

**A Changing Didacticism:
The Development of South African
Young Adult Fiction from 1985 to 2006**

THESIS

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Abstract

This thesis endeavours to establish how political transformation in South Africa has impacted on the didactic function of locally produced young adult fiction between the years of 1985 and 2006. To this end, a selection of young adult novels and short stories are examined in relation to the time period during which they were written or are set, namely the final years of apartheid (from 1985 to the early 1990s), the period of transition from apartheid to democracy (approximately 1991 to 1997), and the early years of the twenty-first century (2000 to 2006).

Chapter One provides a brief overview of publishing for the juvenile market in South Africa over the last century, noting how significant historical and political events affected both the publishing industry itself and the content of children's and young adult literature. This chapter also adumbrates the theoretical foundations of the study.

The second chapter examines a selection of texts either written or set during the final years of the apartheid regime. This chapter establishes how authors during this period challenged notions of racial inequality and undermined the policies of the apartheid government, with varying degrees of success. The authors' methods in encouraging their (predominantly white) readers to question apartheid ideology are also interrogated. Those novels written after, but set during, the apartheid era are examined with the aim of determining their authors' didactic objectives in revisiting this period in their novels.

Chapter Three explores how authors writing during the transition period aimed to encourage readers to participate in the building of a 'rainbow nation,' by portraying

idealised modes of relating to the racial 'other.' While some of the authors examined in this chapter are optimistic, and even naïve, in their celebration of a newly established democracy, others are more cautious in suggesting that decades of oppression and separation can so easily be overcome.

Chapter Four demonstrates how the freedoms afforded by a democratic society have prompted young adult authors to explore the possibilities of adapting the sub-genre of the teenage problem novel to suit a distinctly South African context. While some of these texts are not overtly didactic in nature, they confront the unique issues faced by a generation of South African teenagers raised in a democratic society, and in some cases challenge readers to reconsider their approach to such issues.

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*Make your own notes,
NEVER underline or
write in a book.*

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Introduction

*Ideologies and attitudes have changed, and children's books reflect this.
(Jenkins 1993, 2)*

For as long as authors have been writing for children, they have been writing to teach their readers something about the world in which they live. From the instructive “courtesy books” of the fifteenth century to the religious tracts and moralistic fairytales popular in the centuries that followed (Townsend 1969, 17; 20; 50), books written for a juvenile audience have always sought to impart a lesson or moral. Didactic agendas in children’s and young adult fiction are naturally informed by authors’ experiences of the society in which they live, and when society changes, so do the pedagogical ‘messages’ contained in juvenile literature. In South Africa, the lessons contained in the pages of children’s and young adult fiction have inevitably shifted as the country has experienced major developments in political, social and cultural hegemony. This shift in the didacticism of children’s and young adult literature has proven particularly dramatic in the last two decades, as the oppressive structures of apartheid were dismantled and democracy finally established.

Authors for children and teenagers in South Africa have responded in much the same way as writers of adult fiction to the myriad of influences present in their society over the last century: changes in social attitudes and ideologies, historically important events, violent clashes and philosophical conflicts, love for the land and nature, and the difficulties of day-to-day living have all been recorded in their books. As Christopher Heywood has observed, “[f]rom its beginnings, South African literature has both reflected and transformed into its own idiom the preoccupations of its parent communities” (1976, vii). Unsurprisingly, the effects of colonialism and apartheid have had a pervasive influence on the history of South African literature. For decades, gross racial inequalities and segregation meant that only a privileged few were in a position to become writers and readers of fiction and, as a result, the discursive and ideological hegemonies of the ruling minority were uncritically reflected in the country’s literature.

During the last decades of the twentieth century, however, literature became a means of participating in the debate surrounding issues of race and prejudice, and many authors came to use their works in ways which (often subtly) criticised and undermined the apartheid system. South Africans from all racial and class backgrounds added their voices to the growing atmosphere of dissent, however difficult it may have proven for some. When petty and grand apartheid were finally dismantled and South Africa held its first democratic elections in 1994, writers of fiction contributed to the establishment of a 'new,' 'rainbow nation,'¹ some expressing their hope and jubilation, and others their scepticism. Whatever their position, South African writers of the greater part of the twentieth century were almost invariably preoccupied with issues of politics, race and social community.

For several decades, however, matters of politics and race were rarely explored by writers for a juvenile audience: as 'adult' concerns, these issues were deemed inappropriate for childhood reading. Following the rise of child activism in the 1970s, authors began, cautiously at first, to explore how apartheid legislation had shaped the childhood and adolescence of their audiences. The involvement of the country's young people in the struggle against apartheid proved that childhood is never completely removed from political control, and authors realised that it is through fiction that "we can bring our children the lessons of political thought, economic development, the relevance of religion and the importance of cultural identity" (Leshoai 1988, 93). By the 1980s, juvenile fiction echoed adult fiction in its often zealous opposition to institutionalised racism, and participated in the celebration of its dismantling. Like adult literature, children's and young adult fiction collectively came to reflect the history of South Africa; more specifically, though, it represented what it meant to be young in a complex and changing society.

The shifts in the didactic intention of young adult literature in the last twenty years mirror in many respects the drastic changes undergone by South African society.

¹ The term 'rainbow nation' is used throughout this thesis with an awareness of recent contentions and debates surrounding its definition. It is acknowledged that this somewhat problematic term has long been discredited by many critics as an ambiguous, empty, 'feel-good' cliché; however, it is a term that has been used extensively to encapsulate the ideal of a racially equal, harmonious democracy in South Africa following the 1994 elections. Since this ideal informs the didactic impulse in the work of many authors for children and young adults, it seems appropriate to use the term by which it is most obviously and commonly designated.

Certainly, political reformation in South Africa has had a marked influence on the didactic function of young adult fiction. By closely examining a number of selected texts either written or set during key phases of South Africa's recent history, this thesis will explore the impact on the didactic agenda of young adult fiction of the country's transformation from apartheid to a democratic state

To this end, Chapter One provides a theoretical and historical overview of publishing for a juvenile audience in South Africa that elucidates the effects of politics on the didactic objectives of children's and young adult authors. A distinction will be drawn between children's and young adult fiction on the grounds of such didactic functions. The relationship that forms between author and reader in the execution of such functions will be discussed, as will the theoretical principles that inform the analyses of a selection of young adult texts in the subsequent chapters.

In the second chapter, two texts written during the final years of apartheid are considered with the aim of establishing how, and to what ends, their authors were challenging racial inequality in South Africa and questioning the policies of the apartheid government. A novel and a collection of short stories written after, but set during, the apartheid regime are also appraised in order to ascertain the didactic objectives of their authors in revisiting the past.

Chapter Three focuses on novels and short stories written during the transition to democracy in South Africa. While issues of race and prejudice remain the central concern of many of these texts, the emphasis now falls on rebuilding relationships and establishing the 'new' South Africa. Through these narratives, authors attempt to provide idealised examples of relationships between people of all races, and to advocate the importance of the younger generation in the founding of the 'rainbow nation.' Although the continued influence of the recent past is duly acknowledged, the tone of these stories is hopeful and optimistic; they look forward to a better future rather than back at a shameful history.

The fourth and final chapter assesses the issues that have preoccupied young adult authors in more recent years. It will be argued that the popularity of the 'teenage problem novel,' a sub-genre of young adult fiction that has long since been a common choice among overseas authors, testifies not only to the influence of the Western world on the

form and content of South African teenage fiction, but also to the increased freedom felt by local authors in exploring alternative modes of writing. Though the novels examined in this chapter have undoubtedly been influenced by overseas trends, it will be shown how their authors have emphasised the distinctly South African context of their texts. While the urgency for political reform is no longer a prominent feature in these novels, the legacy of apartheid is still discernible in the poverty, class divisions, and HIV/Aids pandemic which they represent.

This thesis will demonstrate that the complexities of South African life are often plainly evident in the didactic agendas of juvenile fiction. More blatantly than adult fiction, books for younger audiences seek to teach, to edify, and to encourage questioning. The stories written for them are certainly a reflection of the society in which young South Africans live, and the *didactic* function of these stories is often most telling of the culture which produced them. After all, what could be more revealing of a society than that which it wishes to teach its young?

Chapter One:

Publishing for children and teenagers in South Africa: a historical and theoretical overview

[Books written for young South Africans] are a record of how, from the end of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twenty-first century, certain individuals conveyed in writing and illustration to young readers their interpretation of life in a complex society. (Jenkins 2006, xvi)

1.1 The politics of publishing: a century of South African children's and young adult literature

The history of children's and young adult fiction publishing in South Africa is not a long one, and is inextricably linked with political and social changes that have occurred in the country. The publishing of locally-written children's and young adult literature is "a fairly recent development," and it took several decades before publishing for the juvenile market became a viable and lucrative enterprise, allowing children's writing to become "an art form in its own right" (Davies 1992, 21). During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the rapidly increasing population of European settlers relied on children's books which were imported mainly from Britain and were "religious in theme and didactic by nature" (Heale 2004, 7). Jenkins observes that

[i]n the nineteenth century, adventure books for boys set in South Africa were published in Britain, aimed at a British readership, and heavily weighted with both scientific information on the country's botany, geography, history and so on, and with moralising on topics such as the responsibilities of British colonisers towards the native races. There was no thought of

writing books for white South African children, since colonials were expected to receive an education that was British in every respect. (1993, 47)

Certainly, there was no thought of writing books for local black children. By the end of the nineteenth century, inspired by the tales of colonial adventures in Africa that were being produced in and imported from Britain, a few local South Africans began to try their hand at children's writing, mostly in the form of poetry and religious prose. In 1883, Mary Carey-Hobson published the "very first full-length children's novel written by a South African [. . .] called *The Farm in the Karoo*" (Jenkins 2006, 1), and a few similar novels followed in the subsequent years.

It was not until 1907, however, that locally-written children's literature became firmly established with the publication of Percy FitzPatrick's seminal work, *Jock of the Bushveld*. Published in London, the novel "could be considered as the starting point of South African children's literature in English" (Heale 2004, 8), and is often hailed "by many [as] the only South African children's classic" (Jenkins 2006, 6). Jenkins comments as follows on the book's popularity:

At face value it is quintessentially South African. Told originally by a South African to his own children [. . .], it describes his adventures in the Eastern Transvaal with none of the clumsy didactic digressions on flora, fauna and native life that earlier writers used to include for their European readers [. . .].

Yet in spite of the novel indigenous quality of *Jock*, FitzPatrick was a man of his time and his book reflects typical colonial attitudes. (1993, 49–50)

Much of the description and attitudes evident in the pages of *Jock of the Bushveld* does indeed "read as gross racism" (Jenkins 1993, 130) today and, interestingly, more recently published imprints of the novel "omit the racially offensive language and attitudes" (Heale 2004, 8). Nevertheless, FitzPatrick's novel remains a revered text in South African literary history: in 1969, the Percy FitzPatrick Award was established to honour great works of children's fiction in South Africa and is today still the greatest accolade in local children's publishing.

Jock of the Bushveld is one of the first texts to be published in what would become a long-standing tradition in South African children's publishing. For nearly a century, writers for children – mirroring trends in adult publishing – turned to local landscapes for the inspiration and setting of their works, in what became an almost compulsive attempt to capture its natural splendour. Jenkins, who calls this phenomenon “The Bushveld Syndrome” (1993, 47), explains that

[t]he history of South African children's books written in English mirrors the interaction of South Africa's peoples, and their relationship with the land. The curiosity and romance which brought early travellers to this country and which transfuse the records of their travels were later transferred to the books written by South Africans for local children. Curiosity led to some of the very first local books being versions of the folktales of the indigenous inhabitants; romance soon turned to nostalgia for a time when wildlife was abundant and adventurers wandered free across an ‘unspoilt’ land. (1993, 1)

Jock of the Bushveld represents one of the earliest manifestations of Jenkins's “Bushveld Syndrome.” Influenced by British tales of colonial adventures in Africa, and by a growing sense of Afrikaner nationalism that sparked a “back-to-the-Bushveld movement after the [second Anglo-Boer] War” (Jenkins 1993, 54), the first half of the twentieth century saw writers producing dozens of romanticised bush adventures, in which (invariably white) characters interacted with local wildlife, flora and fauna, and on the rare occasion, with South Africa's indigenous peoples. These were stories “of self-glorification and myth [. . .] written in praise of the beautiful countryside, the friendly people, the gallant history” of South Africa (Heale 2004, 10). The bushveld was portrayed as uncharted terrain that needed to be explored and tamed by brave adventurers; hunting was uncritically, even romantically presented, and young boys proved their manhood in their brave confrontations with wild Africa. For the most part, these books were not set during the time in which they were written, but rather nostalgically harked back to the previous century for their settings. Jenkins cites the popularity of Viktor Pohl's *Bushveld Adventures* (1940) as a “classic example of the increasing interest in hunting and animal adventures [. . .]. This is a book of

reminiscences of [the author's] early life, most concerning hunting adventures and encounters with animals, told in a flat, awkward style" (1993, 54).

Novels of the "Bushveld Syndrome" of the first half of the twentieth century certainly reflected a deeply felt love and curiosity for South Africa's landscapes, and an appreciation of interactions with local wildlife, flora, and fauna. At the same time, however, these novels – and indeed those of other genres – reject indigenous peoples and cultures, and strongly suggest that cultural value is to be found elsewhere. As already mentioned, such novels invariably feature white protagonists, and privilege a European or Western value system; black characters and cultures are, almost without exception, undermined, infantilised or elided. Of course, contemporary readers recognise this practice as inherently racist, but it must be remembered that these novels reflect perceptions of race that had already been deeply ingrained in the Western world for centuries, and subsequently brought to South Africa during its colonisation by European countries. A brief examination of the basis of these discriminatory notions of race will prove useful here in understanding how these perceptions came to be reflected in both adult and children's literature of the first half of the twentieth century.

While the word 'race' first entered the English language some time during the sixteenth century, it was only two hundred years later, during the Enlightenment period, that "the idea of race began to be incorporated into more systematic meditations on the nature of the world" (Rattansi 2007, 23). Biologists, scientists and intellectuals, spurred on by explorers' descriptions of the indigenous peoples they encountered on their travels, began to theorise the 'differences' noted between the races. Most came to agree that there existed at least four "sub-species" of human, namely *americanus* ("red"), *europaeus* ("white"), *asiaticus* ("yellow") and *afēr* ("black"), all of which fell under the classification of *Homo sapiens* (Rattansi 2007, 25–26). The categorisation of the human sub-species was not only based on anatomical variances, however; scientists believed that each of the classified races was distinguished by certain innate characteristics of nature. Swedish naturalist Carl Linnaeus, for example, describes these differences in his influential 1792 work *Systema Naturae*:

H. Europaei. Of fair complexion, sanguine temperament, and

brawny form . . . Of gentle manners, acute in judgement, of quick invention, and governed by fixed laws . . . *H. Afri.* Of black complexion, phlegmatic temperament, and relaxed fibre . . . Of crafty, indolent and careless disposition, and are governed in their actions by caprice. (qtd. in Rattansi 2007, 26)

Scientists and intellectuals believed, then, that differences in physical appearances determined intellectual capacity, disposition, temperament, and ability to advance or progress as a people. Dubbed ‘scientific racism,’ these beliefs firmly established a racial hierarchy that heralded white Europeans as the most superior, civilised and intellectually advanced race, and regarded black Africans as inferior, uncivilised and backward. This thinking, which was to prevail for almost two centuries, was used to justify racially discriminatory practices such as colonisation, slavery, and eventually, apartheid.

During the first half of the twentieth century, South Africa (and indeed most of the world) was still steeped in the rhetoric of ‘scientific racism,’ and “[n]early all white South Africans, English-speakers as well as Afrikaners, assumed that any sensible, civilised person knew that Africans were a culturally inferior race and should be treated accordingly – an assumption that corresponded with the global distribution of power and wealth and was still endorsed by reputable Western scientists” (Thompson 1985, 41). When the National Party came to power in 1948, bringing to an end decades of foreign rule, the implementation of racist laws and policies was believed to be not only justifiable, but essential. The National Party’s “reinforcement of pseudo-scientific ‘biology,’ plus its theocratically inspired form of tyranny” (MacCann and Maddy 2001, 9), ensured the continued political supremacy and economic advantage of white South Africans. At a social level, the dominance of white hegemony and racialised discourse influenced the way in which South Africans related to and interacted with one another, and as such, modes of racial ‘knowledge’ were continually reproduced. Accordingly, “Africans (blacks) [were] said to be slow, lazy, and smelly; Coloureds (brown) [were] said to be rowdy and cheerful; South African Indians [were] said to be crafty” (de Villiers 1971, 402). The prevalence of these beliefs amongst many white South Africans – who formed the vast majority of writers, producers and readers of local literature – meant that these stereotypes inevitably found their way onto the pages of children’s books. The formalisation of the apartheid government’s racist legislature confirmed, for many, the

validity of white supremacy, and this oppressive ideology was further endorsed in the majority of locally produced literature. In the pages of their books, usually through authors' employment of crude stereotypes, white children were taught that theirs was the naturally superior race, and that as whites they had the right and even the responsibility to patronise and demean those of other races. Children's and young adult books produced during this time almost invariably portray white characters as intelligent, civilised and dignified in comparison to dim-witted, simple and savage blacks, and moreover, reinforce the idea of this being a natural or divine social order.

Most white South African children were rarely, if ever, exposed to alternative examples of inter-racial relations in their literature. As international sanctions against South Africa increased, many overseas publishers and individual authors refused to export their publications to the country, and the need for locally produced literature increased dramatically (Heale 2004, 9): as a result, the South African children's publishing industry flourished during this time. The government's tight control on education also proved to be financially beneficial for publishers, as prescribed networks (for use in the classroom as well as to stock school libraries) ensured that many children's and young adult books enjoyed several print runs. Jenkins explains that the "economics of book publishing [. . .] tie up closely with the influence of government education departments on children's books. Because the ordinary retail market is so small, having books prescribed for use in schools offers a most attractive financial return, particularly in black schools where numbers are so large" (1993, 5). The financial return offered by this market allowed publishers to risk the publication of other titles that were less likely to be prescribed in schools, ensuring a relatively substantial output of children's fiction. In 1961, the Transvaal Education Department prescribed the first novel by a South African writer for use in classroom teaching. Entitled *Out of the Strong: A Bushveld Story* by R. Lighton, it is "[d]escribed in a contemporary review in the *Pretoria News* as a 'South African novel which never once mentions race,' [. . . and] is a typical *plaasroman* about the intrigues of white farmers and country schoolmasters" (Jenkins 1993, 54).

By the early 1970s, the ever-popular bushveld adventures had become more self-consciously historic, most notably in the works of Jenny Seed, one of South Africa's most "prolific and also consistently good writers" (Jenkins 1993, 6). Seed produced

dozens of historically accurate novels for young readers, and set her narratives during some of the most contentious periods of South African history: the arrival of the British settlers in the nineteenth century; the wars between the Boer trekkers and the Zulus and the Ndebele, and later against the British; the Border Wars in the Eastern Cape; and the diamond rush in Kimberley and the gold rush in the Transvaal, among others (Jenkins 1993, 109). Her novels focus on the “personal experiences of people involved in historical events” and, according to Jenkins, “[t]his has the advantage of enabling Seed to show that everyone is a victim of historical circumstance but that individuals can, in the sphere of their own lives, behave honourably and with compassion towards their fellows” (1993, 113). Her unusual sensitivity in her portrayals of black characters set her novels apart from their contemporaries, and “[w]hite children reading them will encounter black people portrayed without patronage” (Jenkins 1993, 113). While she has been criticised for her Eurocentric view of South African history, she does not present a romanticised view of that history, and does not “shrink away from indicating the less palatable facts of colonialism” (Heale 2004, 10). Seed is certainly to be praised as one of the first South African children’s writers to reject damaging racial stereotypes in her attempt to portray black South Africans in a more insightful, sensitive light.

During the 1980s, stories of the “Bushveld Syndrome” began to take a different turn. Rejecting earlier themes of hunting and the exploitation of the natural world for the enjoyment of man, writers of the 1980s focussed on the ecological conservation of the environment (Jenkins 1993, 72). Jenkins explains that the children’s writers of the 1980s “acknowledge that human beings are part of the ecology of the entire country, and they explore our moral and spiritual response to this oneness” (1993, 67). As is the case with all children’s works with a bushveld theme, these novels are often overtly didactic, but this didacticism has shifted in its focus to the conservation, rather than the unrestrained consumption, of the country’s natural beauty. Together with the characters of these novels, readers learn about South Africa’s rich array of wild- and plant-life, and are made aware of the dangers posed to nature by the greed and ignorance of people. In doing so, the “child protagonists engage with something which creates the dramatic tension of the novel: they grapple with scientific knowledge or an adventure; or they come to terms with their own nature. Some of them, through interacting with the environment, learn to

cope with personal relationships” (Jenkins 1993, 107). These children (often girls) are, in every respect, far different from the gregarious boys who populated the bushveld novels of the first half of the twentieth century. However, such novels are not completely divorced from the ideologies of their predecessors:

As successors to the ‘Bushveld’ prescribed works of the 1940s, they are a new way of expressing patriotism, of confirming the bond between South Africans and their country. The colourful local language and names for the creatures and plants express this sense of South Africanness. But now it is a patriotism that requires the conservation, rather than the exploitation, of the country.
(Jenkins 1993, 107)

However, what is still absent from this “sense of South Africanness” is the presence of black characters in these novels. Invariably, the characters who endeavour to learn about nature are white children, who are usually taught by an affable white game ranger or conservationist (though, to be fair, some of these texts do not feature people at all, but are rather populated by talking animals and insects). The involvement of the black population in nature conservation is rarely portrayed in such novels and, as Jenkins points out, this is “one significant issue on which they are silent” (1993, 107).

Indeed, black South Africans have historically failed to play any sort of meaningful role in children’s literature. Nevertheless, the influence of their culture, in spite of its general rejection by earlier writers, is responsible for what is perhaps the most enduring genre in juvenile publishing. African folktales are a notable manifestation of the South African “Bushveld Syndrome” and have provided endless material for children’s books. From early in the twentieth century, “collector[s] of African folklore” (Heale 2004, 6) have published volumes of stories based, sometimes loosely, on indigenous oral tales, often adapting them to conform to the European fairytale tradition (Jenkins 2006, 87).² Even before folktales came to be formally written and marketed as children’s stories, European missionaries endeavoured to record and preserve these stories, though their efforts often resulted in the stories being “sanitised or moralistically rewritten” (Heale 2004, 6). African folktales often feature personified, talking animals of the wild, and the

² Of course, the history of African folktales, and their relationship to European fairytales, is an incredibly complex one, and cannot be examined in much detail here.

interactions between these animals usually results in a moral lesson. Collections of folktales released in the last few years have usually been exquisitely illustrated and attractively packaged, and remain popular choices amongst parents. However, the production of folktale collections has always been highly problematic. Jenkins notes that folktales “form a considerable proportion of the limited number of children’s books published in South Africa, and within the super-heated racial sensibilities of the country this cross-cultural enterprise is obviously a significant phenomenon” (1993, 9–10). Perhaps most troubling is the disparagement of African culture inherent in the marketing of folktales as children’s stories. As Heale notes, “[t]he original stories had been intended for listeners of all ages,” but “[i]n the ears of a 17th century European, tales of talking animals seemed childish” (2004, 6). Jenkins concurs, stating that the marketing of folktales as children’s literature poses “the greatest danger of injustice to the originals and their culture, for the implication might be that African folktales are ‘childish’” (1993, 21). Indeed, the patronisation of African culture and people formed the basis of apartheid ideology. In addition, gross racial inequality in South Africa meant that, until recently, folktale collections were written by (and for) whites. Obviously, “this could be a tall order for a white writer who had only the faintest notion” of the culture from which their stories originated (Jenkins 2006, 87), and this often resulted in the reductive misrepresentation of that culture. More recently, folktale collections written by black authors have appeared, and Jenkins has suggested that an “upsurge of publishing in this field” is a result of a “desire of whites to learn more about African culture, as well as an assertion of black people of their own culture” (1993, 10). Whatever the reason, “African folk tales remain popular materials” (Louw 1979, 23) for children’s books, though even today the majority seem to be penned by white authors.

If what Jenkins calls the “Bushveld Syndrome” resulted in much of the literature produced for children in South Africa during the first half of the twentieth century (and some well beyond that time), then a growing political consciousness seems to have motivated the production of juvenile literature in the last few decades. Jenkins observes that “[t]he children’s uprising of 1976 marked the liberation of South African English children’s books from a taboo on matters of race and politics” (1993, 130), signifying a dramatic shift in attention for many writers. Political activism amongst children

“provided material for realistic plots on this new theme, and prompted writers to make race and contemporary social issues the focus of children’s books instead of the unmarked background” (Jenkins 1993, 130). Of course, the policies of the apartheid government had, for some time, been subject to criticism, and the “growing current of disapproval [. . .] resulted in our children’s literature catching up with the times” (Heale 2004, 11). For most writers, this meant a move away from the rural settings of children’s literature to the cities and towns where “residential segregation was breaking down [. . .], schools were being integrated, social mixing became possible and young people were exposed to political thinking opposed to apartheid” (Jenkins 2006, 18). While a few writers (who were still mostly white) attempted to write from the perspective of a black character, the white protagonists of many of the books produced during this time were meeting and interacting with their black counterparts in ways which transcended the traditional master – servant relationship. These characters invariably came to question the concept of race, the validity and ethical principles of apartheid, and even the beliefs and behaviour of their parents. As Jenkins points out, “[w]hat these writers are doing [. . .], is using the point of view of innocent children [. . .] to present a fresh view of South Africa, stripped of adult cant” (1993, 133), and suggesting a new mode of thinking about the racial other. The black children portrayed in these novels “are proud, intelligent, educated and speak English fluently” (Jenkins 1993, 135), by no means the inferior human beings denoted by the apartheid government. By the 1980s, “authors for young adults regularly showed up adult racism through the eyes of young people” (Jenkins 2006, 39).

This shift in the representation of race in young adult novels (as well as adult fiction) was no doubt influenced by the ever-increasing credence attributed to the argument that race is a discursive construct, rather than natural or legitimate category. By as early as the late nineteenth century, the beliefs stemming from ‘scientific racism’ were being widely questioned, and eventually were rejected altogether. Pseudo-scientific definitions were abandoned and ‘race’ deemed a “dangerous trope” (Gates 1985, 5) which constructed a baseless system of knowledge that allowed for the subjugation of the racial other. Academics began “to define race as a function of linguistic and cultural differences rather than as a natural or essential property” (Leitch et al. 2001, 2422) and most agreed to “treat the issue as terminological” (Appiah 1985, 21). Henry Louis Gates,

Jr., for example, asserted that “[r]ace, as a meaningful criterion within the biological sciences, has long been recognised to be a fiction. When we speak of ‘the white race’ or ‘the black race,’ ‘the Jewish race’ or ‘the Aryan race,’ we speak in biological misnomers and, more generally, in metaphors” (Gates 1985, 4). Race, then, was no longer regarded as a valid system of biological classification but as something that existed only within the language used to define it. Gates explains that

The sense of difference defined in popular usages of the term ‘race’ has both described and *inscribed* differences of language, belief system, artistic tradition, and gene pool, as well as all sorts of supposedly natural attributes such as rhythm, athletic ability, cerebration, usury, fidelity, and so forth. The relation between ‘racial character’ and these sorts of characteristics has been inscribed through tropes of race, lending the sanction of God, biology, or the natural order to even presumably unbiased descriptions of cultural tendencies and differences.

(1985, 5; emphasis in original)

Ironically, then, the presumed differences between the races – and the prejudice inherent in the belief in their existence – has come to depend on the continued use of racial discourse. “Racial character,” as Gates defines it, is maintained by language; it is “a metaphor for something else and not an essence or a thing in itself, apart from its creation by an act of language” (1985, 402).

The destructive power of the language of race should not be underestimated, however. As Mikhail Bakhtin explains, “[l]anguage, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other” (qtd. in Gates 1985, 1) and is therefore mobilised by the individual in defining the other, much as one uses language to make sense of the external world. The discourse of race maintains the presuppositions of inherent difference as defined by ‘scientific racism.’ In making use of this discourse, the social hierarchy of race is reproduced and ‘non-white’ races continue to be subjugated. As Christian points out, “one major element of ideologies of dominance, such as sexism and racism, is to dehumanize people by stereotyping them, by denying them their variousness and complexity” (1988, 2263), and thereby rendering them inferior. Racial discourse constitutes ‘knowledge’ of the racial other in place of lived experience.

The continued reliance, particularly by those in positions of political and economic power, on the discourse of race ensured that the legacy of colonialism, and the oppressive laws of apartheid thereafter, remained in place decades after academics began to question the validity of the biological classification of races. By the second half of the twentieth century, however, authors had begun, often self-consciously, to incorporate these new modes of thinking about race into their narratives, and in so doing, questioned the legitimacy of apartheid rule. Of course, books that openly criticised institutionalised racism and government policy were not met without opposition, which no doubt partly explains why local literature was so slow to reflect ideas of race that had already been accepted elsewhere in the world. Heale points out that “[t]he state was by far the major purchaser of [. . .] books (for schools or public libraries) and would clearly not spend money on [. . .] books [which criticised the government], so publishers would not accept such offerings” (2004, 15–16). Novels which were openly critical of the apartheid government were promptly banned, among them *Journey to Jo'burg* (1985) by Beverley Naidoo and *The Sound of the Gora* (1980) by Ann Harries. The authors of these books found publishers overseas, while others offered a more veiled criticism of apartheid in order to escape an appearance on the list of banned publications.

During the early 1990s, South African society experienced rapid change. ‘Terrorist’ organisations such as the African National Congress (ANC) were unbanned by the government and the country held its first democratic elections in 1994. The realisation of a ‘new,’ democratic South Africa marked a shift in the tone of juvenile fiction from one of urgent protest to one of optimism and celebration. Books such as *The Day Gogo Went to Vote* by Elinor Batezat Sisulu (1997) and Floyd Cooper’s *Mandela: From the Life of a South African Statesman* (2000) proliferated. Once this ‘honeymoon period’ had come to an end, themes of politics and protest began rapidly to disappear from the pages of South African children’s books. A few authors revisited the years of apartheid in their novels, often in a revisionist attempt to provide a more balanced, less Eurocentric history of the country. For most writers, however, “[t]he advent of democracy in 1994 [. . .] liberated [them] to write about the joys and anxieties of childhood without reference to politics or identifying the characters by race” (Jenkins 2001, 145). Contemporary social issues such as poverty, crime and HIV/Aids became the focus of more serious works of juvenile

fiction, while some authors have chosen to write ‘teenage problem novels,’ popular in the United Kingdom and America, that explore issues of universal teenage angst such as drugs, sexuality, overbearing parents and identity crises. Still others have tried their hand at writing novels in the perennially popular romance and fantasy genres.

In the last decade, however, authors and publishers have seen a “financial depression settling over the children’s book scene” (Heale 2004, 22). The dismantling of apartheid meant the end of strict government control over education, and schools and education departments have been allowed more freedom in prescribing textbooks for classroom use. As Heale explains, “[t]he huge profits made by publishers on prescribed books allowed them to risk the publication of other children’s books not so likely to be prescribed. When the prescribed book market died, so did the funding for indigenous children’s literature” (2004, 20). In addition, “[w]hatever money is spent on education leaves hardly anything over for supporting (still less starting) a school library. [. . .] The result is that most publishers can only consider creating books for children if they come under an ‘educational’ heading and can be used for actual teaching. Individual fiction titles are a risk” (Heale 2004, 25). As a result, the number of new titles for children and young adults is dwindling every year, and as most of these books only achieve one edition, they quickly fade into obscurity.

Bookshops which sell directly to the public have also encountered obstacles. The introduction of Value Added Tax (VAT) on orders made to publishers meant that “[p]utting books on the shelf became more expensive – so they stocked only the titles sure to sell” (Heale 2004, 24).³ Inevitably, this has meant that bookshops have stocked vast amounts of imported children’s and teenagers’ series such as *Goosebumps*, *Sweet Valley High*, *Sweet Dreams*, *Babysitters Club* and *Point Horror*, in addition to classic favourites such as Enid Blyton, Roald Dahl, Dr. Seuss and Beatrix Potter. Celebrity and TV series tie-ins have proved immensely popular, with series of books being produced to capitalise on the fame of the *Hannah Montana* and Olsen Twins franchises. Children’s movies often coincide with the release of related books and other products. This phenomenon, together with the overwhelming prevalence of the global franchise built

³ The “No tax on knowledge!” policy in Great Britain means that bookshops do not pay tax to publishers when ordering books, and are therefore able to sell books to the public at a lower cost. Unfortunately, calls to introduce a similar policy in South Africa were unsuccessful (Heale 2004, 24).

around the *Harry Potter* series, has meant that local publications are all but eclipsed. Managers of some local bookshops claim that it is only tourists looking to take home a memento of their African holiday who buy South African children's books (Heale 2004, 24). Certainly, the layout of many of these bookshops (particularly those belonging to national chains, such as Exclusive Books and Fact & Fiction) attests to this: even in stores which boast large children's sections, there are often only one or two shelves, dubiously labelled "Africana," that display South African works, usually with picture books for small children impractically arranged alongside novels for older readers.

Despite this anomaly, the failure to recognise the diverse reading needs of children of different ages is no longer as common as it once was. Though the history of the development of children's and young adult literature is inextricably linked in many regards, and often mutually dependent on the development of adult fiction, young adult fiction must be recognised as a category of literature in its own right. While Donelson and Nilsen contend that this term "would have been strange, even meaningless, [. . .] one hundred years ago" (1980, 2), a growing interest in and understanding of human psychology during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has led to the identification of adolescence as a distinct phase of development. Publishers and writers have, for many years, recognised this, and in turn catered for the unique reading requirements and tastes of this age group (Donelson and Nilsen 1980, 2). The following section of this chapter will explore some of the theories surrounding the production of texts for a young adult audience, and relate these to a specifically South African context.

1.2 Didacticism and young adult fiction in a South African context

Young adult fiction as a category distinct from children's and adult literature has proven notoriously difficult to define for academics, critics and publishers alike. It is generally accepted that novels in this category are aimed at readers in their teens; however, defining the age parameters of this audience is a complicated task. Literary theorists Donelson and Nilsen have acknowledged that "although most of us are quite sure we know what a teenager is, no hard and fast rules have developed for defining *teenage books*, *adolescent*

literature, or books for young adults. The terms are vague and in professional literature are used interchangeably” (1980, 5; emphasis in original). Donelson and Nilsen define the audience of young adult fiction as being between the ages of twelve and twenty (1980, 6), while another literary theorist, Gladys Williams, argues that this age range falls between eleven and fifteen (1970, 104). Young adult fiction writer Ian Bone delineates this category even more broadly, saying that a young adult is “any reader from 12 to 25 or beyond” (2005, 3). Indeed, the vast differences in the development of reading skills of individuals in this age group make it virtually impossible to impose an accurate age range for novels in this category. A precocious child of nine, for example, may read a book intended for and enjoyed by readers in their teens. Bone observes that “Young Adult fiction can be categorised as ‘just about anybody who can understand the words’, because students as young as year six and as old as fourth year university, will access this group of fiction” (2005, 3).

Some critics have abandoned the task of delineating an exact age range in defining young adult fiction, and instead look to its content for their definitions. Steve Bennett argues that these “are longer books, often 50,000 words or more. Most are contemporary stories, and often involve contemporary problems, including drugs, sex, and peer pressure i.e. popular themes are usually relevant to the problems and struggles of today's teenagers, regardless of the genre” (2008, para. 5). Bone, meanwhile, rather elusively explains that the “protagonist in YA fiction is almost always a young person, from a teenager to late teens to early twenties. Yes, adult fiction has characters of this age, but generally adult fiction looks in on the young person's life, whereas YA fiction lives out the young person's life” (2005, 5). While it is true that, almost invariably, the protagonists of young adult novels are close in age to their intended audiences, Bone's explanation that such novels “live out” rather than “look in” on teenager's life is extremely vague. At the same time, Bennett's argument that young adult fiction deals with “contemporary problems” is restrictively narrow; though many novels in this category do follow this trend, not all conform to the constraints of this particular sub-genre (commonly known as ‘the teenage problem novel’).

Often the most tangible identifying quality of a young adult novel is the manner in which it is packaged by the publisher.⁴ Having identified a novel's target audience as teen readers, most publishers tend to present the text in such a way as to appeal to that market; usually, this entails a cover design that clearly delineates a particular readership.⁵ The covers of young adult novels will frequently indicate their intended audience: for example, the cover of *Crossing Over*, an anthology of short stories compiled by Jakes Gerwel and Linda Rode, states that the stories focus "on the world of young people entering adulthood today" and should appeal to "young adults" (1995, back cover). Indeed, it has become a common practice amongst publishers to suggest a particular readership on the covers of young adult novels (Hentoff 1969, 400), and it was on the basis of such packaging that many of the novels chosen for this study were identified.

What can safely be established is that young adult fiction is usually *intended* for adolescent readers, approximately of high school age, and the protagonists of these novels are almost invariably of a similar age. Novels in this category are generally more sophisticated than children's picture books, and while they often deal with similar issues to adult novels, their *approach* to these issues is vastly different. Though young adult novels frequently tackle topical social and political issues, as their adult counterparts may do, novels written for teens are often more obviously didactic in intention than adult fiction. Young adult fiction is similar to children's fiction in this regard, as both aim to teach the reader. While overt didacticism in young adult fiction has purportedly become less and less popular over the last fifty years, it has by no means disappeared completely, but rather has become subtler in its presentation. John Rowe Townsend comments as follows on this issue:

Is the didactic spirit extinct in children's literature today? We tend to talk and write as though it were. It is contrary to our view of the happy, relaxed, and more-or-less-equal relationship between the generations which we now regard as ideal. Yet the urge to instruct

⁴ Once again, however, there are exceptions to this rule. The publishers of the *Harry Potter* series, for example, have released all seven novels in the series with alternative, 'adult' covers, presumably to capitalise on the wide appeal of the novels to both children and adults. At the same time, novels which were originally intended for an adult audience, but proved popular with teenagers, have also been re-released with covers meant to appeal to this younger audience, for example J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (1954 – 1955) and J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951).

⁵ Examples of these covers can be found in Appendix A.

the young is deeply built into human nature. And if one looks at the 'quality' children's books of today, and still more at what is written about them, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that didacticism is still very much alive. (1969, 33–34)

Townsend goes on to argue that “[y]ears ago we threw old didacticism (dowdy morality) out of the window; it has come back in at the door wearing modern dress (smart values) and we do not even recognise it” (1969, 34). Indeed, while it may not be fashionable to admit to the didactic nature of young adult fiction, the belief that adolescence is “the years of supreme educational opportunity, a time for sowing, when the mind of youth is open and easily moulded this way or that” (Williams 1970, 104) is often at the forefront of an author's mind. Children's literary theorist Jill P. May concurs, arguing that

Few authors simply write to wile [sic] away the time. And very few authors write strictly to entertain readers. As humans involved in a contemporary world, writers observe the people and events surrounding them. They react to things that excite them and those that upset them. Writers also read, and they discover how the past has given rise to the present. What they observe becomes important to them; they want to share with others what they have seen or read and thought about. In other words, writers write to tell us about life. (May 1995, 114)

The urge to convey wisdom to a younger generation, then, is still a strong motivating factor for most children's and young adult authors. This is not to suggest, however, that an author's 'message' is simply and unquestioningly accepted by his or her reader. In young adult fiction, as with any genre, meaning is created through the formation of a relationship between the author and the reader.

As May claims, an author is never an individual removed from his or her socio-historical context. Authors will be affected and influenced by what is happening around them; their life experiences, convictions, ideological beliefs and opinions will inevitably inform their work and, in the case of authors of children's and young adult literature, will shape the didactic thrust of that work. The author of any text, then, writes from a very specific subject position in culture, and from this position becomes the mediator of the 'message' he or she wishes to convey. Often, this presents complications when it comes to texts written for children and young adults, as “[t]he plain fact is that children's

literature, with very few exceptions, is written *by* adult writers *for* young readers. This rather obvious point has fundamental implications for the way children's literature negotiates the issue of growing up" (Nikolajeva 2002, 111; emphasis in original). Nikolajeva explains that "the subject matter – childhood – is inevitably detached from the writer's experience, even though all adult writers have once been children. The notion of childhood and the ideas about growing, procreation and death which we meet in children's fiction reflect the views of adults, which may or may not correspond to the real status and experience of real children in any given society" (2002, 111). Potential obstacles that this may present in the formation of the author–reader relationship are obvious: should an author's position and experiences prove to be too far removed from those of the reader, or should an author's text lack an authenticity with which the reader can readily identify, the potential for meaningful intercourse between author and reader may be lost.

The subject position of the author will also bear a strong influence on *how* he or she chooses to construct his or her narrative. Young adults are particularly sensitive to being 'preached' to; if a young reader feels he or she is being patronised or that an author is condescending, he or she is likely to reject that author's 'message.' May explains how

[a]uthors create meanings for their stories through characterisation, plot, and imagery. They *suggest* how the story should be *interpreted* by establishing a narrative style, using traditional literary devices of a particular genre, and setting up a narrative point of view. The meanings are *implied*; good authors will indirectly state their meanings. They strive not to preach. Since they hope to predict how the reader might react to their stories, they rely on images that have cultural significance, characters who fit certain stereotypes, language that *suggests* or predicts future outcomes in the plot. Most authors, however, do not tell their audience how to respond.

(1995, 55; emphasis added)

Most children's and young adult authors realise, then, that their reader needs to be "a kind of co-author" of the text, to participate in the construction of its meaning in order for the author's "message [. . . to] be brought home" (Tabbert 1980, 40). Readers, like authors, will inevitably bring their own life experiences, values and beliefs to their reading of a text: as its "co-authors," no two readers will experience a particular text in the same way,

or glean the same meaning or 'message' from it. At the same time, the reception of a particular text will shift according to the socio-historical context in which it is read. A novel written during the nineteenth century, for example, will not be received in quite the same way by modern readers as it was by those who read it soon after its publication.

Because individual readers "infer what the author's message might be" (May 1995, 54), it is all but impossible for an author to predict exactly how readers may respond to his or her text. It is far more complicated to evaluate the subject position of the reader than it is to position the author in the author-reader relationship. What *is* usually discernible from an assessment of any given text, however, is the *implied reader* of that text. In defining the implied reader, Wayne C. Booth explains that "[t]he author creates, in short, an image [. . .] of his reader: he makes his reader, as he makes his second self" (1961, 138). The implied reader is, for an author, the ideal reader: he or she will react to the text in the way in which the author expects, interpret the 'message' the author intends to convey, and hail from the kind of background and belief system that the author had in mind when writing his or her novel. In short, he or she is the reader to whom the author addresses the text. In examining literature written for young adults and children, "the implied reader can be deduced from the very arrangement of the text" as "the writer arranges the whole text according to that figment of his imagination [the implied reader]" (Tabbert 1980, 41). The subject matter, diction, characters, settings and a myriad of other choices made by the author hints at who that author had in mind as the audience of his or her novel. Often, the didactic significance of a text is one of the most telling indicators of who the implied reader may be, particularly when the assumed values of the implied reader are not congruent with those of the *actual* reader. The values or attitudes advocated by the text will, "[d]epending on the profile and background of the actual reader, [. . .] either confirm existing attitudes, prompt a reconsideration, or result in the ideas expressed being dismissed because of the reader's own radically different ideological viewpoint" (Inggs 2000, 53). In such cases, the ideological stance and didactic agenda of the author become all the more obvious.

As already mentioned, amongst the most crucial differences between literature for both adults and children and fiction aimed at a young adult audience is the way in which the didactic function of the text is approached. Because younger children and teenagers

are both at very distinct stages in their development, their reading requirements and preferences are vastly different. Donelson and Nilsen argue that

[c]ognitive and intellectual development has a tremendous influence on reading interests at all stages from early childhood through adolescence. Jean Piaget has theorized that at about the age of twelve, the 'formal operational' stage of thinking begins to develop. It is not until this stage is developed that a person can reason logically and consistently, handle abstract ideas, infer cause and effect, and make generalizations. Another way of saying this is that a teenager is able to consider variant possibilities and to imagine actions and their results even though there is no way to actually try them out. Boyd McCandless and Richard Coop describe this stage of thinking as an ability to 'adopt several different viewpoints when considering a given act: a policeman's view, a parent's view, even the views of a dog, a Martian, society in general, or God. In short, [the young person has] gained possession of all the powers of *If*.' In relation to imaginative literature, there is probably no intellectual quality more important than possessing 'the powers of *If*.' This is true not only of fantasy and science fiction, but of any literature dealing with subjects and viewpoints beyond the reader's actual experience. Even in realistic novels, for example, we are asked to enter into the being and viewpoint of other characters and must think 'as if' we were another. (1980, 3-4; emphasis in original)

Because of the developing intellectual capacities of their audiences, then, authors of young adult fiction are able to deal with very different issues than authors for children. Unlike children, teenagers are able to imagine realities very different to their own; they are able to envision themselves in the place of characters with whom they otherwise have little in common, and consider how that character may be feeling or experiencing the same world in a very different way to the reader. For young adults, "[r]eading is a likely and practical way [. . .] to be exposed to such alternatives and to explore realities beyond their own immediate situation" (Donelson and Nilsen 1980, 5). Just as importantly, young adults are able to *question* their own immediate situation and, through the alternatives offered to them in fiction, confront their habitual values (Jackson 1983, 11), as during this stage of their development, adolescents are "encouraged to move away from an exclusively egocentric perspective to a position where they are able to view situations from different points of view" (Jackson 1983, 94). From childhood, young readers

“gradually move away from a simple interest in what happened in the story. They ask *why*” (Donelson and Nilsen 1980, 26; emphasis added).

It is for this reason that books written for young adults, particularly in recent decades, regularly deal with more controversial themes. Critics have argued, however, that even in dealing with these more controversial issues, “the majority of teenage novels tend to reinforce conventional and establishment attitudes” (Ray, qtd. in Donelson and Nilsen 1980, 17). Donelson and Nilsen contend that young adult novels are “clearly on the side of the angels. Even when the subject is sexuality, alcoholism, divorce, or drugs, the books support conventional middle-class standards” (1980, 17). Considering that the vast majority of these novels are informed by a didactic objective, it is unsurprising that they advocate more ‘acceptable’ behaviour or, in the words of Donelson and Nilsen, “middle-class standards.” However, to suggest that *all* young adult novels pursue a middle-class agenda is unjustly reductive. Many of these novels, particularly those which deal with greater social injustices, take a decided stance *against* the ‘acceptable’ middle-class status quo. Because they are more open to questioning the world around them, “[y]oung adults, especially in the last year or two of high school, have often been receptive to books about the human dilemmas stemming from the ways society functions or malfunctions” (Donelson and Nilsen 1980, 161). Indeed, Inggs has observed that “[a]s an agent of social change, youth fiction in South Africa has played a major role in encouraging young people to question, and even reject, the moral basis of society” (2002, 23).

It was the younger generation’s willingness to question their society that allowed for the great change in South African young adult fiction during the last quarter of the twentieth century. As already mentioned, the involvement of children and teenagers in political activism “marked the liberation of South African English children’s books from a taboo on matters of race and politics” (Jenkins 1993, 130), allowing authors to explore these issues in the books written for the juvenile market. Apartheid policies were increasingly subjected to criticism, and “[s]tories of teenagers caught up in the events of social and political change [. . .] show[ed] a willingness to explore new paradigms of human relations in South Africa” (Jenkins 1993, 2). The 1980s saw a surge of young adult novels which “started to contain the first hints of criticism of our social structure,

the first glimpses of what South Africa could become” (Heale 2004, 14). The didactic ‘message’ contained in these books is usually very clear, as is their intended audience: authors wanted their predominantly white readers to realise that apartheid was an unethical, immoral and outmoded system that needed to be abandoned. In achieving this aim, authors usually confronted the validity of racial stereotypes, showing how unfounded and damaging racism had proven to be for South African society. While “earlier books simply reflected the status quo and the racial attitudes that predominated among whites at the time” (Jenkins 1993, 130), these novels challenged those racial attitudes and invariably exposed the premise of racial ‘knowledge’ and stereotypes to be unjustified.

The majority of authors during this period were white women, and for the most part, this still remains the case today (Louw 1979, 23; Bentley and Midgley 2000, 52; Inggs 2002, 22; Heale 2004, 18; Jenkins 2006, xi). This lack of diversity amongst authors for young adults has been the basis of speculation and criticism by several academics, who are sceptical as to whether a white writer is able to convey accurately the ‘black experience’ (which, it must be noted, is an essentialist notion in itself). Jenkins comments that “[e]ven when white writers are not romanticising, it is not easy for them to portray black characters authentically or create a plot that will convincingly engage them with white people” (1993, 142). Indeed, the question of whether a white, middle-class author’s subject position is too far removed from that of his or her black characters to allow for their credible depiction is one which deserves consideration. Many academics believe that “books in English (or Afrikaans, for that matter) about contemporary Black life will only become really successful once they are written by Blacks, from personal experience” (Louw 1979, 23); to this end, “[i]n recent years, some publishers have made strong efforts to find, encourage, and publish young adult books by writers of colour” (Bentley and Midgley 2000, 57).

Difficult though it may have been, writers for young adults during the 1980s and early 1990s attempted to bring together young people of all races in their narratives, and though “such apartheid legislation as the Group Areas Act insisted that different cultural groups in South Africa should live apart, our children were beginning to have the opportunity to meet each other in the pages of books” (Heale 2004, 16). Stereotypes and

prejudice were, as a matter of course, undermined and avoided; where stereotyping did find its way into stories, it was “not as part of characterisation, but because an author want[ed] to convey a particular message” (van der Walt 1995, 73). Indeed, the use of certain (carefully selected) stereotypes and clichéd circumstances often proves useful to authors, as another challenge they face is finding ways in which their readers can identify with the text. Though teenagers are generally more comfortable than younger children in reading texts which place them ‘outside’ of their own experiences, they still search for situations and contexts with which they are familiar as a means of ‘connecting’ with the narrative. While this does not necessarily mean that teenage readers demand to find characters similar to themselves in the novels they read, they should at least be familiar with the socio-political context or ideological values presented in a novel. Van der Walt argues that

[t]he value of these contemporary, realistic stories for South African children is that they are set in a familiar world, and that the use of language and situations in which characters find themselves, are familiar. Readers can therefore identify with the characters – not necessarily because they have been in the same situation themselves but because they are familiar with the circumstances. Although the main characters in these books are often black, they are read mostly by white children – if the trend which applies in South Africa holds true, namely that black children read far less fiction than white children, the circumstances are familiar to the white readers. (1995, 76–77)

Certainly, it seems to have been the aim of many authors for children and young adults writing during the 1980s to present their (white) readers with a familiar world, in which unfamiliar characters live through strange experiences. In doing so, authors challenge young (white) readers to re-examine their habitual values and prejudices and question the status quo in their society. The very values that authors encourage their readers to examine are usually most telling of whom the author assumes his or her implied reader to be.

The above issues will be considered in some detail in the following chapter. By examining a selection of young adult novels and short stories written during the final years of apartheid, the challenges faced by authors in ‘introducing’ white readers to

young people of different races will be discussed, and it will be shown how these authors attempted to discredit the racial stereotypes upon which apartheid was built. In addition, this chapter will show how novels written *after*, but set *during*, apartheid not only reinforce these ideas but also, by projecting a wider audience, respond to apartheid's continuing legacy in democratic South Africa.

Chapter Two:

Politics, history and notions of race **in apartheid novels**

*Political realities have always been a strong component
of coming of age in South Africa.
(Bentley and Midgley 2000, 52)*

After decades dominated by sentimentalised tales of colonial life and romanticised stories of bush adventures, the 1980s saw a definite shift in focus in South African children's and young adult fiction in English. As previously discussed, novels dealing with national politics and the notion of race had until this time been sporadic. Issues such as these were rarely central concerns of children's and young adult authors; however, the rise of child activism in the 1970s meant that these subjects were no longer a taboo in youth literature, and young adult fiction produced in the 1980s came to reflect that "[a] nation's politics [had become] a child's everyday psychology" (Bentley and Midgley 2000, 52). In a country where people of different races lived entirely separate lives, progressive authors attempted to establish youth literature as a site in which readers could meet and interact with those from whom they were isolated. After 1994, many writers continued to revisit the years of apartheid in their novels in an attempt to instil in their readers an awareness of the effects of institutionalised racism still evident today.

Young adult novels set during the apartheid era are usually overwhelmingly didactic in nature. They aim to teach, to inform, to encourage questioning and to deepen understanding. Whether written before or after 1994, this is their common trait. However, this is also where similarities end. Novels written *after* apartheid often approach their subject from very different angles and with different objectives to those written before the advent of democracy; moreover, those written during the *same* time period and with similar intentions will vary in their execution and style. This chapter will examine these differences through the evaluation of a sample of young adult novels written both before

and after apartheid was dismantled. Lesley Beake's *The Strollers* (1987) will be considered as an example of an author's attempt to reveal to young white readers the material inequalities and hardships experienced by those oppressed under the apartheid system. Nevertheless, it will be noted how textual ambiguities and authorial uncertainties hinder any direct indictment of the apartheid government. By contrast, Beverley Naidoo openly criticises apartheid policy in *Journey to Jo'burg* (1985) by undermining the racial stereotypes upon which it was built. Naidoo's subsequent collection of short stories, *Out of Bounds: Stories of Conflict and Hope* (2001), reveals how her perception of the notion of race has developed to allow for a more balanced presentation, and is an example of a post-apartheid text which reflects on how the injustices of the past have shaped contemporary South African society. Kagiso Lesego Molohe's *Dancing in the Dust* (2002), meanwhile, is a novel aimed at a very specific readership, that is, black females in their mid- to late-teens, and attempts to show how political circumstances influenced the personal development of young adults during apartheid. In so doing, Molohe posits the notion of a communal heritage.

According to van der Walt, novels for young adults produced in the mid- to late-1980s "were most probably regarded [by authors] as a means of portraying what was wrong and to create an awareness among the readers of this wrongdoing" (1995, 79). A number of authors, prominent among them Dianne Case, Jenny Seed, Naidoo and Beake, used their works as a means of introducing their predominantly white readers to a different way of life. In the vast majority of cases, this meant penning novels populated by black, Indian and 'Coloured' children living in impoverished conditions under oppressive apartheid laws. The two novels written during the 1980s that are examined here are examples of such works: *The Strollers*, by Beake, depicts the lives of Cape Town's homeless children, while *Journey to Jo'burg* by Naidoo is the story of two naïve rural children who visit the city of Johannesburg for the first time in search of their mother. The lives of the children portrayed in these novels are vastly different to those of their readers, who during the 1980s would almost invariably have hailed from more privileged backgrounds. As such, the unfamiliar and sometimes shocking living conditions represented in the texts would probably have elicited strong emotional

responses from readers. As Jenkins observes, novels such as these necessarily feature 'non-white' protagonists:

Through empathising with white characters [as opposed to black characters], white readers can sense the hurt caused by apartheid, though they cannot realise the full depths of what it has inflicted. That white South Africans can grow up so ignorant of the history and ramifications of apartheid and its effects on the daily lives of people classified as 'non-white' is in itself part of the writers' commentary on South African society. Their didactic thrust is to teach young readers a view of South African history and current affairs that is not white-centred, to experience through the protagonists a different paradigm of human relations, and share with them growth in formulating a personal credo to direct their lives. (1993, 133).

What Jenkins emphasises here is the need for authors to feature black characters in these novels in order to achieve their pedagogical aims. However, this necessity introduces its own complications. If any novel is to appeal to and create an impact on the lives of its intended audience, an author needs to construct points of commonality between characters and readers. Though it is true that adolescent readers are usually open to reading about experiences that are far removed from their own, they will nonetheless seek out grounds on which to relate to the characters in the books they read. White authors who people their narratives with black characters, then, face the challenge of constructing these points of commonality for readers without undermining the didactic intentions of their work. As will become clear in this chapter, the authors of the examined texts meet this challenge with varying degrees of success.

In addition, authors are faced with the task of realistically and authentically portraying characters with whom they have little in common, and experiences of which they have no first-hand knowledge. This was, perhaps, the most difficult challenge for many authors during the 1980s, most of whom were white. As Töttemeyer observed, "young white authors, who are products of apartheid, have lived separately from blacks all their lives and cannot possibly write from experience about life in the township or the slum" (1988, 87). The limitations of authorial experience are patently obvious in many texts produced during this time. Despite these challenges, children's and young adult

authors of the late apartheid years tackled their subjects as bravely as censorship laws would allow. A great majority of these authors were progressive in their political views and, realising that racism was learned rather than “innate, hereditary or even spontaneous” (Töttemeyer 1988a, 173), set about to challenge dominant ideological views in an effort to encourage their young readers to do the same.

Apartheid novels written *after* 1994, meanwhile, endorse an understanding of how South Africa’s past has shaped its present society. For the first time, young black authors who grew up under an oppressive regime have been given license to tell their stories and fill in the gaps left by official, white-centred versions of history, while white authors can air their opinions without fear of censorship. Contemporary authors seek not only to creatively reimagine history, but also to examine how that history continues to impact on present-day South Africa. Their intentions are didactic in that they hope to show young readers, who are unlikely to have any of their own memories of apartheid, how the laws that governed the past continue to affect their own lives. Although the idea of looking back in order to understand one’s present is certainly not new, it is particularly pertinent in a context in which the atrocities of history need to be redressed if there is to be any hope of moving forward. Flockemann suggests that “South Africans must talk frankly about the details of racial prejudice on a deeply personal level before they can attempt to participate in a non-racial society” (1998, 144). The works examined here, *Dancing in the Dust* and *Out of Bounds: Stories of Hope and Conflict*, aim to do just that by exploring the deeply personal agendas of both the authors and the characters they have created.

2.1. The late apartheid novels

2.1.1. The issue of blame in *The Strollers* (1987)

The Strollers has enjoyed some success in South Africa, having reached its twentieth impression by 2005.⁶ In the year of its publication, it was awarded the Maskew Miller

⁶ It should be noted, however, that this is not necessarily an indication of the novel’s popularity or favourable reception by its target audience, as it was prescribed as a school setwork for a number of years and reprinted several times as a result.

Longman (MML) Young Africa Award and, in the following year, was the recipient of the Percy Fitzpatrick Award. Critics have, for the most part, responded positively to the novel: it has been hailed as a “specifically South African story” in which the author “does not lecture the reader, nor is [. . .] sentimental [. . . but] holds the mirror up to her society, letting us smell, taste and witness the atmosphere of the strollers” (Burness 1988, 180). The judges of the MML Young Africa Award, Jay Heale, Brenda Cooper and Chris van Wyk, are particularly complimentary, describing the novel as “a lovely slice-of-life tale that should appeal to both boys and girls across a wide social spectrum” (Beake 2005, back cover).

Some critics, however, have been less approving in their assessment of the novel. Jenkins, for example, considers *The Strollers* to be “a moving story which is nevertheless flawed by sentimentality, facetiousness and weakness in narrative technique” (1993, 149); Yulisa Amadu Maddy and Donnaræ MacCann condemn the book as inherently racist, and accuse its author of “gloss[ing] over” the injustices of apartheid (2001, 47).

These conflicting and often directly contradictory responses to Beake’s novel expose the ambiguities that are at the heart of its construction. The author’s over-reliance on secondary research material renders her novel a textbook study of Cape Town’s strollers,⁷ which nevertheless avoids some of their harsher experiences and fails to provide any real insight into their lives. It would seem that the didactic objective of *The Strollers* is to reveal to a white, privileged young readership some of the consequences of apartheid legislation for the country’s oppressed majority. Nevertheless, Beake’s overly subtle social commentary fails to level any direct criticism or blame for the strollers’ circumstances; indeed, some critics have gone so far as to brand the novel as racist for adopting a stereotypical ‘blame the victim’ approach. Although this accusation is not entirely valid, Beake’s tentative and somewhat unconvincing exploration of the social system responsible for the strollers is ambiguous in its inferences, and these ambiguities often undermine the didactic ‘message’ of the novel. In this regard, the faults in the narrative are ultimately attributable to the limitations of both author and reader. Beake, as a middle-class, white foreigner to South Africa, seems restricted by her own – often conflicting – ideologies, as well as by her narrow understanding of strollers and the wider

⁷ “Strollers” is a commonly-used term for homeless street children, particularly in the Cape Town area.

socio-political structure that produced them. While she does seem to seek some explanation for the strollers' circumstances in her sympathetic portrayal of them, she overestimates her inexperienced young readers' ability to recognise and understand some of her subtle critiques. A comparison of *The Strollers* with the secondary research material that its author has relied upon, together with an evaluation of some of the accusations of racism levelled against the novel, reveals this tension between Beake's limited knowledge of her subject and her unrealistic expectations of her readers.

In her Acknowledgements, Beake writes the following:

I would like to thank everyone who provided information for this book, particularly Paul Wade, who conducted many interviews with strollers, and The Institute of Criminology, UCT, who generously allowed me to use research material. This has since been published in a book called *Growing Up in a Divided Society: The Context of Childhood in South Africa* [. . .]. The chapter which I found particularly helpful is called *Strollers – Street Children of Cape Town*, by Wilfred Schärf, Marlene Powell and Edgar Thomas. (2005, npg)

By her own admission, then, Beake conducted little or no research of her own into the subject of which she writes. Her dependence on the perceptions and interpretations of the abovementioned researchers cannot but render problematic her knowledge of her subject. To be sure, there are striking similarities between *The Strollers* and the research material she mentions, published under the title "Strollers – Street Children of Cape Town," which reveal that Beake's understanding of the strollers' habits, background and psychology is gleaned almost exclusively from this essay.

Schärf, Powell and Thomas conducted their research over a period of several months in 1985. While they took into account the opinions and perceptions of local teachers, parents and social workers who were in some way connected with strollers, their focus was on building relationships with the children themselves, in order to gauge "the way in which the strollers themselves make sense of their world" (Schärf et al 1986, 262). Their extensive investigations exposed some of the most common circumstances that lead to the strollers' decision to leave home, their social habits and relationships with one

another, and their means of survival on the streets of Cape Town. Interviews conducted with a number of street children revealed that, for most, “the hostility of the step-parent had been an important factor in their decision to leave home” (1986, 267); in addition, the researchers found that strollers often experienced “difficulties at school” (1986, 269) and, as a result, “for many of them school [became] a frightening and alienating experience” (1986, 272). It is thus noteworthy that Beake’s protagonist, Johnny, decides to leave his family home under these same circumstances. Johnny is beaten regularly by his step-father Nelson (2005, 5) and, in relating his problems at school, describes how “he’d tried, he really had, but there were too many children and not enough teachers; not enough books” (2005, 5–6). Later, he also recalls his humiliation at not being able to keep up with the class, and the consequent beatings he received from the principal (2005, 61–62).

The similarities between Beake’s novel and the research conducted by Schärff, Powell and Thomas extends to the strollers’ social habits (1986, 275), their use of recreational drugs as a means of psychological escape (1986, 278), and their means of survival through “bomming,” or begging from pedestrians (1986, 276), and “aanklop,” or door-to-door begging.⁸ There are several other examples, too numerous to mention here, of where Beake has drawn material for her novel directly from their findings. Since she seems to have relied solely on this research in familiarising herself with her subject, it follows that the views and observations reflected in the novel are second-hand. Beake’s portrayal of the strollers is, in many respects, stilted and clichéd, and this may prove to be an obstacle for her readers in their grasp of her didactic ‘message.’

While most of the novel adheres to the findings of Schärff, Powell and Thomas, it deviates from their study in two distinct and significant ways. The first of these deviances relates to the researchers’ observation that “[t]he most lucrative skill which the children acquire exposes them to a pattern of behaviour that is both unusual in terms of their upbringing and deviant from mainstream moral values. All but four of the twenty-eight male strollers [interviewed] indicated that they had derived part of their income from prostitution” (1986, 279). Although it is made clear that prostitution, mostly to older males, is a significant aspect of the strollers’ lives, Beake does not allude to this in her

⁸ Interestingly, while Beake uses the terms “aanklop” and “bomming” in her novel, she has switched their definitions (2005, 28–29). It would seem that this is simply a case of confusion on the part of the author, but is revealing of her flawed knowledge of her subject despite her attempts at authenticity.

novel. It could be argued that she felt the inclusion of prostitution would not be appropriate material for the age group at which she was aiming her novel, and so chose to present a slightly sanitised version of the strollers' experiences.

The second and more significant difference between Beake's novel and the research of Schärf, Powell and Thomas lies in their approach to addressing the social conditions that lead children to adopt a life of strolling. As mentioned, Beake stops short of levelling any direct criticism in this regard. Schärf, Powell and Thomas, by contrast, "consider it important not merely to analyse the actions and motivations of the children in terms of individual pathologies or inadequacies, but to acknowledge the role that ideology and history have played in their lives" (1986, 264). To this end, their concluding comments acknowledge that

[i]t is a glaring demonstration of the considerable material and educational inequalities in South Africa that no white strollers are to be found in the whole of Cape Town.

Part of the explanation may well be that the African and coloured communities are by law confined to low-cost housing settlements with insufficient public and recreational amenities in most cases. They are also subjected to inferior education where poorly equipped schools are staffed by predominantly poorly qualified teachers, who have to cope with exceedingly high teacher-pupil ratios. (Schärf et al 1986, 281)

This observation is developed throughout their research and, unlike Beake, they do not shy away from directing the blame for the strollers' predicament at what they identify as an unjust social system. Schärf and his associates recognise that the apartheid system was responsible for the brutalised psyches and dire conditions of their research subjects, and acknowledge the role that their inadequate schooling, poverty and broken homes played in their resultant 'deviance.' As already indicated, Schärf, Powell and Thomas shifted their focus from exposing individual or group pathologies as underlying causes of strolling, to understanding the greater social patterns at work in this particular context. Their findings suggest that "[t]o confine oneself to the social pathology argument ignores the fact that the material conditions in which certain classes find themselves at particular times are partly attributable to the policies of the ruling classes" (1986, 264).

In stopping short of openly indicting the apartheid system, Beake *apparently* fails to expound this idea in her novel. Her focus on “the supposed pathology of Black people” (2001, 41) forms the basis of MacCann and Maddy’s argument that the novel is inherently racist. MacCann and Maddy claim that

Beake is one of many authors [for young adults during apartheid] who stick to the ‘social pathology argument,’ thereby turning the dynamics of Apartheid upside down and making the victims of that system the guilty parties. Beake’s homeless children [. . .] are abandoned, cast out or physically injured by their Black parents. The policies of the White ruling regime are ‘offstage,’ and not presented in any cause and effect relationship to the blighted communities and lives. (2001, 42)

MacCann and Maddy’s argument is based largely on the stereotypical representations of black people in the novel, and the apparent lack of criticism or blame directed at the apartheid system. Black people in the novel, they claim, are reduced to demeaning stereotypes: drunk, violent, irresponsible, needlessly rebellious and dim-witted. In line with this representation is the implicit notion that black people – or at least, black adults – are solely responsible for their own troubles.

MacCann and Maddy cite Johnny’s stepfather Nelson as an example of such a character. Nelson is depicted as a violent drunk who regularly beats Johnny (2005, 5) and whose dreams and promises to Johnny’s mother “all came to nothing” (2005, 4). He is completely reliant on Johnny’s mother, who is portrayed throughout as a careworn but hardworking woman. Nelson is uneducated: having lived on a rural farm until he was eighteen, he claims to have been “too old for school” and that he never had the chance to be educated, unlike Johnny (2005, 3). This seems to be at the heart of Nelson’s bitterness towards his stepson, and a source of constant conflict between them, as Johnny rejects Nelson’s reason for not having gone to school: “Why hadn’t he had a chance, Johnny wondered bitterly. Other men came from farms. Other men had some schooling. What was so different about Nelson?” (2005, 3). MacCann and Maddy argue that Johnny’s reaction to Nelson’s non-existent schooling places Nelson at fault, when “[in] fact, schooling for rural African children was a rarity. Nelson was not ‘different’ because he

had no schooling: he was ordinary” (2001, 44). They argue further that the novel presents apartheid activists and students instigating school riots in an equally unforgiving way as “destroyers of schools and families and as mindless troublemakers enticed by the excitement of revolution” (2001, 43). MacCann and Maddy also cite several other examples of demeaningly stereotypical characters: the “knife-wielding cutthroats” of “Kaatjie se mob,”⁹ Johnny’s foolish brother Abraham, and the drug-addicted Rastamen from the marketplace, among others (2001, 45). In addition, they accuse Beake of having rejected the opportunity to “bring some balance to the impression she was creating” in describing the plight of the other strollers (2001, 44): all have parents who beat, neglected or abandoned them (2005, 58), and Abel, Johnny’s best friend, claims that his parents were simply glad to have “one less mouth” to feed (2005, 6).

Though MacCann and Maddy present a damning argument, they fail to take into account the subtle social commentary evident in Beake’s novel. While it is true that Beake does not go so far as to criticise the apartheid government, the effects of the oppressive system of separation and institutionalised racism are by no means disregarded in the novel. What MacCann and Maddy do not realise is that Beake would certainly have been aware that any open condemnation of the apartheid government would have resulted in *The Strollers* being banned in South Africa,¹⁰ and so she was more than likely to have practised a kind of self-censorship in order to avoid this. As a result, the social commentary and indeed criticism she offers in *The Strollers* is veiled, indirect and at times presented quite ironically. Having said this, it is nonetheless true that the author does seem somewhat uncertain of where her sympathies truly lie and that this, together with the subtlety of her social critique, means that the didactic ‘message’ of her novel is fairly difficult to discern, and certainly may be lost on younger, inexperienced readers.

Beake’s portrayal of Johnny’s family’s circumstances – which MacCann and Maddy view as shifting the blame away from the apartheid government – exemplifies her use of irony as a means of social commentary. Johnny’s father, a migrant worker in Johannesburg, is killed in a mining accident when Johnny is still a small boy, and Johnny’s family is forced to move out of their home. As a child, Johnny is unable to

⁹ “Kaatjie’s gang”

¹⁰ Beverley Naidoo’s *Journey to Jo’burg* (Longman, 1985), for example, was openly critical of apartheid and was banned in South Africa until 1991.

understand fully the implications of this: “Only later had he understood that [. . .] Pa, that distant, often talked of person, had died. Died on the mines, they said; in an accident, they said; nobody’s fault, they said; and Ma’s smile, pinched and brave [. . .]. Pa couldn’t help dying. Nobody’s fault, they said” (2005, 4). The repeated insistence that his death was “nobody’s fault” implies that someone *was* at fault, that the blame for his death lay, if not directly, then certainly implicitly, with some unnamed person or set of circumstances. Moreover, the repetition of “they said” hints at some insistent and yet incomplete explanation provided to the family. Beake, however subtly, seems to be criticising the migrant labour system here: Johnny’s father is described as a “distant” figure with whom Johnny seems to have no personal relationship, that is, as a provider who was forced to live apart from his family. “They,” the mining authorities, provide the brief explanation of his death that Johnny relays, and ultimately seem to see his death – and indeed his life – as having little consequence. Johnny’s family, meanwhile, has lost its breadwinner and is forced to move “to a smaller place where they would not be bothered – and then a smaller place, and a smaller, until they landed here [in the township]” (2005, 4).

A similar strategy is adopted by Beake in explaining Nelson’s circumstances:

When they first knew Nelson things had been very different. He had been rich then. He had a job. [. . .] And he had dazzled Ma, and Johnny who had been ten years old then, not only with his smile, but with his promises. For a time it seemed that they would have a little house of their own. Nelson would pay the rent every month and Ma would not have to work so hard and Johnny would . . .

But it all came to nothing. After Nelson moved in with them almost the first thing that happened was that he lost his job. *It wasn’t his fault.* The factory had shut down, gone into liquidation *it was said*, closed its doors to the men who had worked there. And with the passing months Nelson’s teeth had flashed less often, and the promises had become smaller and eventually stopped altogether. With some part of his mind Johnny could feel sorry for Nelson, because Nelson had meant well. Like Pa dying, *it hadn’t been his fault.* (2005, 4–5; emphasis added)

Beake provides insight into Nelson’s character here. Despite Nelson’s brutality and Johnny’s obvious dislike for him, the reader is able, through these two short paragraphs,

to recognise the deterioration of Nelson's sense of pride and self-worth, from a businessman "in a maroon suit and a striped tie" (2005, 4) who is able to promise his new bride a secure life, to an unemployed alcoholic dependent on his wife. Though Johnny seems unable to make the connection, Nelson's brutality towards him is a reflection of his own brutalised psyche and, perhaps, an attempt to assert his debased masculinity.

The riots occurring at township schools are also not presented as simply as MacCann and Maddy suggest. They are mentioned in the opening of the novel only briefly, with little explanation: Johnny's mother comments to Nelson that "it's difficult with the school sometimes out and the children who want to strike" (2005, 3). While it is true that the reader is given the impression that the children are ungrateful troublemakers from the conversation that takes place between Johnny's mother and Nelson at this stage in the novel, the subject of the school riots is later revisited in more detail. Johnny's recollections of his experiences at school are not without ambiguity; nevertheless, Beake does seem to be endeavouring here to reveal the desperate state that township schools found themselves in. Throughout the novel, Johnny repeatedly refers to the fact that "there were just too many children in the class, and there were not always enough books" (2005, 61),¹¹ citing these as the reasons why he was unable to learn anything at school and ultimately became frustrated enough to leave. He notes that

[f]or a while there had been another reason [for not going to school] when the big children had closed the schools and all the pupils had surged out into the street, *caught in the excitement* of the speeches, *the feeling of violence* about to happen and the *promise of something better*. But that was many months ago, and the white people knew about it, or *some of it*, and they *weren't very sympathetic*. (2005, 60; emphasis added)

This observation is loaded with the ambiguity typical of Beake's novel, as the reader is unsure of where the author's sympathies lie. Though it is clear that Beake recognises that the township or 'non-European' schools were hopelessly under-staffed and ill-equipped, her attitude towards the rioting children seems ambivalent. As the above extract illustrates, she seems to suggest that many of the children were simply caught up in the

¹¹ An experience, it must be noted, that would seem quite alien to privileged white readers.

excitement surrounding the uprisings; at the same time, however, she points out that they were hoping for “something better” than what they already had. Beake also makes a point of positioning her (presumably white) reader in this paragraph. She portrays whites as simultaneously unsympathetic and unable to understand the motives of the students involved in the school riots. If one were to assume that a teenage reader in the late 1980s may have heard something of the school riots (most likely from ‘unsympathetic’ parents), Beake may be attempting to suggest an alternative reaction to the rioters.

What is perhaps Beake’s most direct criticism of the apartheid government arises from Johnny’s recollection of when, in his second year, the walls of his school were painted. The bitterness of those subjected to gross racial inequality is evident in Johnny’s explanation that his Ma had “said [that the school had been painted] because the Government had decided to do it ten, maybe fifteen years before. *She had made a bitter face then,*” and commented thereafter that “Hulle sal dit seker nie weer doen nie” (2005, 63; emphasis added).¹² When the walls are defaced by a gang of children, Johnny remembers how his teacher had cried, “real tears that ran down her cheeks” (2005, 64). While Beake’s presentation of the school riots may be ambiguous, her depiction of the hopelessness felt by both pupils and teachers alike is clear.

Similarly, a feeling of hopelessness pervades Beake’s descriptions of the other strollers’ circumstances, despite MacCann and Maddy’s accusation that the author’s presentation is unbalanced (2001, 44). Mesana’s father died and her mother “simply disappeared,” while Finkie “didn’t say why” he had run away (2005, 58). Spongasi and Nongosi “had been lost together when their families were resettled,” and Raymond and Andrew “didn’t like it at home. That was all they said, and nobody asked questions,” (2005, 58). The pain they have experienced in their short lives is obvious and, in sharing their stories, their suffering is highlighted. Johnny comments that they “were finding out about each other, and nobody wanted to know that much” (2005, 58). Beake’s portrayal of the pain and hopelessness suffered by her black characters is, perhaps, her attempt at criticising the social system responsible for them.

Beake’s indictment of the apartheid government, however, remains ambiguous and hesitant, and is further complicated by her lack of any real understanding of her

¹² “They probably won’t do it again.”

subject. Despite the praise by some critics that Beake's is an "honest" (Heale 2004, 16) story of a world she knows (Burness 1988, 180), glaring faults in the novel indicate that her 'knowledge' is flawed. These faults are most evident in the characterisation of her protagonist, Johnny, and reveal the ideological position from which she is writing and from which she assumes her readers approach the text.

Beake never explicitly states the race of her protagonist. Instead, readers are left to glean this fact from several, often conflicting, racial markers in the narrative, which seem to suggest that Johnny is black. The most immediate of these, which will inevitably influence the readers' perception of Johnny before they have even opened the book, is the illustration on the front cover, which depicts three black children crouched near a row of colourful umbrellas and market stalls obviously meant to signify the Parade marketplace.¹³ Johnny is described early on as having a "dark complexion" (2005, 7) and, in addition to this, his fictionalised surname, Xashan, and repeated references to his ancestral home in the Transkei (2005, 3; 57) suggest to the reader that Johnny is of Xhosa origin.

However, Beake's presentation of Johnny's character often contradicts this suggestion. Johnny and his fellow strollers converse with each other in a mixture of English and Afrikaans, a vernacular associated with so-called 'Cape Coloureds,' and Johnny's family lives in the Cape Flats, an area designated 'Coloured' during the apartheid period. This conflation of black and 'Coloured' characteristics is highly problematic and indicative of Beake's insensitive, even ignorant, treatment of her subject. The confusion over Johnny's race is especially noticeable in critics' treatment of the novel, as they base their evaluations of it on the assumptions they have drawn regarding the race of the central characters: while MaCann and Maddy assume that Johnny and his fellows are black, Jenkins, by contrast, believes the characters are 'Coloured' (1993, 137).

Beake's unconvincing characterisation of her protagonist is also evident in Johnny's emotional development throughout the course of the novel. This character is an important narrative tool in that Beake uses him to introduce her readers to the world of strolling, with which she quite obviously assumes they are unfamiliar. As mentioned

¹³ See figure 1 of Appendix B.

previously, a young reader will usually seek ways in which to relate to the stories he or she reads, and in *The Strollers*, this is made possible through a shared lack of knowledge of this world between the protagonist and reader. When the novel opens, Johnny is ignorant in the ways of the street children, just as a presumably white, middle-class adolescent reader would be. Throughout the course of the opening chapters, Abel and the other children patiently explain their habits to Johnny, all the while snidely commenting on Johnny's lack of experience: "Jislaaik," Abel thinks to himself, "didn't Johnny know nothing?" (2005, 32). Therefore, just as Johnny begins to learn the ways of the strollers, so too does the reader – though the experiences of both protagonist and reader are mediated, of course, by Beake's own understanding of the children.

At first, the idea of strolling is presented as a kind of freedom for Johnny, a break or holiday from the troubles he faces at home and school. The more experienced Abel introduces this idea to Johnny through his description of strolling: "'Strolling's,' he paused, looking for the right word, 'like free. Yes, man, freedom's what it's all about'" (2005, 6). Johnny expresses a similar sentiment when he first joins the children on the streets, reflecting that "This was life, man! He was free" (2005, 25). Certainly, Johnny and the children have escaped from the conditions that initially lead them to abandon their homes: on the streets, they are not subjected to adult authority, do not have to attend school and, in Johnny's case, do not have to live in fear of domestic violence. The worries and difficulties the children faced at home and school are eliminated and, initially, this does induce a feeling of freedom. However, as the novel progresses, the reader comes to realise that these freedoms come at the cost of others. The children live a hand-to-mouth existence; they are never sure of where their next meal is to come from, or even where they are to sleep that night. They live in constant fear of the police, and "always have escape routes in their heads" (2005, 51). During a period of increased policing, the children decide to hide in the mountains for a few days, and their fear during this time is palpable: "The threat and the menace had followed them. In their imaginations they heard the sirens coming closer" (2005, 55). Their 'pinies' become a means of escape on which many of the children become dependent (2005, 55).¹⁴

¹⁴ A 'pinie' is a plastic bottle in which a rag, soaked in paint thinners, glue or some other intoxicant, is placed, and 'sniffed' through the neck of the bottle.

Ultimately, a short series of events brings Johnny to the realisation that he is not as free as he initially believed, but instead has exchanged one set of difficult circumstances for another. He decides to return home, taking another stroller, Mesana, with him (2005, 104). Despite this qualification of the notion of freedom, the novel ends rather abruptly at this point, and is highly problematic in the conclusions with which it leaves its readers. There is no indication of how Johnny will be received when he returns home, or whether his difficult home life will have improved. In addition, the ending suggests a universal concept of 'home' and 'family' with which the reader can identify, a 'home' which a middle-class white reader will understand as a caring, safe, and problem-free environment that can easily be returned to. The novel's ending reinforces the idea that Johnny's time on the streets has simply been a kind of 'summer holiday,' and now that circumstances have proven too harsh, he is simply able to return to the loving bosom of his family. Johnny has his conventional happy ending, and as the narrative closes, the reader no longer has to be concerned for his welfare. If Beake wished to engender sympathy from her readers for the plight of street children, this intention is effectively undermined by the notion of being able to return to home and safety.

While this convention of a 'happy ending' is a common one in both children's and young adult novels, it serves to emphasise further the central ambiguity of Beake's novel: how does she intend her readers to react to Johnny and the narrative as a whole? It would seem that the didactic thrust of the novel is to introduce privileged readers to the plight of street children, and through the depiction of their desperate conditions to elicit a sympathetic response from such readers. However, Beake's hesitance in explicitly revealing the source of their suffering leaves her readers with an incomplete understanding of the strollers' social position and, by extension, the socio-political context of South Africa during the time in which the novel is set. While Beake does offer a subtle criticism of the apartheid dispensation, her criticism is almost invariably veiled, uncertain, or ironic: inexperienced younger readers can certainly not be expected to appreciate it fully. Although they may feel sorry for Johnny and his fellows, such readers are left without direction for blame and, as such, the plight of the street children is presented as an unavoidable social misfortune. With no-one to blame and no unjust social system explicitly revealed, Beake's readers are left powerless to act on their emotional

response to the novel in any way more significant than giving a coin or loaf of bread to the next street child they encounter. Beake's failings, then, lie not only in her flawed knowledge of the strollers' lives, but also in her inability to understand fully and expose the social system that produced them. The novel's didactic thrust is therefore lost in its ambiguities.

2.1.2 Stereotyping race in *Journey to Jo'burg* (1985)

Beverley Naidoo's *Journey to Jo'burg* is a simply told, emotional story in a variation of the 'Jim-comes-to-Jo'burg' genre (Jenkins 2006, 171). The novel's protagonists are thirteen-year-old Naledi and her younger brother Tiro, who undertake a journey to Johannesburg, some three hundred kilometres away from their rural homestead, to fetch their mother when their baby sister falls ill. Their mother works as a domestic worker for a wealthy family in the city, where she spends most of the year separated from her family. It is Naledi and Tiro's first visit to the "City of Gold," and along the way they meet a variety of characters who either help or hinder them on their quest. The story concludes with the expected happy ending – the siblings' baby sister, Dineo, is nursed back to health once their mother arrives home, and Naledi finds her eyes have opened to the world beyond their small rural community.

Naidoo penned this, her first novel, as a South African exile living in England in 1985. In a postscript to the novel, added some fourteen years later in 1999, Naidoo recalls the circumstances that prompted her to write it:

Years [after leaving South Africa], in England, with children of my own, I wanted to find a way of telling them about South Africa. Their father's grandparents had come from India to South Africa; now, apartheid laws forbade us to live together in our home country. I wanted my children, as well as others in England and elsewhere, to ask questions. By this time many black South African children were refusing to go to schools which they said only taught them to be servants, and the government was sending police and soldiers to arrest or shoot them. Yet in England, even in non-fiction books, young people were not being told what was really happening in South Africa. (1999, 89)

Naidoo's postscript is revealing in several ways. Immediately apparent is the audience for which she chose to write – not South African young adults but rather a foreign audience with little or no prior knowledge of South Africa. Second, and perhaps less obvious, are the didactic intentions that informed her writing. Here and elsewhere, Naidoo stresses the need she felt to provide a means for foreign children and teenagers to understand the lived realities of apartheid for young South Africans. This, then, is the driving force behind her narrative: to educate, to encourage questioning, to allow for readers to draw parallels between this constructed reality and their own. That her readers make this “shift from the narrative to a wider social and political terrain” is of utmost importance to Naidoo (1996, 348), and in letters she receives from her adolescent readers, she notes with some pride that “what they have read in my fiction actually matters to them in their thinking about, and questioning of, the real world” (1996, 350–351). In fact, Naidoo openly encourages this response from her readers. For instance, the preface to *Journey to Jo'burg* opens, somewhat condescendingly, as follows:

Can you imagine having to live apart from your parents for most of your childhood?

In South Africa for a long time the law forced many parents and children apart. Many fathers and mothers from the countryside had to go away to towns and cities to work. Their children had to stay behind. For this was the land of *apartheid* – where the broken families were all black and the people who made the laws were white. (1999, npg; emphasis in original)

From the outset of the novel, then, readers are already guided in their responses. The remainder of the preface quotes several newspaper clippings citing ‘real-life’ tales similar to the one about to unfold, in what seems to be an attempt to authenticate the novel's realism and again encourage a particular type of response from readers. Naidoo herself notes that authors approach their work with a particular agenda in mind (1996, 343): in *Journey to Jo'burg*, hers is unashamedly didactic.

Naidoo achieves her didactic aims by relying on the use of somewhat crude stereotypes in the construction of her narrative. As previously indicated, the use of

stereotyped characters has long had its place in children's and young adult fiction; here, Naidoo uses stereotyping as a tool to elicit the emotional – and indeed political – response she desires from her readers. The characters in *Journey to Jo'burg* fall firmly in one of two categories: unsurprisingly, these categories are split along racial lines.

The black characters in the novel are invariably portrayed in a positive light. Jenkins points out that in most novels produced around the time *Journey to Jo'burg* was written, “black people are portrayed as good, caring, warm and loving” (1993, 137). This is true of *all* the black characters in Naidoo's novel, who invariably hail from poverty-stricken, downtrodden backgrounds. Naledi and Tiro, for example, are archetypal “country children”: naïve, innocent and easily shocked by the evils they encounter in the city, where they are overwhelmed by the “noise, smoke and a horrid smell coming from the traffic” (1999, 32–33). The children seem to have an infinite capacity for love and trust, and the seemingly impossible journey they undertake is one motivated by good intentions. Similarly, their mother is shown to endure endless suffering for the sake of her selfless love of her children. On the journey home, she comments to Naledi,

[y]ou know, every day I must struggle . . . struggle . . . to make everything just how the Madam wants it. The cooking, the cleaning, the washing, the ironing. From seven every morning, sometimes till ten, even eleven at night, when they have their parties. The only time I sit is when I eat! But I keep quiet and do everything, because if I lose my job I won't get another one. This Madam will say I'm no good. Then there will be no food for you, no clothes for you, no school for you. (1999, 64)

Perhaps the most striking characters, however, are the kind-hearted strangers the children meet along the way, who have a strong impact on their lives if only for a short time. For instance, a “friendly” young Tswana farm worker provides them with a place to sleep on the first night of their journey despite great personal risk to himself (1999, 22); the following day, a black man with a “friendly face” offers them a lift on the back of his orange truck and insists on giving them “a few coins” for bus fare once they reach Johannesburg (1999, 27; 33). Perhaps the most influential character is Grace, a stranger they meet at the bus stop who takes the frightened children under her wing and provides them with a meal and a place to sleep. Significantly, it is Grace who ‘educates’ the

children about the realities of apartheid when she tells them about her involvement in the school riots and her brother's bold political activities. As she falls asleep that night, Naledi is consumed with questions:

Her mind wandered over the terrible events in Soweto, to [Grace's brother] Dumi and to the word in big letters [on the protesters' placards] – FREEDOM. What did the word really mean? Did it mean they could live with their mother? Did it mean they could go to secondary school? But Grace said the children marched because they had to learn a lot of 'rubbish' in school. So what would you learn in a school with FREEDOM? (1999, 58–59)

It is important to note here, once again, that the novel was originally intended for an audience of foreign children. As Naledi, for the first time, begins to question her world, readers are shocked into realising that all they take for granted in their own lives – the ability to live with their parents, and to receive a sound education, for example – are seemingly simple and basic rights that are denied their fellows in faraway lands. For her own part, Naledi decides by the end of the narrative to seek out like-minded people such as Grace in her own community and school, and to fight for the rights she never realised she was due.

In this regard, Naidoo must be credited with breaking at least one stereotype that was often employed in the portrayal of black people during this time. As Jenkins notes, a “way in which blacks are subordinated [in fiction] is by depicting them as helpless victims” (1993, 142), and this is something that Naidoo carefully avoids. Her black characters, though oppressed and downtrodden by their circumstances, are *not* helpless victims. Grace's brother Dumi, for example, is arrested for his participation in the school riots, and though “the police had beaten him up badly [. . .] he would go on fighting even if they killed him” (1999, 57). The children who march in the streets are those who do not want to be “learning in school just how to be servants. They want to change what is wrong . . . even if they must die!” (1999, 64). Even Naledi, in her small way, wants to contribute to the struggle for her people's freedom. Other characters, such as the farm worker and the truck driver, who may seem powerless, assert themselves by providing help to those who need it in whatever way they can. Naidoo's black characters are

certainly not helpless victims destroyed by their circumstances – they fight fiercely for what they believe is right.

By contrast, the depiction of white characters in the novel is particularly disturbing. While the black characters are invariably kind, warm and loving, the white characters are tyrannical, hard and unfeeling. Naidoo's readers cannot help but feel shocked at their behaviour. The farm worker who helps the children on the first night of their journey warns them that "the white farmer could kill you if he sees you. Don't you know he has a gun to shoot thieves?" (1999, 22). At this, the children remember the brother of a friend who "had been whipped until he couldn't stand up any more" for stealing a single cob of corn (1999, 24). When they reach Johannesburg the following day, the bewildered children are rebuked for attempting to board a "Whites Only" bus:

They were about to jump aboard, when someone shouted at them in English, 'What's wrong with you? Are you stupid?' Startled, they looked up at the angry face of the bus driver and then at the bus again. White faces stared at them from inside as the bus moved off. (1999, 35)

At this, their new friend Grace comforts them by saying, "Don't let it bother you. That's what they're like" (1999, 36). The reader is left with little doubt as to who "they" are, and this reference serves to reinforce the notion evident in the novel that *all* white South Africans subscribe to particular, racist belief systems.

Perhaps the most shocking aspect of the novel is the treatment the children's mother receives in the house where she is employed. Before the children undertake their journey, they know little of the family their mother works for, apart from the comment she once made that "The little girl is very rude. She thinks I belong to her mother. You should hear how she can shout at me" (1999, 38). When their mother asks her "Madam" for leave to go to her sick child, the children are stunned at her employer's response:

'Well, Joyce, I can't possibly let you go today. I need you tonight to stay in with Belinda. The master and I are going to a very important dinner party . . .'

She paused.

'But I suppose you can go tomorrow.'

'Thank you, Madam.'

‘I hope you realise how inconvenient this will be for me.
If you are not back in a week, I shall just have to look for another
maid, you understand?’

‘Yes, Madam.’

The children couldn’t follow everything the Madam was
saying in English, but her voice sounded annoyed, while Mma spoke
so softly. Why does the white lady seem cross with Mma? It’s not
Mma’s fault that Dineo is sick, Naledi thought. (1999, 42–43)

Interestingly, Naidoo modifies another convention here. Jenkins notes that many children’s and young adult novels written during this period perpetuated the romanticised relationship between master and servant made popular during the colonial period (1993, 136). However, the relationship that Naidoo depicts here is hardly one of loyal servant and giving, understanding master; rather, the Madam is an inhumane, unfeeling autocrat who denies a mother the freedom to attend to her sick child, simply because it would prove to be an inconvenience.

Naidoo is undoubtedly attempting to elicit a strong emotional response from her readers, not simply of pity, but of outrage and indignation. Her portrayal of the white Madam serves to complete her representation of white South Africans during apartheid as heartless, despotic oppressors. This, together with her positive depiction of *all* black characters, amounts to a disturbingly one-sided view of South African society. While it is true that her portrayals are not without justification, their complete lack of diversity calls into question the novel’s authenticity, and is surprising when one considers that Naidoo herself was once a white anti-apartheid activist in South Africa. Ironically, in her openly critical approach to apartheid policy (conveyed not only through the stereotyping of black and white characters but also through Grace’s teachings), Naidoo herself is guilty of essentialising the notion of race. In her effort to provide a more sympathetic portrayal of black South Africans, Naidoo has presented instead a damaging stereotype of white South Africans. Van der Walt describes this kind of overcompensation as “inverse racism” (1995, 74). Keeping in mind that her intended audience would have had no inside knowledge of South African society, the reality of Naidoo’s novel is dangerously skewed. However, as has already been noted, Naidoo approached her work with a very particular agenda, and her novel is carefully constructed to advance her views. The didactic preface and postscript, the stereotypical characters, the shocking interactions between these

characters and the emotional response these elicit from readers all promote a strong message: apartheid must be done away with. Despite the failings of the novel, this message should, of course, not be undermined.

2.2 The post-apartheid novels

2.2.1 Dancing in the Dust (2002) and the girl-child “Revolutionary”

Molope used her own experiences as a child growing up in the turbulent 1980s as a reference when writing her first novel, *Dancing in the Dust*, which chronicles the political awakening of a young black girl living in a township amidst the violent student uprisings common at the time. At the young age of fourteen, her protagonist Tihelo somewhat hesitantly becomes involved with a political youth group in her neighbourhood, and slowly her involvement with them stirs her own sense of duty towards her community and fellow children. Tihelo shoulders responsibilities and the burden of brutal experiences that a child should never have to bear; as the months pass, she witnesses the murders and violent beatings of many of her friends and family members, the exile of comrades, and the pain of blighted opportunities. Before her fifteenth birthday, she is arrested and incarcerated for a period of six months, during which time she is physically, mentally, emotionally and sexually abused by police officials.

Dancing in the Dust poignantly captures the experience of a girl-child growing up in turbulent times. The final years of the apartheid regime form an important backdrop to Molope’s narrative; however, it is the coming of age of her young female protagonist that is the main concern of her novel. As an adolescent battling to come to terms with her identity and with realising her position within her broader community, her personal journey is thrown into sharp relief by the changeable circumstances in which she finds herself.

Molope’s use of the *Bildungsroman* conventions emphasises the socio-political changes experienced by her protagonist. While a common understanding of the *Bildungsroman* genre is that it simply entails the maturation or “coming of age” of its (usually male) protagonist, Stefan Helgesson has emphasised the role of the community



in this process by relying on Franco Moretti's investigation of the genre. Helgesson explains that "[b]y privileging youth, [the *Bildungsroman*] tried to accommodate the rapid pace of change that 'the double revolution' (political and industrial) had brought about [in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries]" (2004, 80). In circumstances comparable to the social revolution that was taking place in South Africa during the late 1980s and early 1990s, then, the *Bildungsroman* emerged some two hundred years ago as a genre that juxtaposed the coming of age of an adolescent protagonist with his or her volatile surroundings. Through this contextualisation, Helgesson notes, the *Bildungsroman* "allowed self and society to merge. The fulfilled individual was, by definition, fully integrated with society" (2004, 80).

It is thus clear why this particular genre suited Molohe's objectives in constructing her narrative. The symbolic form of the *Bildungsroman* not only allowed her to recount the (specifically female) experience of growing up under apartheid rule, but also to explore the relationships her protagonist develops with her neighbours in the process, in a "broader strategy of celebrating African identities and communities" (Hlongwane 2004, 41). Significantly, the very communities that Molohe celebrates in her novel form part of those "population groups that were denied a meaningful past under a racist system" (Petzold 2005, 149). Writing a decade after the advent of democracy, Molohe is revising the histories of those whose stories were silenced by oppressive rule; indeed, it was the voices of black women and children during apartheid that were, more than any others, left unheard.

The history of those living under apartheid rule will inevitably seem distant and alien to young readers who were raised in a democracy, however. Teenage readers are often averse to reading fiction that is heavily imbued with political issues, as they find little in these novels to which they can personally relate. Molohe's deployment of the *Bildungsroman* genre provides her with the means of overcoming this challenge, in that it allows her to create a protagonist with whom young readers can readily identify. Many of the challenges faced by Tihelo in her process of maturation are ones which readers – particularly girls – will easily recognise from their own experiences. Their appreciation of her character will then assist them in understanding the effects of what may otherwise be unfamiliar political and historical circumstances. In addition, Molohe's emphasis on the

importance of Tihelo's sense of belonging to her community may serve to draw *the reader* into that community, allowing him or her to identify Tihelo's history as part of his or her own heritage.

Molope's focus on the experiences of black women and girls during apartheid makes *Dancing in the Dust* an unusual novel: through her young protagonist, Molope "takes the reader on a journey that has previously been seen through male eyes [. . . and] brings into play a feminist consciousness which very few black South African narratives of struggle have done before" (Smith 2006, 27). As such, the novel raises issues that are rarely explored in similar works: issues specific to women and girls both during apartheid and today. Moreover, its emphasis on the experiences of the female characters, both adults and children, foregrounds the contribution of women to the struggle for freedom – a fact that, even today, is often left unappreciated.

Tihelo becomes increasingly conscious of this lack of appreciation when she begins to work for her local chapter of the South African Students' Organisation (SASO):

It was not hard to understand why the men's efforts were better documented. They had a way of taking over and making it look like it was only them fighting for women and children, when in reality no one person had a role more important than the other. [. . .] I read about women like Albertina Sisulu and Winnie Mandela, who were made to look like they were targeted only because their husbands were so prominent in the ANC, but who in fact were comrades in their own right. I also knew without having to read about it that many women I had grown up around were detained and had been tortured. [. . .] I spent a lot of time [. . .] wondering if some day some history book would acknowledge that there were many women working and risking their lives in that house [the SASO headquarters], and elsewhere in South Africa.
(2006, 122)

Tihelo quickly develops a great respect for the female freedom fighters she comes into contact with every day, and is increasingly fulfilled in her own role in the struggle. At the same time, she is aware that they have to deal with added burdens *because* they are women.

This specific burden of womanhood is demonstrated in a particularly ugly scene involving Tihelo's incarceration for suspected involvement in political activism. Isaacson

has argued that readers familiar with South African 'struggle narratives' may be "prepared for some of the stories of abuse, of humiliation, but somehow, not for the experience of [Tihelo's] torture and near-rape by white policemen in jail" (2004, 18). Molope admits that this was the hardest chapter of the novel to write: "I didn't know if I could go through that with her. I tried to find a way to go around it and probably tell it as though she were an observer, but I didn't think that would have been honest" (qtd. in Wanjelani 2004, 8). The prison officials' abuse of her body skews Tihelo's still-developing sense of her own sexuality and physicality:

I was made to sit naked on a chair. I tried to cover myself with my arms, but one of them kept pulling my arms away from my chest so that he could have better access to my breasts. My feeling of being proud of my breasts, of liking how firm they were, was really hurt by that experience. That man's hands made me want to be out of my body, and I stopped enjoying the beauty of my body in that room. They had every name for my body except the words I used in my head. (2006, 167)

Moreover, Tihelo becomes increasingly distressed that, to an outside observer, this assault may seem consensual: "Because my arms were being pulled so far back, my body was positioned in such a way that my chest protruded towards the man in front of me. In that way, if someone had walked in that room they would have thought I was giving him full permission to do whatever he wanted to do with me" (2006, 165). This loss of agency, of control over her own body, is perhaps the most traumatic aspect of Tihelo's imprisonment.

The notion of feminine sexual agency is central to the novel. Throughout the narrative, the reader learns of the fear and stigma associated with feminine sexuality in Tihelo's community: girls are taught to fear sex, to fear the consequences of giving in to physical desire. "Sex was the killer of dreams," Tihelo observes, "I had never heard about a man and a woman loving each other. All you heard about men and women was how, when they encountered each other, they found a way to sabotage each other's futures" (2006, 47). For the young women and girls of the township, falling pregnant terminates any hope of leaving their dire circumstances behind: in a country where the "law allowed no reproductive choices for women, Black or White" (2006, 47), an unplanned pregnancy

puts an end to dreams and ambitions. This is true of Tihelo's mother, Kgomotso, who is forced to quit nursing school and take on a menial job when she falls pregnant with Tihelo's sister, Keitumetse (2006, 14). Despite her own experience, Kgomotso fails to establish an open dialogue with her daughters concerning their developing sexuality, and instead allows the taboo topic of sex to remain shrouded in fear and mystery, as it is in neighbouring households. Consequently, Tihelo and her sister are stunned when Keitumetse falls pregnant after her very first sexual experience: "We had been brought up to believe that this only happened to other girls – those who spent no time at home and who slept with many different men" (2006, 74). While the father of her baby initially agrees to accept responsibility, Keitumetse panics when his political activism forces him to leave the country and go into hiding and, with the help of Tihelo, she seeks out an illegal or 'backstreet' abortion. The trauma of the risky procedure nearly ends her life.

The confusion and fear surrounding feminine sexuality and agency is another autobiographical element of *Dancing in the Dust*. Molohe recalls that "I was constantly threatened by the women around me: 'You can't get pregnant. You can't do this and you can't do that.' So you don't even know how far you want to go. I was constantly on guard, afraid to get raped, afraid to get pregnant or to sleep with a man" (qtd. in Smith 2006, 27). This "hyper-vigilance around a girl's sexuality" impacted dramatically on Molohe's own development, and it is "something that many black girls are [still today] forced to deal with in South Africa" (Smith 2006, 27). Since curiosity and confusion surrounding developing sexuality transcend generational gaps, and remain important issues for contemporary readers irrespective of their race, they establish a point of identification between the readers and the characters in the novel, allowing readers to form a relationship with the characters and sympathise with their experiences. If *Dancing in the Dust* is attempting to personalise or humanise a distant, unknown history, this point of identification is key to achieving its aims.

Tihelo's developing sense of her own sexuality forms part of the broader structure of the *Bildungsroman* which informs the novel. As mentioned, another important aspect of Tihelo's *Bildung* is her growing sense of responsibility towards her community, and it is this sense of community that proves most influential to her developing identity. In the course of the novel, Tihelo moves from an outside observer to an active member of her

community, a development that is cleverly mapped by the gradual replacement of the pronoun “I” with the collective “we” in the narrative discourse.

Two significant events, both of which occur early on in the narrative, serve as catalysts in solidifying Tihelo’s bond with her community and set into motion the consequent action in the novel. The first is the separation of Tihelo from her childhood friend, Thato. For the narrating Tihelo, Thato represents the innocence of her childhood years: as young girls, the two were constantly in each other’s company, playing games and worrying little about what was going on around them. However, when Thato’s relatively wealthy parents send her to a non-racial private school, and Tihelo is left to attend the local high school, they find that their relationship undergoes a rapid transformation as the class distinction between them becomes more pronounced. Their bond of girlhood friendship is broken, as is the protective ignorance of childhood that Tihelo had come to depend on. Her more mature, experienced self observes that “a child’s innocence – although it can be their worst enemy – is often their best protection. Although the constant rioting was disturbing, I knew and understood very little about what exactly was going on in the law and so I played and loved and laughed carelessly in those years” (2006, 22). After Thato’s departure, Tihelo begins to interact with more politically aware children in her community, and her involvement with them – and subsequently, with the South African Students’ Organisation – marks the end of her ‘careless’ years.

Shortly after Thato’s departure, another traumatic event in Tihelo’s life opens her eyes to the collective experiences of those around her. Following a pass raid at a train station in town, Tihelo and Keitumetse’s mother is arrested and detained overnight. A neighbour accompanies the girls to the crowded local police station to enquire after her:

Keitumetse and I walked in with Ausi Martha and Karabo, all of us holding on really tightly to each other. As if we could all save and protect one another from the vultures surrounding us. [. . .] Families had come in taxis from the townships in the middle of the night to ask for their mothers and fathers who had never made it home after work that evening. [. . .] However, as always, strangers were speaking to each other, trying to make sense of what was going on. (2006, 61–63)

Waiting for their mother in the congested reception area, not knowing if she was hurt or even if she *had* been arrested, Tihelo realises that many other families are experiencing her same anxieties and fears, and this is, perhaps, the first time that she is consciously aware of the bond of community. When the detainees are finally released, Tihelo comments, “I often prefer not to remember seeing *our people* in that space, all bruised and their clothes torn like that. They looked humiliated and afraid” (2006, 64; emphasis added). Here, Tihelo has abandoned the egocentric self-concern of childhood, and recognises the collective trauma experienced by all those around her – not just by herself and her family. As she watches her friends and neighbours emerge from their humiliation in detention, Tihelo begins to feel a sense of responsibility towards them, towards “our people.” Interestingly, as already noted, the notion of becoming *a part* of a community is a slight departure from the traditional narrative structure of the *Bildungsroman*. Whereas most novels of the genre deal with the “*emergence* of the individual in society” (Helgesson 2004, 81; emphasis added), the maturation of Tihelo’s character instead involves her *merging into* her community, developing from a child and an outsider into a young woman fully invested in the welfare of her neighbours. Ironically, the strictures of apartheid designed to fracture communities often served to bring them closer together in the interest of their own survival.

The use of the pronouns “we” and “our” in the above passage and elsewhere also serve to include the reader in the narrative by drawing him or her into Tihelo’s community. By doing so, Molohe is attempting to extend a sense of personal history beyond the fictional characters depicted in her novel and to make readers aware, however subtly, that this is *their* heritage. It should be noted, however, that while the use of the pronoun “we” may operate to include *some* (implied) readers in the fictional community, it also effectively excludes others. As the members of Tihelo’s community are black, her use of “we” does not seem to allow for the inclusion of white readers. This is, of course, understandable, as Tihelo’s story is centred around the experiences of black women and girls growing up in a black township – certainly, this would not constitute a part of a white reader’s heritage. Molohe’s implied reader, then, is very definitively identified in the text as a black South African girl in her mid- to late-teens.

This emphasis on the fundamental importance of community and belonging is reflected in the title of the novel, *Dancing in the Dust*. Again, there are two incidents in the narrative that explain the meaning of the title, and both, although very different, are based in the notion of community. The first is the event of a neighbour's wedding. Tihelo describes how, in preparation for the festivities, the entire community contributes in whatever way it can, whether it be cooking or baking, or simply offering blessings to the bride and her family (2006, 86). When the day arrives, Tihelo explains the customs of her community, including that of dancing in the sand roads surrounding their block of houses:

There is a reason dancing is known as *thuntsha lerole*, or shooting the dust. When you are really feeling the music all the way down your legs, it goes and settles in your feet and becomes so heavy that you have to hit your foot really hard on the ground, swaying your body back and forth and from side to side. By the time you are done going up and down the street, your clothes look like you have just been frolicking in a tub full of dust. We took our celebrations very seriously.
(2006, 88)

This image of dust being kicked up in a moment of joyous celebration is sharply contrasted later on in the novel with a student-organised march that ends in a fatal shoot-out:

We were masses moving as one, covered in the dust we were dancing in. From a distance you would probably not have seen people dancing so much as a dust storm rising. Our black shoes and socks wore the powdery, brownish colour of the sand we were swimming in. Our hair looked like we had bathed in sand and so did our clothes. People who had covered themselves in Vaseline had what almost looked like a mud mask covering their legs, arms, and faces. But all of it was intoxicating, the way power always is.
(2006, 129)

This juxtaposition of the novel's central image emphasises the solidarity of community that is its main theme. Tihelo's is a community that stands together in joy and in pain; in

celebration and in battle. By the time Tihelo is imprisoned, shortly after the march, her community has become central to her survival, solidifying the sentiment that her narrating self established early on: “Living in the townships involved the blindest and most fierce kind of faith – you could believe in an invisible and all-powerful force, but your best bet was probably to have unrelenting confidence in yourself and in your neighbours” (2006, 23).

Tihelo’s faith in her community and her sense of belonging to it play a major role in the resolution of the central mystery of her identity. Throughout the novel, she is aware of the physical difference between her and those around her: the lighter shade of her skin which “stuck out like a sore thumb in my township” (2006, 10). Although as a child Tihelo is preoccupied with this difference, she is forbidden from questioning it (2006, 10). As the novel progresses and she becomes more involved in her political activities, she becomes less interested in this anomaly. However, when she is hospitalised after her release from prison, she receives a visit from a neighbour, a ‘Coloured’ woman who always seemed particularly interested in her but to whom she was forbidden from speaking. The woman reveals the well-kept secret of Tihelo’s heritage: Kgomotso, the woman Tihelo has always believed to be her mother, is in fact her aunt; her father is Kgomotso’s brother, Setshiro. Setshiro was working as a gardener in the home of a wealthy Johannesburg family when he fell in love with his white employers’ teenaged daughter, Diana. When Diana fell pregnant, Setshiro was accused of rape and imprisoned, where he subsequently died. Diana’s parents refused to accept her child into the family, and shortly after the baby – Tihelo – was born, she was given to Kgomotso to raise (2006, 176–178).

While Tihelo is understandably shocked to learn the truth of her parentage, she is not thrown into a crisis of self-doubt. Still recovering from her ordeal in prison, she accepts the news calmly, and does not press Kgomotso for details of her history. Instead, she resolves to call the house of the grandparents who rejected her and, without revealing her identity, is given the address of her birth mother in Canada (2006, 180). At the close of the narrative, Tihelo writes a letter to Diana, “one that I may never post, but one that I really need to compose” (2006, 185). In it, she tells her birth mother about her life, her

involvement in political activism, and her community, and expresses a hope that they will one day meet:

*I have been with my mother, Kgomotso, since the day your father gave me to her. I have a sister, Keitumetse, and neither of them look [sic] anything like me, which is something I have always been curious about until the one night in the hospital when I heard about you and it all began to make sense. I have lived in the township all my life. Everyone I have ever loved is here. [. . .]
Are you happy there? I hope so. I am not happy here, but I am close to family, and that is comforting. [. . .]
If you are ever looking for me in South Africa, my name is Tihelo Masimo, Revolutionary. (2006, 185–187)*

Tihelo never verbalises her motives in writing the letter, which could be read as a rejection of the family that once rejected her, a denial of her white heritage. She does not beg her birth mother to recognise her, or for emancipation from the oppression she has experienced, despite her repeated resolve to leave the township she grew up in. Nor does she suddenly consider herself to be ‘Coloured,’ despite the slight elevation in social status that this would entail. Instead, Tihelo chooses to embrace the only heritage she has ever known. She does not deny the family she has grown up with. Her letter to her birth mother ironically marks her sense of belonging to the community which has enabled her survival, a “community of people brought together by circumstances meant to destroy us” (2006, 15). The resolution of the mystery surrounding her physical differences does not destabilise her sense of self, but rather, through her choice to embrace her upbringing, solidifies it. Molope subtly comments on the discursive construction of race here, as Tihelo does not feel that a sudden change in her racial classification has altered her identity in any way. Her assertion of her given name, and that integral part of her identity – “Revolutionary” – confirms her coming of age.

Molope’s novel may be criticised for being overly political and, indeed, this may prove to be a deterrent for many contemporary readers. However, the novel’s emphasis on community and the collective “we” serves to alert readers to the notion of a shared history. Tihelo is a character with whom any adolescent girl can identify in her struggle with her identity, her sexuality, and her place in her community. These carefully

constructed points of commonality humanise what otherwise may have been a bland political history to readers, and allow them to understand the workings of apartheid on a more personal level. It must be noted, though, that the notion of a shared history presented in the novel is aimed specifically at black (implied) readers: it is the history of black women and girls under apartheid, the struggles they faced under oppression and their contribution to the fight for freedom. By identifying with the novel's protagonist, black female readers may recognise the histories of their own mothers, grandmothers, aunts and sisters, and by extension, appreciate their own history.

2.2.2 Ideologies of past and present in *Out of Bounds* (2001)

Beverley Naidoo's concern with the implications of apartheid continues well into her career and beyond the establishment of democracy. Her fifth work, *Out of Bounds*, is made up of seven short stories, each set in a different decade in history, spanning from 1948, when apartheid came into being, to 2000. While the protagonists of the seven stories are all aged between nine and twelve, the short story genre enables Naidoo to represent a variety of social, racial and economic backgrounds. In each story, the child protagonist is faced, often for the first time, with the discrimination and oppression that characterised the apartheid regime and, in most cases, is left subtly questioning racial classification and its implications. Despite their undeniably political backdrops, the stories are deeply personal, reflecting the often painful awakening of the protagonists to the realities of the society into which they have been born. Indeed, the author suggested in an interview that the characters' experiences "seem to trace [her] own reactions to racism in her country, from acceptance to awareness to active involvement in the fight for freedom" (Mariner 2004, 88). The collection as a whole "yields a nuanced and disturbing understanding of the inner workings of apartheid discourses on children [. . . and] renders a frightening portrait of the psychological mechanisms that undergird the system" (Fainman-Frenkel 2004, 6).

In his foreword to the collection, Archbishop Desmond Tutu notes that

[m]ost of what is described here no longer happens in the new South Africa. But this record is important so that we South Africans can never with any degree of credibility deny that we could reach such depths of depravity [. . .]. We must acknowledge that it happened. But most importantly we should, after reading these quite disturbing stories, renew our commitment to the new democracy and its new culture of respect for fundamental human rights and say for ourselves and our descendants, 'Never again will we want to treat fellow human beings in this fashion.' (2001: x)

Tutu's foreword reflects the need to remember in order to move forward, to acknowledge the pain and oppression suffered under apartheid and, as a generation raised in a young democracy, to appropriate that suffering positively into our collective and personal identities. This sentiment is affirmed by the subtitle of Naidoo's collection, "Stories of Conflict and Hope": read as a whole the stories seem to suggest that we look back at South Africa's fraught history in order to see how far we have come.

Once again, the didactic nature of Naidoo's work is obvious: in her introduction, she explains her intention not only to examine the effect of apartheid policy on the lives of the country's citizens of all races, but also to show how South Africa's current social and political landscapes continue to be influenced by decades of oppression (2001, xiii–xv). Through her stories, Randolph points out, "Naidoo identifies a multicultural array of casualties in the land of apartheid, perceptively showing that victims came in many hues, not just black" (2005, 33).

The collection opens with a story entitled "The Dare," which is set in 1948, the year the National Party government came to power in South Africa and began to implement apartheid policies. This story recounts the experiences of Veronica, a white, English-speaking child of about ten years old, who holidays several times a year with her parents in the countryside surrounding their Johannesburg home. Throughout her early childhood, Veronica gets on well with the children of the Afrikaans family on whose farm they stay; during this visit, though, the children force her to perform a dare if she wishes to be part of their 'gang.' She is told she has to walk across the neighbouring orange farm and pick a poinsettia flower from a bush growing near the farmhouse. The owner of the farm, Meneer Venter, is greatly feared amongst the local children for his fiery temper and the rumours that he murdered his wife. As Veronica cautiously

approaches the farmhouse, she hears Venter screaming with rage, and from her vantage point behind the poinsettia bush, sees him drag a small black child from inside the house. The boy, about Veronica's own age, is accused of stealing an orange, and beaten brutally before a number of farm-workers who plead with Venter to take pity on the child. Veronica is almost paralysed with fear; however, when Venter finally sees her, he merely walks by and pats her gently on the head as he passes. Relieved of her apprehension, Veronica takes several of the flowers from the bush and, as she leisurely walks back across the farm, even considers taking a few oranges to her friends as proof of her bravery.

In "The Dare," Naidoo depicts an act of brutal violence which was fairly commonplace during the time and, in so doing, illustrates the process by which the children of apartheid came to realise their place in racial discourse. The story reveals the "complex mechanisms through which children learned their positioning in [. . .] society" (Fainman-Frenkel 2004, 7). Veronica shows frighteningly little concern for the boy, though only moments before he is beaten, she notices how closely he resembles the son of her family's beloved domestic worker, Rebecca. While this may reflect a childish selfishness, Naidoo is also attempting to portray how such brutal race relations were normalised under apartheid discourse, and how, as a white child, Veronica is not only afforded a certain superiority, but becomes implicated in the perpetuation of racial discourse. Even the depiction of Rebecca, the domestic worker, resounds with similar precepts: while Veronica speaks of her fondly and looks upon her as a kind of counsellor, her description of their relationship reveals a gross imbalance of power. Rebecca is thus rendered inferior and even infantile purely on the grounds of race. Even at her young age, Veronica "understands the bounds that race draws around cruelty and entitlement, bounds that are articulated without words" but are nonetheless ingrained in the social consciousnesses of all race groups (Fainman-Frenkel 2004, 7).

A similar awareness of the destructive power of racial discourse is portrayed in the story "One Day, Lily, One Day." Set in 1960, the story's protagonist, Lily, is again a ten-year-old white girl, but the differences in her character and Veronica's are marked. While Lily is somewhat more naïve and does not have the same sophisticated grasp of language as Veronica, her progressive upbringing has rendered her much more sensitive to the

nuances of racial discourse, a sensitivity which her peers obviously lack. When her friend, Caroline, meets a black man on her way to the bathroom in Lily's home, she is panic-stricken and runs to Lily to report:

'There's a strange native in your house! As big as a giant! [. . .]
He came out of the bathroom and went into your dad's study!
Then she widened her eyes in horror. She loved to make up
dramas.

'Do you think he's a burglar?' [. . .]

'It's all right. My daddy probably knows him.'

'But what's he doing in your house? Is he your garden boy?'

(2001, 47)

Lily realises that the man Caroline encountered in her house was their family friend, Uncle Max. Though she hides her feelings from her playmate, she is offended by Caroline's derogatory use of the words "native" and "boy" to describe the grown man she has known and loved since her early infancy, as her parents have taught her to use the word "African" when referring to black people. Lily is too young to comprehend the subtle nuances of language on a conscious level, but she immediately recognises and reacts to the offensive nature of her friend's comments and the racial stereotyping inherent in them.

While it is true that the stories featuring white protagonists in Naidoo's collection deal almost exclusively with the ideological implications of apartheid, the author also explores the material, manifest realities of institutionalised racism. Her stories which feature black, Indian and 'Coloured' protagonists deal at a deeply personal level with the repercussions of apartheid law.

"The Noose," set in 1955, is the story of Jacob, a 'Coloured' boy, and deals with the ramifications of the recently-passed Population Registration Act and Group Areas Act.¹⁵ Jacob and his family are preparing to move to an area designated a 'Coloured'

¹⁵ The appendix to *Out of Bounds* explains these laws as follows: "*Population Registration Act*. Everyone must be classified according to a so-called 'racial group': 'White'; 'Coloured'; 'Indian'; 'Native' or 'Bantu', i.e. Black African. The definitions are scientific nonsense but they become law. Classification affects everything about a person's life. Some families are split when children of mixed heritage are classified differently because of differences in the shade of their skin or curliness of their hair. *The Group Areas Act*. People are forced to live in separate areas according to the 'racial group' in which they have been put" (Naidoo 2001, 138–139).

location, as the neighbourhood they have lived in all their lives has been declared a “white suburb” under the Group Areas Act. Before the move takes place, however, Jacob’s father is denied registration as a ‘Coloured’ by the local government Pass office. Unable to prove that he is the descendant of a European settler, Jacob’s father is classified as African, or black, by government officials, on the grounds that his complexion is slightly darker and his hair curlier than the rest of his family’s (2001, 36–39). His classification has serious implications for the family: throughout the story, the characters refer to the fact that no matter how badly they are treated as ‘Coloureds’ under apartheid rule, they are still better off than the black population. Jacob’s father’s classification as an African means that he is in danger of losing his job; most devastating, however, is the realisation that, because the family members have been grouped as different races, they will no longer be allowed to live together under the stipulations of the Group Areas Act. It is now illegal for Jacob’s father to live under the same roof or even in the same area as his family, simply because his skin is of a darker shade. It is this realisation that catapults Jacob from the cocoon of childhood innocence: as the story closes, he comments, “I suddenly felt much older [. . .]. And for the first time I felt I knew what Uncle Richard meant by ‘the noose around all our necks’” (2001, 40).

Naidoo does not limit herself to narratives set in the apartheid era: the final two stories of the collection, set in 1995 and 2000 respectively, focus instead on the aftermath of decades of racial oppression. Through these stories, Naidoo examines the new sets of difficulties ushered in along with democracy, as members of all racial groups attempt to readjust to new ways of living alongside each other and interacting with those from whom they have long been separated. Most significantly, these two stories depict how the effects of apartheid extend well beyond the change in law.

“The Playground” is set in the year after South Africa’s first democratic elections in 1994. It is the story of Rosa, an eleven-year-old black girl who, for the first time, is attending a previously ‘whites only’ school in her neighbourhood. Also attending the school is Hennie, the son of her mother’s white employers and a childhood playmate of Rosa’s. As the school year commences, Rosa finds that the white parents of Oranje Primary School are protesting against the admission of black children into the school: racial tension runs high as these parents and their children do their utmost to make Rosa

feel unwelcome. During the morning break on her first day, Rosa is lured to a deserted area of the playground where she is harassed and antagonised by her white classmates, but is rescued by her childhood friend, Hennie. Rosa is surprised by this, as Hennie's father is openly racist and was the one who put a stop to the children's friendship years before.

Although simply narrated, "The Playground" is characterised by the skilful juxtaposition of contrasting emotions that prevailed during this period of adjustment in South Africa. Prominent among these emotions, particularly in the township where Rosa has been raised, are joy and hope. As Rosa contemplates the beginning of her school year, she remembers that

[o]nly a few months earlier, for the first time in her life, Mama had stood in the same long winding queue as Hennie's parents and the other white townfolk, waiting to cast her vote for their new government. A 'rainbow government', Mama told Rosa. A government that would make sure her daughter could attend a school with enough classrooms, teachers, desks, books and playing fields for everyone. The school that the white parents had kept just for their own children would have to become a 'rainbow school', Mama had laughed. (2001, 101)

Indeed, it is on her mother's insistence that Rosa plans to attend Oranje Primary School after years of receiving a poor education at the overcrowded township school. Although Rosa is the same age as Hennie, she is a year behind him at school, because she was forced to start a year later than she should have when the over-subscribed township school turned her away from Grade One. As Rosa recalls this period in her life, she also remembers a day shortly afterwards when

a spirit of joy blossomed like an unexpected rainbow [. . .] over the entire township [. . .]. All around Rosa people were crying and laughing. Unbelievable, they said. It was a day they had almost thought would never come. Nelson Mandela, the man the white government had locked up for life, was walking free from his prison! Here was their Madiba coming to help them. They prayed for him to chase away the heavy grey clouds thrown over their lives by the white people's government. (2001, 105)

The recollection of these significant events in Rosa's young life establishes the sense of hope and joy that she and her community have invested in the 'new' South Africa. However, Rosa realises that attitudes are not so quick to change as the law, and it is with a feeling of trepidation that she begins the school year. She is shaken, but not surprised, to find that she and her mother are forced to cross a picket line of protesting white parents on her first day. She finds herself unable to "blot out the hoarse screams [of the protesters]: 'NEVER! WHITE AND BLACK DON'T MIX!' 'FIGHT FOR A WHITE ORANJE!' 'NO BLACKS HERE'" (2001, 110), and discovers that many of her classmates and even teachers share these sentiments. She is relieved, then, when her estranged friend Hennie, whose father once called her a "savage" and a "piccanin" (2001, 104), does not reject her:

'I saw you and your ma come to school this morning . . . with all those people.' He paused awkwardly. 'You were very brave.' [. . .]

She let Hennie's words sink in. Did they mean that Hennie didn't like the protesters? But surely his father thought like them! [. . .]

'Somebody had to be first,' she said. (2001, 116)

It is this notion of bravery that seems to be at the core of Naidoo's story. Both children display immense courage: Rosa in asserting her right to attend the school despite the protests of others (Randolph 2005, 31), and Hennie in standing up for his friend against their racist schoolmates. Naidoo's characters are aware that adjusting to the 'new' South Africa will not be easy for some. As part of the inaugural generation of democratic South Africa, it is in their power to abandon the old prejudices of generations before them – as Hennie has done – and to negotiate a new position from which to relate to one another. While the discourse of race still retains a great deal of its influence, Naidoo seems to be suggesting that individuals can overcome this influence in their interactions with others. As Rosa's mother tells her daughter: "My grandmother taught me an old Zulu saying: '*Ubuntu ungumuntu ngabanye abantu*' . . . 'People are people through other people.' It means we are who we are in the way that we treat others" (2001, 108–109).

This principle of 'Ubuntu' also plays a role in the title story of the collection, "Out of Bounds." Set in 2000, the story's protagonist is Rohan, an Indian boy from a privileged community that is thrown into upheaval when an informal settlement is established in the open area behind their homes. While the homeowners are, at first, willing to help the informal settlers by providing the basic resource of water, their increasing paranoia over crime tests their generosity. Though forbidden to answer the door to the informal settlers, Rohan helps a boy of about his age, Solani, when he begs for water for his mother, who is giving birth. Rohan, despite his misgivings, then accompanies Solani into the informal settlement to deliver the water.

Randolph observes that "'Out of Bounds' highlights the plight of the thousands of homeless people of colour today who are struggling to create a living space" (2005, 32). Interestingly, this story marks a shift in prejudices based on racial difference to ones centred on class distinction, while still noting that such class distinction is defined along the lines of colour and is therefore a direct consequence of apartheid policies. Cleverly, Naidoo emphasises the issue of class rather than race by making her protagonist Indian instead of white, and so "the position of the Indian community is complicated in the story's post-apartheid re-drawing of racial boundaries along class lines" (Fainman-Frenkel 2004, 10). In addition, the prejudices portrayed in the story come not only from the Indian community, but also from their black neighbours:

The first complaint of clothes disappearing off the washing line came from their new neighbours. The first African family, in fact, to move in among the Indians on Mount View. No one had actually seen anyone but everyone was suspicious including the neighbour, Mrs Zuma.

'You can't really trust these people, you know,' Mrs Zuma tutted. (2001, 119–120)

As already mentioned, the community's initial sympathy towards the township dwellers abates with their increasing fear of crime and feelings of mistrust:

A new nervousness now gripped the house-owners on top of the hill. Every report of theft, break-in or car hi-jacking, anywhere in the country, led to another conversation about the

squatters on the other side of their garden walls. [. . .] In the daytime, when Ma heard the bell and saw that it was a woman or child with a bucket, she no longer answered the call. All the neighbours were agreed. Why should private house-owners be expected to provide water for these people? That was the Council's job. (2001, 120)

Rohan realises here that the opinion has begun to prevail in the community that they should not be responsible for the well-being of their poverty-stricken neighbours. Naidoo condemns this attitude, however, through the inclusion in the story of the factual news piece concerning the devastating Mozambican floods, which occurred in 2000, and the characters' response to this disaster. As Rohan's mother watches the images of the rescue of a young mother who had been forced to give birth in a tree,¹⁶ she exclaims, "Those poor people!" (2001, 123). Immediately afterwards, when Rohan asks her what would happen to them if the hurricanes hit, she replies, "'No, we'll be all right son. But that lot out there will get it. The government really should do something.' Ma nodded in the direction of the squatters" (2001, 123). Here, Naidoo reveals the hypocrisy of Rohan's mother and their neighbours by proving that their sympathies are hollow, and do not extend to taking action in relieving the hardships of those who are suffering on their very doorstep. The notion of 'charity begins at home' is subtly introduced and, by making use of an authentic news piece, Naidoo extends this notion into the reality of her readers' lives.

It is with this in mind that Naidoo lauds Rohan's bravery in offering his help to Solani by venturing into the township with him despite his fears. That Solani's mother, like the Mozambican woman, is giving birth under difficult circumstances is significant, as it alerts readers to the fact that suffering is not only the stuff of abstract news pieces, but is taking place all around them. In addition, Rohan discovers that the fears of Solani's community are not so different from his own: after a threatening man interrogates Rohan in the township, Solani explains that "They don't know you. Sometimes people come and attack us. So if a stranger comes, they must always check first" (2001, 135).

¹⁶ During the devastating floods brought on by hurricanes, Sophia Pedro was trapped in a tree where she gave birth to her baby girl, Rositha. Both mother and baby were rescued and survived their ordeal. See Greenberg (2000).

The cumulative effect of the narrative is to explode the misplaced fears of its characters and, by extension, of the readers. By exposing the hypocrisy of the community, Naidoo is gently showing her readers that sympathy means very little if one is unwilling to take responsibility for alleviating the suffering of those so close to home. As Randolph notes, “Naidoo’s stories demonstrate social responsibility and cultural sensitivity” (2005, 32), and it is with this final story that Naidoo’s collection achieves an encompassing and authentic portrayal of South African life over five decades and the continued significance of apartheid in the lives of its people.

Rather than adopting an essentialist approach to the notion of race, as she did in her earlier novel, *Journey to Jo’burg*, Naidoo achieves a more balanced portrayal in *Out of Bounds* by rejecting certain racial stereotypes without creating others. Many of the stories deal with the discursive nature of race as well as the implications of racist legislation and, when compared to her earlier works, demonstrate Naidoo’s growth as a writer. The collection is written for a generation of children who were born into a democracy but are still experiencing the aftermath of apartheid. The didactic intention of Naidoo’s work, then, lies in its attempt to assist readers to understand the complex history of their country by tracing the origins of racial prejudice while at the same time revealing those prejudices to be unfounded.

* * *

The rapid changes in South Africa’s political climate during the 1980s were reflected by a shift in the subject matter of fiction written for young adults. Writing in 1993, Jenkins noted that “as the pace of political reform has increased and South African society has become freer, more and more children’s and youth novels on these themes have been published, exploiting the greater tolerance of what may be published and children may read” (1993, 130). Politically progressive authors began to use children’s and young adult fiction as a platform from which to introduce sheltered readers to experiences with which they were unfamiliar, in an attempt to expose the atrocities of apartheid rule. As such, the fiction produced during this time was almost invariably didactic in nature and, as has been shown by the examination of a sample of texts set during the apartheid era,

influenced heavily by the personal, political and moral agendas of authors. This trend has been carried into the twenty-first century by authors who persist in the attempt, more than a decade after the first democratic elections, to educate a new generation about the history of institutionalised racism.

While it is true that almost all fiction set during the apartheid era is heavily imbued with the moralistic and political intentions of its authors, the didactic thrust of this fiction has shifted with the establishment of democracy in South Africa. During the 1980s, authors of novels such as *The Strollers* and *Journey to Jo'burg* endeavoured to expose their privileged, white readers to the hardships experienced by children and adolescents of different races in an attempt to engender sympathy and provoke a change in racial prejudice. In the case of both Beake and Naidoo, the author not only ushers the reader on a journey through the unfamiliar, but also negotiates the difficulties presented by constructing a reality with which she had little or no first-hand knowledge. For Beake, this meant relying solely on research information from which she liberally borrowed, carefully choosing material which suited her purposes while at the same time rejecting that which she felt inappropriate for her young readers. By contrast, Naidoo reverted to the use of crude stereotypes to make her point known.

Naidoo and Beake also differ in the amount of guidance they provide to readers in their interpretation and response to the text. Beake's timidity in dealing with the harshest aspects of the lives of the strollers, as well as the inherent ambiguities in her novel, allows her readers to vacillate between a shocking reality and the safety of an adventure story with a happy ending. It would seem that Beake's own hesitancy in exposing the unjust social system responsible for the strollers has resulted in a novel that stops short of criticising the apartheid government. Naidoo's novel, on the other hand, is a damning indictment of institutionalised racism, though intended for a foreign audience. The author carefully and almost forcefully guides her readers' reactions through a didactic preface and postscript, and her agenda is further supported by her use of stereotyped characters (van der Walt 1995, 73–74). Both authors, however, interrogate the notion of race and the stereotypes upon which the apartheid government was built, and encourage their readers to do the same.

With the advent of democracy, the focus of children's and young adult authors has shifted to helping children and teenagers, who have been born into a democratic nation and have no memories of apartheid, to understand how the history of South Africa continues to influence current socio-political landscapes. In addition, contemporary works set during the apartheid period often attempt to show readers how the history contained in their pages is *their* heritage, by personalising and humanising otherwise bland historical fact. This change in how authors expect readers to respond to their texts has meant a shift in how their subject matter is presented.

For Molohe, writing *Dancing in the Dust* was a deeply personal experience, spurred by her realisation that her experiences as a township girl growing up in turbulent times were not reflected in any of the literature to which she was exposed (Wanjelani 2004, 8). Her novel therefore chronicles the coming of age of a teenager suffering under oppressive political conditions, with particular emphasis on the experience of women and girls during this time. The struggle of coming to terms with one's own identity is one to which most contemporary teenagers can easily relate, and Molohe uses the issues associated with this struggle – sexuality, individuality, responsibility, community – as a means of including her readers in an otherwise alien environment. At the same time, the intended audience of Molohe's novel is very clearly demarcated, to the exclusion of certain readers. Nevertheless, black female readers, in feeling that they can relate to the characters in Molohe's novel, are able to recognise that the historical backdrop of the novel is part of their own heritage.

Naidoo's more recent work examined in this chapter, *Out of Bounds*, is equally as forceful in its didactic thrust as her first novel, but perhaps more balanced in its portrayal of South African society. Her use of the short story genre allows her to present characters from an assortment of social and racial backgrounds, during a variety of different time periods. Through these characters, she is able to chronicle changing attitudes and ideologies throughout the country's history, while at the same time accounting for current social prejudices. Her collection as a whole recognises the atrocities of the past and maintains a hopeful outlook for the future.

Young readers are often resistant to reading politically charged works of fiction. The authors examined here have all met this challenge in a range of different ways and

with varying degrees of success, bravely attempting to overcome this political apathy while endorsing their moral agendas. Each has endeavoured to help young readers to negotiate unfamiliar experiences, to understand the society in which they live, and to realise their place in history.

Chapter Three:

Crossing the divide: novels of the transition

*It is those young people whose coming of age coincides
with the transition to democracy who will
help shape our collective future.
(Gaylard 1997, 104)*

From the time of Nelson Mandela's release from prison in 1990, until well after the first democratic elections were held in 1994, South African society found itself in a state of transition and uncertainty. As it became increasingly evident that the apartheid system was finally going to be dismantled, South Africans were faced with new challenges in adapting to a rapidly changing socio-political environment: for many, this meant questioning old values and negotiating new modes of relating to those from whom they had been separated for decades; for the marginalised majority, new-found equality and freedom was often complicated by questions of racial and cultural identity. Regardless of race, class, religious creed, age and gender, all South Africans found themselves affected in some way by the changes in the political climate.

Authors for children and young adults were inevitably influenced by the implications of the transitory phase. Flockemann points out that "[a]s adolescence itself is a transitional phase, it follows that literature for and about adolescents [. . .] could be seen as a barometer for some of the social and political changes taking place during this time" (1998, 145). Art and literature of the early to mid-1990s began to reflect the collective, as well as the personal, experiences of South Africans in a changing society; indeed, "everything in South Africa [had] changed, including the settings, characters, plots, themes, authors, and points of view, and tones of young adult novels" (Bentley and Midgley 2000, 52). Inggs concurs, noting that "forces of political transformation and change at work in South Africa [. . .] had a major impact on the development of the South African youth novel and its dominant themes" (2002, 22).

What emerged in the young adult fiction market during this time was what could be termed the reconciliatory novel: fiction which aimed to heal the injustices of the past, to reflect the changes taking place in South Africa, and to suggest to young readers how to cope with these changes. Many authors of young adult fiction had lofty goals, and some succeeded in producing novels and short stories that gesture towards reconciliation and speak of optimism for the future while still providing an honest portrayal of the challenges faced by South African society. Daly argues that though there was often “something artificial and forced about many of these books [. . .] they suggested a potential for someday realising a multiracial South Africa” (2002, 42). Invariably, these novels and short stories place children and young people at the forefront of the possibility for change. It is the country’s youth, the authors of these texts argue, that will most easily shed the prejudices and resentments of the past in an effort to achieve the ideal of the ‘rainbow nation.’ As Khorana notes, “[d]uring this period of social, political, economic, and national reconstruction, the role of youth as agents of change is seen as crucial, and children’s books become the vehicles for that message” (2003, 2). This chapter will examine a selection of texts which deal with this phase of transition in South Africa’s history by not only reflecting on the changes taking place, but also suggesting how challenges associated with the negotiation of a new socio-political ideology should be met.

This discussion will begin with an analysis of Kagiso Lesego Molohe’s second novel, *The Mending Season*, which is set in the early 1990s at a time when these changes were being set into motion. Here, the period of transition forms a backdrop to an intensely personal narrative of one individual’s experience of coming of age in the ‘new’ South Africa. Through this narrative, Molohe suggests how readers may overcome challenges presented by similar experiences in their own lives without compromising their principles. Following this, a collection of short stories compiled by Jakes Gerwel and Linda Rode, entitled *Crossing Over*, will be assessed in terms of its goal of inclusively representing the new ‘rainbow nation,’ and will be considered as an imaginative record of the changes taking place in South Africa. The stories chosen from this collection for examination are those that deal explicitly with the 1994 democratic elections, an occasion which prompts characters to reflect on their prejudices and

perceptions (and, by extension, encourages readers to do the same). Finally, Anton Ferreira's *Sharp Sharp, Zulu Dog*, a novel set in the early years of democracy, will be discussed in terms of its failure to offer tenable solutions to the complications it raises in terms of inter-racial relations.

These texts have been selected from a fairly extensive range of options for their vastly different approaches to the difficulties faced by young people growing up in a phase of transition. While they may vary in the problems they tackle and the positions that they adopt, each author examined in this chapter has, in some way, attempted to cross ideological divides. Inevitably, this has meant imaginatively constructing an ideal democratic society, and challenging the obstacles to its realisation. In doing so, each author has, in his or her own way, posited an idealised approach to relating to the racial other, and attempted to expose the prejudices that prevent the normalisation of race relations.

3.1 The struggle for acceptance in *The Mending Season* (2005)

Similarly to *Dancing in the Dust*, Molope's second novel, *The Mending Season*, is heavily populated with strong female characters. Once again, the coming of age of an adolescent black girl forms the focus of the narrative and, like Tihelo, its protagonist finds that her growing sense of self-awareness is complicated by the social and political changes underway in South Africa. As its title suggests, the novel deals with the challenges of reconciliation and the reparation of historical injustices during the final years of apartheid, during which time the country was already preparing to usher in a new democracy. Molope explores how these challenges threaten the personal development of her young protagonist, as she battles to find her place in a changing society. The author seems to suggest to her readers that, while acceptance and tolerance are necessary in order to move forward, this should not come at the expense of one's individuality or personal convictions.

Set in the early 1990s, *The Mending Season* uses as its backdrop the phase of transition when Bantu Education policies were in the process of being abandoned and

previously 'whites only' schools were starting to open their doors to children of all races. It is the story of Tshidiso, a black girl in her early teens who leaves her township school to attend a racially integrated girls' convent. As she battles to fit in, an incident on the netball court suddenly throws her situation into sharp relief: a fellow classmate, a white girl, mutters the racist slur '*kaffir*' at her when Tshidiso accidentally bumps into her. It is the first time she has encountered blatant racism: though she is paralysed with shock, another classmate, also a black girl, overhears the comment and slaps the other girl's face. The story eventually reaches the media, despite the school's attempt to keep the incident quiet, and sparks a national debate on the readiness of South Africans to put their pasts behind them and become a truly integrated society. The white child's racist slur is downplayed, while the black girl's violent response is cited by many as evidence of the validity of the racial stereotypes that characterised the apartheid period. Though Tshidiso is a witness to the incident, she is reluctant to become involved in its aftermath. Still desperately attempting to fit in with her peers, she fears that being singled out for her involvement, however passive, will estrange her even more from her classmates.

Tshidiso's ever-present sense of alienation and isolation is central to the development of her character in the novel. She lives with her three 'aunts' – one of whom is actually her biological mother – in a community where the lack of a male authority figure in their household is treated with suspicion. From her infancy, she has been actively excluded from the games of the local children and, like her aunts, is still avoided by her neighbours. The aunts are three of the strongest female characters in the novel: despite the disapproval of their community, all three choose not to marry or invite any permanent male presence into their household. They share a strong bond and a lifelong dream, believing that "every black woman should have her own business" (2005, 15). However, their independence and assertiveness are frowned upon by their neighbours; the women's failure to comply with gender expectations and stereotypes is the source of their condemnation. Tshidiso observes that "the neighbours disagreed with [the aunts] on almost everything, especially on the topics of men, money and rage" (2005, 5–6). Indeed, the aunts' "rage" – their tendency to display their emotions publicly – is a topic of contention in their community, where it is believed that "no woman should have that kind of rage" (2005, 10).

In the months before Tshidiso is due to start her high school career, the aunts decide to forgo their dream of opening their own business and instead use their savings to send the girl to a private school in town, so that she may benefit from a better education than the one she would receive at the local township school (2005, 66). For Tshidiso, this not only means associating with white people for the first time, but also escaping the stigma attached to her in her neighbourhood. Finally, she is able to socialise with people who have no knowledge of her family's situation, and she is "determined not to be an outcast like my family was at home" (2005, 63). As she is attending a racially integrated school, she believes that she will feel a sense of belonging to a progressive and rapidly changing group of individuals and will no longer feel that she is an outsider. Tshidiso's hope for her future is reflected by the socio-political context of the novel: South Africa at the time was undergoing a rapid process of transformation in becoming a racially integrated society. In keeping with this idea, the notion of transformation (or the appearance thereof), as well as the discourse associated with it, are central to the novel. *The Mending Season* reflects the reality that, while individuals and institutions may strive to maintain a 'politically correct' public façade, a long history of prejudice grounded in ideological beliefs is not easily changed.

There are several examples in the novel that illustrate this point. On Tshidiso's first day at the Ascension Convent, the headmistress introduces the school's new head prefect at the morning assembly:

Mrs Allison held up a newspaper clipping with Anita's picture on it. 'We're the first school to have a black head girl, and we've been heralded as rebels and trend-setters in the media.' At this, Mrs Allison chuckled, showing a smile for the first time since assembly began. [. . .]

'It's just for the media,' said someone behind me. 'They just want to be on the front page of the *Pretoria News*.'

'They just want people to think they're not racist.'

(2005, 34–36)

Mrs Allison's delight in the publicity generated for the school is obvious; the girls, however, are not as easily appeased. After the assembly, a group of black students complain that Anita is "not even black" (2005, 35), but 'Coloured' – revealing not only a reliance on racial discourse and distinction, but also the continued practice by the school

and media of conflating all 'non-white' races into the single category of 'black.' This was a common habit during apartheid, and effectively established 'white' as the preferred norm and everything else as 'other.'¹⁷ Above all, though, this brief incident suggests that the school appointed a 'non-white' head prefect with the sole intention of generating favourable publicity – particularly since her appointment is not in keeping with the tradition of selecting a head prefect who has been with the school since the first grade. It seems, then, that the Ascension Convent would have their reputation as a 'non-racial' or 'non-racist' school firmly established in the public eye. Moreover, the suggestion that this reputation has been carefully constructed rather than well-founded forewarns of the difficulties and insincerities that Tshidiso will encounter there.

Tshidiso quickly discovers that it is the common opinion among black students that their teachers, all of whom are white, are racist. During one of her first classes, the students are reprimanded by their teacher in a manner that is unequivocally motivated by a racist attitude:

'Black girls,' she started, 'making noise as usual!'

'Ah, Miss!' Trish said. 'It's not just us!'

'*Hao*, Miss! It's everyone, not just the black girls,' Tamz protested. Several black girls were offended but everyone else kept quiet. [. . .]

'Excuse me! You're so rude! I won't tolerate rudeness in my class. Now, I don't know how you speak to each other where you live, but this is not how we do things around here.'

The class fell silent. The girls started whispering something in Sesotho, and the teacher retorted, 'And you know you're not allowed to speak your language in here! This is an English Medium school!' (2005, 46)

The issue of language is at the heart of several racially motivated encounters in the novel.¹⁸ Even the parents of black students are subjected to the 'English only' rule imposed by the school: when a mother speaks to her young children in their home

¹⁷ Petty apartheid, for example, ensured separate amenities for 'white' and 'non-white' South Africans.

¹⁸ Interestingly, the 'English only' rule is only applied to black students. Tshidiso notes that foreign students – for example, the small group of Portuguese students who attend the school – are not reprimanded for speaking their language to each other in the same way that black students are chastised for speaking isiZulu, isiXhosa or Setswana.

language of Setswana, a teacher reprimands her in much the same way she would a student. Unlike the students, though, the mother asserts her right to “speak to my children in whatever language I want to. How I speak to my children is none of your business” (2005, 66). The ‘English only’ rule at the Convent poses a difficult dynamic: while parents and teachers in the novel espouse the commonly held belief that black children should be schooled in the English medium in order to ensure better prospects later in life, the novel also reveals how abandoning one’s native tongue fundamentally alters one’s identity and diminishes traditional culture. Tshidiso’s aunts notice radical changes in her behaviour towards them when she addresses them in English (2005, 69); meanwhile, Tshidiso’s friend KB, whose flawless accent Tshidiso attempts to emulate, is portrayed in a superficial, unflattering light. In both instances, the author implies that their adoption of the English language has extended to an adoption of ‘white culture,’ and an abandonment of the qualities of respect, modesty and morality so fundamental to black cultures.

It is the difficulties that Tshidiso encounters with her new school’s insistence on using English that hamper her ambition of ‘fitting in’ at her new school. Despite having left the stigmas associated with her aunts behind her, she continues to feel alienated from those around her. From her first day at the Convent, Tshidiso is painfully aware of her “township accent” when she hears how the other black students, who have been there longer than she has, speak English. “I heard them speaking in exactly the same English accent as the white girls,” she observes as she walks into the school, “all were so at ease with a language that I felt would take me a long time to say anything in” (2005, 31). Indeed, she never finds herself at ease with speaking to her peers or teachers, particularly when she is asked to recount the incident of racism on the netball court that is central to the novel’s action (2005, 89). For Tshidiso, the incident throws into sharp relief her feelings of isolation and even imprisonment brought on by her inability to speak English fluently and with the “correct” accent, and also reveals the powerful role of language in the interaction of individuals and groups.

The white girl’s single utterance of the word ‘*kaffir*’ has devastating consequences for all involved and, as mentioned, the incident is discussed at length in both national and local media; interestingly, however, outright repetition of the word is avoided thereafter. It is reported to the teachers merely as a “racist word” and when the story is retold,

Tshidiso notes that “the word had turned into ‘it’” (2005, 84). In “its” wake, Tshidiso feels utterly powerless at first; however, she makes two decisions, both relating to language, which finally allow her to reassert herself. The first is not to circumvent “the word” when she is asked, for a second time, to report her version of events:

I told the story, cringing all the while at the sound of my accent but going on anyway. Then in the end instead of saying ‘the word’ or ‘it,’ I paused and inhaled, then said – loud enough for the whole class to hear – ‘Beth said ‘kaffir’ to me. She said ‘kaffir’ and that’s when Veronica slapped her.’ (2005, 107)

Tshidiso’s determination to say aloud “the word” – “a name we all hate and that makes us all feel bad” (2005, 89) – frees her from its power, its ability to define and degrade her. In addition, by repeating “the word,” she is rebelling in some small way against her teachers, who would rather downplay the incident by circumnavigating the language involved. Her bravery in saying “the word” aloud and risking the displeasure of the school’s authorities shocks her peers, but also earns her their respect. Shortly afterwards, she is finally able to voice her feelings about the episode when she speaks to a local reporter in her home language of Setswana:¹⁹

I told my story slowly, not feeling uneasy at all. I did not have to hope that she would believe me, as I had to when I told the teachers and the principal. I did not have to worry about my English accent. This time my voice was steady and slow. For the first time, I wanted to tell everything. (2005, 110)

Unfettered by her awkwardness in the English language, Tshidiso finds her voice and is able to process her emotions, which are no longer modified or defined by her accent or fluency. Her story is finally heard and, following in the example of her aunts, she is able to assert herself.

¹⁹ The local reporter is Tihelo Masimo, the protagonist of Molope’s first novel, *Dancing in the Dust*. Now a confident young woman, Tihelo has achieved her dream of becoming a journalist and has a vested interest in giving the women of her community the means with which to tell their stories. Interestingly, Tihelo has not left the township and the community she grew up in, something she was so determined to do as a child.

It is possible to view Tshidiso's negotiation of her individuality in the novel as a reflection of the changing socio-political discourse against which it is set. After a childhood spent alienated and ostracised from her own community, the onset of Tshidiso's adolescent years coincides with her almost violent propulsion into an entirely unfamiliar social setting, where she is at pains to conform to a particular set of homogenising mores. As a "girl from the township," she attempts to alter her accent, behaviour and dress sense – indeed, her identity – in order to be accepted by girls (not to mention, her teachers) of vastly different racial and economic backgrounds. When circumstances beyond her control render her ambition of obscurity impossible, Tshidiso is faced with the choice of denying the values instilled in her by her formidable aunts, and thereby appeasing her new community, or risking her alienation by speaking what she knows to be the truth. With the support of her aunts, she chooses the latter, marking the coming of age of her character. Significantly, this is only made possible by fully rejecting the homogenising culture of her school environment, by telling her story in her own language rather than English – something that is strictly forbidden within the walls of the convent. In doing this, Tshidiso symbolically casts off the role which the school is attempting to foist upon her and simultaneously embraces the values and mores of her own family and community, despite the potential cost to her happiness.

Similarly, South African society during the early 1990s was undergoing fundamental changes to its base social structure, as it was compelled to transform from an enclave founded on ideologies of separation and difference into an idealist, all-embracing national community. Tshidiso's difficulties in adjusting to her new environment reflect, on a more individual level, the challenges faced by a newly integrated society in which the Eurocentric ideals of the white ruling class were still dominant. Molohe seems to be suggesting, through her narrative, that legitimate integration cannot be achieved through the propagation of a homogenising ethos. Instead, previously undervalued cultural identities should be embraced, rather than abandoned, and moreover should be appreciated and accepted. Put more plainly, Molohe appears to be criticising the expectations of the white ruling class that black South Africans should conform to Eurocentric ideals in order to participate in a so-called integrated society, or the idea that blacks would only be accepted if they 'acted white' (reflected in the novel by some of the

black girls who have cultivated a 'white' English accent). Molope is responding here to the call for "the general Eurocentrism of South African culture [to submit to] rigorous critique" (Hlongwane 2004, 42). Moreover, the author seems to be insisting that integration through conformation to Eurocentric ideals will not be successful.

The similarities, then, between Tshidiso's story and the broader context in which it takes place are clear. Tshidiso's childhood is spent in isolation from her community; South Africa under apartheid was characterised by the separation of its citizens. Tshidiso, once she starts attending her new school, battles to adjust to an environment and culture with which she is unfamiliar; South Africans of all races in the early 1990s were attempting to achieve harmonious integration with those from whom they had kept apart for decades. Tshidiso realises that she cannot stay true to her upbringing by conforming to the demands of her peers; Molope is suggesting, by extension, that the ideal of a 'rainbow nation' cannot be realised through the homogenisation of culture and discourse. In this way, issues of national politics are allegorised by the personal experiences of the protagonist in the novel.

Although the implied reader of *The Mending Season* is not quite as clearly delineated as in *Dancing in the Dust*, it would seem that Molope is once again aiming her text primarily at a black female readership. Certainly, the prominence of female characters suggests that female readers would identify more readily with the novel than males.²⁰ Further, the particular experiences of the protagonist may indicate that Molope expected her novel to be more pertinent to black readers. Since the text, as already noted, challenges the propagation of Eurocentric ideals and discourse in the establishment of the 'new' South Africa, it would appear to speak most directly to a black reader, in suggesting that, like Tshidiso, she need not abandon her culture, language and upbringing in order to benefit from the opportunities offered by a freer society. However, the novel's concern with racial discourse certainly does indicate a wider intended audience, in that it demonstrates the ability of racial slurs to degrade and denigrate an individual.

²⁰ Research into the reading habits of young adults and children consistently shows that readers prefer novels with protagonists of the same gender. While girls are more open to reading books in which the protagonist is male, boys are more likely to avoid novels which feature a female protagonist (Machet, Olën and Chamberlain 2001, 53–57).

The Mending Season is first and foremost the story of the coming of age of a young black girl in South Africa; the political backdrop to her story, though pertinent, primarily functions to allow her questions of social and individual identity, self-awareness and upbringing to be brought to the fore. Tshidiso's emergence as a fully integrated individual into her society – the pinnacle of her *Bildung* – is challenged on two grounds: first, in her own community, where her upbringing in the absence of a significant male presence by three strong-willed and independent women is looked upon with suspicion and disapproval; and, secondly, in the environment of her 'non-racial' school, where her accent and culture are deemed undesirable by the homogenising force of her teachers and peers. By the close of the novel, it seems that Tshidiso has managed to overcome these challenges. In a short epilogue, four years older and in her final year at the convent, she looks back on her first days at the school and reflects that "I would just as soon forget the Tshidi who so desperately wanted to be liked" (2005, 126). She has overcome her desire for obscurity and anonymity at school and emerged as one of the leaders in her class, having been elected as a prefect for her matric year. At home, she has been accepted as a member of her community and is no longer an outsider treated with mistrust; even her aunts are now looked at differently by their neighbours (2005, 126). Interestingly, though Tshidiso seems content with her position in both the school and her community, the social and political upheaval continues around her: South Africa is still in a state of turmoil. On the eve of the country's first democratic elections, she notes that "again there is a feeling of uncertainty in the air. In the townships, people predict overnight changes while in town they warn of more riots, more calamities. 'Civil War,' the White people are still saying, but 'freedom' is what they say in the townships" (2005, 125). As for Tshidiso, she "live[s] in both worlds" (2005, 125) and, finally, is comfortable with that.

3.2 “In that moment we were one voice”:
Crossing Over: Stories for a New South Africa (1995)

Following the historic elections of 1994, Linda Rode and Jakes Gerwel issued an invitation to South African writers to contribute short stories for inclusion in an anthology they compiled under the title *Crossing Over: Stories for a New South Africa*. Gerwel explains the compilers’ mandate in the Foreword to the volume:

The inspiring coming together of a divided nation during and immediately after the April elections, signalled the crossing of a divide which had liberating effects far beyond the obviously political: the awakening of an awareness of others, a loosening of the paralysing bonds of fear and suspicion, the dawning of a sense of self, the possibility of remembering and speaking about pain without unleashing destruction, the emancipation of the personal from the overbearing domination of the political.
(2006, npg)

Specifically, contributors to the anthology were asked to “give insight into the world of young people entering adulthood amidst the wide-ranging changes in South Africa today” (2006, npg). The invitation was open to established authors as well as unpublished writers of any gender, race and economic background, and could be submitted in any of South Africa’s eleven official languages.

The resultant collection consists of twenty-six short stories penned by authors from a variety of backgrounds and covering a vast range of social issues, all of which delve “deep into the vortex of the socio-political life of South African teenagers” (Molele 1995, npg). Despite the “every effort” of the compilers, Gerwel admits that “the eventual crop is still not representative of all the social sectors of our society” (2006, npg): almost all of the contributors are established authors, journalists or dramatists; most are male, with only one black female represented; all submitted their stories in either English or Afrikaans; and “rural dwellers are not represented at all” (Gaylard 1997, 115). However, within the stories themselves, a multiplicity of voices is certainly not lacking. The protagonists represented in the twenty-six stories range in gender, age, class, background,

race and experience, collectively fulfilling the mandate of the anthology's compilers and, more broadly, the heady aspirations of the new 'rainbow nation.'

As mentioned, the stories explore an extensive range of social milieus and topical issues; the four chosen for examination here are those that deal most directly with the pinnacle of the transition from apartheid to democracy in South Africa, the 1994 elections. While the authors of these stories ostensibly deal with the same issues, they do so through the diverse 'voices' of their protagonists, each of whom brings his or her own experiences of growing up in apartheid South Africa to his or her understanding of the transition. Of all the stories collected in the anthology, the four examined in this chapter seem most accurately to adhere to the objectives of its compilers, in that they promote a "renewed awareness of 'self' in relation to 'others,' [. . .] uncovering and undoing the racism and stereotyping that have been endemic to our society" (Gaylard 1997, 103). The collection as a whole demonstrates to readers the opinion that it is the country's youth that is at the forefront of the possibility for change, and encourages them to participate constructively in that change. At the same time, many of the authors warn that it may not be as easy as some believe to leave the past behind.

"The Crossing," by award-winning young adult author Dianne Case, is written in a variation of the "maids and madams" sub-genre (Gaylard 1997, 114), and depicts the interactions between Katy Hendriks, a 'Coloured' domestic worker, and her white Madam in the weeks leading up to the first democratic elections. Case uses her two characters to construct a binary opposition that not only highlights the discrepancies in class and material wealth characteristic of South African society, but also explores their divergent reactions to the upcoming elections. In doing so, Case stages the choice with which South Africans were confronted: that is, whether to participate in a new socio-political configuration or remain locked in the intolerances of the past.

Katy's white Madam represents those South Africans who were unwilling or unable to participate in these imminent changes. Caught up in the fear and panic that gripped many (mostly white) South Africans at the time, Katy's Madam is frantically stockpiling groceries and other supplies in anticipation of the political upheaval and economic collapse she foresees after the elections. "You must buy lots of candles, Katy," she tells her maid, "We are going to see bloodshed that Africa has not seen yet. There will be no

electricity, for how long, I'm not sure" (2006, 44). Katy is merely amused at her Madam's behaviour, as she helps her pack her cupboards and observes the shelter that the Madam has contracted to be constructed beneath the garage floor as a safety measure. The reader, however, realises that the Madam's fear is symptomatic of an uncertainty over her position in the new political dispensation. As the country prepares for power to change hands, the Madam fears the loss of status and economic privilege that her white skin has always afforded her. In an ironic reversal of exclusionary politics, the Madam does not see herself as having a say in the transformation of her country: "You people can also go and make your cross on the twenty-seventh. But how many understand a thing about politics? I can see the country going to ruin. [. . .] So, let's sit back and watch them mess things up" (2006, 47). The Madam, then, does not view the introduction of democracy as an opportunity for *all* South Africans to participate in nation-building; after decades of living under and apparently accepting apartheid ideologies, political power exists for her in a kind of binary construction, in terms of which either whites or blacks rule but can never govern side by side. Her defeatist comment, "let's sit back and watch them mess things up" (2006, 47), is a clear indication not only of her feelings of exclusion, but also of the fact that she is *actively* distancing herself from the changes taking place. Moreover, as Gaylard notes, the repeated references to "you people" and "them" is "a classic example of 'othering'" that reveals her inherent racist attitude (1997, 114). For Madam, it is not the fact that power is changing hands, but that it is changing into *black* hands, that spells out impending disaster.

At the same time, Katy's Madam seems aware of the shifting boundaries in terms of 'politically correct' public discourse. Though her remarks are often baldly racist, she makes weak attempts at disguising them in what she seems to think are more acceptable expressions: though she tells Katy that she and her husband promised their neighbours not to sell their house to black people as it would "spoil the neighbourhood" (2006, 47), she refers to blacks as "K's" instead of uttering the word '*kaffirs*' outright. Discrimination has suited her insofar as it has assured her uncomplicated acceptance of her lifestyle in the past; as racism is no longer publicly endorsed, she seems to feel the need to justify this acceptance. "I don't have anything personal against people of colour," she insists to Katy, "I am willing to share power. I'm willing to live next door to anyone,

as long as they respect me and the neighbourhood and keep the place clean” (2006, 47–8). Once again, a racial value is assigned to her use of “they.” The Madam clearly conceives of her “neighbourhood” in an exclusionary way: she will accept others only if she can do so on *her* terms, that is, the terms of the community of which she is a part. Though apparently contradicting her earlier statements, it is clear that Katy’s Madam does not consider black people to be ‘civilised’ enough to live alongside her. She goes on to defend the apartheid government, extolling the virtues of De Klerk’s government: “He has done away with petty apartheid. He has done away with the Group Areas Act. Oh! I could go on forever!” (2006, 48). Even as she says this, she presses more of her old linens and curtains on Katy, and offers her an advance on her salary to enable Katy to begin her own stockpile of essential goods. “I worry about you, you know” she tells Katy (2006, 48). As Gaylard points out, however, “[h]er need to vindicate herself, to prove that she is in the right, masquerades as concern for her maid’s welfare” (1997, 114). Despite her insistent justifications and her acceptance of the status quo under apartheid, which enabled her middle-class lifestyle, it would seem that the Madam is now plagued with what one might call ‘white guilt.’ While appearing to make some gestures towards amendment, however, she is simply in mourning over the imminent loss of her status and material wealth. It should also be noted that through Katy’s madam, Case is carefully positioning her readers, through the use of irony, in opposition to the attitudes expressed by the character: the author evidently expects her implied readers to recognise the Madam’s foibles and does not intend for her to be a character of whom readers approve. Case’s use of irony works in terms of establishing a contract between the implied author and implied reader, and is revealing of the beliefs and attitudes expected of the reader. In this way, irony serves a didactic purpose in the narrative, by clearly demonstrating which values should be considered as the more desirable and acceptable.

It may strike the reader as odd that Katy never objects to or seems offended by her Madam’s racist behaviour. As the story’s focaliser, she treats her Madam with a gentle sense of amusement, even wondering at one point why she should take offence as she “wasn’t black herself” (2006, 47). She seems oddly removed from the politics surrounding her; her conscious assertion that she is ‘Coloured’ rather than black leaves the reader with the impression that she feels the current unrest is a matter between black

and white South Africans, and therefore that it does not concern her. This is a reflection, perhaps, of the ambivalent position of the 'Coloured' population at the time of the first democratic elections. Rather than focusing her thoughts on issues of race and politics, Katy spends much of her time reflecting on the economic hardships faced by her and her community. When her Madam warns her of the upheaval that she is sure will follow the election, she reflects as follows:

she knew that if her madam was right, she and almost all her neighbours in Lavender Hill would suffer, as there was no money to stockpile. There was not enough money to meet everyday expenses, where still to provide for the future? Mrs Lackay next door, for instance, had had a new baby and they did not have electricity, not because they did not pay for it, but because they did not have the money to pay the water account that went back a few years. It is no joke to struggle without electricity when you have a small baby. (2006, 45)

There is no bitterness in her observations, no indication of resentment towards her wealthy employer. However, Katy's musing that her neighbour is living without electricity comes soon after her Madam's worry of their power supply being interrupted after the elections, and thereby throws into sharp relief the enormous economic disparity between them. This juxtaposition is further emphasised by the image of the enormous amounts of supplies that the Madam is hoarding, which Katy dutifully packs away while reflecting that she and her neighbours are barely able to afford day-to-day necessities. As she works, listening to her Madam's increasingly hysterical ramblings, she mulls over the desperate situation that her community lives with every day: her meek, gentle-mannered husband unable to find work, her neighbours unable to afford food, her mother reduced to distributing illegal alcohol simply to survive. In short, Katy and her neighbours are *already* living the hopeless, hand-to-mouth existence her Madam so fears being reduced to. Still, Katy shows no sign of resentment, only resignation.

Katy's preoccupation with meeting her family's day-to-day needs seems to leave her with little time to consider the politics that cause her Madam so much apprehension. She is caught unawares, then, when her Madam asks her outright who she will be voting for in the upcoming elections: "She had not really thought about it herself, but answered

her anyway, as honestly as she could. 'Mr Mandela,' she said, looking her in the eye" (2006, 48). Later, as she walks towards the taxi that will take her home that evening, she notices a slogan emblazoned on the back of a passing vehicle that says "*Your voice is your vote*" (2006, 49). It is only then that she begins to realise the magnitude of the upcoming elections: "That said it all. Suddenly she understood. She was a real South African now. She never had a voice before. Her mother never had a voice before. Her father never had a voice. Her vote was her voice. The 'your' in the slogan meant *her*, Katy Hendricks" (2006, 49; emphasis in original). This is a profound moment for her, one that brings with it a feeling of hope and belonging that her Madam never experiences. As Gaylard succinctly summarises,

[h]ere the political, in the form of the slogan, intersects with the personal as Katy realises, perhaps for the first time, what having a vote means: she is a person; she has a voice; she, Katy Hendricks, matters. This small, personal victory assures her that she too has a place in the new democratic dispensation. Her willingness to look her madam in the eye and name Mandela as the person she will vote for enables her to reverse the power-relations that had previously governed their interaction as maid and madam. Things will never be the same again – nationally, personally, or in her workplace. The madam, on the other hand, has chosen to exclude herself from the new dispensation – one of those who remain locked into the racism of the past. (1997, 115)

Certainly, Gaylard is correct in pointing out the shift in power relations that occurs between Katy and her Madam. As far as the new political dispensation is concerned, Katy is now afforded equal status to her employer, and has an equal say in electing those who will govern her – a right that, for so long, had been denied to her and her community. While the importance of this should not be undermined, contemporary readers are left wondering whether this will mean any real change in Katy's material welfare, which so concerns her. In the years subsequent to the first democratic elections, readers will know that, just as the Madam's fears of civil war and economic collapse were unfounded, the transfer of power did not mean that poverty and class discrepancies were immediately alleviated. In post-apartheid South Africa, material wealth and economic power are often

still determined along racial lines, even if in the eyes of the law, all races now enjoy equal rights.²¹

It is understandable, however, that during the phase of transition when most of the anthology's writers were penning their stories, the "celebratory and transformative impulse is [. . .] uppermost" (Gaylard 1997, 116). The atmosphere of hope and optimism for the future proved to have a compelling influence on the imaginations of these writers as they endeavoured to create "an imaginative record of what it actually meant to be part of or witness to this transition" (Gaylard 1997, 110). The inauguration of Nelson Mandela as South Africa's first democratically elected president is a powerfully symbolic moment that two of the anthology's authors, Lesley Beake and Marita van der Vyver, use as the setting for their stories, "The New Beginning" and "St Christopher on Parade." Both told from the perspective of a first-person narrator, these stories are emotional and very personal accounts of the moment when Mandela appeared on the balcony of Cape Town's city hall before a crowd of thousands of South Africans, standing together as equals for the first time. Although both stories are dominated by a tone of joy and optimism, the complications still wrought by racial differences are subtly introduced to qualify what may have otherwise been oversimplified tributes.

As is suggested by its title, Beake's "The New Beginning" focuses on the opportunity for change afforded to all South Africans by the advent of democracy. In keeping with a common trend in children's and young adult fiction of the period, this possibility is depicted as most apparent among the country's young people. The suggestion of the possibility for change is found in the seemingly casual observations of the story's protagonist, a young 'Coloured' girl, of the crowd gathered around her: "Old people came, and people with small babies. Many young people came, and their faces were glad. White people came – some of them also wearing ANC colours. I wondered if they had also changed for the New South Africa, or if we just hadn't known about them before" (2006, 55). The young protagonist seems to accept without question that the "white people" she observes have indeed undergone a change of heart and rejected the principles of apartheid, presuming, somewhat problematically of course, that because

²¹ The relationship between race and class in post-apartheid South Africa is, of course, more complicated than this, and will be discussed more fully in Chapter Four.

they are white they were previously supportive of institutionalised racism. Her high-spirited aunt, a self-proclaimed supporter of the Democratic Party, chooses to don the colours of the ANC in a similar show of support. A more astute reader, however, may be sceptical of the authenticity of this public display, as the author seems to be.

Similarly to the author of "The Crossing," Beake juxtaposes her characters that are actively participating in the country's transformation with those that are distancing themselves from it. As they are preparing to leave for the inauguration, the protagonist muses about her white neighbour who is forbidden from joining them: "Hendrik's pa is not so happy about the New South Africa, but Hendrik says that's *his* problem. Hendrik says the old people might need a bit longer to get used to the idea, but he's glad he doesn't have to see all that killing on television anymore" (2006, 54; emphasis in original). Again, the idea that the younger generation is more adaptable to the changes taking place in South Africa is foregrounded; indeed, the protagonist's comment that "Nobody notices that Hendrik is white any more" (2006, 54) is, according to Gaylard, "a sign of a society normalising itself" (1997, 111). However, Hendrik is a conspicuous presence in the story only by virtue of his absence at the symbolic union of the country's citizens. Moreover, his absence serves as a subtle reminder that a change in essential beliefs and prejudices cannot take place instantaneously. The people gathered at the inauguration decked in the colours of the new ruling party, however, are certainly making a gesture in support of change and as such are contributing constructively to the creation of a new 'rainbow nation.'

In a similar vein, "St Christopher on Parade," by Afrikaans writer Marita van der Vyver, is a story that enacts the "inclusion of the white outsider into the new nation-in-the-making" during that symbolic moment of Mandela's presidential inauguration (Gaylard 1997, 113). The story is narrated by Kitta, a white teenaged girl who attends the inauguration to honour the memory of her brother, who died in a car accident four years previously. Kitta has recently turned eighteen and, significantly, her coming of age coincides with the momentous political changes in South Africa:

Like millions of other South Africans, I voted for the first time just the other day – 27 April 1994. Before that, I simply hadn't been the right age, not the wrong skin colour as well, but it was

still a bonus to vote for the first time on such a historic day. For the first time I felt as though I belonged here, on this continent, in this country, right here where I'm standing today. (2006, 51)

Again, the notion of children and young adults being at the forefront of change (and indeed, being more *capable* of change) is emphasised here. Kitta's assertion of belonging, however, is belied by her initial feelings of discomfort and isolation from the crowd gathered at the city hall, awaiting the appearance of Mandela. As the gathering swells, she begins to feel claustrophobic and wishes the others were not standing so close: "Or am I the only one thinking this? Because I'm white and not accustomed to crowds? Always enjoying enough space, my own bed in my own bedroom, a big house with a passage and a garden with a willow tree" (2006, 50). Interestingly, Kitta ascribes her sense of alienation to her skin colour: for the first time, perhaps, being white has meant that she feels excluded, rather than privileged as a member of the elite minority. However, her assertion that "[f]or the first time I felt as though I *belonged* here" (2006, 51; emphasis added) may also indicate that van der Vyver is commenting on the way in which apartheid policy oppressed whites as well as blacks. In addition, Kitta's reflection on the material privileges she has enjoyed allude here to an unconscious guilt that others – the very 'others' that she now gathers with – have had to suffer in order for her to live in relative luxury. Kitta remembers that, a few hours previously, she noticed a group of young black women singing and dancing happily near her, and though she wished she could join them, she was unable to understand the song they are singing: "I've never really understood enough" she reflects (2006, 50). Again, Kitta is excluded by her whiteness and ignorance, an experience that is wholly unfamiliar to her. Though she is making an effort to be a part of the changes underway around her, she is uncertain whether, being white, she has the place or even the right to participate. The author's construction of her character, and the intimacy of Kitta's first-person narration, indicates an implied reader of a similar background: it would seem that van der Vyver expects her readers to relate to Kitta's experiences and intends to suggest how they may negotiate similar feelings of alienation and uncertainty.

For Kitta, the turning point comes when she strikes up a conversation with an old Malay woman standing beside her. The woman, Rehana, has brought her small

granddaughter to witness the historic event; Kitta, perhaps in an effort to feel less isolated, offers to place the little girl on her shoulders so that she may see above the heads of the crowd. Kitta is grateful, “as if I’d passed a test” (2006, 52), when the woman converses with her in Afrikaans and offers her an orange, taking this as a indication that Rehana does not begrudge Kitta her heritage or skin colour. No longer wracked with feelings of uncertainty and estrangement, Kitta experiences an “electric” (2006, 53) sensation rippling through the crowd as Mandela prepares to step out and address the crowd: “And I realise, amazed, that I no longer feel the weight upon my shoulders” (2006, 53). It is a symbolic moment as Kitta refers here not only to the weight of the child she is carrying, but also of another burden she has been bearing, one associated with her skin colour and the weighty history she has inherited with it. As an adolescent who has chosen to participate in the making of a new nation, “it is easier for her to cast off or sidestep the legacy of doubt, guilt, alienation and regret that has often been the lot of the white minority in this country” (Gaylard 1997, 112–113). It is a heady, idealistic moment that speaks clearly of new beginnings and possibilities but, most importantly, of the union of the divergent, previously separated peoples of South Africa. The young ‘Coloured’ protagonist of “The New Beginning” experiences a similar sensation when Mandela appears before the crowd:

I will never forget that time. The crowd was so tight around me that we felt like one person, breathing together, and feeling together. [. . .] After [Mandela’s speech], when we sang, I cried. Lots of people were crying and everybody was holding their hands high in the Peace Sign. All around me was warmth and smiling and happiness. In that moment we were one voice, and one heart. *We are* one people at last. (2006, 56–57; emphasis in original)

The conclusions of both stories, then, reflect an affirmative, optimistic tone as the country ushers in a new socio-political era. However, as Gaylard observes, “the reader knows that this is the experience of one moment, never to be repeated, and that when the crowd fractures individuals will resume their separate identities, albeit altered in some way by this moment when they stand together for the first time as citizens of a new democratic South Africa” (1997, 112). Indeed, the aftermath of such a momentous event introduces

the more complicated challenge of integrating this idealism and desire to change into one's everyday life.

Lawrence Bransby's appropriately-titled contribution to the anthology, "A Reflection of Self," is the story of Victor, a young white boy, and takes place the morning following the presidential inauguration that was the focus of the two stories preceding it. The story seems, at first, to adopt the same optimistic tone that characterised "A New Beginning" and "St Christopher on Parade"; Victor is woken by his father joyously proclaiming "Welcome, son of mine, to the New South Africa!" (2006, 58), and performing a kind of celebratory dance, much to his son's amusement. Victor recalls how his family had watched the ceremonious raising of the new South African flag on the television the previous night, and how his parents had reminisced into the early hours about their student days, when they had protested against apartheid policies. Now, father and son marvel at the dawning of the "New South Africa":

'It struck me, you know,' his father continued, sombre now,
'that, although I've been a South African all my life – born here,
ancestors here since 1820 – only today, now, these last few hours,
have I at last attained spiritual citizenship of my country. It was a
profound thought . . .'

'I know,' Victor said, understanding. 'It's like –' he searched
for an image, 'forgiveness, isn't it? Then starting again . . .'

(2006, 59)

This notion of "spiritual citizenship," of finally belonging to the country of one's birth, is similar to that expressed by Kitta in "St Christopher on Parade." In both cases, the characters seem to have a sense that some fundamental wrong has been put right, and that they, as progressively minded individuals who have been oppressed by white supremacy themselves, can finally be proud to claim their citizenship. At the same time, Victor and his father, like Kitta, feel as though this amendment has absolved them of some collective guilt for the wrongs of the past: Victor speaks here of "forgiveness" and the opportunity to start over with a clear conscience.

As Victor's recollections soon reveal, however, this sense of "forgiveness" has not come as easily for his parents as it has for him. He recalls how, the previous night, his parents had "talked on, smug in a way that events had proved them right. But in the early

hours Victor realised with a shock that his parents were doing more than reminiscing; there was a hollowness in their voices, and in their eyes, which cried: but was what we did really enough . . . ?” (2006, 59). Clearly, the burden of guilt has not been so easily lifted from the consciences of his parents. Victor himself is indignant of his parents’ apparent complacency during apartheid, wondering, “[h]ow could his parents have *lived* through it all, accepted it, done so little?” (2006, 60; emphasis in original). Rather self-indulgently, Victor imagines that had he been in their position, he would have emerged as a hero of the anti-apartheid struggle:

Victor convinced himself that had he been old enough during those times, he would have done something about it – some grand gesture, perhaps been arrested, his photo on the front page of the *Sunday Tribune*: ‘TEENAGER ARRESTED FOR FLOUTING SEPARATE AMENITIES ACT . . . ‘It was the least I could do,’ Matthews said when interviewed from his cell while awaiting trial.
(2006, 60)

Indeed, Victor even feels cheated that the “time for grand gestures against apartheid seemed to be over” (2006, 61). As sanctimonious as Victor’s fantasies appear, he echoes sentiments felt by many young South Africans at the time, expressing indignation that his parents allowed the atrocities of apartheid to occur on their doorstep and, through their mute acceptance, were somehow complicit in them. Safe in the knowledge that they will never be called upon to act on their words, many young, usually white South Africans, like Victor, distanced themselves from their parents’ actions (or lack thereof) once the change in political climate meant that these actions were now publicly condemned. Victor insists that, had he been faced with similar circumstances, *his* reaction would have been different. In doing so, Victor rejects the burden of “white guilt” (2006, 61) in order to comfortably eke out his place in the ‘new’ South Africa.

Victor’s confidence, however, is tested in a most unexpected way that unsettles what he thought were his deep-seated principles. Later that morning, his mother sends him to the local shop to buy rolls for their lunch. As he walks through the streets, Victor is still elated by his own sense of righteousness. Seeing a black stranger, he claims to see him “with new eyes: he was an equal, a fellow South African, a person; Victor

suppressed the desire to walk up to this leaning black man, shake his hand, call him Brother. He wanted so badly to tell him of his new perspective, his changed view” (2006, 61). While it is true that Victor’s desire is one born of good intentions, he does not seem to realise how patronising this act would be. When he reaches the crowded shop, he joins a long queue of people waiting at the cash register, all of whom are black. The shop owner, also a white man, notices Victor waiting in line, and “as had often happened in the past when a white stood in line behind blacks” (2006, 62), reaches past the customers ahead of Victor in the queue – including an elderly lady – and serves him first. Victor automatically, unthinkingly, accepts this:

And it was then, as the shop owner took the money from his hand, as the man [in front of him] with the frayed collar turned to look him in the face, sharing the wordless reproach of the old woman now waiting at the till, that Victor realised what he had done.

For a moment, he saw as they saw.

He turned away confusedly, leaving his change, leaving the rolls, pushing through the bodies which seemed to close him in.

(2006, 62)

In the look that he receives from the man standing in front of him, Victor suddenly realises his own complicity in a social system that privileges white above black, a complicity for which, only a little while previously, he had so thoroughly condemned his parents.

This seemingly insignificant incident reveals how deeply ingrained this system had become during the apartheid years, both in society and in the behaviour and consciousness of the individual subjected to it. Victor, despite his “new perspective” and his fresh sense of kinship to black South Africans, has not escaped the forms of socialisation that have taught him that his white skin renders him superior to blacks. In this moment, the reader recognises how thoroughly ‘other’ black individuals are to Victor, just as he realises that ‘they’ are more than the faceless subjects of his fantasies, and that confronted with ‘them’ in reality, he behaves very differently to the way he imagined he would. There seems to be no room for “grand gestures” here, and Victor realises that change now has to be effected in the small, daily interactions with those he

espouses as his equals. At the same time, the reader recognises how easy it is to accept arbitrary privilege over others, no matter how corrupt the system is that offers it. As Gaylard notes, “the story cautions against simplistic or naïve assumptions of transformation and acceptance” (1997, 114) and demonstrates that change will not take place overnight. Such was the nature of apartheid oppression that, irrespective of an individual’s sentiments, beliefs, even outrage, he or she inevitably became complicit in that system. Again, the use of a particular form of irony in this story exposes its implied reader and its didactic trajectory: Bransby appears to be warning his white readers against naively accepting that attitudes are easily, and without conscious effort, altered so dramatically as they may believe.

While this is indeed true of South African society in a state of transition (and remains true more than a decade after the establishment of democracy), the anthology as a whole certainly succeeds in contributing to righting the inequalities of the past, specifically as far as racial, gender and economic representivity in South African literature is concerned. Though the demographics of the contributing authors may not have been as varied as the compilers had hoped, the “very multiplicity of voices [in the stories themselves] is appropriate and indeed necessary for a literature produced during a transitional period” (Flockemann 1998, 145). Many of the authors have crossed the boundaries of race, class, gender and age to adopt the voices of those who, during apartheid, were classed as ‘other’ to them: Beake, a white, middle-class woman, chose to tell her story through the eyes of a young ‘Coloured’ girl; Engela van Rooyen, also a white woman of a middle-class Afrikaans background, tells the story of a black boy living in an informal settlement in “Your Own Two Hands.” Of course, for these authors, this has meant a negotiation of the discourses inherent in their subject positions, which they have achieved with varying degrees of success. Meanwhile, those authors whose stories feature protagonists of similar backgrounds to theirs, like Bransby and van der Vyver, often interrogate the ideological stances associated with their race and gender, thereby compelling their readers to do the same. Others still “go some way in providing a window onto the variety of cultures and lifestyles that together constitute our plural society” (Gaylard 1997, 108): Zulfah Otto-Sallies’s “A Better Life For You, Mums,” for example, shows the reader how little economic circumstances have improved for those

living in informal settlements through the story of Solly, a promising but desperate young 'Coloured' man who is imprisoned and eventually murdered after becoming involved in drug trafficking in an effort to support his family.

These "crossings," the overcoming of boundaries by both author and reader, are at the heart of the anthology's literary importance. As Flockemann notes, and as previously mentioned, "identification with others has been described as an important aspect of young adult literature" (1998, 148); it is this aspect that the authors of this collection have most actively exploited in achieving their didactic objectives. As a whole, the collection gestures towards understanding and healing between previously unequal cultures, races and ethnicities, and foregrounds South Africa's children and youth as those who are capable of realising the dream of the 'rainbow nation.'

3.3 Superficial reconciliation in *Sharp Sharp, Zulu Dog* (2003)

While many stories, such as those collected in *Crossing Over*, reflect a credible and complex understanding of a newly integrated South African society, and certainly contribute constructively to a culture of nation-building and reconciliation, others have not been so successful at portraying post-apartheid society. *Sharp Sharp, Zulu Dog* stands out as an example of an author's failure to overcome his own bigoted values in attempting to write a novel of reconciliation and understanding; the novel fails to offer viable solutions to the problems it raises and presents an unconvincing, over-simplified depiction of inter-racial relationships. As Randolph observes, "*Zulu Dog* is a marred portrait of reconciliation efforts in post-apartheid South Africa. Ferreira does take several steps in the right direction [. . . but] ultimately fails to move beyond the White supremacy perspectives of the past" (2005, 32). Though it would seem that Ferreira's didactic intention is to encourage his readers to abandon the racialised ideologies of the past, this 'message' is undermined by his seemingly unconscious failure to do so himself.

Sharp Sharp, Zulu Dog is the story of an inter-racial friendship between Vusi Ngugu, a Zulu boy living in a kraal consisting of a "dozen mud-and-thatch huts" (2003, 1) in rural KwaZulu-Natal, and Shirley Montgomery, a white girl from a "sprawling"

(2003, 29) and prosperous cattle farm nearby. The children meet by chance when Vusi wanders onto the Montgomery's property; over the months that follow, their friendship blossoms as they learn each other's languages and explore the differences in their lifestyles. However, their friendship must be kept secret from Shirley's family, who would disapprove of her relationship with the black boy. In the meantime, each child experiences his or her own triumphs and disappointments: Shirley is appalled at her parents' decision to send her to a boarding school in Johannesburg the following year, and Vusi proves his manhood by participating in his first successful hunt with his father and brother. In a dramatic climax, the children's friendship is revealed when Shirley runs away from home and is rescued from a leopard by Vusi and his three-legged dog Gillette who, throughout the story, acts as a kind of catalyst in their relationship. In his gratitude, Shirley's father undergoes a complete change of heart, realising the errors of his racist behaviour, and offers Vusi and his family a home on his farm so that they might escape from the gang of city criminals threatening their safety.

Ferreira's narrative varies little from the "playmates" theme (Jenkins 2006, 39) typical of South African literature of the early twentieth century. Such stories date "back to the earliest boys' adventure yarns set in South Africa" (Jenkins 2006, 36), where a "sanctioned" friendship was struck between a white boy and a black farmworker's son when the white child's parents "formally allocated a black child to be the white child's companion for safety reasons" (Jenkins 2006, 37). These friendships were often highly sentimentalised and usually ended when the children reached adulthood. While Ferreira "appears to have been unaware of the literary tradition in which he was writing" (Jenkins 2006, 39), the evocation of this well-established genre immediately renders the narrative problematic. Novels written in this tradition almost invariably promoted white supremacy in their racist stereotyping of characters and culture, a failing which Ferreira has not managed to avoid and which is particularly inappropriate to a post-apartheid context. Even the ending of *Zulu Dog* is true to the tradition which it resurrects: as Jenkins notes, these novels usually culminated in an incident where "the loyal retainer rescues his master from a charging wild animal" (2006, 36).

The plot itself is riddled with clichés and stereotypes that Ferreira does not adequately challenge and, in some instances, even bolsters. His descriptions of Zulu

culture are particularly antiquated, and serve to “reinforce rather than demolish ‘primitive’ stereotypes of Africans” (Randolph 2005, 32). Michael notes that “[w]hile Ferreira takes care to show that in latter-day South Africa, rural life is not untouched by modernity (there are references to taxis, radios, razors), the novel does run the risk [. . .] of giving the impression that [all] black South Africans either live in mud huts or shacks” (2003, para. 3). Indeed, while Vusi has access to the media and attends school, he is still amazed at the sight of a cell phone (2003, 124) and bemused when Shirley tells him about dog biscuits and veterinarians (2003, 103). Traditional cultural practices such as hunting and lobola are also implicitly criticised in the interactions between Shirley and Vusi (an issue that will be discussed more fully later). Rural Africans are portrayed as hopelessly backwards and ignorant; their urban counterparts, of which the reader is only afforded a brief glimpse, are depicted as criminals and bullies.

Given this essentially racist portrayal of black South Africans, it is hard to believe that this novel would appeal to a local readership, particularly a black one. Ferreira’s narrative can hardly be viewed as a balanced or accurate portrayal of contemporary South African society; his sentimentalised rural tale is certainly not typical of recent trends in young adult fiction, but rather reminiscent of the bushveld adventures that were popular during the first half of the twentieth century. The author’s romanticised depiction of the landscape, indigenous ‘tribes,’ and the hunting of wild game suggests that he had a foreign audience in mind, one which would enjoy the exotic notion of a wild, untamed Africa. In fact, though the novel was published locally by Jacana in 2003, it first appeared under the title of *Zulu Dog* in 2002, published by the American company of Farrar, Straus and Giroux. It is fair to assume, then, that Ferreira’s implied reader is a foreign child; though given the author’s apparent uncertainty over his focaliser, it is difficult to determine whether that child is male or female. The story shifts in its point of view between Vusi and Shirley, and although the majority of the narrative is told from Vusi’s perspective, it is Shirley’s viewpoint that is presented as the stronger and more reliable. Though the children are the same age, Shirley is the more mature, worldly, and indeed ‘Westernised’ of the two, and Ferreira clearly expects his reader to identify more readily with her perspective. Vusi, meanwhile, is naïve, inexperienced and quaint, and his lifestyle is portrayed as both unfamiliar and exotic. Indeed, he is characterised as a

primitive and backward African whose customs and culture belong to a bygone era. While one would hope that a modern adolescent South African would recognise this depiction as an inauthentic stereotype, a foreign reader with little or no knowledge of contemporary South African society may fail to do so.

Perhaps the most damaging portrayal of post-apartheid South Africa, however, lies in Ferreira's damning and even racist indictment of the ANC government. Ferreira's attitude is immediately apparent in the Author's Note which precedes the main text: this supposedly "'factual' introduction to the novel reads like a page from an apartheid textbook" (Randolph 2005, 32). In it, Ferreira gives the reader a very brief history of South Africa from the arrival of settlers from the Netherlands, France and Germany until the time apartheid was dismantled (perhaps for the benefit of his foreign audience). Of course, the fact that the author considers the arrival of white settlers to be the beginning of the country's history is immediately suspect. His Eurocentric focus is further evident in his description of the first encounters between the settlers and the country's "indigenous tribes":

The Afrikaners regarded the blacks, who had no written language, dressed in animal hides, and still fought with sticks and spears, as inferior, heathen savages. In the ensuing wars of conquest, the whites, though vastly outnumbered, gradually came to dominate the region through force of arms. The Afrikaners attributed their victories to God, and many of them interpreted the Bible as decreeing that whites should maintain their racial purity and should rule over blacks.

(2003, npg)

Ferreira's recitation of history is presented squarely from the point of view of the white settlers; nowhere in the Author's Note does he even attempt to consider how the indigenous black "savages" he describes may have viewed the Afrikaner settlers, who pillaged their land by force and bloodshed. His description of the struggle against apartheid is especially skewed: he speaks of "black resentment," emphasises the use of violence and rioting, and downplays the human atrocities perpetrated by the apartheid government and the justifiable anger of the marginalised population by only mentioning policies related to land reform and petty apartheid. Groups such as the ANC are described as terrorist organisations, and the eventual dismantling of apartheid policies is afforded

only a few lines: “disgust at apartheid drove many countries to impose economic sanctions on South Africa, and in 1990 the white government accepted that it had to scrap the system. Mandela was released from jail, and in 1994 the country held its first all-race election in which the ANC was swept to power” (2003, npg). Ferreira seems to dismiss or at least elide the influence of decades of political activism by black South Africans here, attributing the end of apartheid solely to the pressure exerted by the leaders of other countries. Finally, Ferreira describes as follows the state of South African society under black majority rule:

Did everyone live happily ever after? No. The decades of armed struggle meant the country was awash with weapons, which now ended up in the hands of criminals. Human life came to be regarded as cheap, expendable. The poverty endured by most blacks provided abundant incentives for robbery. The police, who had been responsible for the harsh implementation of apartheid, were held in contempt.
(2003, npg)

Ferreira’s post-apartheid South Africa, then, is a country where quality of life has deteriorated even further, where the average citizen lives in constant fear of violence and where those in authority are unwilling or unable to implement improvement or exert control. No mention is made of the freedom and equality enjoyed by the majority of the country’s population after decades of oppression; the achievements of the ANC government are wholly ignored.

The Author’s Note marks the introduction of a theme that is maintained throughout the novel: a scathing indictment of what the author perceives as the incompetence and ineffectiveness of the ANC government. Although this criticism is often voiced by the openly prejudiced characters of the novel, and could therefore be dismissed as the bigoted ramblings of a racist, Ferreira tellingly fails to offer an effective counterargument to these disparagements. His attempt at introducing a ‘voice of reason’ in the character of Robert Rudolph fails spectacularly: though Rudolph tries to point out the strengths of the government and attempts to rebuff racist remarks, he is invariably dismissed by the other characters, regarded as a “kaffir lover” (2003, 38) and ridiculed into silence. Even the

observations of the seemingly more objective characters in the novel serve to substantiate rather than demolish accusations of government incompetence and corruption.

Shirley's father, Henry, is among the most openly prejudiced – and vocal – of the novel's characters:

'What's this country coming to?' says Henry shaking his head.
'We give Mandela the country and now his people want to murder us all.'
'Come on, Henry,' says Robert, 'it's not that bad. Sure there's a lot of crime, but the new government has made tons of progress, especially for the poor.'
'Progress?' says Denis. 'Progress? I don't see any progress. The schools are getting worse, the government hospitals are a joke, our taxes just disappear into a black hole, the police are helpless to stop crime . . . ' [. . .]
Robert shakes his head and takes a mouthful of curried beans. He's had this argument countless times. (2003, 39)

Rudolph's ineffectuality as a foil to the racist characters' slurs is clearly apparent here. In addition, Ferreira fails to provide examples elsewhere in the novel of the government's competence: instead, Henry's criticisms are bolstered by illustrations of his complaints. Vusi's school, for example, readily fits with Henry's descriptions of the "appalling" (2003, 70) standards at government schools:

Agnes [Vusi's teacher] looked around the classroom with its peeling paint, missing panes, and dilapidated desks and frowns. Not much government spending has reached Msinga, she thinks. The education budget is all spent in the cities, where the children of the government officials go to school. The people in the countryside have to make do with what's left over, if anything. (2003, 51)

Elsewhere, examples of corrupt police officials and government authorities abound (see, for example, 53, 57, 115).

Ferreira, then, presents a dangerously slanted view of black rule in post-apartheid South Africa: in completely failing to provide any examples of improvement or development, he leaves readers only with examples of the government's failings, creating

the impression that blacks are incapable of self-governance and that democratic rule has brought only disaster on South Africans. This impression is reminiscent of the apartheid government's prediction that should the ANC be "allowed to prevail," South Africa would be plunged into a state of "anarchy and chaos" similar to that "in black-ruled countries to the north" (2003, npg). *Sharp Sharp, Zulu Dog* thus becomes an example of a "post-1994 [novel in which] Blacks are portrayed as essentially unready for self-rule" (MacCann and Maddy 2001, 117). Such a one-sided view is hardly congruent with a novel which presents itself as "depict[ing] post-apartheid South Africa with honesty and compassion" (Ferreira 2003, back cover), and certainly does not contribute constructively to reconciliation or nation-building.

The oversimplified friendship that develops between Vusi and Shirley also presents complications which Ferreira fails to resolve adequately. Michael claims that "Ferreira offers a complex exploration of the difficulties of negotiating cultural difference, through the developing friendship between the children" (2003, para. 3), but admits that "the frustration of cultural suspicion and misunderstanding is not given a neat and comforting solution, but remains difficult, tense and painful" (2003, para. 4). Initially, the children are "fascinated by how different each other's lives are" (Ferreira 2003, 75). Nevertheless, these differences are only presented in terms of family and material wealth:

Shirley has two wardrobes full of clothes, while Vusi's possessions fit into a small cardboard box. She can count eight close family members – aunts, uncles, cousins – but he loses count after twenty. She eats off fine porcelain with silver knives and forks; he eats from a tin plate with his fingers. There are three television sets in the Montgomery home – the Ngugu kraal doesn't even have electricity. (2003, 75)

Interestingly, Vusi shows no sign of resentment at or envy of Shirley's family's wealth. Once the children move beyond these superficial differences in their lifestyles, however, and begin to explore their cultural differences, their relationship comes under strain. Shirley's father, during one of his racist tirades, denounces blacks as "backward and superstitious" for believing in witchcraft and evil spirits; he tells her that Zulus "buy women with cattle. Can you believe it, in this day and age, if a Zulu wants to marry a girl,

he gives her father a bunch of cattle, and then he owns her! How backward can you get? We have nothing in common with them” (2003, 78–79). Shirley is incredulous at first, but when Vusi confirms her father’s claims, she balks:

‘Is it true that Zulu men buy their wives?’ She blurts it out abruptly to change the subject. The idea has bothered her ever since her father cited it as an example of the backwardness of black people. She is sure her father made it up, and that Vusi will laugh and deny it. But he does not. [. . .] Shirley is temporarily speechless. She always enjoyed comparing her life with Vusi’s before, because they were learning about each other and the differences didn’t seem important – just a question of one family having more wealth than the other. But today she is discovering some of the differences are deeper. (2003, 101)

As soon as the differences between her and Vusi become “deeper” than she suspected, then, Shirley finds them more difficult to accept. She thinks Vusi and his family’s practice of hunting game is cruel, and is shocked to think that polygamy is acceptable to Zulus. Moreover, she is horrified when she finds out that Vusi’s grandmother is a *sangoma* or “witchdoctor” (2003, 109) and accuses Vusi of practising witchcraft on her. “My father was right – you *are* superstitious, you *do* believe in magic” (2003, 110; emphasis in original), she tells him. Michael points out that “the weight of understanding and rapprochement falls upon Shirley” (2003, para. 4), and again this confirms that Ferreira’s implied reader is of a Westernised background. Following their confrontation, Shirley refuses to see Vusi for a period of several weeks, and after her rescue from the leopard, the issue is not raised again. Although Ferreira seems to be “at pains to point to the potential for understanding, which exists in these moments of conflict” (Michael 2003, para. 4), he allows this tension in their relationship to become lost in the drama of the plot and fails to provide an explanation or example of how this “potential for understanding” can be achieved.

The novel’s climax is further complicated by Henry’s sudden and complete “change of heart” following Vusi’s rescue of his daughter, a “formula that has a long history in children’s literature” (MacCann and Maddy 2001, 73). Henry realises that

[t]his boy, in a couple of hours, has shown him just how wrong he has been, how bigoted, how he has allowed his life to be embittered by racist hatred and prejudice. He has mistreated his black neighbours, his black employees. He has been unfair to them, he has made their lives miserable. He has soured the life of his own daughter. (2003, 139)

Although Ferreira tries to introduce some subtlety and complexity to Henry's questioning of his old prejudices by describing him as "confused" (2003, 136) upon seeing his daughter embrace a black child (Michael 2003, para. 6), this attempt is lost in a series of trite and ultimately meaningless phrases: he decides, for example, that the "embrace was so heartfelt, so natural, so . . . *right*" (2003, 136; emphasis in original). The novel's didactic thrust is baldly and clumsily handled when Henry tells his neighbours that "[t]he lesson that Shirley and Vusi have taught us is that nothing is as important as friendship. And that you can be friends even if your parents, and your grandparents and their grandparents before them, were enemies" (2003, 138). Perhaps most problematic, however, is the novel's ultimate resolution in Henry offering Vusi's family a place to live and work so that they may escape the city criminals threatening their lives: the underlying suggestion here is that blacks need to be rescued by their philanthropic white neighbours in order to survive.²² As Michael correctly observes, "[i]n attempting to create an ending that symbolises reconciliation, Ferreira's novel veers dangerously towards the suggestion that white patronage provides an adequate answer" (Michael 2003, para. 7).

Indeed, the lack of adequate solutions to the problems the novel itself raises is its central failing. Ferreira has clearly made an attempt at penning a reconciliatory novel, one which encourages readers to "overcome the past and build a better future" (2003, npg). His lack of understanding of the complexities of this difficult process, as well as what would appear to be his own latent prejudices, have resulted in a failure to provide viable solutions. Unlike many of the stories collected in *Crossing Over*, Ferreira's novel also fails to interrogate past (and present) ideologies in any real way. Instead, the author resorts to presenting damaging stereotypes and avoids resolving the issues he raises. Ultimately, young foreign readers of *Sharp Sharp*, *Zulu Dog* are left with a dangerously

²² This is also suggested earlier in the novel, when Robert Rudolph strikes a deal with the Ngunu family, allowing them to hunt game on his farm in exchange for their promise that they will no longer steal his cattle (2003, 84). The Ngunus very survival here depends on the patronage of their white neighbour.

skewed and inaccurate perspective of post-apartheid South Africa; local readers, in their turn, are offered no guidance in overcoming the complications associated with reconciliation in South Africa.

* * *

Racial prejudice has played a major role in the historical development of South Africa, and racism remains an undeniable feature of the country's contemporary society. Since the dismantling of apartheid, the continued reliance on racial discourse remains the main obstacle to the realisation of a 'rainbow nation.' Tötemeyer explains that

[i]nstitutionalised racism, which prevents members of 'out-groups' from obtaining the same rights, privileges and opportunities as members of the power group, can become part of the tradition and culture of an 'in-group' and can become internalised to such an extent that the 'in-group' is not aware the racism inherent in their society or their personal racial prejudices. Their prejudices are transmitted to their children through the process of socialisation, because racism is not innate, hereditary or even spontaneous, but learned. (1988a, 173)

If racism is learned, however, it follows that it can be unlearned. The novels and short stories examined here encourage readers to unlearn the prejudices and behaviour passed on to them by apartheid society. They promote self-reflection and ultimately attempt to show racial prejudice as arbitrary and damaging. Most importantly, they suggest to readers how they may constructively take part in nation-building, in the accomplishment of a 'rainbow' society. Du Plessis has observed that young adult novels which participate in "investigating race relations [. . .] can help adolescents to understand the unique but also universal problems, emotions, fears and dreams of adolescents of other races [. . .]. [I]t is thus essential that [these novels] should reflect the problems and difficulties associated with race relations" (1999, para. 2). Novels which elide these problems by failing to suggest their solutions, such as *Sharp Sharp*, *Zulu Dog*, are unsuccessful at portraying a changing South African society with any accuracy or honesty.

Of course, a text can never be assured of achieving its author's aims. Readers bring their own experiences and receptiveness to their reading of novels and short stories, and may not be open to changing their ideas of the country in which they live. What authors are able to do, then, is simply "reflect the changes and offer guidance as to how young people might live in the new rainbow society" (Bentley and Midgley 2000, 52). Personal narratives, such as *The Mending Season*, present one individual's experience of the challenges of growing up in uncertain times, and suggest how these difficulties may be overcome. Stories such as those anthologised in *Crossing Over* are imaginative records of South Africa's triumphant historical moments, and capture the optimism for the future brought about by momentous changes in the country's socio-political climate. At the same time, the authors of *The Mending Season* and the short stories of *Crossing Over* do not ignore how difficult it is for some to leave the past behind. *Sharp Sharp, Zulu Dog* is an example of an author's failure to put his own prejudices aside in his attempt to write a reconciliatory novel. What all of these texts share in common, though, is their privileging of children and young adults as being at the forefront of the changes taking place in South Africa, and their efforts to "impress upon them how personal values can make a significant mark for good in the midst of great historical events over which the individual would seem to have little control" (Jenkins 1993, 109).

Chapter Four:

Contemporary realism in the 'new' South Africa

*[E]very generation of young people has a special set of problems unique to the age.
(Donelson and Nilsen 1980, 182)*

In the years following the establishment of democracy, the 'normalisation' of South African society brings with it a shift in emphasis in young adult fiction from reconciliation and nation-building, to the challenges faced by a new generation of South Africans raised in the 'rainbow nation.' The form adopted by the writers who inaugurated this shift is that of the new realist genre, or more specifically, the sub-genre of the teenage problem novel.

During the 1960s, a new mode of writing for young adults took root in the United States of America and the United Kingdom. The growing resistance of teenage readers towards overtly didactic and exaggerated novels (Donelson and Nilsen 1980, 182), together with the social and political upheaval underway at the time, ushered in the trend of new realism in young adult fiction. For the first time, books dealing with the very real and often controversial issues faced by contemporary adolescents became commonplace, and authors began to explore more freely those topics which had previously been considered unacceptable for young readers. Tunnell and Nilsen explain that "[l]ong-standing taboos imposed on authors and illustrators began to break down as the social revolution of the 1960s began to boil. Few books before this time dealt with topics such as death, divorce, alcoholism, and child abuse. In fact, books did not even show children and parents at odds with one another" (Tunnell and Jacobs 2004, 48). Novels such as S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* (1967), Paul Zindel's *The Pigman* (1968) and the perennially popular novels of Judy Blume had young readers enthralled (and made many parents and educators nervous). The 1960s and 1970s certainly saw a resurgence of interest in reading amongst young people overseas, a trend many critics have ascribed to the establishment of new realism (Tunnell and Jacobs 2004, 48): the genre was distinctive in that it treated

“candidly and with respect problems that belong specifically to young adults in today’s world” (Donelson and Nilsen 1980, 181). Naturally, teenagers responded positively to having their problems treated more seriously and reflected more accurately by authors (Donelson and Nilsen 1980, 182).

Though South African writers for young adults commonly favoured the realist mode of writing, new realism was slower to take hold in the country than it had elsewhere. The strict censorship laws of the apartheid government, together with the conservative approach of most publishers, meant that South African authors enjoyed fewer freedoms than their Western counterparts. With the advent of democracy, and the ensuing environment of social and political upheaval (similar in some respects to that of America during the 1960s), writers began to explore the possibilities offered by the new realism genre. Inggs explains this development in South African young adult fiction since the final years of apartheid:

When the road to democracy opened up at the beginning of the 1990s, writers shifted their attention to dealing with the problems encountered by young people reaching adolescence and adulthood in a society in the throes of intense social and political upheaval. This gradually gave way to a decline in politics as a primary motive for writing young adult fiction, and increasing experimentation with content and structure.
(2006, 22)

As the need for political reform that had concerned writers during the 1970s and 1980s was no longer a matter of urgency, and the period of celebration and reconciliation during the transition to democracy came to an end, authors gradually began to explore other facets of adolescent experience. By the turn of the millennium, the issue of racial inequality was no longer the major preoccupation of young adult fiction. Authors now turned their attention to other, more pressing social issues, including poverty, crime and HIV/Aids, and also began to tackle more seriously ‘universal’ teenage issues such as drugs, sex, abuse, pregnancy, violence and broken homes. Jenny Robson’s *Dark Waters* (1995), for example, tells the story of a fourteen-year-old boy who turns to drugs as a means of coping with his parents’ divorce, while *Little Sparrow* (2005), by Phyllis Owen, deals with domestic abuse. Several authors have focused on difficulties at home, whether

it be the death of a parent, such as in *Superzero* (2006) by Darrel Bristow-Bovey, or the sudden presence of a step-parent and step-siblings after a parent's remarriage, which forms the focus of Marita van der Vyver's *The Hidden Life of Hanna Why* (2007).

Novels which deal with contemporary teenage issues are generally referred to as 'teenage problem novels,' a sub-genre "born early in the age of new realism, when taboo topics about the problems of growing up became acceptable fare for juvenile books" (Tunnell and Jacobs 2004, 134). Rather than being exclusively confined to the personal problems of their protagonists, problem novels often tackle wider social issues through the eyes of an adolescent observer. Typically (but not always), these novels are written in the first person, "in which case the reader shares the subject position and world-view of the narrator" (Inggs 2007, 37). This narrative technique suits the purpose of novels written in this genre: teenage problem novels usually aim to reflect accurately the objective realities of contemporary adolescents, while at the same time not patronising readers. May speculates that "[m]any authors probably use first-person narrative in order not to seem didactic. The narrator says, 'Let me tell you all about it,' and the reader listens. If the narrator says, 'I've learned something from my experience,' the listener can pause in agreement or appreciation or consider that the teller might not have learned as much as she suspected" (May 1995, 124). Certainly, teenage problem novels often do not have an obvious didactic agenda. Donelson and Nilsen explain that a novel in this sub-genre is unlikely to be enjoyed by readers if it "spells out the attitudes and conclusions with which [the author] wants each reader to leave the book" but at the same time, should have "a worthwhile theme" (1980, 183). Readers of teenage problems, they claim, are looking for entertainment, comfort, and commiseration (1980, 182), and if a novel is "relevant to those concerns, not didactically but in creating textures of experience which teenagers can recognise as germane to their own, it can merit their attention" (Hentoff 1969, 401).

The four novels chosen for examination in this chapter, each of which is written in the first person, are all examples of teenage problem novels. Each of the four novels tests the limits of what was previously considered taboo for young adult fiction, whether it be through candid discussions on sex, portrayals of disturbing violence, or even the inclusion of a profanity or two. While the protagonists of these novels are all dealing with

personal crises, they also confront broader social issues, and these social issues are what make these texts distinctly South African.

Sarah Britten uses humour with great effect in her portrayal of contemporary South African life in *Welcome to the Martin Tudhope Show!* and *The Worst Year of my Life – So Far*. Her protagonists, Martin and Meredith, are astute observers of social institutions, and provide witty and often satirical commentary on a broad range of issues, from materialism to economic reform, in post-apartheid South Africa. Although her novels have no obvious didactic overtures, they are nonetheless firmly rooted in a specific ideological position.

Crossing the Line by Lutz van Dijk and *Praise Song* by Jenny Robson are examples of novels in which the author has adapted the typical features of the teenage problem novel for a very specific didactic purpose. The HIV/Aids pandemic in South Africa forms the focus of both narratives, with van Dijk and Robson each making a conscious effort at contributing towards awareness and education, though seemingly with very different messages in mind for their young readers.

4.1 Adolescent angst in the ‘new’ South Africa: the novels of Sarah Britten

Welcome to the Martin Tudhope Show! (2002) and *The Worst Year of my Life – So Far* (2000) have all the hallmarks of a typical teenage problem novel. The first-person narrations of Martin and Meredith, the novels’ protagonists, chronicle the day-to-day tribulations of “the stormy seas of adolescence” (2002, 19): both narratives deal with the burdens of peer pressure, the agony of not ‘fitting in,’ the frustration of being misunderstood by parents, the demands of schoolwork and the temptations of sex and alcohol. For Martin and Meredith, adolescence is a trying and exhausting experience.

Sarah Britten, however, has adapted the sub-genre of the problem novel to emphasise the distinctly South African context of her narratives. *Martin Tudhope* and *Worst Year* are not simply novels about the difficulties of being a teenager; they are novels that reflect the unique challenges of being a teenager in post-apartheid South

Africa. Moreover, the dry wit and sardonic humour of Britten's protagonists prevent them from wallowing tiresomely in their angst, and enable them to reflect on their circumstances from a sharply ironic perspective. As a result, both novels are characterised by satirical observations of the humorous and harsh aspects of the 'new' South Africa.

While they are of different genders, the protagonists of the two novels are white and hail from a comfortable, middle-class upbringing in the suburbs of Johannesburg. For instance, Meredith rather self-consciously describes herself as "a relatively privileged, spoilt Northern suburbs white girl at a private school" (2000, 87). Their perceptions, opinions and experiences, then, are firmly and unmistakably entrenched in their background and circumstances. The implied reader of both novels is obviously expected to identify with these circumstances and to be able not only to relate to the protagonists' experiences, but also to recognise the humour in their remarks; as with most first-person narrations, the author seems to anticipate the "identification of the implied reader with the focalising character" (Inggs 2000, 48). Referring specifically to Britten's novels, Inggs observes that the "implied reader is assumed to be familiar with such references [to literature, the media and other elements of a capitalist consumerist society], clearly an inhabitant of the middle-class urban landscape of South Africa" (2006, 27). Indeed, much of the humour in the novels relies on the reader's familiarity with these kinds of references, most of which, as Inggs observes, are specific to the experiences of white, middle-class South Africans.

The narrative forms of both novels certainly allow for an abundance of references to contemporary consumerist culture. The protagonist of *Martin Tudhope* is an aspiring stand-up comedian, and his narrative is addressed to an imaginary audience: "In my head, you see, I have the perfect audience. I know you're not real in the flesh and blood and bad breath sense, but, Ladies and Gentlemen, you are mine and that's what counts" (2002, 154). This narrative strategy, together with the regular interjections of material from Martin's stand-up act, provides "ample opportunity to critique contemporary society" (Inggs 2006, 25). Meredith's narration, meanwhile, takes the form of a diary, incorporating reports on her daily life, monologues on specific topics, and poetry. As Inggs notes, Britten's use of this narrative form "introduces a metanarrative in which

Meredith constantly reflects on her own writing and her own situation” (2006, 25). Both Martin and Meredith, then, have a knack for witty observation, and for recognising the follies and the inescapably cruel circumstances to which they bear witness, and their narratives provide an “interesting commentary on some of the nation’s preoccupations” (“Commendation” 2001, para. 2).

In this regard, it must be noted that while the issue of race plays a major role in Meredith and Martin’s discussions of class, poverty, and government policy, racism or racial prejudice seems to be a non-issue in the protagonists’ worlds (with the exception of a racist uncle in Martin’s narrative). This is surprising and, certainly, somewhat unrealistic: it would be naïve to suggest that racism, less than a decade after the dismantling of apartheid, had been completely eliminated from South African society. Nonetheless, its absence appears to have been very intentional on the part of the author, who seems to be attempting to portray a society in the process of normalising itself after decades of oppressive rule and, as a result, presents a rather idealised portrait of the South African public as far as inter-racial relations are concerned. In the worlds she has created in both novels, a person is not judged by or discriminated against on the basis of the colour of his or her skin: indeed, the race of her characters is never even mentioned. In this regard, Inggs points out that “only the names [. . .] provide an indication of racial origin. Thus, the South African reader will be immediately aware that Tsakane and Lerato are the names of black girls, and that Ereshnee Pillay is of Indian descent, but none of these characters exhibits any signs of economic disempowerment” (2006, 27). Though Martin and Meredith seem aware of the continued effects of apartheid on their society, and do not hesitate in pointing them out, neither appears to have inherited any prejudicial attitudes. Both protagonists are members of a generation in the process of abandoning the discriminations of the past, and Britten clearly supposes her (presumably white) readers are doing the same, or at the very least, is encouraging them to do so.

For Martin and Meredith, it is not unusual to develop a friendship with or even a romantic interest in someone of a different race; as Meredith observes, her environment is “very rainbow nation” (2000, 3). Of course, this is a fairly recent development in young adult literature, because although inter-racial friendships were not uncommon in novels written before and shortly after the advent of democracy, they were certainly not

portrayed as the norm. In her study of race relations in South African young adult fiction of the 1990s, Du Plessis notes that “[i]n spite of the fact that integration has taken place in numerous sectors of South African society, South African adolescents have established very few interracial friendships and interracial heterosexual relationships” (1999, 1). This is not the case in Martin and Meredith’s worlds, where the colour of a person’s skin does not matter. What does matter, though, is class and material wealth.

In both novels, class seems to have replaced race as a basis of discrimination, as in post-apartheid South Africa, “White and Black no longer correspond to rich and poor” (Butler 2004, 69). This preoccupation with wealth and class is symptomatic of a decreased concern with racial inequality in young adult fiction in the years following the dismantling of apartheid. Møller has observed that the “new generation has been born into a human rights culture and measures its success in material terms” (2007, 187), and materialism is certainly a significant issue in both novels. This is highlighted by the fact that “Meredith and Martin both come from families who are neither as wealthy as those of their peers nor share the same materialist values, reinforcing the fact that relative power and status are delineated here on economic rather than racial grounds” (Inggs 2006, 26). Martin and Meredith attend wealthy, private schools on scholarships, and the fact that their peers are from more economically privileged backgrounds is a source of constant stress, particularly for Martin. Both are aware that at their schools, wealth is equated with power and status. Invariably, the children of the wealthiest parents enjoy the greatest popularity, and those who cannot afford to meet the standards set by them are looked down upon.

As mentioned, Martin feels the burden of his relative poverty keenly, and with an ever-present sense of humiliation, though he often tempers his embarrassment at not being able to compete with his classmates with light-hearted self-deprecation. He laments that “you can’t get away from the fact that my father sells toilets for a living. Not exactly something you can admit to your classmates, whose fathers are all lawyers and MDs and CEOs” (2002, 20), and claims that “[i]f anyone, *anyone* from my school ever came into my house, I would die. I would just drop dead of embarrassment, right then and there” (2002, 21; emphasis in original). Worst of all, he declares, is the fact that he does not have a cellular phone: “I am possibly the only kid at school – including the guy who

cleans out the rubbish bins – who does not possess a cellphone. You have *no* idea how embarrassing it is when people ask me for my number” (2002, 16; emphasis in original). Martin dreams of the day when a successful career as a stand-up comic in New York will make him “seriously rich,” and allow him to “drive an Audi TT during the week and a Ferrari Testarossa on the weekends, with an Aston Martin for variety” (2002, 22). Though he is “a young man at war with the way society divides itself according to status” (Molose 2007, 18), his war is waged with the knowledge that, for now, he is unable to be on the winning side.

Martin’s worries are exacerbated when he falls in love for the first time. Tsakane, or TK as she is better known, is from a much wealthier background than he; she also happens to be black. The fact that the two are of different races, however, is never mentioned in the narrative as a potential complication; the only time it is acknowledged by Martin is when he realises that he may have offended her by calling her a “fair maid”: “Just then, I remembered that in our broader socio-political context, maybe this wasn’t the best expression to use. I hoped she wouldn’t take it the wrong way” (2002, 47). As usual, Martin’s humour is used to dispel the tension in what otherwise may be an awkward situation. That Britten chooses not to make an issue of racial difference is again revealing of her strategy of consciously portraying South African society in the process of normalising itself after apartheid, and could even be viewed as a challenge of the reader’s normative assumptions of race and inter-racial relationships.

What does pose a threat to Martin and TK’s relationship, however, is the vast difference in their economic backgrounds. Though this never seems to bother TK, it serves to deepen Martin’s feelings of inadequacy and inferiority. TK’s family is exceedingly wealthy: their house is located in a “gated enclave” that features its own golf course (2002, 50), and she has her own “suite of rooms” with “the latest zillion-herz PC” and “framed posters of international art exhibitions” (2002, 51). Martin describes her life as the one “you’d always dreamed of” (2002, 88); certainly, it is a life that Martin dreams of, and the marked differences between them bolsters his assumption that she is “totally out of [his] league” (2002, 44).

TK’s character is an example of the author’s concern with government policies regarding Black Economic Empowerment and Affirmative Action in both *Martin*

Tudhope and *Worst Year*. In an effort to address the economic inequalities of the past, the post-apartheid government has introduced these measures as a means of more evenly distributing wealth and power among the previously disenfranchised. As a result of these policies, “for the first time since colonial rule, South Africa has created a substantial black middle class” (Møller 2007a, 390). *Martin Tudhope* and *Worst Year* are both populated with characters who have benefited from these policies. Meredith’s friend Lerato is the daughter of a businessman who “is frequently on the front pages of the financial magazines – he engineered a major new black empowerment deal” (2000, 8), and is “on first name terms with our new President” (2000, 73), while TK tells Martin that her “mom runs her own investment company” and her father is a deputy minister (2002, 53).

Though both criticise these empowerment policies, such criticisms do not necessarily come directly from the novels’ narrators. In a particularly memorable scene, one of Martin’s four sisters, Phoebe, a politically minded university student, becomes involved in a heated debate with their racist uncle at a family gathering:

‘I deal with the real world every day,’ Uncle Brian went on. ‘I deal with the roads and the bridges that keep this country going. I deal with the labourers that don’t want to work.’ He pronounced work *wek*. ‘I deal with the unions, and the government that wants to see a black face before it awards a tender, regardless of whether that face has two brain cells between its two fucking ears or not.’ [. . .]

Phoebe was thrilled. ‘Uncle Brian reveals his true colours,’ she said, loudly. ‘The racist, spoiled and hopelessly bourgeois white South African male. Are you planning to emigrate, Brian? I do hope so.’ [. . .]

‘I am not going to leave this country to communist ANC-worshipping cretins like you,’ said Uncle Brian. ‘If people like you were in charge, we’d soon grind to a standstill.’ He took another swig of whisky. ‘Oh wait, I forgot – the cretins *are* in charge.’

(2002, 100; emphasis in original)

As usual, the inherent humour of the scene dispels any tension it creates, and Uncle Brian and his drunken ramblings are easy enough to dismiss. The characterisation of Uncle Brian is very intentional in this regard: most readers of a white, middle-class background

will be sure to have heard this kind of grumbling before, but by using this character as the one who expresses these views, Britten reveals them to be narrow-minded and racist.

Meredith's slightly more serious qualms about Affirmative Action are also likely to be familiar to readers of a similar background:

I feel bad complaining about affirmative action, because it makes me look like your typical whining white kid, who benefited from the injustice of the past and wants to keep things that way. But I can't help feeling that it's unfair. I mean, look at Lerato, whose father is loaded and who has the best of everything. How is she disadvantaged? When has she ever been disadvantaged? She's always had maids and gardeners and private schools and BMWs, just like the white kids who happen to be better off. Yet one day, when she applies for a job, she'll get it because she is black, and therefore "previously disadvantaged". I think Lerato would be able to get any job she went for anyway – but why should she get it because of the colour of her skin? Why shouldn't I get to compete against her because I'm the wrong colour?

It's not fair.

The university where my parents work is constantly in the news over issues of "transformation". I've lived more than half my life in the new South Africa, so I know that transformation has to happen. But I also worry about my parents losing their jobs to affirmative action appointments. They've always told me, from when I was little, how they – especially my mother – campaigned for democracy in this country. The irony is that they're now threatened by the very system they helped (or at least wanted to help) bring to power.

(2000, 99)

While Meredith runs the risk of sounding "like your typical whining white kid" here, and though some of her statements could certainly be considered politically incorrect, she does raise some important issues. Though Uncle Brian's criticisms are based on racial prejudice, Meredith's views centre on a concern for her own security and future prospects, and are revealing of what she sees as the flaws of Affirmative Action and Black Economic Empowerment policies. Her views are common ones: it has frequently been noted that there is "widespread concern among Whites, Coloureds, and Indians that the government's affirmative action, or 'job reservation,' and college and university admission policies have made them victims of racial discrimination of the same types that Blacks had to endure before the end of Apartheid" (Gay 2001, 176–177). While Meredith

tries to be diplomatic, she does not seem to grasp fully the gravity of “the injustice of the past” or the necessity for these corrective measures. Of course, having been born into democracy and, moreover, being white, she cannot be expected to appreciate what it was to be “the wrong colour” under the apartheid regime and, like many of her generation, does not understand why she should have to make sacrifices in order to make amends. Her apprehension over her future employment prospects and her more immediate anxiety over her parents’ job security are understandable concerns for her own well-being. It must be noted again, however, that her narrative perspective very clearly delineates a white readership, one that is expected to understand and sympathise with her concerns. Though Britten challenges these concerns in *Martin Tudhope* through the sardonic portrayal of Uncle Brian, she makes no real effort at offering an alternative perspective in *Worst Year*. Meredith’s trepidations are wholly selfish and not contested in any way.

Meredith’s comments about Lerato never having been disadvantaged acknowledge the fact that empowerment policies have only benefited a small minority of South Africa’s black population, a reality that many critics have pointed to in their assessment of the country’s economic transformation (Møller 2007, 190; Gay 2001, 171; Butler 2004, 69). This disparity is further emphasised in both novels, but particularly in *Martin Tudhope*, by the presence of that sector of the population whose lives have changed very little since the advent of democracy, and who still live in dire poverty, without employment or access to basic services. Martin describes how, overnight, an informal settlement was established on the neighbouring property, which was dubbed Winnieville by its inhabitants.²³ Though Martin’s father is horrified by the development, his mother takes a more philosophical view: “In Africa, you either accept, you leave, or you go mad. We cannot leave. I would prefer not to go mad. So I choose to accept it. Finish and klaar” (2002, 26). She begins to visit the township regularly in an attempt to help those living there, and Martin explains that “[a]part from cooking lessons, she lectures the women on Aids prevention and got the animal welfare people to come around and give all the dogs rabies injections” (2002, 28). When her family voice their concern that they will fall

²³ With his characteristic humour, Martin describes how the township was given its name: “Winnie Mandela, they have told my mother, is the mother of the nation, and the only one in politics who cares about poor people any more. ‘Maybe she will sell her nice big car to help you,’ my mother said, but I don’t think they got the point” (2002, 26–27).

victim to the criminals they are sure are living in Winnieville, she tells them that “[i]f nobody *does* something, they *will* slit our throats. [. . .] They’re decent people, most of them, just trying to make a living. They’re on our doorstep, so it’s up to us to do something to help them” (2002, 59; emphasis in original). Martin’s mother eventually convinces her children to join in her “one-woman social services project” (2002, 106) by providing extra lessons to the school children living in Winnieville. They are reluctant at first, but eventually come to find the experience rewarding. After a few months, a local newspaper hears of their charitable work and decides to publish a story about them in a series featuring “community heroes” (2002, 139).

While the Tudhope family’s involvement in helping the residents of Winnieville could easily have been viewed as a condescending example of white paternalism, Martin’s ironic response to the article immediately dispels this notion. Martin groans that the story makes the family “sound like a bunch of Mother Teresas” (2002, 140) and is more concerned with the fact that it mentions the family’s “modest home” and the “overgrown plot” on which they live (2002, 139). The family also mocks Martin’s sister, Lizzie, who is quoted in the story as saying: “I call on all young South Africans to reach out and help uplift the underprivileged, and so make South Africa a better place” (2002, 140). Lizzie’s rather clichéd comments and her assertion that “[i]t was the right thing to say” (2002, 140) satirises and even undermines the family’s motives in helping their local community. Interestingly, the article does not receive a positive response from Martin’s classmates; though he prepares himself for “smart remarks” from them, “[t]hey just looked at me sideways, as though I had a communicable disease. As though they felt rather sorry for me” (2002, 141). Britten seems to be commenting rather pointedly here about the unwillingness of those in positions of privilege, who have benefited from empowerment policies, to help those still in need. Even TK is horrified by the idea of venturing into Winnieville, saying that it “looks like hell on earth from the road” (2002, 60).

Martin notes with some irony that, despite their poverty, even the residents of Winnieville have not escaped the rampant materialism of South African society. When reflecting on the importance of wearing the correct designer labels at his school, he realises that “Mr Price and Woolworths don’t cut it in Winnieville either. South Africans

are very attuned to the Nike swoosh and Gucci snaffle, but Phoebe says this is just another sad consequence of American cultural imperialism” (2002, 27). Indeed, the influence of Western culture on South Africa features strongly in both novels. Britten’s narratives are littered with references to American products, films, television, politics and slang, with which the reader is assumed to be familiar. Martin is determined to emulate the career of American comedian Jerry Seinfeld (2002, 22), while Meredith has a secret affection for a character from the television series *Frasier* (2000, 50). Even the structures of the narratives have been influenced by American popular culture: Martin’s narration is interspersed with extracts from his Seinfeld-inspired stand-up comedy act, while Meredith regularly describes incidents in her life as though she were writing a script for a Hollywood movie (2000, 2).

Despite these references, both novels are distinctly South African in context. Martin and Meredith regularly comment, often self-consciously, on particular aspects of their middle-class South African lifestyle. Meredith, for example, remarks that “overseas readers should note that no South African household is complete without the maid/domestic/housekeeper/other currently politically correct term” (2000, 15), while Martin refers to “the tuneless laughter of the macho South African male” (2002, 43). On a more serious note, both novels reflect the fact that “South Africans have become accustomed to living in a violent society” (Louw 2007, 235), and highlight an awareness of high crime rates in the country. Meredith in particular is concerned about crime: in a diary entry headed “I’m scared,” she recounts a recent hijacking in her neighbourhood and mulls over the question of the death penalty, commenting that “I’ve tried to resist complaining about it because everyone else shuts up, but I’ll say it anyway: I’m sick of all this crime! Most of the time I don’t notice it, but every now and then I wake up and realise: I’m so tired of being scared” (2000, 54–55). TK, meanwhile, tells Martin that she is “just glad we’ve got security guards and walls and stuff. It’s about the only place where you can walk around and feel safe” (2002, 60). Later, during a class discussion about crime, she claims that “[b]eing raped is like, my worst nightmare” (2002, 111).

In spite of these and other references to the problems faced by contemporary South African society, Martin and Meredith both seem to view their country in a generally positive light. Though Britten has no obvious didactic agenda in either novel, she is

careful not to portray South Africa in a completely pessimistic manner. In *Worst Year*, this is achieved with a few carefully worded observations: for example, when discussing the trend amongst middle-class white South Africans towards emigration, Meredith wonders if they believe “their offspring run the risk of developing a degenerative brain disorder should they stay. Do they realise that their children are going to develop horrible accents and support the wrong rugby team?” (2000, 24). In *Martin Tudhope*, Martin is entered into a public speaking competition by his English teacher, and made to write a speech on the “whole be optimistic vs. pessimistic about South Africa thing” (2002, 132). Britten uses the public speaking competition as a means of highlighting some of the more positive aspects of South African society without directly moralising or preaching to the reader. In his speech, Martin describes the community upliftment work that he has been involved in, and declares:

Perhaps we are fooling ourselves when we think that there is a future for us in the country we love. Perhaps it is the cynics who are right after all. But I choose not to believe that. Ladies and Gentlemen, I say to you, we do not *have* a future. A future is not something you possess, like a CD player or a pair of shoes. It is something you bring into being as you go along. We hold the power within ourselves to make the future, a *good* future, real.

I used to believe that happiness and fulfilment lay in a nice house and an expensive car. I have since come to realise that true riches lie in people, in friendships, in the relationships you form within your community. The value of your life lies not in the number of zeroes after the number in your bank balance, but in the happiness you are able to bring to others. If more South Africans could realise that, we would be a happier nation.

(2002, 137–138; emphasis in original)

Of course, Martin’s speech could easily be dismissed as sentimental and even insincere should the reader choose to do so; he is aware himself that “it was the kind of idea that would get your average teacher all misty-eyed” (2002, 135). Whatever his or her reaction, however, it certainly has the potential to provide the reader with something to reflect upon. Martin himself seems to have taken these words to heart by the end of the novel: his character shows growth in that his dream of fame and fortune has evolved to include the benefit of others, as he has decided that he will “give a whole lot of money to my

family, and set up a trust for Winnieville, so that they can build a school. Maybe a centre for performing arts as well. And a clinic and a veterinary hospital, too, to keep my mother happy” (2002, 159). If Britten *does* have a subtle didactic ‘message’ in this novel, it is in her light-hearted criticism of conspicuous consumerism and her lauding of generous philanthropy. This, she suggests through Martin’s speech, is sure to maintain an optimistic outlook for South Africans.

A good teenage problem novel, Donelson and Nilsen have claimed, is one in which the “setting enhances the story” (1980, 183). For South African young adult fiction of recent years, the distinctly local setting has certainly added a new dimension to the sub-genre of the problem novel. South African teenagers of the post-apartheid era face many of the same challenges as their Western contemporaries: sexuality, identity, school and home life can certainly be considered as universal growing pains. The country’s unique socio-political environment and culture, however, contribute in their own way to the experience of adolescence in South Africa. Britten’s novels have captured this unique aspect in the narrations of her protagonists, and accurately reflect for many readers what it means to be young in South Africa today. As demonstrated, her novels are aimed very specifically at a white readership, one which will understand and commiserate with the views of her protagonists. Though Britten does not seem to endorse a particular didactic agenda, she does in some respects challenge her readers to reconsider some of their preconceived notions of South African society. Her main concern, however, lies in presenting a perspective, through her protagonists, with which her intended audience can identify.

4.2 Facing up to HIV/Aids:

Praise Song (2006) and Crossing the Line (2006)

The rapidly increasing prevalence of HIV/Aids in South Africa has unquestionably become one of the greatest and most threatening challenges faced by the country in recent years. At present, “South Africa has the highest incidence of HIV/AIDS in the world” (Møller 2007, 194), with teenagers and young adults under the age of thirty being most at

risk of new infection (von Maltzan 2006, 97). A considerable and ever-increasing amount of media attention has focused on raising awareness amongst the general public of the dangers of HIV/Aids by explaining how the virus is spread and advocating preventative behaviour. It would seem natural, then, given the prominence of the disease as a matter of social concern and the danger it poses to South Africa's youth, for young adult authors to make concentrated efforts at educating their readers about HIV/Aids through their novels.

The publication of such novels did not occur as promptly as one might expect, however. In 1998, Karin Chubb launched an extensive research project into the availability of South African youth literature that dealt with HIV/Aids, and found her initial results to be "alarming": "just two novels located in the white upper-middle class of Johannesburg" had been published, and "no novel for young readers addressing this issue in connection with daily life experiences of black youth" was, as yet, available (Chubb and van Dijk 2001, para. 2). Chubb maintained that a "new approach to AIDS education" was needed in South Africa, one which, rather than simply providing the youth with bland facts and dire warnings, would incorporate "old traditions of storytelling and new developments in youth literature" in order to engage young readers with the issues at stake (Chubb and van Dijk 2001, para. 1). Chubb enlisted the help of young adult writer Lutz van Dijk, and together they "embarked on a joint book project, namely to create a story that would reflect the 'daily life experiences of black youth' and [which] could also be used as an educational tool" (von Maltzan 2006, 97). *Stronger than the Storm* was published in 2000, and is the story of a young girl who is gang-raped and consequently infected with HIV.²⁴ The novel received a positive response from educators and young readers alike; Chubb reports that the

first reactions from young readers after the book was published [. . .] were spontaneous: 'This book is really about us! It is about our life . . .' Quite often they continue without further encouragement from teachers or other adults to tell what they think about the story and the main characters of the book, what they would have done and how the problems mentioned in the text could be dealt with. (Chubb and van Dijk 2001, para. 5)

²⁴ The novel appears in German, van Dijk's native language, under the title *Township Blues*. The English version was translated by Karin Chubb and released simultaneously, and the novel has since been translated into Afrikaans and isiXhosa. Chubb also produced a teacher's guide for the novel.

The novel has since been prescribed as a setwork in more than 400 South African schools (von Maltzan 2006, 98).

Chubb and van Dijk seem to have set the trend among other young adult writers in producing often overtly didactic novels for young adults dealing with HIV/Aids: such novels have appeared with increasing regularity since 2001. While some of the earlier novels were often simply a “dreadful warning” against the dangers of infection, later works “developed a more nuanced approach” in which the “problems of stigma and stereotypes feature strongly” (Warren 2007, 1). Certainly, these novels have come to occupy an important position in educating young adults about the issues surrounding the HIV/Aids pandemic in South Africa. Researchers involved in The Soft Cover Project, a programme which aimed “to explore the ways in which youth themselves can be active participants in HIV prevention” (Walsh, Mitchell and Smith 2002, 106), found that

the texts provoke a different relationship with their young readers than do straightforward pamphlets on prevention. These stories allow their readers to relate to characters who are living with the realities of HIV and AIDS; literature has a special role to play in this respect. In this way an action-space is opened up for young people to actively engage, through different literary genres, with the issues. (Walsh, Mitchell and Smith 2002, 109)

It would seem that van Dijk and other authors for young adults were aware that most of their readers “were tired of hearing endless and repetitive details of the disease that appeared to have no concrete connection to their personal experiences and conflicts. Because knowledge did not lead to any change of behaviour, infection rates did not change either” (Chubb and van Dijk 2001, para. 3). Most of the novels written on the subject of HIV/Aids, then, seem to be the result of concerted efforts on the part of their authors to reflect as accurately as possible the realities faced by their readers, in the hope that this may prompt engagement, reflection and positive action. The typical characteristics of the teenage problem novel are particularly suited to this purpose, and many authors writing on the subject of HIV/Aids have appropriated the form of this sub-genre in order to emphasise their didactic agenda.

One such novel is *Praise Song* (2006) by Jenny Robson, an overtly didactic story which warns against the dangers of HIV infection while also offering “a plea for tolerance for those living with HIV/Aids” (Horler 2006, 9). Also in 2006 and following the success of *Stronger than the Storm*, van Dijk published his second youth novel, *Crossing the Line*, which is similar in content and narrative construction to his first novel.²⁵ While both authors deal with community stigma and discrimination as a major theme, the overarching ‘messages’ they present to readers are vastly different: *Praise Song* can be read as a kind of cautionary tale that uses scare tactics to warn young readers against ignorant behaviour that could lead to infection, while *Crossing the Line* is essentially an inspirational story that suggests that goals and dreams can still be achieved by those living with HIV/Aids. Interestingly, the differences between these novels are summed up by the protagonist of *Praise Song*, Gaone, who comments as follows on the apparently conflicting messages disseminated by the mass media about HIV/Aids:

It is a strange thing that I have noticed in the books and magazine articles, in the pamphlets and posters I cannot stop myself from reading. There are two separate messages, and they seem to conflict and to contradict each other constantly.

First, there is the message of hopelessness and destruction, of how unprotected sex will lead to death. Once you are infected, so this message goes, your life is over. All hope is gone. So be careful. Aids will not give you a second chance. This is not a situation where you can learn from your mistakes. One mistake is all it takes and then you are doomed. You have crossed the line and there can be no going back, not ever. So avoid this disease at all costs. Because if you don't, you will pay with your life. Once you are infected, you will get sick. You will die.

And of course, this is an important message that young people [. . .] must hear. So it is right that this message should be frightening and shocking: Aids means death and the end of all hope and life.

And yet, other posters and other magazine articles give a second message. This is the message meant for people who are already infected, or for those whose loved ones are infected. And this is a message of comfort and compassion. Don't give up hope, this message says. There are things you can do to make your life better. HIV infection is not the end of the road. Eat well and treat you body with care. There is even talk of medicines that can help; they cannot cure you, but they can make you feel much better. Above all, be

²⁵ Again, the novel was originally written in German and translated into English by Karin Chubb.

positive and hopeful. If you have faith in life, being HIV-positive is not so bad. Where there is life, there is hope. While there is life, you can find ways to keep Aids itself at bay. (2006, 62–63)

Robson has chosen the former strategy, the “frightening and shocking” (2006, 63) message, to inform the didactic thrust of her novel. At the same time, she shows how community-based stigma against those living with HIV/Aids – indeed, the denial of the community she portrays that HIV/Aids is a disease that can affect anyone – can in turn lead to reckless behaviour and an increase in infection rates.

Praise Song is constructed as a kind of murder mystery novel centred around the death of the protagonist’s teacher, Miss Diko. The first-person narration of the protagonist, Gaone, is presented in a non-chronological order through a number of episodes occurring during the days immediately preceding and following Miss Diko’s murder, and in this manner the circumstances of the teacher’s death are revealed. It emerges that Miss Diko is murdered by a prominent member of Gaone’s community after revealing at the town’s Aids Day celebrations that she is HIV-positive. Despite her previously good reputation, her disclosure provokes the fury and rejection of the community, who label her a “whore” (2006, 83) and declare her unfit to be “teaching our young people” (2006, 45).

Gaone seems unsurprised, though certainly troubled, by the reaction of her community. As the focaliser of the narration, her perceptions – coloured as they are by her own experiences with HIV/Aids – are important in guiding the reader’s reactions in the way intended by the author. Gaone claims to “know a great deal about Aids. I have read every book, every article, every leaflet I can get my hands on. I read every poster that Sister Thebe puts up outside the Aids Testing Centre. My sister Precious says that I am obsessed, completely obsessed [. . .]. But I have a good reason to be obsessed” (2006, 17). Her “good reason,” it transpires, is that her mother died of an Aids-related illness when she and her sister Precious were small children. This is never openly admitted in their household, however: the girls’ aunt, who took them into her home after they were orphaned, “has always insisted that our mother died of TB. Only TB and nothing more sinister. The word ‘Aids’ is never spoken. Never!” (2006, 59). Despite their aunt’s

insistence, Gaone remembers that, as a child, their aunt took them to a local HIV/Aids testing centre before she took them in:

‘You understand, Sister?’ That was my aunt speaking. I was cowed by her enormous, unfamiliar girth and the rough way she had pushed us into the consulting room. ‘You understand? I must know for certain. If these children are infected, it is not possible that I can have them in my home. I want to do my Christian duty, but some things are beyond my strength.’

(2006, 59)

Gaone understands from an early age, then, that HIV/Aids is seen as something shameful and embarrassing in her community; the opinions and behaviour of her aunt are representative of the general perceptions and stigmas associated with HIV/Aids in her town of Meriting. Having lost a loved one to the virus, Gaone takes exception to this kind of discriminatory behaviour, and though she rarely speaks out against it, her narrative is characterised by a constant inner battle with the prejudice and ignorance she experiences every day.

Gaone’s relentless agonising over the behaviour of the people of Meriting often results in rather self-righteous interior monologues. Despite this, however, the reader is firmly guided through her portrayals of the community in his or her understanding of their misguided notions of HIV/Aids. Gaone’s descriptions reveal her community to be steeped in naivety and denial about the realities of the virus, and those who already infected are treated with cruelty and suspicion:

Some of the churchgoers here in Meriting believe Aids is God’s way of punishing people who misbehave and do not live by the Bible. How cruel is that? It makes me so angry. Why would God want to punish people like my mother, who was always good and kind, not only to me and to Precious, her children, but to her neighbours also. Well, she was good and kind until she got sick. And then all those neighbours stayed far from our door. Even when my mother died, none of the neighbours came to help her children, not even on that terrible day when the strange man appeared and said he was my mother’s uncle, and that the house was his now, and that we should leave. (2006, 50–51)

The citizens of Meriting seem to adopt what Deacon has called the “‘blaming’ model of stigma” (2005, 7), that is, they ‘blame the victim’ in order to distance themselves from perceived risks. Deacon explains that “[p]eople articulate their own group identities as different in key risk-reducing ways from groups stigmatised as deviant or ‘other,’ who are then blamed for having risk-enhancing characteristics” (2005, 7). Through ‘othering’ members of the designated “outgroups” (Deacon 2005, 12), people allow themselves to believe that they themselves are not at risk. This becomes particularly problematic when it translates into a failure to modify sexual behaviour in order to avoid HIV infection, as inevitably the belief that ‘it can’t happen to me’ leads to an increase in infection rates. Kelly and Parker, in their research into HIV/Aids awareness amongst South Africa’s young people, observed a similar phenomenon in the “very widespread belief [amongst respondents] that HIV is a problem to society, but not necessarily a sense that it is a problem that one might address oneself, or take responsibility for” (2000, 24).

This is certainly reflected in Gaone’s portrayal of the community of Meriting. Her anger at this behaviour, however, allows the reader to recognise its inherent danger, cruelty and ignorance. She observes that “[n]o one would ever risk telling anyone they were HIV-positive. Not even their closest friends! In Meriting, people mostly pretended Aids was something that happened far away, in big cities where people were without morals and did not attend church. HIV infection happened only to people who had no respect for themselves or for their elders” (2006, 32). Despite this, she knows that

Meriting isn’t Aids-free. It isn’t, no matter how hard people try to pretend. Our citizens get sick and then they die even though they are still young, but the CCDU [Committee for Community Development and Upliftment, of which Gaone’s aunt is president] hands out programmes for their funerals declaring that they passed away due to pneumonia. Or malaria. Or after a long illness. And the Meriting cemetery spreads out beyond its brick walls, filling with graves, even the tiny graves of tiny children. (2006, 49)

Robson seems to be encouraging her readers to recognise similar prejudices and naiveties in their own communities and, through Gaone’s narration, to re-evaluate their attitudes towards people living with HIV/Aids.

Perhaps the most effective indictment of Gaone's community, however, is achieved through the narrator's representation of their treatment of Miss Diko following her disclosure of her HIV status at the World Aids Day celebrations. Again, Gaone's first-person narration is important here in shaping the reader's reaction. Miss Diko is a favourite teacher of Gaone's and she describes her as a soft, honourable and gentle person throughout the narrative. On discovering the body of her murdered teacher, Gaone remembers that "she had always moved with such modesty," had been "so lovely in life" and "had a calm sweetness" about her (2006, 7). Gaone clearly has a great amount of respect for her teacher, a fact that is made plain in her portrayal of her. When Miss Diko makes her announcement in front of the community, Gaone admires her courage and is ashamed at the reaction the teacher receives (2006, 82). Until this point, Gaone is frustrated at the proceedings of the World Aids Day celebrations: the speakers avoid saying anything directly pertaining to the spread of HIV/Aids, and the production by the local drama group turns into a comedic farce (2006, 64). None of them, Gaone feels, has "any clue about what World Aids Day was supposed to stand for" (2006, 38).

Following the performance of Gaone's choir, Miss Diko takes to the stage, saying that she wants "to make sure that every single young person here knows exactly how Aids is transmitted. And how they can save themselves" (2006, 81). Her frank explanation of how Aids is transmitted in "words that had never been heard before in that hall," together with her confession that an ex-boyfriend infected her with the virus, sparks outrage (2006, 82). Gaone is bewildered at this reaction:

Surely there were at least some citizens who were saying, 'No, but what that young woman did was so brave. This is the kind of speech that will bring Aids to an end. It is in silence and denial that death waits for our children. This is a war, this fight against Aids. And this young woman fought like a brave soldier. These things must be brought out into the open. It is the only way our young people will be saved. What she did was full of courage. She is a hero, I think.' (2006, 96)

No-one seems to share Gaone's sentiments, however. Miss Diko is treated with contempt and hostility by the members of her community: Gaone observes one man spitting at the threshold of Miss Diko's room (2006, 110), while her landlady demands that she

immediately vacate her quarters, and tells Gaone that “[t]his is a decent place I keep, not a brothel! Already two of my lodgers are gone with no notice. They say they will not live next door to a whore who has a mouth like a shebeen owner” (2006, 109). Gaone also overhears her fellow students, who were previously respectful of and devoted to their gentle teacher, whispering as follows about Miss Diko:

‘Well, I mean, I feel sorry for Aids victims, you know.’ It was a Matric girl whispering in the line just beside me. ‘But I mean the innocent people, you know. Like women who get raped. Or like babies that get it from their mothers. Or from transfusions. But with Miss Diko, now – she isn’t an innocent victim, is she? So you don’t really feel sorry for her, do you? Did you hear all those things she was saying about her boyfriend in Cape Town? It was disgusting! If anyone was asking to get infected, it was her. My mother says she shouldn’t be allowed to teach young girls ever again.’ (2006, 108)

The ‘blaming’ model of stigma described by Deacon is obvious in the reactions of Gaone’s community. The citizens of her community completely disregard their high opinions of Miss Diko after her revelation; it is now simply her HIV status, and all the preconceived stereotypes of HIV-positive people, that define her. The community decides as one that she has been deceiving them with a show of being a good, moral person, as they believe that only “whores” with no principles contract the virus (2006, 32). Ostracising Miss Diko from the community fold becomes a kind of coping mechanism, because if the community members were to accept that one of their own had fallen victim to the disease then they would be forced to admit that they themselves were vulnerable (see Deacon 2005, 23). This forms part of “more active attempts to dispel the perception of risk, through, for example, attitudes of bravado or machismo,” and is damaging in that it “does not translate into effective or consistent risk management practices” (Kelly 2000, 23). The opinions of the citizens of Meriting are certainly common in some South African communities, and readers will therefore recognise many of them as having been expressed by those around them and, in some instances, even by themselves. Gaone’s narration demonstrates not only the cruelty of this behaviour, but also the danger and

ignorance associated with discrimination. It is clear that Robson is attempting to reveal to her readers the unthought-of consequences of stigmatisation.

While Gaone wages a kind of inner battle against the prejudices of her community, she also deals with unresolved personal issues surrounding HIV/Aids. These issues manifest themselves as an intense fear of the virus, as Gaone worries not only about herself, but also her sister Precious contracting the disease. Gaone is clearly uncomfortable with and even afraid of her own maturing sexuality: when her friend, Monty, tries to kiss her, she panics, and sees “images of death and sickness, of arms dried to sticks, of faces shrunken into skulls. And behind them all, the appalling echoes of my mother’s final cries, half-formed words without sense and beyond understanding” (2006, 88).

Her main concern, however, lies with her younger sister. Throughout the narrative, Gaone observes with a growing unease her sister’s interest in an older boy, Ebenezer, whom “[e]veryone knew the stories about” (2006, 18). Ebenezer has a reputation for being something of a ‘playboy’ who once had an affair with an older married woman, and Gaone worries that he may seduce her sister. Despite her efforts to warn her, Precious refuses to listen and even becomes angry with Gaone, accusing her of wanting Ebenezer for herself. Gaone’s worst fears are realised when one of Ebenezer’s ex-girlfriends confides in Monty, when she hears that Precious is becoming involved with Ebenezer:

Sannah says that she had sex with him, Gaone. That’s what she told me. And afterwards Ebenezer stood over her here in the shed and he was laughing. And he said, ‘Guess what? I’ve got our good friend the virus. And now you’ve probably got it too. That’s fair, don’t you think? Since it was a bitch female that gave it to me in the first place. I’ll get my revenge on all of you bitches before it takes me out. As many as I can.’ (2006, 103–104)

Gaone is not able to find her sister to warn her in time; however, Precious later tells her that Ebenezer had indeed tried to seduce her, but she had remembered their teacher’s brave confession at the World Aids Day celebrations and had pushed him away from her at the last moment (2006, 119–120). In this way, Miss Diko’s sacrifice is justified by the

end of the narrative, as she herself had said, "If what I have said here is enough to save even one young person's life, then it is worth it to me" (2006, 83).

Gaone's narrative therefore works on two levels to warn young readers about the dangers of HIV/Aids. While her turmoil over her community's prejudices serves to reveal not only their cruelty, but also the danger of their ignorance, her retelling of Miss Diko's experiences seems to highlight the need for openness and honesty in overcoming this ignorance. At the same time, Gaone's personal fears emphasise the notion that HIV/Aids infection poses a risk to everyone, no matter what their beliefs may be about the virus. Certainly, her narrative is characterised by a pervasive sense of fear, compounded by her awareness that HIV can, and has, touched the lives of those she loves. The implied reader of Robson's novel is someone who has been exposed to prejudices and ignorance similar to those of Gaone's community, and who, as a result, may believe himself or herself to be immune to the risk of HIV infection. By showing that HIV/Aids is not something that happens only to immoral, sexually deviant individuals, or members of 'outgroups,' who deserve HIV as a kind of punishment for their wayward behaviour, Robson clearly delineates the dangers of this naivety through Gaone's narrative. Though this kind of deviant character is typified by the villainous Ebenezer, Robson demonstrates to the reader that even moral, innocent characters like Miss Diko, Sannah, Precious and Gaone's mother are at risk.

It is disappointing, then, that Robson appears to undermine this message with the revelation of the identity of Miss Diko's murderer. Gaone realises, after witnessing her burning her blood-stained clothes, that her aunt is responsible for murdering her teacher: "My aunt, the murderer. Yes. My aunt, the killer who had picked up those rocks on the waste ground and hefted them with such violence. My aunt had crushed the life of a gentle teacher and choir mistress" (2006, 117). Gaone does not share her knowledge with anyone, however, and cryptically declares that "there are other kinds of justice. There are punishments far worse than the shame of a police van and the loss of freedom in a locked cell among criminals. Far worse!" (2006, 118). She reveals that, prior to the murder, her aunt had cut her hand whilst chopping vegetables; some days after the discovery of Miss Diko's body, she advises her aunt, seemingly casually, to take care of her wound: "You should keep it bandaged. It is dangerous when it is still not healed. What if someone

else's blood fell on it – someone who was infected with HIV? Their blood would get into your wound. The virus would be able to get right into your bloodstream . . ." (2006, 125). Gaone observes how her aunt, upon hearing this, experiences an "overwhelming terror," and explains with some satisfaction that "this is why I say: there are other kinds of justice. There are punishments both more unbearable and more fitting than the laws and the judges and the courts and the prisons of our country can offer" (2006, 126).

Gaone's aunt's punishment for murdering Miss Diko is therefore the knowledge that she may be infected with HIV. As Gaone knows, her aunt will never submit herself for an Aids test, and will have to live with the "terror" of uncertainty for the rest of her life (2006, 126). This resolution to the novel's central mystery is certainly disturbing in that it seems to suggest that the virus is a just punishment for wicked behaviour, a notion that Robson appears to have been refuting throughout the novel. That Gaone's aunt has, in her eyes, received an unbearable yet justified punishment simply bolsters, rather than discredits, the prejudicial myth that those suffering from HIV/Aids have merely gotten what they deserved.

Despite its dubious conclusion, *Praise Song* is an overtly didactic novel aimed at educating young readers about HIV/Aids, stigma and ignorance. It is difficult to gauge, though, how teenagers may react to the novel: while some may recognise and re-evaluate their own prejudices, Robson's heavy-handed approach may prove tiresome and even condescending to other readers. The subject of Aids awareness is certainly central to the novel (to the point where it encumbers the narrative), and yet, there is no mention of this on the cover: the blurb sums up the novel by describing the murder of Miss Diko and stating that the citizens of Meriting "seem to be unaware that they, in turn, are being stalked by a murderer – a murderer who strikes without mercy or motive and who is beyond the arm of the law" (2006, npg). This "murderer," it transpires, is HIV/Aids: readers who expect the novel to be an exciting thriller or murder mystery will be sorely disappointed. The novel, then, is packaged in a way that conceals its didactic motives, perhaps indicating that the publishers expect readers to be uninterested in a story about HIV/Aids. It has been observed that youth in South Africa are already "regularly being exposed to HIV/AIDS media from a range of different sources" (Kelly 2000, 5) and may not wish to read about such serious matters in the literature they choose for their leisure

time.²⁶ If this is the case, Robson has certainly damaged the didactic intentions of her novel by making HIV/Aids its principal focus, to the extent where the narrative is weighed down by the narrator's constant moralising on the subject.

Van Dijk manages to avoid this shortcoming in his novel by featuring HIV/Aids in such a way that it contributes to the action of the plot, rather than dominating the narrative. *Crossing the Line* is chiefly an uplifting story of a young boy overcoming numerous hardships in order to achieve his dreams. Though this may seem clichéd, van Dijk manages to avoid romanticising or sentimentalising his protagonist's circumstances, and does not patronise his characters or his readers. As a result, his novel manages to maintain its didactic impact throughout.

Crossing the Line is narrated by Themba, a boy in his early teens living in the rural Eastern Cape mountains of Qunu with his younger sister, Nomtha, and their mother. The family is direly poor, having survived on the mother's meagre salary as a farm-worker since their father's disappearance on the Johannesburg mines years before. When Themba's mother loses her job, their situation seems set to worsen still; however, the appearance of Luthando, who claims to be a distant relative of their father's, initially provides the family with some hope. Despite this, Themba and Nomtha take an immediate dislike to Luthando, and are distressed when their mother begins a sexual relationship with him. Months later, their mother is forced to take on a job as a domestic worker in Cape Town in order to support the family, and she leaves the children in Luthando's care. In the meantime, Themba's dream of becoming a soccer star begins to materialise: his soccer team – a group of local boys who meet casually to play together a few times a week – take part in a provincial tournament and he is noticed by a scout based with a club in Cape Town. Soon after, however, disaster strikes when Themba wakes one night to find Luthando, who has returned home drunk after a night of revelry, attempting to molest his sister. Though Nomtha manages to escape, Luthando, in a rage, beats Themba so brutally that he loses consciousness, and revives to discover that Luthando has raped him. Themba and Nomtha flee to Cape Town in search of their mother, from whom they have not heard in several months, only to find her near death in

²⁶ It may be that Robson, or her publishers, hoped her novel would be selected for inclusion in the school syllabus. Certainly, the didactic nature of the text would make it an appealing choice for educators.

a particularly squalid township. The children do their best to help their mother, and in the meantime, Themba contacts the scout he met at the soccer tournament, who eventually asks him to play for his club. At the novel's close, Themba is playing on the national squad, and has discovered that he is HIV-positive.

Similarly to *Praise Song*, there is a marked emphasis in the novel on the reactions of the local communities to those suffering with HIV/Aids. From his experiences both in Qunu and Cape Town, Themba realises that many people are fearful and even ignorant of the disease: stigma and prejudice are rife in both the rural and urban settings. In Qunu, there is a certain secretiveness surrounding the virus, and no-one seems to want to talk about its consequences. Themba's friend, Sipho, conceals the fact that his mother has died of an Aids-related illness by not allowing anyone into their house, leaving school, and becoming a casual labourer in order to support his three younger siblings (2006, 52). Some time before this revelation, Themba is shocked when he hears his neighbour admit that her daughter died of Aids: "Mama Zanele is the first person in my life who uses this word," he explains (2006, 31).

When Themba and Nomtha arrive in Cape Town, they are faced, for the first time, with outright discrimination when they realise how the neighbours have been treating their ailing mother. Initially, Themba cannot understand why no-one is willing to help them, and is hurt by their reactions:

He [their neighbour] does not answer and only shoves the boy back into his hut. Then he barks at us in a hoarse voice: 'That woman must leave here!'

'That woman is our mother!' I am indignant. 'Why have none of you helped her?'

'That's her own fault,' he croaks again and slams the rickety door shut. Nomtha and I look at Mother in distress, but she has only lowered her head during this altercation. (2006, 97)

Finally, a young girl living nearby explains to Themba that the community has shunned their mother because she is suffering from Aids. Themba is initially shocked: this is the first he has heard of his mother's illness. At the same time, however, he realises that her HIV status does not justify the behaviour of her neighbours:

Why, for heaven's sake, is it necessary to have all this secrecy, this silence, this rejection, all the hype and drama as though it is not a disease but some evil curse? If our Mother now needs one thing above all else, it is love and caring from others. Although it is such a terrible truth, I thank God that He has let us come here to Mother, just in time. (2006, 98)

Themba's descriptions of the community's reactions to HIV/Aids achieve similar ends to Gaone's portrayal of Meriting in *Praise Song*. Unlike Robson's novel, however, *Crossing the Line*, through its conclusion, indicates that such attitudes are beginning to change. Themba's mother's neighbours eventually begin to accept her and offer their assistance to the family; Nomtha becomes a volunteer at a local Aids shelter for children;²⁷ and, in Qunu, Themba learns that "Mama Zanele has even started a group of women who look after others who are sick because of AIDS" (2006, 127). The inclusion of these developments invests the novel with a more positive and hopeful conclusion, and even suggests to young readers how they might become involved in Aids outreach programmes.

Themba's growth as a character, however, is the most significant and didactically effective aspect of the novel. Certainly, *Crossing the Line* can be viewed as a *Bildungsroman* in that it traces Themba's development from childhood into manhood – a process which is catalysed, rather than complicated, by his rape and subsequent infection with HIV. Indeed, Themba comes to view his rape by Luthando as a kind of rite of passage:

I accept this pain as though it is a part of my *ulwaluko* – my initiation from boyhood into being a man, which I will experience later in the ritual circumcision of our tradition. Then I will shout it in the presence of my peers. Now I only whisper, but my whole naked body to the tips of my fingers and toes is filled with its spirit, 'Ndiyindoda . . . ndiyindoda . . . a man . . . I am a man!' (2006, 77)

²⁷ The shelter Nomtha works for, "House of Children," is based on the non-governmental organisation HOKISA (Homes for Kids in South Africa), of which van Dijk is the co-founder. The author's royalties from *Crossing the Line* have been donated to this organisation (2006, 147).

This experience, coupled with the hardships he endures in Cape Town, instils in his character a sense of bravery and pride that enables him, at the climax of the narrative, to declare his HIV status at a press conference following his first match with the national squad. The novel ends rather abruptly at this point, leaving the reader to form his or her own impressions: interestingly, van Dijk does not try to force a particular reaction from his readers here. Themba does not attempt to explain to the reporters that he contracted the virus through being raped, a revelation that would have been likely to elicit sympathy and set Themba up as an innocent victim. Instead, he departs quietly, leaving the reporters “discussing my statement wildly with each other”: some applaud his bravery, while others declare that “Themba has abused the sport of soccer as a platform to air his personal problems” (2006, 139). Neither reaction is validated by the author, who trusts, perhaps, that the reader will reach the desired conclusion after having engaged with Themba’s narrative and sympathised with his circumstances.

Both *Praise Song* and *Crossing the Line* are undeniably pedagogical in nature and, while their messages may differ slightly, Robson and van Dijk have attempted to achieve their ends by constructing situations to which their readers can relate. It is fair to assume, then, given the narrative situations of the novels, that both authors hope to appeal to a black readership familiar with the circumstances of their protagonists. Certainly, van Dijk’s first novel was written specifically with the intention of “representing[ing] the voices of the people of the township” (Chubb and van Dijk 2001, para. 5) and it is clear that *Crossing the Line* was written with this same intention in mind. Both authors expect their readers to recognise that the prejudices, conflicts and challenges represented in their novels are present in their own lives; by featuring protagonists with which the authors hope these readers will identify and sympathise, they are prompting them to change or at least interrogate their own circumstances and attitudes. In the case of these novels, as with many others dealing with the issue of HIV/Aids,

the reader is invited to participate in this learning process, not only in the sense of being confronted with facts as well as misconceptions about HIV and AIDS but also in terms of the attitudes, prejudices, rejections, fears, myths that circulate about the disease within the family, among friends, within the school and the community at large as well as ways to overcome or rise above

such enormous stumbling blocks. (van Maltzan 2006, 100)

It is clear, then, why young adult fiction has become such a significant tool in cultivating a positive and well-informed attitude towards HIV/Aids amongst South Africa's youth.

* * *

Inggs has observed that “[a]s South African society has become less preoccupied with the immediate issues of racial inequality, writers have become less concerned with presenting a didactic message to their readers, and have focused on wider themes using more varied narrative techniques” (2006, 28). Certainly, this is true of many of the South African young adult authors who have chosen to adopt the problem novel format for their narratives. This sub-genre has allowed these authors more freedom in content and style, and afforded them the opportunity to explore issues that were previously considered taboo in literature for teenagers without necessarily imposing a moral or message on their readers. Some authors, however, have appropriated this format for didactic purposes, having found the intimate, first-person narration typical of its construction ideal in educating readers about broader social issues.

Sarah Britten chose to utilise the freedoms offered by this sub-genre in her two novels, which explore topical South African issues through the eyes of their rather sardonic teenage protagonists. While her novels may not have an obvious didactic message, they do assume a very particular ideological stance, one which clearly delineates a white, middle-class audience. Britten's protagonists introduce a strong element of humour in both novels, a device which effectively satirises some of the more farcical elements of South African culture. Meanwhile, van Dijk and Robson both utilise the sub-genre's typical characteristics to emphasise their didactic agendas. Having realised that HIV/Aids is a very real and potentially threatening issue for South Africa's youth, these authors chose to use their novels to contribute towards education and awareness, in what they hope will be a more effective and immediate approach than that of other media.

Though contemporary realism has been an established mode of writing for young adults for more than forty years, local authors have distinguished their novels from overseas offerings by emphasising the distinctly South African context of their narratives. Whether it be through a focus on topical social issues, or simply the use of colloquial slang, South African authors have made this genre their own.

Conclusion

The changes in South Africa's political structure over the last century have had a marked impact on locally produced fiction for young adults. South African authors writing for teenagers have inevitably been influenced by the changes taking place in their society, and the impact of such changes on the attitudes and concerns of these authors is evident in the didactic 'messages' they wish to impart to their young readers. This thesis has sought to trace the rapid shift in the didactic agendas of young adult authors through a study of the literature produced by them during the last two decades, as South Africa itself underwent a dramatic political transformation.

In Chapter One, it was established that in the decades before apartheid policies began to be dismantled, issues of politics and race were notably absent from young adult fiction. Authors of the first half of the twentieth century, for the most part, avoided these topics, as they were considered inappropriate reading for young people; instead, fiction produced for young adults usually concerned itself with bushveld adventures and historical dramas. With a few exceptions, these novels did not question the limited and essentially prejudiced notions of racial difference. These ideas bolstered apartheid ideology which, like racial inequality, was never challenged in young adult fiction.

By the 1970s, however, the participation of young people in the struggle against apartheid alerted authors to the fact that while most of their readers were white, they could no longer afford to remain ignorant of issues of politics and race. Slowly at first, these authors began to introduce their readers to alternative ways of thinking about the racial other, and in doing so, subtly undermined the principles upon which apartheid was established. By the 1980s, novels which challenged – or at least attempted to challenge – apartheid policies proliferated. In the second chapter, it was argued, through a study of a selection of these novels, that this was achieved with varying degrees of success by authors who, at times, were ambivalent in their own views of apartheid policies or who struggled to adopt a convincing point of view from which to present their didactic 'message.' Others who were more zealous in their criticism of the government found that

their novels were swiftly banned in South Africa. However these novels were received, their message was nevertheless clear: apartheid policies were no longer acceptable.

The advent of democracy in 1994 brought about another major shift in the concerns of young adult authors. As demonstrated in Chapter Three, many of the novels and stories produced during this period of political transition are undeniably optimistic in tone: they look forward to a future where all South African citizens are treated as equals, and posit idealised relationships between those of different races who, for so long, were kept separate from one another. These writers are preoccupied with the notions of healing, of moving forward and leaving the past behind, and of nation-building in a climate of racial harmony. Some writers took a more cautious, sceptical approach, and though they participated in the celebration of a new democratic nation, they questioned whether decades of racial inequality, ingrained prejudice and violence could be so easily forgotten in the realisation of a 'rainbow nation.' The establishment of democracy and equality did, however, afford those who had previously been silenced the opportunity to have their voices heard. Some of these authors, for example Kagiso Lesego Molohe, chose to revisit the years of apartheid in their novels and, in doing so, told stories that were silenced in the past and emphasised the importance of a shared, communal history to a new generation of readers.

By the turn of the millennium, the didactic agendas of young adult authors were once again undergoing a shift. These authors began to explore the possibilities offered by a free society: no longer feeling compelled to speak out against racial inequality, or encourage readers to participate in the building of a 'rainbow nation,' they began to experiment with sub-genres of young adult fiction that had long since been established overseas. The sub-genre of the teenage problem novel has proven immensely popular with local authors; however, as illustrated in the fourth and final chapter, these authors did not simply reproduce the narratives of their overseas counterparts, but rather adapted the form of the problem novel to suit a South African context. The novels of Sarah Britten, for example, are distinctly South African in content, and while the author seems to have no overt didactic agenda, she explores the issues facing South African teenagers raised in a democratic society. Other authors, meanwhile, have utilised the intimate, first-

person narration characteristic of the problem novel to teach their readers about broader social problems, most notably HIV/Aids and the dangers of community stigma.

It is clear, then, that socio-political transformation in South Africa has had a palpable influence on the didactic 'messages' contained within young adult novels, and that this is particularly evident in the literature produced since the final years of apartheid. As South Africa continues to undergo changes into the twenty-first century, the didactic function of young adult fiction is certain to develop as well.

Appendix A:

Illustrations to Chapter One

Below are a few examples of how publishers package novels aimed at a young adult audience. Bright colours, unusual fonts, stylised photographs and cartoon illustrations are commonly used to indicate, as well as attract, a teenage readership.

Fig. 1: *The Hidden Life of Hanna Why* by Marita van der Vyver (Tafelberg, 2007).

Fig. 2: *Welcome to the Martin Tudhope Show!* by Sarah Britten (Tafelberg, 2005).

Fig. 3: *Superzero* by Darrel Bristow-Bovey (Tafelberg, 2006).

Fig. 4: *Journey to Jo'burg* by Beverley Naidoo (HarperCollins, 1999).

Fig. 5: *The Mending Season* by Kagiso Lesego Molope (Oxford UP, 2005).

Fig 6: *The Worst Year of My Life – So Far* by Sarah Britten (Tafelberg, 2000).



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

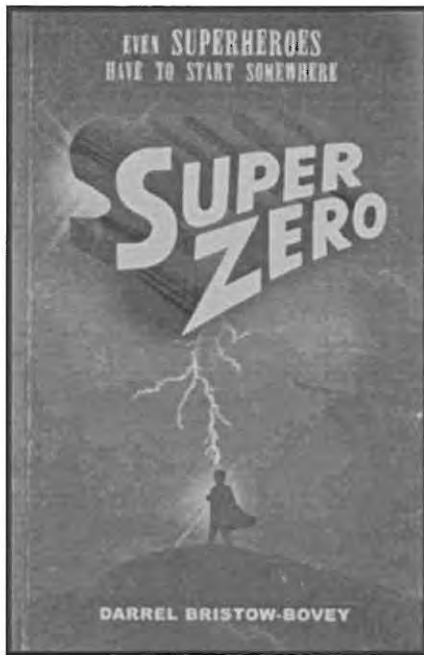


Fig. 3

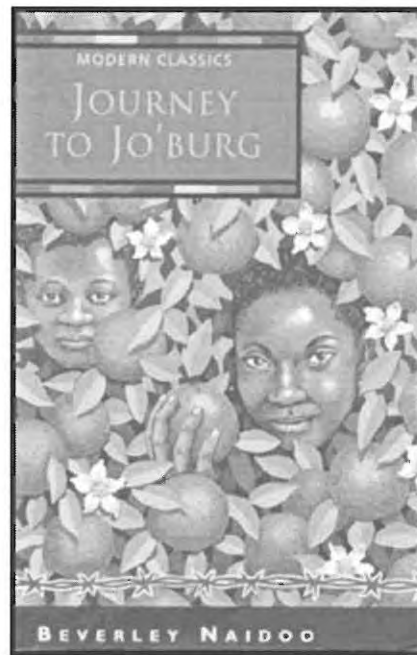


Fig. 4

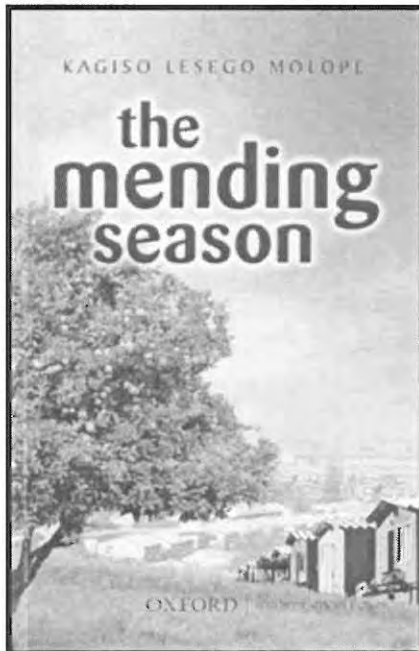


Fig. 5



Fig. 6

Appendix B:

Illustrations to Chapter Two

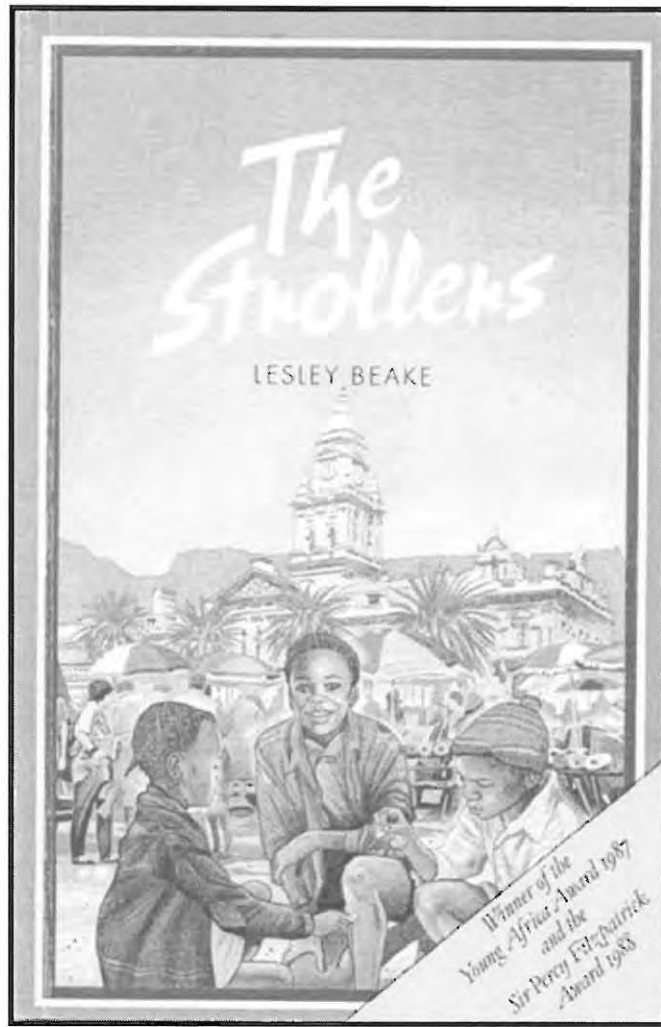


Fig. 1: Front cover of *The Strollers* by Lesley Beake, which depicts the novel's main characters as black.
(Maskew Miller Longman, 2005)

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