“How can you build a nation without telling its stories?”: Transgressive, Testimonial Fiction in Post-TRC South Africa

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

Master of Arts

at

Rhodes University

by

Keenan Collett

June 2019

Supervisor: Dr Sue Marais

Abstract

Transgressive fiction refers to works of literature that are fundamentally concerned with the provocation of their reader. This effect is typically accomplished by authors crafting novels that feature upsetting content: extreme violence, taboo sex acts, and drug abuse – often narrated by protagonists who are either the recipients or enactors of violence and trauma. Given their rootedness in familiar social settings, these works of fiction manage to relay critiques of their particular societies. Over the past three decades, transgressive fiction has amassed a small critical reception with focus predominantly directed toward texts from the United States and the United Kingdom.

In an attempt to build on existing scholarship, this thesis explores recent and disturbing works of South African literature in order to gauge whether the markers of transgressive fiction are as easily applicable in a new national setting. K. Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents,* Kgebetli Moele's *The Book of the Dead* and Jason Staggie's *Risk* form the basis of the discussion. Each novel exposes a concern with social developments within a 'post-apartheid' South Africa, and codes its respective critique in narratives concerned with the violation of consent, as depicted in profoundly unsettling ways. The spread of publication dates across the three novels also allows for an examination of morphing social critique from 2000-2013.

Acknowledgments

This thesis could not have been completed without the support of the following individuals:

Dr Sue Marais, my supervisor and academic role model, for exhibiting supernatural patience and whose probing questions caused me to rethink not only aspects of this thesis, but many facets of my personal life.

My parents and siblings, for their unwavering love through the best and worst of times.

Various members of my department for their support throughout my university career. These include Dr Minesh Dass, Prof. Mike Marais, Karen, Yolisa, Michael, Chelsey, Keagan and Beth. Your assistance – whatever form it took – is and always will be greatly appreciated.

Prof. Paul Walters, for providing an enduring friendship and being an unshakeable pillar of support.

Murray and Darren, whose constant friendship and intellectual engagement has sent me down many intriguing paths.

Emma, my beloved partner, for each reassuring touch, every tear wiped, and whom I trust will understand why language fails me now.

The financial assistance from the Mellon Focus Area Scholarship towards this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to Rhodes University or the donor.

The financial assistance from the Mandela Rhodes Foundation towards this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to Rhodes University or the donor.

Table of Contents

Chapter I
Rainbow-Faded Finger Trap:
Locating Transgressive Fiction in Post-TRC South Africa

> Attempting to achieve subversive transgression within a literary text that does not first clearly posit the boundaries that are being transgressed would be pointless, on the order of attempting to play tennis without a net. (Booker 208)

> For there is no logic, no body of evidence by which decorum can plead for and justify itself. It is the essence of decorum to be tacit. Decorum marks off a domain about which there shall be silence, and preserves silence about how the boundaries of that domain are determined. Decorum can therefore be gestured towards but not codified. Once questioned, it turns to smoke.
>
> (Coetzee 50–51)

1.1) Introduction

In 1993, Michael Silverblatt published an article in the *Los Angeles Times* titled "SHOCK APPEAL/Who Are These Writers, and Why Do They Want to Hurt Us?: The New Fiction of Transgression". In his article, Silverblatt drew attention to a rising trend in American fiction, one which "has violation at its core: violation of norms, of humanistic enterprise, of the body" (para. 2). Since Silverblatt identified the genre "transgressive fiction", various attempts have been made to assemble authors beneath its banner, and some of these authors stretch as far back as to Euripides (Gardner 54). A number of articles and texts from around the world have attempted to describe and study what is an essentially nebulous form of literature. As transgression is not a concept exclusively owned by any nation, time period or culture, literary transgression must have a global presence, manifesting differently in individual societies. That said, there exists an irreconcilable tension at the heart of discussing transgressive fiction, and this is the same tension demonstrated between the two epigraphs above: transgressive fiction necessarily exceeds the boundaries of decorum (among others), yet attempting to identify those boundaries can be as difficult as catching smoke. Molly Hoey has described transgressive fiction best in likening it to a finger trap: a tension-based puzzle that resolves itself if one could only relax ("The Generic Veronica" 162).

This thesis inserts itself into the unfolding discourse regarding transgressive fiction by examining three South African novels as unique and contemporary examples of this contested literary form. It is crucial, then, to construct a clear historical and theoretical framework from within which this thesis may be read. This opening chapter will provide such a framework by presenting an overview of transgressive fiction with its identificatory, categorical and ethical dilemmas; discussing the particular importance of studying violent testimonial fiction in South

Africa following the Truth and Reconciliation Commission; and examining the effect of these two concerns on readers' empathy whilst reading the texts.

1.2) Transgression: (Re)Crossing the Uncrossable

As transgressive fiction is a disputed literary form, it is paramount that a historical and theoretical exploration considers both the scholarship surrounding literary transgression as well as the fictional texts. As a term, "transgression" provides a wide range of interpretations, which severely hampers any ensuing exploration of its presence in fiction. By "transgressive fiction", a very specific form of prose is invoked – one which has experienced a peculiar treatment is academia, if considered at all. This first section is arranged by scholarship: first analysing critical writing on literary transgression prior to Silverblatt's 1993 article and coining of the term, then proceeding to discuss the article and its implications, and finally exploring subsequent criticism. Though Silverblatt's writing does not feature the depth or range of that by academic critics such as M. Keith Booker and Robin Mookerjee, its publication in the *Los Angeles Times* ensured that a wider audience became aware of this particularly curious literary form. By structuring the section to include both scholarship as well as texts, some core literary aspects – such as the carnivalesque or Menippean satire – and their recurrence in transgressive fiction and academic commentary on transgressive texts can be mapped.

It seems prudent to discuss the varied sources of theoretical writing that inform this section. In comparison with other groupings of literature – such as crime fiction, horror, and chick-lit. – transgressive fiction lacks academic attention. Whilst one can find dedicated texts or edited collections of essays examining an author's oeuvre, a survey across countries and time periods is clearly underexplored.[1] Given the aforementioned ambiguity surrounding the word "transgression", the term itself requires explication. In his study of offensive art, Anthony Julius traces the etymology of "transgression", its roots and subsequent transformations through use in various contexts. First, "transgression" possessed strong religious connotations; invoked to describe committing sin against God (17). The word was then secularised during the seventeenth century and its meaning expanded to account for any disobedience of the law – be it legalistic or based in scripture (18). By the end of the seventeenth century, the concept enlarged further, referring to both the violation of a rule/principle, as well as a deviation from correct behaviour. This indistinctness is aptly described by Julius: "Transgressions thus reach up to the most serious

[1] Naomi Mandel's monograph *Bret Easton Ellis: American Psycho, Glamorama, Lunar Park* and *Novels of the Contemporary Extreme* – which she co-edited with Alain-Philippe Durand – are excellent examples of the author-focused and edited collection approaches to transgressive fiction.

of misdeeds and reach down to the most inconsequential of solecisms. A 'transgression' is the name of the worst offences and of any offence" (18). He concludes by summarising the multiple interpretations of "transgression" thus:

> Four essential meanings emerge, then: the denying of doctrinal truths; rule-breaking, including the violating of principles, conventions, pieties or taboos; the giving of serious offence; and the exceeding, erasing, or disordering of physical or conceptual boundaries. (19)

The author's discussion then shifts to a fundamental aspect of transgression: its transitive property. This refers to the notion that one transgresses *against* another, and therefore "[i]t is not the rule that is violated, but the person" (18). The implication of transgressing *against* another is that the act intentionally seeks to harm, and is made to do so aggressively. This thesis's further expounding on transgressive fiction will reveal that notions of injury and aggression remain fundamental.

Extending beyond Julius's etymological mapping, Michel Foucault – arguably one of the most prominent theorists (and supporters) of transgression – assists in considering the social implications of such an act. In particular, he (re)emphasises the instability inherent in prescribing a particular definition: "transgression incessantly crosses and recrosses a line which closes up behind it in a wave of extremely short duration, and thus it is made to return once more right to the horizon of the uncrossable" ("A Preface to Transgression" 34). Foucault is careful not to posit the relationship between taboo – the line – and transgression as dialectical. Rather, the taboo is described as a relational entity without an absolute identity, which can only be sensed in the act of transgression (McNay 43). The act of transgression and the boundary are dependent upon one another – each requiring the other in a form of relative co-definition. As a result, transgressions are fluid; ever-changing and arguably impossible to permanently identify. As time proceeds, particular behaviours and attitudes may be phased out from the illegal and abhorred and promoted to the legitimate and desirable. This concern will be returned to at various points, but for now it is integral to emphasise that fluidity does not imply unknowability. The fact that "transgression" is an ever-evolving term in a society does not translate to the society being unable to recognise its occurrence and essential violence. Foucault's discussion of the concept is intended to "remain free from notions of scandal or the subversive, anything negative", and is therefore separate from the moral assessments that typically follow a transgression (Jenks 91). Those moral assessments are integral to any discussion of transgressive fiction, however, as the reception of such texts has historically included moral outrage, with the publication of *American Psycho* being perhaps the most well-known and exemplary case in this regard (see Murphet 65–71).

Given that transgression incites such negative reactions from those encountering it, some justification for the practice is necessary. Julius maps three arguments that can be employed to defend transgressive works.[2] These three defences – employed individually or in combination – are labelled "the estrangement defence", "the canonic defence" and "the formalist defence". The first is the most important when discussing transgressive fiction, as the estrangement defence argues that

> it is the job of art to shock us into grasping some truth about ourselves, or about the world, or about art itself, and that the one way in which does this is to alienate us from our preconceptions, by making the familiar strange and the unquestioned problematic. (26)

This defence emphasises the artwork's ability to reveal a society's communal limitations, and holds significant implications for the later discussion on readers' empathy. The canonic defence is also applicable to transgressive fiction, albeit to a lesser degree, since it seeks to "subdue the audience's shock, by putting these works in the context of other (once) shocking artworks" (42). The central idea underpinning the canonic defence is that new forms of literature are always shocking upon their debut, as they are measured against the contemporary understanding of what constitutes the 'literary'. Later, these shocking texts are folded into the new understanding and become, in a sense, canonical. This second defence bears a peculiar relationship with transgressive fiction, as such texts often attempt to defy genre categorisation or classification in any kind of canon yet are often listed together within the broad and nebulous field of "transgressive fiction". The result is that these novels simultaneously elude canonisation within genres with far-reaching histories, but are also grouped together on the basis of this evasiveness. One can therefore trace a tradition of transgressive writing from the Marquis de Sade, through Anthony Burgess and Chuck Palahniuk, to Jason Staggie.

A detailed academic survey of early transgressive fiction is Peter Stallybrass and Allon White's *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*. Despite its title, the study is more concerned with the politics than the poetics, and thus rarely applies itself to thorough examinations of the works of writers such as Jonathan Swift, John Dryden and Ben Jonson. Rather, Stallybrass and White opt for a thorough examination of social transgression from the seventeenth to the end of the nineteenth century, centred on concepts such as the grotesque, authorship, and intra-city spaces of transgression. They begin with the assertion that hierarchies of low/high permeate most prominently into four general domains: psychic forms, the human body, geographical space, and

[2] Julius does cite a literary example of these defences, as they were variously employed by Salman Rushdie in response to the backlash against *The Satanic Verses* (30–31).

the social order (3). The authors claim that the interlinked nature of these domains is revealed when the hierarchy of one is transgressed and ramifications appear in the other domains. As "vertical extremities frame all other discursive elaborations", understanding the high/low extremes as they pertain to the four domains makes it possible to "lay bare a major framework of discourse" (3). Stallybrass and White state that extremities not only structure one another, but that either end also "depends upon and invades the other in certain historical moments, to carry political charge through aesthetic and moral polarities" (3–4). The authors explicitly state that there are various "highs" and "lows" whose respective definition is dependent upon the particular historical perspective, and that the terms are not symmetrical or equal. This imbalance in power can be challenged by the low through the posing of counterviews that invert an established hierarchy. The "low" is revealed as a site of contradiction in which one finds "a striking ambivalence to the representations of the lower strata [… since] they are both reviled and desired" (4). The "top" is then engaged in a psychological dependence upon the low – or "the Other" – who are socially oppressed and excluded.

The theorist of central concern to Stallybrass and White is Mikhail Bakhtin, specifically his 1965 study *Rabelais and His World* and the concept of the carnivalesque. In his analysis, Bakhtin focuses on the pre-Renaissance carnival in European society, specifically as a site in which repressive control over the body was relinquished and lower-class individuals were given *carte blanche* to criticise their rulers. The carnival is, for Bakhtin, a mode of understanding which "is both a populist utopian vision of the world seen from below and a festive critique, through the inversion of hierarchy, of the 'high' culture" (7). The speech pattern inherent to the carnival is of particular importance to Stallybrass and White, a type of speech that is "coarse", "familiar" and "excluded from official discourse", and which may be employed "for parody, subversive humour and inversion" (8). The carnival's throng of bodies, its "corpulent excess", is made to symbolise "cosmic, social, topographical and linguistic elements of the world" by means of grotesque realism:

> Grotesque realism images the human body as multiple, bulging, over- or under-sized, protuberant and incomplete. The openings and orifices of this carnival body are emphasized, not its closure and finish. It is an image of impure corporeal bulk with its orifices (mouth, flared nostrils, anus) yawning wide and its lower regions (belly, legs, feet, buttocks and genitals) given priority over its upper regions (head, 'spirit', reason). (8–9)

Bearing in mind the fluidity of transgression, it is fitting that Stallybrass and White describe the image of grotesque realism as "always becoming, it is a mobile and hybrid creature, disproportionate, exorbitant, outgrowing all limits, obscenely decentred and off-balance" (9).

Bakhtin argues that, following the Renaissance, the carnival was prettified and "incorporated into commercial or civic display or regarded as a purely negative phenomenon" (9).

Bakhtin's conceptualisation of the carnivalesque has not gone unchallenged, however, and Terry Eagleton draws attention to the carnival's status as a licensed event; its essence being a "permissible rupture of hegemony" (13).[3] Stallybrass and White also warn against essentialising the carnival and its politics, and instead argue that "the politics of carnival cannot be resolved outside of a close historical examination of particular conjectures: there is no a priori revolutionary vector to carnival and transgression" (16). This is a significant suggestion, as it gestures toward two necessary components in discussions regarding transgressive fiction. First, the act is *permitted*, and therefore cannot be conceived of as radical. When considering transgressive fiction, this translates to the novels' existence as printed works of literature – products approved by a publishing house, and distributed by various sellers in the hope of deriving profit from their sales.[4] Second, the "close historical examination of particular conjectures" emphasises the need for an examination of sociohistorical context in order to map the environment in which the novels are produced, and which they address. Couching any discussion of transgressive fiction in relation to these two factors is essential, as they prohibit any consideration of such texts as perpetually and universally offensive.

Booker's *Techniques of Subversion in Modern Literature* proceeds from Stallybrass and White, developing on the notion of the carnivalesque in literature as well as linking it to the concept of abjection. In his introductory chapter "Is Literary Transgression Stupid Stuff?", Booker foregrounds his interest in literature as a source of and force for political action and dedicates an early segment to a general description of the "troubling images" in modern literature. Whilst aware that there is an impulse to valorise this writing as "that [which] will inspire and equip us to effect transgression in the real world", Booker warns that these images can equally be interpreted in the opposite way. That is to say, transgressive imagery can "help us tolerate injustices, sublimating our transgressive impulses into literature while pursuing a course of political quietism in the real world" (5). Booker's ability to maintain a grounded perspective is perhaps best exemplified in the following assessment:

> [E]ven the most transgressive works of literature do not in general immediately send their readers into the streets carrying banners and shouting slogans.

[3] My later discussion of Molly Hoey's scholarship will explore this notion of licensed subversion in relation to transgressive fiction, specifically.

[4] The model sketched here refers, of course, to the traditional publication and distribution of physical books. The influence of the internet – specifically, the ability to upload material online without the approval or editing of a publication house – is a subject that, though deeply intriguing, is beyond the ambit of this thesis.

> Transgressive literature works more subtly, by gradually chipping away at certain modes of thinking that contribute to the perpetuation of oppressive political structures. (4)

Booker's approach then builds upon Stallybrass and White: electing to focus on literary transgression as not simply reader-affecting, critical of the institutions and social forces at play in the world beyond the text, but also not so enamoured with the concept so as to overstate its relationship with politics grounded in the reader's world.

When selecting his texts, Booker considers the presence of the carnivalesque and Menippean satire to be indicators of "transgressive energies". Although the carnivalesque has been explored, it is integral that Menippean satire be discussed as well, as it recurs later in Robin Mookerjee's scholarship, as well as in Dambudzo Marechera's writing on African literature. Bakhtin examines Menippean satire thoroughly in his *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, but for the purposes of this discussion it is necessary only to emphasise the genre's incorporation of "slum naturalism", "scandal scenes", transformation, and a focus on contemporary and topical issues.[5] "Slum naturalism" – a rather disparaging phrase – refers to setting the satire "on the high road, in brothels, in the den of thieves, in taverns, marketplaces, prisons, in the erotic orgies of secret cults, and so forth", resulting in a collision "with worldly evil, depravity, baseness, and vulgarity in their most extreme expression" (115). Scandal scenes operate similarly, and are defined in equally broad terms:

> [E]ccentric behavior, inappropriate speeches and performances, that is, all sorts of violations of the generally accepted and customary course of events and the established norms of behavior and etiquette, including manners of speech. […] Scandals and eccentricities destroy the epic and tragic wholeness of the world, they make a breach in the stable, normal ("seemly") course of human affairs and events, they free human behavior from the norms and motivations that predetermine it. (117)

Booker claims that transformations are central to Menippean satire, as "to be transformed into something that formerly seemed totally alien to itself interrogates the boundary between self and other, challenging the validity of even that fundamental duality" (54). The final primary characteristic of Menippean satire – and the literary works in its tradition – is specificity, with texts being "intensely involved with the sociohistorical moment in which they are produced" (67). These four concerns, which will recur in later chapters on South African fiction, assist in the orientating of transgressive fiction: its setting in seedy and violent locations, its characters' unusual and often illegal behaviour, the transformation of the protagonist, and its interrogation of social issues.

[5] Much of Bakhtin's discussion is largely historical and does not require recapitulation here. That information and the additional aspects of Menippean satire can be found in *Problems of Doestoevsky's Poetics* (112–22).

Treading the same ground as Stallybrass and White, the author reveals an awareness of the carnival's ambiguous and licensed nature, and therefore an awareness of transgressive fiction's potential to "reinforce the very norms it purports to oppose" (7). In addition, Booker argues that the position of Theodore Adorno and other Frankfurt School critics – that "radically experimental 'high' modernist art contained a genuinely subversive potential" – is undermined by those very texts being canonised and considered "great works" (8).[6] Transgressive energies are also appropriated by bourgeois society and transformed into amusing, popular entertainment, with terms such as "avant-garde" becoming "thoroughly inscribed in mass culture" (9). After listing these concerns, Booker asserts that genuine transgression *is* possible although "difficult and […] (in terms of literature) we should examine ostensibly transgressive works very closely for hidden complicities with the powers-that-be" (9–10). The critic must approach transgressive texts and read them "in a manner that highlights and emphasizes transgressive elements" (10). The importance placed on the reader recurs throughout the study, with the author claiming that "in cases of literary transgression, much of the transgressive energy must come from the reader" (15). Describing Marxism, feminism and deconstruction as "transgressive critical movements", Booker identifies his work as "multiple" and therefore not identifiable with any single critical approach. Simultaneously, he refers to a point of debate that I discuss at the end of this section: "It is also true that any attempt to take multiple political stances is in danger of degenerating into the taking of no stance at all" (12). Booker's approach to each text is therefore tailored according to their individual transgressive energies, and (like Stallybrass and White) he employs a broad definition of transgression "as the disruption of hierarchies, taxonomies, or limiting systems of all kinds" (12).

Also similar to Stallybrass and White is Booker's concern with the methods of categorisation and classification used by the dominant group to negatively define and structure the Other. As such, the carnival's emphasis on sex, excrement and death provides a heuristic that reveals the division between that which is essentially human – regardless of class, race, gender, etc. – and the "fundamental factitiousness of all systems of rationalization for the exclusion or oppression of particular marginal groups" (13). He is clear that the carnival is employed metaphorically and being linked with Julia Kristeva's conception of abjection, claiming that the concepts "represent two different (potentially transgressive) reminders of the aspects of life that dominant culture systematically seeks to repress" (14). Though many of the texts in *Techniques of*

[6] Booker seems oblivious to his own participation in this process by publishing a critical study of transgression in fiction which focusses on, among others, Virginia Woolf, Geoffrey Chaucer, Thomas Pynchon and James Joyce.

Subversion in Modern Literature do not fit the later definition of transgressive fiction, the author does make a useful attempt at distinguishing between it and postmodern fiction, "though the two categories are highly correlated" (15). Labelling a text transgressive is also to wrestle with the categorical process that these novels typically undergo upon publication and first review. Put differently, one must contest with the work being an example of postmodern, queer, or literature of a specific nationality – grand, overarching labels – in order to discuss the novel as transgressive.

In 1993, two years after Booker's study was published, Silverblatt's article appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*. Despite being limited by its form and therefore unable to reach the depth and rigour of the above scholarship, the piece reinvigorated transgressive fiction by providing it with a title. The coining of "transgressive fiction" provided not only a moniker, but also created a productive space in which to have more detailed debates regarding what should or should not be considered its constituents. In the article, the Marquis de Sade and William Burroughs are identified as key influences on a rising trend of transgressive fiction emerging out of the United States.[7] Silverblatt also reveals an association with Foucault's writing on the subject:

> The underlying idea of transgressive thinking (as derived from Foucault) is that knowledge is no longer to be found through the oppositions of dialectical reasoning. Instead, knowledge is found at the limits of experience. The body becomes the locus for the possibility of knowledge. (para. 15)

The content deployed in transgressive fiction – and particularly by the authors the article discusses – may include, but is not limited to, acts of sexual assault, paedophilia, necrophilia, extreme violence, bestiality, and drug abuse. As a result, the article lists fifteen authors whose work constitutes transgressive fiction (para. 18). Certain names on the list are recognised as authors fundamental to expanding transgressive fiction beyond Burroughs, such as Dennis Cooper, Kathy Acker, Will Self and Bret Easton Ellis. Other names, such as David Foster Wallace, seem more out-of-place.[8] Silverblatt proceeds to clearly state, as Booker did, that transgressive fiction is constrained by its form and thus not the revolutionary item for which it may be mistaken. He proceeds to claim that whilst transgressive fiction employs "the trappings of sex that previously seemed dangerous", one must remember that "reading fiction, even transgressive fiction, is perhaps the safest sex of all" (para. 20). The most valuable insight provided by Silverblatt arises in his distinguishing between Ellis's *American Psycho* and Anne Rice's fiction, of which the latter

[7] Silverblatt dedicates the subsequent paragraphs to discussing Sade and does not return to Burroughs at any point in the article. This elision is, in my opinion, to the article's detriment.

[8] Some authors have not been discussed as I have not read their work. These authors are Jeannette Winterson, William T. Vollman, Lynne Tillman, Joel Rose, Catherine Texier, Mary Gaitskill, Stephen Beachy, Steve Erickson, and Karen Joy Fowler.

"locates transgression in the supernatural realm, the work is as distanced as a Regency Romance, even the most shocking violations are rendered in the gassy, swooning rhetoric of a bodice ripper" (para. 22). It is this distinction that vitally informs the type of transgressive fiction of concern to this thesis. Unlike the work of Pynchon, Dryden, Woolf, and other authors under study in pre-1993 scholarship, transgressive fiction – as distinguished by Silverblatt – does not allow for a distance between the representation of transgression and the reader. The use of a flat, affectless style and the locating of events within a social realist setting provides a jarring effect on the reader. The article thus distinguishes between the false transgressor (Rice), who "wants to give us an experience of virtual-reality" that "underlines the fantasy element of the experience", and the real transgressor (Ellis), who "will not feed our yearning for fantasy and distance" (para. 24). What is fundamental here is the transformation of the text into a hostile object and, as later scholarship argues, one that is concerned with negatively disrupting the psycho-somatic state of its reader.

Scholarship succeeding Silverblatt's article tends to continue to focus on the authors he mentioned in 1993: American and European writers who emerged and came into prominence in the late-twentieth century, such as Chuck Palahniuk (who debuted four years after Silverblatt's article), Ellis, Welsh, Acker and Burroughs. Over a six-year span, *Fight Club*, *Trainspotting* and *American Psycho* were adapted into feature films that not only performed well financially, and therefore experienced broad exposure, but also undoubtedly stimulated debate regarding transgressive fiction. These film adaptations also resounded powerfully with audiences, either positively in the case of *Trainspotting* or controversially in the cases of *Fight Club* and *American Psycho*.[9] Undeniably, the cinema audience found the subject matter to be affecting, and it is in the wake of this increased interest that Robin Mookerjee and Molly Hoey's scholarship emerges. Mookerjee's *Transgressive Fiction: The New Satiric Tradition* is arguably the most concise and thorough literary criticism on the topic. Hoey, an Australian doctoral student, will also receive attention here for her subsequent critique of the form, and suggestions regarding the future of studying transgressive fiction and its subversive relationship with the reader.

Mookerjee's 2013 text is among the most recent studies of transgressive fiction in print, and one that is markedly affected by Silverblatt's writing.[10] The texts under examination include

[9] Discussions regarding the fidelity of adaptations of transgressive texts tend to be thorny, and it is beyond the ambit of this thesis to engage with the difference between cinematic and literary transgression. It should be noted, however, that this issue is endemic to South Africa as well, as is evidenced in Michael Raeburn's 2008 adaptation of *Triomf*.

[10] Coco D'Hont has published a 2019 study titled *Extreme States: The Evolution of American Transgressive Fiction 1960–2000*. Unfortunately, its date of publication and exorbitant price have disqualified it from use in my thesis. I am also aware that Dr James Meffan of the Victoria University of Wellington is currently writing a book-length study on transgressive fiction.

those written by the authors cited above, as well as J. G. Ballard's *Crash*, Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*, Philip Roth's *The Breast*, and Mary Gaitskill's *Bad Behaviour* among others. From the outset, the author frames the texts in relation to Menippean satire as he believes the texts are rendered more understandable as a result.[11] This decision assists in understanding the lack of an authorial voice, which is obscured by "the author-speaker-reader triangle so important to the Menippean mode" (2). Mookerjee also invokes Kathryn Hume's discussion of "aggressive fiction" which "tramples reader sensibilities, offends and upsets wilfully and deliberately" (qtd in Mookerjee 14). Evidence of Silverblatt's influence appears in Mookerjee's definition of literary transgression, as it acknowledges critical attention as integral to defining and understanding transgressive texts:

> [I]t achieves an audience among the cultural elites while maintaining neutrality, a refusal to take sides in the debates brought up by the subject matter of the work. This masterstroke forces the audience to face the subject matter of the work directly, rather than through the optic of a system or theory. (2)

One of Mookerjee's more complex assertions – summarised in the above quotation's final sentence – is that transgressive fiction evades analysis from any particular theory or established framework of understanding. This claim echoes Booker's belief that transgressive texts must undergo tailored readings so as to highlight and emphasise their respective "energies". Yet this seems incongruent with Mookerjee situating transgressive fiction in the realm of Menippean satire, which is arguably a lens through which to read the assorted texts (6).

Hoey's contribution to the existing scholarship takes the form of two academic articles: "The Lacuna of Usefulness: The Compulsion to 'Understand' Transgressive Fiction" and "The Failure to Act: Acting Subjects and Passive Bodies in Transgressive Fiction". In the first article, Hoey claims that transgressive fiction's central mechanism is the intentional frustration generated within the reader ("The Lacuna of Usefulness" 28). This frustration is achieved, according to Hoey, by presenting the critic with novels that are "written in order to create an extreme emotional reaction" (29), and presents a work that is "a-ideological, neither for or against cultural norms" (29), and "unproductive" in the sense of George Bataille's "General Economy" – which is to say that transgressive fiction does not contribute to the form of work believed to liberate humankind from its animal nature (31). The article also provides a frank assessment of transgressive fiction in the twenty-first century, and the possibilities for further scholarship on the topic:

[11] In her review of Mookerjee's text, Hoey problematises this decision by arguing that "anything that negates the affective and violating nature of transgressive fiction removes its potency and power", and remarks that she is "left wondering whether anything as ambiguous, reflexive and slippery as transgressive fiction can really be considered satire" ("The Generic Veronica" 162).

> Transgressive Fiction (mainstream or otherwise) has by 2014 been absorbed into the body social. Whilst it explores heterogenous and sacred matter, its existence as a printed and published work is evidence that it has moved into the realm of the homogenous. As a consequence, the task is not to try and convince ourselves that Transgressive Fiction is indeed still beyond the pale, but to avoid housebreaking it any further. What is now needed is to resist the drive to neuter the text further, […] and instead develop a reader-focused framework which imagines the text and its 'meanings' in terms similar to that of Iserian potential. This can be achieved by focusing on the Transgressive text's affective power and the reader-text relationship. (35)

Two aspects of this quote stand out: the acceptance of transgressive fiction's content as a waning source of provocation, and the suggested focus on the "text's affective power and the reader-text relationship".[12] The former is similar to the earlier quote from Booker, emphasising a realistic approach to transgressive fiction and its capacity for instigating social change. The latter will be interrogated in the proceeding chapter's discussion of *Thirteen Cents*.

In her second article, Hoey builds on her critique of transgressive fiction by countering the estrangement defence outlined by Julius above. Instead, she argues that the ability to effectively discomfort its reader has been misinterpreted as the text fulfilling its "pedagogical potential", stating that such novels "have little to reveal about either 'ourselves' or the 'world' and really only addresses topics about the manipulative and structuring nature of language" ("The Failure to Act" 3). The reply postulates that the transgressive novel is reconfigured as an acting subject:

> The dyadic contract between the reader and text is unlike the traditional novel, as the Transgressive text and its reader do not form the customary correlation of reader as subject and text as object. The Transgressive text instead attempts to make itself an acting subject by imposing itself upon the emotional body of the reader. (4)

Hoey does not proceed to extol transgressive fiction for this effect, however, instead claiming that the outcome "is always unsuccessful as the reader dissects the text through critical analysis, rendering the text 'safe'" (1–2). She proceeds to argue that transgressive fiction fails to alter readers' assumptions and beliefs regard taboo topics – such as paedophilia, mutilation or repressed female sexuality – as such texts "in no way try to convince the reader that these are socially repressed and misunderstood urges that need further exploration" (9). The result is that "in these instances the reassertion of the taboo is no revelation as we never sought its absence" (9). An interlinked argument, that transgressive fiction teaches readers something about themselves, is considered by Hoey to be "equally suspect":

[12] Whilst there is perhaps potential for an affect-based study of transgressive fiction, affect theory is not the focus of this thesis.

> [T]he reader will return to the moral and ethical framework from which they started, and any pleasure that has been experienced throughout the text draws attention to the manipulative nature of language, rather than the reader pleasures or repressed fantasies. Transgressive fiction's final comment is on the nature of textuality and the way in which language constructs and models identity and understanding. (10)

This claim is more debatable and will be given more attention in this chapter's final section, which considers empathic response to transgressive fiction. For now, it is sufficient to note that the social realist setting of these novels allows the possibility for the reader to consider their own complicity and participation in the large-scale systems of oppression of which transgressive behaviour is alleged to be a product.

Hoey also destabilises her own argument shortly after these critiques, by claiming that "The text makes promises of catharsis and exploration, and then mocks the reader for believing such a thing possible" (10). This is an inaccurate assessment of the narrative strategies deployed in transgressive novels, as the novels rarely suggest catharsis. Especially in books narrated by victims of non-consensual abuse, such as *Thirteen Cents* and Acker's *Blood and Guts in High School*, it is not the text that misleadingly suggests catharsis but rather the expectation of the individual reading the novel.[13] Transgressive texts certainly do mock, to a certain extent, the desire for catharsis, but to claim that they also instigate that wish is erroneous. Such works depict violence on such a persistent and wide-ranging scale that a catharsis often seems to be the most unlikely of conclusions and rarely occurs.[14]

Ultimately, Hoey builds upon the comment in her earlier article, that readers should "resist the drive to neuter the text further" ("The Lacuna of Understanding" 35). She argues instead that a work of transgressive fiction does "hold affective power over the implied reader through its insidious textual nature and in return the reader will take the text apart as though conducting a dissection, rendering the text compartmentalized and lifeless" ("The Failure to Act" 14). Though forming interesting schemas through which to consider the text-reader relationship, Hoey is too enamoured with the notion that transgressive texts are at their most affecting upon a first, uncritical reading. This belief strikes me as flawed, though, as it elides the fact that most, if not all, readers *are* able to critically engage with a novel during their first reading, and that readers can be repeatedly offended and alarmed by transgressive texts when returning to reread them. Setting

[13] I use the term "non-consensual" abuse, because some transgressive texts – such as Palahniuk's *Fight Club* and, later, Staggie's *Risk* – do involve self-inflicted acts of harm and violence that are consented to and deemed beneficial to the recipient.

[14] That chapter concerning *Risk* will interrogate whether or not the novel provides catharsis, and therefore whether it is one of the few transgressive texts to do so.

definitive terms for when and to whom a novel is transgressive, as opposed to writing with greater generality, establishes traps and footholds for any proceeding academic criticism, or lay conversations between readers regarding their experiences. Hoey's suggestion that transgressive texts achieve their function prior to dissection also comes into conflict with extensive scholarship by Julia Kristeva, who argues that "our tendency to presume that texts possess a meaning unique to themselves" is erroneous and instead the "appearance of unity and independent existence is, in fact, part of its momentary arrangement of words and utterances which have complex social significance 'outside' the text in question" (Allen 36).

Given the above outline of transgressive fiction and its study, certain core tenets can be identified as markers that reduce the nebulous haze surrounding the term. It must be made clear that not every text designated "transgressive" will employ all of these aspects. Most important of these tenets are the two that have constantly been emphasised throughout this discussion: the inclusion of extreme content, and a narrative strategy that seeks to collapse the distance between reader and fictional act. Writing for *The New York Times* two years after Silverblatt's article, Rene Chun offers a more cogent definition of transgressive fiction:

> A literary genre that graphically explores such topics as incest and other aberrant sexual practices, mutilation, the sprouting of sexual organs in various places on the human body, urban violence and violence against women, drug use, and highly dysfunctional family relationships, and that is based on the premise that knowledge is to be found at the edge of experience and that the body is the site for gaining knowledge. (49–52)[15]

Chun's definition explicitly centres upon the rupture and abuse of fictional characters' bodies – a useful development that informs much of the proceeding discussion as well as my own analysis.

Although Chun's is one of the better definitions I have encountered over the past two years, and one that offers more nuance than simply "crossing a boundary", it does not comment on the pervasive narratorial style in transgressive texts. The affectless style further horrifies the reader, exposed not only to extreme content but also a disinterested relaying of transgression, masking the author's moral assessment of characters' actions. The latter effect has drawn considerable criticism, as the ability to provide accounts of those on the social periphery in a manner that allows for a conceptualisation that is not reductive is paired with the possibility of authors condoning these same actions.[16] An especially effective example is K. Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents*, whose protagonist is Azure: a child living on the streets of Cape Town, prostituting himself in fear of

[15] I would like to thank Mr. Chun for rummaging through his attic to locate a clipping of his original article and emailing me scanned photocopies.

[16] Once again, Ellis's *American Psycho* is the quintessential example, as is demonstrated by Julian Murphet's discussion of the novel's reception (65–71).

gangsters and more state-sanctioned authorities. It is through Azure's first-person perspective that the reader is encouraged to consider alternate views regarding the street child, the sex worker, and the social construction of legality and acceptability that elides their existence and suffering. This effect is the primary focus in the following chapter, which concerns *Thirteen Cents*.

The narrative voice in transgressive fiction is often problematised by impeding forces such as psychosis or substance abuse. For example, the protagonists of *Fight Club* and *American Psycho* are rendered unreliable through the increasing destabilising of their psyches. Similarly, *Trainspotting*'s Mark Renton and *Filth*'s Bruce Robertson are narrators whose constant engagement in narcotics and alcohol produces a narrative haze over their storytelling. By purporting to reveal the lives of those who are socially excluded but also rendering that narrative unreliable, transgressive fiction creates instability and uncertainty within its own narrative, further complicating the reader's relationship with the text, and often leaving the novel without resolution, or rather one that is anticlimactic. This instability and uncertainty do not detract from the representation of oppressive systems, however. The lack of closure provided by transgressive texts is simultaneously fitting and frustrating. The open-endedness of the texts, in which the 'deviant' protagonist typically escapes any juridical punishment, is symbolic of the rigid social structures that will not be undone by a handful of controversial novels. Readers are thus able to consider the relation between the open-ended narrative and the social setting in which they find themselves. Yet this open-endedness can frustrate the reader who, accustomed to the conventional structure of a realist novel, finds it an anticlimactic close to a literary work that has trampled over their sensibilities and generated psychological and emotional discomfort. There is no cathartic reward for the individual who has elected to continue reading until the novel's last word. Whilst few transgressive texts – like *Fight Club* and *Trainspotting* – are followed by sequels and some authors – like Ellis – allow characters to appear across various novels, most end with an unsatisfying conclusion.[17]

The protagonists in transgressive texts often express a discomfort with their surroundings, and an unease with the expectations placed upon them by these social systems. Characters thus speak from positions of isolation and ostracisation, although they may elect to occupy those positions. Quite often, the protagonists' transgressive acts are linked to, and considered a result of, the very societies they exist in. Rather than portraying characters as deviants that exist to undermine an existing social order, transgressive texts have often posited that these characters are

[17] *Fight Club* was followed by *Fight Club 2* in 2015, whilst *Trainspotting's* sequel *Porno* was published in 2002. Ellis's characters appear across his entire body of work, though often in minor roles.

products of the social spaces and pressures exerted upon them. Pairing this isolation and discomfort with first-person narration opens the possibility for a narrative in which the narrator misses essential actions and/or beliefs in the lives of other characters, either out of misunderstanding or because they, being ostracised, are purposefully kept away from strands of information. Duiker's *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* employs a kaleidoscopic narratorial structure: consecutive chapters are not narrated by the same individual, and the diversity of insight allows the reader to witness the slippage of meaning that occurs between characters. A linked tenet, which is not remarked upon in academic criticism but one that I have noticed over the past five years of interest in the subject, is the absence of parental figures – particularly those of the protagonist. Examples of this include Ellis's *Less than Zero*, Palahniuk's *Fight Club*, and Duiker's *Thirteen Cents*. Parents are often mentioned by the protagonist who notes their absence and responds ambiguously. As the later discussion of Jason Staggie's *Risk* will reveal, these parental absences can function as complex symbols of a society's history.

Issues regarding consent have not been explored thus far in scholarship concerning transgressive fiction, despite the matter being central to these works. In each novel, the narrator either violates the consent of others, has their own consent violated, or experiences both – such as in the case of *A Clockwork Orange*. Beyond the worlds of the texts, there is also the consent of the reader to consider. Tom L. Beauchamp argues that "autonomous choice and voluntariness are central to the notion of consent" (55), and therefore the reader's choice to engage with transgressive texts provides a fascinating new arena of study and debate. The following description by John Kleinig is most essential in framing my argument:

> Where called for, consent can sometimes function like a proprietary gate that one opens to allow another's access, access that would be impermissible absent the act of voluntarily opening the gate. Thus, I may consent to another's sexual advance, use of my car, performance of an operative procedure, or dissemination of information concerning myself. Or, sometimes, consent can function like a normative rope whereby one binds oneself to another. Thus, I may consent to another's offer of marriage or request that I give a lecture or join a committee. In each case, whether the consent is viewed as opening a gate or as binding oneself, an act or outcome that would not be permissible absent the consent is given a normative sanction. Whether that sanction is sufficient to justify what is done is a further question, though there is usually a presumption that, in circumstances in which consent is normatively required and given, an important ground for complaint has been removed. (4)

The transgressive novel interacts with the reader along both lines of consent outlined by Kleinig above. In electing to read *Thirteen Cents*, for example, readers are "opening the gate" to the emotional and psychological discomfort which the novel is designed to cause. Continuing to read

the novel following this realisation, is to "bind oneself" to the narrative and continue following it to its bewildering conclusion. Consent is, then, a multifaceted concept in reading transgressive fiction: one which is fictionally violated within the text, but also troubles readers once they consider their own complicity in allowing their subsequent discomfort to persist.[18]

The final central tenet is the elision of trauma, or traumatic consequences. By this I refer to the noteworthy absence of trauma and its consideration in narratives concerning extreme violence to the body and psyche. This elision defies a psychological explanation for two reasons: the insertion of clinical psychology in literary studies so as to diagnose a fictional character is absurd, and these affectless elisions are experienced and expressed by characters who are not described as psychopathic by their authors.[19] The lack of trauma does harm the text's social realism by eliding a psychological consequence that is expected and well-established in other literary works. I have struggled to conceive of a reason for this recurrent feature and, although there are some lines of thought to be followed, these are simply speculation. Despite the fact that trauma is characterised as being an absence, its presence in literature has typically been signalled by certain narrative strategies. The absence of those strategies in a text that should so clearly incur them is puzzling, as the distance erected between the traumatic event and the reader is significant:

> There are times when [authors] do make the reader feel as they are entering into the story and create various ways of distancing from traumatic material (often as those who experience it do). However, the purpose of the writer's approach is significant here: Does it help to bring the reader into the disturbing but weighty aspects of the material, or is it too comforting? An important indicator might be the kind of resolutions (if any) that are offered to traumatic circumstances and to what degree of optimism they are offered. (Vickroy 7)

Drawing on Laurie Vickroy's claim, perhaps the elision of trauma is suggested to mirror the elision of concern for the precarious subjects in transgressive fiction. What is deemed vital and expected – the occurrence of trauma after suffering violence – is eschewed to illustrate the elision of other vital and expected facets: support for those forced to the margins by the systemic implementation of certain norms and mores.

This discussion of exceeding boundaries may seem to be endorsing unlimited transgression in literature; any attempt to shock readers with graphic content. To be clear: the purpose of transgressive fiction – as it is defined in this thesis – is the specific representation of graphic

[18] Whether the effect described here only occurs upon the first reading of a novel or every subsequent reading too is a matter of debate. Hoey advocates for the former: "The reader's loss occurs upon the first reading, which is reactionary and often emotional. But the reader returns to the text, and, with the tool of the analytical trade, steadily takes the text apart" ("The Failure to Act" 13).

[19] Ellis's Patrick Bateman, the eponymous American psycho(path), is the obvious exception here.

content as a critique of social institutions and systems of oppression. Creating a transgressive novel or film requires something of a balancing-act – the ability to incorporate social criticism into the upsetting content so that the link is visible to the reader/viewer. Booker offers a similar view on the subject:

> [T]he key element here is subjective: a carnivalesque mixing of languages and breaking of traditional rules in literature can be subversive only if it has a troubling effect on the reader that results in his reexamining [*sic*] the hierarchies normally accepted by his society. On the other hand, if an intermixing of languages is not troubling, it can indeed act to reinforce traditional distinctions between low and high. In a given text, the subversive force of a carnivalesque mixing of languages will generally lie somewhere between these extremes, with the exact position on the continuum varying from reader to reader according to individual reactions. (93)

Consequently, a novel such as Samuel Delaney's *Hogg*, which depicts the activities of a rapist-for-hire, seems written purely for shock-value and therefore not transgressive in my opinion. In the realm of cinema, a similar judgement can be made of the highly controversial *A Serbian Film*, which was best described by Joshua Rothkopf as "say[ing] as much about Eastern Europe as *Twilight* does about the Pacific Northwest" (par. 3).

Transgressive fiction has not been without its detractors, of course. Arguably the most often-cited critique is James Gardner's 1996 article, wherein he reveals a crucial error in interpretation while discussing A. M. Holmes's *The End of Alice* and Dennis Cooper's *Try*:

> These two novels are intended for two groups of readers, paedophiles on the one hand, and "normal" people on the other. This loaded term "normal" is used advisedly for the simple reason that the authors themselves implicitly draw on the same distinction. One senses that their gaze is always steadily fixed on the reader, as though asking, "Are you revolted yet? Are you shocked?" If this work were marketed as pornography, the term being used not in reproach but simply for purposes of description, we should be forced to acknowledge its usefulness to those whose fantasy life comprises the sodomizing of children, necrophilia, and coprophilia. (55)

The assumption made here – specifically that fiction containing paedophilia has also been "intended" for paedophiles – is staggeringly outrageous. In fact, Gardner's claim implies that whilst Cooper and Holmes may have attempted to sell books critiquing and problematising sexual mores, they can also rely on a quick buck from those using these novels as masturbation material. Gardner's rebuke also grossly simplifies the interaction between reader and text, in that his description neatly divides the former into two camps: 'normal' people who are being lured into trivial revulsion, and individuals who are widely considered deviant. Therefore, his summary does not allow for readers who are curious and willing to be challenged by a discomforting reading experience, but who are in no way titillated by the events and/or attitudes depicted in such fiction.

The above evaluation implies that only 'safe' fiction should be produced – the very literary standard against which transgressive texts rebel – and that the voices of those who are marginalised are not deserving of a literary representation, purely because there may be some readers who enjoy the text as titillation. To be clear: I am *not* advocating for literature intended to titillate rapists. My contention lies with Gardner's claim that the authors have *intended* for their literature to be used in this way.

To eschew Gardner's argument entirely is dangerous too. In ignoring his argument that some readers are titillated by transgressive fiction, one succumbs to the trap of arguing from the position of an ideal reader. To declare a text transgressive – the argument goes – is to elide alternate ethical and aesthetic values and, by means of the authority inherent in the position of critic, impose this singular view as *the* correct view. Such an argument is particularly apt in the twenty-first century when obscenity trials and book-burnings – clear signposts of literary transgression – very rarely occur, if ever. Furthermore, the argument is a useful rebuttal against forms of literary criticism which exoticise or demonise forms of behaviour that are culturally tolerated in the society of the novel but considered transgressive by critics beyond that sphere.

There is, however, a somewhat hypocritical problem built into the ideal reader argument. To insist that criticism cannot proceed with a reader fully formed in one's mind is to insist that criticism must rather proceed with a human-shaped silhouette in mind – a process that Hoey describes as "reduc[ing] the reader to an interchangeable object" ("The Failure to Act" 5). That is to say, for criticism to completely avoid allegations of being influenced by an ideal reader, it must somehow account for all of the potential ways in which a text may be interpreted. Therefore, if one were to follow the ideal reader argument to its (awfully) pedantic end, then Ellis's *American Psycho* is no longer transgressive on the basis that the serial killer Paul Bernardo testified to drawing inspiration from it for his atrocious acts (see Cairns and Burnside). Although Ellis has been exasperatingly contradictory as to where the inspiration for *American Psycho* came from, I doubt that it was written with the intention to titillate Bernardo and others of his ilk. Furthermore, the existence of Bernardo's contrary interpretation of *American Psycho* does not automatically imply that the text is no longer transgressive for a much larger portion of its readership.

Although challenging the construction of ideal readers is a necessary part of an inclusive system of criticism, I claim that depictions of extreme acts which eschew consent and cause violence to the body are transgressive across ethical and aesthetic value systems. This argument can certainly be labelled naïve, but if literary studies does not begin with the understanding that feeling human beings read novels, then it becomes very difficult to understand what value the field

possesses. Moreover, if considerations of reader-response must take into account those members of our societies who are thrilled by the violation of consent, then any work of fiction – transgressive or otherwise – loses a substantial quotient of its influence and emotional resonance.

Before continuing to discuss South African literature and literary empathy, a summary of the framework thus far is necessary, Transgressive fiction refers to works of literary prose that centre on the abuse of the body and the overriding of consent, depicted in a direct and discomforting manner. The protagonists – like the novels' authors – are generally male, and their perspective is often relayed via first-person narration. Works of transgressive fiction do not offer cathartic closure for the reader, and their characters evade either juridical punishment for their actions – in the case of protagonists who are perpetrators – or any form of reparation for the victims of these violent acts. Instead, such works end ambiguously, with the reader doubting the reliability of the narrator and, consequently, the veracity of the events he describes. These characters also avoid psychological fallout, as the manifestation of trauma rarely occurs in such novels. That being said, transgressive novels reveal larger, systemic sources of trauma, often by inferring that their characters' attitudes and behaviours are, to varying extents, a response to or informed by social pressures. Authors of transgressive fiction often install a distancing device in their narrative strategy, which masks their own moral judgement of the violence and instead presents in the story in an amoral register. The cumulative result is a work of fiction that is designed to render the reader as uncomfortable as possible, without respite or ethical guidance, but always with intention and valuable insight into the machinations of a particular society, culture, or sub-culture.

1.3) Post-TRC South Africa and the Value of Transgressive Narrative

Whilst attempting to wrangle transgressive fiction into a discussable form is difficult, seeking that form in the South African literary landscape is equally – if not more – challenging. Post-1994 South Africa is recognised as an incredibly diverse social space with a vast array of literary styles and concerns amongst its local writers. This issue is not unique to contemporary South Africa, as the western world has similarly claimed to embrace the multicultural and pluralistic state of the age. The greater integration of populations, aesthetic ideals and increased social freedoms collide and intersect to shift the boundaries of what constitutes transgressive. Mookerjee offers a wry observation that displays this change in literary values from the early 1990s to the present:

> The nearly successful effort to stop the publication of *American Psycho* hinged on an argument that it would motivate rape and murder. No one has ever made this argument about a novel such as *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. (1–2)

One must also contend with the history of Africa within the global imaginary – as a continent that has long been considered transgressive to the European gaze:

> [D]arkest Africa, the continent which, 'after the pyramids', Hegel declared, 'World spirit leaves … never to return'. No matter how high-handed one may find Hegel's riposte, no matter how one may demur or protest, there is no dispelling the fact that the philosopher's view has become global common knowledge. Africa: place of unreason, place of the mad; un-evolved, unworldly, superstitious and immoral. Not a place for the 'World spirit' but a place for the damned, a place where effects exist *without* causes.
>
> (Jamal 141–42)

A legacy of transgression can be harmful on many fronts, but here the focus narrows to the implications that legacy may have for literature. South Africa is particularly complex in this regard: folded into the above description of Africa whilst also bearing a legacy of apartheid with all of its horrific acts of violence and violation. With the memory of such oppression still fresh in the minds of South African citizens, one could not be blamed for sensing a diminished sense of shock in response to literary transgression. Of course, such a generalised analysis of South Africa is purely speculative. The very impetus of this study may seem strange, as none of these novels caused controversy upon their release. Quite conversely, Duiker's fiction is rightfully lauded as truly unique and ground-breaking. Unlike his debut, *Room 207*, Moele's *The Book of the Dead* experienced a quiet publication and no outrage ensued. Finally, Staggie's *Risk*, which he has explicitly described as "transgressive fiction", was not subject to any protest or calls for banning.[20] Despite these factors, I consider the 1999 furore over J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* to be indicative of the potential for South African literature to upset readers and thus reveal a capacity for offense (see van der Vlies 71–79 and McDonald "*Disgrace* Effects").[21] Since I do not believe that a sudden, magical process of desensitisation occurred as the country tipped over into the new millennium, it is safe to assume that offense can still be generated by novels, and that potential exists for scholarship concerned with such fiction.

In the South African context, a comparison of older institutional values with contemporary ones proves to be more problematic. Under the apartheid regime, a system of literary censorship was constructed to vet and embargo locally written texts deemed unsuitable for the public. It would be a mistake, however, to consider all texts banned under this committee to be transgressive, as the apartheid censorship system was quite unlike any other in the world. Peter D. McDonald has

[20] I interrogate Staggie's claim in the chapter concerning *Risk*.

[21] Further afield, but still within the wide scope of artistic endeavour, one could also consider the responses to the defacement of Brett Murray's 2012 painting *The Spear* (see Dubin 184–87), angered responses to the music of Fokofpolisiekar (see Little), or debates concerning the 2017 film *Inxeba* (see volume 32, issue 1 of *Image & Text: a Journal for Design* for varied responses to the film).

provided an excellent study of this censorship system, describing its behaviour as "inconsistent" (*The Literature Police* 48). Though some authors, such as William Burroughs, were outright banned on the basis of controversial writing, others were granted more leniency (45–52). McDonald also notes that freedom of speech under the current South African constitution is not limited by clauses concerning obscenity or blasphemy, which greatly reduces the potential for obscenity trials or the banning of fictional texts (348). Such a reduction, although due to an invaluable human right, simultaneously suppresses the ways in which the public is made aware of offence caused by novels. This legislative development offers an enigma: if one was offended by a South African novel, is there any legislative path to recourse? Also: does the removal of an obscenity- or blasphemy-based limit to free speech imply that South Africans perceive literary works as simply unquestionable, unprotestable, and simply acceptable as is? Such a line of questioning may seem counter-productive in a thesis championing transgressive fiction. Yet, it is integral that citizens be made aware when works of art are published, in order to participate in debates regarding their merits, complexities, or lack thereof.

Given the enhanced difficulty of locating transgressive fiction, it is vital to establish clear limits in order to focus the exploration on a certain period of time. As a result, I have located myself within complex debates regarding what constitutes "South African fiction" and how it is to be described. In their oft-cited essay, "Conceptualizing 'Post-Transitional' South African Literature in English", Ronit Frenkel and Craig MacKenzie assert that post-2000 fiction is characterised by a proliferation of genres, including

> diasporic South African writings (often examining issues of dislocation), proletarian disclosures, lyrical existential ruminations, memoir, satire, miracle narratives, and crime stories, and [that it] addresses issues of return, the dynamics of illness, and questions of space and contestation. (4)

Frenkel and MacKenzie's list is by no means exhaustive. Given the universality of transgression as a social fact, it must exist, in some form, within South African literature too. I establish the texts analysed in this thesis as works of South African fiction for three reasons, and these were the primary parameters for selecting my texts. First, the plot and characters in the novels are engaged with the politics of this geographical state (although concerns over revolutionary violence, biological citizenship, and whiteness affect the world-at-large). Second, the authors locate(d) themselves in South Africa – working and living within its borders and thus within its turbulent social make-up. Lastly – and perhaps least importantly – the novels were printed and distributed by South African publishers. Separating these texts from others afforded me a smaller pool through which to sift for my three novels of study. As a second set of parameters, I established three strict

criteria when selecting texts: the novels must be written by authors of colour, must be written after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and must employ first-person narration. I will now elaborate on why these three criteria were so integral.

As demonstrated in the previous section, transgressive fiction is concerned with acts of violence and suffering against the body, often also involving the violation of consent.[22] South Africa, whilst no longer under a legislative system of apartheid, still suffers from its legacy and the aftermath of its racialised policies of privilege.[23] There are long-running debates within literary studies regarding the right to write an experience that the author has not undergone. To detail these debates is beyond the scope of this thesis, but I do raise the topic so as to situate my position in the matter with regard to my thesis. Whilst I do believe it is dangerous to embargo an author, I do respect authors of colour writing about the abuse of the black body within a system that still, in many ways, targets the black body. It is my belief that such texts may reveal forms of systemic injustice and violence that are invisible to me as a white male. To be clear: I am not claiming that white authors cannot be compassionate and incisive in their writing on social realities in South Africa. Furthermore, I do *not* want to present the author of colour as an "anthropological subject" (see Mgqolozana), and fetishize the literature they produce. The fiction written by these three authors will be subject to criticism that accounts for its entwined aesthetic and ethical facets, and is not an exercise in glorification. It is also important to highlight that Moele and Staggie's novels have astonishingly little to no scholarship. Their inclusion in this thesis, then, allows for further study of the two texts.

There are two reasons why the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was selected as a parameter: first, it is a far more tangible marker of time than 'post-apartheid' and therefore allowed for a clearer image of which texts could be selected; secondly, and more importantly, the TRC operated on the basis of testimonies issued by victims *and* perpetrators of violent acts. The TRC's indelible impact on South African literature cannot be ignored either. In his study of fiction after the TRC, Shane Graham examines the exhibition of "a collective sense of loss, mourning, and elegy, as well as a sense of disorientation amid rapid changes in the physical and social landscape" (1), and proceeds to list the specific facets of TRC-inflected literature:

> narrative forms such as confession and second-person direct address; representational strategies utilizing displacement and condensation; recurring

[22] I say "often" because in a novel such as *Fight Club* the characters engage in violence consensually. That does change, of course, once the 'club' transforms into a terrorist network.

[23] It is because of this aftermath that I reject the term 'post-apartheid', which signifies a progression beyond the legacy of racialised violence. The limited appearances of the term in this thesis will always be enveloped by scare-quotes, so as to register my apprehension with its use.

> tropes involving mapping, archiving, and curating; the symbolic conflation of bodies and landscapes; excavations and holes; and palimpsests. (5)

Of the facets listed above, the confessional address and palimpsests are integral to this thesis's argument. All three texts examined here specifically engage in first-person address,[24] and relay acts of violence which have either been committed by the protagonists themselves or enacted upon them. Furthermore, the protagonists' conception of their acts of violence and/or experiences of trauma are overlaid with historical significance, forming palimpsests – whether of the racial dynamics of the gang world depicted in *Thirteen Cents*, the feared HIV epidemic in South Africa which permeates the atmosphere of *The Book of the Dead*, or the relationship between anti-apartheid violence and the acts committed in *Risk*. Graham claims that the TRC, "by staging a public drama about private traumas […], began a long and sometimes painful process of renegotiating South Africans' relationship to their social and physical spaces" (3). This thesis argues that all three novels examined here engage in the same process, albeit it from the distanced position of fiction.

As a temporal marker, the TRC also leads into the new millennium, and thus centres the continual presence of a 'post-apartheid' malaise among young characters. It is the structure and significance of these testimonies that fascinates me and that I wish to discuss in relation to South African transgressive fiction.

Dominick LaCapra presents a conception of different traumas that is relatable to discussions of both the TRC and transgressive fiction. LaCapra distinguishes between historical and structural trauma: the former is "specific, and not everyone is subject to it or entitled to the subject position associated with it" (78), whilst the latter "is not an event but an anxiety-producing condition of possibility related to the potential for historical traumatization" (82). If one considers the testimonies presented at the TRC through LaCapra's schematic, the individual testimony of suffering reflects historical trauma. The individual testimony was presented at the TRC not only for sympathetic engagement, but also because it gestured toward the structural trauma inflicted by the apartheid system. Jill Bennett supports this interpretation with the following claim:

> One could argue that such an awareness of both historical catastrophe and personal suffering is a fundamental underpinning of the TRC; the need for the testimony to be *received* within the new South Africa is perceived to be at least as important as the utterance itself. […] More than the Yale archive for Holocaust testimony, the TRC structures into its self-representation a politics of encounter in which responses to testimony are not only visible but sought and measured. (105)

[24] It should be noted that *The Book of the Dead* oscillates between first- and second-person narration in its second half – the portion of the novel of more concern to my chapter.

Simultaneously, these testimonies existed and were voiced as a result of the apartheid system, a source of structural trauma. The testimonies and, importantly, their broadcast on national and international television, eradicated any doubt over the apartheid regime's systemic violence by presenting narratives "so horrifying that they could not remain untold in a South Africa in need of a bridge between the past and the future" (Esterhuyse 146). Significantly, two of the novels discussed in this thesis employ a subplot of writing. In Staggie's *Risk*, the protagonist begins to write his companions' acts down in the form of a novel. In Moele's *The Book of the Dead*, the protagonist(s) keeps the eponymous journal to record every woman purposefully infected with HIV. In both novels, the protagonists die, leaving their texts to be read by someone else. These fictional texts thus achieve an additional testimonial dimension by being a narrative that is read by someone, even if the author/speaker is not aware of this reading.

Proceeding from the TRC, I chose to study novels written in first-person for two reasons: first, because much transgressive fiction of the twentieth century employed first-person narration, thus there is some continuity there; second, because it was the same mode of address employed in the TRC hearings. First-person narration presents the reader with unique effects: being submerged in a character's mind – exposed to their beliefs and systems of rationalisation, viewing the disparity or coherence between these thought processes and their actions, and the author's subtle removal of the third-person, omniscient narrator who may provide a totalising perspective that does not convey the turbulent emotions of the protagonist. Whilst I will not claim that shocking fictional narratives possess the same effect as real narratives do, I wish to acknowledge the peculiar notion that some shocking narratives are more acceptably presented to the public than others. The narratives presented at the TRC, narratives of violence and dehumanisation, were screened on television to the South African public for years. There was a necessity to the screening: a need for and by the South African public to discover what atrocities occurred under the apartheid regime:

> [T]he TRC broke down the fundamental divides between public and private spaces and narratives, and between the scales of the familial, the local, the national, and the international: that is, stories that were previously considered private and personal were told in a public forum, registered in collective consciousness, and mediated for a global audience. (Graham 3)

The testimonies were often personal and therefore linked to individual experiences of trauma. That said, their trauma was symptomatic of structural violence that was helmed by the National Party. Although Duiker, Staggie, and Moele have published fictional narratives, their novels display a clear concern with the social realities of contemporary South Africa which concern individuals experiencing historical trauma – in LaCapra's terminology – that is identified as a product of

structural trauma. They choose, as authors, to depict and problematise these concerns by situating their characters in spaces deemed transgressive.

This study of transgression in South Africa is not entirely novel, and the work of Judith Inggs certainly deserves recognition. In her 2016 study, Inggs explores English young adult fiction in South Africa – defined socially and geographically – from the 1980s to the present day. Although there is a substantial difference in content between this study and Inggs's, the concern over methodology is quite similar. In her introductory chapter, Inggs maps the terrain of the study and acknowledges the numerous categorical and restrictive issues that emerge: from labelling texts "South African literature" and "young adult literature" to focussing specifically on fiction produced in English (1–7). Inggs's study, like this thesis, sets clear parameters for its exploration, aware that simply pursuing "transgression" in "literature" is insufficient in the contemporary moment.

Her fifth chapter, titled "Transgression, Romance and Sexuality", is where Inggs's work bears the closest resemblance to this thesis. She does not define transgression, however, but rather identifies its amorphous presence in various novels concerned with romantic and sexual relationships. "Transgression" thus refers to interracial relationships in pre-1994 publications (67), engaging in sexual activity (72), and crossing a boundary deemed sacred to a community, such as the act of speaking against HIV-related silence in Jenny Robson's *Praise Song* (72–73). The issue of specific narrative voice – flat, affectless – is not of concern to Inggs's study, though this is understandable given the intended audience of young adult fiction. Inggs's study, then, is more concerned with a conception of transgression similar to that of Stallybrass and White rather than Silverblatt.

I wish to mention other texts that were excluded from this study on the grounds that one or more criteria were not met, but which I believe contribute to South Africa's growing production of transgressive fiction. Marlene van Niekerk's brave work *Triomf* is, in my opinion, one of South Africa's greatest examples of transgressive fiction. Sifiso Mzobe's *Young Blood*, which portrays an adolescent drawn into a world of vehicle theft, is also a moving example. Futhi Ntshangila's *Shameless*, which provocatively equivocates prostitution and Black Economic Empowerment token membership is also a worthwhile read. To expand slightly beyond the borders of South Africa, one can turn to Dambudzo Marechera's novels, particularly *Black Sunlight*. In his essay "The African Writer's Experience of European Literature", Marechera boldly claimed that "[i]t is no longer necessary to speak of the African novel or the European novel: there is only the

[M]enippean novel" (364).[25] Finally, what more can be said of *Disgrace* that has not already been said?

Before closing this section and proceeding to a discussion of empathy, I wish to elaborate on the quote in this thesis's title: "How can you build a nation without telling its stories?" Encapsulated within this question I see the same impetus that fuelled the TRC: a necessity for those who call themselves "South African" to engage with *all* narrative consequences of the country's social make-up. The three novels interrogated in this thesis clearly identify harmful institutions and systems of social organisation. Whilst the characters and events are fictional, the reality they depict is depressingly familiar. It would be a mistake to consider the use of this quote as gesturing toward a notion of national literature, as this thesis is rather concerned with the opposite: wrestling transgressive texts away from their nationalised interpretations so as to discuss the implications of violent content and form.

1.4) Empathy and Transgressive Fiction: Keeping Your Own Shoes On[26]

The belief that reading must be a comfortable activity for the reader is, like decorum, one so ingrained in fundamental assumptions regarding the reading of fiction that it is difficult to conceive of the activity without it. Undergirding this assumption is a conventional understanding of literature as empathy-invoking – the text allows you, as the exasperatingly simple adage goes, to "walk a mile in another's shoes". Furthermore, there is the belief that reading literature is an empathy-building activity; exposing the reader to the lives of others, it is argued, enhances their capacity for altruism in their non-fictional world. When transgressive fiction boldly emerges as a style that radically challenges these assumptions, one must question the nature and function of empathy in engaging with these texts. Such a line of inquiry is the focus of this final section, which seeks to interrogate the relationship between readers and texts, as well as the purported link between novel-reading and pro-social action in the 'real' world. Given that scholarship on literary empathy emerges from either – or incorporates both – neuroscience and philosophy, this section is clearly distinguished as drawing upon philosophical writings, particularly Ann Jurecic's claim that "brain research may provide a new foundation for thinking about empathy, but it does not rescue empathy from moral ambiguity, and it leaves many questions unanswered" (12).

[25] For an analysis of the Menippean elements within Marechera's own fiction, see Ashcroft.

[26] The distinction between "sympathy" and "empathy" in literary studies can alternate between obtuse discussions and mundane claims. I have elected to discuss empathy as it is less associated with pity and therefore with a condescending approach (Keen 5). "Empathy" has also recurred more frequently in my research, and particularly in research closely related to my field of inquiry – the unsettling of the reader.

Suzanne Keen's *Empathy and the Novel* provides an impressive overview of theoretical approaches to empathy and its function in literary studies – as it occurs between characters and between reader and text. Keen begins with a key point of clarification: empathy – "we feel what we believe to be the emotions of others" – can be both a positive and a negative experience, with the former entailing experiences of happiness or triumph and the latter entailing experiences of pain or pity (5). Of course, positive experiences of empathy provide comfort and assist with the enjoyment associated with reading fiction, whereas negative experiences of empathy can lead to what Keen calls "personal distress":

> Empathy that leads to sympathy is by definition other-directed, whereas an over-aroused empathic response that creates personal distress (self- oriented and aversive) causes a turning-away from the provocative condition of the other. (4)

Keen's description relates to my earlier suggestion that enjoyment is considered such an essential component of reading that its tacit nature is only revealed in an experience of discomfort. This process of discovery echoes Foucault's earlier claim that the boundary and limit rely upon one another, sustaining the other's definition. To study transgressive fiction – or simply to read it – requires that the reader enter a complex proposal offered by the text: this experience will cause distress, and by the novel's close this discomfort will not necessarily be rewarded. As the following genealogy of empathy illustrates, the concern for the reader's comfort has always been allotted primacy, and therefore an alternate conception must be consulted to account for the reader's psychological and emotional response to transgressive fiction.

Prior to the Victorian period, reports Keen, novels were regarded with suspicion fuelled by Christianity, and moral arbiters set about "the cultural project of cleaning up a form that had the reputation of tending toward inappropriate, even scandalous, representation" (38). The tide turned with Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot, who incorporated harsh social realities into their fiction so as to diagnose their origins and map their effects (38). The coinciding of literature being sanctioned and the translation – from German to English – of *Einfühlung* as "empathy" established the foundation upon which much heated debate over empathy in literature would emerge (39).[27]

Keen argues that one's engagement with fiction establishes boundaries within which it becomes easier for an individual to respond empathetically:

> I argue here that the very fictionality of novels predisposes readers to empathize with characters, since a fiction known to be "made up" does not activate suspicion and wariness as an apparently "real" appeal for assistance may do. I posit that

[27] Employing the metaphor of a family tree, Keen claims that empathy's relations include "fellow feeling, pity, compassion, and benevolence" (41).

> fictional worlds provide safe zones for readers feeling empathy without experiencing a resultant demand on real-world action. This freedom from obligation paradoxically opens up the channels for both empathy and related moral affects such as sympathy, outrage, pity, righteous indignation, and (not to be underestimated) shared joy and satisfaction. (4)

On the basis of the above summary of Keen's position, it is evident that transgressive fiction – with its wilful drive toward discomfort and unease – contravenes the condition she establishes for fiction, by not providing a "safe zone". Instead, an alternate conception of empathy is required when discussing transgressive fiction specifically – one which accounts for the conditions of the novel as an "acting subject", to quote Hoey.

Megan Boler provides such a formulation, while questioning the assumption that empathy leads to social justice in the contemporary, *multicultural* world.[28] Boler takes issue with Nussbaum's notion of "compassion", and demonstrates that, in this binary formulation, "the agent of empathy, then, is a fear for oneself" (257). In addition, Nussbaum's three beliefs all emerge from positioning the reader as a judge who decides "what others need in order to flourish", which Boler deems "an exceptionally complicated proposition not easily assumed in our cultures of difference" (257–58). What is of particular concern here, and applicable primarily to social realist texts, is that the reader "is not required to identify with the oppressors, and not required to identify her complicity in structures of power relations mirrored by the text" (258). Boler claims that the "compassion" advocated by Nussbaum results in the "annihilation" of the other's suffering, as opposed to an engagement with its existence and the systems that (re)produce it. Throughout her paper, Boler returns to "the irony of empathy: that it is only our separation – I/not I – that permits empathy" (265). She cites her own experience teaching a course designed to introduce students to multiculturalism through the study of texts such as Art Spiegelman's *MAUS* – a graphic novel that relays the story of a Holocaust survivor. The ease with which students claim to have identified with Holocaust survivors is distressing to Boler, who asks a question also found at the heart of transgressive fiction and this very thesis: "What does it mean to experience a pleasurable read and be spared the emotions of rage, blame and guilt?" (260).

In contrast to what she terms the "passive empathy" advocated by writers such as Nussbaum and, arguably, Keen too, Boler advocates for "testimonial reading". This system of reading and relating to texts is grounded in the belief that testimony challenges the legal and historical claims to truth by providing a subjective perspective that "does not claim a static 'truth'

[28] Boler's essay on empathy appears in two forms: a 1997 article in *Cultural Studies* and later as a chapter incorporated into her 1999 book *Feeling Power: Emotions and Education*. I cite from the original journal article.

or fixed ‘certainty’” (263–4). To substantiate these claims, the work of Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub is drawn upon, specifically their discussions of a “crisis of truth” and the “responsibility of listening”. The former refers to the tension between a reality scarred by historical trauma which consists of an essential silencing, and a necessity for that trauma to be spoken and heard. The latter leads to the “responsibility of listening”, which emphasises the importance of a listener in the relaying of testimony – traumatic or not. For Boler, an essential component of listening is the avoidance of identification – electing to restrain oneself from claiming to understand the character’s experience, to “walk a mile in their shoes”. Rather, the reader must “recognize oneself as implicated in the social forces that create the climate of obstacles the other must confront” (257). The onus thus lies upon the reader to self-reflexively engage with the novel through a method that “recognizes its own limits, obstacles, ignorances and zones of numbness, and in so doing offers an ally to truth's representational crisis” (266). Boler claims that testimonial reading is applicable across genres, as each text is positioned within a set of power relations (267).

Given the discussion of Boler’s concepts and their value in relation to social realist narratives, this formulation of empathy and its accompanying testimonial reading strikes me as congruent with the social critique built into transgressive novels. A novel that is not constructed for the reader’s enjoyment, and which features characters whose actions and beliefs alienate the reader to the extent that identification is at least challenging, must provoke an alternate response. If the reader can understand the text as a carefully constructed social critique, then self-reflexivity is a possibility. Jurecic claims that the approach of affect theorists – centred largely around Paul Ricouer’s “hermeneutics of suspicion” – seeks to combat “the anesthetizing effects of empathy generated through naïve reading so that readers can see injustice more clearly” (22–23). Similarly, I argue that transgressive fiction eschews a traditional conception of empathy and, more importantly, empathetic characters, in order to frame acts of social critique more starkly. The forthcoming chapters on *Thirteen Cents*, *The Book of the Dead* and *Risk* have been written following an attempt to read in the fashion suggested by Boler.

Dominick LaCapra – whose conceptions of historical and structural trauma were referred to earlier – advances a similar form of empathic engagement in *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, published four years after Boler’s article. LaCapra’s notion is titled “empathic unsettlement”, and entails “a kind of virtual experience through which one puts oneself in in the other’s position while recognizing the difference of that position and hence not taking the other’s place” (78). Like Boler, LaCapra challenges the self-serving forms of empathy that are typically advanced:

> It is dubious to identify with the victim to the point of making oneself a surrogate victim who has a right to the victim’s voice or subject position. […] It places in

> jeopardy the fetishized and totalizing narratives that deny the trauma that called them into existence by prematurely (re)turning to the pleasure principle, harmonizing events, and often recuperating the past in terms of uplifting messages or optimistic, self-serving scenarios. (78)

The social critique essential to transgressive fiction then requires a concept of empathy such as that suggested by Boler and LaCapra. The ostracised protagonists that typically narrate transgressive novels are not incorporated into the centre through a self-serving form of relation. The core concern of this project – the relaying of unheard and often dismissed stories – requires a response from the reader that, as Boler argues, must instigate an interrogation of the self and its relation to others in the social space.

I proceed from this point to the text-based analyses: analyses of complex novels designed to frustrate readers and cause them discomfort by including extreme content that is portrayed without the moral compass generated by an observable author's voice. Chapter II centres on Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* – and, in particular, on the novel's use of trauma as a mechanism to disrupt the reader's interpretive process. By exploring the existent scholarship on *Thirteen Cents,* I argue that the traumatic content of the novel is either elided entirely or made understandable in service of the scholar's argument. In contrast, however, I claim that respecting the novel's incoherence and ambiguity ultimately allows for a richer and more comprehensive – albeit discomforting – engagement with Azure, the protagonist, and the deft social commentary conveyed by the novelist.

Following the chronology of publication, Chapter III then examines Moele's *The Book of the Dead*. Focusing on the text's curious characterisation of HIV as a deific presence and on Nikolas Rose's work on biological citizenship, I argue that Moele's novel is unnerving because of how well its protagonist adheres to codes of conduct assumed of all citizens. Thus, the form of self-care expected of 'responsible' citizens is weaponised and, in turn, revealed to be a flawed form of bodily surveillance and control. This, coupled with the novel's metatextual meditation on inscription as a dehumanising act, presents a critique of responses to HIV that inflate its destructive properties and stigmatise those who are infected.

Finally, in Chapter IV, Staggie's *Risk* is analysed as the most obvious – and self-proclaimed – work of transgressive fiction in this thesis. After mapping the novel's invocation of several similar American and European novels and films, I explore its particular intertextual relationship with Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* in order to frame the chapter's inquiry into the nature of the violence portrayed in Staggie's novel. Drawing both on Frantz Fanon's writing on anti-colonial violence and on Julian Brown's notion of the "insurgent citizen" in recent protest action, I argue that *Risk* falls somewhere between the two, since the novel's ambiguous treatment of violence

reflects overlapping social concerns regarding race, class and the historical valorisation of violence in South Africa. As a result, the text challenges our ability to judge whether certain acts of violence are to be read as necessary protest or senseless terrorism.

Drawing on and/or mutating traditions that harken back to the grotesque realism of pre-Renaissance carnivals, the structure of Menippean satire, and works of transgressive fiction from abroad, all of these novels appear antagonistic in formulation. Furthermore, they emerge from writers located in a country that is slowly reckoning with deep wounds inflicted by epistemological, bodily and psychological violence. In each chapter, a particular novel's critique of South African institutions and processes is laid bare, and the possible empathic response from the reader is questioned.

Chapter II

The Elusive Child: *Thirteen Cents* and the Disruption of Interpretation

> Sometimes I aint sho who's got ere a right to say when a man is crazy and when he aint. Sometimes I think it aint none of us pure crazy and aint none of us pure sane until the balance of us talks him that-a-way. It's like it aint so much what a fellow does, but it's the way the majority of folks is looking at him when he does it. (Faulkner 219–20)
>
> "Funky eyes," she says. I smile at her whiteness. (Duiker 99)

2.1) Introduction

K. Sello Duiker's powerful debut, *Thirteen Cents* (2000), is narrated by Azure – a teenage boy who lives on the streets of Cape Town. Azure's harrowing narrative presents the reader with a complex portrait of the legal and illicit power structures that underpin his existence, as he engages in paedophilic sex work with white men in order to gain money to afford him protection from gangsters and eek out an existence. Echoing elements of Duiker's second novel, *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*, *Thirteen Cents* closes its narrative with a disorienting turn from social realism to either magical realism or psychic distress resulting in hallucination – or a mixture of the two, as the protagonist witnesses the cataclysmic destruction of Cape Town. Winning the 2001 Commonwealth Writer's Prize for Best First Book, *Thirteen Cents* launched Duiker's tragically short career as a fictional writer. Although *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* has amassed more scholarship, *Thirteen Cents* has been widely addressed in criticism and is considered a seminal text in the 'post-apartheid' era.

Thirteen Cents features as the first text-based analysis in this thesis for two reasons. First: Duiker's style of writing was distinctive at the time of publication, but subsequently several imitators – Kgebetli Moele among them – have emerged (see Demir, Moreillon and Muller). Second: *Thirteen Cents* presents a particular challenge to its reader or academic interlocutor. As I will illustrate in this chapter, Duiker's debut features subtle devices that interrogate each reader's positionality in relation to the text, challenge their interpretation of Azure as a character, and problematise any use of Azure as a malleable symbol in the interpretation process.

This argument proceeds by exploring the foundational mechanisms that undergird the reading and interpreting of fictional novels, with a focus on reader-response criticism and Molly Hoey's related scholarship, which concerns itself specifically with transgressive fiction. Following this theoretical scaffolding, attention turns to existing scholarship on *Thirteen Cents*, in order to

map various critical opinions concerning the level of agency available to and exercised by Azure.[29] Following this charting, I identify and address a gap in the aforementioned scholarship: that it does not consider the protagonist's frustration with "grown-ups" – a position from which literary criticism is generally conducted – and their inability to understand him. Instead, I read Azure's constant complaint as a reflexive device deliberately inserted by Duiker to undermine the confidence usually placed in the reading process. The chapter concludes with some remarks regarding *Thirteen Cents*'s canonisation within 'post-apartheid' literature, and the incompatibility of such a process with the novel's central demands.

2.2) Reading with One Eye Open: Transgressive Fiction and Interpretive Strategies

The central focus of this section is to survey, expand on, and respond to, existing scholarship regarding transgressive fiction. The basic theory explored here can generally be categorised as part of reader-response criticism, as I cite the work of Wolfgang Iser and Stanley Fish.[30] Iser provides an effective schematic of the reader-text relationship which accounts for the plurality of interpretations. From Fish, I map the concept of "interpretive communities" so as to best expound on an interest beyond the literary mechanics of *Thirteen Cents*, and to explore the novel's academic reception. Following this theoretical scaffolding, I turn to criticism produced by Hoey which reveals how Iser's notions have been brought to bear on transgressive fiction, and argues for an expansion on her existing scholarship. Finally, I conclude this section by linking the concerns of reader-response theory with Megan Boler's notion of active empathy in reading texts.

In her survey of reader-response criticism, Elizabeth Freund provides a cogent description of its concerns:

> The "turn" loosely called "reader-response criticism" attempts to make the imperceptible process of reading perceptible by seeking to reopen to scrutiny that which has been declared inscrutable, illegitimate or trivial. […] In one mode or another, the swerve to the reader assumes that our relationship to reality is not a positive knowledge but a hermeneutic construct, that all perception is already an act of interpretation, that the notion of a 'text-in-itself' is empty, that a poem cannot be understood in isolation from its results, and that subject and object are indivisibly bound. (5)

[29] Curiously, many articles that claim to discuss *Thirteen Cents* and *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* – or broader concerns that reportedly permeate Duiker's entire *oeuvre* – tend to focus only on the latter (see Stobie, Samuelson, and Tsehloane, for example). Although there are some threads of inquiry that link both novels, claims made about *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* will not be applied to *Thirteen Cents* here.

[30] Although I acknowledge the tension that exists between Iser and Fish (see Fish "Why no one's afraid of Wolfgang Iser", Iser "Talk like Whales", and Freund 148–51), I have carefully drawn on both authors in a manner that accommodates both of their scholarship without causing contradiction.

As Freund's summary reveals, the turn to readers' hermeneutic construction of reality opens the doors for scholarship that reorients those very readers at the centre of a dynamic between themselves, the text, the artist and the universe.[31] Thus the shift to a reader-centred approach to literature not only serves the exploratory angle of this chapter, but is also useful in extrapolating on the previous chapter's concern with establishing the processes and players involved in the writing, publishing and reading of transgressive fiction – fiction that radically subverts and disturbs typical assumptions brought to the text by the reader.

Iser's scholarship has largely been concerned with interrogating the relationship between reader, text and author, and proceeds from a postmodern emphasis on the importance of an understanding of meaning as constantly constructed and therefore unstable. Given that each reader approaches a fictional work with varying assumptions and beliefs, Iser argues that instituting a common frame of reference is difficult and reductive – if not impossible. As a result, "the codes which might regulate this interaction are fragmented in the text, […] must first be reassembled or, in most cases, restructured before any frame of reference *can* be established" ("Interaction Between Text and Reader" 109). These fragmented codes are described by Iser as being constituted by "gaps" which provide the reader with the opportunity to actively participate in the construction of literary meaning by requiring imaginative leaps:

> These gaps have a different effect on the process of anticipation and retrospection, and thus on the "gestalt" of the virtual dimension, for they may be filled in different ways. For this reason, one text is potentially capable of several different realizations, and no reading can ever exhaust the full potential, for each individual reader will fill in the gaps in his own way, thereby excluding the various other possibilities; as he reads, he will make his own decision as to how the gap is to be filled. In this very act the dynamics of reading are revealed. […] They are often so fragmentary that one's attention is almost exclusively occupied with the search for connections between the fragments; the object of this is not to complicate the "spectrum" of connections, so much as to make us aware of the nature of our own capacity for providing links. In such cases, the text refers back directly to our own preconceptions – which are revealed by the act of interpretation that is a basic element of the reading process. ("The Reading Process" 285)

From the above description, it is evident that in selecting one interpretation of a text, the reader eschews many others. Furthermore, it suggests that Iser expects and promotes an awareness of these mechanisms on the reader's part.

In his mordant response to Fish, Iser painstakingly expands on his notion of textual "gaps". The following argument for a distinction between what is "given", "determinate" and

[31] This reorienting is a reference to M. H. Abrams' diagram depicting "the total situation" of an artwork (Freund 1).

"indeterminate" within a text is most helpful to my argument regarding Duiker's narrative construction of *Thirteen Cents* and constant appeal to the reader's self-critique:

> The words of a text are given, the interpretation of the words is determinate, and the gaps between given elements and/or interpretations are the indeterminacies. The real world is given, our interpretation of the world is determinate, the gaps between given elements and/or our interpretations are the indeterminacies. The difference is that with the literary text, it is the interpretation of the words that produces the literary world – i.e. its real-ness, unlike that of the outside world, is not given. ("Talk like Whales" 83)

Iser's statement above describes textual engagement in such a manner that it allows for opposing interpretations without enabling them to become outlandish. Moreover, of the three divisions that he identifies, what he terms "indeterminacies" provide the reader with the most opportunity to engage in self-reflection. Hoey further clarifies this link to transgressive fiction, by claiming that Iser's conception of gaps impacts the individual's constant creation of meaning whilst reading:

> By allowing themselves to interact with the transgressive narrative voice and visualizing the images that are presented to them, the reader enacts and participates in the violence and subversion that the text depicts. Through this enactment the transgressive text, as acting subject, attempts to objectify and act upon the body of the reader; through a combination of pleasure, guilt and disgust. ("The Failure to Act" 5)

This participation, by the reader, is what Hoey elsewhere refers to as the text's "Iserian potential" ("The Lacuna of Usefulness" 35), and the subject of discussion in later paragraphs.

For Iser, textual indeterminacies are "the most important link between the text and reader" ("Indeterminacy" 43), as they "send[] the reader off on a search for meaning" (41). In reaching the crux of his argument, he directly addresses the instability of multiple symbolic interpretations that is central to this chapter:

> If fiction stubbornly refuses to reveal the sought-for meaning, then the reader will decide what it has to mean. But then one realizes that by imposing an allegorical or unequivocal meaning onto the texts, one's approach tends to be superficial or even trivial. Should not this allegorization be seen as an indication of the nature of our current conceptions and preconceptions rather than as a means of explaining the text? If so, then such texts will show us the fundamental lack of freedom resulting from our self-imposed confinement within the world of our own ideas. (41–42)

As will be illustrated in the succeeding section, Duiker's novel is often read, especially in academic criticism, in an allegorical manner. Specifically, the experience of Azure is interpreted as a metaphor for the failure of 'post-apartheid' South African society to adequately address and repair social inequality, or it is implied that the protagonist's experience is representative of all street children. The imposition of various interpretations may appear innocent and congruent with the

content of *Thirteen Cents*, and thus exemplary of fiction's openness to diffuse opinion. In the specific case of Duiker's novel, however, the text itself contains confrontational facets which seek to undermine wider readings by narrowing the field of interpretation through the deployment of ambiguity, most notably, the insertion of trauma-based narrative strategies. As a result, the reader of *Thirteen Cents* – in particular, the academic reader – must choose between deriving allegories from the text or respecting the ambiguity and inconclusive nature of its narrative. It is not that *Thirteen Cents* invites a multiplicity of interpretations because of its indeterminacy, but rather that the indeterminacy renders any interpretation unstable and exposes the insertion of the reader's assumptions when constructing a specific reading of the novel.

A difficulty arises when one considers the intersection of Iser's theories with the presence of traumatic content in literature. By its very nature, trauma is unknowable to both the individual experiencing it and others attempting to understand it. Consequently, that which is traumatic evades language and is signified by absence more than presence. In the face of such content, then, Iser's "indeterminacies" become even more unstable and evade meaning itself. The literary manifestation of trauma may be represented with such ambiguity that it is misinterpreted or overlooked in favour of other interpretations. In the case of narratives which are relayed via first-person narration, the relationship between reader and speaker becomes even more fraught. As Lauren Berlant explains, a traumatised individual "is deemed both to have the most and least expertise over its significance – least because trauma definitionally dissolves the rules of continuity that stabilize self-knowledge over time and most because ultimately no one else can witness one's own story" (43). I return to this line of argument in the chapter's third section. For now, it is integral to recognise that Iser's notion of "indeterminacy" can be restricted by the presence of trauma, particularly in a novel utilising a first-person, trauma-inflected perspective. These types of narratives cause the reader to question how reliable any interpretation of indeterminacy can be, when the indeterminacies themselves intersect with trauma – an unknowable and unmappable psychic scar.

Despite the combative relationship between their theoretical stances, there is an aspect of Fish's work which can be read congruently with Iser's writing: interpretive communities. In his seminal essay "Interpreting the *Variorum*", Fish argues that such communities are "made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions" (483). Furthermore, he claims that interpretive communities "are no more stable than texts because interpretive strategies are not natural or universal, but *learned*" (484). The longevity and perpetuation of various interpretive

strategies and schools are, for Fish, a product of instruction and learning, as opposed to a function of an inherent and/or transcendental truth in any text. As the upcoming dissection of existing *Thirteen Cents* scholarship will reveal, there are commonalities that confirm Fish's claims regarding interpretive communities. It is also important to note the seeming inescapability of membership and/or categorisation into one or other interpretive community. For example, this chapter pursues an interest in trauma and its disruption of interpretive processes, and therefore may be described as aligned with trauma scholarship or literary trauma studies. Therefore, I do not intend to argue against the existence and perpetuation of interpretive communities, but rather to identify and explore which particular interpretive communities have been active in relation to *Thirteen Cents*.

As the novel progresses through its startling first two chapters, in which the conditions under which Azure survives and 'works' are revealed, the reader is made uncomfortable by the results of engaging in a voyeuristic perspective. Given the nature of the relationship between text and reader, the latter is able to set aside Duiker's novel once the content has reached a certain level of provocation, however. That is to say, the reader is not obligated to continue to the very last word. This argument reinvokes my first chapter's discussion of a text-reader relationship of consent and engagement. It is the argument of this chapter, by contrast, that, should the individual consent to continue reading, their relationship to the text is altered, and this alteration bears consequences for the form of scholarship which might proceed from the text. At the novel's close, the readers are presented with the possibility of reckoning with themselves, questioning why they have consented to continue reading a work of fiction that – as was argued in the previous chapter – incurs emotional and psychological discomfort without catharsis. Given that this thesis draws strongly on Boler's conception of empathy, the readers' reckoning becomes a fundamental part of negotiating how one relates to the text and the paradigms depicted within it.

The reading of prose fiction involves many of the same dynamics as voyeurism. Readers are provided a window through which they may witness the events of a fictional world, but do not bear the same 'consequences' as a character of that world. This process of reading may instigate emotional and psychological reactions to the content of the novel, and these reactions may be comforting, discomforting, or any other emotion on the spectrum between these two points. In her discussion of "passive empathy" – addressed in the previous chapter – Boler cautions against reading that "not only frees the reader from blame, but […] allows the voyeuristic pleasure of listening and judging the other from a position of power/safe distance" (260). When discussing voyeurism in relation to transgressive fiction, however, the relations between text, reader and

author become more complex. As was explained in the previous chapter, transgressive texts are written with the specific intention of denying a comforting and/or reaffirming experience for the reader. Rather, they set out to provoke or upset their readers by presenting characters whose attitudes and behaviours are generally considered taboo and undesirable in their respective, fictionalised social settings. With regard to *Thirteen Cents*, depictions of sex between adults and children and of extreme violence constitute such provocation, given the clear physical violence and eliding of the child's consent. Hoey has argued that central mechanism of transgressive fiction is frustration:

> Transgressive texts systematically set about to frustrate all the desires that a reader brings to the text: the quest for meaning, the desire for escape, the consolations of mimesis, the pleasures of voyeurism, even the desire to transgress. Any reader hoping through these texts to realize violent fantasy is confronted by the impossibility of any such fantasy as is evidenced with the endings of *Frisk* and *American Psycho,* where the violence is revealed to have been imaginary, or the endings of *The Dice Man* and *Cock and Bull* where the story unravels into reflexive incoherence. (28)

Hoey's article attempts to map the technics and results of this frustration via the theoretical writings of Iser, Roland Barthes, Georges Bataille and Mikhail Bakhtin. In describing a transgressive novel as "a-ideological", she claims that it is "neither for nor against cultural norms; it refuses to comment on the ideology from which it is written, maintaining its ambiguity through the constant movement and play of signs" (28–29). The gist of Hoey's argument is that subversive texts are inevitably "absorbed into the body social", and therefore that readers should avoid attempts at "housebreaking" the transgressive text, and rather "develop a reader-focused framework which imagines the text and its 'meanings' in terms similar to that of Iserian potential" (35).[32] From what Hoey implies in her article, I read this statement to mean that transgressive texts are to be read within the realm of Iser's scholarship, with its focus on the individual reader's response. In agreement with Hoey, as well as the previously discussed scholarship of M. Keith Booker, I have elected to focus on a series of theoretical frameworks in each of this thesis's chapters, with no single methodology being relatable to all three texts.

Furthermore, these frameworks are not simply imposed on the texts, but rather established in order to explore how each novel grapples with, confirms, and/or denies their respective premises. Where I differ from Hoey is in her claim that, once transgressive texts are considered as a form of carnivalized literature (again invoking Bakhtin), the reader is "invited to suspend his

[32] Hoey bases this argument on Bataille's response to critics who have detracted from the "suffocating brilliance" of the Marquis de Sade (33–35).

morals and assumption[s]" (36). Yet this is a claim that ignores the construction of the carnival as a sanctioned and limited event, which is followed by a return to the morals and assumptions one holds outside its occurrence. In response, I argue that the specific morality and assumptions that readers bring to such texts are very often the targets of the novels' critiques and drives for self-reflection. If it were possible for readers to suspend their morals and assumptions, the result would be a rather futile endeavour: the passive reader would shrug at each character's appalling behaviour, and any attempt to engage with pre-existing social mores would become redundant. If one were able to dislocate from a sense of ethics and acceptability, it makes little sense why this would be a practice required solely of transgressive fiction. Instead, the blank reader could approach any text without tinted lenses and engage with it in a clinical sense. Furthermore, Hoey fails to address the fact that, when adopting an "a-ideological" position, the author would be acting within a specific ideological framework. Regardless of whether or not one considers the text to be a-ideological – which it cannot be – the decision by the author to frame the novel in such a manner is ideological in itself.

Hoey's description of the reader-text relationship is a nihilistic one; the texts themselves seeming to contribute absolutely nothing to the reader's experience of literature and/or the world outside the text. Such a notion of the relationship also does a disservice to the authors crafting transgressive literature, as it eschews their own concerns, concerns which are noticeably present in their work. Chuck Palahniuk, for example, is seemingly frustrated by stifling forms of masculinity, and this dissatisfaction is evident in *Fight Club*. For Hoey, Palahniuk's critique may be noticed by the reader but not necessarily then extracted and examined as social commentary. I believe that Boler's conception of active empathy is a strategy of reading more congruent with transgressive fiction, as the act of self-reflection ruptures a simplistic view of literature as unaffecting.

As a result, an individual's decision to read a transgressive novel implies a recognition of the nature of the text's content, *and* a desire to engage with that content nonetheless. Texts such as *Thirteen Cents*, *The Book of the Dead* and *Risk* – all of which employ first-person narration – call into question the reader's relationship to the story by having the protagonist directly address an implied reader. In Duiker's novel, this is made evident by Azure's first paragraph of narration, which functions similarly to a personal, albeit blunt, introduction between two people: "My name is Azure. *Ah-zoo-ray*. That's how you say it. My mother gave me that name. It's the only thing I have left of her" (1). Duiker's positioning of a familiar greeting at the opening of *Thirteen Cents* implies an acknowledgement, on Azure's behalf, that his narrative is addressed to someone; that

an interlocutor is invoked, and the protagonist is not simply speaking into a void. Vartan P. Messier, in discussing *American Psycho*, draws attention to the reduction of distance that occurs between the "I" of the narrator and the "I" of the reader, as a result of that novel's first-person narration (78–79). Given this collapse of distance, a certain degree of discomfort may be generated in the reader, who experiences acts of transgression through the eyes of their perpetrator. This narrative technique is widely used in transgressive texts, including Moele and Staggie's novels, as discussed in subsequent chapters.[33] In having Azure introduce himself, Duiker foregrounds this narrative mechanism and positions the reader as one who is receiving a narrative. Duiker's positioning of the reader is not only a stylistic choice, but one that implicates the reader in a different array of ethical concerns, to be discussed later in this chapter.

2.3) Azure Refracted: Academic Interpretation

With the above theoretical scaffolding in place, I turn now to existing scholarship on *Thirteen Cents*, in order to establish both the assumptions brought to bear on the text, as well as the manner in which Azure is (re-)presented. This section attempts to engage with as wide a selection of existing *Thirteen Cents* criticism as possible, in order to reveal the broad array of theoretical concerns to which Duiker's novel has been yoked.

I begin with Sam Raditlhalo's article entitled "A Victory of Sorts': All *Thirteen Cents* and *Bitter*, Too", which explores the work of Duiker and Achmat Dangor as delineating problems that "emanate both from the past that refuses to go away and a present that betrays the ideals of the past", and as depicting protagonists who are "caught in a maelstrom of a vicious circle of degeneration neither of their making nor choosing" ("A Victory of Sorts" 267). Raditlhalo's approach to Azure is a sympathetic one: he describes the protagonist as "no longer a child (in the real sense)" (273), but nevertheless has "aged far beyond his chronological years" (274). This particular article demonstrates an empathetic approach to Azure and his psychological state, taking into account the manner in which he is routinely exploited by both legal and illegal systems of abuse.

By foregrounding traumatic experience, Edgar Nabutanyi's scholarship promises a similarly empathetic engagement with *Thirteen Cents*, and specifically with Azure.[34] This is

[33] First-person narration is also employed – widely, if not exclusively – in the oeuvres of Irvine Welsh, Chuck Palahniuk, Anthony Burgess, Kathy Acker, Will Self and Dennis Cooper.

[34] Nabutanyi's article "Powerful Men and Boyhood Sexuality in K. Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents*" is slightly marred by some misreadings of Duiker's work. For example, Azure's beating at the hands of Sealy is an act of punishment, and not a gang initiation rite, as Nabutanyi suggests (38–39) and, in *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*,

accomplished by eschewing the view that Azure is simply a child who is battered by social and economic forces, and instead recognising that he has "the agency to deny his vulnerability as a poor child" ("Archives of Troubled Childhoods" 6). In his work on Duiker, specifically, Nabutanyi explores the intersection of the complex post-apartheid city, tendril-like patriarchal forces, the economic and literal survival of the marginalised, and horrifying paedophilia. Given its attempt to include so many weighty concepts, the article lacks a focus and culminates in an unclear reading of the novel's closing chapter ("Powerful Men and Boyhood Sexuality" 47).

Mamadou Abdou Babou Ngom's article is a curious piece of scholarship, with its sympathies and assumptions swaying between a concerned and considerate reading of Azure, and inaccurate and troubling formulations that do not seem grounded in the text. The contradictions in the article arise from Ngom being trapped between two conflicting arguments. The first is as follows:

> Street children are as diverse as their individual experiences, and behind every street child there is a traumatic ordeal to tell. The intricate and convoluted nature of the street kid phenomenon as well as the diversity in their individual experiences serve to substantiate the different street lifestyles of these drifters. (46)

The second argument assumes that Azure provides a comment on "the fate of street children in South Africa" (45), and therefore that his subjective experience can be mapped onto the faces and psyches of any other street child one encounters. The very title of Ngom's article – "Exposing Street Child Reality in South Africa" – further underscores this second argument. Ultimately, this view of the novel suggests a universality to the experience of being a homeless child, despite the fact that Azure is a fictional construct who has been manufactured by Duiker for a specific narrative purpose.

The aforementioned inaccuracies include mistaking the protagonist's internal monologue for dialogue spoken to other characters (49) and claiming that the events recounted in the novel encapsulate the sum of Azure's experience in sex work (47, 48), whereas the latter is a source of revenue he has clearly turned to before. Ngom makes disconcerting claims here, such as that "Azure has gone gay overnight" and "is on a slippery slope towards anal and oral sex at full throttle" (49) – remarks which either misunderstand the complexity of Azure's situation, or do not fully engage with the novel's ambiguity and the reader's consequent discomfort. This misreading is alarming, given that one of Azure's most frank and horrific descriptions summarises how terribly exposed he has been to violence, especially of a sexual nature:

Tshepo does not open a "homosexual school" (39). Unlike Ngom's article discussed below, however, these acts of misreading are not central to the larger argument.

> A boy? I am not a boy. I've seen a woman being raped by policemen at night near the station. I've seen a white man let a boy Bafana's age get into his car. I've seen a couple drive over a street child and they still kept going. I've seen a woman give birth in Sea Point at the beach and throw it into the sea. A boy? Fuck off. They must leave me alone. I have seen enough rubbish to fill the sea. I have been fucked by enough bastards and they've come on me with enough come to fill the swimming pool in Sea Point. (142)

This passage so blatantly refutes the other remarks made by Ngom that its elision is curious at best.

Andrea Spain analyses *Thirteen Cents* within the realm of queer theory. *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* certainly opens itself to such exploration by grounding a large portion of its narration in the psyche of a young gay man. I would argue that *Thirteen Cents* is a more difficult text to discuss in this regard, as it is difficult to definitively identify Azure's sexual orientation given the complexity of his position as a sex worker. In her article, Spain provocatively remarks that "at times – although Azure repeatedly insists that he's not gay – he takes pleasure in the sensuality, the sex, but also small pleasures the encounters bring" (428). Throughout the novel, Duiker clearly establishes Azure's heterosexuality via his attraction to Liesel (3–4, 17–18), his revulsion toward male genitalia (8), and his inability to gain sexual arousal in homosexual sex. On the few occasions in which Azure does gain an erection and ejaculate with a man, he draws on images of Toni Braxton and Mary J. Blige in order to do so (9, 91). Therefore, the protagonist certainly engages in queer relations via his 'work', but his lack of queer desire makes Spain's argument an uneasy one. The lack of clarity on Azure's sexuality further enlarges the novel's quotient of ambiguity, due to the distinction between what he chooses and that which he finds of inherent sexual interest. Although it is one of the goals of queer theory to interrogate and explore the representation of individuals' sexualities, invoking its arguments in a discussion of *Thirteen Cents* is difficult given the opaque nature of its protagonist. That said, Spain's claims regarding Azure's agency in sexual encounters – an agency which does not depend on Azure being queer – do resonate with my own later observations. For example, Spain emphasises this agency in her discussion of Azure's sex work: "which he largely controls, determining with whom he hooks up and steering the sex acts with a skilled, cultivated self-commodification" (428).

Brenna Munro also analyses *Thirteen Cents* through the lens of sexuality, but is more discerning in her description of the ambiguity surrounding Azure's sexuality. Describing the text as an "un-coming-out novel" (199), Munro suggests that "Azure, the beautiful, angry, mixed-race orphan, is perhaps meant to be read as like the new nation itself: everyone wants to rip him off" (201). In attempting to categorise Azure's psychological state in the novel's concluding chapters,

conflicting views appear in Munro's analysis. At first, she suggests that "Azure's improvised rituals seem to tap into some cosmic power", but then writes the following:

> Azure goes back up the mountain and deeper into a kind of madness that might also be a way of seeing the world clearly, but from a different angle. […] At the end of the novel, he comes down the mountain to see Cape Town being destroyed by a giant tidal wave that seems to be a manifestation of his fury, or even of AIDS, and it is difficult to say what is meant to be read as "real". (206)

The structure of Munro's argument allows for much ambiguity – not all of it uncomfortable. These quotes suggest three possibilities: that Azure has "tap[ped] into some cosmic power" and then becomes mad, or that madness and access to cosmic power are interlinked, or that the author is unsure of how to read this passage and is hedging her interpretive bets. The ending of the novel is extremely ambiguous, as has been mentioned on several occasions. Attempting to advocate for one or more interpretations of the events erodes that ambiguity, and does not acknowledge its importance as a narrative feature, designed by the author and intended to confuse and unsettle the reader.

What has become apparent in the above review of existing scholarship on *Thirteen Cents* is that there is a silence regarding the metatextual implications of Azure's mistrust of "grown-ups". This mistrust is voiced so often in the novel that it is foregrounded as a vital aspect of the protagonist's outlook. However, scholars who *do* mention this aspect of Azure's narration do not explore the possibility of whether they, as academics writing on *Thirteen Cents*, are not also implicated in the protagonist's critique – especially given the novel's recurrent focus on surveillance and misunderstanding. In what follows, I will explore this idea: namely, that Duiker has planted a deliberate obstacle to interpretation in his debut novel. Following an exploration of this idea, I shall turn to the self-reflexivity that *Thirteen Cents* arguably demands of its adult reader and their handling of Azure as a character.

2.4) Offering My Thirteen Cents: Trauma and Resistance to Interpretation

This section will consider the recurrent thematic concerns raised by the novel, as well as the complex narratorial strategy Duiker employs in order to tempt the reader into prematurely suggesting interpretations and literary associations before coming to the realisation that such an endeavour is largely thwarted by the text's construction.

Two prominent, recurring thematic concerns in *Thirteen Cents* are surveillance and misunderstanding – particularly as they occur between adults and children. Throughout the novel, Azure draws attention to various forms of surveillance that he notices and/or imagines. These range from the tangible and physical, such as the monitoring of his body and movements by gang

members and white "tricks", to the less tangible forms that Azure believes to be the product of supernatural forces. The clearest example of tangible surveillance occurs once Azure is in the home of a white man who has 'hired' him for sex:

> As soon as he leaves I put the TV on again. This time the TV shows the room we were doing it in. I go in there and look for the cameras but I can't find them. It starts feeling creepy walking around the house naked. Is this guy a pervert or something? I say as I put on my clothes. I walk around the rooms but only in the ones where the doors are open. In two of them the doors are locked. So this is how people who work in banks live. They are always being watched. I wouldn't want all his money if it meant I had to live like that. To always have people watching you is a curse. I turn off the TV. (89)

The presence of a surveillance system may, at first, seem commonplace in a South African home. Given the interlinked presence of crime and paranoia in the country, home-security systems seem omnipresent – particularly in white suburbs – and necessary to ensure peace of mind. Duiker's text eludes such a simple interpretation, however, when Azure notices that cameras have been placed in "the room we were doing it in" (89). This statement draws attention to the insertion of surveillance technology – and, by extension, a sense of voyeurism – in the most private of spaces. Moreover, the above quote's final sentence provides a wry suggestion to the reader: just as Azure turns off the television in an attempt to feel comfortable, the reader could close the pages of the novel. This excerpt also draws attention to the dark irony at the heart of *Thirteen Cents*: Azure, while narrating his moving and heart-breaking story, laments an existence that is constantly observed all the while being read and observed by the reader.

The very first page of *Thirteen Cents* establishes this conflict with reference to the narrator's striking physical features:

> I have blue eyes and dark skin. I'm used to people staring at me, mostly grown-ups. When I was at school children used to beat me up because I had blue eyes. They hated me for it. But now children take one look at me and then they either say something nasty or smile. But grown-ups, they pierce you with their stare. (1)

Azure is stared at and monitored, first and foremost, due to his physical features. His blackness and blue eyes are interpreted by South African society to be marks of peculiarity and causes of suspicion. Furthermore, his lifestyle is viewed as warranting surveillance and derision not only by the local gang members to whom he finds himself 'indebted', but also by other adults whom he encounters. Gang members such as Allen, Gerald and Richard exercise a direct form of control over Azure by identifying various spaces in Cape Town where he can or cannot move, and by forcibly moving his body from place to place. The former is evident in the protagonist's choice of sleeping location – "In town there are too many gangsters" (3) – and his avoidance of certain areas

which, once entered, will likely lead to an encounter with dangerous characters (21, 28). The latter is exemplified when Azure is kidnapped, forced to perform sex acts, and locked on the roof of a building for several days (45–55). Surveillance by non-gang members is established early in the text, such as in his interactions with street vendors and Joyce, an older woman whom he befriends but who ultimately betrays him. The street vendors chastise Azure for not attending school during the day (2) and Joyce forces him to promise that he will abstain from gang involvement (13). Both remonstrations signal a monitoring of his movements and a declaration as to where he should and should not be in space and time.

The 'less tangible' forms of surveillance alluded to earlier consist primarily of Azure's suspicion that witchcraft and other supernatural forces influence his life. Once again, Duiker raises these concerns early in the novel and sustains them until *Thirteen Cents*'s final page. In the opening pages, for example, Azure suspects the aforementioned street vendors of putting "funny things in the dustbins where we go scratching for food":

> I can smell their evil. I know a few kids who are under their evil spell. They make them walk the night spreading their evil. And some of them are so deep into their evil they can change shape. They can become rats or pigeons. Pigeons are also rats, they just have wings. And once you become a rat they make you do ugly things in sewers and in the dark. It's true. It happens. I've seen it. (1–2)

The image of evil pigeons recurs in *Thirteen Cents* and Azure associates them with a dark, supernatural force that is monitoring his movements (18, 20, 40, 63–64, 66). Specific moments in which these pigeons appear are revealing, as they coincide with some of Azure's most graphic descriptions of his abuse. For example, just before mis-identifying Gerald as Sealy, and being severely beaten as a consequence, Azure notices a pigeon flying above and remarks that "The work of evil will never stop" (18). Similarly, while locked on the rooftop by Gerald, Azure observes "ugly fat pigeons, flying around me endlessly" (50). Although the reader might interpret the association of pigeons with abuse as coincidental, the novel itself does not attempt to endorse any single reading of the events. The misunderstandings that permeate the novel are a direct product of these extensive forms of surveillance.

Acts and claims of misunderstanding recur so frequently in *Thirteen Cents* that it is possible for one to conclude that false readings are one of the text's overarching themes. Azure repeatedly laments the inability of "grown-ups" to understand him, often pairing this with the assessment that adults are "full of kak" and, more specifically, that "white people are full of kak" (81, 117). Duiker's protagonist is misunderstood for a myriad of reasons that I will explore below, and then proceed to argue that Azure's critique of adults not only applies to those actors within the text but also to its readers. The discussion above of the street vendors and Joyce is applicable in this regard

too. Joyce, seeming to express genuine concern for Azure's well-being, impresses on him that he should not associate with gang members, but she does not recognise the systems of exploitation in which he is already trapped. The street vendors are equally myopic in ignoring the possibility that Azure is out of school so that he can make money in order to survive.

It is primarily the adults he encounters who misunderstand Azure, though it is important to note that some aspects of Azure's behaviour and psychological state render him unintelligible too. The novel's first-person narration – that is, how readers come to observe this behaviour and psyche – is therefore an important facet here. This relates to Terry Eagleton's assertion that "a work's moral outlook, if it has anything so cohesive, may be secreted as much in its form as in its content", and that "the language and structure of a literary text may be the bearers and progenitors of so-called moral content" (*The Event of Literature* 46). *Thirteen Cents* employs first-person narration not only to provide the reader with a subjective insight into the disturbing underbelly of Cape Town, but also because its ethical concerns are linked to the expression of – and, hopefully, a respect for – that specific subjectivity. As was noted in the previous chapter, transgressive texts set their plots and perspectives in social and geopolitical spaces that are either generally ignored in literary and public representation or are approached with loaded assumptions regarding the actions and attitudes occurring in those spaces. By foregrounding that the narrative, in a sense, 'belongs' to Azure – he is its conduit – Duiker subtly causes the reader to interrogate whatever beliefs they may accumulate in occasional encounters with street children in Cape Town – or, sadly, in any other South African city. For example, he deliberately draws attention to these assumptions by inserting a scene in the novel in which a doctor treating Azure spouts a series of ungenerous and harsh assumptions regarding street children, and even displays a sense of malice toward the protagonist (42–44). Whether the reader shares the doctor's beliefs or not, their expression provides a specific subjectivity with which readers may question the social and interpersonal forces at play.

A deeper discussion of Azure's agency must also take note of his narrative style – or what Nabutanyi aptly describes as his "point-blank coarse register; first-person agency ('I'), tour-guide perceptiveness, and cocky personality" ("Powerful Men" 41). The reader's default assumption – which is valid and understandable – may be that, given the protagonist's age, lack of economic security, and (often) forced social settings, he is simply shuffled and shoved from one unhealthy and dangerous scenario to the next. In other words, he *has* no agency. However, he displays a strategic use of cunning and insight to manipulate certain adult figures in an attempt to lessen the extent of his own exploitation. Before proceeding to expound on this observation, I wish to make

it clear that this is not to blame Azure for the horrific ordeals he experiences, nor to argue that he freely chooses to pursue sex work. Rather, I maintain that the protagonist is a far more strategic character than some critics acknowledge. Consider, for example, the following interactions between Azure and the white men by whom he is 'hired':

> He rubs the soap quickly between his hands and slides his hands on my back and bum. I'm forced to smile. That's what they expect. Grown-ups. I know their games. I smile. (Duiker 8)

> We got to his car. His ring shimmers in the night.
> "Do you always wear your wedding ring?" I say just so that he doesn't take me for a fool and try to cheat me after the sex.
> "If I give you sixty will you shut up?"
> "I can do that. I can be quiet." (29–30)

> "Does your wife know you do this?"
> "No. She's away on holiday," he says a little nervous.
> "Well, take off your ring. I don't want to see it," I almost shout at him.
> "Done," he says and pulls it off.
> "Why do you wear it?"
> "Because I'm married."
> "No. I mean…"
> "Oh, I don't know. Habit, I guess. Also I don't want to lose it."
> You've lost your mind, I say to myself.
> "You have kids?"
> "Look, I don't want to talk about my family. Are you coming or not?" (81)

In each of these examples Azure displays an awareness of his clients' expectations, as well as pressure points which render them uncomfortable. This discomfort reveals both their underlying assumptions that the 'hired' street child will not be cheeky or respond aggressively and strategically, as well as the fact that there is an element of guilt and shame connected to these men's actions. More importantly, these interactions signal Azure's ability to recognise such experiences of shame and guilt and manipulate them to his advantage so as to ensure his financial safety. By presenting a canny character, Duiker undermines literary tropes that the reader may expect in his representation of Azure: such as those of the traumatised child, the passive child, and the exploited child sex worker. The reader is thus placed in an uncomfortable position: understandably feeling sympathetic – or even pitying – Azure due to the horrific aspects of his existence, but also experiencing a questioning of the assumptions they bring to their engagement with this character, and how his narrative may not cohere with notions of agency.

For many critics, the most essential aspect of Azure's first-person narration is the impact of trauma on his psychological wellbeing. It is self-evident that Azure is a traumatised individual, having found his parents' corpses, fallen victim to extreme physical and sexual abuse at the hands

of gang members, and been cast adrift in Cape Town with his only friend leaving for more promising prospects in Port Elizabeth (99). At first, *Thirteen Cents* seems to fall in place behind other works of transgressive fiction, in that characters who undergo (or enact) violent and traumatising events are seldom psychologically scarred by these experiences. Bret Easton Ellis's *Less than Zero* and Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* are two examples in which this curious elision of trauma occurs. In a similar vein, Azure's recollection of discovering his parents' dead bodies is presented in a matter-of-fact style, using short, clipped sentences that seem devoid of emotion:

> I lost my parents three years ago. Papa was bad with money and got Mama in trouble. The day they killed them I was away at school. I came back to the shack only to find them in a pool of blood. That was three years ago. That was the last time I went to school. […] My friend Bafana can't believe that I saw my dead parents and didn't freak out. But I told him. I cried and then it was over. No one was going to take care of me. (2)

However, the simultaneous pathos and bravado of the final line of this quotation underscore Azure's actual psychological state – that of a traumatised child – and the image of self that he has developed: an adult, capable of maturely dealing with the complexities of life. Moreover, his morbid fixation with his parents' death is evident throughout the novel when he returns to thoughts of the loss of his mother, especially – a recurrent motif in the text (24, 47, 161, 162, 163, 164). As Cathy Caruth explains: "What returns to haunt the victim […] is not only the reality of the violent event but also the reality of the way that its violence has not yet been fully known" (6). *Thirteen Cents* thus reveals itself to be quite different to the works of transgressive fiction listed above, since trauma is central to the novel, rather than uncomfortably absent from it.

In *Thirteen Cents*, trauma becomes an even more complex element than previously outlined. In her analysis of trauma in fiction, Laurie Vickroy writes of figures such as Azure: "traumatised children [do not only provide] poignant metaphors but also concrete examples of neglect, exploitation, disempowerment, and disavowal of communities and even entire cultures" (81). Although there are many texts to which this statement may be applied, I believe that *Thirteen Cents* wrestles with its potential status as metaphor for the sum of experiences endured by street children in South Africa. The novel is certainly concerned with Azure – his precarious and difficult daily existence, and his traumatised psyche. Yet the novel's constant return to misunderstandings signals a concern with how Azure is misinterpreted. It strikes me as equally possible for Duiker's protagonist to be misunderstood by us, his readers, as it is for those who exploit him and elide his existence. One brief passage illustrates this point excellently: "I dreamt I was at sea and that I had fallen out of a boat but no one had seen me. The boat just kept going and I was beginning to drown. And it was night too. It was a scary dream. To be alone in the sea, at night and without a soul or

land nearby, what could be worse?" (100). Azure's dream could easily be read as a metaphor for disadvantaged street children in early-2000s South Africa. Or, it could represent the condition of all people of colour in a supposedly 'post-apartheid' South Africa. Perhaps it symbolises Azure feeling unmoored, following the departure of his friend, Vincent. The possibility of all of these interpretations reveals that the text is deeply indeterminate or ambivalent, and therefore "show[s] us the fundamental lack of freedom resulting from our self-imposed confinement within the world of our own ideas" (Iser "Indeterminacy" 42). The result, and the gist of this chapter, is that the reader ultimately chooses an interpretation of the events, but the novel provides sufficient opportunity for said reader to recognise their own power in that choice.

As stated earlier, there is a similarity between surveillance of Azure's body in the white man's apartment and the general, pervasive surveillance he is subjected to daily. The text represents its protagonist as trapped in systems of abuse and exploitation that he seems powerless to avoid, challenge, or even perceive on certain occasions. Arguably, too, Azure's manipulation and scrutiny by systems of surveillance and misunderstanding are indicative, on a metatextual level, of his positionality as a fictional character. Like the security system in the banker's home, *Thirteen Cents*'s first-person narrative offers the reader insights into the most private of Azure's experiences. The reader begins the novel with no knowledge of its protagonist but comes to know him via his experiences and reflections. Given that the themes of surveillance and misunderstanding are intertwined in *Thirteen Cents*, the novel thus suggests that the reader's safe position also allows for misinterpretation and, possibly, that the reader is implicated in the systems of abuse to which street children are subjected. Duiker has therefore crafted a novel that not only discomforts the reader via its depictions of Azure's abuse, but also challenges and undermines the reader's interpretive assumptions, due to its subversion of the reading process itself.

A specific interaction in *Thirteen Cents* supports my argument that Duiker is critical of the conventional assumptions brought to bear on texts and, in particular, is suspicious of how white readers respond to narratives about abused black bodies. This interaction occurs when Bafana introduces Azure to two young white men, who offer them LSD/acid in return for a form of 'poverty tourism':

> "We've got good acid," the other says, "and we'll like feed you for the evening but it must be like a totally outdoor experience. Like we were wondering if you would take us to all of your hang-out spots at night. You know, to get the whole experience unedited."
> […]
> "But this is going to be a totally awesome experience. Like don't you want to tap into some raw energy? I mean just think of it. Think of us making art, man. Right here right now," the shorter one says.(22–23)

In their statements, the two white men indicate that Bafana's and Azure's experiences are simply fuel for the 'art' they plan to create. The use of the word "unedited" is telling, as it reveals that the men are aware that their perspective on poverty has been mediated, yet the 'tour' is still an experience they wish to have whilst narcotics are influencing their engagement with the world, possibly in the hope that the drugs will dull the sharp edge of Azure's exploited existence. This sentiment is similar to that of an individual who reads transgressive fiction: the experiences depicted are, understandably, too disturbing for one to willingly engage with in reality (that is, in the reader's own world) and therefore it is preferable to read fictionalised narratives, edited and structured to allow a certain amount of safe distance between the reader and the text. A dilemma emerges, however, when whatever insights may be gleaned from such texts are applied to claims the reader makes about the non-fictional world. Azure's subjective experience, extremely well thought-out and constructed by Duiker, is perceived either as some sort of Ur-text about the disenfranchised child – as Ngom seems to suggest – or a novel sufficiently ambiguous to be shoehorned into arguments that are better suited to evidence drawn from the real, non-fictional world. Yet the latter appropriative actions eschew the fact that *Thirteen Cents* is itself a construction – invented and edited as a work of fiction. In other words, the very fictionality of the text must be held constantly in mind by the reader, so that they may assume that the encounters and characters they witness in Duiker's novel are not necessarily similar to what they would see in the real world.

Existing scholarship on *Thirteen Cents* has room for such a reader critique. For example, it does engage with the text's reflections on race relations, surveillance, notions of masculinity, and the abuse of the black body, but it does not engage with what appears (to me) to be a clear problematising, by Duiker, of the reader's voyeuristic consumption of the narrative and with interpretations which ignore Azure's trauma by positing political interpretations which position the novel in a 'post-apartheid' canon concerned with disillusionment and malaise.

As with all of Duiker's fiction, however, interpretation is not a straightforward process. One must also contend with the occasional literary references that he inserts into the novel, which signal to the reader that intertextual connections can be made between *Thirteen Cents* and other works of literature. Examples include the similarity between the names Azure and Azarro, the protagonist in Ben Okri's magical realist novel *The Famished Road*, as well as Azure's claim "My mother was a fish" (127), which invokes the shortest chapter in William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*. A subtler form of intertextuality, argues Sam Raditlhalo, lies in the link between Azure and the protagonist of Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye* ("The Travelling Salesman" 98). Yet, when

these intertextual allusions are traced in order to discover potential meaning, they render very little. For example, claiming that the protagonist of *Thirteen Cents* is locked within a magical realist narrative – in support of the intertextual link to Okri – is to eschew the novel's ambiguity on that very matter. Azure is distinct from Faulkner's Vardaman, most particularly in terms of the latter's tense familial dynamics and the other's lack thereof. Duiker therefore seems engaged in a playful game of deception with the reader of *Thirteen Cents*: laying a trail of intertextual references that ultimately fails to reward. This 'game' is arguably an extension of his larger narratorial strategy, which involves the disruption of interpretation and the assurance that readers will remain unfulfilled, due to the novel's indeterminacy.

A characteristic of trauma in fiction is the intrusion of traumatic material into the present. Moments in time become a palimpsest, layered with present meaning and the irruption of prior trauma. Azure's dreams in the mountain cave are possible examples of this layering and intrusion. I say "possible" as I am not attempting to discredit alternate readings of the novel that are open to its foundational narrative ambiguity. Here, some of the more esoteric elements of *Thirteen Cents* play an integral part. The series of dreams experienced by Azure (119–23, 126–30), coupled with the novel's closing description of a Cape Town cataclysmically destroyed (160–64), are enigmas to the reader. Given Duiker's aforementioned intertextual 'game', these sequences are rife with interpretive potential, and have been approached as such in existing scholarship. The reader therefore must decide between interpreting the appearances of Saartjie Bartman, T-Rex and Mantis (119–23, 126–30) as illegible aspects of Azure's psyche or mythic revenants of South Africa's pre- and colonial past – or possibly a combination of the two. This decision is, frankly, less interesting than the ambivalence Duiker created when writing the novel. Given Iser's comments, quoted earlier, readers are required to decide upon meaning in every text they encounter. Duiker's choice to deploy such extensive and strategic ambiguity in a novel narrated by a child prostitute – thus problematising more general notions of reader's sympathy for abused children – is the more thought-provokingly transgressive aspect of *Thirteen Cents*.

I suggest an alternative reading of these sequences, one which is congruent with the argument espoused thus far: leave them uninterpreted. This may strike some as lazy scholarship; an unwillingness to engage with the complexity of the text. However, any reader's decision to elide the novel's recurrent and vital presence of indeterminacy is to incompletely engage with the text. Furthermore, if one accepts my earlier argument that Azure is a traumatised and psychologically unstable individual, the products of his mind must be treated as part-and-parcel of

Thirteen Cents's "psychic realism", as opposed to descriptions of "gritty realism" which the novel has attracted (Brown 37).

2.5) Hindsight is 20/20: The Canonisation of *Thirteen Cents*

It seems prudent to offer some account as to why academics have elided the self-reflective dimension of *Thirteen Cents*. I posit that the (warranted) acclaim surrounding the novel and the subsequent pronouncement of it as a core text in the 'post-apartheid' canon may have distracted from the novel's subtler aspects. Michael Green remarks that Duiker, Phaswane Mpe and Zakes Mda are considered "a regular triumvirate forming the kernel of a new canon for the new nation" (334). Similarly, Leon de Kock counts Duiker among a "bewildering array of new names" which have "literally taken over from the older local canon of Schreiner, Smith, Fugard, Brutus, Mphahlele, Gordimer, Coetzee, Dangor, Mda et al" (115). In his tribute "The Travelling Salesman", Radithlalo describes Duiker's and Mpe's fiction as having "left behind priceless delineations of a post[-]apartheid South Africa awakening to its infinite, if uncertain, futures" (96).[35] Whilst these assessments are made on the basis of Duiker's evident writing skills, the exact time in which he published cannot be discounted. Read not only as a trauma narrative, *Thirteen Cents* has also been viewed as a novel of the post-1994, post-transitional, post-TRC era and of the early 2000s, and therefore as a response to at least one of these markers. Coupling the novel's publication date with quotes such as "Mandela se poes" (49) and "I watch the flames play with all the colours of the rainbow" (111) lends the novel a pessimistic tone that can be easily instrumentalised for the political arguments alluded to earlier.

Jane Poyner remarks that contemporary South African novelists "have pointed up the need both to bear witness to the past in order to build a better future and also to regard the promises of truth and reconciliation in the 'Rainbow Nation' with a politically urgent and measured scepticism" (112). Whilst it is understandable that a nation freeing itself from apartheid's tyranny requires innovative and critical representation, the link between that desire and the creation of an interpretive community cannot be ignored. In his assessment of the emerging "post-apartheid canon", Michael Green identifies the following recurrent features:

> In terms of content, no concentration on race and little mention of apartheid – instead, engage with one or more of AIDS, crime, xenophobia, homosexuality, returning exiles, urbanisation, new forms of dispossession, and identity displacement. In terms of style, take as much latitude from the standard realism associated with struggle literature as possible – association with 'magic realism'

[35] For additional examples – specifically statements made after Duiker's and Mpe's death – see Attree.

> is acceptable, as long as it is made clear that this is drawn from African tale-telling traditions rather than any particular international influence. (334)

Poyner, by contrast, suggests that in such a canon "themes and topics typically previously 'out of bounds' proliferate, such as black complicity with the regime and a renegotiation of 'coloured' and white working-class Afrikaner identity" (106). Whilst Poyner's and Green's evaluations and summaries do shed light on current and persisting trends in South African fiction, the inclusion of one or more of these elements or themes is not necessarily grounds for immediate canonisation. If so, the difficult work of representing and 'reading the nation' through literature would become reduced to a simple sorting system on the bases of identifiers, thus eschewing the possibility for a novel such as Duiker's to resist the process of categorisation altogether. Though *Thirteen Cents* does contain some of these identifiers, and arguably assisted in cementing them as useful tools in considering 'post-apartheid' fiction moving forward, its multifaceted use of ambiguity cannot be ignored as a result.

I have argued that *Thirteen Cents* confronts its reader with a demand for self-reflection – a narrative mechanism which complicates any reader's easy categorising and interpretation of the text. If this argument is taken seriously, and the novel's demand respected, then *Thirteen Cents* asks to be allowed to exist as fragmented and elusive, never fully understood, and thus troubling any academic reader who seeks to draw determinate conclusions or interpretations from it. Such a request is at odds with the need for literary canonisation – a process which continues in the twenty-first century, albeit in a more rarefied form. *Thirteen Cents*, as I have argued, is riddled with ambiguity – with regard to its protagonist's psychological state and the narrative's linear progression.

Chapter III

Framing Gods and Tracing Citizens:

Biological Citizenship and Violent Inscription in *The Book of the Dead*

> Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and in the kingdom of the sick. Although we all prefer to use only the good passport, sooner or later each of us is obliged, at least for a spell, to identify ourselves as citizens of that other place. (Sontag 3)

> I feel that language in its widest sense is the hawk suspended above eternity, feeding from it but not of its substance and not necessarily for its life and thus never able to be translated into it; only able by a wing movement, so to speak, a cry, a shadow, to hint at what lies beneath it on the untouched, undescribed almost unknown plain. (Frame 43)

3.1) Introduction

Kgebetli Moele's *The Book of the Dead* presents a disturbing account of the serial, premeditated infection of unknowing women with HIV.[36] By the novel's close, a minimum of five hundred women have been infected by the protagonist.[37] The text, divided into two distinct sections, charts the development of Khutso, the novel's protagonist, in a subversion of the classic *bildungsroman*. The first section, titled "Book of the Living", is a third-person account of Khutso and his wife, Pretty, and depicts their upbringings, courtship, marriage, and ultimately ends with Pretty's death. The second section, which forms the basis for much of the discussion in this chapter, is titled "Book of the Dead", and is narrated by the HI virus living within Khutso. The use of a tape worm as a narrator in Irvine Welsh's novel *Filth* and Nadine Gordimer's short story "Tape Measure" is evidence that Moele's infectious speaker is not unique. The author's cruel construction of HIV provides South African readers with a particularly shocking narrator, however, as the country is among the most highly infected in the world.

This chapter argues that *The Book of the Dead* is a novel fundamentally concerned with acts of framing and recognition, and that Moele's novel displays how traumatic experience cannot be captured within any mode of understanding or representation, thus gesturing toward the frame's

[36] The HI virus narrates the novel's second half and is constantly spread, but the "spectrum of illnesses" (Sontag 104) which comprises AIDS is responsible for the death of most of Khutso's victims. This chapter discusses – and draws upon scholarship concerning – HIV/AIDS as two diseases working in conjunction on the individual. Therefore specific references to *The Book of the Dead*'s viral narrator will be termed "HIV" and references to the effect on the human body will be termed "HIV/AIDS".

[37] Khutso's journal is described as having five hundred pages (82), and by the end of the novel "only four blank pages remained" (158). My calculation is premised on Khutso recording only one name per page, though the novel does suggest that the total is far higher.

inadequacy. Using Moele's novel, this chapter will argue that the trauma present within *The Book of the Dead* is not represented, but instead acts to constantly disrupt the frame. This chapter will proceed in three movements, the first of which concerns the novel's peculiar narratological strategies, with particular reference to the amorphous form of HIV in its capacity as narrator. In the second section, I will argue that *The Book of the Dead* constitutes a transgressive text, not only because Khutso commits countless appalling acts – including statutory rape – but also due to its subversion of 'responsible' citizenship as defined in medical rhetoric. The third section will pursue what I term the "violence of inscription", and argue that, like Khutso in the novel's latter half, medical studies of HIV/AIDS risk converting life narratives into statistical evidence, and thus elide the human component of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Interrogating the intersection of trauma, inscription, and medical rhetoric initiates a socially valuable conversation amongst South Africans, and human beings globally. Laurie Vickroy warns that "[t]he meaning a society ascribes to a particular traumatic event is significant in how it will be defined and resolved for the individual and the group" (15). This chapter ultimately argues that Moele is attempting to address the insufficiency of the various existent methods of interpreting and representing HIV infection, and *The Book of the Dead* presents this critique.

3.2) "You have never seen my face": Complicating the Presence of HIV in *The Book of the Dead*

The concepts of framing and recognition employed in this chapter are derived from Judith Butler's scholarship. In *Frames of War*, Butler maps the relationship between the two concepts:

> The "frames" that work to differentiate the lives we can apprehend from those we cannot (or that produce lives across a continuum of life) not only organize visual experience but also generate specific ontologies of the subject. Subjects are constituted through norms which, in their reiteration, produce and shift the terms through which subjects are recognized. These normative conditions for the production of the subject produce an historically contingent ontology, such that our very capacity to discern and name the "being" of the subject is dependent on norms that facilitate that recognition. At the same time, it would be a mistake to understand the operation of norms as deterministic. Normative schemes are interrupted by one another, they emerge and fade depending on broader operations of power, and very often come up against spectral versions of what it is they claim to know: thus, there are "subjects" who are not quite recognizable as subjects, and there are "lives" that are not quite – or, indeed, are never – recognized as lives. (3–4)

This chapter's central argument is that Moele has constructed a novel in which various schemes for determining lives and subjects are carefully contrasted, with each exposing the inadequacy of the next, particularly with regard to the desire for a manageable conception of HIV. These various

schemes are relatable to Butler's conception of frames, in that Moele depicts a protagonist whose constant infection of women with HIV provides a challenge to readers' own conceptions regarding the virus and its spread.

Butler proceeds to claim that the construction of any system of recognition inevitably involves the imposition of limitations to that system, and that these limitations are evident:

> [T]o call the frame into question is to show that the frame never quite contained the scene it was meant to limn, that something was already outside, which made the very sense of the inside possible, recognizable. The frame never quite determined precisely what it is we see, think, recognize, and apprehend. Something exceeds the frame that troubles our sense of reality; in other words, something occurs that does not conform to our established understanding of things. (9)

Butler's description of the frame is not only applicable to interactions between human beings in the non-fictional world (i.e. the world of the reader), but also between fictional characters. Regarding *The Book of the Dead*, Butler's writings are most pertinent when considering the potential for Khutso's victims to undergo physical and psychological suffering. The former is obvious and reflected upon, but not taken seriously, by the virus: "You think that the bony remains that are breathing their last look like me, but they are bones that I have long deserted" (77–78). In this statement is a clear acknowledgement of the physical suffering caused by HIV, but an absence, too, of any moral reflection or sympathy for the victim.

As the arguments in this chapter proceed, emphasis will return repeatedly to the virus's standards for a 'useful' body to commandeer in order to propagate itself. The psychological impact of becoming HIV-positive is never directly addressed by the virus but becomes evident to the reader through various actions taken by Khutso's victims. Upon discovering that they have been infected, these women respond to Khutso negatively, ranging from the severing contact with him (132) to confronting him directly and physically (151–52). The cluster of negative emotion that these women undergo is an understandable reaction to being deceived and infected; to not being recognised as beings capable of suffering and deserving of respect.

Although Butler's description relates to acts of recognition between human beings, the foundational assumptions underpinning her work are applicable to literature too. The very form of the novel is itself a framing device: the reader opens a work of fiction, knowing that the contents between its covers is work of the imagination. Narrative forms such as the *bildungsroman* provide further frames, presenting structures and character arcs that are familiar and, often, predictable. A disruption of this preestablished narrative form could be interpreted as a gesture towards its inadequacy. Subsequently, Moele's alteration of the *bildungsroman* in *The Book of the Dead* is

not negligible. This first section explores the various disruptive strategies installed by Moele as a means of unsettling not only readers' emotional comfort, but their personal views on HIV/AIDS, its spread, and its representation.

Throughout *The Book of the Dead*, Moele develops various sources of ambiguity which force the reader to question both the reliability of the narrative and their own relationship to Khutso. These sources are largely thematic, but the following examples emerge in the technical construction of the text as well. Chapter titles differ between the novel's two halves in a manner that further elaborates on the novel's fixation with the permanence of HIV/AIDS. In the "Book of the Living", chapters are numbered and follow sequentially, thus signifying chronological progression in the narrative as one continues with what appears to be a conventional *bildungsroman*. This includes the twelfth chapter, in which the HI virus addresses Khutso and/or the reader, which is labelled simply as "12". The acquisition of HIV, then, is part of the section's teleology. When the "Book of the Dead" begins, the first chapter is titled "Khutso", and details his physical standing: his height, weight, age and CD4 count (89). Titles from this point onward feature the names of the women that Khutso infects in the respective chapters, thus orienting the specific chapter around the meeting, infection of, and fallout between Khutso and the victim. The only deviation occurs when the virus shifts focus to the reader, in order to report on Khutso's psychological and/or biological health, and these four chapters return to sequential numbering (110–11, 133, 153, 165). By removing a typical titling/numbering structure for chapters, Moele signals that Khutso's life, so ordered by teleology prior, has lost that very structure. A chronology of life events – schooling, marriage, and rearing children – is replaced by a predatory fixation on each woman targeted for infection – a fixation to be addressed later in this section. Ralph A. Austen claims "the only point of consensus in considering whether any narrative can be considered a bildungsroman is that it should deal with an individual's life, focusing on his or her formative youth in the context of a 'modernizing' world" (215).[38] The use of chronology and teleology is therefore a crucial characteristic of the form.

Ambiguity is further developed in the novel's use of two conflicting narrators: the seemingly-omniscient third-person narrator in the first half, and the first-person perspective of the HI virus in the second half.[39] This incongruity manifests in the tensions between the narrators that

[38] Although Austen's article problematises the use of the *bildungsroman* in studying African fiction, the novels that his article discusses are radically different in comparison with *The Book of the Dead*, and therefore there is no contradiction in featuring the above quotation.

[39] Unlike Azure in *Thirteen Cents*, whose concluding chapters suggest the possibility of a psychological break with reality, the *The Book of the Dead* does not indicate that Khutso is the narrator of either section, nor that the viral narrator may be an identity that he assumes.

recur throughout the novel; the most glaring of these is when the HI virus claims that Khutso "had never enjoyed his life; he had only ever endured the struggle that his life had been" (9).[40] This quotation appears on the novel's first page, and its use of past tense implies that the narrator is speaking after Khutso's death. As the reader proceeds with the novel, however, two explicit claims to happiness are encountered: one by Khutso, within the "Book of the Living" section, and one by the HI virus in the second section (60, 160). By establishing either or both narrators as inaccurate, Moele establishes a fraught relationship between the reader and the text. As the reader proceeds into the "Book of the Dead" section – which relates all of Khutso's horrific acts – she is unsure as to whether or not the virus is relaying 'true' events, as they occur in the fictional world of the novel. This tension appears more prominently throughout *The Book of the Dead*, but it is necessary to note that the author invests in ambiguity from the first page of the novel so as to unsettle the reader and disrupt any expectation that Moele has written a conventional, non-experimental novel.

Moele never reveals the origin of HIV in Pretty and Khutso's relationship, thus presenting an integral source of ambiguity that plays off the reader's assumptions. In the "Book of the Living" section, both Khutso and Pretty's sexual histories are revealed to the reader: Khutso's shameful participation in the gang-rape of a drunken woman (25–26), and Pretty's numerous sexual exchanges with men, which ultimately provides her with sufficient money to attend university (32–42). Both characters thus enter into their marriage with the possibility of being infected. When Pretty discovers she is HIV-positive, it is revealed that she has been tested "countless" times before, and always declared uninfected (73). The depiction of Khutso's rage upon discovering Pretty was HIV-positive implies that there was no foreknowledge or expectation in him, but the third-person narrator also does not explicitly state whether Khutso had ever been tested for HIV. In her analysis of the novel, Kulukazi Soldati-Kahimbaara claims that Pretty is the first to be infected, despite the lack of evidence outlined above (171). It will become increasingly evident that Moele has constructed a novel that seeks to expose and dislocate common (mis)conceptions regarding the spread of HIV, and the assumption that Pretty is the origin of the disease – due to her more extensive sexual history – is one example of these assumptions. Assumptions such as these are integral to the formation of frames of recognition, in that they form part of the norms "which, in their reiteration, produce and shift the terms through which subjects are recognized" (Butler 3–4).

[40] This quotation bears a curious similarity to an epigraph to Welsh's *Filth*: "We shall do best to think of life as a *desengano*, as a process of disillusionment: since this is, clearly enough, what everything that happens to us is calculated to produce" (Schopenhauer qtd. in Welsh i).

The novel's thirteenth chapter is vital to my focus, as it contains the moment in which Moele most clearly gestures toward the trauma associated with discovering one is HIV-positive. After Pretty's death and discovering the truth in her diary, Khutso is described as living "in the valley of suicide":

> Khutso roamed the valley and a thousand times came one step away from the exit. His senses ceased to pick up the sights and sounds of life. Hurt and failure became the only things that they communicated to him. His ears heard them. His tongue tasted them. His skin felt them. His eyes saw only them. The only way to have peace was to shut his body down, and the only way to do that was to die. (Moele 79)

Khutso's psychological state is evidently disturbed by his recent realisation. This turn to suicide echoes Pretty's response to discovering that she is HIV-positive, which involved deciding "to drive under the trailer of a truck" (73). After starving himself and engaging in self-harm, Khutso is revived by a voice – soon revealed to be the HI virus – which informs him that "This is life, […] we are born, we live, and then we die: life" (80–81). This statement does not signal Khutso's progression out of a depressed psychological state, but rather provides the character with an excuse to engage in a series of harmful interactions with women, as this chapter marks the start of the virus's interference in Khutso's life and the beginning of their "mission". Of the women who are infected by Khutso, two are listed as committing suicide after testing HIV-positive (91, 152), and all others are left understandably distraught upon discovering the same. Although the virus may endorse the continual spread of HIV, its acquisition is undoubtedly considered a harm by those who are infected – including Khutso, for a time. The protagonist's suppression of this knowledge, and decision to continue infecting women, is shocking to the reader, and difficult to understand, given the peculiar narrative structure and the insertion of a viral narrator that is essentially inconceivable.

As much of the discussion in this chapter springs from the virus's narration and (possible) action in the "Book of the Dead" section, it is necessary to begin with a description of how this entity presents itself. The reader first encounters the virus in the novel's twelfth chapter – as already noted, that is part of the "Book of the Living". The previous eleven chapters have been relayed by the third-person narrator, when that narrative style is suddenly interrupted:

> I. I live amongst you, waiting like a predator. I am faceless. I am mindless and thoughtless. But I am feared and despised. You hate me. But then I put on a face – wear a human face – and I am respected, appreciated and valued. *I am I*.
>
> (Moele 77, emphasis mine)

The interaction is surprising, as the only version of the novel in print has no explanatory blurb to warn the reader of this upcoming turn in the narrative, and thus the reader is unexpectedly set into

a very different story. Emphasis has been placed on the quotation's final sentence to draw attention to the first of many biblical allusions that appear throughout *The Book of the Dead*. In the Book of Exodus, when Moses speaks with God via the burning bush, the following exchange occurs:

> Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?"
> God said to Moses, "I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I am has sent me to you.'"
>
> (*New International Version*, Ex. 3.13–14)

The virus repeats this in a later sentence in the same chapter: "Sometimes I am very poor and sometimes I am very wealthy, but most of the time I am just I" (77).

These biblical allusions pervade the text. When the virus first contacts Khutso during his contemplation of suicide the interaction is described using religious language: "Lights up – Khutso came back to life. Something had possessed him and it made everything that had happened to him irrelevant" (80). The closing chapter of the "Book of the Living" reveals that Khutso has a journal specially made for his upcoming endeavour, the eponymous "Book of the Dead", and requests "something leather-covered, like a Bible, with the same quality paper as a Bible" (82), and later states that Thabiso's name "was the second to make it into my holy book" (90). When luring Matimba into a sexual engagement, the virus remarks "I felt like God" (106), and when a mother and her daughter pass away as a result of being infected by Khutso, his expression of faux sympathy takes the form of "What can we do but let His will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (134). After Khutso succeeds in having sex with Nonkululeko after a year of pursuing her, attempting to infect her after she has witnessed the virus kill her brother, the malicious narrator describes the act as "miraculously done" (151). Cumulatively, it would seem that Moele has constructed the virus as deific – allotting a great deal of power, both in terms of physical and psychological control over Khutso, and with regard to the interpretive potential of religious symbolism.[41]

Soldati-Kahimbaara has interpreted this deific quality as being "an expression of Khutso's anger against his Maker/God who has failed to protect him against HIV infection, or the death sentence as Khutso perceives it, which he believes he does not deserve" (171). This reading does not account for the complicity between Khutso and the virus, however, as expressed when the two plot their "mission": "We were sitting in Khutso's study, both of us pondering the mission ahead,

[41] Moele's novel is not the first to bear its title, as the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* predates it by several millennia (see Davis). This duplication of title is, then, a second form of Moele linking his novel with a spiritual tradition, but will not be discussed here due to Moele's focused use of biblical allusion.

the mission that we were going to undertake together. We are going to fuck 'em dead, I told him, and he smiled" (Moele 89). The problematic and ambiguous complicity between Khutso and the virus is integral, as their pairing radically challenges the reader's assumption of Khutso's agency. If the virus – now narrating their "mission" and thus seeming to commit the acts via the host's body– does control Khutso, his culpability in the acts becomes questionable. Moreover, if Khutso's culpability is questionable, the reader's reaction to his character may become more complex than simple condemnation.

Yet this 'deity' is without any benevolence or care toward humankind – core characteristics of the Christian God – and instead seems determined to instigate the species' extinction, as the only justification provided for the continual infection of women is phrased in the rhetoric of war. The text also allows for a reading of the virus as a capricious god, and thus one more closely aligned with those of the Greek and Roman pantheon, due to its expressions of shame (165), reluctance (159), hurt (163), sadness (164, 165) and boredom (95). Although the perpetually ambiguous nature of the HI virus in *The Book of the Dead* prohibits a singular reading bound to a specific religious figure, it is presented as an entity possessing deific qualities in concert with human emotions too. It is a voice that is perpetually and simultaneously familiar yet alien to the reader, and therefore complicates the reader's relationship to the text, which originally presented itself as a work of social realism.

The relationship between religious language and HIV/AIDS discourse in South Africa predates *The Book of the Dead*. Claire Laurier Decoteau has noted the Treatment Action Campaign's use of evangelical rhetoric to present antiretroviral medication as "life-giving" (145–46), as well as their "conversion rituals", through which the organisation "reaches out to isolated HIV-positive South Africans and provides them with a means of joining an activist community, which also serves to responsibilize them" (147). Moele's construction of HIV as deific instead subverts an established pairing of HIV treatment and religious terminology, and the virus outright denounces the legitimacy of other forms of spiritual healing whilst expressing nihilistic sentiments. For example, after infecting Thabiso and relishing the act, the virus reflects on the possibility of her turning to religion: "You think that I will go away if you believe in the Almighty and go to church every Sunday, if you pray every second. But you are wrong. It is all useless. It is all futile" (Moele 91). During the first of the four addresses to the reader, the virus claims that both God and traditional healers are "full of lies" (110). Later in the text, however, Khutso uses traditional medicine to revive his libido (136). Rather than a contradiction, this action can be read as further

evidence of the division between the virus and Khutso, despite the constant portrayal of them as amalgamated.

In addition to what is an already disturbing image, the sexist nature of the virus must also be addressed. Throughout its encounters with women, the virus repeatedly posits femininity as a weakness, and states this opinion outright toward the end of the novel: "You were on the right track all along, I wanted to tell her, but your weakness is the fact that you are a woman" (152). In discussing its victims – all of which are exclusively women – the virus constantly resorts to stereotypes, as the following examples illustrate: "she was the most ambitious […] a result of her jealousy of the other wives" (93), "Money: the key to any woman's heart" (101), "blame it on your bad discipline" (136), "your weakness is the fact that you are a woman" (152), "he didn't want to break their fragile hearts" (157).[42] Patriarchal and misogynistic attitudes appear in the novel prior to Khutso's discovery that he is HIV-positive, however. When Khutso first meets Tshepo, his roommate, at the University of the North, the protagonist describes women as "nothing" and as those which "can be a problem" (30). When Khutso and Pretty's relationship begins, Tshepo reveals his sexist belief that all women suffer from an inferiority complex, and therefore dating Pretty provides Khutso with the opportunity to have sex with any women he chooses (50). Early on in their marriage, Khutso does not trust Pretty to drive herself, and limits her access to transport in the fear that she may commit adultery (56). This restriction is lifted once their son, Thapelo, is born, and Khutso devotes his attention solely to him (62). The novel thus features male characters, and specifically a male protagonist, with a sustained pattern of sexist views that perpetuate themselves in the company of other men. It is only that the virus's comments are more explicit in their denigration of women.

One cannot exclude the odd, understated treatment of racial representation in the novel. When Khutso has his journal printed, the white sales manager worries – given the book's title – that he may be supplying a serial killer with a ledger in which to record his victims' names. Although this is the very purpose of the journal, Khutso's guilt-provoking response is "The black man is always a suspect…" (83). When Khutso later approaches a white woman for sex, she asks "Is that how black men do their thing?", to which he replies, "I'm not sure about black men, I am not representing any black men" (154). Whilst having sex with Elizma, a coloured woman, the virus states the following: "It was a dream come true for Khutso as he, like *almost all black men*, spent too much time looking at naked white women in newspapers, on TV and anywhere else he

[42] The reader is informed of one male entry into the journal, that of Ntsako who becomes infected as a result of his wife having sex with Khutso (109). The virus refers to the this as an "honorary entry", which further substantiates the point that the virus seeks out women exclusively.

could find them" (131, emphasis mine). This dissociation of Khutso from all black men is a necessary and integral construction by Moele, as part of former president Thabo Mbeki's denialism over HIV/AIDS was the stereotypical manner in which it represented black African men as "lazy, liars, foul-smelling, diseased, corrupt, violent, amoral, sexually depraved, animalistic, savage and rapist" (Mbeki qtd. in Pienaar 37). Moele thus avoids associating his disturbing, anomalous character with all black men and perpetuating stereotypical views regarding their sexuality.

These ambiguous facets that constitute the viral narrator are consistently made ambiguous to the reader, and thus the form of the virus – be it physical or ideological – remains blurred throughout the novel. Susan Sontag notes that "AIDS, like cancer, does not allow romanticizing or sentimentalizing, perhaps because its association with death is too powerful" (109). The drastic transformation of Khutso from mild-mannered father and husband into productive psychopath may seem, at first, a leap too great for the reader to follow. It has been noted above that the two sections of *The Book of the Dead* strike one as two completely different works of fiction. Returning to Sontag gives us a potential framework through which these two halves may potentially be reconciled, though: "[T]he invader takes up permanent residence, by a form of alien takeover familiar in science-fiction narratives. The body's own cells *become* the invader" (104). Similarly, Moele appears to have reconstructed Khutso, following the discovery that he is infected. In a conversation with his father about the daunting prospect of sexual intercourse, Thapelo remarks "If Aids were a person, I would kill him or her with my bare hands, but there is no Aids, there are only people, and that is the worst thing about Aids" (163). The most striking aspect of this moment is not Thapelo's youthful insight, but that the personified, deified, virus agrees.

It is possible to interpret this exchange as Moele advancing an alternate paradigm for considering HIV. Such acts of blurring and withholding refuse the reader a coherent idea of what HIV appears as in this novel. In one of the virus's direct addresses to the reader, the following is relayed:

> I have been talked about so much that people say my name like it belongs in a nursery rhyme. They have seen so many pictures of dying people that they eat their evening meal in front of the TV, undisturbed by reports on the news. They have seen me take down gladiators – eat them up, put them in bed and leave them wearing nappies – and yet they are still not afraid. I have become… usual. (110)

This extract is perhaps the most succinct summary of what Moele's novel attempts to achieve: a defamiliarising of HIV/AIDS among a South African readership who may believe itself to be knowledgeable on the subject. HIV, in *The Book of the Dead*, functions much like traumatic experience – its presence unwanted and form unknowable. Consequently, Moele's virus, like trauma, *cannot* be fully understood, and thus the two entities equally fit the description quoted

above. By disrupting the familiar frame of the narrative, however, the presence of trauma is made known to the reader. The presence of trauma exerts an unquantifiable amount of control over Khutso and complicates the simplistic reading of him as a villainous figure.

3.3) "A human being is a traceable thing": Biological Citizenship in South Africa

In addition to purposefully blurring the form of the virus, Moele's novel seeks to undermine the frames of recognition that are imposed by the state and the medical community – often in concert – in their attempts to make the virus knowable. Nikolas Rose claims that the vital politics of the twenty-first century were "concerned with our growing capacities to control, manage, engineer, reshape, and modulate the very vital capacities of human beings as living creatures" (3). Rose then presents an account of citizenship projects, and their alteration – due to transnational forces such as globalisation, multiculturalism, and economic and political migration – from national projects in the late nineteenth century to complex biology-tied projects in the contemporary moment. Whilst the following passage outlining the necessity of responsibility is lengthy, it is essential that it be presented in its entirety:

> Activism and responsibility have now become not only desirable but virtually obligatory – part of the obligation of the active biological citizen, to live his or her life through acts of calculation and choice. Such a citizen is obliged to inform him or herself not only about current illness, but also about susceptibilities and predispositions. Once so informed such an active biological citizen is obliged to take appropriate steps, such as adjusting diet, lifestyle, and habits in the name of the minimization of illness and the maximization of health. And he or she is obliged to conduct life responsibly in relation to others, to modulate decisions about jobs, marriage, and reproduction in the light of a knowledge of his or her present and future biomedical makeup. The enactment of such responsible behaviors has become routine and expected, built in to public health measures, producing new types of problematic persons – those who refuse to identify themselves with this responsible community of biological citizens. (147)

The concept of "biological citizenship" functions as a lens through which lives are constituted, and therefore a form of framing as outlined by Butler above. I have cited this passage in its entirety because the behaviour of Khutso in *The Book of the Dead* can be used to both substantiate such a conception of responsibility, as well as undermine it. Moele's novel, unlike *Risk* and *Thirteen Cents*, does not use the literary form to present illegal and abusive sexual acts. That is to say, the novel does not shock the reader with depictions of sexual intercourse. *The Book of the Dead* is alternatively concerned with undermining the systematic force of 'responsible' medical behaviour – what is being referred to "biological citizenship" – through the intentional spread of HIV.

Rather significantly, those sexual acts which are depicted in Moele's novel are often restrained to a single sentence, and described using sporting metaphors that emphasise competitiveness and athleticism over pleasure: "we sat back and waited for the referee to blow the whistle so that the game could commence" (Moele 113), "we ran the race" (126), "after the race" (126), "she knew the race track very well" (129), and "it wasn't long before we were running the Comrades Marathon – comfort sex" (157). Instead, I consider the novel transgressive due to its subversion of the concept of biological citizenship, and its rejection of the disciplining forces of biomedical citizenship. When one considers why the narrative generates shock and disgust, it is not only because specifically targeted women have been infected, but that HIV – an epidemic in South Africa – has been willingly spread further amongst the country's citizenry.[43]

According to Rose, the biologically-informed process of "making-up citizens" is not solely imposed hierarchically from the top down, but rather, as a continuation of sentiment in the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries, citizens also regulate identity and biovalue amongst themselves via perceived ethical demands between the individual, family, and community (133). These ethical demands form part of the "individualizing" component of biological citizenship, which is centred about the concept of responsibility: "one has long been responsible for the health and illness of the body, but now 'somatic individuals' must also know and manage the implications of one's own genome" (134). According to Rose, common practices such as ultrasounds, amniocentesis, and chorionic villus sampling all constitute examples of state-imposed regulation of the citizen's body (139). Such medical tests are normalised in the medical discourse of a country and, as such, are required of its citizens.[44]

Similarly, South Africans who discover that they are HIV-positive are expected to engage in healthier forms of living, many suggestions of which originate in the Treatment Action Campaign's anti-denialism rhetoric. Examples include abstaining from smoking and heavy drinking, following a balanced diet, ensuring antiretroviral medication is taken on time, undertaking daily exercise, and – perhaps most importantly – always disclosing one's HIV status to a sexual partner (Pienaar 107). What is emphasised in these 'recommendations' is an extensive form of self-surveillance which informs the notion of responsible citizens. In some regards, the provision of a routine for infected individuals can be beneficial, not only in bolstering an

[43] For information on the willing spread of HIV within the homosexual subculture of "bugchasing" and "gift-giving", see Gonzalez and Bergelson (167–68).

[44] For a detailed analysis of how biological citizenship has morphed into biomedical citizenship – "the disciplining of bodies according to biomedical regulations and the creation of biomedical technologies of the self" (137) – in South Africa, see Decouteau (113–62).

individual's health but also as a structuring device in response to the "profound epistemological anxiety" elicited by AIDS, "as it not only challenges what we know about the world, but also how we live in it" (Decoteau 20). From the descriptions above, one can deduce that biological citizenship is not without disadvantages to those who do not meet the requirements of a "responsible" citizen. More specifically, those who have limited to no access to ARV treatment, adequate nutrition or possibilities for exercise become 'irresponsible' citizens. Kiran Pienaar argues that those sections of society that have historically been considered 'less human' within the paradigm of liberal humanism – queer, homeless, drug-addicted, and undocumented individuals – are currently among the most marginalised and the least likely to manage a 'responsible' regimen (110). The convergence of their already-ostracised identities along with the perception that these individuals are 'irresponsible' serves to further exclude and denigrate their position within a society.

The Book of the Dead presents a narrator who not only commits horrendous acts, but is, when considered within the aforementioned paradigm, an irresponsible citizen. Moele supplies a literary depiction of "responsible" citizens when the protagonist first meets the "clan" of unfaithful men whom he accompanies to Durban:

> "You are our friend," Mahlale told Khutso. "You are valuable to us and to your family and relatives. You are a vital part of the nation. You are a father. In short, you are a man. But as a man you also have a man's needs. So, your strongest point is that you are a man and your weakest point is the fact that you are a man. And, as a man, it would be tragic beyond words if you were to take a disease from the street and deliver it into your home." (Moele 94)

Mahlale's statements draws together many of the novel's concerns: the problematic emphasis on androcentrism, the misconception that HIV – or any sexually transmitted infection – is a "disease from the street", and positioning the body as a constituent of the nation.

Khutso's irresponsibility cannot be ascribed to the forms of marginalisation identified by Pienaar; Khutso's wealth affords him access to antiretroviral medication, adequate nutrition, and the possibility for exercise among the other recommendations provided by the Treatment Action Campaign. His acts of infecting women, however, are certainly irresponsible, as he does not disclose his HIV status to them prior to sexual intercourse. Additionally, there is the blatant undermining of medical strategies to combat HIV's effect of the body, such as the virus's view of antiretroviral medication:

> ARVs. I like them. In fact, I love them. I want my soldiers to live as long as they can. I want them to have the freshest faces for the longest time, so that no one ever suspects that they are sick. That is the reason I love ARVs so much. And that is the reason I forced Khutso to take them. (133)

This is arguably one of the most horrifying passages in the novel, as it converts antiretroviral medication – one of the few remedial forms available to HIV-positive individuals – into fuel that serves to allow for further propagation of the virus. In addition to his use of antiretroviral medication, Khutso undergoes HIV tests and records his vital statistics in the journal in order to track his health and assure the virus, it would seem, that he is able to continue their "mission": "I told Khutso that he must save his life, not for himself but for the cause" (133). The rhetoric employed by the virus is militaristic, using combat-based terms, and therefore framing the entire "mission" as one that is intrinsically violent.

After sex with Nonkululeko, Khutso manufactures a false HIV test score and uses it to assure her that she is safe from infection (150). This act is indicative of a number of assumptions regarding the intersection of HIV and prudence. First, that Khutso elects to create a false report gestures toward knowledge that such a document is invested with trust and assurance by the reader – in this case, Nonkululeko. Second, the very opportunity to have false statistics manufactured is, in itself, an acknowledgement of the constructed nature of such summaries. His interactions with Nonkululeko are of particular importance, as her behaviour – which would be considered "responsible" within the paradigm of biological citizenship – provides a stark contrast to Khutso's actions. Nonkululeko, unlike Khutso, recognises the degenerative effects of HIV/AIDS: "It wasn't something she had read about in the papers, or something she had heard positive people talk about their experiences of living with, it was something she knew" (146). The protagonist therefore appears to others as a responsible biological citizen who has modified aspects of his behaviour for the safety of himself and others. To the reader, these modifications are known to be part of an elaborate system of disguise intended to endanger his fellow citizens. In his construction of such a manipulative character, Moele undermines the blind faith that some may place in the systematic identification of "responsible" biological citizens and, in doing so, gestures toward the medical community's reductive attempts to distinguish between those who are managing their HIV well and those who are not.

Biological citizenship can only be deemed valid, however, if the subject exercises agency, as the autonomous choices made by the individual will reflect the values that he/she associates with particular attitudes and actions. Moele's novel muddies the notion of autonomy with regard to Khutso, by presenting the virus as controlling but simultaneously depicting that control as being in a constant state of flux. Recalling the above discussion of the virus's deific associations, the novel initially frames the dynamic between Khutso and HIV as though "[s]omething had possessed him" (90), and the virus is then presumed to exert an almost absolute control. In addition to forcing

Khutso to take antiretroviral medication, there are other moments when the virus claims to persuade or even overpower him and make decisions on behalf of them both, as is evidenced in the following examples:

> I kept my vigil over [Demie]. Khutso wanted to let her go, but that wasn't necessary. This, I told him, is the last kick of a dying horse – then we will be in control. (95)

> Khutso got so close to Nonkululeko that he nearly opened up to her. He wanted to tell her the truth about our life. He felt an overwhelming need to relieve himself to her, but I restrained him. (148)

> I stopped Khutso there. He wanted to disclose more than was necessary. (161)

Yet, there are moments in *The Book of the Dead* when Khutso, in disagreement with the virus, pursues his own desires, and thus reveals a certain amount of agency. Curiously, these moments of resistance only occur when Thapelo – whom the virus repeatedly refers to as "the little gangster" – visits his father after years of separation:

> After Kghaliso's visit, Khutso invited the little gangster to come and spend the school holidays with his father. I was reluctant. I didn't want to pick him up at the airport, but eventually Khutso persuaded me. (159)

> I wanted to tell the little gangster that we were too busy to check up on him all the time, but Khutso stopped me. (160)

These interactions between Khutso and the virus prevent the reader from conclusively deciding whether the protagonist possesses total agency, which is required to view the protagonist as responsible for his acts. As a result, sole blame for the intentional infections cannot be attributed to Khutso, who can be variously understood as being psychopathic, a hostage to the disease, or a combination thereof. Of course, the reader is surely aware that claiming to be possessed by a virus does not provide legitimate grounds for ethical consideration in the real world. In the world of the novel as it is constructed by Moele, however, the ambiguous nature of both the virus and its relationship with Khutso are obstacles to establishing a clear ethical judgment of whether to condemn the character. Despite this blurring of identity and ethical judgment, it is apparent that Khutso is able to satisfy the demands of a biological citizen whilst also spreading a virus.

Recalling chapter one's contention with Molly Hoey's argument that the reader should avoid interpreting the transgressive text, this section closes with a reading of Khutso that both satisfies the reader's necessary processes of interpretation and the text's refusal to fully flesh out its protagonist. This interpretation originates in a comment by Ntsako: "Sorry, Khutso, but I don't trust you. You are a phantom" (103). Although Ntsako's interaction with the protagonist differs from the reader's, the mistrust shared by both is similarly attributed to an inability to understand

his rationales and value system. In a text that aligns HIV with the deific, it does not seem too far a stretch to consider Khutso as a phantasmagorical presence and one which is constructed by Moele to embody the worst fears a person can hold regarding HIV and its spread. According to this reading, the protagonist enacts the most extreme and reviled behaviour imaginable for one living with HIV. Yet the categorisation of Khutso as a phantom produces associations that undermine the validity of those fears which may possibly be held by the reader. The phantom is immaterial, singular, and an abnormal presence – the concern its presence invokes is dictated by its otherness. By constructing an embodiment of the virus, Moele represents a fear that may be held by some readers, namely that the acquisition of HIV engulfs the identity of the individual, reducing them to a single identificatory marker: HIV-positive. Simultaneously, the uniqueness of such a character, placed within a novel, reveals the constructed nature of these fears and their lack of grounding in the world of the reader.

3.4) The Hollow Women: HIV Discourse and The Violence of Inscription

In this section, attention turns to the narrative framing of women in Moele's novel, in particular the recording of victims in Khutso's journal. The representation, and later inscription, of women will be analysed in relation to the clinical/medical gaze, as discussed primarily by Michel Foucault.[45] Following a mapping of Foucault's claims regarding the medical gaze, focus will shift to Khutso's journal as a document which eschews the humanity of its victims in its recording of the dates of each individual's infection and subsequent death.

In *The Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault interrogates the ideological repositioning of the patient in modern medicine from the nineteenth century onward. This repositioning posits that the human body functions as the sum of the person, and therefore reduces the patient to their biological standing:

> It is as if for the first time for thousands of years, doctors, free at last of theories and chimeras, agreed to approach the object of their experience with the purity of an unprejudiced gaze. But the analysis must be turned around: it is the forms of visibility that have changed; […] it is nothing more than a syntactical reorganization of disease in which the limits of the visible and invisible follow a new pattern; the abyss beneath illness, which was the illness itself, has emerged into the light of language—the same light, no doubt, that illuminates the *120 Journées de Sodome, Juliette,* and the *Désastres de Soya*.[46]
>
> (195–96)

[45] The terms "clinical" and "medical" are used variously in Foucault scholarship. From this point onward, the term "medical" is used in this chapter.

[46] Foucault here connects his argument with the transgressive writing of Marquis de Sade.

A significant feature of this repositioning is the medical gaze, which is employed by a doctor in their analysis of a patient's symptoms:

> In anatomo-clinical experience, the medical eye must see the illness spread before it, horizontally and vertically in graded depth, as it penetrates into the body, as it advances into its bulk, as it circumvents or lifts its masses, as it descends into its depths. Disease is no longer a bundle of characters disseminated here and there over the surface of the body and linked together by statistically observable concomitances and successions; it is a set of forms and deformations, figures, and accidents and of displaced, destroyed, or modified elements bound together in sequence according to a geography that can be followed step by step. It is no longer a pathological species inserting itself into the body wherever possible; it is the body itself that has become ill.
>
> (136)

In his description of the gaze, Foucault emphasises its prescriptive effect: "the gaze is not faithful to truth, nor subject to it, without asserting, at the same time, a supreme mastery: the gaze that sees is a gaze that dominates" (*The Birth of the Clinic* 39). The medical gaze divorces the patient's identity from their body, as the latter is perceived as the host to an entity which is harmful and thus to be examined and treated. Those who are HIV-positive can be represented in medical and pharmaceutical discourse as CD4 counts and statistics, as opposed to human beings with complex structures of meaning-making and identity.[47] In South Africa, scholarship exists linking the gaze to various issues plaguing hospitals in the 'post-apartheid' era (see Gibson and Butchart). Such an incomplete portrait of the individual lends itself to incorporation in notions such as biological citizenship, whereby the infected person can be deemed 'responsible' or 'irresponsible' on the basis of such a simplified assessment.

In *The Book of the Dead*, this biomedical approach to inscribing subjects is most evident in three journal entries, wherein the virus records indicators of Khutso's health:

> 03 October 2002: Khutso
> Age: 41 years
> Height: 1.74 metres
> Weight: 107.6 kilograms
> Status: HIV positive
> CD4 count: 650 (Moele 89)
>
> Date: 06 January 2005
> Name: Khutso
> Age: 44 years
> Height: 1.74 metres
> Weight: 95.0 kilograms
> Status: HIV positive

[47] For juxtaposing views on the reductive nature of the medical gaze, see Armstrong and Osborne.

CD4 count: 400 (133)

06 November 2008: Khutso
Age: 47 years
Height: 1.74 metres
Weight: 65.0 kilograms
CD4 count: 60 (165)

Recalling the earlier claim that Moele appears to have reconstructed Khutso for the novel's second half, the first listing of his physical and biological features functions as an introduction to the 'new' character. The placement of updated lists later and at the novel's close signifies that the narrator has not undergone a change in perspective, but also that his body is in decline as the "mission" progresses. This list also foreshadows the virus's preoccupation with lowering the health of all women who are infected by Khutso, as they too are seen only as hosts to inhabit and destroy.

Butler's conceptualisation of frames of recognition provides a departure point for discussing the treatment of women and the infected in *The Book of the Dead*. Despite being associated with the deific, the virus employs the human methods of framing discussed by Butler in order to justify its actions and beliefs. The decision to infect a woman is made by the virus and/or Khutso after considering the individual through a normative scheme that prioritises infection. Additionally, framing is a central concern to the novel, which features various schemas that replace one another as the narrative progresses. These competing frames include the virus's view of women, readers' conceptions regarding HIV/AIDS and its spread, the structure of the novel itself – as a literary form, as well as the view of the female victims themselves, which appears peripherally to the reader but is ignored by the virus and/or Khutso. Considering the aforementioned assessment that *The Book of the Dead* seeks to challenge readers' (mis)conceptions regarding HIV/AIDS and its spread, Moele continues this attempt by mimicking aspects of scientific/medical discourse whilst exposing its superficial representation of human beings. By constantly shifting frameworks of understanding, Moele reveals the insufficiency of any single perspective when considering HIV/AIDS, as well as the intersection and slippage that occurs between frameworks of meaning making in relation to the virus's nature as a "nexus where multiple meanings, discourses intersect and overlap, reinforce, and subvert one another" (Treichler 42).

Moele's concern with multiple perspectives recurs when one considers the novel's epigraphs, which appear before the "Book of the Living" and "Book of the Dead" sections. Although epigraphs can be ignored by readers who do not wish to be provided with a starting point for interpreting the text, the ability of the epigraph to frame the reader's interpretation cannot be

ignored. The first epigraph, “Don’t inject me with that venom”, attributed to Thabo “Nyakza” Matsane, clearly presents a response to HIV that understands the virus’s harmful effect and expresses a desire to avoid infection (5). To repeat what has been mentioned above, *The Book of the Dead* does not alert the reader to its concern with HIV prior to the twelfth chapter. Upon one’s first reading, therefore, the “venom” can be interpreted widely as symbolically referring to any social ill – an interpretation which lasts until the closing of the novel’s first section. The second epigraph, “And every bitch I ever loved, I wish an Aids-related death”, credited to poet Goodenough Mashego, frames the virus as a tool of retribution within an androcentric framework (87). Furthermore, the second epigraph is acknowledged by the virus on the next page and similarly used in Khutso’s journal: “I wrote it in the middle of the first golden page. I underlined it. He had taken the words right out of my mouth” (88). By employing these epigraphs as frames, Moele signals the differing tones inherent to each section, which are linked to the shift in narratorial perspective. The selection of such provocative epigraphs – particularly the second – could be mistaken as evidence of Moele’s desire to simply shock his readership. Such a reading is incongruent with the novel’s final page, however, which features an oft-quoted statement by Nelson Mandela: “Aids is no longer just a disease, it is a human rights issue” (166). Although a page reference for this quotation has been provided here, the novel does not feature one. The absence of a page number permits the statement to exist within the constraints of the text, as part of Moele’s narrative, whilst also gesturing toward the world of the reader by repeating a socially conscious imperative. These three quotations function as framing devices: the first two by alluding to the tone of their respective section and the attitude possessed by its narrator, and the third by indicating that the concerns of the text extend into the non-fictional world.

The narrator’s view of women constitutes another framing device, as it is through this paradigm that the reader navigates the novel’s second half. Such an intentional and malicious decision to constantly infect women signifies either an inability to perceive them as subjects capable of suffering – psychologically and physically, both as potential results of HIV acquisition – or is indicative of a callous disregard for that suffering. The novel does contain phrases indicating that the virus is aware of the ethical implications of its actions, as is evident following the infection of Nonkululeko, when the narrator exclaims, “I am a shit of a man! […] I am a dangerous motherfucker!” (151). This contrast, between uncaring infection and moments of self-awareness, contribute to the aforementioned ambiguity constructed by Moele.

Butler claims that the recognition of another’s vulnerability is essential in ethical engagement with that individual:

> A vulnerability must be perceived and recognized in order to come into play in an ethical encounter, and there is no guarantee that this will happen. Not only is there always the possibility that a vulnerability will not be recognized and that it will be constituted as "unrecognizable," but when a vulnerability *is* recognized, that recognition has the power to change the meaning and structure of the vulnerability itself. In this sense, if vulnerability is one precondition for humanization, and humanization takes places differently through variable norms of recognition, then it follows that vulnerability is fundamentally dependent on existing norms of recognition if it is to be attributed to any human subject. (*Precarious Life* 43)

In *The Book of the Dead*, recognition of vulnerability is more complex. From the perspective of the virus, human susceptibility to HIV acquisition – typically considered a vulnerability – is celebrated. This is evidenced by its gleeful observation of Thabiso's body succumbing to infection:

> She always complained about her body, and she told Khutso that she had tried to diet many times, but she had failed each and every time. Wasn't it funny that I was the one to give her the body that she had always wanted, the body that she had wasted hours in the gym trying to get?
> "You look wonderful," Khutso told her a few months later. "Don't you feel good, lively, full of life?" (90–91)

Despite the virus's ability to perceive the vulnerability, this engagement is fundamentally unethical as it incurs suffering and ultimately results in Thabiso committing suicide (91). Given the incurable nature of HIV/AIDS, acquiring the virus permanently removes that vulnerability from the individual and instigates an unending host of health concerns. In Moele's novel, once that vulnerability has been exploited by Khutso in the act of sexual intercourse, women become 'useful' to the virus as "soldiers" – an occupation typically bearing a strong association with masculinity. Acquisition of HIV by these fictional women can be read, then, as a transformative process that converts them into masculine figures. It is fitting to recall the transformative description by Sontag: "[T]he invader takes up permanent residence, by a form of alien takeover familiar in science-fiction narratives. The body's own cells *become* the invader" (104). Sontag's statement is informed by the use of the military metaphor in popular and medical discourse, the effect of which she describes as "far from inconsequential": "It overmobilizes [*sic*], it overdescribes [*sic*], and it powerfully contributes to the excommunicating and stigmatizing of the ill" (94). Yet Sontag does not address the use of such a metaphor in a literary work, and the potential for subversion if represented in that form. Rather, Sontag claims that, unlike an illness such as dementia, AIDS "does not allow romanticizing or sentimentalizing, perhaps because its association with death is too powerful" (109). Moele's novel avoids romanticising the illness while subverting its liberally used military metaphor by inverting the metaphor, thus life is the enemy to be eradicated by disease. The reorganising of a commonly held metaphor exposes the vulnerability of all human beings who possess the potential for infection.

Throughout the "Book of the Dead" section, the reader encounters various examples of the reduction of entire human lives to entries in the eponymous book: a name, an infection date, a caustic remark, and (occasionally) a death date, a cause of death, followed by another caustic remark. For example, Thabiso, the first victim, appears as follows:

> 05 October 2002: Thabiso
> Done.
> Early lunch, Oasis Lodge. Power in nothing without control. (90)
>
> Died: 16 December 2004
> Cause of death: suicide
> She could not handle the facts. Powerful woman. Disgrace of a wife. (91)

These entries, which Khutso writes for each woman he infects, are analogous with the medical gaze in that both are solely concerned with the manifestation and behaviour of the virus as opposed to the identity of the infected individual. Treichler's description of the virus as a "nexus where multiple meanings, discourses intersect and overlap, reinforce, and subvert one another" (42) is evident here, as that multiplicity extends to representations in medical discourse of those who are infected.

In *The Book of the Dead*, the virus reveals an understanding of the medical gaze:

> That face, that man, that woman is me. You define me and give me all types of names. You try to understand me. But I like the game that you are all playing, talking about me as if you can identify me – thinking that I am a virus when I am out walking in the street. You have never seen my face. You think that the bony remains that are breathing their last look like me, but they are bones that I have long deserted. They are no longer of any use to me. (77–78)

There is a degree of irony in the virus's claim that "You have never seen my face", as it underscores not only the reader's inability to employ an unambiguous understanding of HIV, but also some readers' belief that an infected individual is easily identifiable. At the novel's close, Moele suggests that the journal remains after Khutso's death to be read by someone else, therefore implying that the journal functions as more than a keepsake. This implication also signifies that the journal, to some extent, outlives Khutso, and he is only a cog in a much larger machine:

> It was an honour knowing you, I tell him. I have had great soldiers, I have seen their great deeds, but you, you come second to none. But now, Khutso, your time is done, I tell him. You are dying and I have to move on, I have to find another soldier of the highest grade. […] Somewhere out there I have conquered another author of no mean talent, and we are starting another book together for the cause. (165)

This extract, featured in the novel's final chapter, presents no optimism or redemption for its protagonist. Rather, the conclusion to *The Book of the Dead* is distressing as it unflinchingly

presents the relentless continuation of the virus and its effect in the lives of South Africans, and other infected individuals across the globe.

The Book of the Dead not only draws on the forms of the medical gaze, but also subverts it. Although the reader is exposed to reductive summaries of the virus's "executions" (100), these quotes appear within the larger narrative of Khutso meeting each woman, seducing her, and having sex with her. A disparity emerges, then, between the contents of Khutso's journal and that of Moele's novel. The starkest example in the text concerns Nonkululeko, the only victim whose representation spans two chapters of the novel, presented with more detail and consequently triggering a more profound sense of loss. The first of the two chapters relays the social fracturing – and eventual death – of her family due to the diagnosis of her brother, Nkululeko, as HIV-positive (137–47). Within this chapter, Nkululeko is subject to various gazes as he is viewed by sangomas, Christian evangelical healers, doctors, and the members of his nuclear family. As the narrative progresses through Nkululeko's various attempts at being cured, his nuclear family become increasingly estranged from one another as they slowly accept that his condition cannot be cured. This progression culminates in an act of bestiality, in which Nkululeko rapes a goat at the behest of a sangoma and his mother (143–44). The act ruptures relations between siblings and parents:

> After the night of the full moon the family was destroyed. They couldn't even share a table any more. They couldn't look each other in the eye. It had made them strangers to each other, and, worst of all, Nkululeko still tested positive. […] They couldn't even greet each other in the morning, and so they tried as best they could to avoid each other. (145)

The chapter concludes with the death of both Nkululeko and his mother, which informs the reader's understanding of Nonkululeko, and in particular her aversion to sexual intercourse. The novel's proceeding chapter recounts Khutso's attempts to deceive Nonkululeko, despite being aware of the experience she has undergone. Once Khutso has infected Nonkululeko, her moving and layered narrative is reduced to the following entries in his journal:

> 05 March 2008: Nonkululeko
> Miraculously done. Who said that patience and hard work don't pay off. (151)
>
> Died: 07 June 2008
> Cause of death: suicide. (152)

The majority of the previous two chapters' content is elided by the virus/Khutso, in favour of this summary, emphasising the aspects of their interaction and of Nonkululeko's life experience that is deemed important. To the individual reading *The Book of the Dead*, however, Nonkululeko appears in a more substantial form, and the slippage between the virus's journal entry and Moele's chapter is indicative of the loss of context and meaning that can occurs in a medical discourse

concerned primarily with CD4 counts and other empirical measurements. In choosing to replicate medical discourse within the novel's form, Moele gestures toward the constructed nature of both writings, and undermines the claims to 'truth' that typically accompany medical and pharmaceutical discourse

The Book of the Dead is a shocking read for any individual, not only South Africans for whom the narrative has particularly upsetting implications. The depiction of cruelty is unrelenting, and as a result any concern for empathic response may appear misguided. However, recalling Megan Boler's call for an empathy that is rooted in considerations of positionality and complicity, Moele's novel provides audiences with the opportunity to consider an array of social mechanisms that assist those infected with HIV, but which can also exacerbate and mask its continual spread.

Chapter IV

The First Rule is You Do Not Rewrite *Fight Club*: (Inter)Textual Violence in *Risk*

> The answer to that perennial mid-1990s question, "What shall we South African writers write about now that apartheid and all its woes are dead?", appears to be more woe, if not of a different order; or, to draw upon a well-known South African colloquialism, *snot en trane* (snot and tears) has turned into more *snot en trane*. (Boehmer 30)
>
> Violence is slippery, changing its shape and meaning, sustaining democracy and corroding it. (von Holdt 118)

4.1) Introduction

This chapter concludes my text-based analysis by examining *Risk*, Jason Staggie's 2013 debut novel. Narrated by Nelson Jekwa, a university student who, together with his friends, creates a 'game' of dares that is centred on financial reward and the realising of identity, Staggie's novel is the most obvious work of transgressive fiction of the three selected here. As the novel progresses, Nelson's game, "Risk", is transformed into a social movement that aims to release Africa from economic bondage via acts of violent protest and, arguably, terrorism. The novel offers a fresh perspective on a post-1994 malaise amongst South African youth, particularly the affluent. This chapter will discuss *Risk* in two sections. First, the novel's metafictional impulse and intertextual relationship with transgressive fiction of the 1990s will be explored, particularly in relation to Chuck Palahniuk's incendiary debut novel, *Fight Club*, with which aspects of Staggie's text bear a strong resemblance. This intertextual relationship provides a platform from which to launch my claim that *Risk* can be read as a bridge between American and European forms of transgressive fiction – which garnered much attention in the latter half of the twentieth century – and the South African transgressive fiction addressed in this thesis. Secondly, my attention will then turn to the nature of violent protest as it is portrayed in *Risk*, the related interpretive impact of mimicking *Fight Club*, and a discussion of the novel's representation of such action in a 'post-apartheid' setting.

4.2) Spot the Difference: *Risk*'s Intertextual Web

Intertextuality, the interlinked nature of literature and language itself, is a subject meticulously researched by Graham Allen, as is evident in his thorough introduction to the topic and succinct description as follows:

> The theory of the text […] involves a theory of intertextuality, since the text not only sets going a plurality of meanings but is also woven out of numerous discourses and spun from already existent meaning. The text's plurality is neither wholly an "inside" nor an "outside", since the text itself is not a unified, isolated object upon which an "inside" and an "outside" can be fixed. (65)

Tracing the threads of inquiry primarily through the scholarship of Julia Kristeva and Mikhail Bakhtin, Allen maps the theoretical terrain that most informs explorations of intertextuality. In Bakhtin, an emphasis is placed on the social context of an utterance. The central, intersecting concepts of dialogism and the polyphonic novel are at play. The former refers to grounding understanding in the context of the speaker:

> Dialogism is not literally the dialogues between characters within a novel. Every character in the dialogic novel has a specific, in some senses unique, personality. This "personality" involves that character's world-view, typical mode of speech, ideological and social positioning, all of which are expressed through the character's words. (22)

It is in the polyphonic novel, on the other hand, that we find "not an objective, authorial voice presenting the relations and dialogues between characters but a world in which all characters, and even the narrator him or herself, are possessed of their own discursive consciousnesses" (23). These two concepts are integral to intertextuality, informing the understanding of discourse as not only based in individual, socially inflected utterances, but also the societal impact of such an effect as challenging to monologic, prescriptive notions of discourse. Furthermore, the dialogic notion does not only pertain to interaction between individuals but is also "a central feature of each character's own individual discourse" (25). Bakhtin summarises his position thus:

> [A]t any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given a bodily form. These "languages" of heteroglossia intersect each other in a variety of ways, forming new typifying "languages". (*The Dialogic Imagination* 291)

Focusing on the social inflection of language and its representation is not only significant for intertextuality but also transgressive fiction at large, as will be argued later in this chapter.

Kristeva, though credited by Allen as coining the term "intertextuality" (15), is largely indebted to Bakhtin in her scholarship concerning the subject. Expanding beyond the importance of social context in the reading of utterances, Kristeva also argues that "ideas are not presented as finished, consumable products, but are presented in such a way as to encourage readers themselves to step into the production of meaning" (33). This process of constantly becoming is predicated on

a text being "not an individual, isolated object but, rather, a compilation of cultural textuality" (35). By this she means that "[a]uthors do not create their texts from their own original minds, but rather compile them from preexistent texts" (35). Given this description of texts as woven from the fabric of various discourses, each one is regarded as unstable and an arena of debate involving "society's dialogic conflict over the meaning of words" (36). These intertextual relationships aid and obstruct interpretation by causing the reader to consider the "intertextual relation between poetic words and their prior existence in past poetic texts" (38). This fraught interaction is beautifully summarised when Kristeva's coins the term "intertextuality":

> [The] horizontal axis (subject – addressee) and vertical axis (text – context) coincide, bringing to light an important fact: each word (text) is an intersection of words (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read. In Bakhtin's work, these two axes, which he calls dialogue and ambivalence, are not clearly distinguished. Yet, what appears as a lack of rigour is in fact an insight first introduced into literary theory by Bakhtin: any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of intertextuality replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least double. (Kristeva qtd. in Allen 38)

By acknowledging intertextuality in fiction, one acquiesces to its implications. These implications include interrogating the authority and originality of authors, recognising fiction as a legacy-bearing form, and acknowledging the existence, no matter how faint, of alternate narrative forms such as poetry and oral literature among others. By deploying titles and familiar narrative structures and dialogue within a novel, the author references alternate texts and emphasises the interrelated nature of literature. Invoking another text also presents the author with the opportunity for subversion, altering well-known narratives in order to reveal their internal assumptions and contradictions, and to possibly respond to some interpretations of the original text's multiple meanings.[48]

In *Risk*, Staggie makes use of two methods of intertextuality: direct reference and the alteration of a familiar narrative structure found in *Fight Club*. The former appears in abundance, as the reader encounters liberal allusions to film and text titles, such as Palahniuk's debut, *American Psycho, Trainspotting, Pulp Fiction,*[49] *Guns, Germs and Steel* and *The Blair Witch Project*.[50] The first three references are of particular importance, as the author is invoking a few

[48] My use of "original text" in this sentence refers to the particular text that may be invoked. However, I realise that, given the nature of intertextuality, there is no such thing as an original text.

[49] Michael Silverberg has also described *Risk* as "Tarantino-inflected" (para. 6).

[50] *The Blair Witch Project*, although a minor reference in Staggie's novel (147), is rather fitting in a text that employs first-person narration, since the horror film is a seminal work in the "found-footage" genre, which is presented to the viewer as 'real' documentary-style footage shot by those who succumbed to some monstrous antagonist.

of the – if not *the* – most well-known works of transgressive fiction to emerge in the late twentieth century. Beyond the clear intertextuality of named works, there is also a striking similarity between Staggie's protagonist and Clay, the narrator of Bret Easton Ellis's *Less than Zero*, specifically in their shared lack of affectual response to shocking acts of abuse. In an appalling scene in which Nelson witnesses an act of sexual assault, for example, he comments "I want to leave but I badly want to see what's going to happen next" (124).[51] In a similar scene in Ellis's novel, Clay debates with himself: "I tell myself I could leave. […] But, again, the words don't, can't, come out and I sit there and the need to see the worst washes over me, quickly, eagerly" (163). When considering Palahniuk and Ellis's oeuvres, the former generally tends to feature protagonists from the middle class, whereas the latter is solely concerned with America's highest economic echelon. Staggie, in recreating the narrative markers of *Fight Club* – as discussed below – but featuring characters more suitable to *Glamorama* or *Imperial Bedrooms*, pays homage to both authors and their bodies of work. In referencing these novels (and their film adaptations), Staggie reveals an awareness of a tradition that precedes him.[52] Of the three novels in this thesis, *Risk* is thus the most clearly identifiable as a work of transgressive fiction, if one solely relies on recurring forms and content used by Ellis, Palahniuk and Welsh. As the chapter progresses, I substantiate my claim that *Risk* provides a useful bridge between American and European forms of transgressive fiction, and the South African texts of concern to this thesis.

In addition to direct refences, Staggie's novel also features the altered structure of Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club*. Consider, in broad strokes, the narrative progression of *Risk*: a narrator exists in an era without a clear ideological or physical conflict to structure his life around; his treatment of women can only be described as misogynistic; he designs a violent 'game' through which participants claim to become more self-aware and are able to discover "what kind of man you are" (54); the 'game' is altered and its goals shift from the personal to the collective; participants commit acts of crime and, arguably, terrorism, under the guidance of their charismatic leader, Troy; a particularly daring act results in the killing of key participants, including possibly the narrator himself. This chronology of events is almost identical to that found in *Fight Club*, with the exception of the chaotic shootout that concludes *Risk*.[53] Palahniuk's Sebastian rails against

[51] Young South Africans' reactions to the more shocking content in *Risk* have been mixed (see Charles, and Du Toit).

[52] Transgressive fiction has been my special interest for several years, but Staggie is the first and only author I have encountered who happily consents to the label. In his Twitter biography, he describes himself as a "practitioner of transgressive fiction".

[53] There is some ambiguity as to whether Troy dies at the end of *Risk*. Whilst the final paragraph strongly implies that he does, Staggie later wrote a short story set in 2034 with a living Troy as the protagonist (Staggie "Beaufort

Tyler Durden, subverts the final terrorist plot, and is sentenced to a mental asylum at the novel's close (Palahniuk 206).[54][55] Sebastian's survival is a common resolution in the author's fiction: "However bleak Palahniuk's worlds may seem, even after planes crash, even after buildings fall, the story – and the storyteller – survive" (Kavadlo "With Us or Against Us" 114). In a similar vein, Robin Mookerjee comments that "*Fight Club* represents the circular nature of revolutions, whether religious or political. They begin as subjective experiences of enlightenment and liberation and end as rigid, hierarchical institutions" (227). By contrast, Nelson and his friends throw themselves completely into their movement, whereas Palahniuk's novel features "the potential return to the traditional heteronormative male, no longer emasculated like the victims of testicular cancer, or homosocial and homoerotic like the members of fight club" (Kavadlo "With Us or Against Us" 106). Nelson transforms from a young man "with all these supposed privileges but with nothing to do" (Staggie *Risk* 21) into a member of The Movement whose commitment to the organisation constantly sways. This is where I believe *Risk*'s transgressive power lies: the conflicted though ultimately ambivalent treatment of violent protest in the contemporary, 'post-apartheid' era.

In the novel's early chapters, the reader is informed that the protagonist was named after Nelson Mandela but feels that he cannot live up to that legacy (9). His mother is absent from the novel, much like his father, though the latter is given more detail: he is emblematic of South Africa's history of struggle against apartheid, and this aspect of his identity permeates much of Nelson's life, as is evident in the protagonist's warm reaction to an African National Congress flag in Thando's home (97). Staring at the sea from Table Mountain, Nelson contemplates South Africa's violent history of colonialism, and considers the possible reactions of his white girlfriend's ancestors, should they see her performing oral sex on a black man (19). It is curious how often acts of sexual intercourse are discussed as mechanisms of power in *Risk*. As has been noted earlier, the narrator treats women misogynistically and predatorially, with every female viewed as a body to be consumed. At one point, he uses possessive language that invokes a slave-

West"). As Staggie does not account for Troy's recovery in the story, I read this presence as a disconnected work, and maintain that he died at the close of *Risk*.

[54] Throughout *Fight Club*, the narrator remains nameless but is called Tyler Durden by his followers. This has led to a belief that Tyler *is* the narrator's name. The recent publication of *Fight Club 2*, however, has corrected this misconception by making it explicit that the narrator's name is Sebastian.

[55] The conclusion of David Fincher's film adaptation is quite different. Although it does feature the protagonist shooting himself in the face to apparently rid himself of Tyler Durden – a tactic that the sequel reveals to be unsuccessful – and reconciles with Marla, the bombs *are* detonated, the financial district collapses, and the fate of the two characters is left unclear.

owner mentality: "I know I can have most of them, those between sixteen and thirty" (78).[56] Nelson is also something of a wanderer: whilst he does have his own accommodation, it is not described in the detail that his friends' residence at 8 Osbourne Road is, and he spends the majority of the novel away from it. One cannot ignore his lack of self-awareness either. When reading the article entitled "African Columbine Scare", Nelson registers disdain for the actions of the three attackers, who "went on a long diatribe about how screwed up the South African education system is" (114). Yet, deep-set educational inequality is among The Movement's many concerns, and the video evidence left behind after The Movement's sexual assaults also feature diatribes. When noting Thabo Mbeki's resignation, Nelson laments that Mbeki was "no Mandela" and "neither is the president-in-waiting" (131). Yet this unrelenting faith in Mandela, and his near-superhuman positioning in Nelson's mind, runs counter to the dissatisfaction expressed for 'post-apartheid' democracy by the characters, and seems more commonplace amongst supporters of the 'Rainbow Nation' perspective. Regarding discrimination: Nelson has no qualms when he witnesses the derogatory word "kaffir" being used, yet takes offence at Stephen's use of the term "clean" to describe a recovering drug addict (35). He even consents, and endorses, the sexual fetishizing of the black male body (78). These contradictions communicate, to the reader, the level of caution that should be exercised when reading Nelson's account. Staggie's protagonist is not as honest as he believes himself to be, although the reader may be led to believe so on the basis of his brutally honest depictions of depravity. This cautionary note operates in a similar fashion to the upcoming discussion of metafictional aspects in the novel: one cannot believe the narrator and his story are simply fabrications to be trusted; that allow the reader to suspend disbelief. In fact, Nelson – and, by extension, the reader – is not present when Risk evolves into The Movement, as Nelson has plunged into a drug-fuelled retreat at the time. The lacunae in Nelson's narrative thus allow for both verisimilitude and doubt.

To return to the format of Risk/The Movement: the dares that are submitted are open to all participants and it would appear at first that there is no ethical boundary limiting submissions. The dares *are* limited, however, by the submitter's own ethical framework, as "people would only put things in there that they themselves would be able to do" (54). It is, therefore, not only a transgressive game with constantly deferred limits, but also a strangely democratic organisation of violence, as each participant is free to write a dare that he would be capable of executing.[57]

[56] There is possibly a transition once Risk evolves into The Movement, since Nelson describes Tiffany as wielding more power over him at certain moments: "The Movement, the politics, the drugs, the sex, the comedowns all vanish as my eyes meet hers" (131). There is insufficient evidence, however, to strongly assert this claim.

[57] I use "he" because women are absent from the enterprise, as they are from much of the novel.

Considering that the goal of Risk is to assert one's masculinity, this form of contributing dares is rather intriguing. Allowing each member of the group to personally suggest an act that supposedly corresponds with his notion of masculinity, and then compelling that individual to undertake the dare, suggests that there is no consensus among the group that various acceptable 'methods' of understanding and proving masculinity exist. In other words, unlike Tyler Durden's fight club, there is no prescribed form of masculinity. In the moment of devising the dare, the individual subjectively considers acts and attitudes that constitute transgression, and – at least initially – when enacted will 'prove' masculinity. If the dares depicted in *Risk* are to be read as an index of the workings of taboo, it is presented as a collective imagining of the taboo. This collective imagining reaches its breaking point once Nelson, in a state of jealousy and rage, dares an act of murder (117). The disagreement between him and Stephen, who draws the dare, illustrates the perpetual presence of ethical boundaries, and their effect on those who choose to play the game:

> "I thought this game was about putting stuff into the hat that you yourself would do. So you're telling me you would be willing to kill this Russell Guy? Because that's not what the fuck I signed up for." […]
> "So are you my father now, Stephen? Is that it? I can put whatever the fuck I want into the hat because it's my game and it's a gamble – and that's exactly what I explained when I created it." (117–18)

What the above extract reveals is both the flawed underlying logic of the 'game', as well as Stephen's rejection that an act of murder is suitable to Risk and his inability to transgress that ethical boundary in the name of continued participation.

4.3) Breaking the Spine: *Risk* as Metafictional Analogy

As with the above discussion of intertextuality, metafiction functions as a method of undoing conceptions of the novel that allow for neat divides between the 'fictional' world of the text and 'real' world inhabited by the reader. By self-reflexively gesturing toward their own construction, metafictional techniques stunt the reader's suspension of disbelief, and bar any attempts at using literature as a form of escapism. Metafiction's continual return to the artifice of language reminds the reader that, just as the novel is constructed by interweaved narratives, so too is the 'real' world he/she inhabits. Self-conscious fiction has also been used to critique the system of genre categorisation, revealing the commercially constructed nature of texts and the methodological process of filtering 'types' of literature into separate groups. In her seminal work on the subject, Patricia Waugh writes the following:

> [Metafictional writers] have come to focus on the notion that 'everyday' language endorses and sustains such power structures through a continuous process of naturalization whereby forms of oppression are constructed in apparently

> ‘innocent’ representations. The literary-fictional equivalent of this ‘everyday’ language of ‘common sense’ is the language of the traditional novel: the conventions of realism. Metafiction sets up an opposition, not to ostensibly ‘objective’ facts in the ‘real’ world, but to the language of the realistic novel which has sustained and endorsed such a view of reality.
>
> (11)

In accordance with Waugh’s description of the opposition between metafiction and realism, strategies of the former are evident when revealed to be undermining the presence of the latter. This discussion thus proceeds to analyse the construction of a recognisable South Africa in *Risk*, before exploring Staggie’s use of metafiction to undermine the safety of the text and present Nelson’s ‘game’ as an analogy for transgressive fiction.

Throughout *Risk*, Staggie inserts descriptions of a contemporary South Africa that readers may find familiar, if only soberly so. Nelson reflects on the country’s colonial history (19), discusses Cape Town’s coloured community and the immigration of South Africans to other countries with Stephen (34, 38–39), and brings Gatsby’s – Cape Town’s famed fast food – to Sharla’s flat (47). Events take place on the University of Cape Town’s Upper Campus (57), in Newlands Forest (100), and among the fast food outlets of Canal Walk mall (145–49). The insertion of locations, topics and items that are typically ‘South African’ may lull the reader into a false sense of security as he/she believes the world of the text to be a familiar reconstruction of their own. The following excerpt is the novel’s finest example:

> Today the country is in disarray because the president has resigned. The president and eleven ministers in his former cabinet have packed up and decided to throw in the towel. […] The outgoing president was no Mandela and what we really need is a Mandela. Unfortunately, neither is the president-in-waiting, a fool who has been on trial for rape and a flood of corruption charges. Once more the world laughed heartily at Africa when he claimed to have taken a shower after the apparent rape, to protect him from HIV. The world never laughed at Mandela, and I’m getting to the stage where, the more I think about it, the more The Movement makes perfect sense. (131)

This is, of course, a reference to Thabo Mbeki’s resignation as president of South Africa on the 21st of September, 2008. I refer to this as the text’s finest example because of its location within the narrative, and the subsequent discomfort the reader experiences. The placing of this paragraph after the sexual assaults on a politician (126–28) and “a bigwig in NEPSA” (123–25), acts to jolt the reader out of the illusion that The Movement’s acts are taking place in an unfamiliar or distant South Africa. Although the above-cited examples of realist setting are scattered between the dares carried out among the seven friends, the discussion of Mbeki’s resignation and the acts of sexual assault together gesture toward a sense of social collapse and/or regression. Suddenly, the horrific events are not located in a clearly-defined fictional world, but rather within one that shares history

with the reader's own world. It certainly is the violent content of Staggie's novel that allows for its labelling as "transgressive". Yet, the use of metafiction adds to that discomfort by reminding the reader that this bizarre world is not distinct from the 'real' South Africa. When these invocations of place, a convention of realism, are undermined by the following metafictional strategies, the illusion of a fiction as a 'safe' space begins to crumble.

Staggie's novel is scattered with metafictional suggestions that the novel is an analogy for transgressive fiction Consider the following quotes from *Risk*:

> It's been reiterated time and time again that the concept of rock bottom is a personal and individual one. Still, one can't help but laugh if you failed a semester because of your marijuana addiction and your parents took your car away. Crack whores and meth addicts abound with tales of abuse, abortion, sodomy, and rape. For some reason, rock bottom seems to have a purer, truer ring to it when it applies to them. (Staggie *Risk* 11)
>
> "This game is so random, and because playing it will be a fucking art, I say we call it Fluxus." (55)
>
> I didn't see what [Jeff] sees but one has to live in a place before one can truly know it. I was just a tourist and hence had no right to pass judgement. (80)
>
> "There has to be meaning in it, though. I think it's pretty dumb to go out and do something random. There has to be some symbolism in it." (139)
>
> I can't help but feel that people simply don't care and that no matter how much you talk and campaign and protest, you can't teach people empathy. […] If you cannot teach them empathy then you have to force them to empathise. (169)

What the above quotes have in common is that they can equally apply to transgressive fiction: it does reveal stories of "crack whores and meth addicts" – among other denigrated groups on the social periphery – with the purpose of revealing the depravation that exists and is maintained in those spaces; it is random and an art form; authors, like their narrators, largely treat their subject matter without moral judgement and assume the position of spectator or even tourist; social critique is symbolically relayed in the work, which is what distinguishes it from erotic literature, for example; and there is an element of shock-equals-enlightenment, which is, of course, not always the case. The use of metafiction in a transgressive novel also causes the reader further discomfort by adding to the text's instability, discussed in chapter one. Much of the power and controversy associated with transgressive texts springs from the absence of an authorial voice – a decision often made to jar the reader by obscuring any clear moral compass. The addition of metafiction to this unstable text presents the reader with a source of discomfort and frustration

whose invisible author is loosening the ties that bind the conventional realist novel, as if readers were holding something harmful that was unmaking itself before their eyes.

Stephen points out early on that it is necessary for there to be evidence that the act which constitutes a particular dare has occurred. When the process of collecting evidence occurs, it is clear that the participants are not simply following a set methodology, however. Rather, perverse interest is expressed, such as when the group follows Jeff, hoping for a fight, or when Nelson and Troy are amused by Stephen's sexual inexperience (72). This experience of schadenfreude can be read as analogous to the act of consumption in reading, particularly when one considers Risk to be a metafictional reference to transgressive fiction. As was noted in the chapter on Duiker's *Thirteen Cents*, the reader of transgressive fiction is positioned as a voyeur, whose experience need not be pleasurable to be labelled voyeuristic. The individual's decision to read the entire novel is premised on electing to "see the worst" as Ellis's Clay would describe it, and every reader who completes *Risk* or any other work of transgressive fiction must reconcile their rejection of the novel's content with their sustained reading.

On *Risk*'s final page Nelson reveals the title of his novel: *The Science of Drug Wisdom*, not *Risk* (189). Here, Staggie prevents the reader from setting the text aside, after finally being told that the novel is simply a circuit: fiction within fiction. Toward the end of the novel, Nelson comments on the nature of routine, and its capacity to maintain the status quo (168). It would be wise to recall Boler's conception of empathy, which is, most importantly, "to recognize oneself as implicated in the social forces that create the climate of obstacles the other must confront" (257). Staggie's use of metafiction, his decision to stunt the reader's escapism, contributes to acknowledging that *Risk* is more than an aesthetic piece. There also exists the possibility of a more critical interpretation when it comes to Nelson's *The Science of Drug Wisdom*: narcotics are inherently unstable and occluding agents, blurring the relationship between reality and addlement. If Nelson's novel is to be understood as a record of The Movement's actions and mission, yet is labelled "drug wisdom", Staggie may be suggesting that the perspective held by their collective is obstructed and perhaps inaccurate.

4.4) Protest or Terrorism?: Violence and Ambiguity

As I discussed in the first chapter, many definitions of transgressive fiction group its content into three categories: extreme violence, drug abuse, and taboo sexual acts. It is certainly the violence depicted in *Risk* that allows for it to be included in this thesis, especially its ambiguous depiction, which makes it all the more relevant and interesting. This section will begin with an analysis of

the character of Nelson as a problematic narrator, the format of the 'game', and the interpersonal dynamics at play once it is under way. This will be followed by a discussion of white guilt in the novel, as the only form of critique that is levelled against The Movement. I will then proceed to draw on the work of Julian Brown and Frantz Fanon to discuss the difficulty of categorising the violence in Staggie's novel, and the importance of such an ambiguous depiction.

It is vital to identify the conditions that The Movement are railing against. When Nelson introduces the 'game', its purpose is the realising of an identity, particularly a masculine one. Some scholars have highlighted the link between violent protest and the construction of identity:

> [V]iolence may well reflect an arduous or even desperate (but rational) *quest for meaning* in circumstances where none appears to exist: a situation where, to paraphrase Gramsci, old politics is dying but a new cannot be born.
>
> (Seferiades and Johnston 6)

Of course, there are fresh challenges that Nelson and his friends face; battlegrounds that give their lives the ideological purpose they lack. When Troy first proposes transforming Risk into a more socially conscious movement, he rather vaguely reminds Nelson that "[t]his is a fucking confused country and an extremely confused fucking continent" (102). This vagueness can be read as Staggie presenting The Movement as misguided and unnecessarily dangerous. Alternatively, I would suggest that Staggie is here undermining the kneejerk judgements that many South Africans make about protesting groups that employ violence as a tactic. As more dares are performed, the reader gains a clearer understanding, but it is not until Troy later addresses members of The Movement that the targets are made specific:

> What cripples and, indeed, what has paralysed us is the debt. The debt that we as Africans owe to rich governments, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. We are living in poverty. Our people are uneducated and AIDS is rampant, and we have no money to fight these afflictions. Because it is all being paid back in debt! (167)

The fundamental crisis in South Africa and the continent at large, for Troy then, is economic. The concern for economic equality does not extend to the self, however, as will become evident later.

Yet, the dynamics of resistance in *Risk* are peculiar, as it is members of the middle to upper-middle class who are organising The Movement. They complain about spending money on overpriced pizzas (170), yet are financially well-off enough that they can pay the one thousand rand entry fee required to participate in Risk. Their demands are for a more equal society and continent, and they rail against rich Europeans who purchase property in Clifton, yet they do not seem, at any point, to contribute from their own capital. The novel contains no evidence of an appeal to the "invited" spaces in which citizens can address the state, but moves immediately into inventing spaces (Brown 63–65) in which a critique of the state is launched by a faceless

movement. If the novel's eponymous game is called Risk, this surely implies that there are elements of both gain and loss: participation is a gamble that may entail sacrifice. Such sacrifice is largely couched in the form of lives or futures (if arrested), as participants risk death or imprisonment with each act. It appears, then, that either their lives – read bodies – are more valuable than their owner's capital, or that their capital is more valuable than their lives, and they would rather not sacrifice the former. Throughout *Risk*, there is a complete lack of respect for the South African police force, who are often equated with pigs and aardvarks. Although "pigs" is a common derogatory label for police in many countries, there is also a connotation of laziness in these analogies, and this is possibly why the participants of Risk and The Movement do not regard them as a challenge. Where does the impetus lie, then? Nelson is not bullied into participating, but does so out of an ambiguous interest to continue capitalising on the enlightenment afforded by Risk.

These acts of violence construct a hierarchy of suffering and criminality: some suffering and illegal activities are acceptable and carried out for the benefit of many others. In a sense, this view is related to Nelson's early musings on the nature of "rock bottom", and its "purer, truer" nature in Cape Town's peripheral spaces. In the chapter detailing the sexual assaults against the politician and pharmaceutical head, these individuals come to represent the failures of the state and corporations in aiding the South African public. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that this is a complete inversion – that those with enormous power are shifted to the bottom and those with no power ascend to the top. It must be emphasized that *Risk*'s violence does not originate from the bottom economic strata of South Africa, but from the wealthy and well-connected. The actions of The Movement are as random as the members who suggest them, which raises the fundamental concern of this chapter: does Staggie portray a movement that is as credible as it is transgressive, or do these acts – and those who commit them – seem unhelpful?

Given the forceful nature of their acts, the actions of The Movement require an audience in order to reach their full impact. Visibility or exposure is therefore vital, as indicated in the video recording of their sexual assaults, and the evidence that informs the newspaper article Nelson reads (Staggie *Risk* 165). Yet, unlike in *Fight Club*, the reader is not exposed to the state's response to these acts of violence (Palahniuk 119). Rather, The Movement's illegal activities seem to draw no attention whatsoever. There is no description of how they are perceived by the South African public, or whether the police service have managed to associate all of the activities with one group. They could simply blend into South Africa's record of lawbreaking, given the country's nightmarish violent crime statistics. Without being formed in the public's imagination, does The

Movement stand to gain or to lose? The reader is aware of The Movement's long arm, being exposed to Troy's webcasts to the various chapters, and privy to information fed by Nelson. Once again, the reader is placed in a position of doubt as reception of The Movement – and, by implication, its efficacy – are called into question.

It is then necessary to investigate the few moments when hesitancy and withdrawal are expressed by the participants, as this signals a discomfort. The first occurs when Kenivl puts forward "Rape Jessie Prins", a dare which Jeff refuses to complete (89–90), and the second is Stephen's refusal to kill Tiffany's lover (117). Both incidents occur before Risk transforms into The Movement, and, as has been discussed, the latter presents a clearer paradigm. When doubt later creeps into The Movement, it is never as overt as Jeff or Stephen's rejections. Instead, it appears in Nelson's comparison with Scientology (154), and in Ismael's suggestion that their extreme acts could be paired down (170). The acts remain violent, though, and these individuals stay in The Movement. Perhaps it is because, as was noted earlier, the format of the 'game' allows for multiple conceptions of masculinity – and later, liberation – to coexist among participants, united under the ever-widening umbrella of "The Movement". To critique another participant's challenge, then, is to critique their subjective experience of oppression, and their individual solutions to far-reaching injustices. Alternatively, by stretching the ideological acceptance so wide that it allows for suggestions such as Kenivl and Nelson's, the very efficacy of the 'game' and movement is threatened.

Rather bizarrely, the acts of violence in *Risk* largely go unchallenged and unpunished, apart from the events in the final chapter, which is not a response from the state but rather from security guards defending their own lives. What little opposition that does exist takes the form of white guilt. Two significant instances of white guilt occur in the novel: a conversation between Nelson and Jeff (129–30), and one between Tiffany and Nelson (150–52). There are differences between the two: Jeff partakes in the original Risk and thus has a connection with the key members of The Movement, whereas Tiffany approaches the group and its activities from the outside. There is also a distinct difference in opinion regarding whether a white individual can call themselves African. Jeff certainly believes that he is (130), though his subscription to inclusivity must be read with caution. This is a problematic decision to make without introspection, as it allows – much like 'colour-blindness' – the erasure of difference and thus the obscuring of inequality. Jeff's dreadlocked hair is an act of cultural appropriation, and he frequently expresses distress when he is mislabelled an Afrikaner. In fact, his interest in 'post-apartheid' Afrikaner identity expands beyond himself. During Kenivl's mugging, Jeff challenges his labelling of a large white rugby

player as Afrikaans (87). He informs Nelson of a subculture in Afrikaans society that is concerned with reinventing identity to escape the shame of apartheid (80). It is significant, then, that his first dare is to say one of the most insulting and politically incorrect words in South Africa, which even causes him a visual display of discomfort upon expression (59). During the confrontation between Jeff and the black student, the former seems most concerned with asserting that he is not Afrikaans. The reaction of his friends is quite bizarre, though. Nelson claims that they are excited not because of the dare, but because of the fight that will inevitably follow (58). The majority of the group, who are acting as witnesses, are people of colour, and the lack of shock expressed upon hearing the word "kaffir" is peculiar. As Nelson makes clear, the word has not undergone the process of appropriation that "nigger" underwent in the United States (58). In this particular chapter, it would appear that the word has lost its dehumanising power, and is being used by the group as a tool; as means to an end.

Tiffany's perspective on The Movement appears to be more conflicted, as is revealed in a conversation between her and Nelson, in which he explains:

> "There are white people in this movement."
> "Baby, you've never had to travel overseas and tell people that even though you have white skin you're from Africa. If you tell them you're from South Africa you can see their faces change because they assume that somehow you had something to do with the injustice. Like you're to blame for the state of South Africa. You've never had to go through that and you will never have to go through that. Can I really call myself European?" (151)

Nelson believes that Tiffany *is* African, with a stronger claim to the label than diasporic subjects have, which is a view later echoed by Innocent (156). Tiffany's rather odd fear is that The Movement too closely resembles the early days of Adolf Hitler's rise to power (150–51), and thus suggests – without articulation – the possibility of genocide. Her use of language is indicative of her ignorance and fear:

> "It's like all that stuff is over and here we have Troy and you guys *looking for another fight*. There is *nothing to fight for* left in South Africa but people still have resentment. This movement is based on anger because things haven't changed quick enough *for certain people and they still want to hate*. Everybody is on about change but have they really tackled the big issues? It feels like no one talks about it because this country's history is shameful and people would prefer to forget. I say *I* had nothing fucking to do with any of that shameful business!" (151–52, emphasis mine)

This quotation is a succinct summary of a defence of white privilege. In the excerpt, Tiffany denies the aftermath of apartheid with "all that stuff is over", believes the anger directed toward an unjust system is derived from impatience and generated by people who "still want to hate", and yet hypocritically claims the core problem is that "no one talks about it". Whilst it is true that Tiffany

was not actively part of the apartheid regime, she does still benefit from a pervasive system of white privilege. In response to such a denial, Mohammad Shabangu writes the following:

> [T]o say this is to miss an opportunity to take on a responsibility not *for* the past, but rather, a responsibility *to* the future. This is primarily because white people have inherited a legacy and, as such, cannot merely deflect the shame that comes with the horrific past as if to suggest that their innocence means that, even accidently, they played absolutely no role at all in maintaining subjugation. (57)

Following this conversation, Nelson chooses to avoid discussing The Movement with Tiffany, and thus does not allow her the impetus for discomfort of its possible interrogation. Shabangu's statement is congruent with Boler's conception of empathy, and the response that ideally Nelson would offer Tiffany. His lack of response – both to her and Jeff – emphasises a sense of unease and hesitancy on Nelson part, which I expound on in the latter section of this chapter.

A less pronounced, though equally fascinating, confrontation of whiteness occurs during Chris's mission, which involves walking back from the centre of Hanover Park – the latter described by Nelson as "a cesspool of unemployment, gang violence, and rampant meth addiction" (75). Chris chooses to abort the mission when he discovers that he has left his heroin at home, and appears unable to continue without it:

> "I've seen enough of this. Let's just go home. It's sad, alright. Like, I have no ill feeling towards anyone, and I would like to keep it that way. I've seen a township now and it's not what I expected."
> I turn the car around for the drive back to what was once whites-only Cape Town. (76)

This passage is particularly interesting when one considers Chris's need for narcotics before engaging with a reality unknown to him. It can be assumed that there is no desire on his part to confront the reality of township life – and, by extension, the reality of gross inequality – without the assistance of narcotics. By undergoing the experience in a hallucinatory state, the white individual is capable of shrugging off the negative aspects as imaginative, or drug-fuelled, as opposed to real. This moment also underscores the irony of Chris's nickname: Jesus – a figure associated with tolerance, self-sacrifice, and one who interacted with members of every social level. These drugs, more expensive than marijuana and thus harder to procure, provide a protective shield around the fragile white outlook that dismisses its own role in South Africa's state of social inequality. The division between "hard" drugs – as Troy describes them – and Nelson's concluding statement – "what was once whites-only Cape Town" – reemphasises this return to a safe space, free of guilt-inducing reality. The addictive nature of narcotics and the dependency that can be incurred is of symbolic value here too. If the comparison can be extended further, the story of Thando is rather apt (93–99). Having overdosed on a "moonflower concoction", he is reduced to

a child-like state, oblivious to much that occurs around him. “Hard” drugs thus provide opportunities to avoid a process of introspection, or empathy as Boler defines it. The similarity between this exchange the previously discussed ‘poverty tour’ in *Thirteen Cents* is also noteworthy.

The question of transgression in the novel – specifically the use of violence by Staggie and his characters – must be addressed. Clearly, attempting to organise The Movement’s violence into clear-cut categories is not only an exercise in futility, but a problematic one too. A more revealing avenue of discussion is that provided by Frantz Fanon’s writings on violence and the figure of the terrorist. His writing is useful because of its wide-reaching influence within South African social movements, as well the direct invocation of his work within *Risk*. In his sketch of the writer’s influence, Mabogo Percy More claims that “No philosopher, except Karl Marx, or political theorist has influenced the political resistance in pre-1994 apartheid South Africa as Fanon did” (127). Similarly, Nigel C. Gibson’s *Fanonian Practices in South Africa: From Steve Biko to Abahlali baseMjondolo* maps Fanon’s deep influence in both pre- and post-1994 South Africa.[58] In Staggie’s novel, Fanon is briefly mentioned by Nomsa after her sexual liaison with Nelson, when she criticises his lack of knowledge regarding lactification and decolonisation (23–24). Though Nelson initially ignores Nomsa’s words, they shortly return to cause him discomfort (25–27).

As renowned Fanonian scholar Lewis R. Gordon notes, the theorist’s writings on violence have often been misinterpreted (118). Fanon’s most pointed comments on violence occur in the first chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth*, entitled “Concerning Violence” (Fanon 27–84). It is here that the author (in)famously describes any process of decolonisation as “always a violent phenomenon” (27). According to Gordon, for Fanon violence and “pure force” are separate terms which can overlap, but are readily conflated by Fanon’s critics. “Pure force” refers to acts of physical and traumatising violence, as Fanon makes clear below:

> In the colonial countries […] the policeman and the soldier, by their immediate presence and their frequent and direct action maintain contact with the native and advise him by means of rifle-butts and napalm not to budge. It is obvious here that the agents of government speak the language of pure force. The intermediary does not lighten the oppression, nor seek to hide the domination; he shows them up and puts them into practice with the clear conscience of an upholder of peace; yet he is the bringer of violence into the home and into the mind of the native. (29)

[58] Recently, Gibson has also studied the impact of Fanon in the student movements that occurred in 2015 and 2016 (see “The Specter [*sic*] of Fanon”), which is evidence that Fanon’s influence has not faded in contemporary South Africa.

When Fanon describes the necessity for violence in a struggle for decolonisation in *The Wretched of the Earth*, however, he is not necessarily advocating for harmful physical interaction between two sides. Rather, he is describing an inherently tragic condition of engagement, as Gordon explains:

> The colonial condition is, Fanon argues, one of competing claims divided by a Manichean (Aristotelian) structure of segregation and policed borders. The indigenous peoples see land around them that has been stolen or acquired through trickery and unjust wars. The settlers see themselves as simply going through legal transactions that give them the right to the land they own. The stage is thus set for a conflict of "rights"—both with legal claims from different systems and shared moral claims against theft and unjust acquisition—that is no less than tragic: One side must lose. Colonialism's victory would be continued violence; the colonized's victory would be, to the colonial forces, violence incarnate. This is why Fanon argues that decolonization is a violent phenomenon: No side of the equation is without it. The situation is thus *tragic*. […] The criteria that would constitute suitable means for the settlers, for the colonial government, would be the absence of challenges to it. This is because such a system does not see itself as unjustified and unjust, which means its overturn would be, from its perspective, unjust, unwarranted, a violation of decency and order—in a word, *violent*. (117–18)

What Gordon illustrates in this excerpt are the essential conditions under which Fanon advocates for acts of violence in the name of decolonisation. If the violent acts perpetrated by Nelson and his friends are to be read as emblematic of Fanonian revolutionary violence, their actions must satisfy these conditions.

Samira Kawash draws a starker contrast between the two forms of violence, distinguishing between what she terms "instrumental violence" and the "violence of decolonization":

> Instrumental violence in Fanon's text is the violence of revolt and of reversal, the violence whereby the colonized challenge and attempt to upend the domination that has oppressed them. At the same time, another violence (perhaps alongside or unleashed by instrumental acts of violence) emerges as the world-shattering violence of decolonization. Decolonization destroys both colonizer and colonized; in its wake, something altogether different and unknown, a "new humanity," will rise up. (239)

Though it is arguable that Nelson and The Movement excel with the former, it is debatable whether their actions can collectively be considered an example of the violence of decolonisation. Their attempts at subversion – the flash mob (Staggie *Risk* 145–49), acts of sexual and physical assault (122–28), and robberies (153–55, 185–89) – are so eclectic and disconnected that they do not sustain a decolonizing attack on the status quo. Staggie does invoke a wider sense of social community by depicting a scene in which Troy addresses The Movement's members via a webcast (133–34). In doing so, it is suggested that The Movement is a much larger and more organised

structure than the small group of individuals with whom Nelson participates. Yet, the language used in this particular scene is revealing:

> Troy is standing in front of Ntando's PC. The sides of his head have been braided and it's created a faux mohawk. He's wearing a bright-purple Palestinian scarf, although its thirty degrees outside. Troy turns on the tripod-mounted camcorder and is live to what Ntando claims to be two thousand computers all over Africa. (133)

Nelson's tone of voice in this paragraph is not cynical, but certainly unsure. In the above description, Troy's newly created faux mohawk and fashionable wearing of a Palestinian scarf gesture toward the strategically constructed image that he wishes to present: one of disruption, counterculture, and a siding with the oppressed. Furthermore, Nelson's use of the phrase "what Ntando claims to be two thousand computers" suggests apprehension over that figure. This ambivalence regarding The Movement's motives, ethical justifications and overall membership dog Nelson throughout the novel. Even its concluding chapter, in which Nelson actively participates in the robbing of an armoured cash transit vehicle, features this unease:

> Troy shouts. "Ready, brothers?"
> No answer. I'm driving and observing the countryside in what feels like slow motion. Troy shouts again but this time louder. "Ready, brothers!"
> Jeff shouts, "Fuck, yeah!"
> Stephen shouts. "Let's do this!"
> I don't say anything as the sign *Caledon 20 km* flashes past me. […]
> I push down on the accelerator as the two Bantams slam into the van one after the other. There are cars driving in the opposite direction and I can feel it in my bones that they know what they've just passed, going just that little bit faster as they drive past, hearts beating and feet more forcefully pushing down on accelerators. Maybe I feel this because this is what's happening to me, yet even though the adrenalin is running rampant in my veins, I stay a decent distance from the highway assault that is unfolding in front of my eyes. (187)

The protagonist's hesitancy is palpable in this extract, and Staggie aligns Nelson's emotional state more with the innocent onlookers than his friends participating in the violent act. The novel's closing lines further emphasise the text's profoundly ambiguous narration: "An animal scream come from my throat as I hold [Troy], and I feel all restraint diminishing. I feel Africa's restraint diminishing" (189). The reader is left to ponder what this restraint implies: whether African countries, following colonisation and neo-colonisation, restrain their own citizens economically and socially, or whether The Movement's commitment to 'freeing' Africa from its historically-induced bondage places a burden on the shoulders of all who participate in its missions.

Julian Brown's 2015 text, *South Africa's Insurgent Citizens: On Dissent and the Possibility of Politics*, presents an outlook on contemporary acts of protest which rejects the naïve view that

these are simply acts of deviance.[59] Drawing on the work of Jacques Ranciére, Brown argues that the majority of South Africans, who typically appear "as a poorly distinguished mass – and only rarely as actors with real power" (3), are asserting that they are capable of political action, and that the expression of that action is not limited to the "invited" spaces that are considered legitimate, but also expressed in "invented" spaces.[60] In order to substantiate and expand his argument, Brown draws upon recent events of protest in South Africa, such as the massacre at Marikana. The following statement is crucial to understanding why Brown's conception of insurgent citizens is significant in the study of *Risk*, and transgressive fiction as a whole:

> These disruptive claims are made on a presumption of equality – that is, on the belief that all speaking beings are already equal and that, therefore, any division of roles and responsibilities between different groups in society is contingent, not necessary. […] Any speaking being is equally capable of understanding any other: of recognising any other speaking being as such, and of being recognised in turn. These moments of mutual recognition are rare, and often fleeting. But in these moments, the equality of all actors reveals the inability of the police order to account for all potential interest, all potential groups, and all potential political claims or demands. (22–23)

As has been discussed in the previous chapter, novels considered to be "transgressive" are concerned with the re-humanising of excluded groups. The "insurgent citizens" that Brown discusses are exactly that: they may not be engaged in sex work, be addicted to narcotics, or carelessly violent, but they are excluded from popular discourse. This exclusion has its roots in historical inequalities and the lack of rectification of those inequalities in the postcolonial, 'post-apartheid' moment. Furthermore, Ranciére and, by extension, Brown argue that the disruption of the police order need not bring about a tangible change (24–25).

The question remains whether The Movement may be considered "insurgent" action, however. As I stated earlier, no member of The Movement ever approaches the "invited" spaces for contestation between the state and its citizens. That is to say, readers are not made aware of any legal action taken to address social inequality before those methods were found ineffective and illegal ones were then pursued. There does seem to be an apathy amongst the characters towards the current government and a scepticism about its capacity for problem-solving, but this

[59] Brown's study makes no mention of Fanon's influence, which is a curious elision given that his study focuses on movements and organisations that also appear in Gibson's *Fanonian Practices in South Africa*. These include Abahlali baseMjondolo (Brown 119–24. Gibson 15–16), the Anti-Privatisation Forum (Brown 132–39, Gibson 162–63), as well as briefer mentions of the Treatment Action Campaign (Brown 131–32, Gibson 162) and the Landless People's Movement (Brown 90, Gibson 133, 149). The invocation of Brown is therefore not a sudden turn from the subject of Fanonian theory, but rather the opening of an additional avenue of inquiry which has intersected with Fanon's writings elsewhere.

[60] Here Brown makes use of terms put forward by Faranak Miraftab (Brown 63–65).

is not sufficient justification for a leap straight to violent provocation and destabilisation. Concluding that their behaviour constitutes "insurgent" protest is therefore untenable.

Given that the violence enacted by The Movement is connected to poorly stated aims and a clear-cut image of an oppressor, Staggie raises the question of whether this violence can be described using another term. The Movement's behaviour does operate in a networked sense – though, as I have just suggested, the size of that network is questionable – and its targets are subject, largely, to illegal physical violence. Therefore, the uncomfortable topic of terrorism must be addressed in order to gauge whether it is a more useful paradigm within which to consider *Risk*'s depiction of violence. The intertextual relationship between *Risk* and *Fight Club* provides fruitful ground for this discussion. Kavadlo's scholarship on *Fight Club* centres on the novel's relationship with terrorism, and specifically its publication date prior to the 9/11 World Trade Attacks in New York:

> Americans did not discover terrorism after September 11, 2001. Contrary to how we may have come to think of it, terrorism came to the forefront of American consciousness in the 1990s, when suddenly, it seemed, real-life terrorism demanded attention just as the threat of nuclear war with the Soviet Union had ebbed. […] The raw ingredients for narratives about domestic terror, like components for the homemade bombs, were all present in the culture before 9/11, an explosive mixture of psychopathy, delusions of grandiosity, cult mentality, the need for spectacle and exposure, and anger over personal mistreatment, government excess, or corporate overreach, whether imagined or not. (*American Popular Culture* 2–3)

Palahniuk's debut is therefore not a work of shocking foresight, but rather one that represents and addresses social and personal concerns that afflicted the United States during the 1990s. By comparison, *Risk* features several references to South Africa's armed struggle against the apartheid regime, which included acts that some may term "terrorism". In this sense, Staggie's novel is also affected by the nation's social realities and historical tragedies. In continuing the examination of *Risk* as inflected by an intertextual relationship with *Fight Club*, the ensuing discussion regarding terrorism must take both works into account too.

Kawash notes that Fanon's advocacy of terrorism is only as a last resort and in retaliation to terrorist acts committed by the colonising state (237–8). Therefore, in order to gauge whether The Movement's actions can be considered depictions of counterterrorism in terms of Fanonian theory, there must exist the presence of a colonial terrorising force. Given the aforementioned lack of specificity in Troy's arguments regarding the subjugation of Africa by neo-colonial forces – certainly a reality, but not well articulated within the novel – it is as baseless to describe The Movement's actions as counterterrorism as it would be to regard them as "insurgent" protest. In

this regard, the novel redoubles its relationship with *Fight Club*, in which the charismatic Tyler Durden similarly identifies vague causes of dissatisfaction and aimlessness in the lives of American men. The knowing reader, having engaged with Palahniuk's work, may find this synchronicity to be further evidence of the novel's replication of *Fight Club*'s narrative features. However, I argue that Nelson is a far more ambivalent narrator, whose views on The Movement's violence are never sufficiently detailed to allow for a direct match to Palahniuk's Sebastian, and therefore the comparison is derailed.

If we return to Boler's conception of empathy and testimonial reading, the question that arises is whether, in the figuring of social dynamics between reader and fictional world, The Movement's violence, though difficult to label, is portrayed as acceptable. After all, transgressive fiction attempts to write against popular discourse, making even the most despicable characters relatable and understandable. As Nelson puts it in *Risk*, "I was just a tourist and hence I have no right to pass judgement" (Staggie 80). Yet, there is a particularly uncomfortable moment, toward the end of the novel, when Nelson states: "If you cannot teach them empathy then you have to force them to empathise" (169). This can be read as a direct comment on the nature of transgressive fiction: literature requires shocking content in order to alert readers to social issues, and to do so is to break away from more peaceful forms of literature that have preceded it. Whether "force" constitutes empathy, though, is a crucial question. Perhaps the time has come to abandon the notion that empathy needs to be introduced gently. Rather, because of its necessity, the bold construction of texts – like *Risk* – that are designed to highlight complicity and apathy are required and should be promoted.

In this chapter, I have attempted to reveal the complex positioning of violence in *Risk*, both as a feature of Staggie's novel as well as a component that is intertextually linked to earlier works of transgressive fiction. The inability to categorise the represented violence as "useful" or "effective" gestures toward the myriad social issues present in considering protest in contemporary South Africa. Furthermore, the absence of an authorial voice, condoning *or* condemning the characters' actions, forces readers to decide for themselves how the actions are to be interpreted. In making this decision, the reader must account for both the positive and negative implications of such violence for the individuals involved – both perpetrators and victims – as well as the social setting or nation in which it occurs.

Conclusion:

"How can you build a nation without telling its stories?"

> Perhaps art should be regarded as a social barometer. What better way to find out what is happening in any country than to look at what its artists are doing. Gratefully we have moved away from protest art and struggle poetry. We have finally started to tell our own stories, "warts and all", without feeling political pressure to keep silent about certain aspects and overemphasise others. And that is humanising, if nothing else. (Duiker "The Streets" 9)

This thesis has attempted to build on scholarship concerning transgressive fiction: literature that is inherently nebulous, controversial, and upsetting. The very act of reading such fiction is a consensual act of emotional and psychological self-flagellation. Often, the only way readers can escape this discomfort is by attempting a reading process that is clinical, mechanical and seeks to install as much distance between themselves and the novel's narrative as possible. Such a process is, however, a troubling practice for any person to engage in. Well-written transgressive fiction, including the novels examined in this thesis, compels individuals to continue reading not for the simple motive of shocking them but rather to raise complex questions regarding social organisation, prejudice and systematic abuse of the marginalised. Subsequently, readers must reckon, internally, with why they continued to engage with a work which represents heinous attitudes and actions.

The theoretical bedrock of my thesis has been Megan Boler's formulation of empathy, which presents an additional layer of discomfort to those reading transgressive fiction. Not only do readers encounter extreme violence and the desecration of consent, but subsequently they must also interrogate their own positionality in relation to the extremity depicted. I recognise that such a self-interrogation is a difficult request to make of any individual.

Though exploring the existent forms of related scholarship, this thesis has also gently suggested that the complicated notion of readers' consent be regarded as a defining facet of transgressive fiction. Whilst acknowledging that readers' consent is a difficult concept to define and identify, I have argued that the troubling choice of persisting through horrific narratives, grounded in the subjectivities of perpetrators and/or victims, requires some thought.

The shadow of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has also loomed over this thesis. It is not that the texts are comparable to the vital testimonies offered at the TRC hearings, but rather that one of the TRC's indelible effects on South African literature has been the reconsideration of first-person accounts of violence.

Beginning chronologically, *Thirteen Cents* was the first text under examination as a subversive work of fiction that challenges its very placement within a 'post-apartheid' canon. Though it features many elements that invite the reader's sympathy – an orphan, disenfranchised and existing in poverty-stricken conditions, sexually and violently preyed upon by men – Duiker's debut seeks to challenge and combat easy assumptions made by readers regarding those very 'sympathetic' facets. The author establishes this challenge by inserting questioning devices into the narrative as a stimulus for the reader to consider their own engagement with the text, especially the preconceptions which they bring to it and that guide their interpretive process. By concluding the novel ambiguously, Duiker refuses the reader any catharsis or clear understanding of the narrative's end. Though the epitome of the novel's transgression is its graphic representation of paedophilia, the discomfort incurred in the reader following Duiker's request for self-reflection is not negligible. *Thirteen Cents* is arguably a foundational work of transgressive fiction for any critic attempting to pursue Hoey's suggestion of "develop[ing] a reader-focused framework which imagines the text and its "meanings" in terms similar to that of Iserian potential" ("The Lacuna of Usefulness" 35).

Kgebetli Moele's *The Book of the Dead* was explored via the overlapping concepts of biological citizenship and violent inscription. The novel subtly reveals the systemic medical policing of human bodies within the South Africa state, by foregrounding a character who instrumentalises such structures to his own horrific advantage. In addition, the journal featured within the novel is a device used to question the limiting nature of language in recording the experiences of human beings. These stunted representations emphasise how writing – both medical and otherwise – is inherently reductive, and that act of reduction strips the individual of their dignity, as well their own narratives regarding the human cost of disease and decay.

Jason Staggie's *Risk*, the novel most explicitly following a tradition of transgressive fiction, raised concerns regarding intertextuality, metafiction, and ambiguous violence. By inserting links to Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club*, among other works, Staggie's novel invites a similar consideration regarding the representation of violence and whether such acts are being promoted or problematised. Given that the novel relays characters' violent acts via a protagonist who is repeatedly unsure as to The Movement's goals and ethicality, Staggie does not ultimately endorse the actions taken by those characters, but rather allows for a sense of ambivalence to encompass the entirety of Nelson's narration. As with *Thirteen Cents* and *The Book of the Dead*, Staggie's decision, as the author, to elide a clear moral judgement of his characters' actions is another similarity between the American and British works of transgressive fiction and our own.

Transgressive fiction is a rich vein that still presents great potential for new angles of academic inquiry, some of which have been gestured toward in this thesis – the nature of consent, affect theory, and text-to-film adaptation, for example. In a recent article in *The Guardian*, Leo Benedictus lists contemporary works of transgressive fiction authored by and featuring protagonists who are women (para 5). As noted in the introductory chapter, transgressive fiction has largely been a male-dominated sphere, with the exception of A.M. Homes's and Kathy Acker's oeuvres. The expansion of texts by female authors can only enrich conversations regarding this form of literature, refute outdated notions of which gender may write transgressive material, and further deepen understandings and representations of systemic oppression. As has been repeatedly stated throughout this thesis, the political and social milieu in which these novels are written has a profound relationship with the texts themselves. This is particularly evident in Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett's 2019 article in *The Guardian*, in which she questions the relationship between the #Metoo movement and recent fiction, written by women, which features rough sex. In addition to those authors mentioned by Benedictus, there is also a recent rise in Korean transgressive fiction by female authors – perhaps most notably Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* and Nora Okja Keller's *Fox Girl*. Potential then exists for scholars to grapple with both the poetics and politics of these novels, and what relation they have to both Korean nationals and those of its diaspora.

As I mentioned in my opening chapter, there exist many more South African novels that one could consider transgressive. Whilst some of these novels, such as Marlene van Niekerk's *Triomf*, have drawn a great deal of academic engagement, others have not. Beyond text- or nation-based explorations of transgressive fiction, there are additional streams of thought that can and should be pursued. During the period in which this thesis was written – 2016-2019 – the world has undergone such extraordinary and shocking change that at times it seems to require a complete restructuring of what any citizen – national or global – could consider offensive and/or transgressive. Rather than the fluid nature of transgression being an obstacle, its constantly morphing form allows for incisive inquiry into why certain topics are considered taboo, and how they are represented in literature.

Furthermore, given that transgressive texts do appear in some academic syllabi, there is also a meaningful and detailed discussion to be had as to whether such texts require specific methods of teaching. The intertwining of the political and poetic sets a particularly intriguing challenge for transgressive fiction when studied in university curricula. In the opening chapter, attention was drawn to Anthony Julius's etymological mapping of "transgression" – specifically, that the word gained a transitive property and was interpreted as causing harm against a person.

The demand for trigger warnings in higher education – particularly in the United States – may suggest a transformation of what is collectively considered "transgressive". Rather than understanding transgressive texts as bearing a coded assault against a society's values and socio-political processes, the nature of the offense is reoriented to inflict the individual, whose psyche becomes the primary cause for concern. This change arguably makes identifying transgressive texts an even more arduous task, as the criteria become increasingly subjective. However, the trigger warning debate also establishes an avenue of inquiry regarding the multifaceted relationships between student, text, educator and institution.

Given that transgression is a societal facet as old as human communities, it is not likely that this subject will ever lose its powerful and complex appeal. Moreover, the chances that authors will cease attempts to shock and disturb readers is equally unlikely. The path forward seems, then, to increase attention to this aspect of our lived and literary cultures, and explore how it intersects with other, larger literary lenses such as postcolonialism and trauma theory. For South Africa – and South Africans, specifically – there is a profound usefulness to mapping national opinions regarding the transgressive. The quote in this thesis's title – "How can you build a nation without telling its stories" (235) – was sourced from Duiker's *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*, and is equally applicable to narratives of transgression as to anything less sordid.

The alteration and progression of concerns and strategies from Duiker to Moele to Staggie also suggests that South African authors are still interested in innovative new forms and dynamic content with which to explore transgression and the boundaries of acceptability. *Risk*, in particular, provides substantial evidence that further temporal distance from the legislative end of the apartheid regime does not result in decreased attention to its long-standing and deeply entrenched social effects. Rather, Staggie's novel provides a representation of South African similarly acidic to that of *Thirteen Cents*, published thirteen years prior.

If we conceive of social justice – however one chooses to define it in such contested times – as a bright lamp shedding light down a tunnel, then transgressive fiction centres on those behaviours and attitudes that are born in the resultant shadow. Their presence is reliant on the torch, reactive toward the torch, and as revealing about our path forward as its warm glow. Such works of South African literature can be, as Duiker suggests above, a social barometer – when its needle uncomfortably spins and points, it is in our best interest to pay close attention.

Bibliography

Primary Texts

Duiker, K. Sello. *Thirteen Cents*. Cape Town: David Philip, 2000.

Moele, Kgebetli. *The Book of the Dead*. Cape Town: Kwela, 2009.

Staggie, Jason. *Risk*. Cape Town: Umuzi, 2013.

Secondary Sources

Allen, Graham. *Intertextuality*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2011.

Armstrong, David. "Bodies of Knowledge/Knowledge of Bodies." *Reassessing Foucault: Power, Medicine and the Body*. Ed. Colin Jones and Roy Porter. London: Routledge, 1994. 17–27.

Ashcroft, Bill. "Menippean Marechera." *Reading Marechera*. Ed. Grant Hamilton. Harare: Weaver Press, 2013. 76–98.

Attree, Lizzy. "Already Falling Apart." *Wasafiri* 20.46 (2005): 30–36.

Austen, Ralph A. "Struggling with the African Bildungsroman." *Research in African Literatures* 46.3 (2015): 214–31.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Problems of Doestoevsky's Poetics*. Trans. Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984.

----------. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Trans. C. Emerson and M. Holquist. Ed. M. Holquist. Austin: U of Texas P, 1981.

Beauchamp, Tom L. "Autonomy and Consent." Miller and Wertheimer. 55–74.

Benedictus, Leo. "Would *American Psycho* be published today? How shocking books have changed with their readers." *The Guardian*. 2 May 2019. 18 pars. Accessed on 2 May 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/may/02/has-fiction-lost-its-edge-american-psycho-bret-easton-ellis-leila-slimani>

Bennett, Jill. *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2005.

Bergelson, Vera. "Consent to Harm." Miller and Wertheimer. 163–94.

Berlant, Lauren. "Trauma and Ineloquence." *Cultural Values* 5.1 (2001): 41–58.

Boehmer, Elleke. “Permanent Risk: When Crisis Defines a Nation’s Writing.” *Trauma, Memory, and Narrative in the Contemporary South African Novel*. Ed. Ewald Mengel and Michela Borzaga. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012. 29–46.

Boler, Megan. “The Risks of Empathy: Interrogating Multiculturalism’s Gaze.” *Cultural Studies* 11.2 (1997): 253–73.

Booker, M. Keith. *Techniques of Subversion in Modern Literature: Transgression, Abjection, and the Carnivalesque.* Florida: UP of Florida, 1991.

Brown, Julian. *South Africa’s Insurgent Citizens: On Dissent and the Possibility of Politics*. Johannesburg: Jacana, 2015.

Brown, Molly. “Towards Reclaiming the Colonised Mind: The Liberating Fantasies of Duiker and Ihimaera.” *Papers: Explorations into Children's Literature* 18.2 (2006): 35–40.

Butchart, Alexander. “Objects Without Origins: Foucault in South African Socio-Medical Science.” *South African Journal of Psychology* 27.2 (1997): 101–10.

Butler, Judith. *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* London: Verso, 2009.

----------. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London: Verso, 2006.

Cairns, Alan and Scott Burnside. “Life Imitates ‘Art’ in Bernardo ‘Bible’.” *The Free Radical* 1 September 1995. 30 pars. Accessed 5 July 2017. <https://web.archive.org/web/20120128202826/http://www.thefreeradical.ca/copycatCrimes/lifeImitatesArtInBernardoBible.html>

Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996.

Charles, Tembi. “The ‘Hades’ of Cape Town Society.” 4 July 2013. Accessed 15 February 2017. <http://slipnet.co.za/view/reviews/the-hades-of-cape-town-society/>

Chun, Rene. “Naked Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner.” *The New York Times* 23 April 1995: 49, 52. Print.

Coetzee, J. M. *Giving Offense: Essays on Censorship*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996.

Cosslett, Rhiannon Lucy. “Why are so many women writing about rough sex?” *The Guardian*. 7 February 2019. 19 pars. Accessed on 16 May 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/feb/07/women-writing-rough-sex-metoo>

Davis, Charles H. S, ed. *The Egyptian Book of the Dead: The Most Ancient and Most Important of the Extant Religious Texts of Ancient Egypt*. Trans. Charles H. S. Davis. New York: G. P. Putnam, 1895.

De Kock, Leon. “A History of Restlessness: And Now for the Rest.” *English Studies in Africa* 51.1 (2008): 109–22.

Decoteau, Claire Laurier. *Ancestors and Antiretrovirals: The Biopolitics of HIV/AIDS in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2013.

Demir, Danyela, Olivier Moreillon and Alan Muller, "In Search of a 'Rock Star': Commemorating Kabelo Sello Duiker's Life and Work Ten Years On." *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa* 27.1 (2015): 26–37.

Du Toit, Melanie. "A forced, desperate attempt at shock-value." 11 July 2013. Accessed 15 February 2017. <http://slipnet.co.za/view/reviews/a-forced-desperate-attempt-at-shock-value/>

Dubin, Steven C. *Spearheading Debate: Culture Wars & Uneasy Truces*. Johannesburg: Jacana, 2012.

Duiker, K. Sello. *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*. Cape Town: Kwela, 2001.

----------. "The Streets and the Gods of Truth." *Rhodes Journalism Review* 24 (2004): 8–9.

Eagleton, Terry. *The Event of Literature*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2012.

Ellis, Bret Easton. *Less than Zero*. London: Picador, 1985.

Esterhuyse, Willie. "Truth as a Trigger for Transformation: From Apartheid Injustice to Transformational Justice." *Looking Back, Reaching Forward: Reflections on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa*. Ed. Charles Villa-Vicencio and Wilhelm Verwoerd. Cape Town: U of Cape Town P, 2000. 144–54.

Fanon, Frantz. *A Dying Colonialism*. Trans. Haakon Chevalier. London: Writers & Readers, 1980.

----------. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Trans. Constance Farrington. 1961. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2001.

Faulkner, William. *As I Lay Dying*. 1930. Vintage: London, 2004.

Fish, Stanley E. "Interpreting the *Variorum*." *Critical Inquiry* 2.3 (1976): 465–85.

----------. "Why no one's afraid of Wolfgang Iser." *Diacritics* 11.1 (1981): 2–13.

Fokofpolisiekar: Forgive Them for They Know Not What They Do. Directed by Bryan Little. Journeyman Pictures. 23 October 2009.

Foucault, Michel. "A Preface to Transgression." *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews.* Ed. Donald F. Bouchard. Trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon. Ithaca, Cornell UP: 1980. 29–52.

----------. *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*. Trans. A. M. Sheridan. London: Tavistock, 1973.

Frame, Janet. *Living in the Maniototo*. United Kingdom: Virago Press, 1979.

Frenkel, Ronit and Craig MacKenzie. "Conceptualizing 'Post-Transitional' South African Literature in English." *English Studies in Africa* 53.1 (2010): 1–10.

Freund, Elizabeth. *The Return of the Reader: Reader-Response Criticism*. London: Methuen, 1987.

Gardner, James. "Transgressive Fiction." *National Review* 17 June 1996: 54–56. Print.

Gibson, Diana. "The Gaps in the Gaze in South African Hospitals." *Social Science and Medicine* 59 (2004): 2013–24.

Gibson, Nigel C. *Fanonian Practices in South Africa: From Steve Biko to Abahlali baseMjondolo*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

----------. "The Specter of Fanon: The Student Movements and the Rationality of Revolt in South Africa." *Social Identities* 23.5 (2017): 579–99.

Gonzalez, Octavio R. "Tracking the Bugchaser: Giving 'The Gift' of HIV/AIDS." *Cultural Critique* 75 (2010): 82–113.

Gordimer, Nadine. "Tape Measure." *Beethoven was One-Sixteenth Black*. London: Bloomsbury, 2007. 17–24.

Gordon, Lewis R. *What Fanon Said: A Philosophical Introduction to his Life and Thought.* London: Hurst & Company, 2015.

Graham, Shane. *South African Literature After the Truth Commission: Mapping Loss*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Green, Michael. "Translating the Nation: From Plaatje to Mpe." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 34.2 (2008): 325–42.

Hoey, Molly. "The Failure to Act: Acting Subjects and Passive Bodies in Transgressive Fiction." *The Journal of Comparative Media Arts* (2015): 1–15.

----------. "The Generic Veronica: *Transgressive Fiction: The New Satiric Tradition*." *LiNQ* 41 (2016): 162–65.

----------. "The Lacuna of Usefulness: The Compulsion to 'Understand' Transgressive Fiction." *Word and Text* 4.1 (2014): 26–39.

Inggs, Judith. *Transition and Transgression: English Young Adult Fiction in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. Switzerland: Springer, 2016.

Iser, Wolfgang. "Indeterminacy and the Reader's Response in Prose Fiction." *Aspects of Narrative*. Ed. J. Hillis Miller. New York: Columbia UP, 1971. 1–45.

----------. “Interaction Between Text and Reader.” *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation*. Ed. Susan R. Suleiman and Inge Crosman. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980. 106–19.

----------. “Talk like Whales: A Reply to Stanley Fish.” *Diacritics* 11.3 (1981): 82–87.

----------. “The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach.” *New Literary History* 3.2 (1972): 279–99.

Jamal, Ashraf. *Predicaments of Culture in South Africa*. Pretoria: U of South Africa P, 2005.

Jenks, Chris. *Transgression*. London: Routledge, 2003.

Julius, Anthony. *Transgressions: The Offenses of Art*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2002.

Jurecic, Ann. “Empathy and the Critic.” *College English* 74.1 (2011): 11–27.

Kavadlo, Jesse. *American Popular Culture in the Era of Terror*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2015.

----------.“With Us or Against Us: Chuck Palahniuk’s 9/11.” *Reading Chuck Palahniuk: American Monsters and Literary Mayhem*. Ed. Cynthia Kuhn and Lance Rubin. New York: Routledge, 2009. 103–15.

Kawash, Samira. “Terrorists and Vampires: Fanon’s Spectral Violence of Decolonization.” *Frantz Fanon: Critical Perspectives*. Ed. Anthony C. Alessandrini. London: Routledge, 1999. 237–69.

Keen, Suzanne. *Empathy and the Novel*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007.

Kleinig, John. “The Nature of Consent.” *The Ethics of Consent: Theory and Practice*. Miller and Wertheimer. 3–24.

LaCapra, Dominick. *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2001.

Marechera, Dambudzo. “The African Writer’s Experience of European Literature.” *Dambudzo Marechera: A Source Book on His Life and Work*. Ed. Flora Veit-Wild. New York: Hans Zell, 1992. 361–68.

McDonald, Peter D. “*Disgrace* Effects.” *Interventions* 4.3 (2002): 321–30.

----------. *The Literature Police: Apartheid Censorship and its Cultural Consequences*. New York: Oxford UP, 2009.

McNay, Lois. *Foucault: A Critical Introduction*. Cambridge: Polity, 1994.

Messier, Vartan P. “Violence, Pornography, and Voyeurism as Transgression in Bret Easton Ellis’s *American Psycho*.” *Atenea* 24.1 (2004): 73–93.

Mgqolozana, Thando. “Thando Mgqolozana: ‘The Audience Does Not Treat Me As A Literary Talent, But As An Anthropological Subject’.” *The Daily Vox* 15 May 2015. 12 pars. Accessed 9 September 2017. <https://www.thedailyvox.co.za/thando-mgqolozana-the-audience-does-not-treat-me-as-a-literary-talent-but-as-an-anthropological-subject/>

Miller, Franklin and Alan Wertheimer, eds. *The Ethics of Consent: Theory and Practice*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010.

Mookerjee, Robin. *Transgressive Fiction: The New Satiric Tradition*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

More, Mabogo Percy. “Locating Frantz Fanon in Post-Apartheid South Africa.” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 52.2 (2017): 127–41.

Munro, Brenna M. *South Africa and the Dream of Love to Come: Queer Sexuality and the Struggle for Freedom*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2012.

Murphet, Julian. *Bret Easton Ellis’s* American Psycho*: A Reader’s Guide*. London: Continuum, 2002.

Nabutanyi, Edgar. “Archives of Troubled Childhoods in Contemporary African Fiction.” *Postamble* 7.2 (2012): 1–14.

----------. “Powerful Men and Boyhood Sexuality in K. Sello Duiker’s *Thirteen Cents*.” *Matatu* 48 (2016): 33–48.

Ngom, Mamadou Abdou Babou. “*Thirteen Cents* by K. Sello Duiker: Exposing Street Child Reality in South Africa.” *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 6.9 (2014): 44–57.

Osborne, Thomas. “On Anti-Medicine and Clinical Reason.” *Reassessing Foucault: Power, Medicine and the Body*. Ed. Colin Jones and Roy Porter. London: Routledge, 1994. 28–47.

Palahniuk, Chuck. *Fight Club*. New York: Norton, 1996.

Pienaar, Kiran. *Politics in the Making of HIV/AIDS in South Africa*. New York: Palgrave, 2016.

Poyner, Jane. “Writing Under Pressure: A Post-Apartheid Canon?” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 44.2 (2008): 103–14.

Raditlhalo, Sam. “‘A Victory of Sorts’: All *Thirteen Cents* and *Bitter*, Too.” *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* 37.3 (2010): 266–79.

----------. “‘The Travelling Salesman’: A Tribute to K. Sello Duiker: 1974–2005.” *Feminist Africa* 5 (2005): 96–104.

Rose, Nikolas. *The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power, and Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2007.

Rothkopf, Joshua. “A Serbian Film.” *Time Out*. 10 May 2011. 3 pars. Accessed on 13 October 2017. <https://www.timeout.com/us/film/a-serbian-film>

Samuelson, Meg. “The City Beyond the Border: The Urban Worlds of Duiker, Mpe and Vera.” *African Identities* 5.2 (2007): 247–60.

Seferiades, Seraphim and Hank Johnston. “The Dynamics of Violent Protest: Emotions, Repression and Disruptive Deficit.” *Violent Protest, Contentious Politics, and the Neoliberal State*. Ed. Seraphim Seferiades and Hank Johnston. Surrey: Ashgate, 2012. 3–18.

Shabangu, Mohammad. “Precarious Silence: Decentering the Power of Whiteness in South Africa.” *The Johannesburg Salon* 10 (2015): 53–60.

Silverberg, Michael. “How to design book covers about Africa without falling into clichés.” *Quartz*. 13 March 2014. Accessed 18 May 2019. <https://qz.com/208859/how-to-design-book-covers-about-africa-without-falling-into-cliches/>

Silverblatt, Michael. “SHOCK APPEAL / Who Are These Writers, and Why Do They Want to Hurt Us? : The New Fiction of Transgression.” *Los Angeles Times*. 1 August 1993. 25 pars. Accessed 12 January 2016. <http://articles.latimes.com/1993-08-01/books/bk-21466_1_young-writers/3>

Soldati-Kahimbaara, Kulukazi. “Immersive and Counter-Immersive Styles of Writing AIDS in Sindiwe Magona’s *Beauty’s Gift* and Kgebetli Moele’s *The Book of the Dead*: A Didactic Approach to Writing AIDS.” *Kritika Kultura* 19 (2012): 162–76.

Sontag, Susan. *Illness as Metaphor* and *AIDS and its Metaphors*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991.

Spain, Andrea. “Transitional Encounters: Practices of Queer Futurity in K. Sello Duiker’s *Thirteen Cents*.” *Safundi* 17.4 (2016): 416–33.

Staggie, Jason. “Beaufort West 2034.” *Sunday Times Lifestyle Magazine*. Uploaded to Staggie’s website. 27 April 2014. Accessed 15 February 2017. <http://www.jasonstaggie.com/short-stories-1/>

Stallybrass, Peter and Allon White. *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*. London: Methuen, 1986.

Stobie, Cheryl. “Postcolonial Pomosexuality: Queer/Alternative Fiction After *Disgrace*.” *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa* 21.1–2 (2009): 320–41.

The Holy Bible New International Version. Minto: The Bible Society, 2007.

Treichler, Paula A. “AIDS, Homophobia, and Biomedical Discourse: An Epidemic of Signification.” *October* 43 (1987): 31–70.

Tsehloane, Thabo. “The Tragic and the Comic: Sello Duiker’s and Niq Mhlongo’s Contrasting Visions of Post-Apartheid Society.” *English Studies in Africa* 53.1 (2010): 79–90.

Van der Vlies. *J. M. Coetzee’s* Disgrace*: A Reader’s Guide*. London: Continuum, 2010.

Vickroy, Laurie. *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction.* Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2002.

Von Holdt, Karl. “The Violence of Order, Orders of Violence: Between Fanon and Bourdieu.” *Current Sociology* 61.2 (2012): 112–31.

Waugh, Patricia. *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*. London: Routledge, 1984.

Welsh, Irvine. *Filth*. London: Vintage, 1998.