Africa in which this disordered state of affairs does not exist. The implication that such chaos is resolvable and not a manifestation of greater social and political problems in the world at large, demonstrates a failure to grasp the idea that nations are complex, contradictory and disordered in their manifestations. Moreover, it demonstrates a failure to link issues of poverty to greater issues of modernity affecting other poor spaces in the world, instead favouring a parochial reading that replicates the codes of South African exceptionalism that have been comprehensively debunked by Mahmood Mamdani (27).

What is perhaps most demonstrative of the ideological motives of the copy-writer is the way the blurb seeks to present a simplified order of existence in which a brief novella on South African life will equip one to understand the lives of Black people in the New South African nation, and from there infer the motives of individuals ("the new century's renaissance man") and groups of individuals (the government that crafts the AIDS policy). The implication one may derive from this is that Memela's novel is simply an object for scrutiny by the self-defining, theorizing white reader (Lewis "Feminisms" 537) who may, upon reading the novel, come to a complete understanding of 'native life' in South Africa.

1.3.4 Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut*

In the case of Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut*, the reader is informed directly under the novel's title that it is the winner of the European Union Literary Award. On the back of the novel, there is a similar but larger piece of copy credited to the EU Literary Award Jury Panel, which demonstrates once more how the Western gaze is elevated to prominence as an agent of literary authority vested with the power to evaluate what the Other sees and experiences. This may be read simply as a cogent advertising strategy but, since the blurb engages in the same codes of authorisation that appear on Tim Ecott's novel, would it not be too farfetched to assume similitude of intent? On the back cover, for example, one reads that Matlwa's work "is an extraordinary debut novel about growing up black in white suburbs". Here again, one sees the publisher's compulsion to inform the reader of what the novel is 'about' in a single, easily digestible phrase. The reading strategy advocated here is one in which the complex ideas concerning selfhood and identity that make up the novel can be boiled down to a single sentence. Following on from this, there is a summary of the characters, in which one is told that:

Rich, pampered Ofilwe and her brother Tshepo are swiftly losing their culture. Ofilwe struggles to fit into a privileged but soulless world that opens its doors to them as quickly as it shuts them. Here is the story of a generation that is given everything, only to fall apart under the weight of history and expectation.

The mention of Tshepo at this point must be remarked upon, for it is curious that he is then subsequently occluded from the précis, suggesting that the blurb-writers were concerned with imparting an explicitly (but broadly) feminist ethos to Matlwa's work. This strategy evinces itself in the way the blurb ignores Tshepo's resistance to being boxed and labelled. Is one meant to ignore his presence and his role in the plot, in the interests of pursuing this reading?

The answer to this question is revealed when one reads further, since one is informed next that:

Hip, sassy Fiks is an ambitious go-getter from the township, desperate to leave her vicious past behind and embrace the glossy sophistication she knows only from magazines. But the golden streets of modern Jozi prove more complicated and unforgiving than even she is prepared for, threatening to destroy her carefully constructed world at every turn.

The introduction of Fiks here complicates matters: she does not 'grow up Black in a white suburb' (she is born and raised in a Black township), which disproves the opening statement of the novel's central theme. One notes, too, the subtle presence of the "Jim-comes-to-Joburg" motif in the description of "the golden streets of modern Jozi". This theme has been described as the situation arising when:

The poor, inexperienced naïf from the country, 'Jim', longs for a wider, more sophisticated or financially beneficial horizon (which the rural land invariably cannot accommodate). He or she eventually embarks upon a great, wide-eyed trek to the looming, 'Golden City' – often Johannesburg, other times Cape Town or any of Joburg's suburbs – looking for fame, fortune, or merely money for marriage or to send money back to support their respective struggling family members in their home villages. Upon reaching the city, said characters are beset by all the evils and vices the corrupt, seething metropolis has to offer, and of course, in their naiveté, they are ill-equipped and unable to resist downfall, temptation, or at the very least, an irreplaceable loss of innocence. (Anon, "Ghosts" 1)

Why does this theme manifest itself in the short description of Fiks cited above? As I will argue in chapter Four, Fiks is not baffled or bewildered by Johannesburg: on the contrary, she seems to move through the urban space itself very freely. Her success, as she views it, is dependent on her being accepted into white society. Further, her experience of the township is certainly not one of life in a rural idyll. It could be argued that Matlwa's text is done a disservice by the blurb that adorns the back cover, which positions it as just one more in a series of books that are preoccupied with re-enacting tragedy, recovery and self-affirmation, as though those might be the only matters of concern to a Black female in the contemporary

moment. The characters and ideas tackled in the novel risk being subsumed into a broad counter-discourse of Black resistance writing, particularly one in which Black women are constantly figured as either interminably oppressed or as escapees from an inherently oppressive culture, but certainly not as complex characters with agency.

In this regard, much has been written about how the casual use of discourses of oppression robs these discourses of “their critical and oppositional import, thus depriving the oppressed of even the vocabulary of protest and rightful demand” (Chow 13). Yet the back cover of *Coconut* is at great pains to stress how the novel “explores the grey, in-between, intimate experiences and dilemmas of a young girl who, like the society around her, is undergoing changes that call old boundaries, comforts and certitudes into question”. If one were to read the novel, one might find that it does not simply write into the interstices. Rather, it challenges the centring of society on white people whose attitudes and values are *not* changing, even as new and previously barred individuals entreat entry to that society or construct their own ways of resisting their assignation to the margins by a society whose power base has not changed, nor in its ideology.

Crucially, Matlwa’s novel does not (as the copy that packages it would suggest) deal with abstracted ideas of gender: rather her characters’ “experience as gendered subjects affects and is affected by their racial constitution” (Lewis, “Feminisms” 540). Thus there is an inscription of the fraught articulations of identity that result from the characters’ exposure to various interacting hierarchies. It is significant, surely, that the copy-writers of this publishing house ignore this complexity in favour of a particularly mainstream frame of referencing to construct the advertising strategy of the novel. The blurb demonstrates a singular insensitivity to the intersections of race, class, and gender in the novel. To gloss over the complexities of these interactions by simply mainstreaming the narrative into a text of general Otherness is to

demonstrate the “restrictively normative boundaries for interpreting women and gender in South Africa” (Lewis “Feminisms” 537).

This strategy of constructing an exoticized and essentialized position of Otherness, with its vague attempts to soft-soap “Black is Beautiful” sentiments from the seventies, when those concepts are inadequate for Black gender politics in the contemporary moment, is potentially harmful in its effects. The manner in which this literary shorthand is deployed constitutes an attempt to fix individuals, rather than an engagement with their complexities and multiplicities. Moreover, it demonstrates that the ‘horizon of expectations’ operating in the writing of this blurb is particularly limited in its range. One is prompted to ask then, as Rosemary Buikema does,

what language, or what scenarios are at our disposal to tell about women? How can it be avoided that we speak of women and their lives in the same sexist and stereotypical way as has been (and continues to be) common practice in history, literature, theology, film, journalism, popular culture, and so on? How can we develop narratives and images that create new perspectives on the significance of being female, or male for that matter, in a given historical and geo-political moment? (309)

1.3.5 Trajectories of the Blurb

The crux of the matter seems to be that, if the work of Black writers is to be marketed, it must commodify certain cultural forms of Blackness and, in so doing, must essentialize and limit those forms so as to render them visible to their intended audience. This may explain why there is a continued need in South African publishing to provide readers with narrow interpretations of Black writing that focus on the exotic marginality of Black individuals. Paraphrasing Eric Lott, the work must allow the publisher’s perceived audience to inhabit or experience “the cool, virility, humility, abandon or *gaité de coeur*” (52) that form “the prime components of white ideologies” (52) of Black identity. Publishing caters to these proclivities through its marketing strategies, and is thus deeply implicated in the process by which Black

writing is constantly figured as writing of alterity, in the sense that the author does not do what the term 'author' connotes. Rather, Black authors are 'writers' in the sense that they merely scribe what already exists or produce ethnographic monographs for the consumption of a white audience. They are interpreters rather than producers of knowledge, psychologically fragmented composers of narratives in which Blackness is figured as pathology (Erasmus *Coloured* 19).

It can be seen, then, that publishers insist, even during this new dispensation of individual narratives, on seeking out the ultimate uniquely Black South African novel, one that is 'truly representative' of 'the people'. They feed into a long history of interpreting the works of Black authors as auto/biographical revelation, so that even when works such as those by Mpe and Matlwa attempt to articulate common experiences but still voice local particularities, they are marketed as though they present a unified and uniform way of being Black. Further, each of the examples examined in this section demonstrates how publishers attempt to fix and territorialize Black writing: they wilfully ignore the fluidity of movement imagined by Matlwa and Mpe¹⁵, amongst others, and if they *do* take note of this mobility, they represent it as a form of literary nomadism.

To speak of literary nomadism is to capture the attitude contained in the copy that is inscribed upon these works. It is to capture a problem that affects the culture of letters in South Africa on a larger level, where Black writing is presented as the works of a select corpus of distinguished literary nomads who, having left their places of origin (spaces of non-reading and non-writing), come to the literary Empire to inform the inhabitants (whose inhabitation of that Empire goes unquestioned) of what goes on outside of the Empire. Black writing of this sort is figured as interrupting the doxa¹⁶ of a white literary centre: it is a literature whose appeal lies in those fragments of Black life that find resonance with white literature – difference and disaffection, or potent historical symbols like Sophiatown. The

presence of a glossary at the end of these works, while not unique in itself, seems to underscore the impression that they are meant for a select audience, one which might not be familiar with the linguistic registers used.

How is this problematic situation to be resolved, then? Since the works that are marketed as delineating this phenomenon are by no means unified in their representations, perhaps it is better to consider that, rather than coercing each text into an awkward relation with a grand historical narrative of Black life under Apartheid, publishers need only determine the grounds upon which the work in question perceives itself as being historical. To say this is to argue for a reading that does not rely singularly on a fixed and/or anachronistic view of Black writing against which the new work must be checked. It is also to argue that there is a need for advertising copy that does not engage in reading Black texts as though they construct a universalist experience of Black South African life. The development of a critical mode of reading, one that does not imagine Black writing as either an exotic Other of the established white literature, or as a poorer and less developed relative of white literature, is essential. Above all, what needs to be understood is that language is never simply a neutral vehicle: it is a site of contestation over meanings, a space of power, resistance and struggle.

How do academics fit into this schema? Notwithstanding the comments advanced by Driver and Sole earlier in this chapter, it could be argued that there is also a space for critically reading texts in their totality, rather than ignoring the packaging of these texts. It must be borne in mind that the publishers, reviewers and copy-writers who pen these blurbs also constitute a corpus of readers whose reading (and subsequent inscribing of that reading upon the text) requires examination. How this corpus of readers works for its own gains at the expense of minorities within the literary landscape has been demonstrated in the above case studies. Yet the dearth of critical writing on this matter seems to suggest that cover-blurbs and other forms of paratext are either seen simply as innocent packaging to the text, or

dismissed as simple marketing strategies to convince potential readers to purchase the work. While some cultural anthropologists, such as Corrine Kratz, have examined the links between cover imagery and reader reception, there has been a dearth of such examinations in regard to South African literature particularly, and from a specifically literary perspective. Indeed, while much critical attention has been devoted to decoding the written text within, few literary critics have noted how inscribed upon the covers of the work are often coded messages which affirm dominant ideologies and privilege a view of South African literature that cannot be said to be fully representative of the genre. In this regard, it is notable that, while Mpe's novel has garnered critical attention in the years since its publication, Kgebetli Moele's work has been the subject of only limited academic attention, notably from Sam Raditlhalo (2008). Matlwa's novel, meanwhile has only been subjected to scrutiny with the publication of Lynda Spencer's article (2009), which is a critical intervention against the tendency to deign Black writing as less 'serious' than white writing. It is therefore necessary to open up for discussion the issue of whether publishers (and their attendant retinue of copy-writers) have a social and intellectual responsibility to the culture of letters in terms of shaping the market.

In this regard, it might convincingly be argued that publishing industries utilise the omniscience and/or assumed objectivity of their position to hide their agency. Publishing houses have a certain idea of who they are targeting, and they address this imagined community of readers with the copy in which they package their texts. Might one speculate that a form of heteronormativity is at work in the way publishers construct these communities? It can certainly be seen from the examples deployed here that the views of (often but not always white) male South Africans are privileged, and that Black writing (as, for example, in the case of Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut*) is frequently framed through the perspective of a white male reader attempting to understand or connect with a foreign world.

Why should this be the case? It is not an overstatement to note the domination of white male academics in the field of South African literature. It is invariably from this field that publishing companies draw their editors, reviewers and copy-writers. One must therefore be aware of “the central role of academics historically in legitimising hierarchies which locate Western European ... heterosexual men at the apex and serve to devalue, demonise and exploit all Others”(Gqola “Coming Out” 23). That the South African academy has still to complete the “task of de-centering white and/or male sources as repositories of expert knowledge” (Gqola “Coming Out” 24) is clear from the unquestioning authority with which these sources may be invoked.

It follows, then, that there are certain structures of power, both visible and covert, that impact on the production and dissemination of literature. Here, the role of publishers in actively creating these structures must be spotlighted, since it is they who “have sole producing rights and can therefore determine what is included and excluded, how events are represented, and even the subject positions of their audiences” (Fairclough 50). As has been demonstrated here, publishing houses manipulate extracts and rely on persuasive linguistic codes not only to influence their readers, but also to appear to be ‘neutral’ whilst doing so.

In responding to similar charges of manipulating their readers, local publishers have made use of “mirror metaphors”(Durrheim 177), strategies of deflection that aim to present the publishing houses as being subject to corporate constraints and the pressures of competing in the publishing field. Here, a recent colloquium on the politics of publishing in South Africa makes for an appropriate case study. Leon de Kock documents how Deborah Posel queried the power possessed by South African publishers, and the uses to which they put that power. The response from Jeremy Boraine, a representative of one of the major South African publishing houses, was to react defensively. According to de Kock, he stated that:

as a publisher he hardly felt as if he was 'saturated with power'. In fact, Boraine said, booksellers and customers were the ones with 'a lot of power'. He suggested that Posel 'get out a bit more' as there were, in fact ... 'many new forms of publishing', such as Posel had challenged publishers to engage in. ("Publishing" 1)

Here, one sees what this particular way of responding to criticism reveals about the position in which this particular representative is invested, a position which, taken in conjunction with Posel's original critique in her inquiry, makes for a fascinating and emblematic figuration of the very authority he disavows and feels accused of. Boraine's response to Posel demonstrates an unwillingness to admit wrongdoing, coupled with what could arguably be described as an attempt to save face, and to maintain mastery and rectitude. Instead of contesting the point raised, he hectors her into a position which enables him to escape his own defensiveness: he wishes to put *her* on the defensive. He pleads ignorance in a manner that leads one to ask if this is indeed ignorance, or "a more wilful, consciously-unconscious means of patrolling – and maintaining – the boundaries of power?" (Jayawardane 32).

It might be argued that, in a society in which the reading of novels is seen by many as falling by the wayside (Morris 1), the use of the commodifying strategies discussed earlier is instrumental to the continuing profitability of the publishing industry and to the distribution of texts as a whole. After all, the novel, once written, becomes a product in an economic system and must avoid alienation from its audience by subscribing to particular marketing strategies. This may be so, but one cannot ignore the possibility that the sensationalism, stereotyping and reductionism present in these strategies have the potential to guide and prefigure the ways in which people read and respond to these works, promoting readings that entrench existing power relations and favour hegemonic discourses. To say this is to argue that publishing bodies are not neutral disseminators of texts, but instead actively perpetuate certain ideologically influenced discourses. They play an instrumental role in guiding how one reads South African fiction by deciding what may be published, and under what

conditions that publishing occurs. Thus, when one speaks of the South African culture of letters, one must be aware in whose name one is speaking. Indeed, one must question the institutional values or ethos which informs that culture, as well as the extent to which its raced-ness is masked or unmarked. Finally, one must interrogate whether the dominant view operates as the unexamined and unexaminable norm from which the country is seen, such that it is of a piece with the existing structures of inequity and inequality while presuming to have the ability to redress the imbalances of which it remains a constitutive part. From this perspective it can be seen that the South African publishing industry maintains a system in which only the beliefs of a certain sector of the population are maintained and perpetuated.

1.4 Conclusion

What is the value of examining the politics of publishing? I believe that it is vital to render visible the prejudices and biases that influence representation. In so doing, one must be aware of simply problematizing the ideas and ideologies of individuals, rather than contextualizing them within the wider context of the practices and ideologies of the institutions those individuals inhabit. Nevertheless, this chapter has advocated a reading that recognises that publishing is not an innocent discipline, but one that is reflective of the exercise of power by those who mask themselves as being neutral proprietors of the work. While the blurb on a book cover is produced through varying circumstances and by various agents at various historical moments, the conventions it exhibits and deploys are powerful because of the influence it exerts on the reader to prioritize one reading of the text rather than to open herself to the possibility of many alternative meanings. The examples shown here testify to the existence of a particular idiom of representing value and meaning to the reader, one that is deeply implicated in the processes by which hegemonic privilege is structurally maintained in South Africa. They also show that some groups, even those for whom the autographical exercise is meant to recuperate their lost author-ity, do not have equal access to the terms of

representation: what they produce suffers the danger of being transformed by the processes of industry and capitalism in late modernity, into merely another commodified entertainment moment divorced from political significance.

NOTES

¹ For a more in-depth analysis of the nature of the paratext, see Gerard Genette's *Palimpsests*.

² I am aware at this point that in my formulation of 'the reader' I encounter certain problematic raised by Walter Benjamin when he declared that "no poem is intended for the reader, no picture for the beholder, no symphony for the listener" (75). However, I believe the reader *can* be approached through the meaning-making function of autobiography. Here, I follow the lead of Lejeune (12).

³ There is no shortage of examples to support this. See, for instance, *Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid and Democracy*, edited by Rosemary Jolly and Derek Attridge (1998), or *Altered State? Writing and South Africa*, by Elleke Boehmer, Laura Chrisman and Kenneth Parker (1994).

⁴ A process which privileges self-revelation, the Foucauldian secular confessional is

a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console. (61)

In this respect, the reader is the partner, virtual or real.

⁵ These terms are often applied in reviews of works such as those by the white writers selected here. A review of Diane Awerbuck's *Gardening at Night* by Kay-Ann van Rooyen is replete with references to Awerbuck's individual story of growing up in South Africa, "told with total honesty" (1).

⁶ Indeed, the latter novel came about as a result of an MA thesis for a creative writing course at UCT. Awerbuck was supervised by Brink himself (see *ESMF Research Bulletin* 2008: 125).

⁷ One thinks here of texts prescribed for school curricula by Marguerite Poland, John Van de Ruit, etc.

⁸ See Es'kia Mphahlele's trenchant commentary in *Living Writers, Living Culture* (40).

⁹ See Lewis Nkosi's comments in *Tasks and Masks* (180).

¹⁰ In the chapter entitled "Inscribing Whiteness", I have outlined the links between Coetzee and Johnson. The last line of the former's *Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life* is the epigraph of Johnson's *The Native Commissioner*.

¹¹ This term describes the set of mental preconceptions readers bring to a text. These preconceptions are formed through their previous experiences of style and genre. The term is drawn from Hans Robert Jauss' *Toward an Aesthetics of Reception* (52).

¹² For instance, Bloke Modisane describes, in *Blame Me On History*, how "Sophiatown was like one of its own many victims; a man gored by the knives of Sophiatown, lying in the open gutters, a raisin in the smelling drains, dying of multiple stab wounds, gaping wells gushing forth blood" (36); Can Themba writes of how "the butchers stabbed him to death in cold greasy blood (31) – there are various such instances of stabbing and violence penned by the 'Sophiatown set'.

¹³ I am referring here to the violent attacks on African immigrants and refugees that took place in the marginal settlements surrounding South Africa's major centres in May 2008, and the coverage of these events in the popular media. David Coplan notes how, instead of telling readers what had just happened, what happened before that, what led up to those events, and what was currently happening, the media sought to provide authoritative answers for this violence, leading to "the most obvious social and 'pop' psychology glosses" being touted as "as necessary and sufficient explanations" (65). Coplan argues that:

Quick-and-dirty research initiatives subsequently undertaken by such agencies as the government's Human Sciences Research Council, or agents of the South African Police Service itself, provided more situational detail but surprisingly even less clarity, and served only to further muddy the swirling waters of debate. As a result, the tsunami of arguments, commentaries, and pronouncements about the 'tsunami' (a term much used locally at the time) of anti-foreign violence has left only a debris of assumptions, discourses, and pronouncements that conceal and deny rather than assuage a pervasive public uncertainty. (65)

In the light of this, it is noteworthy that Mpe was drawing literary attention to these tensions in 2001.

¹⁴ Here, I use James Snead's adaptation of Umberto Eco's notion of the code as "a set of conventions defining perception in limited and predictable ways within any given culture" (6).

¹⁵ It is noted in Mpe's case that, while publishers have failed to respond to this creativity, readers (including those in academic contexts) have been overwhelmingly positive. See *Words Gone Too Soon: a tribute to Phaswane Mpe & K. Sello Duiker* (2005), an anthology of reader's responses published after Mpe's death.

¹⁶ Utilizing here Pierre Bourdieu's expression of doxa as the codes and practices through which "the natural and social world appears as self-evident" (64). In this respect, the sense of "ce n'est pas pour nous" (literally, "this is not for us") does not manifest in, for example, Matlwa's novel itself, but is suggested in the acclaim and celebration that packages the novel.

CHAPTER 2: AN EXCESS OF BELONGING: ACHMAT DANGOR'S *BITTER FRUIT*

Like the other texts in this study, Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit* (2001) explores the boundaries of genre by merging autobiography with fiction. The novel exhibits a polyphony of voices struggling to form their own testimonies. Further, it deals with the impulse to realize a sense of self through modes of confession: it interrogates the desire to expose the self through acts of recounting and writing. In this respect, *Bitter Fruit* engages with the relationship between individual self-insight and the conscience of the nation, complicating the links between storytelling and recovery.

As a means of putting across the difficult nature of that recover, Dangor depicts the lives of a family who, under the auspices of the Population Registration Act of 1950, would have been classified as c/Coloured. The characters – Silas Ali, his wife Lydia, and their son Mikey – lend themselves to being read according to the stereotype of the 'troubled c/Coloured'. That is, they articulate a sense of confusion and anxiety about their place in the world, living lives "clouded in sexualized shame and associated with drunkenness and jollity" (Erasmus *Coloured 3*).¹ Dangor's rendering seems at first to be an anachronistic depiction of c/Coloured identity. That is, it is a view of c/Coloured identity that does not differ dramatically from the self-destructive, displaced characters that appear in the works of Richard Rive, Alex La Guma, or indeed, in Dangor's own earlier fiction.² Rather than establishing the possibility of multiple c/Coloured identities, Dangor seems to adopt the long-standing essentialized view of c/Coloured identity as unquestionably homogenous in its dislocation.

That essentialist view deserves attention as historical in its own right. Various critical theorists, among them Mohamed Adhikari (2005), Zoë Wicomb (1998), Zimitri Erasmus (2001) and Ryland Fisher (2007), have noted how the idea of a monolithic c/Coloured identity has been discursively situated in a manner that has made it resistant to being

dislodged. While Erasmus has cautioned against seeing the pervasiveness of this view as a response to the negated space in which c/Coloured identity resides, there exists much room for speculating on how it is that this view of c/Coloured identity has gained its current prominence. The examinations of these theorists have focused, for the most part, on the lived realities of those who were/are designated 'c/Coloured' in South African society, with some consideration of how these lived realities affect their representation in literature.³ Certainly, in the case of all of the above theorists, there has been an attempt to problematize the notion of a fixed identity referent in the formulation of c/Colouredness. While Wicomb and Adhikari have analysed the ways in which essentialist notions of c/Coloured identity have been propagated, there appears to be little evidence in their work of a sustained attempt to go beyond postulating c/Colouredness as positionality. Yet, because there continues to be an abundance of these axiomatic and essentialist identity formulations, there is a need for continued investigation in order to dislodge preconceived ways of being.

Such an investigation must touch upon *Bitter Fruit*, in which the author appears to encode notions of the tragic mixedness of c/Coloured characters as an axiomatic truth. This depiction of c/Colouredness within *Bitter Fruit* is anomalous, since the novel is concerned with the overgeneralizations of South African society in the Post-Apartheid moment. The ways in which Dangor works with 'race' can be read through the dominant cultural figurations of c/Coloured identity that Erasmus, Fisher, Wicomb and Adhikari seek to problematize.

In order to understand why Dangor does what he does with his characters, it is necessary to briefly describe those characters and the various roles they play throughout the course of the novel. By the end of the first section, "Memory", it has been established that this is a c/Coloured family living in the middle-space that signifies c/Coloured existence in most South African literature, caught between the poles of respectability and sexualised shame. But, as the novel unfolds, we see that Dangor *is* in fact attempting to complicate the all-too

familiar emphasis on c/Colouredness as a site of instability. In this regard, the seemingly unreflexive use of c/Colouredness is actually a key to the preoccupations of the novel as a whole.

2.1 Silas

When we first encounter Silas, he is moving through a shopping mall, observed by an omniscient narrator. The scene echoes the opening of Alex La Guma's *A Walk in the Night*, where we follow Michael Adonis through an urban space in a similar manner. Here, the narrator remarks that "[i]t was inevitable" that "Silas would run into someone from the past, someone who had been in a position of power and had abused it" (7). The method of narration seems to cement the idea of determinism referred to in this opening sentence: Silas is powerless, the logic goes, and thus it is unavoidable that he should be thrown into the crisis that will unfold over the course of the book because, he is, like Adonis, the "slave of a pattern of perverse choices (a pathological pattern, perhaps) whose design is visible" to the reader but not to him (Coetzee *Stranger Shores* 220).

This is, of course, untrue. The information that is focalized through the omniscient narrator is in fact the product of Silas's own thought processes. What we witness in this moment is how Silas's view of himself as victim is dominant, obscuring the ways in which he is an agent of the events that will take place. His grocery errand is what brings about the "inevitable" (7) confrontation with Du Boise: what happens is more attributable to coincidence than fate. However, it is the significance Silas places in this chance encounter with Du Boise that creates the crisis which befalls the Ali family. As he follows Du Boise, the reader has the sense that Silas has prepared himself for this moment, and resolved what he would do if the chance arose to extract his revenge for Du Boise's rape of his wife. But, when the confrontation occurs (8), he is unable to act as he would like to. When he approaches Du

Boise, who does not remember him and does not appear to consider Silas important enough to remember (8), the latter experiences only impotent rage. He feels himself to be powerless, and so he seeks refuge in alcohol and indolence (9), the traditionally ascribed vices of the c/Coloured male. The next scene is significant, in this respect, as it reflects the poles of shame and respectability that conventionally anchor c/Coloured characters in South African fiction. Silas's recollections of growing up contrast with the staid officialdom of his daily life, and demonstrate his desire for the sense of authentic identity he recalls from his early years in the township. In this moment, Silas experiences nostalgia for "the townships" (9), remembering that space as one of freedom and, more critically, one in which his manhood was consolidated. Here, the references to "bras" and "manne" (9-10)⁴ tie this masculinity to Silas's c/Coloured identity in clear ways: they act as a metonymy for the cult of nostalgia. The past, figured here, had its problems, but those problems were simple ones in contrast with the complications and anxieties of the present. The past, Silas imagines, was a happy time marked by its authenticity.

The notion of a brotherhood of experience is highlighted as Silas reminisces about the township. His thoughts address a second-person "you", suggesting a commonality of history that does not bear scrutiny. That is, the experiences of men cannot be the yardstick by which the past is constructed, but in Silas's mind this is certainly how the "pleasurable, forgetful" (9) past is remembered.⁵ It is when Silas resolves to tell Lydia about his run-in with Du Boise that we glimpse the importance he places on his masculinity. As he and Lydia talk about Du Boise's rape of her (16-19), it is difficult not to draw a link between the violation and Silas's obsessive masculinity. As Lydia questions him, it becomes clear that what he recalls of the rape is *his* abasement. At each turn, what he remembers is not Lydia's pain, but his own: for Silas, the tragedy is not Lydia's rape, but the loss of his masculinity in the moment of powerlessness.⁶

The scene that follows is especially important. When Lydia challenges Silas with the assertion that “[a]ll those years, we never spoke about it” (16), he replies that “[t]here was no need to” (16). What he means, as Lydia immediately points out, is that *he* saw no need to address the issue. Silas’s alienation from Lydia is realised in this moment, when it becomes clear that he wishes to determine the ground upon which his wife can express her violation. He urges her to come forward and tell her story, since he is unsatisfied with Lydia’s private system (her diary) of coping with their ‘shared’ experience. She rejects Silas’s desire to “force on her his comforting arms and consoling voice” (17), telling him that Du Boise “took your woman, he fucked your wife, made you listen to him doing it” (19) – the possessives remove Lydia from the space of memory. But when she asks Silas if he would kill Du Boise for what he did, he is again without reply. The point being made here is that there is no space, even now, for Lydia to articulate what has happened to her. The imperative of what she disparagingly terms “honour and all that kind of kak” (19) displaces her even further. We have no access to her story in the ‘official’ discursive space claimed by the novel, as that space is a masculine one.

2.2 Lydia

Lydia’s characterization is in some ways problematic, since womyn suffer other crimes directed at them because they are womyn, but rape appears to be the most obvious trope to call on.⁷ Here, one notes how the idea of rape as a shame-inflicting act intersects with the hyper-sexualized identities ascribed to c/Coloured womyn.⁸ But the manner in which Lydia resists the ascription of shame via the rape act suggests that she is more complex than at first appears. It is possible, in Dangor’s depiction of Lydia, to discern a concern with the processes of memory which serve to silence womyn. We see this in Silas’s preoccupation with uncovering the truth. He believes that “somewhere inside of her that *other* Lydia was hiding”

(35), shielding herself from the memory of being raped and from his response to it. In his gestures to reach out to her, one senses his belief that she can be returned to her pre-trauma state.

What Silas displays here may be accurately described as the tyranny of memory. He wishes to co-opt Lydia into a process that is more concerned with the sacrificial and redemptive qualities of her trauma, than with the trauma itself. He sees Lydia's 'story' as neatly fitting into the great national narrative he has been instrumental in crafting. Memory becomes a force which is coercive in nature and subtle in its violence. It is noticeable, in this regard, that Silas occupies as much discursive space as he does, even though the novel has moved to discussing Lydia. The moments where we see the latter in the opening chapters are not focalized through her consciousness, as is the case with Silas. Instead, the author constructs a scene where the focal authority remains with Silas, even as Lydia speaks. But the positioning of this focal authority with Silas is at the very least problematized by Lydia's words, as she calls into question Silas's assumptions. Lydia's recollection of the rape intervenes between the tendency to underplay rape as being 'a womyn's problem', and the displacing claims made upon the act by Silas.⁹ That is, she describes the rape in terms of "the hot knife – that piece of useless flesh you call a cock – turning into a torture instrument" (18), a description which denies the limiting discourses of torture and rape prevalent in the TRC hearings – where men would speak of torture in their testimonies, distancing themselves from the discourse of sexual subjugation.¹⁰ Lydia's description of her rape in terms of torture thus pierces the veil of silence around sexist understandings of rape: it removes the act from the privatized realm of incomprehensible womyn's issues and affirms the power-political ramifications of the act. Yet the difficulty she has in describing her pain suggests that the TRC is an extension of the hegemonically masculine discourses of honour and control that have constrained her from speaking. That masculine regime is ringed by the perpetrator and

the agents of justice (Lydia mentions Archbishop Tutu and Silas himself, in the latter regard), who are all male. What makes her draw back from revealing her story is her sense that Silas is disinterested in her pain, but has an investment in the possibilities that may arise from the sharing of her pain. The author's depiction of Lydia's reluctance reflexively implicates the TRC, of which Silas is literally a representative through his job. For Lydia, the TRC is a discursive entity which will only represent her as a victim of sexual violence. She resents the reduction of her trauma to a 'story' of violation which then defines the terms and conditions under which that 'story' may be articulated. She will not submit to this, because to do so is to become a victim of an epistemological violence.

The rape has ruptured Lydia psychologically, yet it is clear that she has reformed herself in the years since. The idea of now taking apart the walls of privacy she has constructed around herself and examining events in minute detail destabilizes her. The dissolution of her mental state problematizes the idea that confession is always necessarily a reconstructive gesture. The episode in which she dances on the broken glass appears at first to be an attempt to etch upon her body some evidence of what she has suffered:

Silas grabbed Lydia by the arms and shook her. The glass of beer fell from her hands. She kissed him on the mouth, held him close to her, and sucked his tongue into her mouth the way she did when she was really passionate. She tasted of hops, of bitter fruit. She gasped, then leaned up against him, her head against his chest, weeping, making gentle dancing movements with her feet. He cradled her head, astonished by how much taller he was. He glanced down the slenderness of her back, saw the slow pool of blood spreading on the floor, saw his heavy shoes immersed in its dark glow, saw her feet dancing, delicate little steps, on the jagged edges of the broken beer glass. (19)

This scene, with its contrasts of erotic intimacy and violence, is disturbing in its intensity. We see the mention of 'bitter fruit', an image that resonates with the flat beer she has just sipped "in order to taste like a man" (Samuelson "Speaking Rape" 1). The image also suggests that she bears the trace of the crime that has produced Mikey, the 'bitter fruit' of the rape. We

read, from Silas's perspective, that *she* "tasted of hops, of bitter fruit", which implies that Lydia has been tainted irreparably by the masculine act of violence which appropriated her body for its own purposes. But it also suggests the presence of a discourse in which womyn are the sum of their maternal duties. The violation Silas wishes her to confront has resulted in Mikey – a reminder of the corporeal violence inflicted upon her. She is the tree that has borne the bitter fruit: the violent act is rhetorically reduced to an act of blood mixing. The slippage between the blood that has mixed in her womb, the "slow pool of blood spreading on the floor", and Silas's attention to the latter, displays the pervasive nature of the masculine gaze. Silas looks on, and the reader notes how this looking on dismembers Lydia: "he glanced down the slenderness of her back ... saw her feet dancing" (19). What is evoked for the reader is the way in which masculinized discourses "commandeer womyn's bodies and deny the more messy aspects of their legacies that cannot be neatly enfolded within the nationalist script" (Samuelson *Remembering* 2). Yet the author's decision to figure Lydia's violation through discourses of masculine exchange is a manoeuvre that runs the risk of reproducing the very problem the author is attempting to illuminate: how *does* one subject the unassimilable to the rationalizing processes of narrative?

The question illuminates a concern that is foregrounded in this chapter with the processes of memory. Silas, as an employee of the TRC, represents a form of externalized memory which is restorative in nature, – one which is concerned with closure and the possibility of redemption. Memory, under this paradigm, submits itself to reorganization via filters such as narrative. It is limited, as Silas demonstrates, by its associations with cultural memory. Lydia's trauma indicates the existence of a form of memory which is deeper in its effects, a form Saul Friedlander distinguishes as "deep memory" (*Nazi Germany* 253). Her trauma is inarticulate: she tries to speak "like a man" (19), and what comes from her is a cry.¹¹ Her pain is unrepresentable in the transactional economy of memory which Silas lays out for her.

It resists attempts to give it meaning, being irreducible to the systems of testimony invoked by the TRC. The inexorable logic acting behind Silas's form of memory cannot, in turn, assimilate the unvoiced trauma, without reducing it to "the order of the calculable" (Derrida *Psyche* 55). The dangers of assimilation are alluded to just before this scene unfolds, when Lydia suggests that, while she was being raped, Silas was unable to tell if her screams were of pleasure or of pain. Now, the scene shows Silas feeling intimacy in his wife's pain. It shows us how differently Lydia and Silas experience the relationship between events and their consequences, in effect illuminating the differences in their approaches to memory. While Silas views the past as having redemptive possibilities, Lydia is presented as possessing a form of memory that clings to her very being. The gulf between them cannot be closed.

This may be why Silas has badly misjudged Lydia's state of mind, and attempts to play the benevolent consoler he imagines himself to be. Lydia, however, will not indulge his selfish desires. She is estranged from Silas's idea of 'memory' because it represents a transactional economy in which her trauma has no meaning. When she draws him closer, there is the same pain in this physicality as there was in Du Boise's violation of her. But, because she is silent, Silas fails to understand just how deeply the discussion has affected her. Lydia's dancing on broken glass thus draws attention to the unspeakable nature of her trauma, but the spilling of her blood suggests that she is both a brutalized body and a silenced figure who can only speak in discourses of blood. Those discourses are, of course, masculinized in their notions of patrilineal honour, where what is important is not womyn, but their symbolic exchange in systems of sexualized ownership and control. Does Dangor craft this scene to suggest that c/Coloured womyn, for so long the fetishized objects of the male gaze, cannot transcend the over-determination of their bodies? Lydia is certainly presented as a womyn whose body is overburdened with ideological meanings. The reader is

implicated in this process of fetishization, as the reader's position is one of witnessing in ways that parallel the roles of the TRC. To witness this scene is to be asked to interrogate the nature of our response to viewing trauma. For Lydia to present her pain, to make it something uniquely hers and not Silas's, she must inflict some form of trauma upon her body. It is possible, if the scene is read this way, to view Lydia's dancing on the glass as an attempt to reclaim her body: she injures herself in order to erase the previous violent appropriation of her body. Yet the act, the reader's only point of contact with her trauma at this point, is transfigured into that which invites interpretation. This is witnessed in the events which immediately follow the scene, where Silas begins to justify what has happened:

in his mind, the circumstances of Lydia's injuries were already being mitigated. Her wounds were not self-inflicted, not provoked by his obsession with remembering the past, it had been a freak accident, it had happened because she wanted to drink beer and hated the taste, and he had criticized her for drinking flat beer. Ja, a small trivial thing like that, and the glass went flying, fell, flung, who knows? (21)

The original event disappears into the morass of explanations and rationalizations Silas creates. We are further reminded of the harmful effects of witness when Lydia's family arrives at the hospital and voices their own suspicions concerning her injuries (43). In all of this, her unhappiness is displaced, her articulation of the trauma transmogrified into an 'accident'. The episode demonstrates that the ethical problem of the witness's aesthetic distance from the act cannot be solved, even via the truly destabilizing gesture Lydia performs.

Nevertheless, by injuring herself, Lydia claims some form of authority, and refuses to observe her pain through the solipsistic suffering of Silas. She rejects the notion that survivors of rape are somehow rendered dysfunctional and unable to work through their own traumas. She clings to her memory of the rape, refusing to allow it to be taken from her and co-opted into a metaphor for the general suffering inflicted by Apartheid (17). Dangor's

treatment of Lydia expresses anger at the violent epistemic protocols that prohibit womyn from speaking out about rape in their own ways. He does so by subverting “the sense of shame that suffuses the identity” of c/Coloured people (Adhikari xi). Lydia increasingly grows in agency as the novel progresses, moving away from a dependency on the men around her.

Lydia’s refusal to share her pain in the manner dictated to her by Silas is thus a critical intervention against the subsuming culture of confession and enforced reconciliation. Her reaction to Silas both emerges from and responds to what Nixon terms “the refusal of amnesia” (77). This refusal is what Silas earlier characterizes as “the need for immersion in words he was not familiar with, words that did not seek to blur memory, to lessen the pain, but to sharpen all of these things” (59). What Lydia wants is not to represent her grief in ways that are dictated to her by men, but to allow it to take a private role, acting as a silence that utters itself through her.

Her diary works as the fulcrum from which the narrative is generated. As a private document of her past, it allows Lydia to remove her history from the grip of public memory and keep it somewhere apart, where she can explore it at an indefinite remove from society. Yet the private nature of this document attracts a destructive curiosity. Her distance from the family is marked by this text (29), a distance that bothers Mikey even as he questions his reasons for being bothered. In this respect Mikey and Silas are united as a contemporary Telemachus and Odysseus, each in their own world of experience but discomforted by the notion that Penelope/Lydia has another world of being that is closed to them (153). Her diary is a source of alternative memory production, providing a space in which the material and psychological effects of the trauma can be suspended or left fluid and inchoate. That being so, it is peculiar that she chooses to transcribe the details in such a perspicuous manner:

Three nights ago, I was raped. By a policeman, in a veld, flung down on the grass, the darkness above his head my only comfort. I will recover from the physical act of that rape. We always do, women have this capacity to heal themselves. But I also know that I am pregnant. Inside of me is a rapist's seed. My child will be a child of rape.
(114)

Is it uncharitable to question whether any womyn would encode such thoughts as though expecting them to be perused by an external reader? The answer may be that, while the diary is Lydia's way of working through the incomprehensible memory of the rape, Dangor is obliged to present these details the way he does in order to advance the story. The duality of inscription (Dangor transcribing what is, ostensibly, Lydia's writing) reminds us that here, in the "Memory" section of the novel, we can only encounter mediated versions of her story. We witness her through the narrator, through Silas, and through Mikey, but rarely from her own perspective. Via the symbolic space of her diary, Dangor creates the illusion of a world into which she can enter, where she is free of the masculine epistemes that determine her phenomenological life. It is a space that places her at the centre, in an affirming way. It constitutes a 'third space' in which she is neither a symbol of suffering nor a displaced corporeal entity devoid of feelings.

2.3 Mikey/Michael

How justified, then, is Mikey in stealing the diary? The question is complicated by Dangor's development of this character. At certain points in the first section of the novel, Mikey corresponds to the various c/Coloured stereotypes Zimitri Erasmus describes in her study: "immorality, sexual promiscuity, illegitimacy, impurity and untrustworthiness" ("Coloured" 17) all manifest in his characterization. At times Mikey even seems to be an avatar of the tragic c/Coloured character who, though intelligent and sensitive, is doomed to unhappiness and destruction by virtue of his mixed race.¹² He is the product of the rape his mother has survived. He is both adult (11) and child (69), innocent and yet tainted with a sexualized

shame (37). The paradoxical ways in which Mikey is regarded recall the middle-space between (white) respectability and (black) degeneracy which c/Colouredness supposedly occupies. Dangor seems to be purposely reprising these tropes in order to invite the impulse to read Mikey as a representation of literary atavism: he is a fluid character who slips easily between the roles expected of him, but is never ultimately knowable.

Yet the descriptions of Mikey are at times troubling. For instance, his mother, envisioning a tryst between Mikey and Kate, pictures “Mikey’s green eyes, the brightness of his skin caught in a yellow glow of light ... Mikey the irresistible ‘innocent’ waiting for his prey” (61). Later, as Kate observes Mikey from a concealed vantage-point, she describes his body as being “tinged with blue, as if he had no colour of his own, as if his complexion was created by absorbing light from elements around him” (71). There is something dated in the nature of these depictions, as though they emerge from a time when a pathologized fascination with bodies was not a morbid symptom of modernity (hooks 68). Moreover, each depiction seems meant to feminize Mikey tacitly, as if to emphasize his marginality, deficiency and fragility as a mixed-race subject.

The gendering of Mikey’s identity is necessary, however, for Dangor to draw a contrast between the Mikey of the novel’s first section, and the new figure that emerges with the discovery of his biological father’s identity. Mikey is, in gender terms, an ambiguous character whose androgyny is exotic and unnatural to those around him. He is unsettling precisely because his fluidity and mixedness (as the author depicts these traits) enable him to evade the rigid boundaries of gender and ‘race’ when he chooses to do so. This fluidity seems to derive from the same source as the impotency that characterizes Silas. When the new Michael emerges (139, 151),¹³ he is formed to exact retribution (significantly, the title of the last section of the novel), is masculine, and rejects his parents. Yet one is aware that the new Michael is in fact not new at all. What he is, Dangor suggests, is Alex la Guma’s

Michael Adonis – but only the superficialities of Adonis, Adonis reduced to his actions. This suggests the inescapability of the literary history that speaks through South African stories, transforming them into meaning-making structures that re-iterate themselves without end. The writer's concern with the symbolic valence of tropes is important: through the recollections of his uncles and cousins from Silas's side of the family (120), Michael attempts to establish some form of authority over his life. This authority cannot hold, insofar as the histories of illegitimacy and degeneracy continue to speak through Michael, so that even as he prepares to take action against Du Boise, he lacks agency.

He thus has to brutally separate himself by embracing the violence that has brought him into being. This violent detachment will be analysed later in this chapter, but it is important to note how even escape is not truly what it purports to be. The dispassion experienced by Michael when he kills Du Boise and changes his name still centralizes the impact of miscegenation on c/Coloured identity. That is, the gesture through which Michael must free himself is still fixated on the notion of paternal whiteness as tragedy for the c/Coloured individual: the white father is both the cause of, and the remedy for, Michael's instability. It is as though Dangor is positing that the antecedents that speak through Michael cannot be overcome, so oppressive is their weight. The point is driven home in Michael's decision to kill the abusive father of his friend as well: one murder may mean as much or as little as another, when perpetrated in the service of the revenge Michael exacts.

2.4 (Dis)Locating History within the Narrative

It appears, then, that the history of writing on c/Coloured identity shapes a critical reading of *Bitter Fruit* in unforeseeable and largely unavoidable ways. This is evident from the meanings invested in the title of the novel, a title which resonates because of its evocation of

tragic mixedness, with c/Colouredness being figured as the unfortunate product of the mixing of the 'primary' groups in South Africa.¹⁴

How to explain the persistent horror of 'the middle-space' in this day and age? It appears that the continued anxiety over the identity politics of c/Coloured characters is symptomatic of an understanding of c/Coloured identity as "a residual, in-between or 'lesser' identity" (Erasmus *Coloured* 6). In partial response to this understanding, one encounters in Dangor's novel an open resistance to the desire for resolution, an impulse which seeks to suspend questions about the position of c/Coloured individuals. The novel focuses on dogmatic and rigid conceptions of identity (whether feminine or c/Coloured or both), and rejects reactionary means of countering racial and gendered injustice because they articulate themselves in terms always already pre-defined by whiteness. It proposes instead the possibility of an alternative view of identities as fraught and constantly evasive of boundaries.

It is significant, in this respect, that Dangor chooses to situate the novel during the years of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, particularly since the narrative is concerned with the manner in which the politics of witness and autobiography play themselves out among South Africa's 'middle' populations in the near-contemporary moment. By choosing such a temporal setting, Dangor picks up the thread of revisiting and reoccupying the past, although that past is a narrative present within the text itself (late 1998, as the commission's final report is being handed over to the president). Writing some years after the event, Dangor questions the manner in which the TRC examined the personal stories of womyn. The novel suggests that the ways in which meanings were extracted from the personal testimonies of womyn failed to grant those womyn the freedom to articulate their experiences openly within the discursive space of the TRC hearings.

Here, some remarks on the TRC and its effects on (and representation within) South African literature are apposite. The TRC was mooted in 1995 via an act of parliamentary

decree. Its mandate was “to ‘uncover and acknowledge’ human rights violations that were committed by various parties during the struggle for and against apartheid”, as well as “to facilitate the granting of amnesty to the perpetrators of those violations” (Harris 162). As Brent Harris asserts, “those involved in the TRC ... presented it as ‘shutting the book on the country’s past’, as coming to ‘terms with our dark past *once and for all*’, and as closing ‘a horrendous chapter in the life of our nation’” (162). However, the TRC also validated personal testimony as a recuperative process, creating a space for the airing of such testimony that resulted in the exposure of many previously hidden histories from the past. Further, the commission occasioned much critical commentary on the validity of its processes.¹⁵ A number of critics, for example, have commented on the negative effects of imposing the confessional mode on victims and survivors of apartheid atrocities, and interrogated the ways in which the commission attempted to re-imagine the personal histories it sought to illuminate in a new narrative of rehabilitation and forgiveness. What cannot be denied is that the TRC validated personal testimony as playing “an invaluable role by preventing, through [its] restless exploration, the closure of history's channels” (Nixon 77). It could be argued, however, that the role of the TRC in shaping a national narrative of ‘unity’ compromised its usefulness to the individuals – specifically the womyn – from whom it sought testimony. As Beth Goldblatt and Sheila Meintjies attest,

By raising these issues within the TRC process we cannot simply put them behind us and assume that abuse of women has been neatly dealt with in our past and reconciliation has occurred. Examining the conditions which allow women to be harmed and violated should focus all our attentions on the need to eradicate this ongoing abuse. If the TRC is to leave a valuable legacy it must lift the veil of silence hanging over the suffering of women and must incorporate the struggle to end this suffering in the struggle for human rights in our country. (55)

To say this is to argue that the larger project of creating a public history risks excluding those narratives that do not easily fit into the “freedom project” (Gqola “Archives” 59). Whether

this was in fact the case with the TRC has been the subject of much critical debate, with a number of theorists subsequently claiming that the TRC was a failure because it failed to provide a truly hospitable environment for personal testimonies, closing down the past rather than opening it up for debate.¹⁶ But such an argument is not entirely sustainable: as Pumla Gqola points out, the emphasis the TRC placed on acts of testimony and witness “made it possible for other previously denied pasts to find public exploration” (“Archives” 61).

Among these previously denied pasts, one might count the various histories of womyn under Apartheid, as freedom fighters, as wives and mothers, and as survivors of atrocity, amongst other roles. Perhaps the reality, then, lies somewhere between these two opposing views.

But if the TRC can be praised for paving the way for further investigations into South Africa’s past, it must also be criticized for laying down a restrictive paradigm through which such explorations of the past were – and may be – conducted. Here, it is important to note that the reliance on confession as the preferred mode of the TRC invites the possibility of glossing over the specificities of the confessional. This trend is depicted vividly in *Bitter Fruit*, when it becomes clear that Silas is more concerned with the *act* of confession itself, rather than what Lydia might actually have to *say*. The message he puts across to her is that what she says is not particularly important, as long as she says *something*, and participates in this national spectacle.

In *Bitter Fruit*, Dangor illustrates Gqola’s idea that, when histories are subject to rigid systems of control, “other possibilities about the same past ... get repressed, transformed, marginalized, forgotten or silenced” (“Defining People” 101). Dangor suggests that, in South Africa, the culture of public confession is a phenomenon that is in accord with the culture of letters’ problematic entanglement with autobiography. In doing so, he conducts a searching interrogation of public confession and writing the self as the keys to absolving national and personal trauma. The novel questions whether public confession does not in fact have its own

covert agenda: does it not structure the time in which it is performed? Is it in reality a sacrificing of the personal to the interests of the nation? These questions can be answered by examining the functions confession plays in the novel.

2.5 The Hegemony of Confession

Mikey's musings about Lydia's diary, his desire to know the details of her "delving into herself" (30), over a belief in publicly rehearsing the formation of memory, a belief that is shared both by autobiography and by the TRC.¹⁷ He knows that the diary "has something to do with Lydia's accident, her subsequent hospitalization, with the name Du Boise that he has heard his parents whisper tensely between them in the hospital room"(30), and this knowledge makes him hesitate in performing the gesture of reading that will transform the diary into autobiography. Lydia clearly views the diary as private: she keeps it locked away. Yet Mikey feels he *must* read it, must convert Lydia's past into a narrative to explain his present. With the diary closed, he is drawn into a personal memory of his own, which he fearfully speculates may reside in his mother's past as well (32). Later in the novel, he reads Lydia's description of her rape, and is immediately seized with feelings of horror and revulsion. He thinks back over the moments he has shared with his mother, and decides that "Lydia had loved him out of pain and guilt" (117). In thinking these thoughts, he projects himself onto the diary, transfiguring it into an autobiographical project of which he is the instigator, and removing from it the individuality of record with which Lydia invests it. His appropriation of the diary as the source of his own pain merely subverts Lydia's desire not to cede control of her story to the public realm.

It is crucial that the diary entry which has thrown Mikey into such turmoil ends with Lydia noting how she "crossed over into a zone of silence" on the night of her rape (117). What is created at this moment in the novel is a paratext (the various memories, diary entries, and so

on) that allows the autobiographical impulse to be discerned. That is, in ‘authorizing’ Mikey to read Lydia’s diary, Dangor produces a reading of Lydia’s history that appears to lend itself to the same processes as the confessions and recounted histories of the TRC. It compels one to read Lydia’s details not only as autobiographical, but also as part of the ‘truth’ of the nation that has been suppressed, a truth that can now be rehearsed and added to the shared historical narrative of the community in an act of reconciliation.

This compulsion in turn raises problems of a complex, contradictory and reflexive nature. Is the reader meant to read Lydia’s (hi)story as suppressed because she does not wish to submit it to public examination? One could argue that Lydia is entitled to her ‘silence’ as a form of protection. After all, she is not avoiding her trauma, but casting aside the pre-eminence of the public as witness to the effects of that trauma. One thinks here of Nthabiseng Motsemme’s assertion that:

Under conditions of scarcity and imposed limits, those who are oppressed often generate new meanings for themselves around silences. Instead of being absent and voiceless, silences in circumstances of violence assume presence and speak volumes.
 (“Meanings in Silence” 5)

Why, then, must readers be made to understand an experience that Dangor fashions as being irretrievably other to them? In creating the opportunity for the reader to access this “secret life” (114) by reproducing the text of the diary (114-117), has he not ‘betrayed’ Lydia by revealing what she seems not to want to reveal? The narrative would seem to suggest authorial approval for Lydia and her actions: she is portrayed more sympathetically than the men in the novel. Though Lydia is not possessed of any autonomous existence outside of her fictional incarnation in Dangor’s novel, surely – in a text that gestures towards silence as one of its concerns – this exposure of her private writings is an issue? Yet, rather than attempting to approximate the irreducible nature of Lydia’s trauma by leaving it unspoken, Dangor

intervenes as the author in order to keep the story coherent. It is perhaps unavoidable that he is implicated in the very process he wishes to resist, even as he attempts to create different ways of narrating the past: the power held by the rhetoric of public confession is, to judge from *Bitter Fruit*, difficult to escape.

This reading requires some exegesis. It can be seen that the institutionalization of confession/witness as a means of healing by the TRC is something Lydia resists, compromised as her grief already is by having to share it with Silas. As Gqola argues, “the project of memory making is not one of retrieval. Rather, it is constructed through language, subject to processes of reduction, distortion and selection” to affirm the larger project to which it contributes (“Defining People” 98). Within such a paradigm, the excavation of Lydia’s history is not a regenerative endeavour, but one that can only strip more away from her in its act of homogenization. Lydia’s wish to remain silent, in a space where confession is almost demanded, is a deliberate refusal to exhibit her (psychological) wounds for the aggressively prying gaze of the public. It is a decision not to issue an authorial reading of those wounds. But that decision is not simply a suppression of memory: as Homi K. Bhabha would have it, “Remembering is never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful remembering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present” (121). Thus Lydia’s ‘silence’ is a decision not to have to lay claim to her life story or to have her trauma circumscribed and authenticated by the confession process.

This decision creates for Silas a present-time that is increasingly untenable. His introspection, forced upon him by Lydia’s withdrawal, does not bring him solace. He retreats instead to a mythologized past, “summoning up happier times, epochs of greater clarity, times without this ambiguity he sees everywhere” (148), whereas for Lydia, it is crucial that she avoid “being seduced by imagined ‘happier times’” (104). Unless Lydia’s rape, and Silas’s suffering on account of it, can be recounted, vocalized and/or recorded, the present for Silas

will remain too enigmatic, his despair too excessive, and his growing estrangement from Lydia too unmotivated. The latter point is worth stressing. Dangor continually focuses on how this estrangement is routed in codes or forms of silence: the Ali family is trapped in their home space by their self-imposed incommunicability. They remain trapped because to speak “the ‘thing’ that has divided them” (148) is not possible, yet to allow the ‘thing’ to remain repressed is not an ideal solution either.

As the novel progresses, the suggestion is that what is required is not the mediation of public vocalizing, but a form that exists outside such “loaded signifiers” (Wicomb 95). Mikey recounts how there exists an attachment between himself and his mother that is olfactory in its expression: they smell each other “affectionately, with the innocence of animals” (126). Yet even at an early age Mikey is made to feel “without knowing” (126) that there is something indecent in this ‘animalistic’ language. He detects “his father’s discomfort and his grandmother Agnes’s horror when he and his mother interact this way” (126). Again, the spectre of sexualized shame is present, as Mikey observes that:

When he was fourteen, he went on his first date, to the Zoo of all places, and saw a wild dog exchange smells with her litter of whelps, a perfect, beautiful act of recognition that made him ashamed of the way he had discouraged his mother from leaning her face into his body and inhaling his odours, pulling away from her abruptly because others were watching. (126)

To this private area of communication, Silas is a peripheral figure. He feels himself excluded and divided from Lydia and Mikey by the intimacy they share. He has no faith in the power of the non-verbal to recover and restore the wounded self, and feels himself cut off from “a love that could not be moderated by words” (59).

Silas’s yearning for the public confessional is thus a manifestation of his desire to close the gap between himself and Lydia. He longs for “the opportunity to play the brave, stoical husband” under the gaze of “a public confession of pain suffered” (140-141). Used to “grand

gestures” (31), he is reduced to confessing his sorrows in bars and pubs. These are places to which people often go to forget their troubles, and in these spaces Silas’s normally eloquent showing of self is replaced by an inadequate allusion to “the tragedy of his life, ‘this wife, you see’, [before he sinks] into a head-shaking silence, his tale unfinished” (146). This is a silence that brings Silas little comfort, for confession lends his life a purpose. His job – “liaising between the Ministry of Justice and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission” (59) – and his interactions with Lydia all revolve around the act of confession. He finds confession more comforting than silence, as a result. More than simply describing his experiences, confession allows him to claim an identity.

In contrast to this, we witness Lydia as being able to re-enter her past through her diary, as long as that diary remains private. When Silas brings the ‘unspeakable’ trauma into focus, he transforms the private space Lydia occupies from a place of sanctity into a limited introspective place, in which she feels trapped. His actions are an attempt to interpret Lydia in a language he understands, where his gestures hold for her the meaning *he* wishes them to convey. This evokes the notion that systems of dominance are ascribed through language: Lydia resents the idea that “Silas [has] betrayed that place of refuge” to which she retreats (110). She realizes that “[f]or her to ‘come to terms’ with what had happened, she would have to seek some inner serenity, lock all her disturbing recollections into that secret crypt in her memory” (110).

It is telling that Silas cannot access these codes of meaning. He struggles to grasp the fluidity of identity that Lydia wishes to possess (58), wanting instead to find ‘truth’ in the monolithic structures of the familiar and the fixed. Dangor here evinces Bhabha’s assertion that what is necessary is “an encounter with ‘newness’ that is not part of the continuum of past and present” (7). In *Bitter Fruit*, Lydia seeks what Silas cannot obtain: a relationship with the past that refigures it “as a contingent ‘in-between’ space, that innovates and interrupts the

performance of the present. The ‘past-present’ thus becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia of living” (Bhabha 7). One may conclude that here there is a more complex relationship between the past and the present than is typically demonstrated in conventional autobiography. The past, Lydia shows, is stored, but the positions of its participants (in relation to it) are constantly changing. Thus, Dangor differs from the likes of Richard Rive, whose writing on District Six typifies what Wicomb calls the “politics of nostalgia” (95). Under such a politics, the past is seen as a solipsistic time, where alternative private memories are “disremembered” (Bhabha 270). The dominant framework of nostalgia which exists in these works, while valuable in its attempt to remember the past, is moribund when faced with the enormity of atrocities like rape. In this respect, the title of the novel’s middle section, “Memory”, gains added significance: Dangor’s novel asks who has access to the construction of memory, and who is ignored when memory is popularized and given expression in such nostalgic ways.

2.6 Retribution-Reconstitution?

The heading I give to the last part of this chapter draws on the title – “Retribution” (203) – Dangor apportions to the final section of his novel. The title reflects not only the violent murders that dominate the third part of *Bitter Fruit*, but the ultimate unravelling of the Ali family, which disrupts the silence that has fallen over the family in the ironically-titled “Confession” section that precedes “Retribution”. Silas, Lydia and Michael go their separate ways as this last section comes to an end. Lydia and Michael both commit acts which fundamentally alter their identity. Silas, it appears, is alienated once more, but it emerges that he too achieves some form of change.

For Michael, the act which will sever him from any and all ties to the past is his murder of Du Boise. The latter’s fate is written in Silas’s failed attempt to hold him to some form of account. Michael does what his father cannot do: the murder scene evokes Lydia’s earlier

derisive comment to Silas that, if he were a real man, he “would have killed [Du Boise] on the spot, right there in the mall, spatter his brains against a window, watch his blood running all over the floor” (19). But in contrast to this graphic imagery, Michael’s act is not a show of male bravado. His murder of Du Boise is speechless – he does not demand that Du Boise recognize him before the latter is dispatched. The brutal act signifies that Michael, too, has scorned the rhetoric of speaking one’s pain. Michael, desiring a rebirth into a life without history (247), can carry out the violently disruptive revenge necessary to exit the interregnum. In his dedication to exacting this revenge, Michael seeks to commit an act of self-creation. That is, he wishes to break away from the present space, where he is “one without a self” (Coetzee *Stranger Shores* 307), by making himself anew in the act of destroying Du Boise. Yet this act is not as simple to carry out as he has rehearsed. Michael wants Du Boise to be afraid: instead he is confronted by a Du Boise who is prepared for “such a moment” (246), and denies Michael the singularity of action he seeks. As Michael looks into Du Boise’s decaying features seconds before he kills him, he confronts not the evil he had hoped to purge from memory, but “an evil whose essence it is to disappoint and frustrate” (Coetzee *Stranger Shores* 217).

Despite the essential futility of his gesture, however, Michael’s murder of Du Boise unites him once more with Lydia: his act is commensurate with his mother’s all-too-visible cuckolding of Silas (236), which jarringly disrupts the notion of narrative resolution. This impulsive act on Lydia’s part is carried out without thought for Silas, enabling her, as Silas realizes, to “[find] release at last” (238). One might question why this gesture of ‘release’ must necessarily occur within a heteronormative framing, since her use of sex as a means of defining herself enables her to reclaim her identity from Silas, but does not contest the terms of that appropriation. Perhaps the scene needs to be read in terms of Dangor’s wish that Lydia violently disrupt the confessional paratext that Silas has willed upon her: she rejects the

rhetoric of confession by providing no explanation for her actions, or for her disappearance, and she rejects Silas's attempts to discuss the night in question (249). The act is merely a means to an end, for Lydia.¹⁸

As Silas realizes, Lydia's release is not simply one "from both her captive demons: from Du Boise and from himself" (238). It is an escape from the authorizing impulse of the TRC. Against Erasmus's assertion that "we are never only South Africans" (in her article of the same title), Dangor's ending suggests that, even in the private realm, Lydia is not only "[m]other, wife, lover, lover-mother, lover-wife, unloved mother" (251), but also an individual in her own right. Her flight is a devastating indictment of the autobiographical impulse. It destroys the illusion that harmony can be accessed through confession, and disavows the emotional spectacle of confession that is valorized in works like Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull* as being deeply implicated in the very processes of control and appropriation they purport to be resisting.

What resolution for Silas? In the end, he loses both his wife and his son. He has an encounter with a distraught friend of Michael's, Vinu (244), but it is not the sexual moment he envisions under the "Confession" section (199). Instead, he cradles her, comforts her in a fatherly role. In this enactment of selfless responsibility to Vinu (who arrives looking for Michael, and does not want Silas), Silas fulfils the role he has envisioned himself playing, repressing his own pain as he helps another to forgive. He provides a space for her that is not compromised by his own feelings or emotions, and does not impose any directives on Vinu. It is not the resolution he seeks, but it provides a way forward.

2.7 Conclusion

The resurgence of autobiography as a metaphor for the nation has been hailed as the "impulse of an entire nation finally bringing its past into proper perspective" (Jacobs 878). The parallels between the TRC and the culture of letters' autobiographical impulse are not

incidental: both co-opt audiences into the spectacle which authorizes them, and both parade their rehearsal in the public space as evidence of their success. *Bitter Fruit* encourages a more critically reflexive approach, asking the reader to be mindful of the specific historical forms and practices with which autobiography/memoir and public testimony/confession exert a form of domination by masking their entanglement in difference and power. That is, Dangor warns against reading and retelling inequalities and traumas “in the past tense, as a mythology whose archaic logic and effects are no longer with us” (Kaul 80). However, what happens to Lydia in the novel seems to suggest that responding to the imperative by migrating inward is not as workable a solution as it seems to be; for in this response one opens oneself up to accusations of evasion. While Lydia’s strategy benefits her, Dangor seems to suggest that it requires explanation, whereas it might be more appropriate to explain the society that witnesses with such relish. While Dangor attempts this to some extent, most of the narrative is given over to observing Lydia, her anguish, and the anxiety it causes those around her.

Nevertheless, *Bitter Fruit* demonstrates that the reconstitutive process is often as destructive as the original trauma. In the narrative, sexualized shame is what propels Silas’s quest for reconciliation. For Lydia, it is not that clear-cut: she casts herself in terms of injury, not shame (Wicomb 91). While initially the novel appears to be treading along the same historical path as other South African novels, what emerges is in fact a complex debate about culture and the politics of singularity, in which Dangor warns against the imperative of the desire for a national identity that tallies with grand narratives. What is subjected to scrutiny in *Bitter Fruit* is the interrogative lens itself, rather than what that lens scrutinizes. If anything can be drawn from this scrutiny, it is that confession is not a contained and simple process, but one which generates and is fashioned by historical processes that privilege certain ideas of ‘truth’ over others. The implications for South African literature are manifold: in Lydia’s

rejection of the totalizing imperative to tell her story, lies the possibility of a mode of existence in which one is not trapped in binarized relations of 'race', or in simplified postures of guilt and victimhood. To the extent that most South African literature in the contemporary moment does not escape these binaries, Dangor's novel is important: not so much because it presents a proper escape, but because it stages a resistance to the existence of such relations.

NOTES

¹ I am mindful of the complications arising from the use of the term 'c/Coloured' to denote identity. I utilize the distinction between upper and lower case to indicate the contestations that mark theories of identity for people who would be categorized as 'coloured' under the 1950s Population Registration Act. For a comprehensive treatment of the terrain of c/Coloured identities, see the introductory chapter in Zimitri Erasmus' *Coloured by History, Shaped by Place* (2001). Mohamed Adhikari's *Not White Enough, Not Black Enough* (2005) and Ryland Fisher's *Race* (2007) provide further views on the issue.

² As Erasmus points out, "Coloured identities were constructed out of fragmented cultural material available in the contexts of slavery, colonialism and cultural dispossession. This leaves their constructed and composite historical nature always evident and their dislocation always present" (*Coloured by History* 20). Elsewhere, Zoë Wicomb remarks on how "the tragic mode routinely used to represent coloureds" is one in which "assumed cultural loss is elevated to the realm of ontology" ("Shame and Identity" 100).

³ See, for example, Adhikari's chapter on Alex La Guma in *Not White Enough, Not Black Enough*, or Wicomb's formulations on the writing of Richard Rive in "Shame and Identity" (1998).

⁴ It is interesting to note how these words are used to create a sense of 'natural' c/Colouredness. Adhikari, in his study of La Guma's *A Walk in the Night*, describes a similar use of authenticity-establishing words (128-129). I argue subsequently that Dangor writes back to La Guma's novella to in a number of ways).

⁵ Dangor draws on "the male street-corner culture of drinking" (Adhikari 137) captured by earlier writers, such as James Matthews, to craft this scene.

⁶ I disagree here with Meg Samuelson, who asserts that "Lydia has allowed Silas to appropriate [the rape] as something that happened to him" ("Speaking Rape" 1). In my view, it is not that she allows this appropriation, but that Silas's distance from the rape encourages him to envision the events in a series of lacunae-laden memories. This is not to remove Silas's agency in displacing the 'literal' rape: he is involved in a complex simultaneous process by which the rape is elided and invoked as a metaphor for his own 'violation'.

⁷ This is particularly true as concerns c/Coloured womyn. In his depiction of rape Dangor was surely aware of the controversy over J.M. Coetzee's similarly configured (white male perpetrator, c/Coloured female survivor) representation in *Disgrace*. It could be argued that these depictions are symptomatic of an unreconstructed politics around representation and gender in South African society, which is mirrored in fiction. Proof of this may be seen in the proliferation of inter-racial acts of rape in texts such as André Brink's *Rights of Desire* (2000), Arthur Maimane's *Hate No More* (2000) and K Sello Duiker's *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* (2001).

⁸ In fact, one might refer to ‘hyper-heterosexual’, since the gaze is not a neutral one, but one which has a decidedly male audience in mind, and one which enforces patriarchy. For a more in-depth analysis of this gaze, see Lewis’s “Against the Grain” (11-24). The point is made graphically clear when Lydia describes to Silas how Du Boise called her “a nice wild half-kaffir cunt, a lekker wilde Boesman poes” (19). In this moment of powerlessness, she is reduced to her sex, made an instrument to be acted upon.

⁹ Samuelson notes how “Lydia breaks the gender divide that names what happens to men’s bodies as torture and what happens to women’s bodies as rape” (*Speaking Rape 2*). The scene is critical in that it weighs in against the assignation of rape to the ambiguous ground of ‘crime against humanity’.

¹⁰ Amanda Gouws, writing on the impact of the various discursive tropes that emerged in TRC testimonies, provides a useful analysis of this trend (*Unthinking Citizenship 255*).

¹¹ Consider, here, Samuelson’s assertion, in relation to the TRC, that “the tearful act of bearing witness became the mode of performance through which women gained a voice” (*Remembering The Nation 163*).

¹² This trope is best symbolized in the figure of Michael Adonis in *A Walk in The Night*, who shares some startling similarities with Mikey. Does Dangor envision Mikey as a younger version of Michael Adonis? The figure of the tragic mixed-race man has an enduring and transcendent currency. For example, Barrack Obama refers in his autobiography to “the troubled heart, the mixed blood, the divided soul, the ghostly image of the tragic mulatto trapped between two worlds” (16).

¹³ One might question if the name change, signifying the authority to ‘author’ oneself, as it were, does not also suggest that such authority is masculine, coming as it does after one has read of Lydia’s struggle to assert her own agency.

¹⁴ This view of c/Coloured identity as a negative category has not lost force over time. Ryland Fisher notes, in *Race*, how “Roderick Blackman Ngoro, the media advisor to the former mayor of Cape Town, caused an outcry when...he referred to coloureds as ‘drunkards’ and said that Africans were ‘culturally superior’ to coloureds” (100-101).

¹⁵ Among them, Njabulo S. Ndebele (1991), Kader Asmal, et al (1997), Gabea Baderoon (1997) and Wole Soyinka (1999).

¹⁶ See Terry Bell and Dumisa Buhle Ntsebeza’s *Unfinished Business: South Africa, Apartheid and Truth* (2003).

¹⁷ There are numerous critical discussions on the nature of public confession in the TRC. For a nuanced summary, see Nthabiseng Motsemme and Kopano Ratele.

¹⁸ This is apparent when one notes that her partner in this act is largely occluded, except in Silas’s paranoid thoughts, where the former is once again described within the discursive paradigms of blood.

CHAPTER 3: INSCRIBING WHITENESS AND STAGING BELONGING IN CONTEMPORARY LIFE-WRITING FORMS

This chapter enters the dialogue on representations of white South Africa in the contemporary historical moment. It asks whether the configuration of white autobiography has shifted and altered over time, and whether certain modes of representation continue to hold a significant

place in the contemporary South African culture of letters. Autobiography occupies a prominent position in the latter: the genre is hailed as having resuscitated local narratives, by narrowing the gulf between the academic study of literature and the reading habits of the 'ordinary' South African reader. A cursory glance at the shelves of mainstream literary outlets such as Exclusive Books and the CNA, demonstrates the popularity of autobiographical literature, with autobiographies, creative autobiographies, and other forms that blend fiction and life-writing populating the South African literature sections of these institutions. Leading this trend are novels like John Van de Ruit's *Spud* series, a trilogy championed in media reviews for "its popularity with both highbrow and lowbrow audiences" ("Young South Africans" 1).

What such platitudes point towards is the existence or the assumption of the existence of a divide between critical readers and those for whom reading is little more than a pleasant way of passing time. In this regard, autobiographies appear ideally placed to bridge this divide, as a form accessible to both the casual reader and the academic. The reviews and endorsements that accompany texts such as *Spud* endorse this view, relying as they do on the expectation that autobiography is well-positioned to make sense of a damaged past, and to allow the restoration of the personal narrative to some form of authority over traditionally hegemonic narratives. This may be because, as K. J. Weintraub observes,

its real subject matter is character, personality, self-conception — all those difficult-to-define matters which ultimately determine the inner coherence and meaning of a life. Real autobiography is a weave in which self-consciousness is delicately threaded throughout inter-experience. It may have such varied functions as self-explication, self-discovery, self-clarification, self-formation, self presentation, self-justification. All these functions interpenetrate easily, but all are centred upon an aware self aware of its relation to its experiences. (824).

In this regard, it is useful to examine why the performance of autobiography has currently become a much-plied trade, particularly amongst white male South Africans. Aside from Van

de Ruit's *Spud* novels, there are such previously cited texts as Johnson's *The Native Commissioner* (2006), and Ecott's *Stealing Water: A Secret Life in an African City* (2008), together with Troy Blacklaws' *Karoo Boy* (2005) and *Blood Orange* (2006), all of which depict personal (white male) histories against the historical background of Apartheid South Africa. In doing so, these writers attempt to move beyond old distinctions between 'political' writing and personal narratives, or attempt to imagine a world in which the political does not always exceed the personal.¹ That Van de Ruit and Blacklaws can serialize their memoirs, together with the autobiography's more general popularity as a mode of literary expression, would suggest that the form has a certain currency for contemporary readers. Certainly, all of these works seem to be practising the commodification of nostalgia.

In order to understand how this commodification takes effect, it is necessary to understand that nostalgia arises out of a perceived lack, or from perceptions of dislocation and uncertainty. Might one speculate, then, that there is a relationship between the loss of formal white political power, the challenge to white economic power, and the surge in popularity of nostalgic literature? This is too reductionist a reading, perhaps: after all, it does not follow that only white readers consume texts like *Spud*. But if novels like *Spud* encode a particular type of nostalgia, one peculiar to white South Africa, surely it is not incidental that they arouse sentiment in those South Africans who identify with the subject-positions in the narrative.

Further, their shared configurations concerning memory and belonging would suggest that there continues to be "a wider set of tropic specificities" which regulate the production of these autobiographical works (Nuttall "Subjectivities" 124-125). In this respect, I find it is necessary to interrogate how and to what ends "the politics and practice of visibility" (Nuttall "Subjectivities" 117) are constructed by the white male writers of such texts. By focusing on the second text in the *Spud* series, and on the texts of Johnson, Blacklaws and Ecott, I

examine how the aesthetic and formal characteristics of each work come together to produce what is both a response to and a representation of South African whiteness in a particularly masculine form. I also consider the question of what future these texts gesture towards, even as they abdicate any form of responsibility towards that future by ending in the here and now.

These works are notable for the manner in which they seek to erase distinctions: distinctions between victim and perpetrator, between author and narrator, and between author and reader. In doing so they suggest that they are abandoning these distinctions in the service of a higher ideal: what does it matter that the narrator of, for example, Blacklaws' *Karoo Boy* is white, so long as he (while never forgetting this cursed state) can achieve some form of sympathetic identification with the oppressed of South Africa? Each work enacts a dynamic of identification through the construction of their protagonists. In each case, one is seemingly required to read the main figure sympathetically, to identify with their tragedy, and to empathize with their journey of development, a journey whose teleology coincides with that of the nation more often than not. If one notes, as Dyer does, that “those who occupy positions of cultural hegemony blithely carry on as if what they say is neutral and unsituated – human not raced” (4), then these novels require serious critical examination that seeks to locate them within the discourse of whiteness.

To say this is to affirm Dyer's assertion that “there is something at stake in looking at ... white imagery” (1). This chapter thus enters into a critical arena that has seen much debate on the nature of white post-transitional writing. Commentators such as Achille Mbembe (2001) and Sarah Nuttall (2009) have gestured towards the general possibilities for South African literature in this moment, but here I consider a specific manifestation of this writing, namely recent works penned by white South African males of English origin, which deal with the fraught consequences of being English in Apartheid South Africa. Johnson, for example, attempts to represent “the ‘inner exile’ of the schizophrenic postcolonial subject” (Buuck

123) by parading the fragmented psyche of the colonized individual as an intrinsic part of the narrative. The nature of this fragmentation, however, is more complex than first appears. There is constantly the suggestion that something is unhinged in both Sam Jameson and the commissioner himself, but this very disorder, Johnson seems to suggest, is a means of making contact with the pulse of the white English condition in South Africa. Van de Ruit, Blacklaws and Ecott are less adept at articulating their sense of fragmentation, but each of their novels undermines notions of white South African Englishness as being homogeneously idyllic.

3.1 Shaun Johnson's *The Native Commissioner*

Johnson's *The Native Commissioner* differs from the other texts cited above, in that it is more a self-reflexive attempt to interrogate the role of trauma in memory, than a project to reinforce the present via the processes of memory that inform constructions of the self. As a result it is an intricate and non-linear narrative formed from multiple voices, rather than a teleologically-threaded narrative told by a single narrator. Nevertheless, I begin with it because it reads like an avatar of the autobiographical impulse in contemporary South African fiction. The reader is encouraged to draw the link between Sam Jameson, the author-figure whose reading crafts the story, and Shaun Johnson who writes it. In his presentation of the author-narrator as an archaeological figure conducting an excavation of the buried past from "the privileged enclave" (2) of white South Africa, Johnson evokes works from an earlier period in the country's literary past – by authors such as Breyten Breytenbach (*Dog Heart*), Coetzee (*Boyhood*), and Ivan Vladislavić (*Missing Persons*).

The references to uncovering, sifting through and re-membering extend beyond *The Native Commissioner* itself to the endorsements written by established authors from the period preceding Johnson. As previously discussed, Coetzee states that the novel is "a

welcome step towards the reconstitution of the South African past in all its moral and political complexity”, while Nadine Gordimer remarks that “[o]ur past is fascinatingly unpacked with the box of papers opened by his [the commissioner's] son, Johnson's narrator”. In similar vein, Njabulo S. Ndebele describes Johnson's work as “a novel of reconciliation through personal testimony”, and Mamphela Ramphele says that “it speaks beautifully of a part of our history that has not been acknowledged” (Johnson “Endorsements”). Each of these testimonials exhibits the same notion of reconstituting the past through testimony, an idea that Breytenbach describes as the use of personal testimony to “undo power” (*Birds* 142) by challenging grand historical narratives. It is also an idea that forms the basis of the TRC of the nineties (Stanley 526), and one which dates the endorsements (and Johnson's narrative) by inscribing upon them the signature discourse of that decade in South Africa.

That Johnson's novel was published in 2006 is therefore indicative of the fact that recent writing in South Africa has not managed to escape the imperatives of the recent past. Bearing in mind that any work of autobiography is a process of self-invention (Eakin 3); that “autobiographical truth is not a fixed but an evolving content in an intricate process of self-discovery and self-creation, ... that the self that is the centre of all autobiographical narrative is necessarily a fictive structure” (Eakin 3); and that, while the past may be stored away like the box of Commissioner Jameson's papers, the position of the narrator vis-à-vis her past constantly shifts such that any autobiographical text is a construction of what the author deems valuable in her present; it is curious, then, that *The Native Commissioner* should select and codify into meaning memories via a representational strategy that speaks not to the time in which it is written, but to a previous period of time – a period that, nevertheless, has engaged much recent Anglophone South African fiction.

To be sure, the politics of nostalgia are at work here: Sam Jameson is facing an existential crisis due to the unresolved tragedy of his father's death, which has forever altered his life

and left him prone to “periodic episodes of depression (46). The unresolved past retains some influence on the present because it creates a fluidity of time in which memory and pain interweave. Nostalgia allows the past to be placed, thus preserving it as an anchor in uncertain times. The difference between Johnson's work and the others analysed here, however, is that it does not perform an elegiac reliving of the past, but is self-conscious about the intensely fractured nature of its project.

Jameson demonstrates this when he writes that the impetus behind his delving into history is “an overpowering sense of something having been rescued arbitrarily, at the instant before its predestined oblivion” (4). To rescue the story of his father, he must make the silent “rotting fused mound of carefully ordered paper and memory trinkets” (4) speak, so that the reader may discover what these relics hold. That is, he must enact a process of memory-making, picking and choosing from among the keys, a large percentage of which precede his existence, to unlock the processes of memory.

He remarks that, once this box of decaying artefacts is opened, it “could not be resealed” (45). His drive to “find out” the meaning of the box’s contents overpowers him, yet at the same time he experiences a reluctance to do so that distinguishes his narrative from the others analysed here, where experience is relived for the reader as if springing anew from the protagonist's consciousness. By contrast, Jameson’s references to “being able to eavesdrop on my parents” (45) stage a certain aporia experienced in this act of transcending history. He feels “something goulish and abnormal” about what he is doing, wondering if he ought to “be fiddling with bones in this way” and “whether this fitting together of fragments was recreating real people, or a fiction of [his] own” (45). Yet, though he worries that his efforts may do a disservice to the dead, he is compelled, through the act of writing, to create a space in which to re-collect his father: he becomes obsessed with “the reconstruction of the story” (45) of his father's life. Here, Johnson evokes Derrida's proposal that “speaking is impossible,

but so too would be silence or absence or a refusal to share one's silence" (*Mourning* 72). In order to do this, of course, Sam Jameson must divest his father of the defining act of death with which the latter's memory is marked.

The manner in which Sam Jameson performs this "digging and raking in graves" (46), or what he describes as a "journey"(47), invokes Maurice Blanchot's reading of the Orpheus myth as an allegory for the writer's task. Acted upon by the impulse to connect with the dead, Sam *must* write (45-46). He is drawn into pursuing the "shade", the obscured and unknowable image of his father, via the numerous "scrapbooks, yellowed newspaper cuttings ... speeches, stories written in another age" (46). His relatives are "skeptical – even alarmed" (46) at his obsession. His wife worries that the project may cause him to "disappear entirely" (46), though Sam's episodic bouts of depression are "not nearly as catastrophic" as his father's (280). He feels that he knows enough "to complete the journey" (46) and bring a close to the family secret that haunts him.

Johnson chooses autobiography as a vehicle for this project when he allows George Jameson to 'narrate his own story', through Sam's reading of George's journals. George, it emerges, is a South African of English descent, who grows up in Zululand during the early period of white settlement in the region. George's Zululand, with its "carpet of hills and plateaus rolled out from the foothills of the great mountain chain of the Drakensberg" (50), evinces the description that opens Alan Paton's *Cry the Beloved Country*. This evocation is important, in that it establishes a particular view of the land as being pure and unsullied, and sets the narrative stage for the interruptions that will follow. As the story progresses, the land is described as being "a place that got into the blood and the brain and wouldn't get out again" (50), with Johnson again evoking the ways in which earlier white writers sought to include themselves in the land (see Coetzee *White Writing* 176). In a passage that recalls Doris Lessing's "The Old Chief Mshlanga" (49-50), the young George Jameson looks upon

the land with its mythical landscapes – the scenes of “tragic and romantic” battles between English and Zulu – and is drawn to accept the land as his own. This, even while the narratorial voice acknowledges that “[i]mpermanence was in the blood of white settlers; it was the knowledge that the place they loved used to belong to someone else” (51).

There is a dated nature to this depiction, even though Johnson is ironically evoking the depiction of untouched rural landscapes created by Paton and other liberal Anglophone writers. That is, the various areas Jameson presents are not idyllic: the promise of Edenic life is denied by the reality of a proto-Apartheid South Africa that does not conform to the settler’s desired co-ordination of man and the land. Rather, the environment is pastoral in the author’s depiction, suggesting that hardship is an essential part of true communion with the land of South Africa. Thus we see George Jameson being thankful, even amidst the terrible environment of Tsumeb, that he is allowed to do as he wants, without the destructive intervention of the national authorities. He sees a certain beauty even in the aesthetic ugliness of the landscape, and a certain honour in doing his job to the best of his abilities. The reader senses that the Commissioner is chasing after something lost, which is, of course, the very nature of nostalgia, assuming its full meaning when the real ceases to exist (Baudrillard 171). Johnson shows in this way that the meaning of nostalgia has changed “because ... home ... can ... no longer evoke the 'remembrance of things past' it once did” (Davis 120). What home *does* invoke for George Jameson is a sense of an inner peace that is slowly and steadily interrupted by the vicissitudes of the political situation. These interruptions of an idyllic life draw attention to the ways in which the Jameson's life is itself part of a greater interruption of the existence of the original, autochthonous inhabitants of the geographical space he now inhabits.

In showing the reader the complexity of the relationship between white settler and the land to which he becomes attached, Johnson reprises an idea that has featured on the critical

landscape since the 1970s (in Nadine Gordimer's *The Conservationist*, for example), namely the fraught nature of that relationship. When the young Jameson writes of his father's ethnic hybridity, he is not simply acting out a trope that can be traced back through the South African culture of letters, from Laurens Van der Post (21) to Rian Malan (whose trekker ancestor, upon entering Africa, is "transformed as all white men who went there are transformed" [21]). Rather, he is evoking notions of "leaving and staying" which are distinctly tied to processes of establishing belonging (Nuttall "Subjectivities" 124). This fixation with establishing oneself as belonging to the land marks Johnson's novel: George Jameson must depict the landscape as one that welcomes him, or else his position in that landscape becomes questionable. But he is aware that there is an element of illegitimacy at the foundations of his history as a white inhabitant of South Africa. One thus encounters George wishing ruefully that his own people "had never come uninvited to the black people's land in the first place. Or that someone had warned [him] not to love Africa and told him it could be dangerous to do so" (24).

Thus the crisis of conscience that George faces is of wanting to belong but feeling ill-at-ease with the crimes committed in his name. The zenith of this crisis comes at the moment of silence around which the novel is performed, in which the Commissioner commits suicide as an act of principle. This act marks him as belonging to the nation: unable to accept the duties demanded of him by the Afrikaners he reports to, he shoots himself in a final gesture of alignment with the 'Natives' he has been tasked with serving. The Commissioner's crisis of conscience is occasioned by the realization that the land and culture he feels so great a love for do not accept him, but regard him as foreign and as having no jurisdiction over them (104). But even this moment has a prominent precursor: Johnson evokes concerns raised by Coetzee in his "Jerusalem Prize Acceptance Speech", namely that "Fraternity ineluctably comes in a package with liberty and equality" (*Doubling* 97).

It is also clear that Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (a novel Johnson describes as having had “a profound influence” on him – “Ten Quick Questions” [1]) has influenced his depiction of the Commissioner. The latter and Coetzee’s Magistrate are both ‘men of conscience’ who attempt to serve their district amidst the incursion of a hostile ruling force to which they owe their allegiance; both men possess a great interest in the culture of the “Other” (the Barbarians in Coetzee's novel, the Africans in Johnson's); and both men enact gestures of expiation that are horrifying to witness. The young Jameson even imagines his father as “a magistrate” who is killed “while heroically trying to save a woman” (234), just as Coetzee’s protagonist sacrifices his career to save the Barbarian girl.

Why should Johnson's novel display such a filial relationship towards older South African works of literature? It is as though he adopts (Coetzee character) Elizabeth Costello’s assertion that, “by exploring the power of the past to produce the present, the novel suggests how we may explore the potential of the present to produce the future” (*Elizabeth Costello* 39). It is also perhaps indicative of the novel's concern with bearing tragedy. How does one live on, having borne witness to tragedy? Here, Johnson's redemptive impulse becomes clearer in its intentions. Sam Jameson does not seek to simply write about what no longer exists, but instead to write on what *can* no longer exist. The distinction is clear: the box of yellowed papers and diary entries are not left to tell their own story. Instead, Jameson interrupts his reading of the entries to bring one to the realization that what he is reading (and the narrative in which the reader is immersed) is something that exists as artefact now. It cannot be relived, or made to ‘speak again’ in order to tell some other truth about the past than what it presents to the reader in its yellowed, aging form. Yet, at the same time, the disaster – of which the yellowed documents are the only record – is the genesis of the narrative. That is, George's suicide de-scribes his story, bringing to an end his diary entries.

These entries are italicized, and replete with temporal gaps and missing sequences of event that drive home the idea that what one is reading is incomplete. It is into this silence that the Commissioner's son's narrative enters. Here one witnesses the difficulty of situating a personal disaster within any sort of time-frame: it always exceeds the date on which it occurs. This is because "memory offers a metaphorical approach to fact; it simultaneously represents fact whilst attempting to understand the fact it represents" (Banner 10). In other words, Sam Jameson's attempts to piece together a picture of his unknown father are in danger of occluding by their act of representation, replacing George the man with his actions, his movements and his words. The fragmentary nature of George Jameson's entries, bracketed by his wife's words as well as those of his son, are all tinged with the mental breakdown that culminates in George's suicide. George's own narration at the beginning of the novel is that of a broken consciousness, and thus cannot reveal a coherent picture of the man himself. Instead, George is frequently an observer rather than a participant in the events, particularly during the part of the novel where he is in the sanatorium (9-25).

Jameson is thus faced with a difficult task: it may be outside of the imagination's power to "invest, fix and represent" (Parry 419) that which has been lost, but the awareness of that loss demands representation. The source of his narrative is a marker whose referent has been transformed into absence by a single event. This means that for the recovery he seeks to occur, his uncovering must unearth the source of the silencing trauma. Yet he cannot simply replace the silence left by his father with the latter's diarized recollections. The text is thus infused with lacunae that impact on the reader's perceived sense of narrative cohesion.

The narrative, however, succeeds by imputing loss to the words and actions within which it is framed. Loss is constantly inscribed via the ways in which the narrative addresses its primary character in the second person, and in the ways it is broken up into sections titled *Just Before Then, Long Before Then, Before Then, Then*, and finally *After Then* – with 'Then'

being the paramount event. Each section establishes a teleological link to the central tragedy, staging a process of repair that is of necessity disordered in nature. These hiatuses halt the progression of related events, frustrating the reader's attempts to seek coherence from the narrative pieces by crafting them into one more or less cohesive whole from which an 'answer' to the narrative 'question' – of what lies behind the tragedy of George's suicide – may be gleaned.

Thus, *The Native Commissioner* offers no suggestions as to how one might go about 'fixing' the present. Instead, it delves into issues of how to accept the past as somehow both ruined and intact. The relationship between George's fragmented world and the voice that attempts to give witness to that fragmentation (Sam's) is richer as a result of Sam's acceptance of this. That Johnson resists a tidy narrative resolution is significant in the context of his project. The novel ceases to be simply a single representation of a prior historical event, and thus does not require a conclusion that is accountable to the grand historical narrative of Apartheid.

George's position is crucial to this. Rather than being an authority over his own narrative, he is displaced – acting out a personal narrative according to what Sam uncovers. There is enough in the way of internal consciousness in the diary entries to give the reader an understanding of his thoughts and motives up to a point, but one's sense is that George's increasing awareness of his whiteness is the catalyst to the narrative. As a result, *The Native Commissioner* is a work that interrogates the drive to “overcome too great awareness of self” (206), a drive that manifests in other novels where the past occurs in the text as though it is happening anew – with no interpretation on the part of the protagonist/author. In *The Native Commissioner*, much of the narrative is supplied through figural and omniscient narration, and the novel thus complicates questions about legitimacy of belonging, in the present moment, for those who are marked by their whiteness. It asks if that belonging is irretrievably

sullied by the history of oppression and dispossession that precedes the present. In answering this question, Johnson is not seeking to simply rehearse questions of belonging from an anxiety-laden present. Rather, he proceeds from the premise that the condition of illegitimacy (of not quite belonging) is an unavoidable consequence of being self-conscious of the power that operates in the name of whiteness. How is one to live on, after bearing witness to this fact? For the Commissioner, to be 'conscious' is to be simultaneously a part of and alienated from one's caste by possession of self-awareness/conscience. He constantly seeks to prevent his mind "from going to those dark places where it should not go" (23). But his awareness is largely incompatible with the narcotized state of belonging to white society, which results in the "bang" (135) that severs him from this society and confines him to the sanatorium where he is removed from sight to recover, or made one of the invisible in a society where such consciousness is a liability.

Johnson's treatment of mental illness in the novel is thus a clear comment on the society in which George Jameson resides: what sort of society is it in which a man of conscience must repress himself in order to exist, must shut himself off from what he knows to be right? George is placed by the power dynamic of his society, a society which gives him privilege and cripples him at the same time. His 'malady' is one of a consciousness struggling against what is expected of a man in his position. Forced to convalesce in the sanatorium, he feels as though he is disappointing his family. Mindful of his wife's struggle to run the household on her own, he resolves to rehabilitate himself. This, of course, does not happen: George's fragile psyche cannot recover, and he commits suicide.

Sam re-emerges from his digging, and is able to reflect on how his father's life has shadowed his own. He concludes that his family's unwillingness to talk about what happened to George constitutes "a very un-African response ... to true trauma" (278). He reflects on the story he has pieced together:

whether I have told it just as it happened – whether, in that sense, it is true – I do not know. It is my version, anyway, and if nothing else, I now know more about myself and how I came to be here. (278)

He subsequently muses: “I have ... had a lot more luck in my life, than [George] did in his” (280), but it is evident that there remains much more to be told of the country’s history than he has managed. Reprising the last lines of Coetzee’s autobiographical novel *Boyhood* (“And if he does not remember them, who will?”(166) – the lines which Johnson quotes as his epigraph) – Sam Jameson pledges to tell the other stories that remain untold, including his own. The novel ends on an ambivalent note, as he wonders whether his efforts will assist his children in understanding their own lives and identities, or whether it will “just make things more complicated” (280). His uncertainty signals to the perceived risk involved in rendering visible that which has been suppressed for so long: the dilemma of self-hood (in the specific context of racial identity), being fraught with the concerns of the future, resists closure.

3.2. John Van De Ruit’s *Spud: The Madness Continues*

A similar concern with the risks of in/visibility is found in John Van de Ruit's *Spud* series. The memoir is that of a young English South African attempting to come to terms with his hybridity, this time at the crucial moment of suspense during the early nineties. Van de Ruit's first-person narrator constructs his world through a series of diary entries, in which it is revealed that John 'Spud' Milton's white skin, “which should be a passport to belonging” (Nuttall “Subjectivities” 123), is not enough to mark him as belonging 'authentically' to white English South Africa.

The issue, for Milton, is that he is possessed of a self-awareness that leads him to question, up to a point, the absurdities that constitute life in Apartheid South Africa. But this questioning self, and the political awareness it generates, is alienating for Milton, in a school

where cultural conformity and blasé commonsensical assumptions about the character of the Other (whether that Other is Afrikaans or Black) are the rule rather than the exception. Milton is thus compelled to lead a double existence, with his political classes, friendship with Luthuli and his diary-writing having to be hidden from his general community, in which his parents' and schoolmates' political inactivity takes the form of a hostility towards the strangeness of the Other. Milton has to undertake “a play of visibility and invisibility” (Nuttall “Subjectivities” 125), masking self-awareness in the same manner as Johnson's Commissioner, but with less vigilance and more ambiguity than the Native Commissioner possesses.

What is also more evident in *Spud* is the process of what Sarah Nuttall terms “watching” (“Subjectivities” 120). That is, the reader gains a sense of John Milton's identity by watching him as he looks at his world. Through his diary entries the reader is encouraged to read Milton against a world that is glimpsed through his looking on or observing. In this act of looking on, Milton himself and his motives are subject to a process of concealment. What one reads in *Spud*, then, is what Milton chooses to let one read, what he sees fit to encode in his diary. While this is a given for any work of autobiography, the use of the journal as a cipher in the *Spud* series creates the impression of an even more restrictive prism. Further, the notion of “watching” in the novels is tied to issues of concealment: Milton worries that his diaries may be discovered by his friends or his teachers, who will then be party to Milton's singularity, a singularity he conceals from them while it is shown to the reader. The illusion of conformity must be maintained if he is to escape being labelled as a pariah. For Milton to maintain this illusion, he must conceal his ‘watching’ and make himself invisible to his society. The reading act, however, simultaneously marks him as apart from it to the reader.

During the course of the novel, Van de Ruit's own subject-position is rendered opaque – that is, one often finds oneself questioning where exactly the author resides in his works. One

is often unsure to what extent one should suspend one's critical interrogation of work presented in a manner that suggests the author has suspended interrogation of his protagonist's attitudes and opinions. What Van de Ruit himself believes the ideological position of his fictional construct to be is never distinctly articulated, and thus becomes mired in the overwhelming mass of 'Boy's Own'-styled self-narration and melodramatic schoolboy adventure. However, perhaps the author's own transient familiarity with, and endorsement of, middle-class South African boarding-school education may account for his inability to probe thoroughly into the ways in which the politics of English whiteness have effects in a divided country on the cusp of democracy.

This same transient familiarity may also explain why Van de Ruit's novel has struck such a cord with South African readers. The novel projects a past in which the very lives and lifestyles of middle-class white South Africans are rendered in a mode of nostalgic reminiscence for schooldays past, focusing on teenage angst, rather than being seen as dependent on the violence and degradation which these same middle-class people either ignore or fight against. The ways in which *Spud* highlights whiteness are notable, in that they remark on the problematic of 'race' in the most superficial of ways, before returning to the more endearing schoolboy memories. Thus, the level on which the novel relates its political message is subsumed by the nostalgia evoked by the prompts of tyrannical schoolmasters, practical jokes and camaraderie. These prompts tie *Spud* to previous texts, encouraging a reading that privileges the schoolboy nostalgia element over the historical narrative, such that the latter becomes merely a background against which Spud Milton acts out his teen angst.

3.3 Troy Blacklaws's *Karoo Boy* and *Blood Orange*

In Troy Blacklaws's two novels, *Karoo Boy* (2004) and *Blood Orange* (2005), there are similar concerns with isolation and concealment. Both have politically disaffected white English-speaking white South African males at their centre. Both reprise the trope of

politically impotent English South Africans and the cruelty of Afrikaners as a function of the latter's positions of power. Both use journey motifs to illustrate issues of belonging and affiliation to South Africa. Their similarities of style and content are such that it is possible to read the novels as companion pieces.

This in itself is interesting: how and why has Blacklaws written two distinct narratives that read so similarly? It is not only that the two texts have the development of a white male as the focal points of their narratives. Both protagonists confront their whiteness in various ways, their stories reflecting the damaged white psyche that resulted from Apartheid. Their representations of whiteness are similar in form, both narratives illustrating the fraught experience of being caught in the culture of whiteness, when that culture ceases to be hospitable to the subject. The two narratives, however, differ slightly in content: the crux of *Karoo Boy* is the unfreedom of the English white South African, whereas in *Blood Orange* it is the psychological damage caused by the militarization of white South Africa that the author represents. Where is the impression of sameness rooted, then? Aside from the obvious answer that both narratives stem from the same author, might their commonality not lie in the sense of white misfortune that accompanies both texts? As will be demonstrated in the arguments below, the central tenet of both works is that the tragedy of the time period was its effect on the individual (white) conscience, an effect which fractures ties of belonging and leaves both protagonists confused and alienated.

Karoo Boy begins with personal tragedy in the form of the death of Douglas' brother in a freak accident, and the destructive impact this incident has on the Thomas family. The father, a writer of liberal persuasions, commits suicide, and Douglas and his mother decide to move from the hospitable 'English' Cape to the inhospitable 'Afrikaans' Karoo. Douglas' mother, an artist, needs somewhere more 'African' to inspire her, and she believes that "Muizenberg is too European" (51). The implication is that 'English' South Africa is not authentically

African enough for claims of belonging to be staked upon it. The family must thus seek out a more 'rugged' South Africa that can affirm their status as white Africans.

They come to the town of Klipdorp, whose name reflects the unyieldingly rugged nature of the landscape and its (white) Afrikaans inhabitants. In this ruggedly authentic Karoo, Douglas encounters the archetypal sadistic Afrikaner male. In Blacklaws's Karoo, all Afrikaner males are practitioners of stereotypical white Afrikaner masculinity: the boys play rugby and torment Douglas using various dead animals (57, 64), in scenes that evoke Coetzee's *Boyhood*. Douglas' teachers, meanwhile, either brutalize students with canes, or attempt to instil National Party doctrine (74). In Blacklaws's depiction, there is no room for the possibility of a compassionate Afrikaner, and there is no attempt to read Afrikaners as anything other than "unaccountably terrible people" (Ndebele 46) whose ritualistic brutality is somehow at the core of being 'Afrikaner'. In this territory, peopled with Afrikaner ogres, Douglas is an outsider: his 'roots' lie elsewhere, we are made to assume. Such an assumption, however, brings into question the precise nature of this crisis of belonging. Douglas, as a white South African, is politically and socially empowered. Yet here in the Karoo, his entitlement with regards to the environment he occupies is diluted because of a sense of cultural displacement.

Faced with the alienating experience of being English in a hostile context, Douglas forms a friendship with Moses, a black petrol attendant who is marooned (and thus does not 'belong' either) due to the actions of a pair of white boys (again, cruel Afrikaners) who attempt to kill him and steal his pass (79). Douglas feels a closeness to Moses that is only disrupted by the intrusion of other whites (100, 105, 138), and which functions as a surrogate for a landscape that never accepts him. Yet the reader is not asked to interrogate what lies behind Moses' predicament: one is instead encouraged to see him as being fellows with Douglas in a shared sense of displacement. They plan a trip that evinces Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* and, as

in Twain's novel, there is the disturbing suggestion that Moses is quite helpless without the guidance and tutelage of the young white boy. As a character, he himself appears unimportant, except insofar as he contributes to the central theme of white male self-realization.

Blacklaws lucidly depicts Moses as being rendered without identity in his own land, his life little more than a game of sport for the white Afrikaner thugs (137-138) who view themselves as the only true inhabitants of the area. When Moses attempts to reclaim his identity he is beaten in a gesture that demonstrates how he has been positioned as a non-person (138). Here, the author suggests that the source of the thugs' actions is the intertext of racial violence that dominates the history of South Africa.

Against these events, one suspects that *Blacklaws* means to elicit some sort of sympathy for Douglas and, by inevitable extension, the well-meaning but deluded liberal white South African. The writer suggests, through the subtle alignment of Moses and Douglas, that the two share an experience of displacement and dispossession. Yet *Blacklaws* presents belonging and exclusion as though they are neutral facts in space and time, when in fact it is precisely these elements that determine Moses' lack of freedom.

There is, in the representation of this relationship, something of Toni Morrison's idea that Americans (in Morrison's example) "choose to talk about themselves through and within a sometimes allegorical, sometimes metaphorical, but always choked representation of an Africanist presence" (17). *Blacklaws* depicts Moses via metaphors that tie him to the land (78) or represent him in animalistic ways (138). When black people are revealed as being human (in moments of suffering), Douglas is alienated from them: he refers to how he is "not up to disentangling the words"(158) they speak. The sense is that the language of the Black world Douglas ventures into is one that is closed off from him by virtue of his being

white. That is, where Black characters appear, they do so in peripheral and supportive performances in order to affirm or deny Douglas' assertions concerning his belonging (139).

Why should this be so? It could be argued that, in order for Douglas to come to an understanding of himself, he should return to the Cape, scene of the traumas he must come to terms with. Blacklaws's Karoo constitutes a place of social exile, which Douglas must leave if he is to discover himself. If he is to do so, he cannot forge ties to this part of the world: the desert exceeds the capacity to adapt and embrace, unless one becomes as cruel as the landscape. Echoing Antjie Krog's assertion that the desert landscape "does not let itself be told" (251), Douglas must return to the Cape in order to 'read' its landscape and discover his place in the world.

If belonging is a means through which to affirm the self, the author suggests that Douglas must struggle to possess his space. In the Karoo, Douglas can be abused and treated poorly because it is a space that, being pre-formed, proceeds to possess him. But in the Cape, Douglas can claim what is his, and give shape to it. Again, the motifs employed in the construction of Blacklaws's narrative are not new. Nor are they distinct from those employed by earlier South African authors writing in English. Moreover, the novel shares with *Spud* a definite *nostalgie de la bou* which suggests that claims of belonging and affiliation with the land can only be staked when the landscape is uncontested in the processes of personal memory.

Blacklaws' second novel, *Blood Orange*, also has as its lead protagonist a young middle class English white male. Like *Karoo Boy*, it has as its initial setting an 'English' part of the country, in this case Natal. The introductory scene has a similarly idyllic rendition of the landscape to Johnson's novel. The narrator, Gecko, describes Natal as:

The land of the Zulus. Hills dotted with cows and clay huts run from the Drakensberg down to the sea, where bananas. Pawpaws and palms tangle on the sand and sharks glide in the deep. (1)

What follows are details of a pleasant life on the family's farm, where the 'Zulu' nanny and cook look upon Gecko and his brother Zane as "white Zulus" (1). The family listens to the BBC news, watches American movies, and generally seems to be quite happy on their farm in generically pastoral Africa. The historical details – the Beatles (3), man landing on the moon (4) – tell the reader that this is sixties South Africa. Initially there is little sign of the political disturbances that are sweeping the country, though, at one point, Gecko hears his grandfather describe how crocodiles slow their heart-beat down in the winter, and wonders "if Nelson Mandela has slowed his heart-beat down to survive jail" (31).

The episodic nature of Gecko's reminiscences means that the reader is witness to his growing, yet muddled, political awareness. He relates fragments of what he hears from the outside world: Mandela and the ANC appear first as terrorists described in negative ways by fear-mongering policemen (41) and teachers (49). Gecko relates how his teacher speaks of supporting the ANC as though it is a perversion, the inevitable result of a degenerate childhood (49). At one point, his teacher remarks that "Mandela and his Cuban friends in Angola want to hijack this beautiful country" (49), and she goes on to state that "the godless Russians give them the tanks and aeroplanes. If it wasn't for our boys on the border, the evil men would burn this school, rape your mother and your sisters" (49). This statement at first appears almost parodic in its utterance: it neatly sums up every rhetorical grounding-point of the ideology underpinning the notion of Black Peril, from communism to rape and general destruction by angry and unruly Black men.²

What is interesting is that the compliant manner in which Gecko receives this information suggests that he is politically unaware. His silence intimates that he is simply a passive recipient of the information he receives. Later, though, Gecko is exposed to dissenting views, through the precise and graphic revelations of his friend Lars:

After being fucked around by the SB, the secret police, they chucked him half-dead in the back of a van and drove him from Port Elizabeth to Pretoria over dirt roads. The police said Biko starved himself to death, of his own free will. Bastards. Truth is, he died of a bleeding brain. (89)

And, even though Gecko finds it “hard to believe such a thing can happen in South Africa, my country” (89), the image is decidedly more ‘real’ than the information his teachers have fed him. He begins to question the status quo, which draws negative and often brutal responses from his teachers and fellow pupils (100-101).

As with *Karoo Boy*, what is problematic about these responses is that they are all from the Afrikaans characters in the story. The retinue of cruel teachers and slow-witted Afrikaans boys (who are defined by their hulking masculine physicality) approximates that of the characters in *Karoo Boy*. These individuals have somehow not managed to transcend their social conditioning, as Gecko suggests *he* has managed to do. As a result, Gecko is seen as a traitor to his people, a “kaffirboetie” (104), and brutalized as a result. Similarly to *Karoo Boy*, no attempt is made to contextualize the behaviour of these cruel Afrikaners. They are simply automatons of the social systems put in place to ensure their white superiority and entitlement.

The problem is exacerbated by the absence of retrospective analysis in the text. Gecko’s narration is all in the present tense. As with *Spud*, we see his world through what Gecko reveals to us with his snapshot depictions of life: the effect constructs events as being somehow causeless. One could argue that Blacklaws’s technique is meant to evoke the ways in which white people of Gecko’s generation were the unwitting recipients of the ideology of racial and cultural superiority. However, the author’s strategy here is problematically oversimplistic. In Gecko’s world, the tormentors always take the shape of boorish Afrikaners in positions of authority. The cruelty of Maljan is visited upon Gecko because Maljan is older.³ The sadistic corporal punishment meted out by Visoog Vorster and Mr Bosman has almost

limitless jurisdiction – one may be caned for improprieties committed outside the school premises (98). And, when Gecko receives his military call-up, the Afrikaans drill-instructor makes him train until he collapses (154).

In each of these cases, what is emphasized and drawn out is the physical suffering that Gecko experiences. The effect is interesting less for the graphic nature of the abuse than for the ways in which Gecko is presented as transcending this physicality. He presents the memories of his beatings in real time, but the narration suggests that he is observing events as they take place from a detached perspective. He is disaffected by this unfathomable, all-powerful cruelty which he is unable to resist. The point seems to be that white males, the English ones at least, are without authority themselves. They are, in the model Blacklaws sets up, merely passive participants, aware of their culpability in the system but considerably less guilty than their actively evil Afrikaans counterparts.

For Gecko, as for Douglas, it is Englishness that is both a means of stability and a source of alienation. At his school, the teachers Mister Sands and Mister Slater (113-115) seem to be oases of sanity amidst the horrors of Afrikaans masculinity. Both are ‘pukka English’, conspicuously so in the case of Mister Slater, who wears a panama hat and drives a Ford Zephyr (114). There is a problem, however: Mister Sands is rumoured to be homosexual (106), which deters Gecko from establishing ties with him. Meanwhile, Gecko longs to be recognized by Mister Slater, but the latter consistently praises the academically brilliant English compositions of Slimjan, an Afrikaans speaker.⁴ He is thus forced to remain isolated from these teachers.

Even the other characters in the novel that assist Gecko seem to be almost conspicuously English/foreign, as if Blacklaws highlights these elements of their personality in order to distance them from the spectre of Afrikaner inhumanity. Bach, “the German boy who lives down the road” (52), is Gecko’s protector for a while, but then he is expelled by Visoog

Vorster for being subversive (98). Lars, Gecko's other friend, is Danish. He later disappears to evade conscription. When Gecko travels to Grahamstown for the festival, he feels a sense of release, describing it as a "snug, curled-up English hedgehog in the African veld" (130).⁵ That freedom is fleeting, for he has to leave this place of refuge. And when he meets the girl he loves, Zelda, she too is Danish, and a visitor to South Africa who leaves because her father is a diplomat.

It gradually begins to dawn on Gecko that he must leave South Africa, in order to find himself. Yet, as he makes steps to do so, he is reassured by Jomo, the Black man who helps him evade a roadblock, that he "will not escape Africa. It is in your bones and your blood" (168). This comment is significant because, throughout the novel, it is the Black supporting characters who stress Gecko's belonging. These characters seem to play a limited, instrumental role, appearing only to confirm Gecko's ties to the country. Having been reduced to a fugitive in his own country by the Afrikaners who dominate, the words are some consolation that he is not without origin.

Yet the portrayal of Gecko's struggle to belong is more sophisticated than Douglas's in the earlier novel. Gecko is constantly aware of his temporality, forever contemplating 'ways to die in the Cape'. While both novels raise similar concerns around their problematic treatment of Black characters, Gecko seems to be more introspective than Douglas. His last feeling, as he leaves South Africa, is guilt "for leaving behind faceless and furtive encounters with black Africans" (172). He is aware that he has lived most of his life with "white eyes averted" (172) from the suffering of Black South Africa. But if his solution is escape, then he does so with the knowledge that he has some sense of belonging, albeit a complicated one, to the country. Unlike *Karoo Boy*, however, there is no gesture towards resolution based on a return to the land. Instead, the novel ends not with Gecko himself, but with the image of "a flapping scarecrow of a man", who:

walks the long road from Paarl to Franschoek. All day long he walks, guiding a Firestone tyre with two criss-crossed poles. As he walks, he mutters rumours of blood. It is hard to tell if the raggedy man is coloured, or white gone dark under the sun. Maybe the day will come when no one bothers if he is one or the other. (205)

The message is clear: if reconciliation is to occur, it will happen when phenotype is no longer a necessary consideration for establishing belonging.

3.4 Tim Ecott's *Stealing Water*

The impulse to tie oneself to Africa through one's memories resurfaces in Tim Ecott's *Stealing Water* (2008). Subtitled "A Secret Life in a South African City", the novel is endorsed by Richard E. Grant, purveyor of his own autobiographical narrative of English life in Southern Africa.⁶ Ecott's treatment of Africa is decidedly sparse: aside from confining himself to remarks about his feeling a sense of belonging to South Africa, the majority of the memoir actually takes place in Ireland. It could be argued that Ecott is attempting to represent a marginalized section of the white South African population, namely those settlers from the United Kingdom who were not well-off or culturally privileged. Alternatively, Ecott's South Africa may, in keeping with the idea of contesting grand historical narratives, be an imagined one where belonging does not exist in a simple dichotomy with leaving (Nuttall "Subjectivities" 124).

Yet when Ecott does remark on his sense of belonging, he does so by evoking the familiar trope of the landscape that imprints itself on the white body: for him "the highveldt [sic] thunderstorms are as comforting as a heartbeat" (299). In his descriptions of Africa there is a topographical emptiness that once again implies a vacant landscape that is mirrored by the complete absence of Black characters from Ecott's narrative. Further, in his descriptions of the arid Highveld, Ecott (like Johnson) evokes the earlier settler accounts described by Coetzee (*White Writing* 41). That is, he presents a landscape which is symbolically empty,

and in doing so legitimates his claim to belonging. The crucial advance over the earlier settler accounts Coetzee describes is that Ecott adapts this arid landscape to suit his purposes: rather than being an inhospitable landscape, it is a site of beauty, a space which can now be domesticated in a gesture of ownership by the English settler who has always held an antagonistic view of this 'unmanageable' land. The final image of this for Ecott lies in the rose bushes (with their suggestion of cultivated gentility) his father plants "in the middle of the open grass" (299). In what may be described as "an act of arrogation, an assertion of implicit overlordship" (Naipaul 147-148), Ecott elides Black people from his vision of South Africa, choosing instead to populate it with those who will not challenge white South Africa for ownership and access to what it claims as its own.

3.5 Conclusion

Invisibility, the invisibility of whiteness, is at the very heart of the acts of life-writing I have discussed in this chapter. To some degree this is unavoidable, because first-person narration invariably involves replacing one form of seeing (one that is direct) with another (one that is mediated). The author's voice is ventriloquized by his protagonist. Ultimately, the actual position from which the narrative being presented to the reader is articulated is never visible, certainly in the works of Van de Ruit and Blacklaws. This is because it exists only in a tenuous state of multiple identities: as marks on a page, as indicators of the contours of consciousness. These contours manifest in the works of Van de Ruit and Blacklaws only where the reader is pointed to them: the whiteness of the narrator only appears when a point is being made about that part of the narrator's identity. Thus when Blacklaws's Douglas is not with Moses, the reader is not made aware of his whiteness. Worse, where the narrator *does* become aware of his whiteness, the recognition that occurs in this moment is one that he is blind to. George Jameson is shocked when the trial accused do not see him as he sees

himself; Van de Ruit's protagonist feels himself to be distant from the casually racist boys in his dormitory. In each of these texts, when the moment of realization occurs, it is necessary that the protagonist be separated from the self he sees. He must be removed from himself so that he is able to be both the one who sees and the one who is seen. The space between, however, remains obstinately invisible. Remaining invisible, the gap becomes a space of blindness occupied by the writer. He may draw attention to his presence 'there', as Johnson does in his narrative. Yet that self which is presented 'there' is other to him. The distinction is noticed by the reader as an uncanny sense of the author's implication in what he pens. That is, one sees an image that is both shared and shaped by the author, while the author's true self, central to this inquiry, is rendered as an absent presence.

How these authors grapple with this absent presence determines the conclusion of their narratives. Of the texts analysed above, only Johnson's novel takes absence and converts it into loss, thus suggesting the possibility of reconstitution. Van de Ruit abdicates authority altogether by breaking up the *Spud* narratives into a series (the third having just been published at the time of writing this thesis), while Blacklaws ends *Blood Orange* with no clear indication that Gecko's traumas and various experiences will be 'resolved'. Indeed, all the novels shy away from satiating the longing for resolution expressed by their protagonists. Here, the deferral of the present referred to earlier in this chapter becomes significant: the uncertainty of the position of whiteness is apprehended and memorialized, which reflects a sense of unease with the notion that identities are subject to displacement.

It can be seen from the preceding discussion that, for contemporary white writers, writing is still not an innocent project, but one that is deeply implicated in the political project of asserting belonging, and thus legitimacy, in the contemporary moment. Why is this so? It could be argued that, by inscribing themselves so singularly onto the landscape, white South Africans have written themselves out of the society. For English South African writers, in

particular, the problem is exacerbated by their self-positioning. As Nuttall argues, “to be white in the texts concerned is to carry a past and a language that is on trial” (“Subjectivities” 258). That trial is the accusation of English complicity with Afrikaner rule, an accusation encapsulated in Mike Kirkwood's challenging of ‘Butlerism’: that is, the 'bad faith' in which English writers in South Africa re-imagined the role of the English as “mediators” (Attwell 30-31) or “traffickers in ideas, and in the arts, transmitters and popularizers of ideas and new ways of feeling” (Attwell 30). In order to escape guilt, one's writing must reflect that one is an individuated self. Thus the autobiographies analysed here all have at their centre the separation of an initial self from the later narrating self (Nuttall “Subjectivities” 129).

Moreover, they all envision their protagonists as being somehow set apart from those around them. The political dimension risks being subsumed into the existentialism created by self-narration. The quandary here is that the character must be positioned as an individual, yet this attempt to posit/create individuality is complicated by white English writers' seeming inability to “write the landscapes out of their system” (Breytenbach *Birds* 108), where landscape may also denote the history of the writing self that has gone before. To attempt to write without reference to the physical and historical landscape is to posit oneself as being without belonging, and in turn to bring the credentials on which one's exercise rests into question. The solution advanced in the examples analysed above, is to write in reference to the self, but to encode these references according to prior works that are accepted in the South African literary canon.

This strategy, whether purposely employed or not, is exhibited by all the texts analysed, these texts being a fairly representative sample of the genre. A possible reason for this, if one is to be found, is that, while history is constituted via discourse and is by its nature a collective discourse, it is perhaps easier to establish one's claims of belonging if that claim is made utilizing conventions drawn from the culture of writing in South Africa. If these

conventions, a Barthesian “tissue of quotations” (1468), have a currency it is because they appeal to the security of the collective past, even if that collective past is a fiction. Thus, the images of casually brutal Afrikaners, of interactions into which ‘race’ (whether in the form of racism or as ‘multi-racialism’) intrudes only occasionally, and other stock tropes are seeded into history and re-confirmed in memories via the medium of autobiography, which transforms individual fiction into the fiction of the nation. The problem here is that this literature continues to articulate itself via surface symbols, rather than deconstructing those symbols themselves in an attempt to get to the heart of the various protagonist’s individual experiences.

If read in the context of the above argument, the fact that each of these novels ends on a similarly ambiguous note becomes especially significant. ‘This is where I am’, each narrator declares in the closing pages. The journeys of understanding the past undertaken by Johnson, Blacklaws, and Ecott, in particular, are products of a present longing: all the reader is left with is the solitary white male, announcing his arrival in the near-present. What does the future hold for the English white male South African, supposedly stripped down to his individuality by the act of autobiography, but still within the fold of his whiteness?

If these texts lose their literary way, it is because the very silencing of the narrative by the use of the suspended ending, with its appropriation of control over time, subverts the force these authors are attempting to convey. Johnson's novel, for example, achieves a striking repudiation of whiteness in the silencing gesture George Jameson commits. But then, as if unsure of the ability of this gesture to speak for itself, Johnson brings back Sam Jameson to provide an irrefutably authoritative close to the novel. Each work, in its own way, deploys the authority of its author to invoke the “transcendental signified” (Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 19) or full stop/period. In their own way, each author seeks to end that which cannot be ended, or that which is always continuing. These efforts cannot but fail, even as they resort to

laying hold of the recent past as culminating points. This failure is a precise result of that which lends these works their power, namely the fictionality that exposes the discursive freeplay of history and its narratives.

A character in Coetzee's novel *Foe* remarks, on the process of writing, that:

The trick I have learned is to plant a sign or marker in the ground where I stand, so that in my future wanderings I shall have something to return to, and not get worse lost than I am. Having planted it, I press on; the more often I come back to the mark... the more certainly I know I am lost, yet the more I am heartened too, to have found my way back. (135-136)

This idea goes to the core of the process being analysed here: to write the self is to engage in a complex process of fabrication/fiction entered into discourse as fact. It is a process that ties itself to time periods by its very nature. Yet it must avoid the future, if it is to have any claim of reality (and thus truth), because the future, residing in the mind, has no reality. If the autobiography is to be a credible expression of belonging, it must lay hold of that which is in some sense tangible, namely the past. In doing so, the writers discussed here find themselves enmeshed in “the issues of violence, guilt and responsibility” that characterize “those 'liberal-minded' whites who were not racist but had stood by while the crime of apartheid was perpetrated, not wishing to risk losing their privileged place in that society” (Kossew 162) – whether they mean to engage with those issues or not. To escape, they (and other contemporary writers) double back to the ground where Coetzee and other authors have stood, because there are recognizable markers there. This in itself is not necessarily a bad thing, for the ultimate goal of the autobiographical enterprise is surely “to get to the truth of oneself by going back over the ground of the past” (Coetzee *Stranger Shores* 300). Whether that truth can ever actually be revealed, however, is a subject that is undoubtedly deserving of analytical engagement.

NOTES

¹ This in itself is not new: in the ‘transitional period’ that began in the 1990s, the mode took hold as various writers (one thinks here of Mark Behr, Rian Malan, and others) sought to read the nation through the filters of personal identity. They pursued new, more personal, more fraught registers of meaning, aligning themselves with the call (voiced by critics such as Njabulo Ndebele and Albie Sachs) for more nuanced articulations.

² See Melissa Steyn’s preface to *Whiteness just isn’t what it used to be*. She speaks of “the belief that black rule could never come to our country – an event that popular discourse held would inevitably bring disaster” (xii).

³ The bully’s name is emblematic, suggesting that what is mad is not just Jan himself, but the system that actively encourages and promotes the crude masculinity he exhibits.

⁴ In a scene that recalls a similar bafflement on the part of the protagonist of Coetzee’s *Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life*, Gecko cannot fathom why he, “the rooinek whose grandpa went to Oxford”, is consistently bested by “this boer boy with an uncanny flair for writing” (115).

⁵ One is prompted to ask if Gecko, by this stage quite politically conscious, is simply choosing to ignore the fact that Grahamstown is where Steve Biko was arrested.

⁶ Grant’s account of his life, *Wah-Wah* (2005), takes the form of a film, rather than a book, however.

CHAPTER 4: WRITING ANXIETY: SOME DIRECTIONS IN THE CONTEMPORARY SOUTH

AFRICAN NOVEL

In the previous chapters I have argued that contemporary South African authors have invariably failed to write out of the boxes created for them by their literary forbearers. The problem seems to be how to articulate a vision of the past that resonates with a reader who, as the close textual analyses in the previous chapters show, is invariably situated within the discourse of whiteness. Autobiographical and periautographical narratives seek to establish a relationship between the acts of reading and writing, a shared ownership of the narrative if not of the experience itself. In order to enable this relationship, however, the writer must seed her narrative with symbols that generate a limited set of meanings in the mind of the reader.

To make this point is to argue that the reader has an important dialogical function in the event that constitutes the text. This is because autographical acts are not only such because a writer has encoded her text as life-writing: the constitution of a text as autographical is also the result of an act of reading. At the point of convergence between reading and writing lies the text itself, a work completed in the synthesis between these two acts. It is thus necessary

to examine the nature of reading, as far as is possible. In conducting such an examination, one must bear in mind that one can never fully know every form of meaning produced in the reader's response to the writing: the positions adopted by the reader are varied and differ depending on time and space. However, a way forward may be to examine the transactional economy that constitutes the dialogical space in which the text functions.

Accepting the infinite iterability of language, and the notion that to participate in the dialogue of writing-reading is to engage in a signifying economy that is transactional, how might one discern the currency within which these transactions occur? In this chapter, I show that the pathologies of the city-space are so established that those novels which are successful are invariably those which render the relationship between subject and space fraught. That relationship, I argue, is often problematic, reinscribing the very oppositions the writer may be trying to circumvent. It is thus necessary, in reading the novels I have selected, to draw attention to the discontinuities, contradictions, and biases that manifest themselves in these texts. As a result, this chapter does not constitute a singularly close reading of the selected texts: instead, I conduct a situational reading of these texts that draws attention to their participation in wider socio-historical relations. In what follows, I highlight the importance of methods of reading in approaching the texts and what they have to say about the current moment. I attempt to de-familiarize and problematise the more commonsensical readings of South Africa enacted in and through these novels.

Essential to my argument in this chapter are three notions which have worked through South African literature for many years. They manifest in the novels I analyse in different but overlapping ways. I use these notions to develop a set of arguments which, taken together, will demonstrate the complexity and uncertainty of these new modes of writing. In so doing, I demonstrate the need to “dislodge or supersede the tropes and analytical foci which quickly harden into conventions of how we read the ‘now’” (Nuttall *Entanglement* 12).

The first of these is the notion of anxiety. Anxiety can be linked in important ways to these novels, for the times in which they are written give rise to a form of literature that is at times uneasy about its formulations. While a sense of anxiety has often existed in South African literature, it appears here not simply as a malady that requires ‘solving’, but as a viable mode of being in a world that is constantly shifting. The texts examined here in different ways acknowledge that “uncertainty and turbulence, instability and unpredictability, and rapid, chronic, and multidirectional shifts are the social forms taken, in many instances, by daily experience” (Mbembe and Nuttall 349). This can best be seen in Timothy Keegan’s *My Life with the Duvals*. At other points, the works are written in response to conditions that generate a degree of anxiety in particular sectors of South African society: as a result, they carry the mark of this anxiety in their very fabric. The works of Kgebetli Moele and Kopano Matlwa exemplify this trend: anxiety can be traced in these novels as an impulse that may overpower expression, or it may be appropriated and used in creative and subversive ways.

From the skein of this idea, I draw the notion of displacement. Displacement refers, in a general sense, to the sense of disorientation and/or alienation aroused in the contravention of an established or existing epistemology. Mary Douglas proposes that “ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience” (4), a description which resonates with the novels of Ian Martin and Kopano Matlwa examined below, where I argue for an understanding of alienation/displacement as a fundamental part of the experience of the present. This ‘displacement’ is a persuasive metaphor in interrogating (in order to get beyond) the reduction of contemporary South African life to the pathological and the abnormal.

The third and final notion, centering on the idea of the metatext, is an important component of this chapter. It relies on the recognition that the text is a discursive event in which the

writer addresses a potential reader. In this literary economy, formed by addressers and addressees, particular phrases and frames of meaning may act as gateways to other, exclusive meanings. The writer encodes the meaning she attempts to convey by way of certain conventions of meaning. The reader, rather than being simply a transparent recipient of the narrative, is expected to be familiar with the conventions being utilized. It could thus be argued that this type of self-aware writing always bears traces of the community into which it enters, because the particular codes with which the metatext is created have their origins in the society into which the work enters. That is, the writer draws the metatextual references from the wider society.

4.1 Timothy Keegan's *My Life with the Duvals*

Timothy Keegan's *My Life with the Duvals* is a novel which openly displays its use of metatextual references, as though daring the reader to identify them. The title of the novel appears to divulge its contents unambiguously: this will be a first-person account of the narrator's life with the Duvals. The novel is nominally the story of Edward, a conservative and socially moribund young white South African, who inherits a considerable sum of money from his guardian while he is listlessly studying at Oxford. It is here that Edward encounters the twin sisters, Milla and Gladys, who see in Edward an opportunity to realize the hedonistic lives they crave. They introduce him to Rex Duval,¹ an enigmatic young scholar who – having completed his MA in English Literature – is without employment. The four become firm friends, with Gladys and Milla marrying Edward and Rex respectively. The English trio accompany Edward back to South Africa, where they stay, largely at his expense, at his stately home in Cape Town. Rex takes up a post in the department of English at UCT, and it is his job there that provides much of the narrative focus for the story. Edward narrates the events of the novel retrospectively, detailing the lives the foursome lead from the sixties up

until the present, which is frozen at the moment of Rex and Gladys's funeral ceremonies. The first chapter begins at the wake which follows, where one witnesses the mourners, "backbiting freeloaders all, having themselves a merry old party in memory of a man whom they'd despised when he was alive and were unlikely to miss now that he was dead" (8). They finally depart, leaving Edward to tidy up the final affairs of the group. With the foursome broken up, he is quite without direction: the present is frozen, the future uncertain. All that remains is to return to the past. Used to being the one whose role "was to listen and to follow" (9), Edward finds himself tasked with guiding the reader through this past.

Edward constantly doubles back and forth in his reminiscences, interrupting them in a way that removes the illusion that the narrative is anything more than recollection. He describes his first meeting with Rex as an exciting event whose importance he would only realize later (11). Rex himself is, according to Edward, "one of those solid, reliable Englishmen with no qualms about his place in the world" (11). Edward returns to the novel's present to remark that "when I think of him now I still think of how he looked when I first met him, when he was in his prime, when the world was full of possibilities and nothing seemed to cloud our horizons" (11). The stage is set, then, for a meditation on the lives of these four characters, one that will see the attack of history on Rex (primarily) and what he stands for, as anxiety replaces the apolitical confidence with which he moves about the world.

The basic narrative structure of the novel appears to be drawn from F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. This is surely no accident, as the reader requires a fairly adequate knowledge of Fitzgerald's novel to detect the intertextual references in Keegan's narrative. Moreover, the plot of the latter requires one to contrast the superficial interpretation of Fitzgerald's work as an earnest novel replete with 'transcendent feeling', with its reality as a story of upper-middle-class white men and womyn at play in the jazz age in the United States. The irony contained in this contrast is what lies at the heart of *My Life with the*

Duvals. The novel, however, adheres incompletely to *The Great Gatsby* and the latter's concern with the liberties of the upper and middle classes. Keegan remakes the scaffolding of Fitzgerald's work: Edward plays Nick Carraway to Rex's Jay Gatsby, but it is Edward who has the money, in this version. The academic elites of UCT are the 'West Egg set' of Keegan's novel, but here it is *they* who slavishly follow the latest trends, whereas Rex is a throwback to an older time. In Keegan's text, Edward constantly defends Rex's knowledge of literature and the arts, whereas Nick is sceptical of Gatsby's claim to being an Oxford man. *My Life with the Duvals* coyly admits its recycling: the party scene in chapter 3 of *The Great Gatsby* is reprised several times; and there is also a conspicuously placed double-entendre – in which Edward recounts the circumstances under which Rex finds himself being blackmailed by a female student – which uses similar wordplay to the scene in *The Great Gatsby* where the guests speculate on the activities of their enigmatic host (45). These incidents gesture strongly towards the intertextuality of Keegan's narrative.

What gives *My Life with the Duvals* a satirical edge are Edward's constant asides to the reader. He is continuously aware that he is the "custodian of all this" (36), by which he means the story that waits to be told. However, as the novel progresses, he is shown to be an inadequate custodian of this story. Edward's attitudes are structured like well-used clichés, the irony being that it is precisely when he addresses the reader in conspiratorial intimacy that we recognize these attitudes for the anachronisms they are. He invites the reader to scoff at the politicized attitudes of the UCT academics who oppose Rex for being a chauvinist and politically disengaged, but the tone he uses is rendered faintly absurd by his own anachronistic and apolitical ideas. The absurdity grows throughout the novel, to the point where Edward cannot be read as anything other than a parody of the conservative white English South African male.

In the case of Keegan's novel, this parody deliberately calls for the reader's attention. Edward's narrative is pedantic, even though he himself claims to be unconcerned with finer details and distinctions (38). But, while the parody seems to offer itself up for analysis, it finally reveals nothing. The author plants within his work intertextual clues which cannot be resolved, frustrating attempts to do so via close reading. That is, the allusions to *The Great Gatsby* prove themselves to have as little place in the world of Keegan's novel as would a romanticized reading of Fitzgerald's work. But they are placed where they are in order that the reader may notice them, and use them as a guide to reading the novel. *The Great Gatsby* ends with the murder of Jay Gatsby: this information may rest in the back of the reader's mind as she awaits the resolution continually promised by Edward, who claims that his narrative will clear up the mystery presented by the deaths of Rex and Gladys in the first chapter.

One may question, given this intricate appropriation of plot details, when intertextual references fall within the reader's ambit and when they are simply exhibitions of the writer's literary acumen. After all, words exist within a history of uses and resonances which form networks of meaning. Reading *My Life with the Duvals* brings into question the significance afforded to the literary echo. These echoes are useful to understanding the parody the author is attempting to convey, but they also mark the novel in ways that might work against its longevity. This is because the text is also infused with parodic allusions to moments in the recent history of South African academia. The following extract demonstrates this point:

I forget when Yusuf Vesey made his appearance in our lives. He was from Jamaica originally, an expert in West African literature, and he was one of the people the university recruited in order to demonstrate their commitment to all that was new about the new South Africa. They gave him a professorship in the English department and a mandate to shake things up. To suggest that he didn't fit in with the old crowd would be to understate the truth. It was common knowledge amongst them that he didn't like white people and had a gigantic chip on his shoulder. From the start, he complained that the whole place was too colonial, too pale, that it was run as if Africa didn't exist. The 'Yusuf' bit he made up himself. He was born Clarence Ike

Eisenhower Vesey but decided to become a Muslim during a few years spent in New York. He arrived in Cape Town from a stint in Nigeria with the highest credentials and a reputation as a slayer of holy cows – a small, intense, humourless man with wire-rimmed glasses. From day one he built up something of a following amongst the masses by declaiming from every soapbox on campus against imperialism, Zionism and the rest of the litany. He was full of theories about Western civilisation having its roots in Black Africa, and annoyed level-headed people by giving lunchtime lectures on his beliefs.

Rex and Yusuf got on each other's nerves from the start. Rex didn't help matters by insisting on calling him Clarence, which infuriated him. Clarence responded by calling Rex 'Professor Duval', as if any camaraderie with such as Rex was beneath him. They clashed on the most elemental matters of what was to be taught and how it was to be taught. It was clear they couldn't co-exist in the same department, and most of their colleagues, even those who tacitly supported Rex, assumed that he had met his match. Rex thought otherwise. He was certain Clarence wouldn't stay long. As far as he was concerned, the man was an impostor and a fraud, and he was convinced that it would be easy enough to prick his bubble by a close scrutiny of his curriculum vitae.

I had heard much about Yusuf Vesey before I came across him in person. Milla and Gladys liked now and then to drag me along to those wretched extramural lectures, and when they learnt that Professor Vesey was talking on something or other they decided they had to see him for themselves. I don't remember much about it, but I do recall he did go on a bit about colonialists, and made some comment to the effect that only in Cape Town could you come across an all-white audience in this day and age. I did notice that the people around us were getting a bit agitated, and one or two walked out. At the end an elderly lady stood up and asked him where exactly he came from, because he seemed very out of touch with the best scholarly opinion on the subject, or words to that effect. Another gentleman said he'd lived in this city for over eighty years and knew a troublemaker when he saw one.

Well, you can imagine the fun that broke out next, with Professor Vesey getting more and more sarcastic and a few people in the audience getting pretty hot under the collar. I do remember one or two taking umbrage at his assertion that Conrad and some others he mentioned were racists. I knew that Conrad was close to Rex's heart, and was alarmed at the man's vehemence on the point. (241-242)

In this extract, the question is whether the reader stops at drawing the link between Vesey and Ronald Suresh Roberts, the academic who gained notoriety in the early part of this decade, or traces the recent history of race-relations at UCT back to the 'Mamdani affair' in 1998.² This is not simply a parody of Roberts, or the white liberal response to Mahmood Mamdani (and, indeed, to Roberts): neither of these allusions is definitive. The author is, however, appropriating the reader's response to all these tell-tale metatextual references. The reader is made accomplice to the parody, in that it is the reader's awareness of this

metatextual analogy that allows the parody to function. Yet these traces of the social world in which the work was forged become problematic if the text is encountered by a reader unfamiliar with the specific historical context which is being parodied. For such a reader, encountering so many densely layered references, some or all of which might not be easily recoverable when removed from their immediate historical moment, the parody might be blunted slightly. However, this caveat can be tempered: while the author's evocation of the surface details of contemporary events in South Africa is precise enough to trigger recognition, based on what one has read before, those details are not allowed to dominate to any great extent. They are grafted onto the fictional world of the novel for the purposes of advancing the intricacy of the plot. The technique is a simulated attention to historical detail on the part of the author, one which the reader may grasp even without prior access to what is being satirized.

In this way, *My Life with the Duvals* encodes in itself its own critique, a self-conscious questioning of the values of white identities in South Africa. Yet, as Keegan does so, he seems almost anxiously aware that the reading public has moved past the searing social critiques of Nadine Gordimer and J.M. Coetzee. He realizes that it expects different and more intimate literature from its white writers. But the personalized and intimate literary work, with its nostalgia-fused narrative of one man's banal recollections, is appropriated here for its style rather than its content. It is as though Keegan recognizes the clichéd nature of the trope and then deploys it anyway. His writing attempts to forge a new path for the novel by changing how we look at such narratives, troubling the reader by creating a narrative which is a pastiche of itself. In other words, it parodies novels in which one reads "what sounds like a common experience of old certainties gone, of little left to wonder at in a rapidly-changing landscape" (Attridge 100).

For this reason, all the narratorial asides and the genteel and somewhat anachronistic manner in which Edward addresses the reader are misleading. Keegan ensures that the irony does not go unnoticed: Edward's pronouncements on matters are so excessively naïve that he cannot *but* be seen as a parody of the politically unaware white English South African. Take the following extract as an example:

I should point out here that all the political nonsense came later. Politics seemed a silly diversion to us. We never talked about it much, it didn't seem our concern. But in case there is any doubt, I should assure you that we never had any truck with the Nats or their apartheid policies. Live and let live was always our motto. Let sleeping dogs lie. We paid a price for those people and their obsessions. Thank God they're gone now, that's all I can say. (12)

This aside to the reader from Edward comes early on in the second chapter. In this extract, Keegan uses Edward to parody those white South Africans who claimed, after 1994, to have been opposed to the National Party and apartheid. Edward's response could be a composite description rendered from a guidebook on white South African responses to Apartheid.³ Such evasiveness continues over the course of the novel, where Edward asks constantly for our indulgence in the face of incontrovertible evidence to the contrary, and constitutes a deliberate provocation to the reader to view him as an ignorant and anachronistic white South African. However, I would argue that, in fact, the constant motivation to read Edward this way is misleading. While Edward initially seems to have been created as an ironic foil for the author himself, allowing us to read Keegan's views as diverging from Edward's, an overall summation of the author's voice is elusive. If he is sometimes worryingly naïve, Edward is also the author's champion against the hypocrisy of white South Africa, a character who, though he is ignorant, does not go out of his way to pretend that he is anything other than a conservative white South African. He serves as a critic of the profligate literati who surround him, even if his criticism is undercut by his own ostensibly uncritical attitudes. The narrative is told from Edward's point of view, but in such a way that what he says is always

undermined by the author's suggestion that events are not as Edward describes them. In essence, the reader is always invited to check the latter's pronouncements against history.

Such a process reveals Edward to be an unreliable narrator.⁴ This would seem to be the obvious diagnosis, upon encountering his particular manner of narration, for Edward utters frequent and blatant reminders of his unreliability. The suggestion running throughout the novel is that he is suppressing erotic/romantic feelings for Rex, which interfere with his judgement of the latter. It would perhaps be more appropriate to call Edward an improbable narrator, in the sense that he constantly escapes definition.⁵ This appears to be an anomaly in a text that attempts to be revelatory in so many aspects. The fact that Edward is a conspicuously unreliable narrator, but one who is difficult to explain, seems to highlight the idea that a concern with reliable narration has no place in a novel of this type. He is meant to sound warning signals in the mind of the reader: one wonders how someone who spends his life observing Rex, Milla and Gladys cannot but notice that they abuse him in a particularly mercenary manner. Yet Edward fails to see (or chooses not to see) behaviour that the reader easily discerns. The more Edward shrugs off the obvious signs that the foundations of his life with the trio are a lie, the less believable he becomes for the reader. It is precisely this reaction, however, which the author seeks to provoke and problematise.

What is present here is what Zadie Smith, in another context, terms an "authenticity fetish" (3), enshrined in the values of the writing-reading process. This fetish allows the reader "the nostalgic pleasure of returning to a narrative time when symbols were full of meaning" (3). In this regard, Edward is nominally meant to function as an exponent of what Leon De Kock describes as "South Africa's greatest literary genre", revelatory life-writing (*Leaving* 1). That is, he is positioned so as to narrate the story of the tragically flawed Rex, creating a biographical record. Edward observes Rex's destruction, a destruction which occurs through the latter's own particular brand of hubris. Edward's conservative nature marks him as being

out of place, but also out of time. He is, as he constantly telling us, chasing the ghost of the past in his attempt to reconstruct what has happened. This motif seems to suggest a similar belatedness in the novel style Keegan is parodying. Thus, the elegiac tone with which Edward constructs his memories of Rex is revealed to be a farce, as the long-standing affair between Rex and Gladys indicates.

The sense that *something has happened*, or that time has passed, is highlighted via the isolation of a single event (the death of Rex and Gladys), against which the rest of the narrative is arranged. Indeed, the novel's main rhetorical mode is prolepsis. But the illusion created by this literary device is destroyed in the reading of the novel. The *Gatsby* parallels tease the reader, but ultimately reveal nothing. Rex dies, but his death is depicted so obliquely as to appear irrelevant. Gladys barely warrants a mention, despite Edward's repeated assertions of his fondness for her. Of their deaths, Edward remarks that "it does not matter, really" (268). The reader may not believe him, unsure whether Edward is responsible for the murder of Rex and Gladys or not – or even whether this is a question that ought to be asked. The novel refuses to divulge, and refuses to present itself as a moral lesson. Ultimately, to understand the novel, one has to understand that it is striving to escape the overdetermination of white South African identities in literature.

This, paradoxically, may be the undoing of the attempt to 'get beyond' that I assign to the novel. The parody in the novel is self-referential to the extent that it defeats itself: it is a South African novel which calls the idea of the South African novel – with its focus on pathologies and belonging – into question. It is neither a novel 'about' Edward (a minor figure of the sort whose personal history is supposed to be revealed by the autobiographical impulse), nor the 'great' Rex Duval. Instead, its renderings of well-worn motifs from the literary imaginary create a new textual history. That textual history embodies within itself both its status as fiction, and its fraught relationship with 'grand history'. The various layers

which form the novel are in a constant struggle with the metatextual information, which attaches to the novel the very historical authenticity it is trying to avoid. The novel's 'defeat' does not escape textuality, however, being one that recalls the high romantic failure found in *The Great Gatsby*.

But to say this is also to point out that a new type of literature emerges, or attempts to emerge, from this failure. There is a tacit contract according to which one read novels like *My Life with the Duvals*. It requires the reader to accept that such novels play themselves out in constant fidelity to history. Keegan's novel rewrites the terms of that contract. It plays a game with the reader in which one is never entirely certain what the novel is until the final chapter: at times it is a memoir, at times a murder mystery. Keegan works meticulously through the tropes carried by white writing (innovation, experimentation), and then takes them apart. In doing so, he presents the possibility, unrealizable though it may be, of a literature that is allegorical only of itself. To read *My Life with the Duvals*, then, is to be confronted with the possibility of a radical syncretism – a literature which marries its diverse and often contradictory fragments together.

4.2 Ian Martin's *Pop-Splat!*

Ian Martin's *Pop-Splat!* attempts a similar kind of literary game to that played by Tim Keegan. The imperative shaping this novel seems to be the idea that, because contemporary South Africa has 'gone wrong' (in ways that defy qualification or definition), older forms of literature are unsustainable. What we see in *Pop-Splat!* is an uninflected and mordant caricature of South African society. At the most elementary level, the novel is about the prosaic vulgarities of life in a violent society. The first chapter opens with a desultory profile of Bruce Dreyer. He is a white mining magnate who drives "a grand saloon" (1), and is obsessed with his safety and security, so as not to end up "another dumb-fucker statistic" (2). One evening, he drives off to meet his brother, and is murdered in circumstances that are

initially unclear. We witness the discovery of his body at the side of the road, “not three kilometres from his Houghton home” (3). The suspicion is that his murder is a hijacking of the sort that the novel suggests is typical of the random violence proliferating in South Africa at present. The scene draws from the South African contemporary imaginary, being reminiscent of the murder of Brett Kebble. The reader is then told that Dreyer’s young, blonde ‘trophy wife’ is missing, but it is not long before her body is discovered by a gardener:

A swarm of blowflies was hard at work. After two and a half days in the hot African sun she had lost her chief attribute, her figure. Distended with gas, she had become a bloated, middle-aged matron. And her lovely pale skin was ruined forever, having turned a blotchy grey and brown and black. It made her blond hair look white. As the primary biodegraders in the decomposition process, the blowflies were taking their job seriously and continued to lay their eggs, by the thousands. The first larvae had already hatched and were greedily consuming Barbara’s nutritious flesh. One of the policemen went back to the car to radio for the detectives. The blowflies were concentrated about the orifices. Mouth, ears and eyes, anus and vagina – these were the normal points of entry. Also, after having been repeatedly raped, she had been both stabbed and shot, thus providing additional access points for the industrious insects. (5)

What exactly the author means by constructing this malodorous scene is not initially spelt out. It once again draws on the crime-fed South African imaginary: the discovery by the gardener and the location call to mind the murder of Leigh Matthews in 2004. Here, the corpse represents *white* beauty transformed into the unclean – the body is defiled even as it degrades into the landscape. The details are paraded with little regard for literary subtlety, and one is aware that Martin is making a concerted effort to produce a feeling of revulsion in the reader. In effect, the novel is invoking the pathological as a means of escaping the repressive mores of literary good taste. However, the result of its efforts is an aestheticization of violence through the deploying of an effect, drawn from the repertoire of crime fiction and film, in order to create the impression that the novel is transgressing boundaries and barriers. The distinction is critical: the use of the abject does not signify that the author is invoking the

repulsive as a means of resistance to the hegemonic influence of “taste” and literary aesthetics. Rather, the abject is excess made to appear ordinary, a technique which artificially inspires and furthers the feelings of revulsion and intimacy that the excess brings about. In other words, the author attempts to objectify the abject as a propulsive force for the novel.

How *Pop-Splat!* harnesses the reader’s feeling of revulsion is important. The novel is positioned on the boundaries of South African literary culture, because its approach to the nation is completely antithetical to, for example, the other novels in this study. Rather than being primarily concerned with subjectivity, it attempts to relegate subjective experience to the margins. The novel promotes exteriority as a means of evading the anxieties and uncertainties of subjectivity. *Pop-Splat!*’s focus on vulgar exteriority evokes Julia Kristeva’s theorizing on how transgressive acts are read in terms of pollution and as threats to the ‘cleanliness’ of society (*Powers of Horror* 4). In essence, it invokes violence in order to better speak to the truth of the violent city experience.

If there is a problem with this strategy, it is that the unrelenting vulgarity lends a static air to the novel: it is the sole marker of the story, rather than a means to new avenues of expression. Once it becomes clear that the story will be concerned with the last months in the life of Matt Dreyer (Bruce’s son), the novel’s desultory ‘structure’ – its attempt to plot a world in which there is no order – begins to falter. The introduction of Matt as the novel’s focalizer gives the novel a direction that seems at odds with its concept. Consequently, it becomes steadily less engaging as it proceeds, relying on outbursts of violence, interspersed with lackadaisical descriptions of the various environments in which the protagonist finds himself, to sustain the trajectory of the novel. The renderings of Constantia and Grahamstown, for instance, are a mechanically rendered backdrop to the action, there simply for the purpose of establishing authenticity.

What is narrated, from the point of the double-murders onwards, is Matt's struggle against subjectivity as he attempts to solve the mystery of his father's murder. There is some difficulty in this struggle, since the novel is acting quite deliberately against the traditional notion of the *grand récit* or 'privileged viewpoint'. Matt is enthralled by the violence that marks the city: he moves within its contours and according to its patterns. This blind immersion in the violent physicality of the city requires the author to deploy an omniscient narrator who observes Matt with unblinking concentration. The latter's psychological complexity as a character is pared down to the essentials, yet the novel cannot detail the extent of Matt's depravity without eschewing its aura of exteriority. Thus, at times, the narrator slips into puzzlingly vivid descriptions which seem out of place, given the emphasis on avoiding subjectivity.⁶ He engages in the pursuit of self-gratification for the duration of his truncated life, with the novel showing him drifting about in various drug-fuelled hazes in order to impart the full degeneracy of the world he inhabits. Matt is withdrawn from this world, at times completely hostile to it. As the novel progresses, he discovers that he has an almost limitless capacity for violence. Witness, for instance, the scene from which the novel derives its onomatopoeic title:

The little thing was desperately trying to stay on its mother's back, its arms about her neck. Matt grabbed its tail and yanked it off, and it instinctively sank its needle teeth into his thumb. More pain and damage to his person! He punched its head away with his left fist and hurled the little devil against the cabin wall. Again he had it by the tail, swung it up high overhead and brought it down like cracking a whip, head first onto the concrete step. POP-SPLAT!

This scene demonstrates the novel's representation of a society in which violence fragments interiority and limits the possibilities available to those within that society. The animal 'instinctively' bites Matt, and with an equal show of 'instinct', he kills it. The random nature of this violence is indicative of a more general condition of violence afflicting society.

Effectively, the scene demonstrates how nothing is left untouched by this violence – everything is crushed by the cruelty of exteriority that dominates the novel. The novel proposes that the cruelty towards animals displayed here is part of a resistance to being organized into any closed hermeneutic systems. The ‘taboo’ against animal cruelty is deployed only to be broken. The monkey exists only to be killed.

It follows that Matt is an extension of this principle, since he is not meant to be a mirror against whose individuality the reader can discern the nation’s mosaic nature. He has no positive traits to counterbalance his selfish and self-destructive self. Instead, he is unashamedly a conduit for metaphors, rather than a fully-realized character. Martin achieves this via a process of literary borrowing. Where Tim Keegan alludes to *The Great Gatsby* in his novel, Martin’s tale is structurally and thematically modelled on Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. More crucially, while *Pop-Splat!* is superficially a contemporary rendering of *Hamlet*, it extracts from that work only the parts it considers important. Thus, much emphasis is placed on the monadic exclusion of Hamlet. The implications of this intertextual allusion, displayed and even mocked at various times, are lucid: Shakespeare’s eponymous hero is translated into an effective rationale for the alienated position of Martin’s protagonist. Here, I find it useful to employ the formulations of Margreta de Grazia, who proposes that the underlying premise of *Hamlet* is that:

at his father’s death, just at the point when an only son in a patrilineal system stands to inherit, Hamlet is dispossessed – and, as far as the court is concerned, legitimately. The promise of the patronymic is broken: Prince Hamlet does not become King Hamlet; Hamlet II does not step into the place of Hamlet I. The kingdom does not pass to the (adult and capable) only son of the dead king. (1)

This description finds allegorical purchase in relation to the storyline of *Pop-Splat!*. There is an undercurrent of racial antipathy running through the novel, which tempts the reader to ask whether the promise of the patronymic alluded to above carries over to Martin’s novel. In

place of Hamlet's monarchic dispossession, we are given Matt's ostensible disenfranchisement from society. The wealth and power that are due to Matt, by virtue of his being a white male, are prevented from becoming his. Displaced by the new order, Matt articulates a discourse of white male disenfranchisement by being alienated from the world as a result of socio-political and economic change. The struggle of Hamlet, as Martin perceives it, is a metonym for the white male's sense of dislocation in the current historical moment in South Africa.

He is alienated, not because he does not engage with the world, or because he differs in his actions from those around him, but rather because the author endows him with a certain perspective which seems to dovetail with "a wider white discourse of disillusionment" (Conway 396). He is alienated from modernity but, within the space of the novel, this position is transformed from a Gramscian morbid symptom into a tragic space that apes the original Hamlet's position. The latter's dislocation is one the reader is meant to relate to Matt – they are both (ostensibly) the victims of tragic circumstance. The author revises, replays, and reinvents the Shakespearean story, restaging it in a simulated contemporary South Africa.

The suggestion here is that, in the perverse present, there is similitude of intent in the narratives of Hamlet and Matt. In a contemporary society in which violence has become so commonplace as to lose its status as aberrant, the novel proposes that excess is necessary to make that violence visible once more. The novel's present is one where the revolting no longer revolts, and where literature does not recoil from the reality of violence, but gazes upon it openly. Of course, Martin's novel cannot follow *Hamlet* too rigidly, because to do so would imply the presence of some form of order, an order that would be entirely out of keeping with the conceptual basis of the novel. As a result, there is little interest in the motives for the murders that take place in the first chapter. Neither is it a book about the development of the main character, since Matt dies without having achieved any personal

growth. What is important in terms of the novel's theme is antinomian excess, and the spectacle of excess as a repudiation of traditional South African literary values.

Those traditional literary values require new sites of entry into the contemporary moment. Thus, in *Pop-Splat!* one finds that the life-story of the novel's protagonist is not as important as the way it is rendered, because unsublatable exteriority has displaced interiority. The unremittingly graphic details are placed in the novel to promote writing as a space for the amoral: the book is a rejection of the anxiety-ridden introspective narratives that populated the South African culture of letters during the twentieth century. Instead, what is cultivated is a sense of the fragmented nature of the country. There is little depth to any of the characters who populate the novel, since they are incomplete analogues for their Shakespearean counterparts. The importance of noting this is that *Pop-Splat!* seeks to generate a very particular meaning in the minds of its readers, who are meant to read it against their own world, in effect authoring the novel by granting it that meaning which the author seeks to prioritize. The creativity, Martin's novel suggests, lies with the reader, and not with the author.

This amounts to a complicated form of audience control on the part of the author. That is, the reader is manipulated into a position where she must realize the novel's conclusions. The reader, then, is imposed upon to project her own meanings onto the text, on the basis of the evidence given. The distinction between the spectacle of the novel, on the one hand, and the reader who witnesses that spectacle, on the other, is abolished. The reader becomes a necessary participant in the novel. Yet there is a degree of incompatibility between the image of the reader the novel attempts to advance, and the likely reality of that reading position. Certainly, *Pop-Splat!* may be read as a *roman à clef*, fashioned so as to expose some apposite truths about the South Africa it represents: it presents itself as though it is giving voice to the times in which it exists. But for such a reading to be sustainable, the reader must have an

unselfconscious sense of the society in which she lives. From such a perspective, one can then readily conceive of the violent details of the novella as a comment on the aberrant violence that ostensibly afflicts South Africa at present.

An alternative reading of the novel might be less charitable than the first. Here, one might propose that what the novel takes for fact can be challenged or called into question. After all, the problems of crime and corruption which are parodied in the narrative are not uniquely South African when extrapolated from their particular effect on the characters of *Pop-Splat!*. To say this is to argue that reading *Pop-Splat!* requires one to read against notions of South African exceptionalism. The novel presages its audience, and then appropriates that audience's predicted sympathetic response as its own attitude. In other words, it exploits the attitudes of those white South Africans who see themselves as victims or heirs of a 'legacy' they did nothing to create, without questioning the legitimacy of that view. The present-time of the novel presupposes an older South Africa in which crime and corruption were not serious problems.

How can this be, one is led to ask, when that South Africa was built on criminality? Under the aegis of whiteness, individuals like Bruce Dreyer amassed the wealth they now use to protect themselves from the degenerate society which the novel reflects. One is inclined to be suspicious of the manner in which the novel's anxiety about the present conceals an unarticulated but implied and reinvented recent past against which the present pessimism is articulated. The novel is presented as though its graphic nature is an antidote to the censored nature of modern society, as though it is relaying previously suppressed truths. Again, this is problematized if one asks why, in the contemporary moment, the novel's definition of violence is still so narrow that it is only concerned with acts of criminal violence visited upon white bodies? The novel seeks, through its symbolic universe, to evoke nostalgia for a past that never was, in such a way that it shapes the pessimism of a phantasmatic future that exists

only in the anxiety-ridden imaginary of what Melissa Steyn calls “White Talk” (“White Talk” 120). It is necessary, then, to interrogate how works like *Pop-Splat!* naturalize and universalize meanings that are actually socially constructed and situated within the ambit of ‘White Talk’, a discourse which dwells on “crime and violence, corruption, dropping standards, affirmative action, and Africans’ ingratitude” (Steyn “White Talk” 131). Martin’s novel seems to be glossing a view of South Africa in which whiteness as a position of victimhood is valorised, when it should in fact be problematised and/or dissembled.

Ultimately, a hermeneutic reading of *Pop-Splat!* is futile, since Martin attempts to strip the novel of its accountability to history. The novel is articulated as though it has no literary forbearers: the pathologized white body is presented as though in a new literary form, but the pathological has been a scopic component of South African literature for many years. For evidence of this, one need only witness the various depictions of corporeality in the writings of Wicomb (2000) and Antjie Krog (2002), amongst other recent writings. In addition, the work of theorists like Judith Butler, whose *Bodies That Matter* (1993) is a critical intervention against the privileged status of the body in cultural texts, renders much of what gives *Pop-Splat!* its ‘shock-effect’ belatedly sensationalist. The author’s politics are hard to reduce to any coherent form: a general scepticism at the state of South African society is clear. The fact that Martin does not seek to unpack the problems his novel represents undoes any case for its being considered a transgressive form of literature. Instead, it reifies the dysphoric elements of ‘White Talk’, rather than providing new trajectories for examining social violence in South Africa.

4.3 Kgebetli Moele’s *Room 207*

If *Pop-Splat!* is compromised by its decontextualized attempt to map the violence of the social encounter, Kgebetli Moele’s *Room 207* seems to tread a more familiar literary path.

Yet it is equally concerned with moving away from the restrictions imposed by South African literary tradition. In a novel which charts the passage through the contemporary metropolis by a group of young black individuals, Moele's characters assert the right to decide their own lives, *sans* history. As the narrator intones, their individual histories are provisional, as is the history of the spaces they occupy. For the occupants of Room 207 (Noko, Matome, Molamo, Zulu-boy, Modishi and D'nice), the past does not exist except as a succession of present mental states. Or rather, if the past exists, it does so only through the Post-Apartheid present. The autobiographical form here creates a vehicle in which the contest between the narrator's views and the 'realities' of history are experienced in the city-space.

This is because Moele exploits the expectation that, in South Africa, such novels ought to redress what was missing from the nation's historical narrative, namely the (hi)stories of individuals. *Room 207* thus appears to respond to the imperative to write into the 'gap' left by the omission of these personal narratives. However, as with *Bitter Fruit*, (the novel by Achmat Dangor which I analysed in Chapter Two), Moele's novel complicates the notion of simply responding to this call for personal narratives.

In this regard, *Room 207* self-reflexively engages with the processes and *raison-d'être* of the autobiographical process. Noko, the narrator of the novel, documents his own story and those of the other characters who occupy the room, detailing their struggles and trials in Hillbrow and the surrounding city. In doing so, he engages with the 'Jim-comes-to-Jo'burg' thematic I outlined in Chapter One. Yet Noko and his friends are not alienated by their experience of the city. Instead, they embrace their experiences, and the city in which they live. Noko emphatically declares that "it's our Jo'burg", and his narration constructs the city as a blank text on which each of the characters writes something of themselves. In this respect, what has come before does not matter: what is important to the occupants of *Room 207* is the future, and how to write themselves into it.

This project is directly implicated in the act of writing the city. Noko and the other characters in the novel figure the city as a character with its own suppressed history that must remain suppressed if their stories are to emerge. Here, the city is re-imagined as a space that is multi-dimensional: rather than rehearsing earlier creative depictions of the city as having an oppressive hold on its inhabitants as a result of Apartheid, Johannesburg appears in this novel as a city where it is “the fear of crime [that] delimits dreams of truly public space” (Nuttall *Entanglement* 37). As Noko muses, “you are either fast or dead” (70) in Johannesburg. Nevertheless, the freedom the characters exhibit as they move through Jo’burg shows that the city can be transformed in order to capture the dynamic nature of the city space. When Noko returns to Room 207, having just been robbed and beaten, Matome interprets the event as an initiation rite:

Welcome to Johannesburg. This time you really felt it, your blood has been spilt and mixed with its soil. You and the city are in perfect connection with each other. Your blood runs in its veins as it runs in your blood. (70)

This scene suggests a way of looking at the city’s fabric as permeable, albeit with conditions attached. The city is transformed as it transforms Noko, rather than being a cavity which admits individuals without being influenced by their presence. As it appears in the novel, there is a spatial openness about the city, and the suggestion that the inhabitants of Room 207 can – unlike their forbearers from the ‘Jim-comes-to-Jo’burg’ cultural intertext – get beyond the surfaces of the city to what lies beneath.

To be sure, Moele’s treatment of the Black urban experience draws out the ironies and contradictions of the space. For, if the city is a space of freedom and fluidity, it is also policed by agents of the law (99-101) and figures of authority (“the landlord’s slaves” [77]) who are hostile to the nomadic lifestyle lived by the inhabitants of Room 207. These figures must be negotiated with, subverted and conspired against if the characters are to maintain their

freedom. Sometimes they are successful, and on other occasions they are not – but the setbacks are always temporary.

Moele's reading of the city reverses traditional power structures: Johannesburg, an imposing historical edifice to the grand narrative of Apartheid, ceases to be merely a threatening territory through which Black people pass fearfully and rootlessly. It becomes instead "lived complexity" (Nuttall *Entanglement* 38), constructed through the wanderings and observations of the characters who inhabit it. In this way, the traditionally pre-eminent narrative of Apartheid becomes the silent historical entity that occupies the deliberately unspoken margin. As a symbol for the past (both communal and personal) that has been left behind, it does not bear mentioning – a gesture that undermines the authority traditionally accorded to grand history. In its place there is a community purposely constructed without recourse to the Apartheid optic through which the past is often recalled in South African literature.

Thus, Moele depicts characters who abuse alcohol, engage in promiscuous sex and exhibit misogynistic attitudes towards the womyn in their lives. The pace of the novel is fast, the prose reminiscent of the poetry of Mongane Wally Serote and Oswald Mtshali. The narration occurs within a register of what Sarah Nuttall (in reference to another context) refers to as "swaggering, faux-macho" earnest (*Entanglement* 95). Various ethnic stereotypes are invoked, particularly concerning the supposedly innate violence of Zulu men and the money-hoarding proclivities of Jewish people. These portrayals have aroused a degree of controversy, with critics claiming that the novel reinforces harmful ideas about black culture and cultural productions, ideas which have a good deal of currency in white society (Ratele & Ngobeni 29).

This particular line of criticism is best captured in an essay by Michael Titlestad. Titlestad accuses *Room 207* of being "fundamentally unsatisfying" and "unfinished", finding that its

“poorly plotted sensationalism borders constantly on political sentimentality and interpersonal cliché” (37). The main facet of Titlestad’s argument, as concerns *Room 207*, is his suspicion that the novel is a pastiche of Black writing from eighties journals like *Staffrider* and *Work in Progress*, which sought to bring to the South African culture of letters “a greater democracy of voice” (37). He queries whether literature should still be responding to these concerns, two decades later, particularly if *Room 207* is meant to stand for the new Black literature (37).

It could be argued that Titlestad is foisting a reading upon *Room 207* that misses the mark as far as the purposes and the nature of the novel are concerned, by virtue of imposing a reactionary reading on the events of the narrative. One is moved to ask if the ideal developmental path for literature that Titlestad has in mind is not at odds with the intentions of the novel. Moele is not concerned with making the political personal, or with exhibiting difference: he ignores those imperatives altogether. I would proffer that, if the novel is responding to anything, it is to earlier injunctions against the “spectacular” mode in South African fiction by Njabulo Ndebele, in particular. The novel seems to ask whether it is time for South Africa to return to this mode of fiction, or more accurately, whether such a mode of fiction can exist now that conditions have altered significantly from those which led to Ndebele’s intervention. The author suggests that the ‘spectacular’ mode might provide a suitable way of accessing the contemporary city imaginary.

It is thus deliberate that Moele’s opening scenes bring to mind the work of Alex La Guma and Phaswane Mpe. The description of the room, in particular, evokes La Guma’s *A Walk in the Night*, with its images of decay and the filmic rendering of the dilapidated building. Moele provides a narrator whose name the reader only learns in the last part of the novel, but who guides one through the flat, alerting one to the lived complexities beneath the crumbling surfaces. Noko directs the narrative in periautographical fashion, actualizing the characters

subtly but deftly. The sense is of being steered through proceedings by a film director. The characters are sketched only briefly in the first half of the novel: the autobiographical imperative of being introduced to characters, who then develop via the narrative in a linear pattern, falls by the wayside. Instead what Moele provides is a set of characters whose experience of the metropolis is at once fantastic and mundane, but which complicates the conventional dichotomies of success or failure: what it means to fail or succeed in the city is brought into question.

Here, Moele directly rejects the 'Jim-comes-to-Jo'burg' thematic, and the assumptions of white ownership of urban areas that accompany it. His characters come to Jo'burg, but their progress is not simply determined by their ability to be assimilated into the machinery of the city. Nor does the narrative repeat pathological depictions of Johannesburg in which the city is rendered as "obsolete, so deteriorated as to be beyond redemption" (Tomlinson xiii). The narrator and his room-mates reject both difference and assimilation as being too neat and orderly for the project of articulating self/selves in the city space. As the narrator points out, it does not matter who founded the city: "[t]he British had their time here and it passed. The Afrikaners had their time; they enjoyed it, and then it too passed by. Now Johannesburg is under the control of the Black man, his time is here and, judging by the looks of things, his time will never pass" (69). To inherit the space, however, is not enough for the inhabitants of *Room 207*. They long to occupy it truly, and not to be constrained by the financial conditions that keep them in Hillbrow. Until that day, "the day we were all waiting for – the day when we would have the biggest party Hillbrow had ever seen" (65), they exist in a condition of fluidity and flux. If they are not rich, they are not truly destitute either. They live off the city by taking what they need from it, and no more. The city as they experience it exists in the interstices formed by traditional depictions of Johannesburg as either "crime city" or "place of rapacious survival" (Mbembe & Nuttall 366).

It is this, more than anything else, that critics appear to have missed in their analyses of the novel. The relationships established between the disparate characters, and between the men and the women they use (and who use them in turn) are not neatly ordered, precisely because it cannot be so. To believe that it can is to ignore the very dexterity of the writing in *Room 207*: Titlestad's criticism seems to evince an embarrassment with the novel for 'lowering the tone' of South African writing. In voicing such a concern, Titlestad inadvertently goes to the heart of a conflict I highlighted in my first chapter, namely the question of for whom writers like Moele are writing.

This is because the sort of novel Titlestad would seem to prefer, a novel which speaks with a clear voice that is in unity with South Africa's white literary culture, would be an exercise in literary banality. What value might be derived from a more 'refined' version of *Room 207*, if that novel simply offered up its characters as an avatar for the development of the nation? Such a narrative would do little more than reprise the "natives at play" motif that stretches back to the *Jim Comes to Joburg*-genre movies of the past. What would such a narrative have to say about the inexplicable events that make up life in the cosmopolitan city-space? Such a narrative would have to think of the city as a unified space populated by a people of one mind who voice themselves in one way, and it would undoubtedly be poorer as a result. What Moele does, by contrast, is create a space which is diverse in terms of both the people who populate it and how those people interact with the space itself.

In all, *Room 207* works against the imperatives of history, and the reliance on prior narratives to inform the present. How successfully it can do so is an issue the novel itself interrogates: the narrative constantly refers to the struggle of history to assert itself. At various points, the narrator refers to the 'sad stories' of Black people in Hillbrow – these 'sad stories' are often shorthand explanations for the suffering and deprivations of Black people, as well as the cruelty and violence that suffering engenders. The presence of "the thing we do

not speak about” (28) is a constant burden, threatening to occlude the here and the now. The past is not easily checked, reversed, or ignored: every person in the city carries with them the burden of memory. We read minimum details of these memories, however, because the novel is seeking to purge the overbearing attention accorded to Apartheid.

In this regard, the form of address used in the novel is unusual. Noko speaks in the first person throughout, but at points in the story he addresses a “you”. Noko does not appear to be speaking to the reader per se: at times the “you” asks questions that do not appear on the page, but are answered by Noko. The “you”, when addressed, is clearly another traveller to the great city. For example, Noko takes the addressee on a guided tour of Hillbrow in what is surely one of the text’s strongest passages. As they walk around, Noko offers an inventory of the people, habits and streets of Hillbrow. “I like this street but I don’t know its name and I don’t care what it is called”, Noko addresses his charge (158). The reader is thus reminded once more of how the city-space, with its street-names reminiscent of a previous era, becomes a site of contested meanings for its inhabitants. Their claim of ownership, to which the addressee is an outsider (158), is one which ignores the official signs and symbols, subverting the oppressive epistemologies represented by these signs.

It thus happens that the “you” to whom Noko speaks is encouraged to discard the disorderly view of the city space: Noko’s description of the characters they meet, and of the buildings they pass, reveals the lacunae inherent in that view. He encourages his charge to reflect upon the paradoxes, ironies and incomprehensible goings-on that constitute life in the city. The exchange with the addressee is reflective, infused with mishearings and contestations of meaning. Only when the two return to the room does it become apparent that Noko is shifting his own consciousness to a space outside of himself: he speaks to that consciousness as though he is a story-teller, and it is this which forms the narrative of the novel. Noko’s shifting form of consciousness is critical in its resistance to foregrounding one

individual history, as opposed to telling the story of the group in which he finds himself. The novel thus takes the idea of periautography, which James Olney describes as “writing about or around the self” (*Memory* xv), and reforms it to reflect the multiple narratives it contains. Rejecting pre-formed positions and the notion of writing into unexplored areas, the narrative chooses instead to focus on how the story of Noko is the story of all the members of Room 207, whose stories come together to form a composite narrative. This is not to say that it simply “renders in a ... direct and faithful way the experience and the vision of a people, which is the same experience and the same vision lying behind and informing all literature of that people” (Olney *Autobiography* 13). On the contrary, the characters of *Room 207* are not fixed embodiments of Black culture, but diverse individuals who come together in one space to form a narrative that embodies the contradictions of that culture: the novel evokes history as it attempts to escape it and unites its characters as it proclaims their individuality.

In many ways the novel is both autobiography and anti-autobiography. If autobiography is a literary mode emerging from the site of confession (Olney *Autobiography* 13; Coetzee *Doubling the Point* 256), Moele’s characters fail to confess. Often, they attempt to make sense of these sad stories that form their lives, only to fall short, unable to express themselves (93-97, 143-145). In the end, they express little or nothing. If South African autobiography is characterized by “a series of political events that configure and invade the private domain” (Whitlock 146), the same cannot be said of *Room 207*, which actively resists the incursion of external political events in favour of articulating its own politics of belonging. But the novel is as involved with the project of writing self (albeit self-in-community) as other autobiographical works. Where it differs, and where it may possibly be redemptive for the practice of autobiographical writing in South Africa, is in its refusal to be co-opted into particular ideological readings of South African history.

4.4 Zukiswa Wanner's *The Madams*

An alternative set of meanings about South Africa may be discerned in Zukiswa Wanner's *The Madams* (2006). The novel focuses on three middle-class womyn and how they negotiate their friendship against the backdrop of contemporary South Africa. The cast of characters is more limited than we are presented with in *Room 207*, with the author choosing to focus on the lives of the more affluent classes. At the centre of the novel is a young Black womyn, Thandi, who has to put up with the demands of her job, her husband, and her five-year old son. She manages the various stresses in her life through the friendship of Lauren, a white ex-Rhodesian who lectures in English literature and is married to a man who drinks excessively, and Nosizwe, a wealthy Black female whose seductive physical beauty and wealthy upbringing make her the envy of her friends. But, as the novel opens, Thandi states that she has admitted defeat to the various pressures in her life, and decided to hire a domestic worker.

Initially, her friends are entirely supportive of the idea. Lauren informs her that “[o]urs is a capitalist nation” (xi), suggesting that Thandi ought to make peace with her privileged place in that system and use that privilege to ease her domestic burdens. Nosizwe proclaims that hiring a maid is helping to alleviate unemployment (xii). However, Thandi decides to disrupt the formulaic white madam-black maid paradigm, by hiring a white female to fill the role. Nosizwe agrees emphatically: she and Thandi know that the latter's decision will expose the conservative sensibilities latent in Lauren's world-view. She finds Marita, an Afrikaner womyn, in a halfway house, and earmarks her as a suitable candidate for the project she has in mind. “Marita's story”, the reader is told, “is a sad one” (25) – but whereas Moele's protagonist is reticent about revealing the sad stories he mentions, Thandi discloses that her new maid is “from one of those few poor Afrikaner families who failed to take advantage of apartheid's provisions” (25). She then notes that Marita has killed her spouse in an act of revenge for the gender abuse he inflicted upon her (26). The suggestion is that Marita, whose

domestic space was first rendered insecure by this abusive spouse, and then removed entirely when she was jailed for murder, occupies a far more marginal position than Thandi, whose domestic security allows her to farm out her 'duties' as she sees fit.

Noticeably, Wanner's representation of Marita situates her in such a way as to draw attention to the changes that have been wrought in South African urban culture. The increase of *visible* white poverty as a socially pertinent issue is referenced strongly. The reader is invited to contrast Marita's poverty with the prosperity of Thandi, who arrives to collect Marita in an Aston Martin (25). Yet the comparison of their life trajectories reveals that Thandi is not as self-aware as she thinks she is: she presents her own story as a successful example of femininity in the contemporary South African aesthetic, but that success seems to be based entirely on her material wealth. Meanwhile, the destitute Marita does not register in Thandi's consciousness for any other reason than the possibility of rehabilitating Lauren. The latter, Thandi decides, will learn a lesson from observing a white female in an untypical socio-economic relation to her Black friends. Nevertheless, the reader is made to understand that Marita is the polar opposite of Thandi's superficial and narcissistic personality. Marita's introverted nature provides a suitably stable platform on which to base her new role as maid in Thandi's home.

The social position, of 'maid' is one that carries a long history in South African culture, a position whose meaning differs from that which it bears in Occidental societies. That is, it is a position whose meaning is inextricably linked to the racialized political and economic inequalities of the past, just as the position of 'madam' – which Thandi now occupies – carries similar historical baggage. The uncomfortable fact of this history is not lost on Thandi: indeed, she is aware that she risks breaching a social taboo regarding 'race' and the spaces in which raced individuals may be placed. Thus, when asked what she will do with her 'new' maid (the register of ownership is subtle, but present), she is vague enough to suggest the

Occidental meaning, as opposed to the South African concept of the domestic servant. The idea that this particular socio-economic role is overburdened with racial meanings is one that Thandi seeks to dislodge, even as she finds herself alleviating this consciousness by paying Marita more than she would if the latter were Black. However, the oversubscription of the 'maid' role cannot easily be subverted: Marita's 'race' does not prevent her from becoming a fetishized body in the domestic space. For example, Sizwe's husband, Vuyo, gazes upon Marita lasciviously, noting that "one cannot have chocolate ice-cream every day and in fact, a man's life called for a bit of vanilla" (34). The ascription of sexuality implied in this gaze is later repudiated when Marita reveals herself to be a lesbian, with the author resisting the impulse to make Marita the site of repressed male desire.

Instead, we are presented with an alternative diegesis, in which Marita is a site of female anxiety. Her entry into Thandi's domestic space provokes a fear of the unknown in the latter that verges on the parodic, with Wanner drawing on the cultural repertoire of satirical texts, such as *Madam and Eve*, to describe the relationship between Thandi and Marita. The servile role Marita inhabits is a liberatory one for her, a literal and figurative release from the halfway house. But, as the novel progresses, her presence introduces an element of chaos: her cleaning is inept and her cooking is inedible (43). This chaos is symptomatic of her assuming a role for which she is not suited. She is "displaced" in the domestic scene, because she cannot be contained by the regimen of tasks set before her. This is made evident when Thandi returns home to find Marita "dancing as only a white girl who's been around black people in prison can, and singing loudly: 'Say it LOUD: I am BLACK and I am PROUD!'" (46). The comedy of the white female appropriating the register of Black Consciousness signals the satirical nature of Wanner's narrative. She has Marita display a range of mannerisms drawn from mainstream white understandings of 'Black behaviour', as witnessed when Thandi overhears her gossiping with Lauren's maid (47). The comedy lies in the ways in which

Marita's parodic approximation of a particular form of Blackness enables her to cross boundaries. She mimics Black speech patterns in an essentializing way, and her appropriation of the domestic space (46) is drawn from the same colonial imaginary that informs, for example, the *Mama Jack* films of Leon Schuster.⁷ The difference, here, is that Wanner's use of parody undermines essentialist notions, rather than reifying them: her re-imagining of the conventional madam-maid rubric suggests an awareness of the ways in which ideologically mainstreamed ways of seeing are limiting.

But the novel is strangely unresolved on the political implications of the madam-maid relationship. Having invited the reader to speculate on why it is that Marita's whiteness leaves her ill-equipped for the role she is expected to perform, Wanner then subsumes these questions under a wider discourse of feminine commonality that seems slightly disingenuous in the face of the diverse interpretive paradigms of meaning and self-meaning she opens up through her disruption of the racially over-determined madam-maid trope. This decision suggests that the legacy of the trope resists attempts to displace it creatively. Wanner's depiction of the madam-maid relationship is, after all, not a radical departure from the original trope: the self-other interaction between Thandi and Marita is still stratified by class, a fact which is glossed over by the author. While Wanner gestures towards the inability of middle-class South Africa to access the inner lives of those who work for them – Thandi, Sizwe and Lauren are all taken aback at 'discovering' Marita's lesbianism – she does not engage more usefully with Marita's mimicry of 'Black culture' and what that mimicry means as a form of subversive resistance on the part of the subaltern.⁸ Since Marita's mimicry draws from a cultural register of Eurocentric narratives, she in effect reinscribes the authority of those narratives as a site of authenticity, rather than displacing them. Nevertheless, Wanner's satirical re-imagining of the madam-maid trope is a necessary intervention, opening up new

discursive sites around the politics of the domestic servant by troubling the associations of 'race' that have been inscribed upon the position for so long.

It is strange, at first, that the reconstruction of madam-maid subject positions becomes increasingly marginal to the heteronormative concerns of the three womyn. The infidelity of, first, Sizwe's husband, and then Thandi's, coupled with the revelation that Lauren's husband has been abusing her physically, becomes the central storyline upon which the novel focuses. These issues represent more visible, and hence more dominant, violations, which would account for the amount of space given over in the novel to representing them. If a problem with this can be discerned, it is that Wanner's storyline trajectory is not fruitful for speculating on the more subtle forms of violence done to womyn. The gender violence which results in Marita being in the socio-economic position which forces her to take up the job offered by Thandi is referred to briefly, but not linked to the gendered violence inflicted upon Lauren (120) – other than when Thandi notes that Marita, "a former victim of abuse herself ... Immediately went into take-charge mode" (121). The novel, at this point, is in danger of repressing the fissures evident in the characters' profoundly different experiences of womynhood in South African society. While the womyn are indeed bound by a sense of solidarity that emerges from their traumas, the resources available to, for example, Lauren, are vastly superior to those at Marita's disposal. The former is able to reclaim her life as a single womyn, whereas Marita's options are restricted by her social positioning, forcing her to act outside the law in order to liberate herself. Nevertheless, to the extent that the narrative events facilitate an awareness in the womyn of the limitations of the positions they have inhabited – and, in so doing, invite them to consider non-subordinate modes of being – the author's treatment is laudable.

In its focus on the acts of resistance by which the womyn in the novel overcome their positions of subjection, *The Madams* draws attention to the idea of deciphering the self. The

lives of the womyn are entangled by their disenchantment with the heteronormative paradigms which underpin their circumstances. Yet the novel seems to skirt some other rather pertinent issues at times. A more considered treatment of what Nuttall refers to as “a socially mobile blackness” (*Entanglement* 99) would be welcome: Thandi and Sizwe are both embodiments of the emergent Black middle class – they are, in fact, wealthier than Lauren. As it is, the novel rejects an overly fraught engagement with the politics of the new South Africa. While the materialist lifestyles pursued by Thandi and Sizwe are satirized mildly, Wanner avoids taking a polemical stance on the neo-liberal economic climate which supports such affluence. Despite this, her depiction of Thandi, Sizwe, and Lauren is interesting for the trajectories of meaning it opens up around urban subjectivities. The potentialities offered to and limits imposed on womyn in the current historical moment are explored with an incisiveness which is innovative, showing womyns’ role in the production of their own subjectivity, rather than just the contestation of an ascribed positioning within masculinist discourses. The author discloses in an interview that she wrote the first draft of *The Madams* in two weeks (“Conversations” 1). While the text was subsequently lengthened and edited, the sense that it is a rushed effort is pervasive: what in the beginning is a refreshingly satirical mode of writing begins to feel forced and awkward, as Wanner reverts to the gloss of pop-culture female empowerment discourses to sustain the novel. This in itself would not be undue cause for concern, since it could be argued that Wanner is simply appropriating the rhetoric of “Girl Power” as part of her larger satirical project. But the novel does not give the impression of having been edited properly: the inconsistencies of tense (at times within the same paragraph) are disconcerting, while the adoption of commodified African-American speech appears contrived. The latter problem is compounded because the reader senses that Wanner is attempting to represent life in what is a dynamic and ever-changing local city-space. The awareness that Wanner has local registers at her disposal with which to represent

the world she constructs makes the reliance on cultural tropes drawn from the African-American commodified milieu even more jarring.⁹ The use of this imported register *does* gesture to the ways in which external economic hegemonies inscribe themselves upon local cultures, particularly those in which materialism is celebrated. Certainly, Wanner's use of African-Americanisms might be rearticulated in light of the multiple points of fusion and crossing-over that Nuttall terms "compositional remixing" (*Entanglement* 124). In this regard, Wanner's borrowing from the cultural repository occupied by, for example Terry MacMillan's *Waiting to Exhale*, may be seen as being useful in order to reconstruct more powerful meanings around the lives of her characters. The sense remains, however, that more effort went into the opening chapters of the novel, in which Thandi addresses the reader directly, than the latter sections, where the dialogue is between the characters themselves. The opening two chapters, in which Thandi outlines the biographies of herself and her companions, is rendered with a wit that displaces the linear formulations that usually occur when characters dispense their biographical information (Olney "I was Born" 149). It is the strongest section of the novel, and illustrates the author's desire to complicate readily-consumable notions of identity, by contrasting Lauren's materially poor upbringing with the relatively privileged lives enjoyed by Thandi and Sizwe. That contrast is then bisected by the privilege Lauren enjoyed on account of her whiteness, which contrasts with the societal disadvantages of Blackness under Apartheid which manifested themselves in the lives of Thandi and Sizwe.

In all, *The Madams* draws attention to the ways in which womyn contest the conventional divisions between public spaces, where contemporaneously they claim equal rights with men, and the domestic zone, in which they are expected to conform to the expectations of their male partners, specifically, and the norms of an oppressively patriarchal gender code more generally. It is adventurous in the kinds of questions it asks about racial and gendered

identities in contemporary South Africa, refiguring the imagery of the madam-maid relationship and then leaving *that* new imagery itself open. In the process, Wanner's novel demonstrates a commitment to the politics of possibility. That is, the novel reconfigures the familiar gestures towards the possibility of new meanings around African femininity, in which 'race' does not wield the power it has held for so long.

4.5 Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut*

The final work I examine in this chapter, Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut* (2007), deals with issues of performativity and identity. The title derives from a derogatory term used colloquially to refer to a Black person who mimicks the mannerisms of a white person: to be a 'coconut is, in effect, to be "black on the outside but white on the inside" (Mckinney 17). The term suggests a degree of contamination in the process, and a losing of purity as a result. It presents an evocative metaphor, through which the novel tackles the self-construction of the two main characters as they grow up in the contemporary historical moment. The narrative is formed around the separate experiences of Ofilwe and Fikile, two girls from disparate backgrounds who find themselves having to formulate their identities in a society where being white, and associating with white people, is held to be a sign of success. Ofilwe is sent to a mixed-race school, where she finds herself having to fit in with her white schoolfriends by adopting their mannerisms and speech patterns. Her parents, who represent the emerging Black middle class, speak English in their suburban home and encourage her to fraternize with white children by holding sleepovers and parties. As time progresses, she appropriates the accents of her white friends, becoming obsessed with appearing 'normal', where 'normal' means 'white':

People don't realise how much their accent says about who they are, where they were born and most importantly what kind of people they associate with. Seriously, when we have those brief exchanges of words at the petrol station or in the bread queue, it is

what you sound like that helps people to place you and determine how they'll treat you. Trust me, the accent matters. Don't let some fool convince you otherwise. (154)

Ofilwe's life, as she narrates it for the reader, is made up of maintaining appearances. Her existence at the "point of entanglement" (Glissant 26) between her Black culture and the white society in which she lives is one in which she craves acceptance from the white people around her: being validated by her classmates (8) and her teacher (14) fills her with a sense of belonging. She fails to notice that the validation she craves comes at the expense of her autonomy as a Black subject: she is praised for her ability to assimilate whiteness, where being white is constantly measured against the inferiority of Blackness. Her desire for acceptance from "the colourless ones" (18) indirectly expresses her dissatisfaction with being Black in spaces where she is constantly made aware that to be Black is to be 'Other' and inferior. When her brother, Tshepo, points out that she does not know who she is, she responds defensively, unprepared to confront the prospect of reforming her identity in a way that affirms her Blackness. Ofilwe's attempt to become white means that she must deny herself the relative stability of her Black identity: she is in reality never fully accepted by her white friends and teachers, and so must hang precariously in a suspended space of 'acting white'. The public role she plays requires all her resources to sustain, leaving her with no time or energy to recast her identity, despite the fact that she longs to bond with her family by learning Sepedi (60-69). At one point, she remarks that "after a while it's agony playing a role you would never dream of auditioning for" (48). She discards one of her white friends after no longer being able to maintain the role demanded of her, but the decision is one her father disagrees with. He argues that it is careless of Ofilwe to "throw away a useful relationship" (67), adding that she can better herself by being friends with white people (67).

For Ofilwe, the burden of mimicking whiteness is further heightened by the constant fear that her Blackness will be revealed. She fears that 'the truth' of her identity will manifest

itself if her disguise slips in any way (53). Her mother is a particular source of shame: “a metallic blue-black in colour”, Ofilwe’s mother does not speak English ‘well’ enough for her daughter’s liking. Ofilwe does what she can to keep her mother away from her social circle, hiding the notifications of her school’s parents’ evenings to spare herself the humiliation of being identified with her mother. Her mother exacerbates the situation when Ofilwe holds a sleepover party, by being overcome with joy at the prospect of white children staying over at their house. She embarrasses Ofilwe simply by being hospitable, with the latter being horrified at her mother’s not knowing “that white people bathe only at night” (53). The scene draws attention to the conflicted nature of identity-formulation in the novel, where Ofilwe’s parents are as unstable in their own identities as she is. In Ofilwe’s world, it is only Tshepo who works against the dominating forces of whiteness. It is he who tells her:

the people you strive so hard to be like will one day reject you because as much as you may pretend, you are not one of their own. Then you will turn back, but there too you will find no acceptance, for those you once rejected will no longer recognize the thing you have become. So far, too far to return. So much, too much have you changed. Stuck between two worlds, shunned by both. (93)

But the pressures Ofilwe faces cannot easily be overcome. Here, her story enmeshes with that of Fikile, a girl from the townships who works in the Silver Spoon coffee shop where Ofilwe and her family have breakfast every Sunday (19). Fikile’s story, which is taken up in part two of the novel, resonates with Ofilwe’s, demonstrating a resistance in the novel to a narrative form that centres on one individual. Fikile lives the life that terrifies Ofilwe when the latter imagines what her circumstances would be like without the material comfort in which she currently resides (13). Fikile believes in self-sufficiency, elevating herself above those around her who have failed to escape the poverty of their surroundings. She plans, via her “Project Infinity” (109), to leave behind the squalor of her beginnings and transform herself into someone with wealth and fame. That Fikile associates these markers of success

with whiteness meshes her narrative with Ofilwe's. She cultivates a manner of speaking English which will best show off her vocabulary to the white customers she serves at the Silver Spoon. One of these customers, she hopes, will recognize that she is 'different', and fulfil her dreams (154-155). As Fikile notes in one of her monological addresses, "perhaps God made some races superior, as an example for the others to follow" (157). She thus is scornful of the Black people she encounters, endeavouring to demonstrate that she is not one of them (140). Fikile fears that those who are "poor and Black" (140) will doom her to remain amongst them. Her disdain, however, extends beyond the poor Black workers who commute with her to work. Ofilwe's family also earns her scorn for being "new money" (174). They, and other Black elites, are "fakers", illegitimate occupants of the realm of prosperity which Fikile herself covets (174). Here, Ofilwe's fear of 'discovery' reprises itself, with Fikile priding herself on spotting the 'subtle' identifiers of Black inferiority in the formers' lack of 'sophistication':

When I ask you if you want your pasta with penne, fettuccine, or spaghetti, you will ask me which is the biggest. If I ask you if you want feta cheese in your salad, you will say, 'Yes, grated please'. When I go get your fruit smoothie, you will stop me and say, thinking that you are really smart, 'Make it decaf!' (174)

It is clear that the white discourses through which Ofilwe and Fikile access and create meanings are not held up for interrogation. None of the practices they try to emulate are seen for the social constructions they are, and so they are never sufficiently deconstructed by either girl. This tendency to elevate whiteness to a position of unquestioned supremacy therefore is limited in analyzing the manner in which the girls are disempowered by the operations of whiteness in their world.

The stories of both girls are, however, marked by uncertainty and doubt. Matlwa's novel does not follow the binaristic and teleological path from innocence to realization, choosing instead to represent the "ambiguity, ambivalence and nuances of identity in the new South

Africa” (Kosew 100). The novel is at pains to express the interconnectedness of its narrative strands. Ofilwe’s desire for acceptance from her white friends is mirrored in Fikile’s desire to be assimilated into white culture. In both cases Matlwa destabilizes the notion of a self-knowing subject, as both Ofilwe and Fikile attempt to claim an individuated selfhood in the epochal years following the arrival of democracy in South Africa, but find their claims frustrated by a white society that allows them only conditional access.

It is peculiar that Matlwa chooses to invoke the trope of hair-straightening as an attempt to escape/exceed Blackness and enter whiteness (3-4). As Kobena Mercer (99-100) and Zimitri Erasmus (“Hair-Styling” 14-15) argue, the myth that the straightening of curly hair is an attempt by Black people to simply ape whiteness or 'become white' has been dispelled as illusory in nature. There is a more complex cultural practice occurring in the act of hair-straightening; no one mistakes straightened hair for ‘naturally’ straight hair, yet this ostensibly disproven conceptualization remains one of the dominant idioms of representation of ‘race’ (Erasmus, “Hair-Styling” 15). Matlwa’s insertion of this colonial misunderstanding into her novel signposts the nature of such fictional constructions, and the manner in which they are disseminated and redistributed until they seem to originate with Black people themselves (Erasmus, “Hair-Styling” 14). She avoids endorsing Homi K. Bhabha’s view on the radically subversive nature of such mimicry (85), since she has a particular objective in mind: the trope of approximating whiteness here signals how “ideology ‘acts’ or ‘functions’ in such a way that it ‘recruits’ subjects among the individuals ... or ‘transforms’ the individuals into subjects” (Althusser 174).

Ofilwe and Fikile’s self-(mis)construction in terms not their own suggests a situation in which young Post-Apartheid womyn struggle to match their ‘cultural’ aspirations to their daily experiences. For them whiteness manifests “in the form of powerful experiences which cannot, however, be embedded in their lives in any obvious way, and which seem therefore to

have their existence in some transcendent realm” (Coetzee *Stranger Shores* 7). Blackness, meanwhile, is for both womyn a claustrophobically essentialising entity, constructing binaries that restrict personal autonomy. This leads Fikile to blame her environment for not living up to the whiteness to which she feels she ought to belong. Ofilwe, meanwhile, does not feel the freedom that her life as one of the Black elite in the New South Africa ought to possess: her linking of hair and hair-straightening with identity is at odds with this freedom.

Fikile’s rapacious consumption of magazines is significant in this regard, in that it is from the media that she draws most of her views on ‘race’, echoing Stuart Hall’s idea of how “the media construct for us a definition of what ‘race’ is, what meaning the imagery of ‘race’ carries, and what the ‘problem of race’ is understood to be” (161). Matlwa suggests that, even in the contemporary moment, the experience of whiteness is still blocked to Black people of a particular class, who only experience it insidiously and in disseminated or indirect forms. Fikile’s ideas of what it means to be either white or Black are reminiscent of Teresa de Lauretis’s definition of “interpellation [as] the process whereby a social representation is accepted and absorbed by an individual as her (or his) own representation, and so becomes, for that individual, real, even though it is in fact imaginary” (12). Fikile desires whiteness, but that whiteness is mediated by the magazines she consumes. She takes this white culture, encoded as it is in the magazines that are passed to her from white people, to be a means of taking her out of her class position in Black South African society, and ultimately out of the futility she feels at being Black.

Both Ofilwe and Fikile construct themselves negatively. That is, they define themselves in their gestures as ‘not-black’. This figuring of Blackness as a negative space to be escaped from demonstrates that what is at work in both figures’ self-construction is more than simply aspiring to be white. It manifests as something that is not reliant on class – playing white in Ofilwe’s case (54) via gestures of whiteness, or directly expressing the desire to become

white in Fikile's case (135). In seeking to escape from Blackness, they find that they are equally without place in the world. Ofilwe's home is not a home in Bessie Head's sense of the term, that is, a refuge or place of peace and shelter (124). In the same vein, Fikile feels she does not belong to the backroom in which she lives with her uncle: her great plan to escape signifies her sense of alienation in what is meant to be her home space. For both womyn, issues of displacement are thus crucial to their identity-formation.

Matlwa is at pains to demonstrate how 'race', gender and class are mutually constitutive of one another, and largely inextricable from the performative gestures of her two characters. As a literary meditation on the struggle to articulate Black womyn's identities, then, *Coconut* writes into a complex modernity where the foundations of agency are fraught with complications. Here, Matlwa's use of the autobiography/memoir form allows her characters the right to articulate a conception of themselves as *sujet-en-proces* (Kristeva "Sujet" 3),¹⁰ without necessarily leaving these constructions of self uninterrogated. Rather, *Coconut* shows that the problematic lies not with Ofilwe and Fikile, but within the ideologies and practices of the society which they inhabit, and the discourses that shape them as individuals.

Matlwa's writing project is nuanced in the sense that it demonstrates how being human is infinitely complex and cannot merely be accounted for by recourse to social science or critical theory. For Ofilwe and Fikile, within the yearning for whiteness there lies the possibility of liberating the Black psyche. Matlwa's novel forces the reader to be aware that the mechanisms of identity construction are dynamic in nature. As Hall puts it,

[i]nstead of thinking about identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then seek to represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. (110)

This idea mirrors the status of the autographical text, as it remains a form which (in the case of *Coconut*) begins *in medias res*, attempts to reveal identity through unconscious gesture and

has no constitutive ending outside representation in the text. What Matlwa seems to be implying is that there can be no easy resolution of identity so long as the dominant mode of being is one in which 'resolution' is the expected outcome.

Coconut traces a definite shift away from a concern with the general 'race' oppression of all Black people to a specific experiential location of urban middle-class Black people. That is, in *Coconut* there is a shift in emphasis from reading the private against the backdrop of South African society to directly examining the personal and the intimate, without the imperative to read events against an external 'community' of experience. It must be acknowledged, though, that Ofilwe's and Fikile's respective understandings and performances of Blackness are historically conditioned in ways invisible to them. The same holds true for the discursive analyses of history and historical conditioning that have been deployed here. In this respect, *Coconut* is ambivalent about the relationship of its narrative to history. This is not to suggest, however, that *Coconut* does not signpost the existence of linked causalities, but rather that it chooses to make those links more complex by encouraging a praxis that reads from the inside, rather than seeing the text as a gateway through which the 'truth of the nation' may be accessed. Matlwa's text seeks to uncover the extent to which collective anxieties (the nation's fixation with 'race') influence individuals who are directly implicated in that collective. As Hall avers, "[f]ar from being grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past ... identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past" (394). If this is the case, then the restrictions that play out on the self-positioning of Black South African womyn speak themselves through the novel.

Thus one finds that *Coconut* situates female experience as belonging to a non-space, or place of dissociation from the spaces in which womyn live. Matlwa's novel offers an ateleological reading of its characters, one that generates a sense of "readerly unease"

(Kossew 172). This unease may be occasioned by the reader's expectations that she will witness the telos, or the culmination, of the characters' *bildung*. Instead she is faced with characters who deny the essentialising literary notions of steady character growth, and who are seemingly as trapped in the dualism of 'race' as they were when the text began, with the suggestion that neither of them can think their way out of this dualism.

4.6 Conclusion

Taken together, the five novels discussed in this chapter suggest the possibility of moving beyond the fixed realities that supposedly exist within the 'South African imaginary'. The latter term is used guardedly here: the novels analysed in this chapter demonstrate convincingly that, if a South African imaginary can be said to exist, it is only in the most fragmented and fraught of senses. They present examples of alternative trajectories for South African fiction, and attempt to move away from the restricting epistemologies through which South African literature has operated for so long. In representing a strategic retreat from/reversal of old dichotomies, they seem to suggest that a variety of lenses may be brought to bear in representing local subjectivities productively and cohesively. The novels of Keegan, Martin, Moele, Wanner and Matlwa expose the paradoxes inherent in epistemological figurations, gesturing towards the possibility of more complex engagements with identity. My reading of these novels suggests, then, that 'the true story' of the nation that many of them seek to arrive at is one that cannot be heard or captured within symbolic systems: they draw attention to the overlap and intermeshing of realities that renders such a search futile.

NOTES

¹ His first name carries almost clichéd associations with hyper-masculinized heroism.

² For an analysis of the 'Mamdani Affair', see Jonathan D. Jansen's "But Our Natives Are Different! Race, Knowledge, and Power in the Academy."

³ See Gunnar Theissen's *Between Acknowledgement and Ignorance* (1997).

⁴ His narration tallies well with Rimmon-Kenan's definition, as we constantly witness his "limited knowledge, his personal involvement, and his problematic value-scheme" (101).

⁵ Witness Rex's summing up of Edward as "a little different" (41). He follows this statement by proposing that "ordinary chaps aren't like you, are they?" (41).

⁶ As in the scene where Matt's mother is described as "a typical rich bitch, through and through – loud, domineering, incredibly rude to domestic staff and shop assistants, dishonest in word and deed, foul-mouthed, lazy, quick to complain, callous, sexually promiscuous, badly educated, opinionated, bigoted, pompous, pretentious and, above all, supercilious. In short: a real Constantia matron" (34).

⁷ This same colonial imaginary is satirized in the *Madam&Eve* cartoon strip. See Gwen Smith's "Madam and Eve: A Caricature of Black Women's Subjectivity".

⁸ See Homi Bhabha's "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse" in *The Location of Culture* (85-92).

⁹ Sarah Nuttall has written at length on the cultural registers of socially mobile urban Black South Africans. See her chapter "Self-Styling" in *Entanglement* (108-124).

¹⁰ Kristeva's phrase refers to the process of coming to subjectivity, and negotiating subjectivity in linguistic and other acts. The literal translation into English ("subject in process") loses the multiple senses of the original French term, with its play on the legal, linguistic and psychoanalytic senses of the subject.

CONCLUSION

In the introduction to this thesis, I quoted Ashraf Jamal on the failure of South African culture to “access the self-reflexive moment” (36). That failure marks the texts I have examined here in different ways. To say this is neither to valorise this failure as an aesthetic mode, nor to decry the literature for failing to attain some illusory state of redemption. It is to point out that the condition, in itself, creates new avenues of literary exploration, as writers seek to evade the strictures that hold South African writing in thrall.

The discussions around identity and belonging in the previous chapters have revealed the necessity of subjecting different subject positions to considered scrutiny. The earlier chapters demonstrate that the field of literary studies is troubled terrain: the works analysed demonstrate an almost pathological aversion to contingency. Yet this avoidance contains within it an element of the very uncertainty it tries to escape. That is, in seeking to represent South Africa’s history as untrustworthy, these narratives invariably privilege that which they seek to negate: the grand historical narrative of Apartheid is necessary for these novels to exist. Without it, in other words, there would be no need to to aim, as these narratives do in most cases, to write into unexplored areas (Nixon 74).

This point seems inescapable: without Apartheid history, there would be no need for forms that look “simultaneously backwards and inwards, opening up paths into multiple pasts that are not unidirectional and straightforward but labyrinthine and multi-layered” (Lewis “Review” 1). It would seem, then, that South African fiction, at least that which hinges on autobiography/autography as its means of expression, is regressively entangled in the very thing it seeks to avoid. But to view matters this way is to neglect the ways in which returning to the familiar invites complex forms of (re)discovery and self-questioning, as the meanings of home spaces and the grounds of belonging become defamiliarised. In novels like Achmat

Dangor's *Bitter Fruit*, even familiar conduits of identity (Lydia's diary on a personal level, the TRC at a more national remove) become sites of estrangement.

It is this characteristic that might provide a possible route for thinking through the present: these texts – via the defamiliarisation of the personal moment and of lived experiences – challenge not only the authority of history, but also the authority of their own claims to power. By rupturing the supposed connection between personal narratives and epistemological control, narratives such as Dangor's *Bitter Fruit*, and Matlwa's *Coconut*, amongst others, destabilize ideas about the individual that trace back to the Enlightenment. In doing so, they open up to the imagination the possibility of constructing more self-assertive and self-reflexive spaces of self-realization.

It is important to note that the dislocation witnessed with the above novels differs in form and content from the disorientation that continues to haunt the narratives of Troy Blacklaws and Tim Ecott. The disorientation depicted within the works of the latter authors conceives of South Africa (the space of belonging, the home space) as a place that is both “irresistible” and “unlovable” (Coetzee *White Writing* 41). Their motive for doing so is to explain away the subject's inability to belong, with the claims of ownership and affiliation that are foregrounded in such belonging. By contrast, the dislocation that is experienced in the works of Matlwa, Dangor, and Martin, speaks of the need to recognise “that social freedoms are multiple and intersecting, and that to privilege single and definitive visions of freedom means ignoring how power relations cut across different axes of domination, and so open up ever-widening paths of resistance” (Lewis “Bessie Head's Freedoms” 61). These stories self-reflexively draw on the past to create new forms of meaning. This differs from the more traditional autobiographical texts by Johnson, Blacklaws or Ecott, where the past, with its values and ideals, must be kept alive by retelling, lest it should disappear. In this respect, there is a noticeable division between a work like *The Native Commissioner*, which functions

almost as a museum of meaning, and *Bitter Fruit*, which destroys the familiar and tries to create new and revolutionary forms. In this respect, it is instructive to think of this division as a breach

between ideology and utopia. While ideology confirms and coheres, the disruptive utopian vision points towards what has not yet been named or disclosed. This may be the most subversive contestation there is. The envisioning of an alterative world and its configuration “elsewhere” demands a massive feat of transformation because it so radically overturns “what is”. (Lewis “Bessie Head’s Freedoms” 38)

Thus, while ideological autobiography does not reach beyond itself, but instead endlessly doubles back in its search for ultimate meaning, utopian autobiography self-reflexively searches both within and outside itself, contradicting and upsetting its own conclusions. It interrogates and displaces the ‘sovereign’ status accorded to the individual, and rejects its own claims to authority at every turn. The texts of Matlwa and Moele are perhaps the best examples of this, since they deal with the complexities of subjective identity-formation without arcane abstraction. Dangor’s *Bitter Fruit* is similarly adept: it represents individual human experience in the light of Apartheid, but also shows how being human is infinitely complex and cannot merely be accounted for by recourse to recuperative discourses. In this way, it troubles more traditional epistemic trajectories, positing instead a method in which “a certain fluidity not available in settled states abounds, which no doubt heightens possibilities for exposure, contest, contradiction, and outright collision of assumptions and interpretations’ (Lâm 870).

If a conclusion is to be drawn, it is that the contemporary autobiographical impulse in South African literature seems to warrant further analytical research and theoretical explication. The central paradox that defines the texts studied here is that the framework within which they articulate themselves does not easily accommodate the aims of their respective projects: the reclamation of individuated selfhood that these texts strive towards

cannot easily be effected through methods that are gesturally situated within the past of the South African culture of letters. If anything, this suggests that new ways of reading the literature of contemporary South Africa must be found, and that formulaic injunctions about re-writing history from the margins actually constrain, where they attempt to liberate. Nevertheless, the texts I have analysed respond to these constraints in ways that problematise binaries between interiority and the outer world.

WORKS CITED

Primary Texts

- Awerbuck, Diane. *Gardening at Night*. London: Secker & Warburg, 2003.
- Blacklaws, Troy. *Karoo Boy*. Cape Town: Juta, 2004.
- *Blood Orange*, Cape Town: Juta , 2005.
- Dangor, Achmat. *Bitter Fruit: a novel*. Cape Town: Kwela, 2001.
- Ecott, Tim. *Stealing Water: A Secret Life in a South African City*. London: Sceptre, 2008.
- Johnson, Shaun. *The Native Commissioner*. Cape Town: Penguin, 2006.
- Keegan, Timothy. *My Life with the Duvals*. Roggebaai: Umuzi, 2008.
- Khumalo, Fred. *Touch My Blood: the Early Years*. Roggebaai: Umuzi, 2006.
- Martin, Ian. *Pop-Splat!* Cape Town: Hubris Publishers, 2008.
- Matlwa, Kopano. *Coconut: A Novel*. Johannesburg: Jacana, 2007.
- Memela, Sandile. *Flowers of the Nation*. Scottsville: UKZN Press, 2005.
- Moele, Kgebetli. *Room 207*. Cape Town: Kwela, 2006.
- Mpe, Phaswane. *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*. Pietermaritzburg: UNP Press, 2001.
- Van De Ruit, John. *Spud*. Johannesburg: Penguin, 2005.
- *Spud: The Madness Continues*. Johannesburg: Penguin, 2007.
- *Spud: Learning to Fly* Johannesburg: Penguin, 2009.
- Wanner, Zukiswa. *The Madams: a wildly provocative novel*. Cape Town: Oshun, 2006.

Secondary Sources

“100 Young South Africans You Must Take to Lunch”. *Mail & Guardian* June 2008

<<http://www.mg.co.za/specialreport/100-young-south-africans-june-2008>>

Adhikari, Mohamed. *Not White Enough, Not Black Enough: racial identity in the South African coloured community*. Cape Town: Double Storey, 2005.

- Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1971. 127–188.
- Amireh, Amal, and Lisa Suhair Majaj. *Going global: the transnational reception of Third World women writers*. London: Routledge, 2000.
- Asmal, Kader, et al. *Reconciliation through truth: a reckoning of apartheid's criminal governance*. Cape Town: David Philips Publishers, 1997.
- Attridge, Derek. "Age of Bronze, State of Grace: Music and Dogs in Coetzee's *Disgrace*." *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 34.1 (2000): 98-121.
- Attwell, David. *J.M. Coetzee: South Africa and the politics of Writing*. Cape Town: David Phillips, 1993.
- Baderoon Gabeba. "The Truth of Paranoia: Conspiracy and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission." Unpublished paper presented at the Graduate Colloquia Series, University of Cape Town. 1997.
- Banner, Gillian. *Holocaust Literature: Schulz, Levi, Spiegelman and the Memory of the Offence*. California: Vallentine Mitchell, 2000.
- Barber, Karin. *Readings in African Popular Culture*, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1997.
- Barthes, Roland. "The Death of the Author." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. Eds. V.B. Leitch et al. New York: Norton, 2001. 1466-1470.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulations*. New York: Semiotext, 1983.
- Bell, Terry, and Dumisa Buhle Ntsebeza. *Unfinished Business: South Africa, Apartheid and Truth*. Johannesburg: Verso, 2003.
- Benjamin, Walter. "The work of the Translator." *Selected Writings*. Eds. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings. Mass.: Belknap, 1996.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1993.
- Blanchot, Maurice. *The Gaze of Orpheus, and other Literary Essays*. New York: Station Hill, 1981.

- Boehmer, Elleke, et al. *Altered State? Writing and South Africa*. Sydney: Dangaroo, 1994.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Trans. Richard Nice. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.
- Breytenbach, Breyten. *The Memory of Birds in Times of Revolution: Essays on Africa*. Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1996.
- . *Dog Heart: a travel memoir*. Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1998.
- Buikema, Rosemarie. "Crossing the Borders of Identity Politics." *European Journal of Women's Studies*. 16.4 (2009): 309-323.
- Butler, Judith. *Bodies that matter: on the discursive limits of "sex"*. London: Routledge, 1993.
- Buuck, David. "African Doppelganger: Hybridity and Identity in the Work of Dambudzo Marechera." *Research in African Literatures* 28 (1997): 118-133.
- Chow, Rey. *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Studies*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993.
- Chrisman, Laura. *Postcolonial contraventions : cultural readings of race, imperialism and transnationalism*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003.
- Coetzee, J.M. *Waiting for the Barbarians*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980.
- *Foe*. Johannesburg: Ravan, 1986.
- *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa*. Sandton: Radix, 1988.
- *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*. Ed. Atwell, David. Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992.
- . *Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1997.
- . *Stranger Shores: Essays 1986-1999*. London: Secker & Warburg, 2001.
- . *Elizabeth Costello*. London: Secker & Warburg, 2003.
- Conway, Daniel. "White Masculinities." *Men of the Global South: A Reader*. Ed. Adam Jones. London: Zed Books, 2006: 393-398.

- Coplan, David. "Innocent Violence: Social Exclusion, Identity, and the Press in an African Democracy." *Identities* 16.3 (2009): 367-389.
- Cornwell, Gareth, ed. *English Studies Management Forum Research Bulletin*. 2008.
- Davis, Fred. *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*. New York: Free Press, 1979.
- De Grazia, Margreta. *Hamlet without Hamlet*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- De Kock, Leon. "Leaving the Forefront of African Lit." *Mail and Guardian* online article. June 2008. <<http://www.mg.co.za/article/2008-11-07-leaving-the-forefront-of-african-lit>>.
- "Politics of Publishing." *Mail and Guardian* Online Article. June 2008. <<http://www.mg.co.za/article/2008-06-30-politics-of-publishing>>
- De Lauretis, Teresa. *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976.
- *Dissemination*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.
- *The Work of Mourning*. Brault, Pascale-Anne, and Michael Naas, eds. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.
- *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*. Eds. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg, California: Stanford University Press, 2007.
- Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966.
- Driver, Dorothy. "Autobiography Written by Black South African Women: The Question of Identity." *Aspects of Commonwealth Literature*. 2. 43 (1996) 114-128.
- "South Africa: Under a New Dispensation?" *Eurozine* 20 March 2006. <<http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2006-03-20-driver-en.html>>
- Durrheim, Kevin, et al. "Denying racism: discursive strategies used by the South African media." *Critical Arts*. 19.1 (2006) 167-186.

- Dyer, Richard. *White*. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Eakin, Paul John. *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985.
- Erasmus, Zimitri. "We are never only South Africans." *Cape Times* 4 May 1996.
- , "Oe! My Hare Gaan Huistoe': Hair-Styling as Black Cultural Practice." *Agenda 32: Race, Identity and Change*. (1997) 11-16.
- , *Coloured by History, Shaped by Place: New Perspectives on Coloured Identities in Cape Town*. Cape Town: Kwela, 2001.
- Fairclough, Norman. *Language and Power*. Harlow: Longman, 2001.
- Fisher, Ryland. *Race*. Johannesburg: Jacana, 2007.
- Fitzgerald, Francis Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Random House, 1980.
- Friedlander, Saul. *Nazi Germany and the Jews: Years of Extermination 1939-1945*. London: Harper Collins, 2008.
- Garman, Anthea. "The Mass Subject in Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull*." *Power, Politics and Identity in South African Media: Selected Seminar Papers*, Eds. Adrian Hadland et al. Johannesburg: HSRC Press, 2004. 204-222.
- Genette, Gerard. *Palimpsests: literature in the second degree*. Trans. Newman, Channa. Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1997.
- Glissant, Édouard. *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1989.
- Goldblatt, Beth, and Sheila Meintjies. "Gender and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission." *Indicator: Crime and Conflict* 6.5 (1996): 34 -48.
- Gordimer, Nadine. *The Conservationist* London: Penguin Press, 1978.

- Gouws, Amanda. *(Un)thinking citizenship: feminist debates in contemporary South Africa*. Cape Town: Ashgate, 2005.
- Gqola, Pumla Dineo. "Defining People, Analysing Power, Language and the Metaphors of the New South Africa." *Transformation: Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa* 47 (2001): 94-106.
- ."Coming Out and Being Proudly Threatening: Feminist Activists and African Academies." *Feminist Africa* 1.1 (2002): 20-24.
- , et al, eds. *Discourses on Difference, Discourses on Oppression*. Cape Town: Centre for Advanced Southern African Studies, 2002.
- , "Archives." *Truth & Reconciliation in South Africa: 10 years on*. Eds. Charles Villavencio and Fanie Du Toit, Cape Town: New Africa Books, 2006.
- Grant, Richard E. *The Wah-Wah Diaries*. London: Picador, 2006
- Gready, Paul. "The Sophiatown Writers of the Fifties: The Unreal Reality of Their World". *Journal of African Studies*. 16.1 (1990) 139-164.
- Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identities and Diaspora." *Colonial Discourse & Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. Eds. Patrick Williams & Laura Chrisman, Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993. 392-401.
- Harris, Brent. "The Archive, Public History, and the Essential Truth: The TRC Reading the Past." *Refiguring the Archive*. Ed. Carolyn Hamilton, Cape Town: David Philip, 2002.
- Head, Bessie. *The Cardinals: With Meditations and Short Stories*. Ed. Margaret J. Daymond, Oxford: Heinemann Educational, 1995.
- hooks, bell. *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Jacobs, Johan. "Life Writing [South Africa]: Autobiography." In *Encyclopaedia of Post-Colonial Literatures in English*. Eds. Eugene Benson and L.W. Conolly. London: Routledge. (1994): 878-882.

- Jamal, Ashraf. "The bearable lightness of Tracey Rose's *The Kiss*." *A Decade of Democracy: South African art 1994-2004: from the permanent collection of Iziko, South African National Gallery*. Ed. Emma Bedford. Cape Town: Juta Press, 2004. 140-143.
- . *Predicaments of Culture in South Africa*. Pretoria: Unisa Press & Brill, 2005.
- Jansen, Jonathan D. "But Our Natives Are Different! Race, Knowledge, and Power in the Academy." *Social Dynamics*. (1998): 106-116.
- Jauss, Hans K. *Towards an Aesthetics of Reception*. Trans. Bahti, Timothy. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1982.
- Jayawardane, M. Neelika. "Taking Things Personally, and Publicising the Private: Encountering Erasure on the Frontlines of Academia." *Social dynamics* 33.1 (2007): 31–51.
- Johnson, Shaun. *Endorsements for "The Native Commissioner."* <www.shaunjohnson.co.za>.
- . "Ten Quick Questions for Commonwealth Winner." *Litnet* online.
<http://www.shaunjohnson.co.za/interviews_one.html>
- Kaul, Suvir. "Colonial figures and postcolonial reading." *Diacritics*. 26. 1. (1996): 74-89.
- Kosew, Sue. *Writing Woman, Writing Place: Contemporary Australian and South African Fiction*. London: Routledge, 2004.
- Kratz, Corrine A. "On Telling/Selling a Book by Its Cover." *Cultural Anthropology*, 9.2. (1994): 179-200.
- Kristeva, Julia. "Le Sujet en process." *Polylogue*. Paris: Seuil, 1977. 55-106.
- . *Powers of horror : an essay on abjection*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.
- Krog, Antjie. *Country of My Skull*. Johannesburg: Random House, 2002.
- La Guma, Alex. *A Walk in the Night and Other Stories*. Oxford: Heinemann press, 1968.
- Lâm, Maivan Clech. "Feeling Foreign in Feminism." *Signs: (Feminism and the Law)*. 19.4 (1994): 865-93.

- Lampolski, Mikhail. *The Memory of Tiresias: Intertextuality and Film*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.
- Lessing, Doris. "The old Chief Mshlanga." *African Stories*. New York: Ballantine, 1951: 49-60.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. *The Levinas Reader*. Ed. Sean Hand. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1989.
- Lewis, Desiree. "Feminisms in South Africa." *Women's Studies International Forum* 16.5. (1993): 535-542.
- , "Review of It all begins. Poems from Postliberation South Africa." *Chimurenga Online* 2003. < www.chimurenga.co.za/content.asp?Section=191>.
- , "Against the Grain: Black Womyn and Sexuality." *Agenda* 63.2. (2005) 11-25.
- , "Bessie Head's Freedoms." *Chimurenga Online* 2007 < <http://www.chimurenga.co.za/page-61.html>>.
- Lejeune, Philippe. *Le pacte autobiographique*. Trans. Katherine Leary. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.
- Lott, Eric. *Love and theft: blackface minstrelsy and the American working class*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Maimane, Arthur. *Hate No More*. Cape Town: Kwela, 2000.
- Malan, Rian. *My Traitor's Heart*. London: Bodley Head, 1990.
- Mamdani, Mahmood. *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.
- Mbembe, Achille. *On the Postcolony*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.
- and Sarah Nuttall. "Writing the World from an African Metropolis." *Public Culture* 16.3. (2004): 347-372.
- McKinney, Carolyn. "If I speak English, does it make me less black anyway?" *English Academy Review* 24:2 (2007): 6-24.

- McNulty, Bridget. "An Interview with Zukiswa Wanner" KZN Literary Tourism Website.
<<http://www.literarytourism.co.za/index.php/Interviews/An-Interview-with-Zukiswa-Wanner.html>>
- Mercer, Kobena. *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Modisane, Bloke. *Blame Me on History*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1963.
- Morris, Terry. "Local books boom". *Mail & Guardian* online. <<http://www.mg.co.za/article/2008-06-13-local-books-boom>>.
- Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992.
- Motsemme Nthabiseng, and Kopano Ratele. 2002. "Losing life and Remaking a Life at the Truth And Reconciliation Commission." Eds. Pumla Dineo Gqola et al. *Discourses on Difference, Discourses on Oppression*, Cape Town: Centre for Advanced Southern African Studies, 2002: 308-312.
- , "Meanings in Silence." *Rhodes Journalism Review* 24. (2004) 4-5.
- Mphahlele, Es'kia. "Living Writers, Living Culture." *Scrutiny* 2. 2.2. (1997): 40-42.
- Mzamane, Mbulelo Vizikhungo, ed. *Words Gone Too Soon: A Tribute to Phaswane Mpe & K. Sello Duiker*. Pretoria: Umgangatho Media & Communications, 2005.
- Naipual, Shiva. *North of South: an African Journey*. New York: Penguin, 1980.
- Ndebele, Njabulo S. *Rediscovery of the ordinary : essays on South African literature and culture*. Johannesburg: COSAW, 1990.
- Nixon, Rob. "Aftermaths - South African Literature Today." *Transition* 72. 6.4. (1997): 64-77.
- Nkosi, Lewis. "Fiction by Black South Africans." *Home and Exile*. London: Longman, 1965. 125-36.
- , *Tasks and Masks: Themes and Styles of African Literature*. Essex: Longman, 1981.

- Nuttall, Sarah. "Subjectivities of Whiteness." *African Studies Review* 44.2. (2001): 115-140.
- , *Entanglement: literary and cultural reflections on post apartheid*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2009.
- Obama, Barack. *Dreams From My Father: a Story of Race and Inheritance*. Edinburgh: Canongate, 2008.
- Olney, James. *Metaphors of Self: the Meaning of Autobiography*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1972.
- , ed. *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.
- , *Memory & narrative: the weave of life-writing*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Parry, Anne. "Idioms for Representing the Unrepresentable: Post-War Fiction and the Shoah." *Journal of European Studies*. 27. (1997): 417-433.
- Paton, Alan. *Cry the Beloved Country: a Story of Comfort and Desolation*. London: Penguin, 1958.
- Pithouse, Richard. "A Politics of the Poor: Shack Dwellers' Struggles in Durban." *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 43. (2008): 63-95.
- Potter, Jonathan and Margaret Wetherell. *Discourse and Social Psychology: beyond Attitudes and Behaviour*. London: Sage, 1987.
- Raditlhalo, Sam. "A Proletarian Novel of The City Streets." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*. 44:1 (2008): 93-96.
- Ratele, Kopano & Solani Ngobeni. "Local publishing in need of colour, not drivel." *Mail & Guardian*. 20-26 June 2007: 29.
- Rimmon-Kenan, Shlomith. *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*. London: Routledge, 2002.
- Samuelson, Meg. "Speaking Rape 'Like a Man': Achmat Dangor's Bitter Fruit." *ARISA* 7. (2004): 1-5.

- . *Remembering the nation, dismembering women? : Stories of the South African transition*.
Scottsville: University of Kwazulu Natal Press, 2007.
- Slovo, Gillian. *Every Secret Thing: My Family, My Country*. London: Little Press, 1997.
- Smith, Zadie. "Two Paths for the Novel." *New York Review of Books*. 55. (2008) 18.
<<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/22083>>.
- Snead, James A., et al. *White screens, black images: Hollywood from the dark side*. London:
Routledge, 1994.
- Sole, Kelwyn. "The state of South African writing." *Litnet* archives September 2006
<www.litnet.co.za>.
- Soyinka, Wole. *The Burden of Memory, the Muse of Forgiveness*. New York: Oxford University
Press, 1999.
- Spencer, Lynda. "Young, Black and Female in Post- Apartheid South Africa." *Scrutiny*2. 14:1
(2009): 66-78.
- Stanley, Elizabeth. "Evaluating the Truth and Reconciliation Commission." *The Journal of Modern
African Studies*. 39.3 (1999): 525-546.
- Steyn, Melissa. *Whiteness just isn't what it used to be: White Identity in a Changing South Africa*.
New York: State University of New York, 2002.
- . "White Talk: White South Africans and the Management of Diasporic Whiteness."
Postcolonial whiteness: a Critical Reader on Race and Empire. Ed. Alfred J. Lopez. New
York: SUNY Press, 2005. 119-135.
- Theissen, Gunnar. *Between Acknowledgement and Ignorance: How White South Africans have dealt
with the Apartheid Past*. Johannesburg: CSV. 1997.
- Themba, Can. *Requiem for Sophiatown*. London: Penguin, 2006.
- Titlestad, Michael. "The pitfalls of literary debut." *Sunday Times Opinion* (25 March 2007): 37.

Tomlinson, Richard, et al, eds. *Emerging Johannesburg - Perspectives on a Post-Apartheid City*.

London: Routledge, 2003.

Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. New York: Norton. 1962.

Van der Post, Laurens. *The Lost World of the Kalahari*, New York: Morrow and Company. 1958

Van Rooyen, Kay-Ann. "Review of Diane Awerbuck's *Gardening at Night*." Women24 website.

<<http://www.women24.com>>.

Weintraub, K.J. "Autobiography and Historical Consciousness." *Critical Inquiry*. Chicago:

University of Chicago Press. 1.4. (1975): 821-848.

Whitlock, Gillian. *The Intimate Empire - Reading Women's Autobiography*. London: Cassell, 2000.

Wicomb, Zoë. "Shame and identity: the case of the coloured in South Africa." Attridge, Derek &

Jolly, Rosemary, eds. *Writing South Africa. Literature, Apartheid, Democracy, 1970-1995*.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1998. 97-108.

-----, *David's Story*. Cape Town: Kwela, 2000.