

*A Difficult Equilibrium: Torture Narratives and the Ethics of
Reciprocity in Apartheid South Africa and its Aftermath*

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Abstract

This thesis takes the form of an enquiry into the development of the “generic contours” (Bakhtin 4) for the narration of torture in South Africa during apartheid and its aftermath. The enquiry focusses on the ethical determinations that underlie the conventions of this genre. My theoretical framework uses Adam Zachary Newton’s conceptualization of narrative ethics to supplement Paul Ricoeur’s writings on narrative identity and the ethical intention, thus facilitating the transfer of Ricoeur’s abstract philosophy to the realm of literary criticism.

Part I presents torture as a disruption of narrative identity and a defamiliarization of the intersubjective encounter. The existence of torture narratives thus attests to the critical role of narration in the reconstruction of the tortured person’s identity and the re-establishment of benign frameworks of intersubjective communication. Literature’s potential to act as a laboratory for the testing of the limitations of narrative identity and the resilience of ethical mores suggests that the fictional representation of torture also has an important role to play in this attempt at rehabilitation. Part II takes the form of a comparative analysis of non-fictional and fictional accounts of torture originating from apartheid South Africa. This shows that the ethical determinations underlying the narration of torture in South Africa range from intersubjective estrangement to a “solicitude of reciprocity” (Bourgeois 109). However, because the majority of these texts used the presentation of human rights abuses to galvanize international opposition to apartheid, the scope for experimentation was limited by the political exigencies of the time.

Part III examines the stylistic and generic shifts in the narration of torture that accompanied South Africa’s transition to democracy. It suggests that the discursive dominance of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission replaced the fruitful—in literary terms—dialogue between authoritarianism and resistance that characterized the apartheid era with a monologic grand narrative of emotional catharsis, reconciliation and nation building. It also suggests that the “truth-and-reconciliation genre of writing” (Quayson 754) that shaped the literary milieu of the post-TRC period be seen in terms of a resurgence of the apartheid-era paradigms for the narration of human rights abuses that were repressed during the initial phase of democratic transition. By framing the TRC as a catalyst for individual journeys of self-discovery, these novels raise important questions about what it means to be a part of the “new South Africa”. In contrast to the majority of apartheid era literature, the novels of the post-TRC period privilege the literary prerogative over the political,

and thus bring to fruition the experimental potential of the previous paradigm. In doing so, they not only go beyond solicitude to achieve an “authentic reciprocity in exchange” (Ricoeur, *Oneself* 191), but also initiate a process of long-awaited literary expansion, in which authors look beyond the limits of apartheid and begin to critically engage with the region’s pre-apartheid history and its post-apartheid present.

Table of Contents

| | | |
|---|--|-----|
| Introduction | | 1 |
| | | |
| PART I. | Theoretical Considerations | |
| 1 | Human Torture and Cosmic Terror: The Disintegration of Narrative Identity | 27 |
| 2 | The Supreme Test of Solitude: Torture and the Ethical Summons | 45 |
| | | |
| PART II. | Apartheid | |
| 3 | The Self Story <i>in Extremis</i> : Human Rights, Risks and Reciprocity in Apartheid South Africa | 60 |
| 4 | <i>Testimonio</i> ; or, the Weight of Witnessing: Non-fiction Accounts of Torture from Apartheid South Africa | 66 |
| 5 | <i>Terribilit a</i> ; or, the Taint of Artistry: Fictional Representations of Torture from Apartheid South Africa | 105 |
| | | |
| PART III. | Aftermath | |
| 6 | In the Fog of Apartheid's End: Grand Narratives and the Literature of the First Transition | 164 |
| 7 | Remembering the Dismembered: The Literature of the Second Transition | 180 |
| | | |
| Conclusion: Towards a Narrative <i>Mengelmoes</i> | | 217 |
| Works Cited | | 223 |

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Introduction: Torture, Narrative and Ethics

“I hope you have listened to the truth in my story, because I do not want to tell it again.”

At this, Berhane’s¹ friend and interpreter visibly relaxed, signalling the end of the interview. I put aside my pen and paper, and, for the first time since we’d met that morning, Berhane shifted his gaze from the floor and looked me straight in the eye. As the tension dissipated and I became aware, once again, of the flickering sunlight and street sounds filtering through the high barred window, I felt the seed of moral discomfort lodge in my mind. The claustrophobic, subterranean environment, the documentation of somatic symptoms and scars, the official rigmarole of psychological interrogation, and—most disturbingly—the task to determine truth: as I reflected upon what had just happened, the parallels between this alleged aid and the experience of torture that it sought to record became startlingly clear. Insofar as Berhane was concerned, this moment of realisation came too late. As the reader of the “scar text”² of his body and the recipient of his traumatic testimony, I became aware of my responsibility to Berhane’s torture narrative only after the fact.

This event was one of the most memorable in my short-lived career as a medical student, staying with me long after I swapped the white coat and dissection kit for Shakespeare and post-Saussurean linguistics. I had already spent several weeks assisting my mother—a midwife—in the antenatal clinic of the faith-based non-governmental organization (NGO) at which she volunteered while living in Cairo, and as a result was familiar with many of the issues with which the refugee community had to deal on a daily basis: poverty, racism, familial and cultural dislocation, as well as the residual trauma of the circumstances that forced them to leave their homeland. At the time—2001—Cairo hosted one of the five largest urban refugee and asylum seeker populations in the world (Sperl 1), the majority of whom were waiting—often interminably—for resettlement elsewhere. The procedure of refugee status determination necessary for this resettlement was, unlike many Western countries, carried out not by the local authorities, but by the Regional Office of the

¹ Not his real name.

² Dietmar Kamper and Christoph Wulf, qtd. in Benthien 9.

United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). Unfortunately, however, the dramatic increase in the influx of asylum seekers from the Horn of Africa during the late 1990s and early 2000s coincided with the UNHCR's descent into what has been described as a "severe financial crisis" (Sperl 13), forcing the organization to delegate many components of its work to local NGOs. One such project, the assessment of alleged torture victims for admittance to the fast-track RSD program, fell into the hands of the organisation my mother worked for, and so it happened that I was asked to assist an experienced medical doctor with the examination and interview of Berhane.

Unlike the voluble, heavily pregnant and colourfully dressed Sudanese women I had met at my mother's clinic, Berhane cut a pathetic figure. Just over five foot tall and of indeterminate age, he was gaunt and sombrely dressed, his body language a curious combination of extreme introversion and visible agitation, all of which stood in stark contrast to the fashionable clothes and easygoing demeanour of the friend he had brought as a translator. After the initial introductions, however, he settled into what was now a familiar role. Having had his initial application for refugee status rejected on the grounds of what the UNHCR officially termed "questionable credibility", he was now embarking on the lengthy process of appeal. His appeal was based upon a perceived "breach in procedural fairness" (UNHCR 7-3), at the root of which was an apparent failure of attention to his narrative. To cut a long and elaborate story short, Berhane was an Eritrean national who, at the age of 11, had been kidnapped by the Tigrayan Peoples' Liberation Front and subjected to a series of human rights abuses. Several years after his initial abduction, he had managed to escape from the camp in which he was being held along with two friends, one of whom died in the attempt. The two remaining young men were then separated as they tried to make their way through war-torn Eritrea back to their families and homes. Upon reaching his village, Berhane found it deserted, and so embarked on an arduous overland journey through Sudan and Upper Egypt to Cairo, whose relative political stability and high density of refugee-related aid organisations had made it into a regional Mecca for refugees. Upon arrival in Cairo, however, he struggled to find work and integrate into the local community of Eritrean refugees. At the time of his appeal, he was surviving on the charity of the Orthodox Tewahdo Church and the few friends he had made through it.

Berhane's interview took place within the framework of an appeal against the UNHCR's refusal to grant him refugee status. This decision, Berhane claimed, was

influenced by the conduct and profile of the official interpreter provided by the UNHCR, who, as a member of a hostile ethnic group, both intimidated Berhane and misrepresented the empirical facts and traumatic effects of his experience. In combination with the struggle against will and memory to revisit the events in question, this feature of the interview process was, he argued, sufficient grounds for appeal. In telling of a life disrupted and redirected by abduction, torture, and migration, Berhane's narrative is all too familiar in the current climate of mass human rights violations. That this narrative was—at the time I met Berhane—in stasis, its forward movement contingent upon the medico-legal assessments of an ostensibly humanitarian organization, is also typical. That these features have come to be seen as typical, however, does not make them acceptable. This, I contend, is why Berhane's narrative stands out from the more familiar accounts of torture found in the media. In presenting a meta-testimony—a telling of a telling—it foregrounds the complex ethical issues surrounding the narration of human rights abuses.

It was only while studying English literature several years later, however, that the seed of discomfort planted by my interaction with Berhane began to take root. The catalyst for this was, once again, a torture narrative, but one distinguished from that of Berhane by its explicitly fictional status – J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980). After enduring 112 pages of violence and abjection, the image of “[a] file of men, barbarians, stark naked, holding their hands up to their faces in an odd way as though one and all are suffering from toothache . . . [a] simple loop of wire runs through the flesh of each man's hands and through the holes pierced in his cheeks” (113) compelled me to put the novel down and resolve to read no further. Like the magistrate, I turned my back on the scene, “striding away from the crowd” so that “I should neither be contaminated by the atrocity that is about to be committed nor poison myself with impotent hatred of its perpetrators” (114). The position of my bookmark marked the boundary of what was—to me—acceptable for a reader to engage with. It also, however, bore witness to the fact that, whether I read on or not, the imaginary atrocities depicted by Coetzee in the remainder of the novel had already been committed to paper—they could not now be erased. The unacknowledged events occupying the pages that I left unread, then, appeared no less real than those I had already witnessed as reader. The only difference was that their unread state allowed me to avoid the personal implications of their performance.

Jean-Paul Sartre famously declared that “You are perfectly free to leave that book on the table. But if you open it, you assume responsibility for it” (qtd. in Newton 19). In returning the book to the table, then, I attempted to unburden myself of responsibility and thus restore my psyche to its prior state of moral complacency in accordance with the magistrate’s reasoning that “I cannot save the prisoners, therefore let me save myself” (*Barbarians* 114). Ultimately, however, the novel’s narrative momentum prevailed over the interruption I had enforced upon it, and after some time I recommenced reading in order to finish the book, more out of a sense of duty than anything else. In doing so, of course, I resumed my responsibility as reader, in spite of my reservations—ignorance, even—as to what that might entail.

This did not, however, present a satisfactory solution to the problem at hand. I would not like to think that I would, for example, block my ears or avert my eyes, even temporarily, from the willed infliction of unnecessary, non-consensual pain upon a sentient being, should I be unfortunate enough to witness it in the immediacy of real life while being fortunate enough not to be the suffering subject. I would not, moreover, have considered asking Berhane to cut short his narrative in order to preserve my own state of psychological contentment. Why, then, should I feel differently about literary fiction, especially that which purports to be realistic? By what criteria do I judge the testimony of Berhane—let alone that of someone whom I have never met, whose name I cannot pronounce, whose entire existence has unfolded in a place I have never visited, but features, photo and all, in an Amnesty International publication—to be more “real” than the narrative universe of *Barbarians*? And how, finally, has this quality of “reality” come to be seen as having both epistemological and moral worth? These are all valid questions, and yet in asking them, one risks overlooking the correspondences between the two narratives. Common to both is a drawing of their participants into what Adam Zachary Newton describes as “the realm of ethical confrontation” (4).

Narrative Ethics³

According to Newton, ethics constitutes the “armature of intersubjective relation” (7), a relation which is foregrounded in the constructs of narrative. The overlap of narrative and ethics, however, has commonly been “construed in two directions at once”, narrative being both “a vehicle of substantive ethical ‘content’” and a requisite property of ethical discourse (8, 9): the former exemplified by Winston’s fabrication of Comrade Ogilvy in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Orwell 41), the latter by the dialogic structure of Plato’s *The Republic*. A third, as yet critically overlooked, instance of the “reciprocity between narrative and ethics” exists, Newton argues, in the perception of narrative itself *as* ethics (8). This approach involves an examination of “the ethical consequences of narrating story and fictionalizing person, and the reciprocal claims binding teller, listener, witness, and reader in the process” (11). In doing so, Newton draws our attention away from the interpretive dissections offered by readers and critics, suggesting instead that we consider the way in which the story “[a]lready reads, or allegorizes, itself” (11). With this in mind, the difference between the genitive “ethics *of* narrative” and the prepositional “narrative *as* ethics” offered by Newton is the difference

between a deontology and a phenomenology—between a reading that attempts to evaluate or even solve a text’s problems and one which engages them in their concrete, formal, narrative particularity. One faces a text as one might face a person, having to confront the claims raised by that very immediacy, an immediacy of contact, not of meaning. (11)

As described above, the seed of this research project was sown by the immediacy of my contact with Berhane, in both physical and psychological senses, during the course of my assessment of him. In consequence, the memory of this interpersonal confrontation was brought to bear upon my reading of *Barbarians*. Newton’s concept of ethical confrontation thus provides a theoretical bridge that not only unites my encounter with Berhane and my response to *Barbarians*—the substrate and catalyst of this thesis—but also provides an entrance point for their critique. By this, I refer not to the genitive “critique of *x*”, but to the term’s “original Kantian aim”, which, according to Costas Douzinas, involves an exploration

³ In *The Singularity of Literature* (2004), Derek Attridge presents an argument that closely resembles that of Newton’s earlier monograph. While Attridge “limits literary examples to a few short poems” (3), Newton’s exposition focuses on prose fiction. Since my thesis is primarily concerned with narrative prose, Newton’s *Narrative Ethics* provides a more appropriate theoretical framework upon which to base my argument. Attridge does, however, extend the hypothesis presented in *The Singularity of Literature* to prose fiction in his monograph, *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event* (2005), a text that informs my reading of *Barbarians* in chapter 5 of this thesis.

of “the philosophical presuppositions, the necessary and sufficient ‘conditions of existence’ of a particular discourse or practice” (*The End of Human Rights* 3). Before embarking on such a project, however, I will address Newton’s response to the dialectic between deontological and phenomenological approaches to narrative, a response that is to form the theoretical cornerstone of this research project.

Building on the triadic model of narrative proposed by Gérard Genette—“(1) the story, or signified content, (2) the narrative, the signifier or narrative text, and (3) narrating, the narrative act” (Newton 8)—Newton proffers a triadic model of narrative ethics:

- (1) a narrational ethics (in this case, signifying the exigent conditions and consequences of the narrative act itself); (2) a representational ethics (the costs incurred in fictionalizing oneself or others by exchanging ‘person’ for ‘character’); and (3) a hermeneutic ethics (the ethico-critical accountability which acts of reading hold their readers to). (17-18)

Within this schema, certain narrative modes are thought to provide paradigms “which in turn imply fundamental ethical questions about what it means to generate and transmit narratives, and to implicate, transform, or force the persons who participate in them” (7). Modes that conform to—and thus reinscribe—authorized ethical codes, however, obscure the contingency of these codes, and in doing so discourage the asking of such questions. In consequence, the effort involved in perception is minimized, resulting in what Victor Shklovsky has termed the “algebrization”, or “over-automatization” of an object. This algebrization, then, “devours works, clothes, furniture, one’s wife, and the fear of war” (Shklovsky 20), bringing about a pervasive dulling of consciousness. The solution to this perceptive apathy, Shklovsky argues, is a technique of aesthetic innovation known as defamiliarization, or *ostranenie* (literally, “making strange”), and based upon the belief that “[w]hat startles us into a new way of seeing is a new way of saying, and we can only appreciate the novelty of *that* against what is habitual and expected in any given context” (Lodge 15). Interestingly enough, Shklovsky’s preliminary example of “defamiliarization” is a passage describing the flogging of convicts from Tolstoy’s essay “Shame” (1895), in which he condemns the practice of corporal punishment. This “harsh example” is “typical of Tolstoy’s way of pricking the conscience” (Shklovsky 21), suggesting that aesthetic defamiliarization is, at least in part, intended to provoke an interrogation of the accepted codes of moral conduct.

While Newton's model of narrative ethics aspires to the generic, he sets up prose fiction as its paragon. For him, the concept of ethics "signifies recursive, contingent, and interactive dramas of encounter and recognition, the sort which prose fiction both crystallizes and recirculates in acts of interpretive engagement" (12). In this thesis, I will argue that the way in which narrative ethics are brought to the fore by accounts of torture—in both fictional and documentary forms—provides fertile ground for extending Newton's theoretical framework beyond the boundaries of prose fiction. Instrumental to this, I argue, is the trope of what Paul Ricoeur has termed the "conversion narrative"—stories that bear witness to the existential crises engendered by traumatic events such as torture ("Narrative Identity" 199). In attesting to these "dark nights of personal identity" (199), furthermore, conversion narratives that take the experience of torture as their subject matter can be broadly classified into two groupings. Since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the increasing legislative empowerment and popular awareness of human rights discourse has led to a codification of testimony and the subsequent establishment of a cohesive genre of life narratives "enlisted within and attached to a human rights framework" (Schaffer and Smith 4). The validity of this genre has, within a South African context, been consolidated by the incorporation of human rights discourse into the rhetoric of nation building. In response to this discursive authorization, however, an expanding genre of "counter-narratives" (Schaffer and Smith 11) has arisen, in which the conventions of human rights testimony are exposed, deconstructed, and—in the most exceptional cases—successfully remade. Contrary to the dominant theoretical attitude of condemnation to the fictional representation of atrocity, moreover, it is my contention that, in accordance with Newton's privileging of prose fiction, such representations contribute more than others to this latter genre of counter-narratives and their ongoing resistance to ethical complacency.

Dark Nights of Personal Identity: Torture Narratives as Conversion Narratives

Having now established a correspondence between Newton's model of narrative ethics and Shklovsky's theory of aesthetic defamiliarization, it is left for me to demonstrate the relevance of this theoretical nexus to the narration of torture. Crucial to this is Ricoeur's identification of the conversion narrative as an account that bears witness to the existential crises engendered by traumatic events such as torture. In order to argue for the transformative effects of torture in terms of ethical defamiliarization, then, it is necessary to consider the testimony of tortured persons and those who—primarily through involvement with their rehabilitation—speak on their behalf.

A recurrent motif in accounts of torture is its depiction as a transformative event that leaves both body and mind irreversibly altered. In consequence, the tortured person often experiences great difficulty in rejoining society, which can be attributed to many factors – an intense distrust of others, particularly public officials; or an overwhelming self-consciousness, even shame, brought about by physical disfiguration and/or disability, for example (Gerrity et al. 16). In the words of Sister Dianna Ortiz, a survivor of torture and humanitarian worker, “[p]eople expect us to be who we were before the torture occurred. But an individual changes dramatically. The consequences of torture are multidimensional and interconnected; no part of the survivor's life is untouched” (Gerrity et al. 15). “A metamorphosis”, then, “takes place”, one which often results in the survivor feeling “more akin to the dead than to the living” (16). In one such testimony, Ortiz describes a survivor recounting how “[p]eople around me were celebrating my miraculous return while I was mourning my death, the emergence of a new person into a world I no longer felt a part of, a world I no longer trusted” (16). This destruction can thus be construed as a destruction of self—the soul, mind and psyche—as well as a destruction of soma.

The conceptualization of torture as destruction—or, to use a term coined by the critic Elaine Scarry, “unmaking”—is eloquently described by the Russian author Fyodor Dostoevsky. A liberal intellectual, Dostoevsky was psychologically tortured by being made to undergo a mock execution at the behest of Tsar Nicholas I, before being exiled to Siberia for four years of hard labour. In a letter to his brother Mikhail he describes the trauma of this experience:

Today, December 22, we were driven to Semyonovsky Parade Ground. There the death sentence was read to us all, we were given the cross to kiss, swords were broken over our heads, and our final toilet was arranged (white shirts). Then three of us were set against the posts so as to carry out the execution. . . . I remembered you, my brother, and all yours; at the last minute you, you alone, were in my mind, and it was only then that I realized how much I love you, my dearest brother! I also succeeded in embracing Pleshcheyev and Durov, who were beside me, and bade farewell to them. Finally the retreat was sounded, those who had been tied to the posts were led back, and they read to us that His Imperial Majesty granted us our lives. . . .

Brother, I'm not depressed and haven't lost spirit. Life everywhere is life, life is in ourselves and not in the external. There will be people near me, and to be human among human beings, and remain one forever, no matter what misfortunes befall, not to become depressed, and not to falter – this is what life is, herein lies its task. I have come to recognize this. This idea has entered into my flesh and blood. . . . That head which created, lived by the highest life of art, which acknowledged and had come to know the highest demands of the spirit, that head has been cut from my shoulders. . . . But my heart is left me, and the same flesh and blood which likewise can love and suffer and desire and remember, and this is, after all, life. *On voit le soleil!* . . . Never till now have such rich and healthy stores of spiritual life throbbled in me. But whether the body will endure, I don't know. . . .

My God! How many images which I have experienced, have created anew, will be lost, will be darkened in my mind or like poison overflow in my blood! Yes, if I'm not permitted to write, I shall perish! . . . There is no bitterness or malice in my soul; at this moment I gladly would love and embrace be it anyone from my past. It is a consolation; I experienced it today when in the face of death I said farewell to those dear to me. . . . As I look back upon the past and think how much time has been spent to no avail, how much of it was lost in delusions, in mistakes, in idleness, in not knowing how to live; what little store I set upon it, how many times I sinned against my heart and spirit – for this my heart bleeds. Life is a gift, life is happiness, every moment could have been an age of happiness.

Si jeunesse savait! Now, upon changing my life, I am being born again in a new form. Brother! I swear to you I will not lose hope and will preserve my spirit and my heart in purity. I'll be reborn to the better. This is my entire hope, all my consolation! (qtd. in Mochulsky 140-42)

This emotional account emphasizes the transformative nature of the event by creating a tension between the earlier trope of destruction—Dostoevsky's metaphorical decapitation and the images that “will be darkened in my mind or like poison overflow in my blood”—and the trope of creation, as represented by the affirmative images of rebirth and hope.

According to Konstantin Mochulsky, moreover:

The scaffold proved a crucial event in the writer's inner life. His life was ‘split in two,’ the past was ended, there began another existence, a ‘rebirth in a new form.’ In order to realize the full significance of this second birth, long years were demanded. From the day of the mock execution almost twenty years passed before Dostoevsky

was able to transpose his personal experience into the language of artistic forms.
(142)

In concentrating on the effects of torture upon Dostoevsky *the writer*, Mochulsky foregrounds the two-fold role of narrative as both the target of and response to torture. Moreover, his analysis of Dostoevsky's life narrative shows torture to be a dislocating event that irrevocably transforms its object.⁴ In this way, the person who walks away from the scaffold is almost entirely different from the person who had, previously, lived in ignorance of the scaffold. In the aftermath of this encounter, the significance of both past and future—the essential components of narrative—is drastically altered, resulting in the need for their reconfiguration according to the organizing principle of causality. The dislocation of narrative engendered by torture can thus be seen to demand a narrative response capable of integrating unexpected events through rewriting.

A second element apparent in this description of self-transformation can be characterized in terms of a hyper-awareness of the other. As Dostoevsky attests, what is believed to be his last minute is spent in consideration of his family and friends, which, in turn, develops into a reflection upon the relationship between the self and other selves, or intersubjectivity:

Life everywhere is life, life is in ourselves and not in the external. There will be people near me, and to be human among human beings, and remain one forever, no matter what misfortunes befall, not to become depressed, and not to falter – this is what life is, herein lies its task. . . . There is no bitterness or malice in my soul; at this moment I gladly would love and embrace be it anyone from my past. It is a consolation; I experienced it today when in the face of death I said farewell to those dear to me.

This emphatic description of intersubjectivity recalls Newton's Levinasian description of the ethical summons as proceeding from the intersubjective encounter (12). Dostoevsky's statement that he will be "reborn to the better", however, adds to this description the concept of "goodness", which in turn calls to mind Ricoeur's definition of the ethical intention as "aiming for the 'good life' with and for others, in just institutions" (*Oneself as Another* 172). In this sense, then, the interrelation of the narrative impulse and the ethical intention is immanent in Dostoevsky's account of torture as a transformative event.

⁴ In the words of the philosopher and Holocaust survivor, Jean Améry, "[t]orture is ineradicably burned into him, even when no clinically objective traces can be detected" (34).

While highly articulate accounts of torture such as Dostoevsky's are the exception, the topoi of narration and intersubjectivity are a recurrent feature of the testimony of tortured persons and those who speak on their behalf. According to the World Medical Association, for example, torture is defined as "the deliberate, systematic, or wanton infliction of physical or mental suffering by one or more persons acting alone or on the orders of any authority, to force another person to yield information, to make a confession, or for any other reason" (qtd. in Gerrity et al. xiii). What this suggests, then, is that torture is in essence an interpersonal event. It is, moreover, an interpersonal event with a pronounced narrative element, not only in the question that lies at the root of its professed objective of "intelligence gathering", but also in both its practice and its aftermath. As Amnesty International attests,

[c]ommunications and their control are central to all aspects of the matter. From the beginning, an individual's inner life is linked to the world of others by messages passed in both directions using means appropriate to all the senses. Free-living people are mostly able to control their passage, their exchange. Tortures, of whatever form, are communications, and are intended to leave their meanings within the victims in the permanent damage both to their bodies and to their minds. (*A Glimpse of Hell* 119)

A "forced demolition of mental integration" is central to the sadistic efficacy of these communications (118). In order to recoup, even in part, one's sense of self in the aftermath of torture, the destruction caused by its sadistic communications must be repaired. This repair requires the establishment of benign, integrative communication frameworks capable of encouraging and accommodating the narrative autonomy of the tortured person. The "changed world of the tortured" (Gerrity et al. 15), however, means that this repairwork does *not* constitute a re-establishment of the communication frameworks that characterized the tortured person's sense of self and their relations to others prior to the incident(s) of torture. Instead, it consists of the invention of new frameworks of communication, which in turn enable the tortured person to create a new sense of self in the light of their traumatic experience. In its capacity to bring about a new way of seeing articulated through a new way of saying, torture can be seen as a defamiliarizing event.

Ortiz notes that "[a] genesis moment of rebuilding trust occurs when we risk allowing others to see, to hear, and to know of the horrors of our torture" (Gerrity et al. 26). If, as Levinas suggests, "consciousness and even subjectivity flow from, are legitimated by

the ethical summons which proceeds from intersubjective encounter” (Newton 12), then the storytelling through which this rebuilding of trust takes place must also constitute a rebuilding of self. This leads us to the conclusion that the rebuilding of self is dependent on the act of storytelling, or, rather, on the interactions between the storyteller and his audience. Such a conclusion is undermined, however, by its assumption that the conditions of storytelling are always conducive to the rebuilding of self. Unfortunately, this is not necessarily the case when it comes to the narration of torture. In order to facilitate the reparative process, then, it is essential to recognise the many variables that, if not carefully controlled, can present obstacles to the narrative autonomy of the tortured person. Newton’s model of narrative ethics provides a useful schema for the identification of these obstacles. Furthermore, it offers a productive methodology with which to advance our understanding of the origins and functions of narration in the aftermath of torture.

At stake in the exigent conditions and consequences of Berhane’s testimony was nothing less than life itself: he testified both to appeal against a negative decision that could potentially return him to the geographical, social and political context of his torture, and in the hope of a positive decision that would rescue him from limbo and provide what he perceived to be a more promising future in the West. Moreover, the need to appeal—and thus endure yet another traumatic return to the memory of his torture—was in essence one of the costs of subjecting himself to representation; or, as it transpired, *mis*representation. This misrepresentation was two-fold. First, the perceived hostility of the interpreter provided by the UNHCR was a significant factor, for it served to inhibit free narration. For Berhane, then, the UNHCR was “experienced not as an advocate . . . but as an adversary” (Gerrity et al. 32). Second, the shortcomings of qualitative research, such as the refugee status determination interviews, are well documented. According to James M. Jaranson and his fellow researchers, torture survivors “may be reticent to tell their stories, or, if they do, may seem paradoxically less upset than one would expect following horrible torture experiences” (Gerrity et al. 253). Consequently, there is a pressing need for improved awareness of the way in which “reiteration can lead to retraumatization, and to distortion” of traumatic experiences as well as the “acknowledgement of cultural variations in the expression and interpretation of these memories” (285, 260). Both of these considerations place the burden of responsibility on the recipient of the narrative, and accord the readers, interpreters, and interviewer-recipients of torture narratives a much greater degree of ethico-critical

accountability than we would usually deem necessary.⁵ By analyzing Berhane's testimony in the light of Newton's model of narrative ethics, however, we can begin to identify the obstacles to the narrative autonomy of the tortured person, and thus to their reconstitution of self and integration back into a community of others.

All three components of Newton's narrative ethics model are apparent in Berhane's testimony. The acute circumstances of its iteration, moreover, can be seen to act as an amplifier, bringing the immediacy of contact elicited by narrative unavoidably to the fore. It thus draws its witnesses into a realm of ethical confrontation in such a way as to encourage a reassessment of what we accept to be normative values with respect to narration, particularly the narration of torture. Transformative testimonies such as this confront the reader with an immediacy of contact, and, in doing so, make explicit the "fundamental ethical questions about what it means to generate and transmit narratives, and to implicate, transform, or force the persons who participate in them" (Newton 7) we should always be asking. In other words, Berhane's testimony and its like *defamiliarize* the accounts of traumatic human rights abuses that have become, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, a recurrent motif in the parlance of international media as well as literary fiction.

Newton suggests that, in "translat[ing] the interactive problematic of ethics into literary forms", stories become an "ethical performance" (13). As such, they are—"in Levinas' sense"—"concussive: they shock and linger as 'traumatism of astonishment'" (13). Like Newton's claims for prose fiction, then, "[t]raumatic experiences" such as torture "challenge people's preexisting core beliefs and assumptions about themselves and others" (Gerrity et al. 67). In the irreversible alteration of worldview and understanding of self it enacts, torture is itself a "traumatism of astonishment". The achievement of its narration is thus the articulation of this traumatism, a process that, under optimum conditions, has the potential to resist its destructive effects upon one's sense of self as well as to elicit empathy and assistance from and for others: "[i]t is the combination of both the telling of the story . . . and the manner in which it is heard and understood that is part of the healing" (Gerrity et al. 267).

Such stories, I contend, require a recognition beyond the theoretical terms offered by Levinas and Shklovsky. More than just concussive, or defamiliarizing, these narratives should arguably be considered radical insofar as their examination of narrative as ethics is

⁵ Ironically, in Berhane's case, the burden of proof is placed upon the narrator.

concerned. The very existence of testimonial narratives of torture attests to the survival of tortured people, not only in the most basic physiological sense, but in terms of a revival of self and a reentry, however incomplete, into the arena of intersubjective relation. The channels for this are many and varied, and so reentry can involve a range of different narrative consequences. The fact of reentry in itself, however, demonstrates an attempt—sometimes successful, sometimes not—to not only “transform the traumatic memory so that it can be integrated into the survivor’s life” (Judith Lewis Herman, qtd. in Gerrity et al. 267) and thus begin the repairwork of the self, but also to convey the “changed world of the tortured” to others—medical professionals, human rights advocates, and laypeople alike—so as to facilitate their reintegration into society not as the person they once were, but as the new self that has emerged from the torture chamber. As such, the survivor of torture promulgates an alternative worldview, one which simultaneously testifies to both the life-shattering actuality of “almost unimaginable” horrors and the “extraordinary ability of some individuals to manage and function with strength and courage” in their wake (Gerrity et al. 8). The experience of torture is one of the most extreme forms of defamiliarization, one which, to paraphrase Primo Levi, challenges the purpose of existence itself (qtd. in Gerrity et al. 9). The attempt of survivors to “construct some sort of meaning and coherence from this gross violation of their being” (Gerrity et al. 9) can thus be seen as a supreme effort to “say something new” in order that those who have not experienced torture might be startled into a new way of seeing. The new way of seeing that an engagement with torture narratives engenders is therefore an actively ethical way of seeing, in that questions of intersubjective relations inhere in both the content and form of such stories.

Before going too far down this line of argument, however, it is necessary to account for the potentially deleterious effect of our increasing familiarity with human rights discourse upon the ethical impact of torture narratives. If, as Michael Ignatieff suggests, “human rights has become the dominant moral vocabulary” in the years following the end of the cold war, then it seems unlikely that contemporary accounts of torture would elicit a response as incendiary as, for example, the publication of Henri Alleg’s *La Question* in 1958. This exposé of the routine practice of torture by French paratroopers during the Algerian revolution was so controversial that it became the first book to be banned in France since the eighteenth

century (Le Sueur xiv). The evolution of such narratives into a marketable commodity,⁶ moreover, is suggestive of a diminution of their concussive force and a prioritization of the readers' desires over the author's autonomy. Contra the critically accepted injunction against the literary representation of atrocities such as torture on the grounds of obscenity, therefore, a principal claim of this thesis is that literary fiction possesses the potential, at least, to offer an ethical epiphany of unparalleled acuity. Inherent in this claim is a belief that the critical rejection of literary representations of torture stems from a myopic failure to recognise the capacity of such representations to challenge—rather than reinscribe—the authority of established ethical codes through a defamiliarization of established narrative modes. This thesis can thus be seen as an apologia for the potential of literary fiction to act as a forum in which the contingency of the ethical *habitus* is held up to scrutiny.

Contextual and Methodological Considerations

Before we move on to the body proper of this thesis one final question remains to be answered: Why South Africa? Although my encounter with *Barbarians* obviously played a role in this decision, this alone would not provide a sufficient basis for a research project of this scope. *Barbarians* is, however, one of the more well-known—and critically lauded—examples of what has come to form a distinct genre in both fiction and documentary literature originating from South Africa: the torture narrative. The origins and nature of this material have been subjected to limited scrutiny in comparison to the outpouring of testimony that followed the events of the Holocaust or the Pinochet regime. Furthermore, the analyses that do exist tend to approach the literature of apartheid with a rigidity of interpretation that Derek Attridge has described in terms of “a widespread”—and apparently unshakable—“assumption that any responsible and principled South African writer, especially during the apartheid years, will have had as a primary concern the historical situation and the suffering of the majority of its people” (*J. M. Coetzee* 33). In contrast to this socio-political validation, however, the attempt to represent this situation of suffering has been subject to a condemnatory critical response similar to that elicited by artistic engagement with the Holocaust. Broadly speaking, this can be summarized by Theodor Adorno's statement that

⁶ See Schaffer and Smith 25-27.

the esthetic principle of stylization, and even the solemn prayer of the chorus, makes an unthinkable fate appear to have had some meaning; it is transfigured, something of its horror is removed. This alone does an injustice to the victims, yet no art which tried to evade them could stand upright before justice. Even the sound of despair pays its tribute to a hideous affirmation. Works of less than the highest rank are even willingly absorbed as contributions to clearing up the past. (“Commitment” 313)

Consequently, the artistic approach to atrocity is, in the words of J. M. Coetzee, “riddled with pitfalls” (“Into the Dark Chamber”). It is my contention, however, that both the emphasis on and conventional framing of these pitfalls—particularly insofar as the aestheticization condemned by Adorno is concerned—present significant obstacles to the evolution of our intellectual response to this narrative genre. Specifically, they frustrate attempts to uncover “the fruitful ways in which certain aesthetic strategies can help to deepen engagement with and understanding of suffering’s meaning, sources, effects, and implications for the spectator” (Reinhardt 15), and thus limit—rather than develop—the reader’s capacity to first perceive and then participate in the plurality of different meanings such strategies generate.

As a comparative study, this thesis requires a body of non-fiction accounts of torture originating from South Africa substantial enough to be juxtaposed against the country’s wealth of fictional narratives of human rights abuses. Regrettably, the atrocities carried out under apartheid—by both the National Party government and those who opposed it—means that there is no dearth of such material. To illustrate the extent of human rights abuses under apartheid, I need only turn to the assessment made in 1987 by the psychologist Don Foster that, “at a conservative estimate, about 70,000 people had suffered” from physical and/or psychological abuse akin to torture since the election of the National Party in 1948 (*Detention and Torture* iv). As such, the need to raise international awareness of the human rights situation in South Africa was a pressing concern for several decades, resulting in the publication—primarily overseas, due to domestic censorship regulations and the mobilization of a transnational anti-apartheid movement (AAM)—of many personal testimonies of torture. These proved to be highly effective in supplementing the reports of non-governmental human rights advocacy organisations such as Amnesty International.

The collapse of apartheid in the early 1990s, moreover, provoked a situation that could be described—to borrow a phrase from Michel Foucault—in terms of a “general discursive erethism” (*The Will to Knowledge* 32) with regard to the narration of human rights

abuses. This reached its pinnacle in the revelations of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)—or, rather, as I will argue, in the literary response to the shortcomings of the Commission. As Nuttall and Michael suggest, personal narratives have been incorporated into the “pluralizing project of democracy” to create a “‘recited’ community” (Michel de Certeau, qtd. in Nuttall and Michael 299). In consequence, the South African context not only provides fertile ground for the consideration of fiction and non-fiction torture narratives, but also a framework within which to contrast the ways in which the narration of atrocity is inflected by the logistical constraints of public enquiry and the ideological pressures of nation building. The movement away from the individual testimonies of the apartheid era and towards an appreciation of trauma as a part of the national consciousness of South Africa also allows for a comparison of torture narratives on the level of the community and all the social, cultural, and political issues inherent in the collective, without losing sight of the individual narrator of torture.

Another methodological factor is accessibility. Within a postcolonial context, it is unusual to find English as a popular medium for the discourse of political resistance—rarely, if ever, do nationalist movements such as the African National Congress (ANC) assert their identity in the language of their previous oppressors. This phenomenon can be attributed to two main factors. First, the enforcement of Afrikaans as the official language of apartheid South Africa provoked a linguistic backlash most tragically apparent in the events that transpired in Soweto in 1976, in which the protests of black schoolchildren against the mandatory use of Afrikaans as a language of instruction in schools were quashed by police violence. In contrast, although English was, until recently, thought of “mainly as a language of formal domains [with] official status” (Karen Calteaux, qtd. in Hibbert 32), this perception of the language fitted with the formal register of political resistance without conforming to the linguistic hegemony of the apartheid regime. The use of English also circumvented the partisan ethos of ethnically exclusive parties such as the Inkatha Freedom Party. Second, as Christopher Merrett attests, apartheid South Africa “was characterised by an avalanche of security legislation which, among other effects, created a massive structure of censorship and self-censorship” (21). In consequence, a literary underworld sprang up, in which “personal narratives, smuggled out of the country or written in exile, kept knowledge about State violations of human rights in circulation” (Schaffer and Smith 58). As a result,

the primary market for such narratives was an international audience, whose demands, broadly speaking, could be met by the use of English.⁷

Insofar as the international orientation of apartheid era human rights narratives is concerned, it is also necessary to account for the close-knit relationship between South African accounts of torture, detention, and political persecution, and the development of the “powerful discourse” of human rights (Douzinas, *The End of Human Rights* 4). Doing so will require a closer look at the history of torture in South Africa. Like many postcolonial nations, this history is essentially hybrid in nature, reflecting the transposition of European—or “Northern”—attitudes towards the practice from the beginnings of the commercial-colonial enterprise in the region up until the implementation of apartheid in the mid-twentieth century, and those attitudes associated with the stereotypically proto-industrial, non-democratic, politically unstable and ethnically divided regimes of the geopolitical “South” thereafter. This North-South divide pervaded the socio-economic conditions of the region during the years of apartheid, to the point where there were considered to be “two South Africas—one ‘Western’ and developed, and the other ‘African’ and underdeveloped” (Louw 80). This “two-world paradigm” (Louw 80) was disrupted, however, by torture, the practice of which was primarily the province of the European authorities from their arrival in 1652 up until the democratic reform of the early 1990s. As Edward Peters attests:

The first European settlers of the world outside Europe brought with them in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the legal procedures of the lands they had left. Among these at that date was procedural torture, and in most cases this seems to have been routinely used in the colonies of countries that used torture at home, not merely upon white Europeans, but upon natives as well, and eventually upon natives exclusively. In Dutch South Africa, for example, torture was routinely used on both blacks and whites from 1652 on, ‘not primarily to get information or to punish the prisoner, but to get him to confess the crime out of his own mouth’, that is, in a manner generally consistent with Dutch legal procedure, which did not abolish torture until 1798. . . . Torture was first abolished in South Africa with the English conquest of 1795. (135)

While it is doubtful that the practice of torture was wholly eradicated in South Africa—or, for that matter, in Western Europe—following its statutory abolition, there *is* evidence to suggest that its practice was severely curtailed by these legislative measures. In any case, the practice of torture underwent a fundamental change following the dawn of the

⁷ Some works, such as Ruth First’s *117 Days* and Tshenuwani Simon Farasani’s *Diary from a South African Prison*, were translated into other languages, mainly European.

Enlightenment in Europe, in that “the disappearance of torture as a public spectacle” (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 7) made way for a renewed brutality when the practice reappeared in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This can be partially attributed to the development of the discourse of human rights, which condemned the infliction of corporal punishment over and above physical incarceration. In contemporary times, moreover, torture became associated with extreme situations in which civil liberties are suspended: violent political coups, or states of emergency, for example. It is thus associated with the culture of denial created by authoritarianism, in which human rights abuses are internally endorsed, yet externally denied in order to court international allies.

According to Peters, the reinstatement of torture as a common practice in South Africa did not coincide directly with the election of the National Party, nor the subsequent secession of South Africa from British rule in 1961 (135). Its resurgence can instead be seen as the response of a precarious political regime to increasingly vocal resistance among civilians.⁸ Consequently, “the law began to lose much of its more tolerant liberal aspect”.⁹ The real turning point in South Africa’s history—indeed, in the history of human rights advocacy—came in 1964, however, with the disclosures of the Bultfontein case.

The Bultfontein case caused international uproar when, during the trial of five Free State constables, “testimony emerged from one of the constables that torture had been used in the interrogation of one of the accused, Izak Magaise, who died from the ordeal” (Peters 136). More than this, however, PC Jacob Maree “also gratuitously remarked that in virtually every police station in South Africa the same practices were used” (Peters 136). Although all five men were charged with murder and assault with intent to murder, the case provoked two major international enquiries. The first consisted of the report of the UN special committee on the policies of apartheid of the government of the republic of South Africa, published on 8 December 1964, in which numerous allegations of the ill treatment and torture of political prisoners were brought to light. The second, “an account of prison conditions in South Africa” appearing in 1965, was Amnesty International’s “first formal report” (Peters 158), thus marking South Africa as a key concern of one of the world’s most influential human rights organizations. In consequence, Peters stated in 1985, the “spotlight

⁸ See, for example, the brutal response of the police to the Sharpeville pass boycott in 1960, and the militarization of political resistance, as manifested by the establishment of the ANC’s military wing, *uMkhonto we Sizwe*, in 1961 (Louw 120).

⁹ Albie Sachs, a human rights lawyer and anti-apartheid activist, qtd. in Peters 136.

has not been off South Africa” since the revelations of Bultfontein, making the nation a focal point for political protest against the oppressive regimes of the twentieth century.

A final methodological concern proceeds from the need to negotiate between the competing demands of cultural specificity on the one hand, and the more general philosophical implications of narrating suffering. Until very recently, the critical response to narratives of human rights abuses has been overwhelmingly grounded in the field of Holocaust studies. According to Marianne Hirsch and Irene Kacandes,

the Holocaust has become a limit case, a prime site for testing aesthetic and ethical theories about mediation and representability . . . the Holocaust can provide some of the most sophisticated interrogations of representability, of the limits of art, of speech in the face of unspeakability, and of the intersection of ethics and aesthetics. (3, 7)

The relevance of these interrogations extends beyond the question of the artist’s response to atrocity and authoritarianism, however. As Derek Attridge reminds us, “[l]essons learned in South Africa have often proved valuable elsewhere, and the predicament literature found itself in during the struggle against apartheid”—and, I would argue, during its aftermath—“has implications which extend to writing and reading in less politically fraught contexts” (*J. M. Coetzee* 2). In conclusion, I propose that the representation of torture in South African literature provides yet another prime site, one in which aesthetic and ethical theories about mediation and representability—such as those of Ricoeur and Newton, for example—can be tested further and, perhaps, revised. As the product of a sustained engagement with this prime site, the insights of this thesis will, I hope, contribute to this endeavour.

Chapter Synopsis

This thesis will adopt a chronological approach to the narration of torture in South Africa, beginning with the election of D. F. Malan’s National Party on the strength of their policy of *apartheid* and ending with the literature of contemporary South Africa. With regard to the period from the end of apartheid to the present day, I have chosen to follow critics such as Deborah Posel and Mark Gevisser in their division of the nation’s post-apartheid history into two distinct phases: that of the first transition, in which the country’s first democracy was established and the TRC implemented; and that of the second transition, in which the country’s newfound political stability was once again disrupted, most dramatically by Thabo

Mbeki's ousting from power by a new generation of aggressively self-confident politicians.¹⁰ Insofar as the literary fiction emerging from South Africa is concerned, however, I would argue that the beginning of the "second transition" preceded Mbeki's departure by almost a decade, and primarily consists of a critical resistance to the master-narrative of catharsis, reconciliation and nation building—and, of course, its ethical implications—that characterized South Africa's transition to democracy.

In part I, my critical intention assumes the form of a response to the aporia generated by the analysis of torture as (decon)structure found in Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (1985). This response takes the aporetic dimension of Scarry's theorization of torture to be two-fold, and responds accordingly. In chapter 1, I locate the disruptive effects of torture within the grander scheme of narrative identity, in service to which I will respond to Scarry's analysis of torture through Paul Ricoeur's writings on the narrative character of personal identity. In chapter 2, my first intention uses the intersubjective encounter as a point of intersection for Ricoeur's concept of narrative identity and Newton's model of narrative ethics, and is primarily focused on the resonance between Ricoeur's reassessment of the Levinasian "face to face epiphany" (Bourgeois 110) from which Newton's argument departs, and the testimony of tortured persons, including the philosopher and Holocaust survivor Jean Améry. Following on, again, from Ricoeur, my second intention in this chapter is to call for an appreciation of fiction as "thought experiments we conduct in the great laboratory of the imaginary", rather than works that sacrifice "ethical determinations in exchange for purely aesthetic dimensions" (*Oneself* 164). These thought experiments contribute to the development of an actively ethical mindset in their capacity to function as "[e]xplorations in the realm of good and evil" without requiring definitive moral adjudication. For, in the words of Ricoeur, "[t]ransvaluing, even devaluing, is still evaluating. Moral judgement has not been abolished, it is rather subjected to the imaginative variations proper to fiction" (*Oneself* 164).

Part II takes up this call by conducting a comparative analysis of the ethical implications of non-fictional and fictional modes of narrating torture within the context of apartheid South Africa. As such, it will demonstrate the way in which such texts work

¹⁰ See, for example, Gevisser.

together to establish a paradigm—in concert with internationally mediated codes of human rights discourse—for the narration of torture in the region.

Chapter 3 provides a brief overview of the relationship between human rights discourse, narrative identity and the ethical intention; and pays particular attention to the third component of Ricoeur’s definition of the ethical intention, that of “just institutions”. In doing so, I call for the differentiation of the ethical intention and the moral norm within the field of literary analysis. Chapter 3 thus provides the groundwork for chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4 addresses the role of South Africa in the evolution of human rights discourse from a relatively “empty declaration” to a “forceful political discourse” in the latter half of the twentieth century (Thörn 6). Using Arthur W. Frank’s theorization of narrative wreckage and repair with regard to the “self-stories” of the physically ill, I will also address the role of narrative as rehabilitation in the aftermath of torture, as well as the ways in which this potential of narrative can be jeopardized, including a strong emphasis on the limitations of human rights as a discursive field. I will then proceed to a chronological analysis of the ethical determinations underlying the use of the “self-story” as vehicle for human rights narratives in apartheid South Africa.

Before embarking on a parallel analysis of the representation of torture in South African fiction, chapter 5 presents a critique of the injunctions against this trope, in the form of a response to Theodor Adorno and J. M. Coetzee’s writings against the “aestheticization” of atrocity. As such, this chapter acts as an apologia for the fictional representation of atrocity, while acknowledging its vulnerability to certain shortcomings. This chapter features close readings of a variety of texts, from the social realist fiction of the early apartheid years through to the post-Soweto period. Important theoretical concerns in this chapter include Njabulo Ndebele’s critique of symbolism in black South African writing of the apartheid era and the solipsistic inclinations of the erotic/mournful gaze.¹¹ Emphasis is placed on Derek Attridge’s concept of the “singular” text, one which serves to critique—rather than reinscribe—the moral norms dominant in the contemporary social, political and cultural consciousness to which it speaks. Singular texts of this sort, I argue, are exceptional in their ability to initiate a process of moral thinking that is informed by—but ultimately

¹¹ Here, I take my cue from J. M. Coetzee’s condemnation of the “erotic fascination” he finds in Sipho Sepamla’s *A Ride on the Whirlwind*, and use the work of Immanuel Kant, Sam Durrant and Jonathan Dollimore to probe into the ethical determinations underlying the erotic gaze in literary fiction.

independent of—moral adjudication. Finally, I argue for an appreciation of metafictional modes of narration as illustrative of the way in which literature can, according to Ricoeur, “lead us back from morality to ethics, but to an ethics enriched by the passage through the norm” (*Oneself* 203).

Part III is concerned with the proceedings of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and its impact upon the narration of torture—in both fiction and non-fiction forms—during the period of democratic transition. Chapter 6 draws on the concept of “cultural trauma”, defined by Jeffrey C. Alexander as occurring “when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (1). As this definition suggests, cultural trauma resonates with the transformative nature of trauma, while also foregrounding the intersubjective encounter immanent in the concept of collectivity. Alexander posits that the creation of cultural traumas enables “social groups, national societies, and sometimes even entire civilizations not only cognitively [to] identify the existence and source of human suffering but [to] ‘take on board’ some significant responsibility for it” (1). It is my contention, however, that this particular species of identifying and accounting—in both senses of the word—for human suffering lends itself too readily to political appropriation, as the relationship between the TRC and the building of the “new South Africa” demonstrates. What is more, I will suggest that this susceptibility to ulterior ideological motives arises from a failure to allow for the ways in which testimony of this sort is influenced by pre-existing paradigms in the region for the narration of human rights abuses. Instrumental to this argument is a consideration of the conflict between the psychoanalytic approach to trauma narration and the dominant discourse of human rights originating from the geopolitical North, and indigenous South African attitudes towards collectivity, particularly the humanist philosophy of *ubuntu*. The overriding telos of this chapter, therefore, is a presentation of the TRC in terms of a shift in the narration of torture from a dispersive, highly individual national antipathy to a unifying, and ostensibly reconciliatory, national sympathy, as well as an attempt to address the problems that arise when individual narratives are subjected to a sudden and normative shift in a community’s “grand narrative” (Bernstein 102).

Following on from this hypothesis, chapter 7 considers the second phase of the literary response to the TRC as a more productive “return of the repressed”¹² than the Commission itself. Without meaning to denigrate the admirable intentions of the Commission, nor its role in the reparation of the social catastrophe wrought by apartheid, I suggest that the demands of achieving historical closure and constructing a national future limited its recognition of the present-day narration of the past, particularly on an individual basis. Insofar as the fixation on the Commission apparent in the literature emerging in its aftermath is concerned, then, this “truth-and-reconciliation genre of writing” has been treated with condescension for its frequent recourse to what Ato Quayson terms “symbolization compulsion”, or “the drive towards an insistent metaphorical register even when this register does not help to develop the action, define character or spectacle, or create atmosphere” (754)—an argument that resonates with Ndebele’s earlier critique of symbolism in black South African writing of the apartheid era. The discursive erethism born of the “decompression, relaxation, and cacophony of the post-apartheid moment” was, however, denied by both the TRC’s “thoroughly modernist” discourse of reconciliation, and by apartheid’s failure to leave “spatial structures in which a culture of pluralism [could] be enacted” (Nuttall and Michael 288; Nicholas Dawes, qtd. in Noyes 51; Noyes 53). According to John Noyes, the need to “invent or borrow models for structuring these absent spaces” lent a “specific cultural and intellectual urgency . . . to [South Africa’s] relationships with globalization” (53); an urgency that petered out, Quayson argues, in the narrative dead-end of symbolization compulsion. In opposition to this, I concur with Nuttall and Michael when they posit de Certeau’s “interminable recitation of stories” as a pragmatically viable means of structuring these absent spaces within imposing structure (299). Rather than a cathartic solution to South Africa’s past, then, I suggest that we heed Newton’s call for an approach to such texts that “engages them in their concrete, formal, narrative particularity” (11). To do so, moreover, requires a recognition of literature in general—and this genre in particular—as a “vast laboratory for thought experiments”, not only for the testing of “the resources of

¹² See Freud 154. As James Strachey, general editor of *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* notes

The concept of a ‘return of the repressed’ is a very early one in Freud’s writings. It appears already in Section II of his second paper on ‘The Neuro-Psychoses of Defence’ (1896*b*), as well as in the still earlier draft of that papers sent to Fliess on January 1, 1896 (1950*a*, Draft K). (Freud 154).

variation encompassed by narrative identity” (Ricoeur, *Oneself* 148), but also for the testing of ethical mores.

In conclusion, literature dealing with the TRC occupies a privileged position as a result of its ability to perform what Edward Said describes as “discrepant experiences” by breaking down narrative identity, something which “is both historically created and the result of interpretation”, yet generally taken to be, in essence, “fundamentally integral, coherent, separate” (35). This essentialism, Said argues, encourages one to “demote the different experience of others to a lesser status” (36). Literature that subverts this totalizing view by emphasizing the fictional nature of identity as configured—or *narrated*—experience, then, foregrounds the ethical intention by promoting the different experience of others to an equivalent status. In doing so, the framing capacity of the “grand narratives” at work in South Africa—such as, for example, the interrelated discourses of human rights and nation building—is shown to be incapable of accommodating a plurality of experience akin to that generated by the TRC. The “truth-and-reconciliation genre of writing” can thus be seen to reject assimilation in favour of excess, emphasizing the fact that “the old frames no longer contain the pace and breadth of new experiences” (Frank 139) and calling not for their replacement with new frames so much as the waiving of frames altogether.

In this way, the literary response to the Truth Commission attempts to impede the sedimentation of resentments engendered by the abuses of apartheid and their proposed panacea, the TRC, by evading closure, in terms of both narrative identity and the ethical intention. In other words, such narratives not only accommodate a plurality of identities and discursive codes, but in doing so maintain a continual openness towards the consideration of the other as oneself. Finally, in its ability to ward off assimilation, this continual openness prevents the full integration of “almost unimaginable experiences” (Gerrity et al. 8), and thereby successfully negotiates the dialectic that Theodor Adorno feared to be unnegotiable: namely, that the restoration of culture in the wake of atrocities such as Auschwitz implies complicity with the culture that engendered the atrocity, while its rejection constitutes a denial of culpability and thus duplicates the process of collusion that enabled the atrocity to be realised (*Negative Dialectics* 366). In other words, it enables memory to triumph in its struggle against forgetting, without confining this memory to the limits of the historical narrative.

PART I
THEORETICAL
CONSIDERATIONS

Chapter 1

Human Torture and Cosmic Terror: The Disintegration of Narrative Identity

On the battlefield, in the torture chamber, on a sinking ship, the issues that you are fighting for are always forgotten, because the body swells up until it fills the universe, and even when you are not paralysed by fright or screaming with pain, life is a moment-to-moment struggle against hunger or cold or sleeplessness, against a sour stomach or an aching tooth.

George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Thus far, it has been established that individual testimonies, human rights accounts and medical resources alike testify to the transformative impact of torture upon body and self. As witness to the “dark nights of personal identity”, furthermore, such accounts can be considered as belonging to the genre of “conversion narratives” identified by Ricoeur. To fully comprehend the pragmatic significance of this appellation, however, demands a more probing enquiry into the precise nature of this conversion and its aetiological relationship with torture. I will thus take the following analysis of torture as my point of departure:

Torture demolishes or dismantles, deliberately, the systems of integration, cohesion, control and defence against dissolution, both physical and mental, that people ordinarily maintain, mostly without thinking about it, to keep themselves together as independent beings.

Once dismantled, these systems may reconstitute themselves, overall or in certain respects, depending on how extreme was the original damage and the degree of stress to which the individual was subsequently exposed. Physical healing may be sufficient to allow a body to function reasonably well so long as not too much is asked of it. But tiredness or other physiological changes may alter the limits, and the same may be said of mental integration, once regained.

It is wrong to see these two spheres as distinct. They are closely linked, and physical performance is always fundamentally determined by mental state. The forced demolition of mental integration, of the whole personality, either completely or in part, introduces an essentially new element to an individual’s experience and knowledge of himself. Such an experience is invariably associated with extreme anxiety, where the sense is of utter helplessness, of the disappearance of all those means of adaptation by which one ordinarily maintains one’s integrity and defends oneself from danger. (AI, *A Glimpse of Hell* 118)

This schema of dissolution followed by an urgent, yet hesitant, attempt at reconstitution is a common topos of torture accounts, which suggests that its trajectory, as experienced by its object, can be divided into two distinct—albeit interrelated—processes: destruction and reparation. On a somatic level, this takes the form of the infliction and healing of physical trauma, as well as the development of coping mechanisms for long term physical sequelae such as impaired hearing, reduced mobility, disfigurement and chronic pain. As Améry notes, however, the destructive effects of torture endure long after its “clinically objective traces” have disappeared (34). To determine the complex nature of these extra-somatic effects, then, requires a closer look at the action of torture upon the systems employed in the construction of an “independent” being, or *self*. Outside the medical community (within which I include the fields of psychology and psychiatry), however, the existential consequences of torture for its victims have been somewhat neglected, particularly if we compare this line of enquiry to the relative wealth of literature concerned with the figure of the torturer. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, for example, attention was initially monopolised by the perpetrators, which can, in part, be attributed to the precedent set in international human rights law by the Nuremberg Trials of 1945-6 and the Eichmann Trial of 1961. According to Schaffer and Smith, however, it was not until the late 1970s that a significant shift in emphasis to the victim/survivor perspective occurred, a transformation that can be attributed to “the proliferation of published life narratives, films, and the immensely popular television mini-series, *Holocaust*”, as well as a growing academic interest in “the ethics, politics, and aesthetics of Holocaust representation” (21). In light of this critical dearth, then, I will now turn to what is perhaps the most systematic analysis of torture as deconstruction, or “unmaking”: Elaine Scarry’s *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*.

My response to this text will focus on redressing the aporetic dimension of Scarry’s analysis of torture as a structural inversion of the process of creation. As I see it, this theorization of torture as “unmaking” is weakened by two significant omissions. The first is located in Scarry’s conceptualization of the integral being—a unity of “world, self, and voice” (50)—upon which torture performs its deconstruction, which is undermined by her failure to acknowledge the impact of torture as a disruption of the ongoing project of identity construction through narration. The amendment of this elision requires, therefore, the establishment of a theoretical framework for the concept of narrative identity, for which I will use the writings of Paul Ricoeur. Consequently, if we side with Newton in considering

narrative as the epitome of the intersubjective relation, and with Levinas in considering the self as an artefact constructed primarily through the intersubjective encounter, it follows that the destruction of the narrative self posited by Ricoeur is bound up in the dynamics of the intersubjective relation. Leading on from this, the second problematic arising from *The Body in Pain* can be attributed to its failure to take the ethical consequences of torture and its narration into account. In response to this omission, I have chosen to focus on the resonance between Ricoeur's reassessment of the Levinasian face to face encounter—from which Newton's theory of narrative ethics proceeds—and the testimony of tortured persons. This second problematic will be discussed at length in chapter 2. Chapter 2 will also provide an anticipation of the comparative analysis of documentary and fictional representations of torture from the survivor perspective in part II, in which I call for a vindication of this genre of fiction as not only the propagator of an actively ethical way of seeing, but indeed the *prime site* of ethical exploration.

Unmaking: Elaine Scarry and *The Body in Pain*

In *The Body in Pain*, Scarry seeks to construct a genealogy of imaginative creation—or “making”—based upon the notion of “work” as a “near synonym” for both pain and “the created object” (169). Her theoretical approach, however, begins with an analysis of ‘unmaking’, as exemplified, she suggests, by the phenomena of torture and war. Scarry’s claim that “torture and war are not simply occurrences which incidentally deconstruct the made world but occurrences which deconstruct the structure of making itself” forms the lynchpin of this argument, in which their structures of deconstruction—or “(decon)structures”—are taken to provide an “inverted outline” of the structure of making itself (279, 21). Scarry’s analysis of these (decon)structures is intended, moreover, as a springboard for the revision of our “faulty and fragmentary” understanding of the process of creation, which—she claims—is exemplified by our failure to recognise its inherent ethical content (22). In defence of this approach, she argues for its reflexive benefits, stating that an “accurate description” of the structure of making “will in turn enable us to recognize more quickly what is happening not only in large-scale emergencies like torture and war but in other long-standing dilemmas, such as the inequity of material distribution” (22).

As “an appropriation, aping, and reversing” of making, the contemporary practice of torture adheres to a “structure that is as narrow and consistent as its geographical incidence

is widespread” (21, 19). The axis of inversion that separates the structure of making from unmaking can be described in terms of what Scarry calls the “language of ‘agency’” (13). According to Scarry, the origins of the language of agency as a means of expressing pain can be attributed to the way in which, when confronted with a body—other than one’s own—in pain, “the events happening within the interior of that person’s body may seem to have the remote character of some deep subterranean fact, belonging to an invisible geography that, however portentous, has no reality because it has not yet manifested itself on the visible surface of the earth” (3). She argues, furthermore, that pain ensures this “unsharability” through an active destruction of language, “bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is heard” (4). Instrumental to this claim is an intentionality thesis in which Scarry presents physical pain as exceptional amongst the “emotional, perceptual, and somatic states” that shape our consciousness, due to its lack of referential content. Love, fear, ambivalence, hunger – these states are all directed towards an object external to the body, whereas pain takes no such object. This lack of objectivity, she contends, is the root cause of pain’s degenerative effect upon language: “It is precisely because [pain] takes no object that it, more than any other phenomenon, resists objectification in language” (5).

Scarry claims that the objectification of pain in language, however imperfect, is successful in eliminating at least some, if not all, of its “aversiveness” (5). Consequently, a pressure exists to “invent linguistic structures that will reach and accommodate this area of experience normally so inaccessible to language”, an endeavour that entails a reversal of “the de-objectifying work of pain by forcing *pain itself* into avenues of objectification” (6). According to Scarry, the language of agency is responsible for this objectification, through the employment of a series of “verbal strategies” that “revolve around the sign of the weapon” (13).¹³

¹³ This concept of the language of agency is based upon the recurrent “as if” structure of pain description identified by V. C. Medvei, found in phrases such as “[i]t feels as though a hammer is coming down on my spine” (15). This “as if” structure is invariably accompanied by one of two metaphors: (1) the weapon, an external agent of pain; and (2) the wound, an instance of bodily damage (15). In both cases, because the weapon/wound “either exists . . . or can be pictured as existing . . . at the external boundary of the body, it begins to externalize, objectify, and make sharable what is originally an interior and unsharable experience” (15-16). In other words, these metaphors objectify pain, projecting private sentience into an external, space in such a way as to overcome pain’s inherent “unsharability”.

The language of agency, Scarry notes, is central to the attempt to express and eliminate pain within a variety of different contexts, from “medical case histories and diagnostic questionnaires” to “the publications of Amnesty International, the transcripts of personal injury trials, the poems and narratives of individual artists” (9)—discourses for which ethical responsibility is paramount. The metaphor of the weapon upon which it is based, however, is marked by instability (13). In counterpoint to its “radically benign” potential as a means of articulating and alleviating pain, the language of agency also possesses a “radically sadistic” potential (13). It is this latter potential that characterizes the practice of torture. In torture, the objectifying power of the weapon is “obsessively mediat[ed]” so as to confer the reality of the victim’s pain upon the regime’s fantasy of power: a process described by Scarry as “analogical verification”. The manipulation of the language of agency in service to analogical verification, moreover, is not limited to the linguistic components of torture—interrogation and confession—but pervades the entire structure of the event: “While torture contains language, specific human words and sounds,” Scarry contends, “it is itself a language, an objectification, an acting out”, one “that permits one person’s body to be translated into another person’s voice, that allows real human pain to be converted into a regime’s fiction of power” (27, 18).

Scarry’s argument aims to demonstrate the way in which the structure of unmaking evident in torture reveals the structure of making upon which, she claims, civilization depends. In the case of torture, then, the structure of unmaking unfolds in the following manner. Violent interrogation creates a situation in which “the subjective characteristics of pain are objectified” (52) in a variety of complex forms, all of which, however, exacerbate—rather than attenuate—its aversiveness. The use of real weapons, for example—including domestic objects: the unyielding wall that fails to cushion blows, the light fitting from which bodies are suspended, the electrical outlet that powers the shock apparatus—elides Medvei’s “as if” strategy from the language of agency, while simultaneously “dramatiz[ing] the disintegration of the world” via the transmutation of the symbols of civilization into the sign of the weapon (38). Pain is also ironically objectified through its ability to destroy “the power of verbal objectification”: the victim’s regression to “the sounds anterior to learned language” is yet another manifestation of the way in which extreme agony eclipses the world. Underlying this linguistic attack is a magnification of “the ever present but, except in the extremity of sickness and death, only latent distinction between a self and a body” (48). This

self, “which is experienced on the one hand as more private, more essentially at the center, and on the other hand as participating across the bridge of the body into the world, is,” Scarry claims, “‘embodied’ in the voice, in language” (49).

The objectification of the victim’s pain, however, must be carefully mediated, in that while it must be made “as incontestably present in the external as in the internal world”, it must also be “categorically denied” in order to successfully achieve its “conversion into an emblem of the regime’s strength” (56). This process of analogical verification, moreover, revolves around the sign of the weapon, or, more specifically, the forked nature of this sign: “Every weapon has two ends. In converting the other person’s pain into his own power, the torturer experiences the entire occurrence exclusively from the nonvulnerable end of the weapon.” (59). An “obsessive, self-conscious display of agency” on the behalf of the torturer thus serves to create the “display of the fiction of power” desired by the regime (27, 57).

In its simplest form, Scarry argues for the structure of making to be seen as an inversion—and perversion—of the sequence of objectification and verification found in torture. This version of making “entails the two conceptually distinct stages of ‘making-up’ and ‘making-real’”, in which “the imagination first remakes objectlessness . . . into an object, and then remakes the fictional object into a real one” (280). As we have seen, torture brings about the destruction of “the artifacts of civilization” and “the generation of a political ‘fiction’”. In counterpoint, the process of making—in its ideal form—first generates a fictional object, before realising this object as a material artefact. The sign of the weapon that destroys the artefacts of civilization, then, is substituted with the sign of the tool that crafts said artefacts. The processes of making and unmaking can thus be seen as occurring at—and, in doing so, inscribing—the limits of human activity. Insofar as pain—“an intentional state without an intentional object”—segues into unmaking, and imagining—“an intentional object without an experienceable intentional state”—into making, these conditions can be seen as the limits of human consciousness, “the ‘framing events’ within whose boundaries all other perceptual, somatic, and emotional events occur” (164-65). “[B]etween the two extremes,” Scarry concludes, “can be mapped the whole terrain of the human psyche” (165). This observation acts as the *volta* in Scarry’s argument, indicating the point at which her critical gaze shifts from the problem of unmaking to that of making.

The subsequent examination of making in *The Body in Pain* looks to what Scarry identifies as two ‘central’ attributes of Western civilization, “its Judeo-Christian framework

of belief, and . . . its insistent thrust toward material self-expression” (179). Consequently, she claims that texts such as the Bible, the Talmud and Karl Marx’s *Das Kapital* “take ‘making’ as their central subject”, and, in doing so, “traverse the full expanse of ground that separates the extreme framing condition of the body in physical pain from the opposite framing condition of self-objectification” to become “epic explorations of the human imagination” (180). The results of this analysis, Scarry suggests, involve an appreciation of the artefact as an extension of the maker’s body that, in turn, acts upon and alters this body. Thus, “in making the world, man remakes himself” (251). This is illustrated by a variety of activities, from eating—“the activity necessary for cellular self-renewal” (251-2)—to medical science, in reference to which Scarry states that

[t]he remaking of the human body is an ultimate aim of artifice, since the construction of artificial hearts, hips, wombs, eyes, grafts, immunization systems, each year extends the confidence with which we intervene in the human tissue itself. . . . The presence of such man-made implants and mechanisms within the body does not compromise or ‘dehumanize’ a creature who has always located his or her humanity in self-artifice. (233-34)

Scarry concludes “that the ongoing work of civilization is not simply making x or y but ‘making making’ itself, ‘remaking making,’ rescuing, repairing, and restoring it to its proper path each time it threatens to collapse into, or become conflated with, its opposite” (279). It is, I feel, essential to note that Scarry’s conception of “remaking making” hinges on the notion of instability and its attendant *threat* of collapse. If, as implied in *The Body in Pain*, the work of “remaking making” consists of an active prevention of this threatened collapse, the conflation of “the world’s construction and reconstruction” (161) can be seen to elide the problematic faced by the victim of torture – not the threat, but the *reality* of the collapse of making. The overarching premise of Scarry’s theory is thus marked by a significant blind spot, inasmuch as her assumption that making and remaking are analogical processes allows for the abandonment of the victim of torture at the point of ultimate unmaking—in which their embodiment becomes absolute and language shatters—by engendering yet another assumption, namely that the process of remaking upon which any kind of emergence from this state depends will necessarily conform to, rather than *inform*, the paradigm described in the latter half of *The Body in Pain*. Contra Scarry, then, it is my contention that the reconstruction of the world in the aftermath of torture is of far greater relevance to our understanding of “the expansive nature of human sentience” (22) than the destruction that

compels and complicates this restorative endeavour. In other words, whereas Scarry engages with torture only as a paradigmatic pathway to the nadir of existence, my concern in this thesis focuses on the peculiar nature of the quest to regain some semblance of comfort with one's identity as being of and in the world in the aftermath of torture, and the relevance of this quest to the problems inherent in the condition of living, in the words of Ricoeur, a "human life" ("Life in Quest of Narrative" 21).

To begin the attempt to unmake Scarry's theorization of torture by revealing the aporias in *The Body in Pain*, I wish to invoke Rosemary Jolly's comments on the critical encounter with representations of violence:

One of the problems of the genre of critical writing is its characteristic defensibility, the consequence of an expectation that it exhibit an armor so impenetrable, that it could never conceive of speaking to its own weakness. This problem becomes particularly acute when one develops the critical language with which to approach scenes of violence. The tendency always exists for the language that explicates violent situations to be perceived—by author, or reader, or both alike—as not merely explaining the crisis, but explaining it away. The mastery that is often posed as the apotheosis of the literary-critical genre tempts the critic to believe that she or he has somehow resolved the violence that the text reproduces by describing its parameters: surely a dangerous assumption. (xii)

That Scarry's observations on torture are often, in themselves, astute—particularly her call for a shift in focus from the moment of confession to the event as a whole—does, to some extent, mitigate the fact that, in positioning the expression of physical pain within "the wider frame of *invention*" (22, emphasis added), the visibility of the person in pain is limited. This aversion of the reader's gaze from the "incontestable reality" (27) of the torture chamber to the expansive metaphysics of Judeo-Christianity and Marxism, then, can be seen to de-objectify pain by intellectualizing it, thus contributing to—rather than alleviating—pain's unsharability.

It is my belief, therefore, that Scarry's examination of torture in *The Body in Pain* falls foul of the problem set out by Jolly. In subjugating the unmaking that occurs during torture to the structure of making, Scarry engages with the structure of torture as a means of describing the parameters not of the violence this practice entails, but of human consciousness—an abstract constellation of interior states. Significantly, the violence inherent in torture is not only explained, therefore, but explained *away* through abstraction. In the context of Newton's model of narrative ethics, Scarry's analysis of torture is

deontological in nature, rather than phenomenological. She fails to consider, in any comprehensive manner, the hermeneutic ethics of the critical endeavour: by limiting her reading of torture to the evaluation, and subsequent resolution, of the theoretical problems posed by the practice, she neglects her own accountability as critic. At the risk of falling into the selfsame trap, it is to this aporetic dimension of *The Body in Pain* that I will now speak.

It is possible to discern two distinct, though interrelated, aporia underlying Scarry's analysis of torture as unmaking. These are, I suggest, exemplified in the following passage:

As torture consists of acts that magnify the way in which pain destroys a person's world, self, and voice, so these other acts that restore the voice become not only a denunciation of the pain but almost a diminution of the pain, a partial reversal of the torture itself. An act of human contact and concern, whether occurring here or in private contexts of sympathy, provides the hurt person with worldly self-extension: in acknowledging and expressing another person's pain, or in articulating one of his nonbodily concerns while he is unable to, one human being who is well and free willingly turns himself into an image of the other's psychic or sentient claims, an image existing in the space outside the sufferer's body, projected out into the world and held there intact by that person's powers until the sufferer himself regains his own powers of self-extension. By holding that world in place, or by giving the pain a place in the world, sympathy lessens the power of sickness and pain, counteracts the force with which a person in great pain or sickness can be swallowed alive by the body. (50)

The coordination of "world, self, and voice" in this passage epitomizes the way in which the concept of narrative as integrator of these facets of human existence is continually implied in Scarry's work, yet never explicitly recognized. Insofar as the intersubjective encounter is concerned, moreover, this perception of suffering frames the process of remaking in the aftermath of trauma in terms of a unilateral ethical initiative that belongs solely to the person who bestows sympathy on the suffering other. This reinscribes the fundamentally egoistic concept of existence implicit in Scarry's belief in the unsharability of pain, and, in doing so, emphasises the immutable exteriority of the other in relation to oneself—a theoretical stance that has significant consequences for an ethical interpretation of torture.

It is to these aporia, I argue, that Scarry's limited view of narrative as a medium for the objectification of pain can be attributed. According to Scarry, aside from the chaotic testimonies of individual sufferers, the "avenues by which this most radically private of experiences begins to enter the realm of public discourse" (6) are four-fold. The first consists of medical contexts, in which the objectification of pain aids the physician's diagnosis and treatment of patients. The second is the arena of human rights discourse, in which the

narration of pain caused by human rights abuses takes on political import by encouraging the reader's "active assistance" in the undermining of oppressive regimes. The third is the courtroom, in which the narration of physical pain and its sequelae are framed as legal evidence. A commonality between these discursive fields is thus evident in their claim to empiricism, couched as they are in the need for the human voice "to become a precise reflection of material reality" (9). It is to this that the fourth avenue, that of art, proves the exception.

Art, Scarry suggests, can perform one of two roles with respect to pain. First, the failure of art as a medium for the expression of pain can relieve the sufferer's frustration with their own inarticulacy: "[a]larmed and dismayed by his or her own failure of language, the person in pain might find it reassuring to learn that even the artist—whose lifework and everyday habit are to refine and extend the reflexes of speech—ordinarily falls silent before pain" (10). Second, the rare cases in which physical pain is successfully represented in artistic forms can also serve to alleviate this frustration by providing "fictional analogues, perhaps whole paragraphs of words, that can be borrowed when the real-life crisis of silence comes" (10). Returning briefly to Dostoevsky's account of his mock execution, we can see this phenomenon in his quotation of the phrase "On voit le soleil", 'I see the sun' from Victor Hugo's novel *Dernier jour d'un condamné* (1829). In both cases, however, what Scarry does not account for is the relative freedom of the aesthetic representation of pain from the demand for objective accuracy that characterizes the discourses of medicine, law, and human rights advocacy.

This demand is, in turn, indicative of the dissymmetry underlying Scarry's unilateral conceptualization of the intersubjective encounter. Her description of the fields of medicine, law, and human rights advocacy posits the initiative to interact with the other in terms of a fact-finding mission, thus placing the burden of proof—or *responsibility*—upon the suffering person, whilst limiting the capacity for action to the initiator. In this model, the desire of the suffering person to express, in whatever way they can, their traumatic experience is minimized, while the value of this expression for others, whether also suffering or not, is ignored altogether. This model of dissymmetry is also evident in Scarry's appraisal of art as a medium of reassurance and catharsis for the person in pain, in which the initiative of the artist is directed towards the suffering person. What this doesn't account for, however, is the conflation of the artist—or, more simply, narrator—and the suffering person, in which the

narrative impulse takes on a considerable degree of reflexivity. In expressing suffering, the narrator both invites the sympathetic attention of the other *and* provides them with evidence of the fundamental universality of human experience, thus establishing an intersubjective relation that can be defined in terms of its bilateral nature. In overlooking the potential for reciprocity in the narration of pain, then, Scarry underestimates its significance for the intersubjective—and thus ethical—encounter. Crucially, then, a defence of torture narratives—in both documentary and fictional modes—as prime sites for ethical evaluation requires a firm theoretical foundation for the claims, first, that identity has a prominent narrative component, and, second, that the intersubjective encounter elicited by suffering is bilateral.

Remaking: Paul Ricoeur and Narrative Identity

[W]hat Ricoeur never loses sight of is the question of what it is *to be* a being described in this way – as managing by the construction of narratives the maintenance of fragile and permeable boundaries? *To be* such a being is to be open to both human torture and cosmic terror, to be able to be carried away by Bach’s fugues, to be able to act decisively and to suffer – on top of being able to reflect about these matters.

David Wood, *On Paul Ricoeur*

The subtitle of *The Body in Pain* reminds us that Scarry is concerned with the making and unmaking of *the world*. The evidence of testimonial accounts, human rights documents, and medical assessments of tortured persons, however, suggests that this is a misnomer. When Scarry talks of the conversion of domestic objects into weapons and the unmaking of the world that follows—“in the conversion”, for example, “of a refrigerator into a bludgeon, the refrigerator disappears; its disappearance objectifies the disappearance of the world (sky, country, bench) experienced by a person in great pain; and it is the very fact of its disappearance, its transition from a refrigerator into a bludgeon, that inflicts the pain” (41)—she is not literally talking about the disappearance of the world, but of a brutal alteration in the worldview of the tortured person. The object of torture, then, is not the devastation of the world, but of the tortured person’s *worldview*.

This thesis depends on the claim that a functional worldview must necessarily go beyond solipsism to place belief in the existence of an external world, populated by other

beings. The crisis in worldview that torture effects, then, is a crisis of trust in the existence of this external world, a point that Scarry raises in her identification of the way in which specific forms of torture are expressly intended to “make the prisoner’s body an *active agent*” in his pain, as well as the more generic feelings of betrayal by one’s own body that attend physical suffering (47). Since torture is, at root, an intersubjective encounter—albeit a grotesquely distorted one—the crisis in worldview brings with it a disillusionment with the benign potential of the relationship between the self and others—the very relationship that, Levinas argues, begets subjectivity. Crucially, torture is an unmaking not of the world as such, nor just of language, but of the self. Scarry’s primary focus on the destruction of the world, and her secondary focus on the destruction of language—both of which are subjugated to her inquiry into the structure of making—leave little room in which to question the characteristics, let alone the existence, of the subject that suffers torture. Her analysis of torture, then, depends on a conception of the subject as consistently absolute, a monadic being suggestive of Kant’s “transcendental self”. From testimonial accounts of torture, such as Améry’s, however, we can infer that the practice effects a disintegration of self, while the rehabilitation of tortured people focuses on the reconstitution of a self capable of negotiating between the indelible effects of their traumatic experience and the need to re-establish some form of engagement with the world and the other selves that occupy it.

Underlying Scarry’s argument is the assumption that the capacity of language to objectify, to make things concrete—and thus to lend them the illusion, at least, of brute facticity—is a given. The objectifying capacity of language, however, does not seem to me a sufficient basis upon which to make—or unmake—a self. Rather, I would posit that even the crudest of worldviews requires more than a succession of brute facts in order to qualify as a “worldview”. As Scarry’s intentionality thesis implies, a worldview suggests an externalization of the self, which is at root an integration of oneself as subject into the external world, and vice versa. This *integration*—of which the intersubjective encounter is an important component—provides the key to the construction of the self. I would posit, furthermore, that *narrative* provides the primary medium through which the subject achieves this integration.

My response to Scarry’s disregard for the way in which narrative acts to coordinate various aspects of the existential condition will thus begin with a consideration of the relation between narrative and identity formulated in Ricoeur’s essay, “Life in Quest of

Narrative”. Herein, Ricoeur uses Socrates’s axiom, that the unexamined life is not worth living, as a point of departure for his analysis of the commonly held distinction between lives and stories, a critical endeavour that is directly implicated in Newton’s narrative ethics when he calls for a recognition of the costs incurred in “exchanging ‘person’ for ‘character’”. This distinction, Ricoeur suggests, is promoted by the “oversimplified and too direct relation” between the narrative component of history and the experience of living as a conscious being, which, in turn, obscures the way in which “fiction contributes to making life, in the biological sense of the word, a human life” (“Life in Quest of Narrative” 20). Narrating, then, is presented as a fundamental of ‘being’—a concept that forms an enduring concern of Ricoeur’s philosophical project.

Narrative—or “emplotment”, as Ricoeur terms it—is described in terms of “an integrating process” or “synthesis of heterogeneous elements” (21). This synthetic process is, according to Ricoeur, three-fold: first, narrative transforms a series of incidents into “an intelligible whole”; second, it organizes a multitude of heterogeneous events—including “interactions between actors ranging from conflict to collaboration”—into a “single story”; and finally, it creates a “temporal totality”, thus mediating between time as “a series of incidents” and time that is configured into story form (20-22). He then ascribes an epistemological function—“narrative understanding”—to emplotment, which in turn takes on an ethical dimension through its capacity to “propose to the imagination and to its mediation various figures that constitute so many *thought experiments* by which we learn to link together the ethical aspects of human conduct and happiness and misfortune” (23). This latter corollary emphasizes the role of narrative as a vehicle for ethical content, however, whereas the idea of narrative *as* ethics posited by Newton emphasizes the capacity of narrative to dramatize the ethical intention.

The attempt to address the “unbridgeable gap” that lies between fiction and life necessitates a readjustment of the terms “narrative” and “life” (25). Insofar as “narrative” is concerned, Ricoeur proposes the following: “that the process of composition, of configuration, is not completed in the text but in the reader and, under this condition, makes possible the reconfiguration of life by narrative” (26). In other words, on the act of reading, in which the world of the text and the world of the reader intersect, “rests the narrative’s capacity to transfigure the experience of the reader” (26). This transfiguration stems from the way in which the text offers a world that is both “distinct from that in which we live” *and*

“a world in which it would be possible to live” (26). A text, therefore, “mediat[es] between man and the world, between man and man, between man and himself” (27). A “life”, on the other hand, is “no more than a biological phenomenon as long as it has not been interpreted” (27-8). Narrative, then, allows for the elevation of a life above the limits of biology by imbuing it with an existential significance born from interpretation. This hypothesis, Ricoeur suggests, is rooted in a perception of the living experience as a “mixture of acting and suffering” that “demands the assistance of narrative and expresses the need for it” (8). Three “points of anchorage” are proffered in support of this claim: first, that human behaviour is differentiated from that of the animal or mineral worlds through a “semantics of action” that enables us to distinguish between conscious action and “mere physical *movement* and psychophysiological *behaviour*”; second, that what we perceive as conscious action is so perceived as a result of its being “symbolically mediated”; and finally, the “pre-narrative quality of human experience” implicit in the way in which our “comprehension of action is not restricted to a familiarity with the conceptual network of action, and with its symbolic mediations”, but “even extends as far as recognizing in the action temporal features which call for narration” (28-29). The “virtual narrativity” that Ricoeur believes must accompany any meaningful human experience, then, stems “not from the projection of literature onto life”, but constitutes a “genuine demand for narrative” in itself (29). “Without leaving the sphere of everyday experience”, he asks, “are we not inclined to see in a given chain of episodes in our own life something like *stories that have not yet been told*, stories that demand to be told, stories that offer points of anchorage for the narrative?” (30).

According to Ricoeur, narrative fiction forms “an irreducible dimension of *self-understanding*” (30). After Socrates, then, an examined life is a “life *recounted*” (31), one in which we find the three synthetic processes discussed earlier: “the mediation performed by the plot between the multiple incidents and unified story; the primacy of concordance over discordance; and, finally, the competition between succession and configuration” (22). More than this, even if we fail in our attempt at synthesis—to create concordance out of discordance and configuration out of succession—it is in the struggle, Ricoeur affirms, that narrative is constituted (32). If we accept this claim—as I suggest we should, although not, perhaps, without some reservations¹⁴—then it appears that our entire lives exist as narrative

¹⁴ In “A Fallacy of our Age”, the philosopher Galen Strawson challenges the commonly held belief that “human beings typically experience their lives as a narrative or story of some sort” (13). The main premise of

acts, as attempts to orient ourselves within the passage of time, to organize it, and thus to discover a personal identity. Crucially, then, subjectivity can be seen to proceed from the examination and recounting of one's life, which is in turn described by Ricoeur in terms of the intersubjective encounter between reader and narrator. "It is in this way", he suggests, "that we learn to become the *narrator* and the hero *of our own story*, without actually becoming the *author of our own life*" (32). Narrative thus overcomes the "unbridgeable difference" between a story and a life by providing an alternative—a "narrative identity"—that negotiates between the "sheer change" of living in time as "discrete succession" and the "absolute identity" of living in the closed system of a textual world. In conclusion, Ricoeur states that

[i]n place of an *ego* enamoured of itself arises a *self* instructed by cultural symbols, the first among which are the narratives handed down in our literary tradition. And these narratives give us a unity which is not substantial but narrative. (33)

As far as Ricoeur is concerned, our identity as *human beings*, as distinct from animal, vegetable, or mineral existences, is, at root, a narrative identity. In the essay, "Narrative Identity", Ricoeur develops this further to conclude that narrative is not merely a fundamental of "being", but a fundamental of *being human*, of being a "self" in accordance with Heidegger's conception of the *Dasein* as an entity characterized by "the capacity to question itself as to its own way of being and thus to relate itself to being *qua* being" ("Narrative Identity" 191).

In "Narrative Identity", Ricoeur turns his attention to an examination of "what is at stake in the very question of identity when it is applied to persons or to communities" (188), or how the construction of a narrative identity serves to ameliorate the problems that arise from the notion of personal identity. In order to do so, Ricoeur focuses on two primary aspects of the concept, that of "identity as sameness"—"*idem*"—and that of "identity as

his argument involves a rejection of two theses—"the Psychological Narrativity thesis" and "the Ethical Narrativity thesis" (13). In the first, narrative is seen to fulfil an empirical role in the experience of being human, while the second accords narrative a fundamental role in the aim towards the "the good life". The dominant belief in the veracity of these two theses is, Strawson protests, "regrettable" (13). Strawson's argument is both complex and, for the most part, cogent. Insofar as my thesis is concerned, however, I find Strawson's approach to the relationship between experience, identity and the ethical intention to be undermined by his assumption that the Ethical Narrativity thesis is incontrovertibly normative in nature. As I hope to demonstrate in my analysis of South African accounts of human rights abuses, the fruitfulness of investigating the intersections between these two theses is dependent on a differentiation of the ethical intention from normative morality.

selfhood”, or “*ipse*” (189). According to David Rasmussen, “Narrative Identity” is primarily concerned with the attempt to “get beyond the reduction to sameness, which eliminates the different forms that self-identity takes over time” (62). To begin this attempt, Ricoeur divides sameness into four subsenses, representing “uniqueness”, “extreme resemblance”, “continuity”—as in “the uninterrupted continuity in the development of a being between the first and last stage of its evolution”, as, for example, an oak is ‘the same thing from the seed to the tree in the prime of life’—and finally, “permanence in time”, which on a *prima facie* basis appears to be indivisible from “continuity” (“Narrative Identity” 189-190). The difference, however, lies in the overlap between the two interpretations of “permanence in time” as *idem* and as *ipse* respectively. To clarify this, I suggest that we look at the subject of any major, voluntary plastic surgery procedure—such as, for example, the transsexual. In terms of biology, their sexual identity with others of their gender is “discontinued” by surgical, hormonal and aesthetic interventions, and yet we do not automatically believe the transsexual to have become an *entirely* different person, a different “self”. For one, their genetic code as a biological individual remains (*Oneself* 117). If anything, we tend to view them as a “truer” version of their previous selves. The notion of permanent identity then, Ricoeur argues, falls into alignment with Kant’s first Analogy of Experience, in that it assumes both an essential, unchanging nature coupled to a changing mode of existence (“Narrative Identity” 190). It is in the consideration of this essential, unchanging nature—or *substance* in the Kantian sense—that the notions of identity as sameness and identity as selfhood intersect.

Ricoeur chooses to approach this point of intersection through a consideration of “ascription”, or “the assignation of an agent to an action” (191). To this, he argues, must be added the concept of “imputation”, which augments the ownership of action by an agent implied in ascription with “an explicitly moral significance” (191). It thus follows that two possible interpretations of permanent identity exist: one that privileges ascription in taking it to signify “a character defined by a certain constancy of its dispositions”, and one that privileges imputation in taking it to signify a “kind of fidelity to the self which is expressed in the form of keeping one’s promises” (192). In distilling the problematics of personal identity down to a conflict in interpretation of “permanence in time”, Ricoeur thus proposes a point of origin for the “aporias of personal identity” (192). Crucially, then, it is to this point of aporetic origin that his argument for narrative identity is directed.

Ricoeur's second hypothesis posits that narrative identity provides a solution to the problematics of personal identity as manifested in the inherent contradictions of "permanence in time". Despite appearing to be primarily concerned with the fictional narrative, it accounts well for the parallels between fiction and genres that aspire to an objective, documentary narrative stance, such as history. With respect to fiction, for example, he suggests that "the question of identity is deliberately set forth as what is at stake in narrative", since "narrative constructs the durable properties of a character, what one could call his narrative identity, by constructing the kind of dynamic identity found in the plot which creates the character's identity" (195). Crucially, however, this construction of identity is also vulnerable to crisis, particularly when fictional situations allowing the differentiation of selfhood and sameness occur (195). According to Ricoeur, then, "the annulling of the person in terms of sameness-identity" corresponds to "a loss of narrative configuration" (196). "[E]ven in the most extreme case of the loss of sameness-identity of the hero," however, "we do not escape the problematic of selfhood"—after all, "[a] non-subject is not nothing, with respect to the category of the subject" (196). More than this, Ricoeur places emphasis on the role of the intersubjective encounter as "constitutive of the narrative situation" within the context of fiction (197). In consequence, "narrative fiction continues to remind us that sameness and alterity are two correlative existentials" (197). Returning to the question of fictional situations in which selfhood is differentiated from sameness, Ricoeur suggests that nihilistic self-negation—"I am nothing"—represents a self deprived of assistance from sameness, from identity as *idem* (198). In its evocation of Améry's commentary on torture's denial of the certainty of help and the way in which this denial undoes one's trust in the world, this hypothesis points to an extension of the meaning of "sameness" to include a shared subjectivity, the recognition of which proceeds from the intersubjective encounter. This interpretation is supported, furthermore, by Ricoeur's conclusion:

What is still 'I' when I say that it is nothing if not precisely a self deprived of assistance from sameness? Is that not the meaning of many dramatic – not to say terrifying – experiences in respect of our own identity, that it is the necessity to go through this trial of nothingness of permanence-identity, to which nothingness would be the equivalent of the null case of the transformations dear to Lévi-Strauss. Many conversion narratives bear witness of such dark nights of personal identity. At these moments of extreme exposure, the null response, far from declaring the question empty, returns to it and preserves it as a question. What cannot be effaced is the question itself: who am I? (199)

This suggests that the crisis of self described in Scarry's discussion of torture as unmaking is primarily a crisis of narrative. Insofar as torture is concerned, however, I propose that we go even further, to suggest that, if a character "draws his or her singularity from the unity of a life considered a temporal totality which is itself singular and distinguished from all others", the narrative disruption brought about by torture provides an extreme example of the way in which this temporal totality is continually "threatened by the disruptive effect of the unforeseeable events that punctuate it" (Ricoeur, *Oneself* 147). The impulse to narrate that many people experience in the aftermath of torture, then, affirms the imperative for a narrative self as a means of emerging from the narrative wreckage of the torture chamber. The defect in Scarry's argument can thus be identified as the mistaking of the objectifying capacity of language for the integrative powers of narrative. When she declares that "to be present when the person in pain rediscovers speech and so regains his powers of self-objectification is almost to be present at the birth, or rebirth, of language" (172), therefore, she is actually pointing towards the rebirth of narrative, and with it the rebirth of the narrative self. As such, the testimonies of tortured people—as well as those originating from other traumatic, disruptive events, such as extreme illness—can be seen as a paradigm for the way in which narrative is both victim of and coping mechanism for the contingency of our existence as beings *qua* being.

Chapter 2

The Supreme Test of Solitude:¹⁵

Torture and Moral Philosophy

I had to write it. I had to purge myself, and this I had to do before memory itself becomes obscured by the distortion of time. . . . there is the filth—the degradation of human relationships imposed on one another within the interrogator-detainee or warder-prisoner context—that one has to get rid of if one wants to go on living.

Breyten Breytenbach, *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist*

The Ethical Summons: Ricoeur and Améry on Torture as Intersubjective Defamiliarization

In the previous chapter, it was suggested that the narration of torture performs two interrelated functions. Both proceed from the way in which, by accounting for the disruptive effects of torture upon the act of narrative configuration employed as a means of organizing, and thus imparting meaning to, the series of heterogeneous events and actions that comprise the experience of living, torture narratives demonstrate that the concept of personal identity is primarily dependent on the construction of narrative identity. First, the narrative *content* of this genre emphasizes the vulnerability of narrative identity, and, in doing so, suggests that “[w]hat fails is not thinking, in any acceptation of this term, but the impulse—or to put it a better way, the *hubris*—that impels our thinking to posit itself as the master of meaning” (Ricoeur, qtd. in Wood 5). Second, the narrative *act* implicit in the existence of this genre attests to the necessity of maintaining such an identity in order to experience living as something more than just a biological phenomenon. This dual function of the torture narrative underscores what Newton has described as the “reciprocity between narrative and ethics” (8) by establishing a point of intersection for the world of the text and the world of the reader. As “ethical performance”, furthermore, this genre can be seen as “concussive” in

¹⁵ Ricoeur describes the face to face encounter with suffering in the following terms:

For from the suffering other there comes a giving that is no longer drawn from the power of acting and existing but precisely from weakness itself. This is perhaps the supreme test of solicitude, when unequal power finds compensation in an authentic reciprocity in exchange, which in the hour of agony, finds refuge in the shared whisper of voices or the feeble embrace of clasped hands. (*Oneself* 191)

its ability to sustain the dialectic that proceeds from a recognition of narrative identity as both essentially contingent and contingently essential (Newton 13). Finally, this capacity of torture narratives precludes deontological resolution, encouraging in its lieu the phenomenological approach recommended by Newton, in which the claims raised by an immediacy of contact with the text—rather than its interpreted meaning—are foremost.

In *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur places the question of narrative identity within an ethical framework of action and imputation, asking “in what way does the narrative component of self-understanding call for, as its completion, ethical determinations characteristic of the moral imputation of action to its agent?” (163). As such, Ricoeur approaches narrative as a sort of middleman, negotiating between “the descriptive viewpoint on action” and the “prescriptive viewpoint”, or ethical initiative (144). He thus posits a relation between the “constitution of action and the constitution of self”; a relation that, he suggests, conforms to the triadic structure “describe, narrate, prescribe” (114). Using this triad as his point of departure, then, Ricoeur extends his enquiry in two directions, asking first “what extension of the practical field is called for by the narrative function, if the action described is to match the action narrated”, and second, “in what way narrative, which is never ethically neutral, proves to be the first *laboratory of moral judgement*” (140, author’s emphasis). Finally, he employs this readjustment of narrative theory as a framework within which to attack Levinas’ theory of responsibility as proceeding from the face to face encounter.

In this chapter, my focus shifts to a consideration of torture narratives as a “laboratory of moral judgement”. I posit that the presentation of the intersubjective encounter found in this genre parallels the ethical inclination immanent in its presentation of narrative identity. By this, I mean to say that the conflicting performances of the intersubjective encounter embodied in the content and form of the torture narrative tend to display a similar capacity to sustain an ethical dialectic—specifically, that which arises from the conflict between the benign and sadistic potentials of the intersubjective encounter. In consequence, the face to face encounter—the “basic dimension” of ethics (Bourgeois 119)—both defamiliarizes *and* affirms the intersubjective relation.

Despite her emphasis on the ethical content of making, Scarry neglects to account for the ethical—and thus intersubjective—implications of both torture and her theoretical response to it. It is my contention, then, that a reassessment of her analysis of torture in the

light of the ethical encounter would greatly enhance the understanding of torture's effects upon the self. I will start with Scarry's initial claim concerning the unsharability of pain, in which she describes physical suffering as empathetically inaccessible to others. In other words, the person in pain cannot present a "face" capable of accurately conveying their internal experience. Building on Levinas' claim that "the approach to the face is the most basic mode of responsibility", Newton advises one to face a text as "one might face a person" in order to engage more fully with the ethical implications of narrative (qtd. in Newton 13; 11). An unforeseen corollary of Scarry's argument, however, is the exposure of Levinas' *a priori* reasoning—an exposure that prompts us to question the ethical impact of situations in which the consequences of the facticity of the face can no longer be taken for granted. If pain is essentially unsharable, as Scarry maintains it is, then it must also be inimical to the intersubjective encounter, and thus—after Levinas—inimical to responsibility and to selfhood.

As a medium for the objectification of pain, the language of agency possesses the potential to assist in the intersubjective encounter, and thus the potential to cultivate ethical responsibility. In counterpoint to this benign, productive potential, however, the language of agency has—Scarry argues—a sadistic potential, in which the objectification of pain is appropriated by the regime responsible for torture through a process known as analogical verification. Scarry's concept of analogical verification frames torture not as a multidimensional practice of which one dimension is language, but as a language in itself. This language, moreover, is characterized by a process of analogical verification, in which "[p]ower bases itself in another's pain and prevents all recognition that there is 'another' by looped circles that ensure its own solipsism" (59). This translation effectively conflates subjectivities, and in doing so distorts the intersubjective encounter into something almost unrecognisable, without—as Scarry claims—eliminating it. As Améry puts it in his account of his torture, this aspect of the practice destroys one's "trust in the world", a loose concept made up of "all sorts of things", including the respect of others for one's physical, and metaphysical, being:

At the first blow, however, this trust in the world breaks down. The other person, *opposite* whom I exist physically in the world and *with* whom I can exist only as long as he does not touch my skin surface as border, forces his own corporeality on me with the first blow. He is on me and thereby destroys me. It is like a rape, a sexual act without the consent of one of the two partners. Certainly, if there is even a minimal prospect of successful resistance, a mechanism is set in motion that enables me to

rectify the border violation by the other person. For my part, I can expand in urgent self-defense, objectify my own corporeality, restore the trust in my continued existence. The social contract then has another text and other clauses: an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. You can also regulate your life according to that. You *cannot* do it when it is the other one who knocks out the tooth, sinks the eye into a swollen mass, and you yourself suffer on your body the counter-man that your fellow man has become. If no help can be expected, this physical overwhelming by the other then becomes an existential consummation of destruction altogether. (28)

Here, Améry articulates a crucial dimension of the destruction of self perpetrated by torture: namely, that when an individual is reduced to a state anterior to language, to screams and cries, there exists, immanent in these cries, “the expectation of help” (28). This is, he suggests, not only an expectation, but a certainty of help; a certainty that, moreover, can be seen as “one of the fundamental experiences of human beings” (28). “In almost all situations in life where there is bodily injury,” he argues, “there is also the expectation of help; the former is compensated by the latter” (29). On the rare occasions when this expectation is thwarted—as it is in torture, for example—“a part of our life ends and it can never again be revived” (29).

Torture is thus revealed to be a perversion—indeed, a defamiliarization—of the intersubjective encounter. Not only does Scarry, for the most part, overlook this fundamental of the practice, but, when she does acknowledge it, her gaze is shackled to that of the torturer in the interpretation of his victim’s sentience of pain as the power of the regime in which he participates:

When one human being ‘recognizes’ the incontestable legitimacy of another human being’s existence, he or she is locating the other’s essential reality in one of two places—either in the complex fact of sentience or in the objects of sentience, in the facts of consciousness or in the objects of consciousness. In normal and benign contexts, the two occur together and imply one another: we respect the objects of sentience, the worldly forms of self-extension, precisely because they lead one in to the fact of another’s sentience; Gloucester’s earldom, Winnie’s handbag, Ibbieta’s Spain, Lear’s feather are like luminous breadcrumbs leading home, traces in the external world of the overwhelming fact at the center. But the two can also become utterly split off from one another. When this happens, the very habit of seeing in the one the proximity of the other encourages the mistake of seeing in the absence of the one the absence of the other. When this happens, the very habit of seeing in the one the proximity of the other encourages the mistake of seeing in the absence of the one the absence of the other, seeing in the loss of Gloucester’s earldom the loss of Gloucester’s sentience, an act of perceptual brutality that is a private and silent form of putting out his eyes.

A political situation is almost by definition one in which the two locations of selfhood are in a skewed relation to one another or have wholly split apart and have begun to work, or to be worked, against one another. Torture is the most extreme instance of this situation, for one person gains more and more world-ground not in spite of but because of the other's sentience: the overall equation it works to bring about, 'the larger the prisoner's pain, the larger the torturer's power' can be restated, 'the more sentient the prisoner, the more numerous and extensive the torturer's objects of sentience.' . . . And, finally, the entire process is self-amplifying, for as the prisoner's sentience destroys his world, so now his absence of world, as described earlier, destroys the claims of sentience: the confession which displays the fact that he has nothing he lives for now obscures the fact that he is violently alive. Over and over, in each state and step, the torturer's mime of expanding world-ground depends on a demonstration of the prisoner's absence of world. (37-8)

This suggests that there is more to the structure of torture than its capacity to throw the structure of making into sharper relief. As a defamiliarization of the intersubjective encounter, the structure of torture is shown to be an ethical concern in itself. More than this, the intersubjective encounter feeds back into the project of identity formation and conservation discussed in chapter 1. According to Douzinas, "the non-recognition or violation of a human right puts on stage and emphasises the difficulties of the always fragile project of identity formation through other-recognition" (*The End of Human Rights* 320). This is, in turn, finalized by the "confession" forced by torture:

The useless 'betrayal' is a further denial of the victim's identity; it unravels his relation to self, a relation that passes through the mutual recognition of the other members of the group and the pride enjoyed in the solitary of the common cause. The torture withdraws from the victim his self-respect as an autonomous moral agent, and the information or the signing of the declaration destroys his self-esteem as a valued member of a community of common goals and a world of shared values. (294)

If the destruction inherent in torture is a destruction of self as well as body, then a closer look at the way in which tortured people reconstruct their subjectivity through the intersubjective encounter—as exemplified, Newton suggests, by narrative—can adumbrate the way in which the self is itself constructed. A preliminary outline of this process can be found by way of a detour into the problem of confession as the definitive event of torture as unmaking.

Foucault calls torture and confession "the dark twins", describing the latter as "one of the West's most highly valued techniques for producing truth" and a constitutive activity

of the Western subject, that “confessing animal” (*The Will to Knowledge* 59). In contrast, Scarry’s conceptualization of torture posits confession as symptomatic of the unmaking of the self, rather than the telos of torture in itself:

The prisoner’s confession merely objectifies the fact of their being almost lost, makes their invisible absence, or nearby absence, visible to the torturers. To assent to words that through the thick agony of the body can be only dimly heard, or to reach aimlessly for the name of a person or a place that has barely enough cohesion to hold its shape as a word and none to bond it to its worldly referent, is a way of saying, yes, all is almost gone now, there is almost nothing left now, even this voice, the sounds I am making, no longer form my words but the words of another. (35)

Indeed, the epistemic value of the confession coerced by torture is, more often than not, doubtful.¹⁶ A distinction can thus be drawn between the typically apocryphal confession of the tortured person, and what has been variously referred to as the “testimonial” or “confessional” mode as a “prominent discursive practice in Western society” (Wiesel 9; Gallagher 3). If, as Scarry suggests, the coerced confession of the tortured person acts to reinforce the way in which the practice distorts the intersubjective encounter so as to deny the benign potential of the relation between selves, then the voluntary “confession” as a means of “bearing witness to a crisis or trauma” (Felman 13) that appears in its aftermath demonstrates an attempt to move beyond the sadistic encounter of torture and re-establish a benign relationship. Confession is historically, moreover, an intersubjective act, from the “oral, public, and voluntary” conventions of its “Christian theological origins” to its spectacular, performative guise in “the latest ‘true confessions’ luridly proclaimed in the tabloids” (Gallagher xii-xiv).

As a form of catharsis, in the Aristotelian sense of the term as the activation of a response from the other that is at once pitiful and fearful, then, post-traumatic narration is conducive to an intersubjective encounter of reciprocal exchange, rather than the unilateral initiative proposed in Scarry’s analysis of individual testimony, medicine, law, human rights advocacy and art as the principal media for the objectification of pain. Continuing down this line of argument, then, I will now look to Ricoeur’s reassessment of the Levinasian “face to

¹⁶ This is perhaps most poetically suggested in the following exchange between Portia and Bassanio in William Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*:

PORTIA. Ay, but I fear you speak upon the rack
Where men enforced do speak anything.
BASSANIO. Promise me life, and I’ll confess the truth.
PORTIA. Well then, confess and live. (3.2.32-35).

face epiphany” (Bourgeois 110) with regard to the potential for a bilateral ethical initiative inherent in suffering.

As a project of ethical enquiry focusing on the “hermeneutics of the self”, Ricoeur’s *Oneself as Another* is implicitly linked to Newton’s model of narrative ethics—particularly its third condition of “hermeneutic ethics”, as the following schema proposed by Ricoeur concerning the “interrelated problematics” inherent in the hermeneutical endeavour suggests: “1. the indirect approach of reflection through the detour of analysis; 2. the first determination of selfhood by way of its contrast with sameness; 3. the second determination of selfhood by way of its dialectic with otherness” (297). In addressing the final component, Ricoeur also addresses the second major aporia arising from *The Body in Pain*, concerning relationship between the unsharability of pain and its lack of objectification. As this aporia is considered within the context of the dialectic between selfhood and otherness posited by Ricoeur, it will become apparent that the shortcomings of Scarry’s intentionality thesis effectively obscure the ethical summons that arises from the intersubjective encounter elicited by suffering. The possibility that the unsharability of pain might bring about a falsification of the face to face encounter as posited by Levinas thus has an impact upon Newton’s privileging of “the immediacy of contact, not of meaning” that arises from “fac[ing] a text as one might face a person” (Newton 11). This, in turn, suggests that a consideration of narrative ethics in terms of Newton’s model requires a reappraisal of Levinas’ theorization of the “face to face epiphany” (Bourgeois 110) in light of the ethical summons that proceeds from the intersubjective encounter.

Scarry’s claim that pain is unsharable is conditional on an intentionality thesis in which pain is seen as anomalous in its lack of referential content. This thesis, I contend, is undermined by the breakdown in the intersubjective relationship described in Améry’s account of torture, in that Améry implies such an intimate relationship between the experience of pain and the certainty of aid that we begin to see, in the very “cries and whispers” that Scarry claims lack objectification, a binding claim placed by the suffering subject on the non-suffering other in the form an obligation to provide palliative care. In this way, the catastrophic effects of pain upon language—and, I argue, the self—give way to what Lenore Langsdorf has termed a “generative intentionality” (49). Responding to Ricoeur’s call for “a concept of intentionality that renders plausible an understanding of ourselves as subjects capable of critique, by virtue of particular resources given in our

inherently communicative way of being”, Langsdorf posits generative intentionality as a precondition for the limitations of Husserlian intentionality, which, on a basic level, can be explained in terms of a relentless focus on “termini *other than* the thinker’s existence” to the exclusion of reflexive self-estimation (35). The deficiencies of this approach are thus apparent in its failure to account for the way in which “intentionality might be operative in the constitution of the intending subject” (Langsdorf 37). In the light of this, Langsdorf’s generative intentionality is rooted in Ricoeur’s supposition of the narrative self as an intersubjective self whose very survival is dependent upon the care of others—as Langsdorf’s analysis of human development from the preverbal dependency of the newborn to identification as a “unifying I” demonstrates (47-8). The fact of human survival to the stage at which this “unifying I” is acquired, then, corroborates the primacy of the injunctive appeal to the other, and thus calls for a reassessment of the Levinasian face to face encounter upon which Newton’s narrative ethics is based. This has, moreover, drastic implications for Scarry’s theory of analogical verification, which will be discussed in greater detail below.

According to Ricoeur, Levinas’ “entire philosophy rests on the initiative of the other in the intersubjective relation” (*Oneself* 188). This asymmetrical initiative, moreover, “establishes no relation at all, to the extent that the other represents absolute exteriority with respect to an ego defined by the condition of separation. The other, in this sense, absolves himself of any relation. This irrelation defines exteriority as such” (188-189). As Patrick L. Bourgeois observes, the conflict between Levinas and Ricoeur rests on their differing theories of existence. Levinas posits a “solitude of existing” based upon the statement that “I *am* not the Other, I am all alone. It is thus the being in me, the fact that I exist, my *existing*, that constitutes the absolutely intransitive element, something without intentionality or relationship. One can exchange everything between beings except existing” (qtd. in Bourgeois 112). For Levinas, then, “the fact of being is private, and existence alone cannot be communicated, cannot be shared as such” (Bourgeois 112). More than this, the solitude of existing is confirmed in the experience of existing, in terms of which Levinas suggests that a being’s “needs and its enjoyment” (Adriaan Theodoor Peperzak, qtd. in Bourgeois 115) are, to use Scarry’s turn of phrase, essentially unsharable. “The face of the other,” therefore, “is an expression that cannot be reduced to my world nor to the task of self-realization” (Bourgeois 115). Although Ricoeur concurs with Levinas in interpreting the face as the

“master of justice . . . who instructs only in the ethical mode” by forbidding murder and commanding justice (*Oneself* 189), his theorization of narrative is strongly opposed to the narcissistic ego postulated in Levinas’ consideration of the other. According to Ricoeur, narrative prompts a movement away from this ego towards a “self”, to which the “solicitude of reciprocity” initiated by the injunction from other selves is key (Bourgeois 109).

While Ricoeur recognizes the face to face encounter as the “basic dimension” of ethics, his interpretation of this encounter goes beyond Levinas’ solitude of existence to establish what Bourgeois has termed a “solicitude of reciprocity” in which an equivalence is assumed between “the esteem of the *other as a oneself* and the esteem of *oneself as another*” (Bourgeois 119, 109; Ricoeur, *Oneself* 194). This “solicitude of reciprocity” can be seen in Ricoeur’s analysis of suffering as “the inverse situation from that of the instruction by the other in the figure of the master of justice” (*Oneself* 190). This presents an alternative interpretation of suffering to that of *The Body in Pain*; one in which the primacy of ethical responsibility to suffering undermines Scarry’s pivotal claim concerning the unsharability of pain, which can, in turn, be seen as a variant of Levinas’ solitude of existence theory.

According to Ricoeur, the summons to responsibility is bounded by two extremes, between which an “entire range of attitudes” towards the intersubjective relation can be found (*Oneself* 192). These extremes are, firstly, the initiative from the other and the initiative to the other, as exemplified by sympathy for the suffering other (*Oneself* 192). Ricoeur’s definition of this suffering other, moreover, supports the claim that the crisis engendered by torture is primarily a narrative crisis in the Aristotelian sense of narrative as *mimēsis praxeōs*, or “imitation of action” (“Life in Quest of Narrative” 28):

Suffering is not defined solely by physical pain, nor even by mental pain, but by the reduction, even the destruction, of the capacity for acting, of being-able-to-act, experienced as a violation of self-integrity. Here initiative, precisely in terms of being, seems to belong exclusively to the self who *gives* his sympathy, his compassion, these terms being taken in the strong sense of the wish to share someone else’s pain. (*Oneself* 190)

The suffering person, however, has the potential to equalize this imbalance in initiative by reminding the other of “the vulnerability of the condition of mortality” as a universal, and thus shared, condition (*Oneself* 191).

In terms of physical suffering, the bilateral initiative posited by Ricoeur can be further augmented by his consideration of the “analogical transfer” that lies at the heart of

the encounter between embodied egos (334). According to Ricoeur, the viability of this encounter presupposes a recognition of the other not as “an object of thought, but, like me, a subject of thought” (332). It is this recognition that is, I contend, crucial to understanding torture as a defamiliarization—rather than negation—of the intersubjective encounter. It also suggests, moreover, that the commonly held perception of torture as “dehumanization” drastically underestimates its cruelty by failing to recognize the way in which torture specifically targets that which makes “a life, in the biological sense of the word, a human life”. It is precisely this facet of torture that, for example, allows for the process of analogical verification posited by Scarry. This analogical verification enabled by the language of agency is thus shown to be a mere accessory to the destruction of self elicited by torture, rather than its fundamental cause.

Returning now to the confessional mode of post-traumatic testimony, it becomes apparent that, in its attempt to elicit sympathy for the other’s suffering and empathy for the universal condition of corporeal *and* existential fragility, the narration of torture facilitates an intersubjective encounter characterized by reciprocity. As such, the act of narrating torture can be seen as an act of restitution for the perversely dissymmetrical encounter it takes as its content. Once again, then, we find the potential to sustain a dialectic between defamiliarization and prescription. In this sense, such narratives conform to Newton’s definition of ethics as “recursive, contingent, and interactive dramas of encounter and recognition” (12). More than this, however, in their ability to “crystalliz[e] and recirculat[e]” these dramas “in acts of interpretive engagement”, torture narratives—in both fictional and documentary forms—can be seen as the epitome of the concussive text, translating a marginal—and marginalized—experience into a metonym for the universal experience of being *qua* being.

Conclusion

In my introduction, I argue for a recognition of the torture narrative as a sort of ethical sparkplug, a text that prompts the reader to reassess the dynamics of the intersubjective encounter—including his or her own subjectivity—and, in turn, reassess the ethical mores according to which people operate, on both an individual and a communal level. In this first part of the study, I have determined that the ethical epiphany engendered by the engagement with torture narratives is two-fold. First, such narratives recount situations in which the

intersubjective encounter is grossly perverted, thus defamiliarizing the basic dimension of ethics. In this respect, then, torture narratives resist ethical complacency. Second, by testifying to the contingency of existence *in extremis*, torture narratives potentiate a symmetrical ethical encounter, in which the initiative to the suffering other is met by the initiative from the suffering other. Insofar as non-fiction accounts of torture are concerned, a third dimension obtains, in which the act of narration also facilitates the reconstruction of the tortured person's identity and worldview, as well as the reaffirmation of their trust in others.

In saying this, however, I do not wish to join Scarry in resolving away the violence reproduced in such texts by describing its parameters. To avoid the dangers implicit in this approach, it is crucial to recognize that the concussive potential of the torture narrative is exactly that: a *potential*. As part II will demonstrate, the narration of torture rarely achieves the type of ethical performance idealized in Newton's *Narrative Ethics*. Indeed, I would be the first to admit that many such texts are neither subtle nor complex in their moral content and narrative technique. I will add to this, however, that—as I see it—these shortcomings in no way undermine the role of the torture narrative as ethical performance providing that they are approached with a full comprehension of the selection pressures at work in the field of human rights discourse. It is for this reason, I contend, that the wholly Levinasian face to face reading recommended by Newton falls flat when confronted with the narration of human rights abuses. Rather, a productive approach to such narratives must necessarily synthesise the distinct interpretations of the face to face encounter found in the writings of both Levinas *and* Ricoeur.

In defence of this approach, I return to Améry's account of torture. One of the most salient features of this account is its rejection of the possibility—and, indeed, the necessity—of achieving empirical fidelity to the lived experience of torture without drastically revising one's sense of identity in terms of “permanence in time” by becoming the perpetrator:

It would be totally senseless to try and describe here the pain that was inflicted on me. Was it “like a red-hot iron in my shoulders,” and was another “like a dull wooden stake that had been driven into the back of my head”? One comparison would only stand for the other, and in the end we would be hoaxed by the turn on the hopeless merry-go-round of figurative speech. The pain was what it was. Beyond that there is nothing to say. Qualities of feeling are as incomparable as they are indescribable. They mark the limit of the capacity of language to communicate. If

someone wanted to impart his physical pain, he would be forced to inflict it and thereby become a torturer himself. (33)¹⁷

This reinforces the Levinasian concept of existence as fundamentally solitary and unsharable, which, in its most extreme state, reduces the subject to a “narcissistic, egoistic and stingy ego” (Ricoeur, *Oneself* 33). Where Améry cannot articulate his physical “luxation” (32), however, his eloquent description of the effects of torture as dislocation of self and distortion of the intersubjective relation succeeds in testifying to the experience of torture as an extreme manifestation of the fragility immanent in the condition of being *qua* being. In this way, his narrative dramatizes ethical intention from the suffering self to the other—in spite, and perhaps even because, of the denial of this summons by his torturers. This, in turn, advocates a bilateral ethical initiative akin to that from which Ricoeur’s solicitude of reciprocity hypothesis proceeds.

A further theoretical dilemma thus ensues from the narration of torture. If, after Barthes, we embrace the possibility that “writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin . . . that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost” (168), then torture narratives—particularly those in the documentary mode—challenge this by invoking Mikhail Bakhtin’s proposition that “it is only when my life is set forth for another that I myself become its hero” (qtd. in Newton 19). To lessen the potential for a dissymmetrical reading of a narrative as intersubjective encounter thus requires an evocation of the summons from the suffering other, in which inheres a shadow, at the very least, of the subject as author. In the case of torture narratives, then, “the author enters into his own death” (Barthes 168) as he enters into the torture chamber, reminding us that the task of being *qua* being is the cultivation of a narrative identity, in which “we learn to become the *narrator* and the hero *of our own story*, without actually becoming the *author of our own life*”. In this way, the inscription of identity implicit in the narrative act serves as a reminder, once again, of what can be seen as a universal condition of existence, in which the self is defined as a narrative, rather than an authorial—

¹⁷ This is seconded in Donald Gutierrez’s analysis of the attempt to articulate the experience of torture in the autobiographical accounts of Viktor Frankl and Jacobo Timerman:

Part of the problem Frankl and Timerman face is trying to communicate the essential core of their experiences, something they both feel to be impossible. Words convey only so much, and if a person has not experienced electrification of his or her genitals, or lay [sic] next door to another room filled with the screams of a person being tortured, an impenetrable curtain separates word from meaning as deed. (292)

or authoritative—self. The death of the author thus becomes a *diegetic* concern of the torture narrative, while the narrative *act* attests to the birth—or *rebirth*—of the subject.

Yet again, then, torture narratives confront the reader with their ability to sustain apparent contradictions in such a way as to suggest a Hegelian synthesis, or higher truth. If we return to Jolly's caveat concerning the tendency of the literary-critical genre to resolve violence by describing its parameters, we can see that successful torture narratives resist this by transforming the description of their parameters into a generative, rather than reductive, activity. Returning to Sartre's proviso that with the opening of the book comes the assumption of responsibility, the opening of the torture narrative goes beyond this to become an act of reciprocity in accordance with Langsdorf's theory of generative intentionality, thus rendering plausible "an understanding of ourselves as subjects capable of critique, by virtue of particular resources given in our inherently communicative way of being" from the very outset (Langsdorf 35). By encouraging one to "ai[m] at the "good life" with and for others, in just institutions", then, these texts actively perform the ethical intention as defined by Ricoeur.

Finally, inasmuch as we perceive testimonial accounts as the documentation of lived, rather than imagined events, the distinction between life and fiction that concerns Ricoeur is still undeniably present in the genre of torture narratives. It is in the consideration of the narrative self and the ethical intention, I submit, that the complementarity of testimony and fiction becomes apparent. As Ricoeur attests, "narrative fictions remain", after all, "imaginative variations on an invariant, the corporeal condition assumed to constitute the unavoidable mediation between self and world" ("Narrative Identity" 196). A further congruity between the two modes can be found in their vulnerability to manipulation and appropriation in accordance with what he calls the "moral norm" in distinction from—yet tied to—the "ethical aim" (*Oneself* 214). As suggested by Levinas, this process allows ethics, "as the extreme exposure and sensitivity of one subjectivity to another", to become morality, which "hardens its skin as soon as we move into the political world of the impersonal 'third' – the world of government, institutions, tribunals, prisons, schools, committees and so on" (qtd. in Newton 178). It is here, that the reasoning behind Ricoeur's emphasis on the role of "just institutions" in the ethical intention becomes apparent. Part II will thus provide a demonstration of the ways in which the "venues of storytelling" (Schaffer and Smith 35) for torture narratives contribute to this slippage from the ethical to the moral plane, and the

consequences thereof. More than this, it will suggest that the relative autonomy of the fictional mode makes it a more successful site for the promulgation of a new way of seeing, one in which continual critical reflection acts as an inimical force against ethical complacency. In doing so, I offer an apologia for a literature that has, heretofore, been generally condemned as “obscene”, “perverse”, “depraved”, “pornographic” and—perhaps most damningly—the propagator of the very abuses it endeavours to hold up for condemnation.

PART II
APARTHEID

Chapter 3

The Self Story *in Extremis*:

Human Rights, Risks and Reciprocity

in Apartheid South Africa

Only mutual recognition works.

Costas Douzinas, *Human Rights and Empire*

In part I, I suggest that torture narratives—both fictional and documentary—be seen as not only the propagators of an actively ethical way of seeing, but as a *prime site* of ethical exploration. Fundamental to this proposition is an understanding of the place of narrative in what Paul Ricoeur has called the “ethical intention”, defined as “aiming for the ‘good life’ with and for others, in just institutions”, and distinct from the “moral norm”. To begin, then, it is necessary to question the way in which our thinking about philosophical issues such as ethics rests on “larger, but usually tacit, assumptions about what a life is, what a person is, what a *good* life is, what social justice is, and much more besides” (Small 2). For the purposes of this thesis, my primary concern here is with our assumptions about what constitutes a “good life”, and in what ways the teleological nature of the ethical intention towards this “good life” differs from the deontological nature of normative morality.

Implicit in the very existence of moral philosophy as a field of intellectual enquiry is an understanding of life—specifically, human life—as more than just a biological phenomenon. It is, rather, an ontological entity open to, if not entirely dependent on, reflexive examination. This distinction between life as a biological phenomenon and life as an ontological activity proceeds, according to Ricoeur, from our use of fiction. By this he means not our capacity for imaginative fantasy *per se*, but the impulse to integrate and attribute meaning to the incidents encountered and actions carried out in the course of being biologically alive. There remains, however, a distinction between the human—or *emplotted*—life and the “good life” towards which ethical behaviour is intended. This is, in turn, qualified by an equally significant distinction between the intent towards the good life that characterizes ethics, and the perceived achievement of this good life that legitimizes—and is legitimized by—normative morality.

As the subject of systematic philosophical enquiry, ethics traditionally places great stock in the relationship between virtue and the good life. The nature of virtue, however, remains open to debate. The ethical determination underlying Ricoeur's concept of narrative identity, for example, uses Socrates' axiom "the unexamined life is not worth living" as a means of suggesting that a life worth living—and hence, a "good life"—is a life examined. More than this, Ricoeur argues that, because narration "is not completed in the text but in the reader", a "good life" must not only be examined, but "recounted", enabling us "to become the *narrator* and the hero *of our own story*, without actually becoming the *author of our own life*". It is at this point, however, that the distinction between ethics and morality comes to bear upon our understanding of the good life. At its most simplistic, this can be characterized in terms of the difference between intention and realization; or, in the words of Ricoeur, the difference between "the *aim* of an accomplished life" and "the articulation of this aim in *norms* characterized at once by the claim to universality and by an effect of constraint" (*Oneself* 170). This, moreover, finds a salient analogue in the contrast between the descriptive nature of ethics and the prescriptive nature of morality.

If we return to the conceptualization of a good life as a narrated life, this distinction becomes yet more complicated. On the one hand, we are confronted with "the narrative 'incompleteness' of life" (*Oneself* 161), which is in turn a reminder of the contingency of existence: teleologically speaking, all life narratives move steadily toward the inevitable fact of their protagonists' death, an event that cannot be recounted by the protagonist himself, but only by others. In this way, what Small terms "a good life narrative" (91) is not a complete—or "unified"—life narrative in the temporal sense, but one that continually—and consistently—works towards the maintenance and development of a coherent identity as a self that interacts with others and the world. It is this latter quality of reflexive consideration, or "self-esteem", that Ricoeur associates with the ethical intention. The notion of self-esteem as a continuous project of identity construction, furthermore, not only resonates strongly with Scarry's definition of "the ongoing work of civilization" as "remaking making", but provides a convincing point of intersection for the conceptualization of torture—and, more broadly speaking, pain—found in *The Body in Pain* and Newton's theory of narrative ethics. In addition, it lays the foundations for a phenomenological approach to the analysis of torture narratives, while allowing adequate room within which to acknowledge—and, it is to be hoped, understand—the prevalence of highly politicized, deontological readings of such

narratives. To return briefly to Jolly's commentary on the attempts of the literary-critical genre to "resolve" violence through analytical explication, the framework outlined above is intended not only to resist this weakness, but also to respond to it by describing the devices through which the violence inherent in torture narratives is repeatedly resolved by a range of discursive methods, while simultaneously offering—rather than prescribing—a reading of such narratives in which the ethical intention has primacy over the moral norm.

According to Levinas, "the extreme exposure and sensitivity of one subjectivity to another" that constitutes the basic dimension of ethics slips into the deontological realm of the moral norm through exposure to "the political world of the impersonal 'third' – the world of government, institutions, tribunals, prisons, schools, committees and so on". At the heart of this slippage, Ricoeur proposes, is a transposition of the project of "self-interpretation" that characterizes human life from the ethical to the moral plane (*Oneself* 179). "On the ethical plane", then, "self-interpretation becomes self-esteem" (179), the transposition of which onto the moral plane fosters a distinct, yet related, condition that Ricoeur designates—after Kant—"self-respect". The moral character of respect, moreover, is qualified as "self-esteem that has passed through the sieve of the universal and constraining norm — in short, self-esteem under the reign of the law" (215).

This description of law as "the universal and constraining norm" brings us to the final, as yet unaddressed, qualifying factor in Ricoeur's definition of the ethical intention: the nature and existence of "just institutions". In the previous chapter, it was established that a sense of justice is implicit in the perception of the other as the originator of the ethical summons, or "master of justice" (189). As Ricoeur attests, "living well is not limited to interpersonal relations but extends to the life of *institutions*" (194). By "institutions", he refers to "the structure of living together" as a "historical community": a "people, nation, region, and so forth" (194). Within this context, moreover, "justice presents ethical features that are not contained in solicitude, essentially a requirement of *equality*" (194). Equality, then, "is to life in institutions what solicitude is to interpersonal relations", in that solicitude "provides to the self another who is a face", while equality "provides to the self another who is an each" (202). In this way, "[j]ustice . . . adds to solicitude, to the extent that the field of application of equality is all of humanity", and in this way extends the ethical dimension beyond the immediate contact of the face to face encounter to a more abstract, yet expansive, construct of community: "[j]ustice extends further than face to face encounters" (202, 194).

Ricoeur's discussion of equality as the primary ethical feature of justice replaces the face to face encounter with the each to each encounter. The definition of this each is couched in the language of rights: Ricoeur sets out this "new determination of the self" in terms of the apophthegmatic "to each, his or her rights" (194). Rights, as Douzinas reminds us, "constitute the basic building block of Western law" (*Human Rights and Empire* 9). The extension of the "field of application"—referred to by Ricoeur—to include "all of humanity" suggests that these rights are more accurately described as *human* rights—as opposed to, for instance, animal rights, property rights, or commercial rights. As a "subcategory of legal rights", Douzinas suggests, human rights "refers to a more or less concrete sense of morality" that typically accompanies, but is not necessarily required for or recognized by, individual legal systems (*Human Rights and Empire* 9). The combination of "law and morality, description and prescription" attendant on the institution of human rights is, moreover, a frequent source of conflict (9-10). In consequence, human rights discourse is characterized by what Douzinas calls a "confounding of the real and the ideal" (10), or the competing demands of pragmatism and idealism.

According to Douzinas, human rights oscillate between "the extant state of law and an absent and desired state of perfection" (10). As "an ideology with a moral inflection" human rights can provide "a neutral, rational, natural discourse" capable of transcending the ulterior motives of institutionalized practice and political priorities (11). They are also, however, highly susceptible to the normative demands of what Douzinas terms "the existent" (11). Returning to Ricoeur's description of fiction as an ethical laboratory for "[e]xplorations in the realm of good and evil", then, the distinction between fictional accounts of torture and its factual documentation within the grander scheme of human rights discourse can be seen in terms of the distinction between the empirical demands of politico-legal testimony and its transcendence. Fiction is thus seen as a storytelling venue characterized by flexibility and permeability, in which "moral judgement is not abolished", but "is rather subjected to the imaginative variations proper to fiction" (Ricoeur, *Oneself* 164). In contrast, the genre of non-fiction torture narratives is subject to more pragmatic concerns, and as such tends to correspond more closely to the concept of the moral norm than the ethical intention. When Levinas observes the process by which morality "hardens its skin as soon as we move into the world of the impersonal 'third'—the world of government, institutions, tribunals, prisons, schools, committees and so on" (qtd. in Newton

178), he reminds us of the relative rigidity and imperviousness of human rights discourse as a platform for narration. This reference to “the impersonal ‘third’”, furthermore, recalls Ricoeur’s comments on the plurality inherent in the nature of “just institutions”: by extending intersubjective relations beyond the face to face encounter, we are confronted with the fact that “plurality includes third parties who will never be faces” (*Oneself* 195). This, in turn, demonstrates the “limit imposed on every effort to reconstruct the social bond on the sole basis of a strictly diadic dialogic relation” (195).

As Scarry observes, “[a] political situation is almost by definition one in which the two locations of selfhood are in a skewed relation to one another or have wholly split apart and have begun to work, or to be worked, against one another” (37). For Scarry, the act of torture is “the most extreme instance of this situation” (37), and yet what is not acknowledged is the way in which this process of distortion pertains to the aftermath of torture, dependent as it is on the accessibility and quality of the mechanisms for rehabilitation and legal action available to the tortured person. Any interaction with these mechanisms—the first step of which must necessarily involve some form of testimony—thus constitutes a political situation, as the case of Berhane demonstrates. More specifically, this political situation is located within the discursive field of human rights: as Schaffer and Smith observe, the tortured person’s testimony “brings into play, implicitly or explicitly, a rights claim. The teller bears witness to his or her experience through acts of remembering elicited by rights activists and coded to rights instruments . . .” (3). The corollaries of these acts of remembering, moreover, are amphipathic in nature: bounded by the competing demands of pragmatism and idealism, the ethical responses and affects they elicit can be channelled in both negative and positive directions (Schaffer and Smith 4).

Without much more ado, I will now enter into a comparative analysis of non-fiction and fiction narratives of torture originating from the period of National Party rule in South Africa characterized by a policy of racial segregation known as *apartheid*. Chapter 4 will chart a trajectory for the development of the human rights life narrative in South Africa. Beginning with the early documentation of human rights abuses in South Africa in both local and international media, as well as reports of the South African Institute for Race Relations (SAIRR), the United Nations (UN) and Amnesty International, chapter 4 will focus on the ethical determinations underlying the “self-stories” of Ruth First (*117 Days*, 1965), Hugh Lewin (*Bandiet*, 1974), Molefe Pheto (*And Night Fell*, 1983), Tshenuwani Simon Farasani

(*Diary from a South African Prison*, 1987) and Emma Mashinini (*Strikes Have Followed Me All My Life: A South African Autobiography*, 1989). In this way, I intend to provide a comprehensive—yet by no means exhaustive—overview of the ethical terrain traversed in the narration of torture in apartheid South Africa, with especial emphasis on the potential for narrative slippage from the ethical plane to that of the moral norm. In contrast, chapter 5 will focus on the fictional representation of torture in South African literature from the same period, from early social realist texts such as Herman Charles Bosman’s *Willemsdorp* (1951) and Harry Bloom’s *Transvaal Episode* (1956) through to the novels of Alex La Guma (*In the Fog of the Seasons’ End*, 1972), D. M. Zwelonke (*Robben Island*, 1973), André Brink (*A Dry White Season*, 1979), and the “Soweto novels” (Chapman 395) of Mongane Wally Serote (*To Every Birth Its Blood*, 1981) and Sipho Sepamla (*A Ride on the Whirlwind*, 1981). Having used these texts to provide an overview of the narration of torture in apartheid South Africa, I will turn to the subversion of the accepted conventions of this genre found in J. M. Coetzee’s *Barbarians* (1980) and Wessel Ebersohn’s *Store Up the Anger* (1980)—works in which the interrogation of the intersubjective relationship that proceeds from suffering is paramount. Finally, I will take up Ricoeur’s proposition that, in subjecting the ethical aim to the test of the moral norm, literature can “lead us back from morality to ethics, but to an ethics enriched by the passage through the norm” (*Oneself* 203). It is my contention that this is exemplified by Breyten Breytenbach’s metafictional enquiry into the nature of subjectivity in his absurdist memoir of solitary confinement, *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* (1984). Described by Jolly as a “parody” of a “conventional autobiography” (92), *True Confessions* is narrated by a multifaceted series of personae, all of whom are presented as versions of the “real” Breyten Breytenbach. In the opening paragraph, for example, he states that “if there is one thing that has become amply clear to me over the years, it is exactly that there is no one person that can be named and in the process of naming be fixed for all eternity” (13). The ambiguity inherent in this stratification of selves demonstrates the potential for literature—specifically, literature that takes both the costs and the advantages of aestheticization into due account—to cultivate the capacity for ethical thinking independent of moral judgement through a sensitive and skilful negotiation between the real and the ideal.¹⁸

¹⁸ For a compelling argument in favour of this claim, see Crary 127-163. In contrast to Crary’s claim that “some literary texts are designed to elicit modes of moral thinking that are not a matter of moral judgement-making”

Chapter 4

Testimonio; or, the Weight of Witnessing:¹⁹

Non-fiction Accounts of Torture from Apartheid South Africa

It was a strange programme, a collection of slogans taken off the banners of numerous backveld elections and elevated into a misty ideology of race and destiny. Its catchword was ‘*apartheid*,’ a word with a potent appeal to the longing for racial exclusiveness. A word with a thousand meanings and no meaning, but with a curious power to change the meaning of other words. Under apartheid the white people became the only people, and the black people the black menace; education became an evil, and racial friendship sedition; the Bible became the authority for imposing slavery, and world opinion became petty, malign, and of no consequence. Apartheid required strange things of people. It required queer, novel laws. And it needed a special type of policeman to enforce them.

Harry Bloom, *Transvaal Episode*

Justice, Morality and Narrative Wreckage

The following consideration of non-fiction accounts of torture originating from South Africa will take the concept of “narrative wreckage”²⁰ as its point of departure. According to Arthur W. Frank, narrative wreckage comes about as a result of severe temporal disruption coupled to a disjunction between one’s anticipated future and present reality. Insofar as temporal disruption is concerned, Frank comments that “[t]he conventional expectation of any narrative, held alike by listeners and storytellers, is for a past that leads into a present that sets in place a foreseeable future. The illness story is wrecked because its present is not what the past was supposed to lead up to, and the future is scarcely thinkable” (55). Frank’s description of this latter disjunction—that “[s]omehow the stories we have in place never fit the reality, and sometimes this disjunction can be worse than having no story at all” (55)—recalls Améry’s quotation of Proust in *At the Mind’s Limits*: “Rien n’arrive ni comme on l’espère, ni comme on le craint,’ . . . Nothing really happens as we hope it will, nor as we fear

(136), however, I wish to draw a sharper distinction between imagination as an ethical activity and adjudication as a moral activity.

¹⁹ The title of this chapter and that of chapter 5 are taken from Susan Sontag’s discussion of the representation of atrocity in photography, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003): “For the photography of atrocity, people want the weight of witnessing without the taint of artistry, which is equated with insincerity or mere contrivance” (23).

²⁰ This term was originally coined by the philosopher Ronald Dworkin in his analysis of abortion, and was subsequently developed by Frank in his study of illness narratives, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness and Ethics* (1997).

it will” (25; ellipsis in orig.). It demonstrates the way in which “psychological preparedness” provides a crucial point of commonality between Frank’s analysis of illness narratives and the analysis of torture narratives found in this thesis. In the context of torture, the theory of “psychological preparedness” posits that the “strong belief system, commitment to a cause, prior knowledge and expectations of torture, and possible prior immunization to traumatic stress” typically found in “highly committed political activists” may confer a degree of psychological protection against the traumatic effects of torture (Gerrity et al. 42). An analogous situation can be found in Frank’s description of his encounter with a young cancer patient soon before he embarked on his first course of chemotherapy:

He talked about the high incidence of cancer in his family, his father’s recent death, and his memories of relatives’ deaths. . . . he told a story of having waited for cancer; a story of illness was already in place before his disease occurred. Cancer had long been on his map as a possible destination. (54)

And yet, Frank suggests, this very state of psychological preparedness serves to compound the ill person’s sense of wreckage by rendering futile their prior efforts at developing a narrative capable of accommodating the anticipated illness and its disruptive effects—a disjunction which, Améry attests, has equally detrimental effects upon the tortured person.

The way out of this narrative wreckage, Frank argues, depends on the telling of stories—specifically, stories in which “the self is being *formed* in what is told” (55). This corresponds to Ricoeur’s conceptualization of narrative identity, and positions the processes of emplotment and interpretation as the basis for the repair of the self in the aftermath of traumatic, dislocating events such as grave illness or torture. According to Frank, however, this narrative repairwork is not a generic whole, but takes specific forms reflective of the narrator’s “strong cultural and personal preferences”, such as the affected person’s cultural background, familiarity with various “narrative types”—which Frank defines as “the most general storyline that can be recognized underlying the plot and tensions of particular stories” (75)—and the “storytelling venues” available to them (Schaffer and Smith 35). The influence of such factors should not be underestimated: as Frank notes, “both institutions and individual listeners steer ill people toward certain narratives, and other narratives are simply not heard” (77). Insofar as this thesis is concerned, for example, methodological considerations have limited my attention to those narratives—both fictional and documentary—that have had some degree of success with regard to “the contexts of story

production, circulation, and reception” (Schaffer and Smith 5): not only have they been selected for publication—whether independently or as part of an institution-sponsored report (e.g. Amnesty International or the TRC)—they have also been recognised as worthy of preservation in private collections, institutional libraries and archives, electronic databases and the like. Without straying too far into the problematics of narrative appropriation and discursive hierarchy—what Ndebele has termed “the phenomenon of . . . who produces information, who interprets it, and who disseminates it” (24)—it is important to emphasize the ethical implications of these “barriers” and the way in which they “provide possibilities for insight” (Frank 77). As Frank reminds us, “[r]eflection on one’s own narrative preferences and discomforts is a moral problem, since in both listening to others and telling our own stories, we become who we are” (77).

According to Frank, illness narratives belong to the genre of “self-stories”²¹ that includes “spiritual autobiographies, stories of becoming a man or a woman and what that gender identity involves, and finally survivor stories of inflicted traumas such as war, captivity, incest, and abuse” (69). The proliferation of this genre and its significance as a prime site of ethical exploration can, he claims, be attributed to the way in which such stories speak to the “condition of perpetual narrative uncertainty . . . endemic to postmodern times” (68). Whether or not this condition of perpetual narrative uncertainty is particularly pronounced in postmodern times, these stories of the self *in extremis* can, I argue, operate in accordance with Langsdorf’s principle of generative intentionality by reminding their readers of the “universal and constraining” condition of mortality in both a biological, and—perhaps more significantly—narrative sense. In consequence, the “three underlying narratives of illness” identified by Frank are of formal relevance to the discussion of torture narratives—particularly those that claim to be non-fictional—in this thesis.

In his examination of illness narratives as a subgenre of “self-stories”, Frank identifies “three underlying narratives”: the restitution narrative, the chaos narrative, and the quest narrative (76). The first of these—the restitution narrative—has as its focal point “the storyline of restoring health”, in which health is portrayed as “the normal condition” and

²¹ Frank’s conceptualization of these “self-stories” is analogous with the discussion of life narratives within a human rights context discussed in the work of Donald Gutierrez (1984), Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl-Ann Michael (2000) and Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith (2004). Both Frank and Nuttall and Michael comment extensively, moreover, on the proliferation of this genre and its increasing popularity in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

illness as an anomalous, undesirable, and temporary aberration from this norm (Frank 77). According to Frank, moreover, the prevalence of—and popular preference for—the restitution narrative does not simply “reflec[t] a “natural” desire to get well and stay well”, but is conditioned by “institutional stories that model how illness is to be told”—such as hospital brochures and pharmaceutical advertisements—which are in turn reflective of social and cultural assumptions about medicine and its “inevitable” triumph over illness (78-83). Insofar as the ethical intention is concerned, the restitution narrative downplays the “struggles of the self” to place responsibility for the ill person’s recovery in the hands of the medical profession (92). The “passive heroism” of the ill person “in the face of bodily breakdown” is thus “invariably tied to the more active heroism of the healer”, resulting in an asymmetric portrayal of the intersubjective encounter that places the bulk of responsibility with the medical professional (93). This responsibility, moreover, is not primarily directed towards the patient, but to the medical profession and its ethos of progress and restitution. By adopting the restitution narrative as a self-story, the ill person “thereby accepts a place in a moral order that subordinates him as an individual” (93). In this way, the restitution narrative can be seen to perform an asymmetric ethical encounter, in which the ill person is primarily perceived in terms of their ability to recover, to attribute their recovery to the medical profession, and therefore to corroborate the supreme success of this profession. A key consequence of this is an abstraction of intersubjectivity, in which the patient is reduced to a solitary individual—what Frank calls a “monadic body” (85)—qualified only by their disease, and the physician to the personification of an institution in such a way as to recall Ricoeur’s description of institutions as “third parties who will never be faces” (*Oneself* 195). In both cases, the relation of these individuals to others is eclipsed by the properties attributed to them: reciprocity is thus diminished, even while rights are upheld. The relevance of this to the narration of torture will be explored in greater detail below; for the time being, however, it is sufficient to note the far-reaching repercussions of the conception of the suffering person found in Frank’s conceptualization of the restitution narrative:

The disease model of medicine reinforces this conception of each patient ‘having’ a disease, and this disease model articulates well with modernist emphases on the individual as an autonomous entity. The same conception of the individual that makes it sensible to speak of ‘having’ a disease can speak of ‘having’ rights, ‘getting’ an education, or . . . ‘having’ empathy. Diseases, rights, education, and empathy are seen as properties of specific persons, not as expressions of persons’ relationships to others. Talking about ‘having’ the disease turns the monadic body in upon itself. (85)

Accordingly, institutions can be seen to erase the generative intentionality of the suffering person by exchanging the identity of the face to face encounter with the anonymity of the each to each encounter.

The chaos narrative, on the other hand, is “the opposite of restitution: its plot imagines life never getting better”, and is characterized by the absence of “sequence of discernable causality” (Frank 97)—or, in the terminology of Ricoeur, an absence of emplotment. While restitution narratives offer the “possibilit[y] of outdistancing or outwitting suffering”, chaos narratives demonstrate the ease with which any one of us could succumb to suffering (Frank 97). The difficulty with chaos narratives, however, is that their failure to integrate and reflect upon events means that they “cannot literally be told” at the same time as they are experienced (98). Instead, any successful reconstruction of “the voice of chaos” demands either temporal distance—retrospect—or some sort of narrative representation, in which those who are not embroiled in the chaos of suffering “speak *on behalf of* those who are” (Scarry 6). “[C]haos”, Frank writes, “is the pit of narrative wreckage”—its stories “are told at the end of the process that Elaine Scarry calls ‘unmaking the world’” (110, 103). These stories, moreover, can only be told “*about* the chaos, from *outside* that chaos” (109). The immediacy of chaos, then, holds off the narrative repair-work necessary for the articulation of a self-story—the ethical repercussions of which are profound. For one, without a coherent sense of subject or plot, such narratives cannot hope to perform the “dramas of encounter and recognition” that Newton cites as the basic ethical dimension of narration. The chaotic subject “cannot tell enough of its own story to formulate its needs and ask for help; often it cannot even accept help when it is offered” (Frank 110), and in this way can be seen as a ready candidate for the type of sympathy described in *The Body in Pain*, in which “one human being who is well and free willingly turns himself into an image of the other’s psychic or sentient claims, an image existing in the space outside the sufferer’s body, projected out into the world and held there intact by that person’s powers until the sufferer himself regains his own powers of self-extension” (Scarry 50). Like Scarry, however, this conceptualization of the chaotic subject as the recipient of a unilateral ethical initiative fails to acknowledge the way in which the inarticulate, disorganized and introverted exclamations of the suffering body can give rise to what Langsdorf has termed “generative intentionality”, as exemplified by Améry’s observation that “[i]n almost

all situations in life where there is bodily injury there is also the expectation of help; the former is compensated by the latter” (29). In this way, the observable fact of suffering allows “unequal power [to find] compensation in an authentic reciprocity in exchange” (Ricoeur, *Oneself* 191). More specifically, this compensation has its origins in the very characteristics of the chaos narratives from which our general discomfort derives: whereas the restitution narrative is limited in its inability to accommodate the ineluctable fact of human mortality, the value of chaos stories “is to reveal the hubris of other stories. Chaos stories show how quickly the props that other stories depend on can be kicked away” (Frank 114).

Restitution narratives, then, “attempt to outdistance mortality by rendering illness transitory”, while chaos narratives “are sucked into the undertow of illness and the disasters that attend it” (115). The third narrative type identified by Frank—the quest narrative—attempts to create meaning in the space between denial of illness and submergence in its pervasive depths by “accept[ing] illness and seek[ing] to *use* it” (115). Such stories tend to conform to a journey structure, in which the ill person seeks to accrue meaning, discover purpose and form an identity through reflection on their experience of illness. As such, it “tells self-consciously of being transformed” in a positive manner as the experience is organized into something “coherent and meaningful” (118). In short, quest narratives strive to *emplot* illness in Ricoeur’s sense of the word. With regard to suffering, however, the quest narrative is portrayed as a sort of rite of passage, in which the protagonist is “initiated through agony” into the depths of human experience (119). Within the conventions of the quest narrative, the outcome of this initiation typically takes the form of what Frank terms “atonement” in the sense of “the realization of oneness” or unity (119), culminating in the protagonist’s return—as one no longer submerged in the all-encompassing realm of suffering, yet “mark[ed] by the brotherhood of pain” (Albert Schweitzer, qtd. in Frank 118)—to share with others the profound insights acquired through this suffering.

The quest storyline, Frank suggests, forms the broadest category of illness narratives, and, as such, can be found to exist in more than one version. Of these, the three most prominent quest stories fall into the categories of memoir, manifesto and automythology (119). Each of these versions, moreover, displays a peculiar ethical character in the act of their narration, regardless of their ethical content. The memoir can be described as “an interrupted autobiography”, in which the onset of illness acts as a catalyst for the recollection of the narrator’s life, resulting in a narrative that combines the immediacy of illness with a

selective remembering of “certain past events” from the narrator’s life (120). As “the gentlest style of quest story”, the memoir can be seen as an example of the mildness with which the sympathetic self “finds itself affected by all that the suffering other offers to it in return” (Frank 120; Ricoeur, *Oneself* 191). This is, moreover, compounded by Frank’s observation that, in the vast majority of cases, most of the authors of such memoirs “are persons whose public status would make them candidates for formal autobiography writing” even in the absence of illness (120). In this way, then, the narrator is primarily perceived as a personality—a familiar face—rather than an individual distinguished only by their disease. Disease adds dimension to these figures, rather than diminishing it, and thus preserves—even augments—the participation of narrator and reader in the expression of the ethical intention as “aiming for the good life *with and for* others” (emphasis added).

The manifesto, in contrast, is a much more aggressive style of quest narrative. As Frank notes, these stories frame the insight gained from illness in terms of prophecy, and often ally this to “demands for social action” (120). The manifesto “asserts that illness is a social issue, not simply a personal affliction” (122). In most cases, moreover, such stories are couched in the discourse of rights. The ethical dilemma here lies in the potential for such stories to distort the intersubjective encounter in the opposite direction to the restitution narrative. Manifestos have a tendency to alienate those who have no personal investment in the issue at stake by appearing to prioritise the rights of a specific group of society over others. This, in turn, brings to the fore the question of desire with respect to the championing of rights. “Desire”, Douzinas tells us, “is the excess of demand over need” (*Human Rights and Empire* 47). In order for the manifesto to succeed in its message that illness is a social issue, then, it must transcend the needs of the sufferers of a specific illness—the “solidarity of the afflicted” (Frank 122)—in order to participate in the universal demand for recognition as an “each”. According to Douzinas, moreover, “[e]very right . . . links a need of a part of the body or personality with what exceeds need, the desire that the claimant be recognised and loved as a whole and complete person” (48). By failing to recognize this in their assumption of moral superiority manifestos risk shooting their cause in the foot.

A more successful negotiation of this ethical dilemma can be found in the third version of the quest narrative: the automythology. The storyline of the automythology revolves around the metaphor of the narrator as phoenix, reborn from the ashes of trauma. “Like the manifesto”, Frank comments, “the automythology reaches out, but its language is

more personal than political” (123). In terms of ethics the automythology circumvents the dissymmetry encountered in the manifesto by balancing the narrator’s implicit demand for recognition with the skilful evocation of a “shared admission of fragility and, finally, of mortality” (Ricoeur, *Oneself* 192). To the Aristotelian combination of pity and fear, then, this “pedagogy of suffering” (Frank 145) adds a hope quite unlike that offered by the restitution narrative. This hope, I argue, proceeds from the way in which the suffering person embodies the weight of bearing witness to a life that is good because of—rather than *in spite of*—the “messier dimensions of human experience” (Susan Bordo, qtd. in Langsdorf 34). Crucially, then, the encounter with suffering alters the ethical dimension of intersubjectivity by encouraging what Améry has chosen to term “enlightenment”: “the will and the ability to speculate phenomenologically, to emphathize [sic], to approach the limits of reason” (xi) without losing faith in the intrinsic value of living within these limits.

Thus far, it has been established that torture enacts a forcible destruction of the victim’s sense of self through a defamiliarization of the intersubjective encounter, the consequences of which can be described in terms of “narrative wreckage”. Emergence from this state of wreckage requires a rebuilding of self and a re-establishment of trust in the benign potential of intersubjectivity—a process that is predominantly mediated through storytelling, or narrative. As Ortiz reminds us, however, while the recounting of trauma initiates this process of rebuilding trust, it also carries with it the risk of retraumatization: “[i]n many instances, survivors not only recount what happened but begin to relive the torture once again; they are no longer on the witness stand but back in that awful setting, hearing the voices of their torturers and the screams of those being tortured, experiencing the smell of death, feeling the blows all over again” (Gerrity et al. 33). Consequently, the impetus to narrate must overcome the tortured person’s reluctance to revisit their traumatic experience. For the purposes of this thesis, I will primarily engage with published narratives of torture, in which—it can be assumed—the magnitude of this impetus was sufficient not only to initiate the recounting of trauma, but also to propel this recounting into the public arena. As a result, a base level of narrative momentum can be assumed. Insofar as non-fiction accounts of torture are concerned, my enquiry focuses instead on the ambiguous character of this impetus and its potential to conflate desire with demand in such a way as to subsume the subjectivity of the individual beneath the homogenizing discourse of human rights.

The impetus to recount one's torture must necessarily differ greatly between individuals, taking on a distinct character according to a variety of factors—such as the tortured person's personality, their political involvement, and the degree of rehabilitative support available to them, to mention but a few. On a more basic level, it is also necessary to account for the way in which this spectrum of narrative motivation incorporates both the benign and the destructive. By this I mean that the distinction between an account of torture that is given willingly by the tortured person to an encouraging and supporting audience, and one extracted by the demands of researchers, human rights advocacy groups, or immigration officials, must be acknowledged. Like the illness narratives described by Frank, we can map this ethical terrain as being bounded by encounters of dissymmetry. On the one side can be found the solitude generated by the restitution narrative, and on the other the exclusionary “solidarity of the afflicted” brought about by the manifesto style of quest narrative.

Without wishing to elide the crucial distinction between the abstract aetiology of illness and the explicit intent to harm that characterizes torture, I find Frank's analysis of illness narratives instructive in that it provides a serviceable template for the analysis of torture narratives. Frank himself speaks of the “overlap” between illness narratives and “survivor stories of inflicted traumas such as war, captivity, incest, and abuse” (69). As subdivisions of the “self-story” genre, then, one might expect this overlap to extend to the narrative conventions of this genre. I will thus use Frank's analysis of illness narratives as a point of departure for my examination of the ethical character of accounts of torture originating from apartheid South Africa.

The “indelible character” (Améry 34) of torture denies the coherence of a restitution narrative as such, in which the storyline focuses on the restoration of health in such a way as to portray illness as a mere blip on the radar of a healthy life, underpinned by “medicine's single-minded telos of cure” and its attendant excision of “the fear of mortality” (Frank 83-84). In many ways, this narrative can be seen to correspond to the process of “normalizing one's life through denial” which manifests itself as a coping mechanism in tortured persons. Denial, as Ortiz describes it, “represents a refusal to believe that such a terrible ordeal occurred at all, or that if it did occur, its psychological aftermath has not had any great impact on the individual, the family, or the community” (Gerrity et al. 24). Like the restitution narrative, moreover, denial mediates between the individual and the collective, thus permitting whole communities to “tak[e] refuge in a bitter silence” (Sartre xxviii).

Within an ethical framework, then, one of the consequences of denial is to create an uneasy complicity between the victims and the perpetrators of human rights abuses, in which the stigma of victimization and fear of retribution prevent responsibility from being rightly apportioned. In spite of this apparent “conspiracy of silence” (Gerrity et al. 151), however, narratives of denial are characterized by an extreme solitude in which the defamiliarization of the intersubjective encounter experienced during torture is protracted.

In the rehabilitation of tortured persons, furthermore, denial is seen to have some value as a “transitional survival skill”, but is discouraged as a “long-term solution” for coping with psychological trauma (Gerrity et al. 26). When such a “culture of denial” becomes an enduring feature of a community—in the authoritarian contexts of Hitler’s Germany, Pinochet’s Chile or apartheid South Africa, for example—fissures develop through which a range of counter-narratives emerge. In apartheid South Africa these counter-narratives attest to the reality of suffering under—and, often, at the behest of—the National Party government. While the culture of denial was fostered by both fear of retribution and wilful ignorance, it was also kept in place by the government strictures placed upon media freedom, resulting in what Allen Feldman has described as “a public culture of knowledge fragmentation and forgetfulness” (235). According to Merrett, “the history of South Africa after 1950 was characterised by an avalanche of security legislation which, among other effects, created a massive structure of censorship and self-censorship” (21). In consequence, opportunities for the narration of human rights abuses within the country were severely restricted, and so many such stories—both fictional and documentary—were published overseas. Attempts to import these works into South Africa were thwarted by the government’s right to embargo, and thus the majority were condemned to literary exile or, at best, limited circulation within the underground of domestic dissident politics.

Censorship in South Africa, Merrett informs us, “was a device used to maintain the illusion that the fine-sounding ideas of apartheid were not only desirable and moral, but realisable” (3). As Anton Harber notes, however, pitted against “some of the most original and far-reaching attempts to control and manipulate the imagination” could be found an equally innovative history of the subversion of censorship, a history that generated “the richest tales of imaginative and creative, and often successful, endeavour” (147). This history can be broadly divided into five distinct, but often overlapping, “venues of storytelling” (Schaffer and Smith 35): the affidavits of victims, witnesses, and their representatives; the

local and international media; the reports of human rights advocacy groups; anthologies of anti-apartheid solidarity writings such as *I Will Still Be Moved: Reports from South Africa* (1963); and, finally, published life narratives. For the purposes of this thesis, however, my focus will be on the development of the published life narrative and its ethical implications.

In contrast to Schaffer and Smith's claim that "[u]p until the release of Mandela [in 1990] there was no discourse on human rights that extended to blacks within the country, no history of published or public storytelling in a human rights context, and no public record of the violations of the majority black population's human rights" (57), my contention is that this latter venue of storytelling—the published narrative—was active in the establishment of the “generic contours” (Bakhtin 4) of the narration of human rights abuses in the region. While the “general discursive erethism” associated with the transition to democracy and the momentous disclosures of the TRC have been characterized in terms of “personal narrative yoked . . . to the reconciliatory processes of nation building within the regime of human rights” (Schaffer and Smith 56), the following analysis will demonstrate that this process of narrative codification has its origins in the narratives that emerged during the period of National Party governance. It is therefore to the development of the generic contours of narratives of human rights abuses in apartheid South Africa that I will now turn.

Differences in Interpretation:²²

The Narration of Torture in Apartheid South Africa

Apartheid is a dream of purity, but an impure dream.

J. M. Coetzee, “Apartheid Thinking”

Although state-sanctioned violence in South Africa is typically associated with the National Party's policy of apartheid, the first decade of the party's rule was characterized by a “relatively tolerant” attitude towards political dissent (Peters 135). Reports of interrogative torture in South African prisons only began to emerge during the early 1960s. Instrumental

²² This is taken from André Brink's *A Dry White Season*, in which Dr Hassiem—an independent pathologist who attended the autopsy of Gordon Ngubene on behalf of the family—explains the discrepancy between his verdict of strangulation and that of the state pathologist—who concludes that Gordon committed suicide by hanging—to Ben du Toit as follows: “We didn't differ much on the facts. . . . After all, we were examining the same body at the same time. But there were differences in interpretation” (205). Hassiem is subsequently detained and banned, and the inquest takes place in his absence. His interpretation of Gordon's death is thus withheld from the court and the media.

in this move towards increasing authoritarianism were the events of Sharpeville on 21 March 1960—in which police opened fire on a Pan Africanist Congress demonstration against the pass laws that restricted the movement of the non-white population—and the international media outcry that followed. As Håkan Thörn notes, Sharpeville “has often been recorded as a watershed in the history of South Africa, as well as a starting point for the international anti-apartheid movement” (128). While the “symbolic significance” of the Sharpeville shootings was immense, concern for the impact of apartheid on the status of human rights in South Africa had been present from an early stage, as demonstrated by the formation of the UN Commission on the Racial Situation in the Union of South Africa in 1953 and the boycott of South African goods advocated by various groups, including the ANC and the Trade Union Congress of Great Britain, from the early 1950s (Thörn 128, 130, 7). Sharpeville, however, fuelled a crucial transition in the discursive focus of the AAM, from the ideology of anti-imperialism and de-colonization underlying the UN’s declaration of 1960 as “The Year of Africa” and the British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan’s “Winds of Change” speech in January of that year, to the issue of human rights.

As South Africa grew into the familiar image of an authoritarian state secured by violence and repression during the early 1960s, so the discourse of human rights grew in stature from a relatively “empty declaration” to a “forceful political discourse” (Thörn 6)—a metamorphosis in which, Thörn argues, South Africa was heavily implicated. Of crucial importance to the development of human rights discourse into what Michael Ignatieff has called “the dominant moral vocabulary in foreign affairs”, Thörn suggests, was “the emergence of the transnational anti-apartheid movement” (6). As “one of the most influential social movements during the post-war era” (Thörn 5), the transnational AAM was fuelled by a flow of information attesting to the violations of human rights under apartheid from the local to the global. It is thus to an international, rather than internal, audience that torture narratives published during the apartheid era were ultimately directed. Moreover, the restrictions of censorship—made all the more severe by the state of emergency declared following the events of Sharpeville—gave rise to a complex process of “narrative circulation” (Schaffer and Smith 58). A key instance of such circulation can be found in the narration of the Bultfontein case of 1964, one of the foundational reports of torture in the history of apartheid.

In stark contrast to the South African Minister of Justice's statement on 22 January 1964 that "we have no shred of evidence before us about people who were tortured" ("Torture in South Africa" 57), on 13 April 1964, four policemen and a station commander from Bultfontein in the Free State were convicted of varying degrees of assault against two black South Africans arrested on suspicion of stealing a nominal sum of money. The surviving witness, Philomeh Makhethia, testified that both he and a fellow suspect, Izak Magaise, had been interrogated over a period of several hours, during which time they were "forced to sit on the floor with their handcuffed hands over their knees and a broomstick between their arms and knees" while repeatedly hit, whipped with a *sjambok*,²³ subjected to electric shocks, and suffocated with a plastic bag placed over the head and tightened around the neck ("Torture Men are to be Caned"). Magaise subsequently died from his injuries. The significance of the case, however, lies not so much in the conviction of white policemen for the assault and murder of black suspects,²⁴ but in the statements of Constables Gert Coetzee and Jacob Barend Maree, in which they acknowledged that the violent interrogation techniques for which they were convicted were commonplace in the South African Police (Peters 136; SAIRR 101; "Torture in South Africa" 19). In a UN special committee report of 8 December 1963, for example, Coetzee is quoted as having said "I have been taught to use, and I have used plastic bags myself in the past on suspected persons. It is common in investigations. I didn't [sic] think there is a police station in the country that does not use violence during questioning" ("Torture in South Africa" 19). Writing in 1985, the historian Edward Peters claimed that these revelations "brought a world of police torture relentlessly to light, and the spotlight has not been off South Africa since" (155). What follows is an analysis of the media channels through which this "world of police torture" was brought to light, and how this focus was sustained.

The Bultfontein case was extensively documented by both the local and international media—including South African periodicals the *Rand Daily Mail*, the *Star*, and *Contact*; the *Guardian* and the *News of the World* of Great Britain; the ANC newsletter *Sechaba*; and the

²³ A leather whip.

²⁴ This was, in itself, little more than a token gesture: their sentences "ranged from nine years and six strokes to three years and six cuts", in comparison to the sentences of life imprisonment given out at the Rivonia trial in the same year (SAIRR 100, 89).

African Communist, to mention but a few—and also appeared in the SAIRR²⁵ annual *Survey of Race Relations in South Africa* for 1964, as well as several reports of the UN special committee on the policies of apartheid,²⁶ and in Amnesty International’s “first formal report”, “an account of prison conditions in South Africa” published in 1965 (Peters 158). A salient feature of the reports of non-governmental organizations such as the SAIRR, the UN special committee and Amnesty International, however, is their dependence on the media for coverage of events such as Bultfontein. As Ann Marie Clark notes with respect to Amnesty International, for example, “[s]taff and volunteers in Amnesty’s central office at first gleaned information about political arrests from newspapers” and other such secondary sources (6). This was later developed in such a way as to supplement the facelessness of its position as “a disinterested and autonomous ‘third party’ actor in the international system” (11) with an approach that more closely resembles the face to face encounter, cultivated through tactics such as letter-writing networks and video testimony.

In a South African context, however, this demonstrates a pathway of information transfer from one “juridical framework” (Schaffer and Smith 36) to another—namely from the sphere of domestic law to that of international human rights advocacy—via channels of media reportage. To a lesser extent, the “official” reports of such organizations then feature alongside information obtained from media sources in explicitly political publications such as the *African Communist* and *Sechaba*. Information concerning the Bultfontein case, for example, appeared in the *African Communist* as part of an excerpt reprinted from the UN special committee report of 23 March 1964, in which the original source is cited as an article that appeared in the British newspaper the *Observer* on 15 March 1964—a month prior to the conclusion of the trial on 13 April 1964.

²⁵ A non-governmental organization established in 1929 and still in operation, the Institute has described itself and its work as follows:

The Institute furthers inter-racial peace, harmony and co-operation in South Africa by seeking truth in all inter-group relations and situations, and by making it known.

The Institute is not a political body, nor is it allied to or given financial help by any political party or Government. Institute membership is open to all, irrespective of race, colour or creed.

It is concerned not only with relations between white and brown and black, but between all groups: Afrikaans- and English-speaking; urban and rural. It opposes injustice, and unfair discrimination, and it seeks to further the social, economic and political development of all communities in South Africa.

The Institute believes that the country’s problems can be solved by hard thinking, hard work and goodwill, on the basis of facts found by dispassionate, objective, scientific enquiry. (SAIRR book jacket)

²⁶ This organization was founded in 1963 (Thörn 31).

Within a few short months, information had been reworked from the first hand observation implicit in direct quotation, into a story suitable for transnational news, which in turn was adapted to fit the needs of an international, non-governmental, human rights advocacy organization, before finally featuring in a journal with a clear political affiliation and agenda. The differing demands of these distinct—and yet interrelated—venues for the narration of torture resulted in a situation in which information was successively reframed. The *African Communist*, for example, printed the excerpt from the UN Special Report under the rubric “Fascist Terror in South Africa”, an inflammatory heading unlikely to have been endorsed by the UN. At each step in the transit of information, moreover, different demands come into play.

Narratives of human rights abuses in South Africa were thus codified from their very inception. As Ethel de Keyser of the AAM observes, a crucial component of the movement’s strategy from the early 1960s onwards involved a highly effective program aimed at “cultivat[ing] particular journalists” at influential newspapers (qtd. in Thörn 99) . An important corollary of this approach to the media was a predisposition towards narratives that conformed to the anti-apartheid agenda. This is, perhaps, why the Bultfontein case received so much attention, even though its victims were not political detainees. As an assault by a group of white Afrikaans policemen on two black men arrested on spurious—or so most accounts imply—charges in the Free State, the bastion of Afrikaner Nationalism, the case became a cipher for apartheid as an infringement of human rights, especially in the English-language press both within and without South Africa. This, in turn, was shaped by a barrage of censorship regulations primarily directed at local journalists. The government’s efforts to control the press had far-reaching effects due to two factors. First, a series of high-profile convictions, banning orders and house arrests—such as that of Harold Strachan, “the man who first broke through the conspiracy of silence with his courageous and defiant disclosures of the horrors of prison life” (“The Gentle Art of Persuasion”) in a series of articles published by the *Rand Daily Mail* following his release from Boksburg’s notorious Cinderella Prison in 1965—resulted in a widespread tendency towards precautionary self-censorship. Second, as Thörn notes, “since international journalists writing about South Africa, whether they were reporting from inside or outside the country, in most cases had to rely on either the South African press (legal or illegal) or on local journalists, in order to get access to vital information”, the government’s strategies of media control severely limited

the information to which the international press had access (102). In consequence, the media became a highly contested site for the narration of human rights abuses associated with apartheid, giving rise to what Thörn has termed a “struggle over information and interpretation” (99).

Problematic in itself, the contestation of the media with regard to the representation of apartheid within a human rights context placed non-governmental human rights advocacy organizations in a very precarious situation during the early 1960s. Their dependence on a highly politicized media for coverage of events such as Bultfontein stood in direct conflict with the mandate of such organizations to “accumulate credible and reliable data about violations and to build a case that can be presented to an official body established to study, recognize, and perhaps adjudicate rights violations” (Schaffer and Smith 36). Initially, these narrative venues appear to have developed along similar lines. In 1964, for instance, newspaper articles, the SAIRR’s *Survey of Race Relations*, and the reports of the UN special committee all adhere to a format that privileges quantitative reporting over qualitative narration:

The extent of repressive measures by the South African Government is indicated by some figures given by the Minister of Justice, Mr B.J. Vorster, in reply to questions in the House of Assembly on January 21 and 24, 1964. He stated that 3,355 persons had been detained under security legislation in 1963. Of these, 592 persons had been detained without trial under Proclamation 400 of 1960 which is in force in the Transkei; 594 persons, including two pregnant African women, had been detained under the ninety-day detention without trial clause of the General Law Amendment Act of 1963. Of the 2,169 others, 1,213 adults and sixty-four juveniles had been detained under the Suppression of Communism Act of 1950; nine adults under the Riotous Assemblies Act of 1956; 500 adults and forty-three juveniles under the Unlawful Organizations Act of 1960; and 285 and fifty-five juveniles under Section 21 of the General Law Amendment Act of 1962. (“Fascist Terror” 63-4)

This “stockpiling approach” to the narration of human rights abuses “is useful in establishing patterns”, but allows “human faces and emotional experiences [to] disappear into the statistical array” (Foster et al., *The Theatre of Violence* ix). In the UN special committee report and the *Survey of Race Relations*, moreover, this “facts and figures” mode is heightened by a frequent use of footnotes to reinforce the impression of reliability and credibility. This style is only somewhat modified in the documentation of actual cases, which tends towards a catalogue of abuses perpetrated by the judicial system of the apartheid state. An example of

this can be found in records of the alleged torture of detainees reproduced in the *African Communist* (figs. 1 and 2):

On November 28, 1963, in Bellville, complaints of assault by the police were made by six African prisoners in court as they were charged with sabotage.¹³⁹

On December 4, 1963, a State witness at the sabotage trial in Pietermaritzburg testified that police had assaulted him, threatened him with death if he refused to answer certain questions, threatened to detain his mother and cause his brother to be dismissed from his job, and placed him in a cold cell where he contracted double pneumonia. The witness was arrested immediately.¹⁴⁰

Mr. Arthur Goldreich, a former ninety-day detainee who had escaped, told the Press that Mr. Abdulhai Jassat, another former ninety-day detainee who escaped with him, had been beaten by twenty Special Branch policemen until he had collapsed. Mr. Goldreich added:

They put a wet sack around his head and tied the cords at his neck until he blacked out. After reviving him, they made him stand on one leg, holding a stone above his head while they stuck pins into his raised leg. The soles of his feet were then beaten with batons, and electrodes were placed on the toes with the current flowing. Finally they held him by the ankles out of a window forty feet above the street in trying to get a confession.¹⁴¹

Fig. 1. Extract from "Fascist Terror in South Africa: United Nations Document." *African Communist* 17 (1964): 62-97. 94.

¹³⁹ *Cape Times*, November 29, 1963.

¹⁴⁰ *Cape Times*, December 5, 1963.

¹⁴¹ *Sunday Express*, Johannesburg, January 12, 1964, quoted in *Spotlight on South Africa*, Dar-es-Salaam, January 21, 1964. Mr. Jassat had been detained on May 20, 1963, and Mr. Goldreich on July 11, 1963. They escaped from Johannesburg police headquarters on August 11 and subsequently fled from South Africa.

¹⁴² *House of Assembly Debates*, January 22, 1964, cols. 99-106.

Fig. 2. Extract from "Fascist Terror in South Africa: United Nations Document." *African Communist* 17 (1964): 62-97. 94.

While the reliance of non-governmental organizations such as the UN on media reportage casts doubt on the impartiality of such information, it also evokes a sense of authenticity. Given the apartheid government's repeated condemnation of such reports as subversive propaganda, constructing and maintaining an image of authenticity was a primary concern for organizations such as the UN and Amnesty International, whose international leverage is based upon their reputation for reliability and credibility. "Anonymity," as Schaffer and Smith observe, "limits the truth-value of the testimony, often rendering it suspect" (237 n.2).

While the manner in which tortured persons are identified in early reports of human rights abuses originating from South Africa provides sufficient corroborative evidence to meet this demand for authenticity, it falls short of the mutual recognition Douzinas claims is central to the practical functioning of human rights as a social ethos. Instead, such accounts tend to abstract the intersubjective encounter in a similar way to Frank's restitution narratives, by reducing the tortured person to one of many individuals qualified only by their status as "victims of apartheid". Like the restitution narrative, in which the "struggles of the self" are subordinated to "medicine's single-minded telos of cure" (Frank 92, 83-4), such accounts downplay the details of the individual's experience of torture in order to emphasize their capacity to substantiate the anti-apartheid movement's single-minded telos of ending apartheid. As "potent sites for challenges to the legitimacy of the South African government and its vast legal and extra-legal machinery of enforcement", then, these evidentiary narratives "motivated member nations of the international community to take steps, such as boycotts and divestment campaigns, that would begin to put increasing pressure on the South African government to end apartheid" (Schaffer and Smith 59). The primary function of these narratives was thus to "supplemen[t] and ad[d] personal immediacy to news reports" (59).

This aspect of early torture reports originating from South Africa is brought to the fore in the extreme political partisanship of publications such as *Sechaba* and the *African Communist*, which frequently reduce information gleaned from newspaper reports and non-governmental human rights advocacy organisations into list form, as exemplified by figure 3:

11 DEAD MEN

The following are the details of the 11 men who have died while in detention –with the verdicts in each case – as compiled by the "Rand Daily Mail".

"LOOKSMART" SOLWANDLE NOUDLE. Detained August 19, 1963, died September 5, 1963. Verdict: Suicide by hanging.

SULIMAN SALOJEE. Detained July 6, 1964, died September 9, 1964. Verdict: Suicide or attempted escape – fell from seventh floor of security headquarters in Johannesburg.

JAMES HAMA KWAYO. Detained August 26, 1966, date of death unknown. Verdict: Suicide by hanging – according to evidence at the terrorism trial.

LEON YUM PIN. Detained November 16, 1966. Verdict: Suicide by hanging.

IDENTITY, date of detention and death unknown. Death disclosed without detail in Parliament.

AH YAN. Detained about November-December, 1966, died January 5, 1967. Verdict: Suicide by hanging.

J. B. TUBAKWE. Detained September 10, 1968, died September 11. Verdict: Suicide by hanging.

NICODIMUS KGOATHE. Detained November 7, 1968, died February 1969. Verdict: Inquest magistrate unable, on evidence before him, to conclude that any person to blame.

SOLOMON MODIPANE. Detained February 2, 1969, died about February 28. Verdict: No inquest – magistrate endorsed postmortem report that death was due to natural causes.

JAMES LENKOE. Detained March 5, 1969, died March 10. Verdict: Suicide by hanging.

CALEB MAYEKISO. Detained May 13, 1969, died June. Verdict: Unknown. Natural causes according to statement by Brigadier Venter, head of security police.

These are known cases. We have no doubt that many others have died in detention and that details of such deaths have been suppressed. For instance on 28th January, 1967, the death of an unknown person was disclosed in Parliament in reply to a question and is not included in the above list.

Fig. 3. "They Died in Detention." *Sechaba* 3.10 (1969). 18.

Such evidentiary narratives provided ample material for the anti-apartheid movement. These early reports laid the groundwork for the arsenal of evidence relating to the South African government's poor human rights record used in the ensuing decade by the international media to foment what James Sanders has termed "a war of representation" (3). In this way, the media portrayal of apartheid South Africa became a crucial "nod[e] in a network of contested political concepts" (Thörn 102), particularly the *decolonization* of Africa and emergent discourse of human rights. The synchrony of this media war and the development of human rights into a "forceful political discourse" (6) thus suggests that evidentiary narratives originating from South Africa figured heavily in the establishment of what Clark calls "human rights norms"; the international standards recognized as "part of human rights

law”, including “core treaties, intergovernmental monitoring and inquiry mechanisms, official guidelines for implementation of human rights, and, perhaps most importantly, an altered consensus on how much the principle of sovereign non-interference entitles states to ignore international criticism” (5).

By placing emphasis on the factual details of human rights abuses, these narratives of evidence divert attention from the “struggles of the self” engendered by torture, underlining their contribution to the accumulation of empirical material with which to challenge the legitimacy of the National Party’s policy of apartheid. This, in turn, provides a clear example of the ease with which the ethical intention breaks down to the moral norm through exposure to “the political world of the impersonal ‘third’”. The demands of the burgeoning discourse of human rights norms—as opposed to the philosophical arguments from which they proceed—during the early 1960s, coupled with the ascendance of the AAM, can thus be seen to extend the solicitude of the “face to face epiphany” at the heart of the ethical intention to the principle of equality upheld in the “each to each” encounter.

This approach, however, risks underplaying the crucial element of desire in the functioning of human rights norms. Desire, as Douzinas asserts, “is the excess of demand over need” (*Human Rights and Empire* 47). In this way, “[e]very right...links a need of a part of the body or personality with what exceeds need, the desire that the claimant be recognised or loved as a whole and complete person” (48). More than this, desire of this kind is predicated upon mutual recognition, in which “I must be recognised by someone I recognise as admirable, intelligent and good to acquire these characteristics. I must reciprocally know myself in another. I can only become a certain type of person, if I recognise in the other the characteristics of that type, which are then reflected back onto me in her desire” (37).

The commonly practised alternative to mutual recognition, Douzinas argues, is exemplified by Hegel’s master-slave model, which “keeps the relationship with the other person external, treating him as inferior” (37). This unilateral recognition is dissatisfactory to both parties, however, because on the one hand, the slave’s recognition of the master “is forced” and remains unreciprocated, and on the other, the master receives recognition only “from someone not considered a worthy or equal partner” (37). What this suggests, then, is that the only satisfactory form of intersubjectivity must be based upon the form of mutual recognition described above. Evidentiary narratives fall short of fostering mutual recognition, and thus fail to support what Frank refers to as the “pedagogy of suffering”

(145), in which the imbalance of power inherent in the encounter with suffering finds “compensation in an authentic reciprocity in exchange” (Ricoeur, *Oneself* 191).

Recognition of this shortcoming is evident in the increasing prevalence of alternative narratives of human rights abuses. An important catalyst for this can be found in the work of Amnesty International, which orchestrated a shift in emphasis from evidentiary narratives to a form more closely aligned with Schaffer and Smith’s conceptualization of “life narratives”. In a sense, such narratives can be seen as an attempt to invert the sensation of “astonishment” that accompanied Jean Améry’s experience of torture; astonishment

at the fact that what happened to you yourself, by right was supposed to befall only those who had written about it in accusatory brochures: torture. A murder is committed, but it is part of the newspaper that reported on it. An airplane accident occurred, but that concerns the people who lost a relative in it. The Gestapo tortures. But that was a matter until now for the somebodies who were tortured and who displayed their scars at antifascist conferences. That suddenly you yourself are the Somebody, is grasped only with difficulty. That, too, is a kind of alienation. (39)

Within the context of human rights discourse, then, life narratives can be seen as an effort to give a face to the Somebody described by Améry—an endeavour in which he ironically succeeds through describing his alienation. In South Africa, this tendency is discernible in the movement away from the evidentiary narratives of the early 1960s towards accounts of torture—as well as other infringements of human rights, including detention without trial, forced removals, and the inferior education system, labour exploitation and pass laws inflicted upon the black population—that closely resemble the genre referred to by Frank as “self-stories”.

A Veritable Archive of Detention Texts:

The Establishment of a Paradigm for the Human Rights Self-Story in South Africa

A seminal text in the progression towards the self-story as human rights vehicle in South Africa is Ruth First’s account of her imprisonment under the Ninety-Day Detention clause, *117 Days*. First was detained on 9 August 1962, shortly after the Rivonia arrests, in which several leading figures in the ANC—including Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and Govan Mbeki—were arrested and subsequently sentenced to life imprisonment for sabotage. A

journalist and academic, First, and her husband, Joe Slovo—a prominent figure in the South African Communist Party (SACP) and *uMkhonto we Sizwe* (MK), the SACP-ANC military alliance—were banned during the state of emergency implemented in the aftermath of the Sharpeville shootings. Slovo went into exile in 1963 and, following her release after 117 days of detention in March 1964, First joined him in London, where *117 Days* was published in 1965. She later moved to Maputo, Mozambique, where she was killed by a letter bomb in 1982—an incident investigated as part of the TRC Amnesty Committee Hearings.

Like so many narratives of trauma, First's account of solitary confinement is redolent with the imagery of unmaking, which she describes in terms of "an anaesthetizing of self" (66). This process of anaesthetization, moreover, is described in terms of a breakdown in the reciprocity expected of interpersonal encounters:

It was like being sealed in a sterile tank of glass in a defunct aquarium. People came to look at me every now and then and left a ration of food. I could see out of my glass case and the view was sharp and clear, but I could establish no identity with what I could see outside, no reciprocal relationship with anyone who hove in view. (64)

This destruction of solicitude, however, is countered by the way in which First "interleaves with her own story a number of other stories of political detainees . . . whose experiences might otherwise have remained untold. . . it becomes a veritable archive of detention texts" (Jacobs 198). First's description of the "detainees' register"—consisting of "scratched initials" on the "blistering green paint" (First 36) of the door to the exercise yard in Johannesburg's Marshall Square Police Station—empowers the written word to serve "as a means of communication and a gesture toward solidarity, a collective meeting place where the individualization of official discourse could be undermined" (Gready 45-46). This concept is then developed in the text through a technique of "narrative interpolation" (Gallagher 95), in which the stories of other political activists persecuted by the apartheid regime are incorporated into First's account of detention in the form of italicized, third-person narratives.

First's use of narrative interpolation in *117 Days* depends on a sophisticated continuity technique that approximates the use of free indirect discourse in fictional prose—such as Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (Gallagher 95)—in which external events punctuate her solitary confinement in such a way as to integrate First's experience of incarceration with

the broader movement against apartheid. The first instance of interpolation is prompted by the arrival of Anne-Marie Wolpe, a friend and fellow activist, in the opposite cell:

The cell doors opened long enough for me to pass out the cotton wool and to catch a glimpse of Anne-Marie Wolpe—wife of our good friend Harold—haggard and drawn, perched on her high bed.

If Anne-Marie had been taken, Harold must have got safely away. The escape had come off, I decided. Thirty-six hours before I had gone into Marshall Square a breakout of the cells was being planned...

Lying on his stomach on the floor of the upstairs cell Ninety-Day detainee Chiba had caught a fleeting glimpse of shapes and sizes under the crack in his door.

'Who's got ginger hair?' he called to Arthur Goldreich, who had played the role of flamboyant artist turned country squire by living in the Rivonia house and providing the front for the secret political work that went on in the outbuildings. (12-13)

This account of the escape of Arthur Goldreich, Harold Wolpe, and Jassat and Mosie Molla from Marshall Square Police Station fulfils several functions. Occurring at an early stage in the development of First's narrative, it helps to establish a context for her detention through its incorporation of details specific to apartheid South Africa, such as the reference to the Group Areas Act of 1950 implicit in the sentence "Mosie and Jassat walked off towards the Indian residential area of Fordsburg; Arthur and Harold skirted the block desperately looking for the car that had not come" (14). The register of this account, moreover, recalls First's career as a journalist, while its quotation of newspaper headlines—"Four 90-day Men Escape" *said the newspaper headlines*. "Wives Held for Questioning" and "Goldreich and Wolpe escape to Francistown" *said the newspaper of 28 August*" (15)—ironically comments on her own role as a news item. It also demonstrates a retrospective reflection on her narrative, in congruence with Ricoeur's theorization of narrative identity and the recounted life.

With regard to narrative ethics, this technique of narrative interpolation foregrounds key elements of the ethical intention at work in First's account of detention. Her use of a naturalistic continuity technique as a means of introducing additional narratives is indicative of a retrospective process of integration, in which heterogeneous events are organized into "an intelligible whole". This is particularly evident in First's use of hindsight to attribute meaning to inexplicable events in her detention, as in the following passage:

The morning-shift wardress broke her silence.
 'Did you hear a shot last evening?' she asked.
 I had not.

Dennis Brutus, live-wire initiator of the campaign against apartheid in sport, himself sportsman, teacher, impassioned poet, had been shot in the side only two blocks from Marshall Square. He had been taken to Coronation Hospital for an emergency operation. Two policemen in surgical masks stood watch in the operating theatre, police patrolled the hospital grounds and stood guard outside Dennis's ward on the first floor. (40)

The wardress's question is symbolic of the spatial and temporal overlap of Brutus's arrest with First's detention in Marshall Square, and yet is sufficiently naturalistic to minimize the disruptive effect of interpolation, allowing the narrative to proceed effortlessly into a detailed account of Dennis Brutus's arrest and attempt at escape, resulting in his shooting by a police officer and eventual incarceration on Robben Island. This process is further emphasized by the reader's awareness of its active nature. In solitary confinement, First's lack of access to information from the outside world would have prevented her from filling in these gaps in meaning as they appeared. Our awareness of this makes the artifice of her narrative technique explicit. This, in turn, serves as a reminder of the fictional nature of narrative identity, while simultaneously acknowledging the necessity of this fiction.

A second ethical determination is apparent in First's use of embedment in *117 Days*, namely, that this technique underscores the way in which First's narrative of detention is told "with and for others". By this I mean that her narrative is positioned within a larger context of narratives of imprisonment and interrogation originating from apartheid South Africa. This has the effect of "add[ing] the stories of other lives and selves unlike her own, black experience of torture, male parallels to female experience....offer[ing] a sense of a larger commitment, of continuity and repetition....Her story becomes a complex, interwoven narrative, creating solidarity by intellectual and artistic means" (Clayton 141).

What is more, Jacobs notes, many of these narratives "might otherwise have remained untold" without First's departure to Britain and the freedom to publish she found there. A crucial component of this can be found in her empathetic recognition of "the narrative 'incompleteness' of life", which proceeds from the way in which all life narratives move steadily toward the inevitable fact of their protagonist's death—an event that cannot be recounted by oneself, but by those that survive it. This is manifested in her attempt to complete the story of Looksmart Solwandle Ngudle's death in detention, the most extended incidence of narrative embedment in *117 Days* and a particularly significant act given that Ngudle had been banned under the Suppression of Communism Act and thus could not be quoted except in a court of law (First 87). First's account, moreover, is characterized by what

Améry has called “the principle of hope” (40), imbuing Ngudle’s death with the meaning of martyrdom:

The magistrate returned a verdict that Looksmart Solwandle Ngudle had committed suicide by hanging himself, and his death was not due to ‘any act of omission involving or amounting to an offence on the part of any person’. The verdict ended the attempt to produce further evidence of the treatment of detainees but it was too late for officialdom to try to stifle that. Looksmart by his death and Tlale by his courage had lifted the lid for the first time on the systematic resort to the torture of Ninety-Day detainees by the Security Branch. (First 96)

The third and final ethical determination of First’s narrative rests on the contrast between the content and form of *117 Days*. Whereas the retrospective technique of narrative embedment gives rise to an account of incarceration that is explicitly “with and for others”, the immediacy of First’s personal experience conforms more closely to the genre of conversion narratives described by Ricoeur as accounts that testify to the “dark nights of personal identity”. At her lowest ebb, she confesses that

I was appalled at the events of the last three days. They had beaten me. I had allowed myself to be beaten. I had pulled back from the brink just in time, but had it been in time? I was wide open to emotional blackmail, and the blackmailer was myself. They had tried for three months to find cracks in my armour and had found some. The search was still on. Some, many perhaps, of my weaknesses had been revealed to the Security Branch; if they had an inkling of others, I would have no reserves left...I had too little emotional resilience left to resist a savage new onslaught on my vulnerable centre...I was in a state of collapse not for fear of what would happen to me physically, of numberless peeling days in detention, but for the gnawing ugly fear that they could destroy me among the people whose understanding and succour I most needed, and that once they had done that I would have nothing left to live for. (122-23)

Despite not being physically tortured *per se*, such episodes testify to First’s loss of faith in the benign potential of the intersubjective encounter following the destructive effects on her psyche of prolonged solitary confinement and interrogation. The loss of faith dramatically recounted in *117 Days* is, however, juxtaposed against the confessional mode of First’s retrospective narrative. In freely exposing her “vulnerable centre”—both in terms of her personal fears and the incriminating information she possesses—to the reader, First’s narrative facilitates an intersubjective encounter characterized by reciprocity. By revealing the information she so assiduously kept from her interrogators, First extends both trust and a solidarity of concern for the value of human rights towards her reader. This, in turn, encourages the process of mutual recognition at the heart of solicitude.

As an “archive of detention texts”, *117 Days* could be seen to approximate the anthologization of testimony identified by Schaffer and Smith as an influential venue of storytelling in the field of human rights. “Such anthologies”, they claim, “gain their ethical force by gathering multiple narratives of shared victimization into one volume whose purpose is to challenge and rewrite history, call the reader to recognition, and spur action” (Schaffer and Smith 45). In *117 Days*, First’s narrative *is* used as a framework for the articulation of “multiple narratives of shared victimization” at the hands of the apartheid state. And it is the symbiosis of two narrative identities—the confessional and the journalistic—I argue, that makes *117 Days* an ethically successful account of human rights abuses in apartheid South Africa. Unlike the anthologies of testimony discussed by Schaffer and Smith, First succeeds in “encourag[ing] empathetic identification” by prescriptive example, without “reducing differences to sameness” (Schaffer and Smith 47). It is important to note, however, that *117 Days* is an exceptional text. In many cases, the publication of life narratives in service to a human rights agenda carries with it a much higher ethical cost.

Following the authoritarian crackdown of the early 1960s, apartheid South Africa became a focal point in the development of the human rights life narrative. Taking its place in this development alongside the narratives of evidence circulated by the oppositional media and non-governmental human rights advocacy organizations, *117 Days* additionally exemplifies the potential for reciprocity in the narration of suffering. First’s text, furthermore, can be seen to establish a paradigm for the memoir genre in white South African writing. Like *117 Days*, Hugh Lewin’s prison memoir, *Bandiet*, attests to the defamiliarization of the intersubjective encounter that occurs during interrogation, in which the presence of others serves not to alleviate pain but to exacerbate it:

But all I could do was ease from one leg to the other, rocking slowly, gently, trying to think the pain away, to concentrate on the legs and the ankles and thighs, feel them straining to burst; trying to think away the voices pressing in, persistent—you’re going to talk, talk—gnawing into the pain, stalking round and round, and the window opposite with its tatty small curtain (who could have thought to put such a stupid piece of curtain up in the window?) faded and the sun went and the lights below shot up in flickers, and the voices kept pressing in, pressing persistent nagging nagging. (16)

First published in London in 1974, *Bandiet* achieves an effect of solicitude similar to that of First's memoir through its integration of the narratives of fellow *bandiets* which "might otherwise have remained untold":

Next door, my former flat-mate, Ernest, was being interrogated. He had been detained the previous day. Four months later, he was the prime witness in the case in which John Harris was charged—and convicted—of planting the bomb in the station, killing one and seriously injuring two others. Five months after the case, John Harris was executed at Central Prison, Pretoria. (24)

Like First, Lewin uses a naturalistic continuity device to integrate the narratives of others with his self-story. Integral to this, moreover, is an awareness of "the narrative 'incompleteness' of life" equivalent to that found in *117 Days*, in which Lewin seeks to contribute to the recounting of the lives of those who died, such as John Harris. A particularly effective example of this is the publication of an account of "The Death of Bram Fischer" and a transcription of a note written by Denis Goldberg detailing Bram Fischer's medical treatment prior to his death, smuggled out of Pretoria Local Prison by Baruch Hirson in 1974. These documents, as well as other information regarding people still imprisoned at the time of Lewin's departure from South Africa, were excluded from *Bandiet's* original publication for fear of revealing incriminating information. Their inclusion in the 2002 edition therefore demonstrates a continuous process of narrative revision, in which events are emplotted—and hence accrue meaning—according to the changing circumstances of the narrator's interaction with others and the world. Again, as in the case of First's text, this is augmented by an explicitly retrospective augmentation of the overlap between these narratives, in which the author's hindsight creates a strong connection between the narrative present and its future. In this way, then, *Bandiet*, like *117 Days*, exemplifies the way in which narratives of suffering can dramatize the ethical intention to live "with and for others". It is possible, moreover, to see the paradigm of narrative embedment established in First's memoir of detention as the basis for not just prison memoirs in the apartheid era, but a range of narrative reflections on the legacy of apartheid in white writing, such as Rian Malan's *My Traitor's Heart* (1989) and Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull* (1998).

Narratives of Heroism and Hope:²⁷

Black Consciousness and the Human Rights Self Story

The rise of Black Consciousness in the 1970s, however, paved the way for a very different kind of self-story. Like *117 Days* and *Bandiet*, texts like Molefe Pheto's *And Night Fell* and Emma Mashinini's *Strikes* can be loosely aligned with the genre of quest narratives through their framing of autobiographical accounts of suffering as part of a larger quest to expose the human rights violations of apartheid and thus encourage international condemnation of the National Party government's methods of social control. Unlike the memoir form that characterizes *117 Days* and *Bandiet*, however, these texts adopt a more aggressive approach to the integration of life narratives and human rights activism. Their distinct emphasis on the social body risks overwhelming the assertion of self, transforming these "autobiographical acts" (Nuttall and Michael 298) into manifestos of the type described by Frank. This is corroborated by the contemporary reception of these texts. Writing in 1973, the critic James Olney's readings of South African autobiographies interprets them as manifestos, stating that "[t]he lesson that [black] South African autobiographies teach is a political and social one", in which "opposition to the oppressive policies of apartheid" provides a crucial means of social cohesion for a community divided—"detrribalized,' urbanized, alienated, often driven into exile"—by these very policies (8, 17).

Black South African non-fictional narratives of detention and torture display a tendency to present the experience of the individual "as synonymous with the wider political culture of struggle" in South Africa (Nuttall and Michael 303). In the words of Molefe Pheto, for example, "[m]y own particular circumstances are a mirror of the sufferings of others before me and—I hope not for long—after me" (7). These narratives, moreover, "frequently negotiat[e] personal trauma by equating it with the struggle for human rights" (Nuttall and Michael 303). Mashinini's childhood relationship with her father, for example, is described as "my first fight for human rights" (7).

Anachronistically, my discussion of these texts will begin with *Strikes*, primarily because of the way in which Mashinini's narrative consolidates the underlying ethical determinations found in Pheto and Farasani's earlier accounts. Mashinini's narrative displays characteristic features of the torture narrative, attesting to both the destruction of self

²⁷ This is taken from Nuttall and Michael's discussion of the genre of black female autobiography in South Africa during the 1980s and '90s ("Autobiographical Acts" 305).

engendered by torture²⁸ and the conscious construction of a narrative identity through retrospective interpretation of events, described in David Schalkwyk's analysis of *Strikes* as "an acute sense of an historically changing self, one in which earlier beliefs, attitudes, and experiences are represented and re-appraised by a later, narrating self" (25).

Described by Nuttall and Michael as belonging to the definitively South African cultural tradition of the "autobiographical act", this "typical autobiography" (Gallagher 85) presents Mashinini's personal identity as strongly informed, if not *formed*, by the notion of a highly politicized collective identity. Although characterized by ambivalence towards the compatibility of these identities, the overwhelming emphasis in this account is on the conceptualization of the recovery of self in the aftermath of torture as inextricably bound to the success of the anti-apartheid movement and subsequent realization of a post-apartheid state. To Mashinini, "[d]eath within a new society would represent a return, a recovery of the self, in a place, a location, in which one belongs in a way that apartheid publicly disavowed" (Nuttall and Michael 302-303). *Strikes* thus bears a resemblance to the restitution style of quest narrative, in that it privileges a presentation of the narrator's interrogative torture as evidence of the wrongs of apartheid, as opposed to a more existential account attesting to the "struggles of the self" engendered by such abuse. As Mashinini states in her preface, this account is primarily intended "to show how, in spite of suffering, our lives are enriched by the struggle to uphold human rights and in the fight for the dignity of individuals" (xv).

Crucially, however, this narrative is framed in such a way as to distort the process of recognition encouraged by the self-story. As Nuttall and Michael observe, "[t]rauma constantly exceeds the ideal of the future nation" (305) that Mashinini clings to. The authenticity of the text as a purely autobiographical account is undermined, moreover, by Mashinini's confession of narrative dependence, in which she tells of the transcription and extensive reworking of her predominantly oral narrative in preparation for publication:

[Betty Wolpert] interviewed me and recorded my story on every possible occasion She would then post the tapes to Ruth Vaughan, her collaborator in London, who would rapidly transcribe them so that I could immediately work on the rough draft. . . .

²⁸ See, for example, the following excerpt from *Strikes*:

It's odd what happens when you don't see yourself in a mirror for such a long time. You don't recognise yourself. You think, who am I? All I had to recognize was a jersey which was sent to me by a friend. It was her jersey and I could recognize it. But I didn't know any longer how to recognize myself. (87)

It was Betty who took my manuscript to The Women's Press, and it was at her house in London that I completed the final draft and worked with my editor, Alison Mansbridge. It was lovingly nurtured by her, and she helped to organise my hastily scribbled thoughts, which at times were difficult for her to understand because of language differences and my level of education As I am not a writer by profession, but rather a speaker, this made her task greater. (xvi)

As an example of the practice of collaborative autobiography in apartheid South Africa,²⁹ Mashinini's text foregrounds the uneasy relationship between the black narrator of torture and her predominantly white audience. The narrator's personal struggles are thus subsumed not only by the universalizing simplification of her testimony into "a triumphant record of a woman's resilience in the face of men's oppression", but its monochromatic reduction to a "story of a black woman's trials and tribulations" in apartheid South Africa (xi). Ethically speaking, the dependency of Mashinini's narrative on her white interlocutors sets up a portrayal of intersubjectivity characterized by ambivalence and inequality, in which the 'face to face encounter' is irredeemably clouded by the differentiating factors of gender and race. This sense of unequal power overwhelms the compensatory potential of this narrative of suffering, and thus obstructs the text's ability to sustain "an authentic reciprocity in exchange" (Ricoeur, *Oneself* 191).

A similar state of intersubjective obscurity can be found in the uncomfortable conflict between intimacy and alienation that pervades Molefe Pheto's *And Night Fell* and Tshenuwani Simon Farasani's *Diary from a South African Prison*. As ethical performance, Pheto's text typifies the conflict faced by Black Consciousness writers in apartheid South Africa, described by Mark Sanders as "the difficulty, for black South African intellectuals of this era, of setting to work ethico-political responsibility as a generalizing foldedness with the other" (*Complicities* 95). In Pheto's memoir, this difficulty can be attributed, broadly-speaking, to two tendencies. The first has its basis in the "brutally political" (*Complicities* 93) rhetoric of Pheto's testimony, which begins with two iconic references to the movement coined by Es'kia Mphahlele as "decolonising the mind" (qtd. in Chapman 245). The first is a quotation from the poem "Concerning Hopes" by the Palestinian resistance poet Mahmoud Darwish; a poem which reads as a "catalogue of revolutionary uprisings" (Elmessiri 88); while the second makes reference to a seminal text of the Négritude movement, Frantz Fanon's *Black*

²⁹ A practice which, Nuttall and Michael note, "usually involved white women acting as scribes for black women's stories" (306).

Skin, White Masks.³⁰ In aligning the literature of decolonisation and a nascent nationalism with “the situation of Black South Africans today”, Pheto’s text evidences the belated embrace of the philosophy of Négritude in South Africa. Rejected by the black intellectual elite of South Africa during the early decades of apartheid, Négritude found a salient analogue in Black Consciousness, a movement which sought to reclaim confidence in a strong, self-determined black identity as a means of “providing an alternative to psychological complicity with racial oppression”, and opposing the apartheid government’s attempt “to ‘tribalise’ the black intelligentsia’s racial consciousness and to divert its energy into ethnic-based development” (Halisi 100, 103). Pheto’s close affiliation with Black Consciousness is reflected in his role as director of the Johannesburg-based Music, Drama, Art and Literature Institute (MDALI), an organisation at the forefront of the Black Arts movement which “spoke of self-determining the artistic activities and destinies of Black artists and insisted on forcefully breaking the chains of exploitation as well as liberating the mental and creative processes of these artists” (Pheto 16). “It was MDALI which,” Pheto asserts, “for the first time in South Africa, used the words ‘Black Arts’ aggressively and positively to inspire action towards liberation, in line with the then current philosophy of Black Consciousness” (16).

The influence of Black Consciousness philosophy is particularly evident in the dichotomy established between black and white in Pheto’s text, as emphasized by the use of capitals to promote the status of these words from common nouns to proper nouns: “I decried apartheid in the arts, demanded that we Blacks determine our cause, recommended a dissociation from White artists and impresarios as long as the colour bar lasted, and I spoke out on the exploitation of the Black artist by the White gallery owners” (11). This approach can be seen to subscribe to the clinical psychologist Noel Chabani Manganyi’s theory concerning the polarity that differentiates the existential experience of being black from that of being white:

The basic structure of existence is historical. It is specifically man’s historicity and his being a decisive being (man decides what to become) which have infused variations on this given existential structure. It is these two factors which have made it possible if not imperative for us to say that there is a mode of existence (of being-in-the-world) which may be characterised as being-white-in-the-world and being-black-in-the-world. There is sufficient documentation of the fact that the history of being in the world...of the black and white races of the world is difference. This history has

³⁰ This was first published in English translation in 1967.

been so different, in fact, that one is justified to talk in terms of a black and white existential experience. (27-8)

In the narration of the black existential experience during the 1970s and '80s, moreover, can be found “an autobiographical impulse” that “suggested not so much the individuality of being as the assertion of identity in harsh, discriminatory times” (Chapman 223). This identity can be further qualified as a collective identity, in which context “writing about an individual then becomes equivalent to writing about a community” (Manganyi, qtd. in Wilson 17). Like Black Consciousness philosophy, literature of this type sought “to articulate mass sentiments” through the autobiographical form, in a similar manner to the “explicit political pre-occupation” of contemporary Black Consciousness novelists such as Zwelonke, Serote and Sepamla (Halisi 101; Ndebele 23). Narration thus becomes a highly ethical act of solidarity, in which the story of racial oppression and suffering is told with and for the entire black community. The Black Consciousness project of “self-realisation”, then, cultivated a self “that was not solitude”, but solitude (Pityana et al. 2).

The attempt at solitude is apparent in Pheto’s integration of the narratives of others with his self-story in a manner similar to *117 Days*—the death of Ahmed Timol (129), the detention of Trevor Bloem (136), the “sensational arrest” of Breyten Breytenbach at Jan Smuts Airport (170) are all mentioned, as well as the trial of Eric Molobi (170) and the suspicious murder of the dissident journalist Henry Nxumalo (179). This attempt at solitude, however, had its limitations. The defamiliarization of the intersubjective encounter that characterizes torture reaches a frenzied pitch in Pheto’s account of his interrogation, through imagined acts of retributive violence against the “sadist swine” (125):

Again, for the millionth time, I wished that I were tall and strong, backed also by a thorough knowledge of karate. That during the time he had given me to show my wares in the art, I would ‘accidentally’ belt this monster in front of me so that he would be unable to recover, mutilate his ribs and throat and eyes and pull his intestines out. Having finished with him, I would turn to this shadow called Makhomisane, cut him on the bridge of the nose with one swipe and make a blind run for freedom, taking with me any moving policeman trying to stop me. (124)

The endeavour to re-establish trust in benign frameworks of interpersonal communication typically associated with the torture narrative is, however, subverted by the circumstances of *And Night Fell’s* narration. Pheto confesses that:

If MDALI was racist because it did not cater for Whites and stood for Black positiveness, then, speaking for myself, I accept that I am a racist, and healthier for it

to boot. I offer no apologies for that type of racism to my fellow Black critics and their White friends, to the régime or to anyone who supports such an accusation against MDALI, especially to the Black critics, some of them poets who flirt with the Whites of Lower Houghton, the rich White suburb of Johannesburg, reading 'Black' poetry there. (17)

But this stance is undercut by the necessity of sustaining “an unwelcome and deforming intimacy” with the white liberal (M. Sanders, *Complicities* 95). This is exemplified in one of the first developed scenes of *And Night Fell*, in which, prior to a visit to the United States, Pheto finds himself stuck with the manuscript of his prison memoirs incriminatingly close to a burning “Bantu Administration-owned bottle store”, at which “[t]he police has just arrived, armed with all sorts of weapons” (9). Pheto is trapped—“I dared not make a move or run. I would be considered a suspect with the carrier bag, alone, so near to the burning bottle store...The manuscript would have led them to associate me with the fire” (9)—until the fortunate appearance of Margaret More, “a friend who was driving to my house to bid me farewell”, who rescues Pheto from the scene and thus facilitates the safe transit of the manuscript to New York (10). This fortunate coincidence is attributed, moreover, to the “African gods” by Pheto (10), thus downplaying the agency of More’s goodwill.

As a transnational human rights narrative, *And Night Fell* displays a relationship with its primarily white readership characterized by deformation and dissymmetry. Black Consciousness assimilated the “striking images” of the “oppressive existential intimacy” (M. Sanders, *Complicities* 96) between the black self and the white other performed in texts of the 1950s and early 1960s, such as Can Themba’s *The Will to Die* (1972)³¹ and Bloke Modisane’s *Blame Me on History* (1963)—texts described by Chapman as “crowded with the demands of [black] identity-making, survival techniques, and community necessity” (237). This intimacy is, furthermore, an unequal affiliation. The implication, in the text, of a white reader whose sympathy is born of a liberalistic concern for human rights favours an asymmetrical intersubjective encounter redolent of the “one-way recognition” described by Douzinas. It contradicts, moreover, the public image cultivated by Black Consciousness as an ideology that “scorned the advice, tutelage and patronage of whites” (Chapman 328).

Like Modisane in the autobiographical *Blame Me on History*, Pheto’s narrative voice in figures “as a beggar dependent on the ‘charity’ of a white reader” (M. Sanders, *Complicities*

³¹ Themba died in Swaziland in 1968; his works were banned in South Africa and only became readily available after his death.

96). As a work of political protest, *And Night Fell*'s authority depends on "the cooperation of the listener or reader", which, in turn, "hinges...on being touched by the tale of a 'beggar'" (*Complicities* 107). Pheto's quest for human rights in South Africa is off-loaded, in a sense, to become a burden on the conscience of the enfranchised white reader. Insofar as the encounter with suffering is concerned, Pheto's text eschews the pedagogy of suffering for what Douzinas has described—after the philosopher Richard Rorty—as the "pedagogy of pity" (*Human Rights and Empire* 72). Pity, however, "is addressed by a superior to an inferior, it is the patronising emotion of looking down at the person pitied" (75). Coupled with the conflation of black experience as suffering presented in Pheto's text, the cultivation of pity in *And Night Fell* can be seen as the result of a purposeful manipulation of the face to face encounter. The ethical repercussions of this asymmetrical interaction contradict Black Consciousness's call for the decolonization of the mind by maintaining a distinctly colonial relationship of paternalism between white and black, in which the black population of South Africa is perceived as incapable of achieving emancipation without the "sympathetic patronage" of white liberal society (Modisane, qtd. in M. Sanders, *Complicities* 99).

More than this, this facet of Pheto's text comes dangerously close to what Tony Vaux—a long term employee of the British NGO Oxfam—has identified as a significant ethical concern in the practice of humanitarian work, in which "the equation of white with power and black with suffering [creates] a barrier" (165) that is sustained by both participants in a manner similar to that of the Hegelian master-slave paradigm. For the suffering person, the testimony becomes—like the restitution narrative described by Frank—a means of acceding to "a place in the moral order that subordinates him as an individual", whereas, for the reader, engaging with this testimony becomes a way of satisfying a "selfish desire to assuage [one's] own feelings of compassion for those in need" without having to take on the responsibility of action (Frank 93; Vaux 173). *And Night Fell* thus fails to avoid two significant ethical pitfalls. Within a South African context, the text enacts an aggressive affirmation of black solidarity, thus alienating readers of other races in a similar way to the manifesto described by Frank. Within a transnational context, it appears to endorse an asymmetrical intersubjective relationship through the address of its portrayal of impotent black suffering to a politically empowered white liberal audience capable of taking varying degrees of action against the system responsible for the author's suffering,

The final non-fiction account of torture from the period of apartheid rule to be discussed in this chapter is *Diary*, the testimony of a Lutheran pastor detained and tortured by the South African Police on four occasions, twice in 1977, once in 1982, and once again in 1986, following his collaboration with Amnesty International in the exposure of government-sanctioned torture in South Africa. The storyline of Farasani's narrative has been described by the Reverend Beyers Naudé—a prominent anti-apartheid activist—in terms of “the terror of torture, the fear of death, and the eventual victory of faith” (Farasani book jacket), which is, in turn, suggestive of the phoenix metaphor that Frank identifies as a defining feature of the automythology form of quest narrative.

Farasani's text displays many of the features that have come, in the course of this thesis, to define the “generic contours” of the torture narrative. In his “Message to the Reader”, for example, a ‘brotherhood of pain’ is established through the alignment of Farasani's experience with that of other South African detainees: “Is this the way Timol, Mohapi, Biko, Aggett, Muofhe, Nchabeleng, and the many others have met their end?” (7). He also speaks of the destruction of the self engendered by torture, in which the brutality of interrogative assault reduces him to no more than a lump of meat as physical pain overwhelms his sense of identity: “In the center of that cell, I looked like a mound of pain, a severed piece of elephant flesh” (70). He becomes “a creature without rights, a nonbeing” (31). Party to this destruction of self, moreover, is a failure of recognition: when, after his third detention, his wife and daughters visit Farasani in prison, his daughter refuses to kiss him, saying “No, this is not my father; my father is the one in the photo” (82), which his wife later explains as “You had changed; you were completely different. You were not the one I knew. I cannot explain it. You had changed: your eyes—you were swollen—your head, your arms. You were different. I do not know . . .” (83).

Farasani also describes torture in terms of a defamiliarization of the intersubjective encounter. This defamiliarization, moreover, is not simply limited to the sadism of his torturers, who respond to his cries of pain with mockery, rather than compassion: “I cried like a baby and begged for mercy. In response the police sang, led by their dedicated captain, ‘Hallelujah, let us praise the Lord.’ The overzealous captain mocked me: ‘Dean, you are a man of God. Call God! He will help you!’” (70). In an almost inconceivable moment of altruism, Farasani attempts to offer his torturers the redemptive power of forgiveness, an attempt that is rejected: “The last time I saw one of my torturers was May 24. On that day he

had looked away from me, although I had hoped to exchange a smile, a small seed of love in world of murder and hatred” (56). As Gallagher notes, religious discourse was a highly contested mode of expression in apartheid South Africa (40); it is a contest dramatically performed in Farasani’s narrative:

As the hunt for dangerous documents went on, I took my Bible and started to read: ‘Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins. . . . ‘ I had hardly gone through half this fifty-eighth chapter of Isaiah when the Afrikaner sergeant cast a menacing glance at me, then at the page, and after reading the first few verses he exploded, “This is the hell that we shall not stand. Always reading the wrong verses of the Bible. Stop this kak. . . . After all, you don’t even understand the Bible. No Lutheran does. All Communists, Catholics, Lutherans, Anglicans, Methodists, English Press! The Christian Institute, Black People’s Convention . . . the South African Students Organisation . . . the South African Council of Churches, the World Council of Churches. Your Lutheran World Federation! All ugly organizations promoting murder and rape [sic] of children and women under the cloak of human rights—wolves in sheep’s clothing. The United Nations. Double standards. This government, my government, comes from God. Why don’t you read Romans 30? [In fact he meant Romans 13.]³² Only one church—and I am very proud that I belong to it—preaches the true gospel in South Africa. Give this damn Bible to me!” (22-23)

According to Robert Fatton, Jr., at the time of Farasani’s political activity and consequent detention, “Black Theology” and “Black Consciousness” were “[i]nseparably bound together” (119). “Black Theology”, then, became a vehicle for “revolt against the spiritual enslavement of black people” and a means “by which to affirm black humanity” (Basil Moore, qtd. in Fatton 107). In the words of Steve Biko, “[t]he Bible must not be seen to preach that all authority is divinely instituted. It must rather preach that it is a sin to allow oneself to be oppressed” (qtd. in Hopkins 197). In Farasani’s account as in Pheto’s, a dichotomy is established between oppressor and oppressed that extends beyond the limits of the torture chamber to provide a paradigm for South African society under apartheid. As Farasani himself notes, “[i]n one small sense this is a personal story, but in another wider, more realistic sense it is South Africa’s tragic story” (8). Within the context of South Africa,

³² This chapter begins as follows:

Let every soul be subject unto the highest powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.

For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same[.] (Rom. 13: 1-3)

Farasani's text takes on attributes of the manifesto, and thus primarily promotes an asymmetrical intersubjective encounter. While Farasani's recognition of his torturer can be seen as an attempt to redress this asymmetry by extending a "small seed of love" symbolic of the benign potential for intersubjective communication, his torturer's rejection of this attempt places the burden of responsibility for the asymmetry on the oppressor, and thus serves as an emphatic reinscription of the sadism at work in torture.

In counterpoint to the destruction of self described in *Diary*, however, can be found a reclamation of self. Unlike the majority of torture narratives, this reclamation of self is not entirely bound to the act of retrospective narration, but seems to take place within the temporal framework of the narrative. Farasani's account begins, unusually for a non-fictional torture narrative, in the third person: "The medium-sized church always seemed to burst at its seams. On that day, young and old, men and women were in the church to listen to God's Word. Their dean, now aged twenty-nine, was with them. He preached on Matt. 20: 20-28" (17). It is not until the moment of his encounter with "the all-powerful security police" that this third-person narrative switches, suddenly and without warning, to the first-person:

The dean looked back at his congregation. Flabbergasted, almost numb all over, he suddenly felt very alone.

I expected God to intervene. After all, was I not preaching the truth? Was it not God who called me into ministry to preach the Word, the Word of love, justice, and equality in apartheid South Africa? I looked all around me, and finally straight into the overcast sky, but God seemed to have retired behind those unthinking black clouds. Was God perhaps on holiday? (17)

With the onset of Farasani's persecution by the state, then, comes an awakening of the self and an assertion of subjectivity. Farasani is removed from his community and isolated as an individual target of torture. With regard to this, William T. Cavanaugh has noted that "[t]orture aims...at the destruction of social bodies and the construction of walls around the individual—though the walls have ceased to be protected" (4). This process of "atomization" creates a self isolated from all benign intersubjective relations and thus exposed only to sadistic encounters. In this way, then, Farasani's subsequent identification with the figure of Christ can be seen as a re-affirmation of a collective identity:

If I must hang in the air, Lord, let it be. Your Son hung on the cross. Who am I to be identified with his suffering! What an honor! Your son suffered to regain the life—the rights of all people enslaved and oppressed by death and the devil. He died for the whole world. (43)

The tone of Farasani's account develops from despair to acceptance, a transformation that is performed in both the content and form of the narrative. But, in establishing an analogy between himself and the figure of Christ, the ethics of this act of transformation become ambiguous. Like the manifesto style of Pheto's *And Night Fell*, Farasani's narrative "reaches out" (Frank 123). In its negotiation between the political and the personal, *Diary* circumvents the dissymmetry encountered in the manifesto by using the figure of Christ as a means of equilibrating the narrator's implicit demand for recognition with a collective sense of existential fragility. The theme of identification with Christ's suffering—which, as Cavanaugh reminds us, "is redemptive for the whole world" (280)—is maintained in Farasani's highly publicized international exposure of the human rights abuses in apartheid South Africa. Farasani thus succeeds in upholding the reconceptualization of Christianity advocated by Steve Biko and the Black Consciousness movement.

Ethically speaking, the ambiguity of Farasani's narrative proceeds from its vulnerability to what Frank has identified as a common limitation of the automythology storyline: such stories "can present the burning process as too clean and the transformation as too complete, and they can implicitly deprecate those who fail to rise out of their own ashes" (135). In portraying himself as a Christ-like figure, Farasani risks underplaying the destructive effects of torture upon the self, and thus failing sufficiently to mourn that which is obliterated through physical pain and the defamiliarization of the intersubjective encounter. Consequently, such narratives tend to minimize the magnitude of the change in worldview engendered by torture, as well as the degree of repairwork required to trust in the potential for benevolence in the intersubjective encounter. By portraying their protagonists as exceptional, such narratives are liable to alienate the vast majority of readers, including both the "ordinary" person who has never been subjected to torture and those who have failed to recover from its trauma. As the following chapter will demonstrate in greater detail, apartheid-era torture narratives that conform to the automythology storyline can be seen to establish a topos for testimony originating from South Africa that has become increasingly problematic in the post-apartheid era—namely, that the stoic endurance of suffering brings with it the boon of enlightenment, heroism and authority. This, in turn, limits the capacity for identification with the narrator, and with it the possibility of an equivalence brought about by the "shared admission of fragility and, finally, of mortality" (Ricoeur, *Oneself* 192).

This overview of non-fiction narratives of torture originating from South Africa during the period of apartheid offers a quite comprehensive map of the ethical terrain covered in the narration of human rights abuses. Bounded on the one side by Ruth First's subtle performance of reciprocity in *117 Days*, and on the other by an asymmetry indicative of a Levinasian solitude of the self such as that suggested in Molefe Pheto's *And Night Fell* and Tshenuwani Simon Farasani's *Diary*, a salient feature of this landscape is its susceptibility to the corruption of Frank's "pedagogy of suffering" by an excess of pity and power. Vaux observes that "the motive of pity so easily interacts with the motive for cruelty, and the desire to help so easily becomes the desire for power" (95). With respect to the narration of torture in apartheid South Africa, this is complicated even further, to the extent that the motive to narrate easily interacts with the motive for patronage, and the desire to be helped easily becomes the desire to relinquish moral responsibility and be overpowered. What this emphasizes is the incompatibility of the face to face encounter with the facelessness of the moral norm, which—according to Levinas—governs "the political world of the impersonal 'third'" (qtd. in Newton 178). The aspiration towards this selfsame moral norm, moreover, is central to the discourses of human rights, feminism, Black Consciousness and Christian theology that provide a framework for accounts such as those of Mashinini, Pheto and Farasani, and thus inflects readings of these first-person narratives with the ethical asymmetry of the political world, in which—as Scarry reminds us—"the two locations of selfhood are in skewed relation to one another or have wholly split apart and have begun to work, or be worked, against one another" (37). In this way, the non-fictional narration of torture is in jeopardy of replicating the defamiliarization of the intersubjective encounter experienced in torture, rather than repairing it. Returning to Vaux, we can see that "[t]he more they try to impose or develop norms, the more they risk the possibility of losing the emotive force that underlies the human response" (173). Conversely, it is a freedom from the demands of these moral norms, I contend, that enables fiction to invest so much in the primacy of the face to face encounter as a medium for "[e]xplorations in the realm of good and evil" (Ricoeur, *Oneself* 164).

Chapter 5
***Terribilitá*; or, the Taint of Artistry:**
Fictional Representations of Torture
from Apartheid South Africa

Obscene. That is the word, a word of contested etymology, that she must hold onto as a talisman. She chooses to believe that *obscene* means *off-stage*. To save our humanity, certain things that we may want to see (*may want to see because we are human!*) must remain off-stage.

J. M. Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*

Many intellectuals—Theodor Adorno, Maurice Blanchot, Edmond Jabès, Jean-François Lyotard—have asked how it is possible to write after Auschwitz. Perhaps the other question that ought to be asked is how it was possible to write before: what naivete informed modernity from its inception?

Arthur W. Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller*

The above quotation from Frank reminds us that the critical response to narratives of human rights abuses is overwhelmingly grounded in the field of Holocaust studies. In more recent years, as the burgeoning discourse of human rights began to encroach upon a more mainstream consciousness, this corpus has been expanded in response to the vast array of narratives—both fictional and documentary—emanating from the “global transformations, both cataclysmic and gradual, that have occurred in the decades since the end of World War II” (Schaffer and Smith 13). Despite this boom in the field of human rights narratives, however, the dominant critical tradition of distaste for this genre has endured. Consequently, intellectual engagement with the aesthetic representation of atrocity has, until very recently, been confined to the dialectic between neglectful silence and voyeuristic debasement put forward by the philosopher Theodor Adorno in the aftermath of the Holocaust. Although the field of Holocaust studies may provide a useful methodology with which critically to approach narratives of trauma that arise from the context of widespread human rights abuses, any approach that fails to question such an overwhelming tradition of critical orthodoxy carries with it the risk of falling victim to the temptation to view this methodology as definitive *theory*. In doing so, we place ourselves in jeopardy of several

dangerous oversights, including the wholesale appropriation of established theories without regard for their shortcomings, as well as the projection of anachronistic and culturally insensitive debates onto inappropriate contexts.

Let us take as an example of this potential hazard, Adorno's response to the poem "Todesfuge" by Paul Celan. Arguably Celan's most famous poem, "Todesfuge" ("Death Fugue") draws on the poet's experience of the Nazi-operated labour camps in Romania to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust. In spite of its haunting imagery—epitomized by the poem's refrain of "Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night . . ."—and elegiac qualities, it is perhaps best known as the catalyst for Adorno's notorious injunction that "it is barbaric to write poetry after Auschwitz" ("Cultural Criticism and Society" 34). As David Bathrick observes, this pronouncement "has come to serve as both prohibition and caveat" (294) against the artistic representation of human suffering: a call for silence in the face of atrocity predicated upon a belief in the violation inherent in the attempt to express it in aesthetic terms. Adorno's revision of this stance in *Negative Dialectics* (1966) is not so much a renunciation as a reconfiguration, in which this barbarism is framed in terms of two seemingly opposite potentialities. According to Adorno, the restoration of culture in the aftermath of Auschwitz implies complicity with the culture that engendered the atrocity—a charge Pam Morris has described as "epistemological complacency" (21); while the rejection of this culture constitutes a denial of culpability and thus duplicates the process of collusion that enabled the atrocity to occur (*Negative Dialectics* 366). The experience of Auschwitz, then, imposes "a new categorical imperative" on society consciously to undergo sufficient transformation to prevent a repetition of the atrocity (365). This call for social—and thereby cultural—transformation is a recurrent theme in Adorno's work, and yet his insistence on its infinite deferral acts to circumvent discussion of how it might transpire.

Adorno puts forth a perception of cultural artefacts as being singularly expressive of the contradictions inherent in the sociohistorical context from which they arise. In doing so, he establishes an ineluctable nexus between society, history, politics and culture, which forms the heart of his philosophical enquiry into the relationship between atrocity and aesthetics. According to the foundational hypothesis of *Aesthetic Theory* (1970), this nexus evolves into the concept of artistic truth content (*Wahrheitsgehalt*) that Adorno believes to arise from the necessary dialectic between content and form. It is thus evident that the notion of truth is positioned as a fulcrum to Adorno's discussion of atrocity and its artistic representation. If,

Adorno argues, the tensions within cultural artefacts reflect the conflicts within the sociohistorical conditions from which they arise, then the artistic truth content of these artefacts should be seen to provide both a critique of—and, as Jolly has observed, a theoretical *solution* to—such conflicts.

In Adorno's writings on atrocity, the philosophical rightness of his injunction against the restoration of culture in the aftermath of atrocity takes primacy over the evidence of cultural praxis. However, he also claims that praxis has the tendency to inhibit the development of a theoretically appropriate response to atrocity: “[w]orks of less than the highest rank are even willingly absorbed as contributions to clearing up the past” (“Commitment” 313). In a sense, then, he appears to view aestheticism as an analgesic for cultural trauma, rather than a medium through which to examine and thus enhance understanding of atrocity's implications. The negative pragmatism that characterizes Adorno's response to the literary representation of atrocity can thus be seen as indicative of a reluctance to accredit not only the possibility of social and cultural transformation in the aftermath of atrocity. As such, his argument begs the question by failing to account, in any comprehensive manner, for the ways in which atrocity—and the attempt to represent the atrocious—could itself enact such a transformation.

Adorno's concerns are resurrected and relocated to apartheid South Africa in J.M. Coetzee's article, “Into the Dark Chamber: The Novelist and South Africa”. Coetzee argues that the “dark fascination” with torture evident in the work of many contemporary South African authors can be premised upon two claims. The first is rhetorical in nature, positing the dynamic of power and pain associated with the torture room as a “metaphor, bare and extreme” for the relationship between the authoritarian National Party government and its subjects—effectively transforming the body of the torture victim into a metonym for the body politic. The second draws on theories of narrative speculation put forward by Henry James and Sigmund Freud to present the torture chamber as “the origin of novelistic fantasy”; a site of extreme human experience inaccessible to the author except through his imaginings, and thus irresistibly compelling. Within the context of South Africa, Coetzee extrapolates this to suggest the apartheid government's policy of enigmatic secrecy surrounding the activities of the state security police “creates the preconditions for the novel to set about its work of representation”.

If—and only *if*—we side with Coetzee in taking the speculative compulsion elicited by the torture chamber as a given, then we are likely to concur that South African writers during apartheid were faced with a precarious situation. In response to this, Coetzee proposes that the author’s primary task is “to not allow himself to be impaled on the dilemma proposed by the state, namely, either to ignore its obscenities or else produce representations of them”. Here, Coetzee’s argument recalls that of Adorno in the construction of a negative dialectic, in which silence in the face of atrocity is opposed—and can only be opposed—by a symbiotic relationship between obscenity and voyeurism that directly simulates the human rights violations perpetrated by the state—a charge that closely resembles that of “epistemological complacency” (Morris 21) levelled by Adorno. The dialectic between silent collusion and active complicity at the crux of Coetzee’s critical stance, then, seems intellectually static in its derivative response to the relationship between aesthetics and atrocity. Challenging South African writers “not to play the game by the rules of the state,” but “to imagine torture and death on [their] own terms”, Coetzee reveals his inability to respond to this genre of literary imagining on *his* own terms, relying instead on the limitations of the critical response to the representation of atrocity validated by Adorno.

The dilemmatic premise of Coetzee’s argument, however, is reliant upon the proposition that the authoritarian state will inevitably succeed in consolidating ultimate authority with ultimate authorship. This proposition is, in turn, reliant on the claim that consolidation will necessarily bring about a situation in which the only possible responses to atrocity are silence or a style of realistic representation that effectively simulates—and thus reifies—the morally reprehensible actions of the authoritarian state. This proposition, in turn, requires the support of yet another claim—that both silence and realistic representation will reify the authority of the state—and is thus subject to logical regress. The first and final propositions in this sequence would, I argue, be acceptable to most on the grounds of historical evidence: events such as the Holocaust and the Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe, as well as the activities of the National Party’s Board of Censors in South Africa, have proven that (a) authoritarianism is typically accompanied by stringent censorship, and (b) silence is almost as effective in facilitating atrocity as simulative participation. This contention is supported, moreover, by Jacobo Timerman’s assertion that “[t]he Holocaust will be understood not so much for the number of victims as for the magnitude of the silence, and what obsesses me most is the repetition of silence rather than the possibility of

another Holocaust” (141). The intermediate propositions—that the only authorial responses possible in the face of atrocity are silence or the complicity inherent in mimesis—are, however, more problematic.

In order to accept Coetzee’s proposition as an apodictic claim, we must concede that the conditions of authoritarianism and atrocity not only limit the reach of aesthetic representation, but limit it in specific ways such as to allow for only two possible responses: silence or unquestioning imitation. More than this, its acceptance implies the extrapolation of the claim to include not just the production of texts, but the ways in which they are received by their readers. Insofar as this is concerned, it is imperative to keep Jolly’s proviso against the resolution of literary violence through the act of critical analysis at the forefront of one’s mind (xii). Whereas Elizabeth Costello—a protagonist of more than one of Coetzee’s novels—speaks of the relationship between literary representation and reality in terms of the “word-mirror” (19), Morris argues that “words function completely differently from mirrors” and that, consequently, literary realism “can never be identical with that which it represents” (4)—an assessment that applies equally to non-fiction accounts of lived experience, as Améry reminds us when he describes the attempt to articulate the pain that was inflicted on him in terms of “the hopeless merry-go-round of figurative speech” (33).

“Into the Dark Chamber” concludes with a discussion of Nadine Gordimer’s novel *Burger’s Daughter* (1979), in which Coetzee follows Gordimer’s descriptive lead in defining South Africa as a “damned, dehumanized world” that exists “beyond the scope of morality”. In response to the “spectacle” of “brutality” witnessed by Gordimer’s protagonist, Rosa Burger, in the novel, Coetzee asserts that only “when humanity will be restored across the face of society, and therefore when all human acts...returned to the ambit of moral judgement” will it

once again be meaningful for the gaze of the author, the gaze of authority and authoritative judgement, to be turned upon scenes of torture. When the choice is no longer limited to either looking on in horrified fascination as the blows fall or turning one’s eyes away, then the novel can once again take as its province the whole of life, and even the torture chamber can be accorded a place in the design.

In framing cultural debasement as a concomitant of undesirable sociohistorical conditions, this concluding statement reveals the unmistakably Adornean compass of Coetzee’s argument. He duly posits, furthermore, that a positive transformation of sociohistorical

conditions will have an ameliorating effect on culture and its productions. The most crucial correlation between the two theses, however, lies in their intellectual limitations: both call for social transformation as the only morally acceptable response to atrocity, yet anticipate its accomplishment with Punic faith. In failing to commit to the discourse of transformation they theoretically endorse, they also fail fully to engage with the ethical implications of the injunctions they make in its guise. Consequently, Coetzee's revival of the formal and philosophical thematics of Adorno's response to Celan can be seen to provide a pertinent illustration of the hazards to be encountered in the indiscriminate arrogation of the aesthetic and ethical theories that have developed around the Holocaust and their incongruous application to the apartheid context.

This is, after all, just one example of the way in which critical analysis may attempt to resolve textual violence. Its particularities, however, serve to highlight the underlying tension between theory and text evident in the syllogistic claims of Adorno and Coetzee. Both men postulate theories regarding the representation of atrocity that are reactive in nature, by which I mean they originate not from moments of spontaneous intellectual epiphany, but are framed as sequelae to acts of literature—namely, Celan's "*Todesfuge*" and Christopher van Wyk's poem, "In Detention". If we judge these claims to be limited to the realm of theory—as I am inclined to suggest we should—our primary impulse as critical respondents should be to search for correlatives within the realm of critical praxis. It is at this point, I contend, that the ethical limitations of the theoretical stance found in the writings of Adorno and Coetzee are illuminated, and their arguments thus exhausted.

Insofar as this thesis is concerned, it is perhaps most appropriate to begin this search with a closer look at the main premise underlying Adorno's distaste for the literary response to the Holocaust, before moving on to an examination of Coetzee's analysis of the representation of torture in the novels of Alex La Guma, Mongane Wally Serote and Sipho Sepamla. For Adorno, the problem appears to lie in the fraught relationship between atrocity and "the esthetic principle of stylization". As Gubar reminds us with reference to the Holocaust, the intuitive response to atrocity does, at first, appear to rest upon a dialectic formed by "the realization that [the Shoah] cannot be transmitted or comprehended in its full horror, and . . . the urgency of attempting to transmit or comprehend it" (165). Insofar as the ethical intention is concerned, then, Adorno's grievances seem to pivot on the way in which this phenomenon impacts upon the relationship between the victims of atrocity and

those who survive to commemorate them. This relationship, I suggest, can be characterized as a form of mourning, in the sense of “bear[ing] witness both to a loss of history and to specific histories of loss” (Durrant 432). According to Adorno, it is “in art alone . . . that suffering can still find its own voice” (qtd. in Durrant 434), and yet, with characteristic *Kulturpessimismus*, he follows this with the assertion that the aestheticization inherent in art is fated to betray this voice, despite the artist’s best intentions. This betrayal, moreover, comes about as a result of the way in which aestheticization not only attenuates the confrontation with suffering by imbuing it with a sort of gnostic significance—in the style, perhaps, of medieval Christian depictions of martyrdom—but also increases the ease with which such events are integrated into consciousness and thus, as Jolly warns, resolved.

As Sam Durrant notes in his study of mourning in the work of J.M. Coetzee, the deconstructionist Jacques Derrida argues that “successful mourning” of this sort “constitutes an idealizing incorporation or ‘consumption’ of the other” in which the difference of the other is neatly assimilated into the self-same (Durrant 436). Successful mourning is thus the antithesis of the ethical intention, in that it obviates the need to live “with and for others”. It is only in unsuccessful mourning³³—that the “infinite remove” of the other is “respect[ed]” and the ethical intention truly realised (Derrida, qtd. in Durrant 436). To follow the argument Durrant charts from de Man to Derrida and back, then, aestheticization is reflective of the endeavour to “memorialize or commemorate the dead by translating loss into words, silence into speech” (437), and is thus fundamentally unethical in its movement towards successful mourning.

At first glance, this provides a compelling argument against the confluence of aesthetics and atrocity. Upon further consideration, however, I find it to generate anxieties of the sort Reinhardt eloquently describes when he speaks of the problems that proceed from the development of aestheticization into “a common, even dominant term, for expressing concern about the way in which [art] can fail in response to human suffering” (14). Although the nuances in this critique, he acknowledges, vary “from critic to critic and era to era”, “all share a sense that . . . aestheticizing suffering is inherently both artistically and politically reactionary, a way of mistreating the subject and inviting passive consumption, narcissistic appropriation, condescension, or even sadism on the part of the viewers” (14)—a

³³ A concept developed in Derrida’s response to Paul de Man’s conceptualization of “true mourning” (Durrant 436-37).

sense that is manifest in the theoretical responses to the aestheticization of suffering put forward by Adorno and Coetzee. Like Reinhardt, therefore, it is my contention that the use of “aestheticization” as a conceptual basis from which to attack the literary representation of suffering is problematical in the extreme. While “[t]here are certainly times or ways in which turning the suffering of another human being into a beautiful or formally elegant image seems somehow indecent”, the use of the “vocabulary of aestheticization” to describe this often “undercuts or dilutes the critic’s best insights” (Reinhardt 15). Like Reinhardt, I will now “explore both the conceptual limits of the idea of aestheticization and the anxieties that underwrite it” (15), with reference not to photographic representation, but to the literary representation of torture in apartheid South Africa. Like Reinhardt, moreover, I hope that this will “help to put critical worries on a sounder footing”, as well as “foster recognition, even affirmation, of the fruitful ways in which certain aesthetic strategies can help to deepen engagement with and understanding of suffering’s meaning, sources, effects, and implications for the spectator” (15).

My approach to the representation of torture in the literary fiction of apartheid South Africa will engage with these anxieties in a manner that builds upon the ethico-political project developed in Durrant’s reading of J. M. Coetzee’s fiction, while simultaneously keeping in mind Jolly’s caveat against the critical resolution of textual violence. In this sense, my analysis of the literary corpus will conform to Edward W. Said’s notion of the discrepant experience by resisting the totalizing view encouraged by this critical heritage. The productivity of this approach, I suggest, proceeds from a crucial discrepancy between the inclination to read such texts allegorically that predominated during the apartheid era, and the more literary, less politically invested readings made possible by the growing temporal distance from this period.³⁴ It is the “exposure and dramatization of [this] discrepancy” (Said 37), therefore, that highlights the potential significance of such texts as “ethically charged events” (Attridge, *J. M. Coetzee* xii) as opposed to the acts of moral edification for which they have conventionally been taken—an argument that has its origins in Njabulo Ndebele’s compelling analysis of South African “Protest Literature” (40) in *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (1991). It is my opinion, furthermore, that only through this discrepancy can representations of torture originating from apartheid South

³⁴ With regard to the literary fiction of South Africa, this discrepancy is eloquently described in Derek Attridge’s monograph, *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading* (2005).

Africa transcend the specificities of apartheid—or, rather, anti-apartheid—politics to address the ethical problems they are symptomatic of.

The fundamental ethical problem in the codes of production and reception affecting these texts can, I believe, be summarized by Coetzee's assessment of apartheid ideology as predicated upon the "denial of desire" ("Apartheid Thinking" 164). If we recall Douzinas's portrayal of desire within the context of human rights as a demand to be "recognised and loved as a whole and complete person" (*Human Rights and Empire* 48), it is easy enough to apprehend the ways in which the system of social segregation instigated by the apartheid government brought about such a disavowal—by failing to recognise the equality of humankind, "*irrespective of colour, race, class, belief or sex*";³⁵ apartheid directly obstructed the ethical intention set out by Ricoeur as "aiming for the 'good life', with and for others, in just institutions" on both an intersubjective and an institutional level.

Contra Adorno and Coetzee, then, my contention is that the ethical import attendant on the representation of suffering in the aftermath—or, in the case of apartheid South Africa, the ongoing perpetration—of atrocity is limited not by aestheticization and all that it might entail, but by an excess of what Ndebele has termed "tendentiousness" (22). According to Ndebele, "[i]n societies such as South Africa, where social, economic, and political oppression is stark, such conditions tend to enforce, almost with the power of natural law, overt tendentiousness in the artist's choice of subject matter, and in the handling of that subject matter" (23). In consequence, "artistic merit or relevance is determined less by a work's internal coherence . . . than by the work's displaying a high level of explicit political pre-occupation" (23-4). The end result of this tendency, Ndebele suggests, is the 'ossification' of "complex social problems into symbols which are perceived as finished forms of good and evil", thus demonstrating a slippage from the realm of ethical engagement into the shallower waters of "moral ideology" (23). Literature of this sort creates characters that "appear as mere ideas to be marshalled this way or that in a moral debate" (23). In reference to this, it is interesting to note that Coetzee's description of the (barely) fictionalized South Africa in *Burger's Daughter* evokes the dichotomy identified by Ndebele in its use of the phrase "a world . . . beneath good and evil". This is ironic in the sense that the world he is speaking of is defined entirely by such a moral binary—it explicitly requires that we pass judgement on the "damned, dehumanized world" (J. M. Coetzee, "Into the Dark

³⁵ Postamble to the Interim Constitution (Act no. 200 of 1993) of South Africa (qtd. in TRC 1:103).

Chamber”) to which Gordimer’s protagonist, Rosa, acts as witness. The overt solitude that characterizes this episode is not, as Coetzee would have us believe, emblematic of a “dark moment of the soul” from which the solicitude of generative intentionality might proceed, but an illustration of the intransitive experiences of being-black- and being-white-in-the-world of apartheid South Africa.

Returning now to Ndebele, we find the “human anonymity” of such characters acting as a cipher for “the anonymity to which the oppressive system [of apartheid] consigns millions of oppressed Africans” (23). Like the evidentiary narratives described in chapter 4, these writings “tend to *inform* without involving readers in a truly transforming experience” (24). “[I]he more dramatic the information,” moreover, “and the more strikingly perfect it is in its finished form as a symbol of the devastating effects of apartheid, then the more desirable it is as a weapon of moral war” (24). What this suggests, then, is a worrying tendency towards a literature of dissent-by-numbers, which, in turn, is indicative of “a dangerously complacent attitude” (27) to the position of art in an authoritarian context.

It is in the light of this observation that the dilemma proposed by Coetzee is revealed to be, at root, an ethical concern—or, rather, a conflict between the face to face encounter that characterizes ethical interaction, and the facelessness of the moral norm. I would argue, however, that culpability in this situation is not limited to the “writer of indictment” (Ndebele 24), but must also be imputed, at least in part, to the reader. To Ndebele’s complaint that such texts effect “very little transformation in reader consciousness” due to their failure to engage any faculty in the reader beyond that of basic recognition (27), I hasten to add that the reader’s tendency to interpret such texts allegorically should be seen as equally complicit in this failure. Against the conceptualization of the patron-beggar relationship described in chapter 4, I will thus juxtapose the distinction Derek Attridge makes between allegorical and literal/literary readings of literature “operating under intense political pressures” (4).

With regard to the fiction of J. M. Coetzee, Attridge suggests that “the widespread assumption that any responsible and principled South African writer, especially during the apartheid years, will have had as a primary concern the historical situation of the country and the suffering of the majority of its people” has invited readings that uphold a “specific type of allegorization” (33) in which a story is merely perceived as “a message with . . . a rhetorical or aesthetic covering” (J. M. Coetzee, “The Novel Today” 4). Implicit in this type of

allegorical reading is an understanding of aesthetic innovation as an “avoidance of political responsibility” (Attridge, *J. M. Coetzee* 8). This is evident in black South African writing in the period following the Soweto uprising of 1976, which attests to the way in which “[t]he moralistic ideology of liberalism...has forced our literature into a tradition of almost mechanistic surface representation” (Ndebele 28). It is my contention, however, that such readings originate not in black writing of the late 1970s and ’80s, but in the predominantly white-authored social realist fiction of the early apartheid years, such as Herman Charles Bosman’s *Willemsdorp* and Harry Bloom’s *Transvaal Episode*. Through a marriage of social realism and political dissent, the explicitly allegorical status of these texts can be seen to lay the groundwork for the definitive ethical—or, rather, for the dichotomy between the ethical and the moral—characteristics of the genre of protest literature in apartheid South Africa. In the comparative analysis of *Willemsdorp* and *Transvaal Episode* that follows, I will demonstrate the limitations of allegorical codes of production and reception within the context of apartheid South Africa, as well as the ways in which these limitations can be transcended. Having established the ways in which the disavowal of desire at the nub of apartheid ideology inflects the literary representation of human rights abuses, moreover, I will then progress to a reading of the ways in which the events of and around Soweto in the late 1970s were fictionalized, with a particular emphasis on the relationship between the concept of the disavowal of desire and that of “erotic fascination” found in Coetzee’s critique of Sipho Sepamla’s *A Ride on the Whirlwind*.

Beginnings

The first representation of torture in South African fiction of the apartheid period is to be found in Herman Charles Bosman’s *Willemsdorp*, a novel left in a “completed but unfinalised typescript” at the time of Bosman’s death in 1951, but not published—albeit in a heavily edited form due to censorship restrictions—until 1977 (Gray 5). Bosman is better known for his short stories recording rural Afrikaaner life, as typified by the collection *Mafeking Road* (1947). *Willemsdorp* deviates from this pattern by taking up—and, indeed, developing further—the white liberal tradition of social realism in twentieth-century South African literature initiated by Alan Paton’s *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948).³⁶ A classically South African

³⁶ Paton has been described by Susan VanZanten Gallagher as the “dean of the liberal protest novel” in South Africa (51).

narrative of racial tension, Paton's international bestseller is concerned with "expos[ing] the palpable realities of white racism and [the] black struggle for dignity and citizenship rights" (Schaffer and Smith 58), thus capturing the zeitgeist of Western politico-cultural concerns in the mid-twentieth century. As Stephen Gray notes, *Willemdsorp* was intended as an "opening attempt to crack the American market" (11), and was thus directed at a similarly transnational audience to *Cry, the Beloved Country*. Unfortunately, Bosman's untimely death meant that this attempt was never realised. The intention, however, is evident; particularly, Gray observes, in Bosman's peculiar use of Americanisms such as "sidewalk" and "negro" in lieu of the South African terms "pavement" and "black" (10). Bosman's use of "the popular murder mystery" form (Gray 10), moreover, appears to have been aimed at a contemporary American market accustomed to the work of mystery writers such as Dashiell Hammett and Ellery Queen.

In many ways, *Willemdsorp* can be seen to emulate the concerns canvassed in *Cry, the Beloved Country*. Crucially, however, in spite of its appeal to universalism, *Willemdsorp* manages to surpass Paton's novel in its detailed exposure of the moral wrongs of apartheid, while simultaneously sharing its failure to go beyond the basics of other-recognition in order to engage with the complex subjectivity of both victims and perpetrators. "Recognition", Ndebele argues, "does not necessarily lead to transformation: it simply confirms. Beyond that confirmation, it may even reinforce the frustration produced by the reader's now further consolidated perception of an overwhelmingly negative social reality." (27). The fundamental shortcoming of these works, therefore, lies in their tendency to produce "very little transformation in reader consciousness", thus limiting their ability to use the ethical potential of literature to overturn the disavowal of desire underpinning apartheid ideology.

While *Cry, the Beloved Country* is concerned with the apartheid system as an infringement of civil rights in an abstract sense, Bosman's examination of South African society in *Willemdsorp* focuses on a more tangible form of human rights abuses: the Union of South Africa's police force's detention and torture, both physically and psychologically, of the country's black population. In chapter 9 of the novel, the question of human rights abuses is brought into disturbingly sharp focus by a white policeman's informal account of his involvement in the violent interrogation of a black man arbitrarily detained as a suspect in a recent murder case under his charge. The scene describes the unsolicited visit of Detective Sergeant Brits to the office of Charlie Hendricks, the novel's protagonist and newly

appointed editor of the local newspaper. The encounter is initially narrated from Hendricks's perspective through the use of free indirect discourse, before developing into a direct dialogue between the two characters. This combination of narrative techniques is critical to the ambiguity inherent in Bosman's framing of police brutality in the years immediately preceding the election of the National Party.

This sense of ambiguity proceeds from the way in which Bosman's initial use of free indirect discourse aligns the reader's experience with Hendricks's discomfort at the appearance of Brits. His assumption that Brits "was calling on Willemsdorp's men to warn them that the police would take action if they were caught cohabiting with black women" causes Hendricks—who is sexually, if not romantically, involved with a coloured woman—to feel "decidedly nervous" and consumed by a "sense of guilt" (119). To Hendricks's relief, however, it emerges that Brits's visit has another purpose—namely, to boast about his prowess as an officer of the law as demonstrated by his recent triumph in his "first big case", in which he succeeded in getting "eight kaffirs" hanged for the accidental death of a play-white shopkeeper following the robbery of his store (119). Although Hendricks confesses to "shuddering, slightly, at the detective's stories" in all their gruesome detail, the shift from opposition—in which Hendricks perceives himself as a transgressor and Brits as a symbol of retributive authority—to the collaboration implicit in Brits's tone of camaraderie causes Hendricks "to feel more at ease" (119, 118). Specifically, Bosman informs us, "[i]t was the kind of stuff Brits was talking about"—the torture and forced confession of an apparently innocent man—"that brought relief to Charlie Hendricks's mind" (118).

Brits's sensational narrative, with its repetition, continual use of superlatives and rhetorical questions intended to entice his audience, is suggestive of a certain relish for the glut of death it describes. His nonchalant manner³⁷ and the aggressive assertion of agency implicit in his frequent and emphatic use of the personal pronoun are indicative of a totalizing failure of recognition. His account of the anonymous man's torture is marked by absolute egocentrism, lacking even the revulsion to suffering demonstrated by "a young police recruit" who "takes just one look at that kaffir and . . . vomits all over the floor" (120):

[W]ell, him I really had to give a solid doing with the whip. I would have to start on him some time after breakfast, and then work through till lunch time. *My* breakfast

³⁷ As demonstrated by his flippant introduction to the tale: "What about the shopkeeper, Vermaak, that got murdered at Klipspruit and that I got eight kaffirs hanged for? And most of them married kaffirs with wives and families. What about that, hey?" (119).

and *my* lunch time, that is. I mean to say as that kaffir, of course, couldn't eat a bloody thing. He just left his mieliepap in the cell all the time untasted. Sometimes when I gets tired I calls in a couple of kaffir policemen to help me. But I done my share with the whip, too, all right. I have my promotion to think of.' (120)

Brits's attitude to the torture of another human being is thus characterized not by a perversion of the intersubjective encounter, but by its categorical defamiliarization. Bosman's depiction of Brits as an inarticulate and unfeeling brute appears, at first glance, to be an exposé of the ignorance and cruelty of apartheid ideology and its enforcers. Insofar as the intersubjective encounter is constructed in this scene, however, the situation is revealed to be considerably more ambivalent. While Bosman's treatment of Brits can be seen as emblematic of the author's anti-apartheid agenda, in portraying him as a "finished product: unaccountably vicious, cruel, malicious, fawning and greedy" (Ndebele 30) and his prisoner as the archetypal victim, it fails to engage any faculty in the reader beyond that of basic recognition, and thus ultimately succumbs to the problematics of ethical alienation.

In *Willemsoord*, the alterity of Brits's victim outweighs the discomfort of Hendricks's interaction with Brits—more than this, it seems to alleviate this discomfort and thus facilitate the ethical aspect of their encounter. In contradiction to Susan Sontag's prescription that "[n]o 'we' should be taken for granted when the subject is looking at other people's pain" (6), the narration of the pain of another serves to unite antagonistic characters and create an exclusive "we" in accordance with Scarry's theory of analogical verification. This is compounded by the fact that, in the representation of torture in *Willemsoord*, narrative agency—in both direct dialogic and free indirect discursive forms—is limited to the white male characters of Brits and Hendricks. In contrast, the use of generic racial slurs—such as "kaffir" and "nigger"—to identify the victim of torture creates a sense of anonymity that extends beyond the boundaries of the text and its characters to other him from the reader as well, thus perpetuating, rather than undermining, the failure of recognition fundamental to the policy and practice of apartheid.

Harry Bloom's *Transvaal Episode*, on the other hand, meets Sontag's specification by declining to take any narrative "we" for granted. Bloom's novel is set in the fictional town of Nelstroom in the Transvaal, approximately five years after the events described in *Willemsoord*. Due to its controversial content, it was banned in South Africa until 1982. *Episode* describes the changing relationship between the white inhabitants of Nelstroom and

the predominantly black population of the neighbouring location, following the return of the political activist Walter Mabaso from a long and formative sojourn in Johannesburg. In an anticipation of the events of Sharpeville, the plot comes to a head when an anti-apartheid demonstration escalates into a riot following the violent intervention of the police. The occurrence results in the death of two women from the location, and marks the beginning of the end for the location's white superintendent, Hendrik Du Toit. The repercussions of "startling the white country out of its illusions of peace" (238) are far-reaching for the residents of the location, whose homes are upturned and who are themselves insulted, manhandled and even killed in the subsequent police raid.

Episode thus features several descriptions of human rights violations amounting to torture perpetrated against the location's inhabitants. The interrogation and murder of the local shebeen queen, Sarah Manana, is one such example. Unlike Brits's anonymous, impassive victim in *Willemsdorp*, however, Sarah is a figure of powerful resistance and individual agency. Her assertive responses to Sergeant Combrink's allegations invert the play of power in their exchange, so that *she* appears to interrogate *him*:

She was standing in the middle of the room. Her eyes were flashing. Her hands were on her hips; she looked huge and pugnacious. Combrink looked at his men; he was undecided. He was very nervous now.

'Who saw me at the riot? Just tell me who?' she demanded.

'Mr. Du Toit saw you, that's who. *He* saw you throwing petrol over his motor car.'

'Du Toit? He saw me? That liar. If Du Toit says that, he's a liar.' (253)

Rather than consolidate their power, moreover, her death inspires anxiety and divisive conflict amongst the policemen involved:

Suddenly there was a shot, and she collapsed with a great deep sigh. She lay sprawled on the floor like a great old elephant felled by a hunter.

Combrink held his light towards the man who had fired the shot.

'Why did you do that?'

'She was going to stab you. Didn't you see, she had a knife in her hand.'

'My God, I didn't see. My God.'

'Yes, I saw the knife gleaming in her hand. Just as she was about to stab you.'

Combrink bent over her and looked at the floor around her hand. There was no knife. He asked the other to give him a hand and he turned her over and then they rolled her across the room, away from the place where she had fallen. They came back and searched the floor.

'You sure about that knife?' Combrink asked.

'Yes. I saw it gleaming. Just as she was going to stab you.'

'I don't think it was a knife. It was that watch she's wearing. I also saw it gleaming and it was definitely her watch,' one of the others said. (253)

While novels such as *Cry, the Beloved Country* and *Willemsoord* can be seen as the precursors of the genre of “protest literature” castigated by Ndebele for its “mechanistic surface representation” and failure to develop individual characters beyond their symbolic significance as “ideas to be marshalled this way or that in a moral debate”, the complex characterization found in *Episode* successfully avoids this tendency “to ossify complex social problems into symbols which are perceived as finished forms of good or evil” (45, 28, 23, 23). One such example can be found in the contrast between Bosman’s alienating use of generic racial slurs in *Willemsoord* and Bloom’s use of them in *Episode*. While the anonymity inherent in this vocabulary is manifest in *Willemsoord*, Bloom’s use of free indirect discourse in combination with other narrative techniques creates a series of referential shifts, which have the effect of subverting this anonymity. In chapter 6, for example, Sergeant Ackerman—a white security policeman—repeatedly addresses the character of Aaron Lukhele as a “Kaffir” despite knowing his real name, and describes him to his partner, Combrink, as “that crazy baboon” (Bloom 90). Ackerman’s use of “Kaffir” is identical to that of Brits in *Willemsoord*, serving as a blanket term to identify Lukhele on the basis of his race only, while “that crazy baboon” further undermines his existence as a human being by denying his sanity and reducing him to the realm of the bestial. Bloom’s omniscient narrator, however, subverts Ackerman’s speech by contrasting his use of a generic slur with the subject’s specific identity: “‘Hey, Kaffir. You deaf? *Come here,*’ he yelled. They saw Lukhele stand for a few seconds, then turn and run away.” (90).

The usage of the term “Kaffir” in *Episode* is not restricted to Ackerman’s reported speech, but overflows into the third person narrative: “They slowed down at the location gate, turned in, and drove along the location main street. All of a sudden they saw this crazy Kaffir standing right in the middle of the street holding a bundle” (90). A similar effect is achieved through the use of animal imagery, in that Ackerman’s use of the description “crazy baboon” is mirrored in the omniscient narrator’s presentation of Lukhele as “a startled guinea fowl, his body bent forward and his arms out, flapping like wings” (90). The blurring of narrative boundaries in *Episode* can thus be seen to depend not only on Bloom’s juxtaposition of several narrative techniques, but also on the transference of linguistic and symbolic idioms from one form to another. This creates a fictional world in which a skilful equilibrium is maintained between the complex subjectivities of individual characters and the

cacophony that this *mélange* of narrative voices creates—preventing any one “we” from dominating the intersubjective encounter that takes place between the reader and novel’s characters, and thus from taking ideological precedence.

As such, Bloom’s novel succeeds in effecting a transformation of reader consciousness. More than this, it goes beyond the cultivation of an ethical relationship between the reader and the fictional victims of human rights abuses—a key feature of non-fiction narratives of torture in apartheid South Africa—to extend this profound engagement with the complex subjectivities of others to the perpetrators of these abuses, such as Combrink and his superior, Swanepoel³⁸—as well as those characters who occupy the grey area in-between. In stark contrast to the conventional portrayal of apartheid functionaries in the literature of the period—in which characters appear as “finished products: unaccountably vicious, cruel, malicious, fawning and greedy” (Ndebele 30)—the character of Swanepoel is intricately developed. We are told about his childhood, the racist indoctrination he experienced at home and at school, and the troubling spectre of miscegenation implicit in the appearance of his elder sister:

And later, in school, he was being told of the wars and massacres and heroes and martyrs, and he was parading with other boys in celebration of past victories, or in mournful remembrance of the black crimes of an enemy who still lived around them.

Then he was in his last year at school, and there was the day when with shock and shame, he first noticed the peculiarity about his sister. Although he lived with the fact all his life without noticing it, he was suddenly aware that his elder sister was very dark. He and the rest of the family were as blonde as Swedes, but she had a pallid sepia complexion, with a heavy black skin blemish on her neck, and stiff black crinkled hair, and something about her features that left a nagging, horrifying doubt forever churning in his mind. Then a fury would take hold of him... (Bloom 178, ellipsis in orig.)

The singularity of *Episode*, therefore, lies in the author’s recognition of an element that many anti-apartheid writers appear to have had great difficulty in acknowledging; namely, that

attempting to understand the villain in all his complexity does not necessarily imply a political acceptance of him. On the contrary, it may intensify political opposition even more. Artistic compassion only situates the villain within the domain of tragic acceptance, which, in practice, translates itself into moral or political rejection. We cannot wish away evil; but genuine art makes us understand it. Only then can we purposefully deal with it. (Ndebele 30-31)

³⁸ Ironically, Bloom’s character shares the name of a man associated with many real-life incidents of torture in the subsequent decade, the so-called “Beast of Compol”, Major P.J. Swanepoel (“Deaths in Detention” 15).

Insofar as the ethical determinations of anti-apartheid literary fiction are concerned, I would go even further than Ndebele, to argue that it is this facet of Bloom's novel that makes it truly ethical, in Newton's sense of the term as an "appeal [that] precedes both decision and understanding" (12). In a way unprecedented—and, for the most part, unsurpassed—in the literature of apartheid South Africa, *Episode* can be seen as an exemplar of the capacity of literary fiction to "tra[n] ethical sensibility" (Newton 9) through its facilitation of "the extreme exposure and sensitivity of one subjectivity to another". Crucially, then, this novel allows the reader to develop the faculty of moral thinking without imposing the requirement of moral judgement. Bloom's novel thus succeeds in overcoming the disavowal of desire to challenge the very foundation of apartheid ideology.

The Riddle of Desire:³⁹

Constructions of the Other in Apartheid Fiction

The increasing authoritarianism of the apartheid government during the 1960s led to a hiatus in the literary protest against apartheid, as stringent censorship restrictions were put in place and authors—including Harry Bloom—were detained alongside political activists (indeed, the two occupations frequently overlapped). As a result, this period has been referred to as "the silent decade" (Chapman 246), a factor that can in many ways be held responsible for the failure of most politicised South African authors to assume the mantle of ethical exploration woven in Bloom's *Episode*. As indicated in chapter 4, furthermore, the majority of publications concerned with human rights abuses in South Africa during this period were non-fiction accounts produced overseas, which played a significant role in the mobilization of the exceptionally vocal transnational AAM. The emergence of the Black Consciousness movement in the early 1970s, however, as well as the escalation of political conflict signalled by the events in Soweto in 1976, brought about a renaissance in the genre of protest literature. It was during this period, moreover, that the generic contours of the form appear most rigidly formulaic, and, I contend, that the demand for moral adjudication came to eclipse the desire for ethical engagement. In the following section, I will use Alex La Guma's *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* (1972) and D. M. Zwelonke's *Robben Island* (1973) as a basis from which to outline the generic contours of fictionalized accounts of torture published during

³⁹ This is taken from J. M. Coetzee's analysis on the writings of Geoffrey Cronjé—a leading apartheid intellectual—in the essay "Apartheid Thinking" (178).

the latter half of apartheid rule. I will next look more closely at the workings of desire in the literary response to Soweto, focusing on three well-known novels of the period: Serote's *To Every Birth Its Blood* (1981), Sepamla's *A Ride on the Whirlwind* (1981) and Brink's *A Dry White Season* (1979). Bearing in mind that there are always exceptions to the rule, I will then examine two further texts—J. M. Coetzee's *Barbarians* (1980), Wessel Ebersohn's *Store Up the Anger* (1980)—as examples of the transformative potential of the representation of torture in literary fiction “operating under intense political pressures” (Attridge, *J. M. Coetzee* 4). Finally, I will take a brief look at the ethical determinations underlying Breyten Breytenbach's *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* (1984). My primary concern in this latter analysis will take the form of an enquiry into the manner in which ethics can be enriched by exposure to the normative demands of morality. I will also, however, demonstrate the way in which Breytenbach's use of metafiction foreshadows the “truth-and-reconciliation genre of writing” (Quayson 754) that will be shown to characterize the literature of the “brave neo South Africa” in part III of this thesis.

Broadly speaking, my grouping of the first five texts—La Guma, Zwelonke, Serote, Sepamla and Brink—is intended not to elide their distinct differences, but to demonstrate that, insofar as their ethical character is concerned, they display a remarkable homogeneity in their “spectacular” performance of “the devastating effects of apartheid” (Ndebele 37, 24). While Ndebele has limited his criticism of “the representation of spectacle” (37) to black South African literature, I will argue for an extension of the phrase to characterize white South African writing of dissent in the apartheid period, such as that of André Brink. It is in this display of the “mind-bogglingly spectacular” (Ndebele 37), furthermore, that the representation of human rights abuses such as torture tends towards the obscenity condemned by Elizabeth Costello in the epigraph to this chapter. My contention, however, is that the offence inherent in this accusation of obscenity cannot be attributed to the mere representation of torture in itself, but must instead be imputed to the ethical—or, rather, moral—character of this representation. The “erotic fascination” that Coetzee accuses Sepamla of reveals itself to be a more complex concept than at first glance. Clearly, it goes beyond the suspicion of sordid speculation to summon the notion of desire at the heart of other-recognition as set out by Douzinas. Implicit in Coetzee's invocation of eros, then, can be found the ambiguous nature of this desire, with its complex correlations to suffering, subjectivity and the possibilities for intersubjective encounter. Eros, as Jonathan Dollimore

points out, refers to “not only sexual love, but worldly desire more generally” (52), a desire that is accentuated by one’s awareness of the contingency of experiencing this desire.

Without stretching the concept too far, it seems to me that this worldly desire quite closely approximates the idea of the good life to which the ethical intention is directed. The place of the other in this desire is, however, distinctly different from that of the ethical intention.

Instead of cultivating the solicitude implicit in the proviso “with and for others”, eros, in the words of Immanuel Kant,

[i]s nothing more than appetite. But, so considered, there lies in this inclination a degradation of man; for as soon as anyone becomes an object of another’s appetite, all motives of moral relationship fall away; as object of the other’s appetite, that person is in fact a thing, whereby the other’s appetite is sated, and can be misused as such a thing by anybody. . . . Since [it] is not an inclination that one human has for another, qua human, but an inclination for their sex, it is therefore a principle of the debasement of humanity. (155)

“As soon as the person is possessed, and the appetite sated,” Kant asserts, “they are thrown away, as one throws away a lemon after sucking the juice from it” (155). As such, the erotic gaze emulates Derrida’s theorization of successful mourning in its absorption—and thus elision—of alterity (Durrant 436). This is reinforced by Coetzee’s coupling of the idea of eros with that of fascination; for the sense of enthrallment that this implies brings with it an intersubjective relationship characterized by dissymmetry, rather than equality.

Within the context of human rights violations perpetrated by authoritarian states, moreover, this is complicated further by the idea of successful mourning as a variant on the ideology of death as formulated by Herbert Marcuse, in which the acceptance of suffering and death brings with it an “acceptance of [the] existing repressive political order” responsible for it (Dollimore 221). In the face of atrocity, the imperative is to *not* accept these circumstances by resisting the impulse to elide the difference of the other, and so the proper response would be one of “failed mourning” as formulated by Derrida. The idea of erotic fascination that Coetzee criticizes in the work of Sepamla can thus be seen as a commentary on the ethical imbalance that proceeds from an incomplete and solipsistic engagement with the suffering other as emblematic of all intersubjective relations within the fictional world of the novel. This, in turn, calls upon Scarry’s conceptualization of the relationship between pain, power and intersubjectivity as based upon solipsism.

To return to the idea shared by Newton and Attridge of literature as “an ethically charged event” (Attridge, *J. M. Coetzee* xii), the trait of superficiality that characterizes these texts can be seen to encompass not only the overwhelmingly symbolic style of their narration, but also—and perhaps most significantly—the pervasive dissymmetry of the intersubjective encounters they depict. It is in this sense—rather than that of the pornographic—that Coetzee’s allegations of erotic fascination can therefore be seen to hold water as an ethical consideration. More than this, the “idealizing incorporation” of alterity (Durrant 436) occasioned by the employment of the erotic gaze as a dominant technique of narrating intersubjectivity within a fictional setting can be seen to come dangerously close to the reductive resolution of violence that Jolly identifies in the critical endeavour.

In going beyond a superficial understanding of Coetzee’s use of the phrase “erotic fascination”, it becomes apparent that certain modes of representation are indeed obscene in Costello’s sense of the word. In contrast to the generative potential of the intersubjective encounter with suffering that Langsdorf identifies in the moral philosophy of Ricoeur, the representation of torture is found to possess a degenerative potential, in which the spectacular and symbolic portrayal of suffering within a politically fraught context such as apartheid has the effect of suppressing, rather than encouraging, the immediacy of contact at the heart of Newton’s theory of narrative ethics. The ease with which the suffering other is incorporated can thus be seen to increase in direct proportion to the simplicity of characterization—which is, in turn, closely linked to the narrative’s disposition towards allegory. As Ndebele suggests, moreover, the greater the allegorical potential of a narrative, the greater its desirability as “a weapon of moral war” (24). In contrast to the second hypothesis in “Into the Dark Chamber”—in which Coetzee positions the torture chamber as “the origin of novelistic fantasy”—I will now suggest that the “pitfalls” in the literary “approaches to the torture chamber” are not a function of the peculiar susceptibility of South African writers to sordid speculation, but quite the reverse. As the following textual analysis will demonstrate, it is a *failure of imagination*, rather than an excess, that gives rise to obscenity, in the solipsistic sense invoked by Costello. Finally, I will argue that this quality of obscenity—a term often interpreted as a form of immorality—is, in fact, the ultimate manifestation of normative morality.

Prior to the events of Soweto, Lewis Nkosi opined that “[w]ith the best will in the world it is impossible to detect in the fiction of black South Africans any significant and

complex talent which responds with both vigor of the imagination and sufficient technical resources to the problems posed by conditions in South Africa” (qtd. in J. M. Coetzee, “Man’s Fate” 344). Instead, the fiction of writers such as La Guma,⁴⁰ Zwelonke, Serote, and Sepamla is typically interpreted as an excessive substantiation of anti-apartheid politics. Quoting Barthes, Ndebele goes so far as to suggest that, in “displaying the culture of oppression to the utmost”, such literature hazards an “exhaustion of the content by the form” (39, 38). In his analysis of La Guma’s short story, “Coffee for the Road”, for example, Ndebele delineates the “firm outlines” of “spectacular representation” (40). In this story, La Guma uses a third person narrative to tell the story of an Indian woman and her children as they are turned away from hotel after hotel and café after café on their long drive through the Karoo; a nominally impartial technique that is, nonetheless, suggestive of a sympathetic bias towards its non-white protagonist in its tendency towards free indirect discourse:

The mother had been driving all night and she was fatigued, her eyes red, with the feeling of sand under the lids irritating the eyeballs. They had stopped for a short while along the road, the night before; parked in a gap off the road outside a small town. There had been nowhere to put up for the night: the hotels were for Whites only. In fact, only Whites lived in these towns and everybody else, except for servants, lived in tumbledown mud houses in the locations beyond. Besides, they did not know anybody in this part of the country. (86)

The spectacular climax in this story, however, occurs in the encounter between the protagonist and a white café owner, who has a “reddish-complexioned face that looked as if it had been sand-blasted into its component parts: hard plains of cheeks and knobbly cheek-bones and a bony ridge of nose that separated twin pools of dull grey; and the mouth a bitter gash, cold and malevolent as a lizard’s chapped and serrated pink crack” (90). La Guma’s use of descriptive language turns the intersubjective encounter into grotesquerie—in an alienating, rather than Bakhtinian, sense—in which the white woman’s voice is presented in terms of the cold and unyielding mineral world, as the “bitter gash” of her mouth opens to issue a voice that does not talk, but screeches, “harsh as the sound of metal rubbed against stone” (90).

Like “Coffee for the Road”, La Guma’s novel *In the Fog of the Seasons’ End* is “built around the interaction of surface symbols of the South African reality” (Ndebele 23). It

⁴⁰ For the purposes of this thesis, I will follow the lead of Coetzee and Ndebele in considering the coloured author Alex La Guma as a “black” writer, in accordance with the contemporary Black Consciousness policy of regarding the black identity as defined by the experience of oppression and exploitation under the apartheid government and thus inclusive of all non-whites.

employs a cast of characters whose “self-understanding”—or, to use the vocabulary of Ricoeur, “self-esteem”—proceeds not from “immanent recognition”, but “through allegiance to ideas, actions and organisations larger than the single life” (Chapman 252). Like the reptilian white woman in “Coffee for the Road”, the community of *Seasons’ End* is populated by disconcertingly lifeless figures, such as the receptionist of the petroleum company at which Isaac, one of the novel’s protagonists, works, “a woman with tired, bleached hair and the face of a painted wax doll accidentally left near a fire then hastily retrieved” (110). This trope of masquerade brings to mind an overtly anti-apartheid phrase from the opening scene of the novel—in which Elias Tekwane is detained by the police—in which the omniscient narrator remarks that “[b]ehind the ugly mask of the regime was an even uglier face which he had not yet looked on” (3), and thus establishes a symbolic schema in which whiteness stands for deception, authoritarianism, and, perhaps most importantly, an obstruction of the intersubjective encounter. Likewise, the typing-pool consists of “rows” of identical, mannequin-like women, a “gauntlet of displayed nylon-clad legs, lacquered hair-dos and bright mouths” (111)—their lack of sentience emphasized by the way in which La Guma’s use of descriptive language recalls the image of “rows of parking-meters like regiments of armless robots” in the novel’s opening scene (1). As William Carpenter notes, at issue in La Guma’s “figurative treatment of the human body . . . is subjective alienation from the human world” (80). The “denial of desire” that La Guma perceives at the heart of apartheid is represented in his novels by a “systematic” transformation of “human beings into ghosts, beasts, machines, or stones, virtually erasing their fundamental human identity” (Carpenter 81). In *Seasons’ End*, these “images of dismemberment” (91) signify both a literal destruction of the human body through torture, and a rejection of a common humanity in favour of the inherent divisiveness of political solidarity.

While the involvement of the novel’s most developed characters, the black Elias Tekwane and the coloured Beukes, in underground anti-apartheid politics forces them to depend on the solidarity of comradeship for survival, this aspect of the novel fails to achieve the ethical intention of living “with and for others” that it initially appears to point towards through its failure to sustain a complex subjectivity with which the reader can engage. As Coetzee notes, the novel’s true protagonist takes the form of “a nascent collective resistance”, rather than any individual character (“Man’s Fate” 356). Beukes’s response to the goodwill of the doctor who treats his gunshot wound, for example, is voiced in the first

person plural—“‘You are taking a chance, doctor,’ Beukes said. ‘We appreciate it.’” (161)—implying a personal identity defined by the collective, in contrast to the autonomy implicit in the doctor’s repetitive use of the first person pronoun, “I”. As Carpenter notes, moreover, “the dedicated pragmatism of the characters, in which pain and fear are subordinated to the practical tasks of the organizing the struggle, reflects La Guma’s artistic dedication, in which the imagination is subordinated to the effective communication of a moral and political vision” (93).

According to David Rabkin, the primary function of character in *Seasons’ End* is “the exhibition of alternative responses to the political situation” (299)—an analysis seconded by André Viola when he states that “from beginning to end, the characters are moved by the one and same imperative of underground resistance” (278). As such, Rabkin continues, “[t]he rich variety of what La Guma earlier described as ‘the human salad’ is replaced by a set of typical figures”, creating a scheme in which “[p]ersonal details are largely subordinated” to the author’s analysis of “the moral character” of apartheid society” (299). Significantly, it is only in the narration of pain that the novel’s protagonists take on a definitively individual identity. The detention and torture of Elias detailed in the first and penultimate chapters of the novel acts as a framing device for both the novel’s diegesis and its ethical repercussions. Elias’s experience of the pain his interrogators inflict is described in vivid detail:

Pain was like a devil which had usurped his body. It was wrenching in his wrists and hands and the sockets of his shoulders as he dangled with all the weight on the handcuffs that shackled him to the staple in the wall. It was his body, battered and bruised by the pistol barrel, and in his legs, his skinned shins, which would not hold his weight. There was a taste of pain in his mouth where the blood had replaced saliva. His whole body was held together on a framework of pain and he was thirsty. His head dangled on his chest: he could see his torn shirt, his waistband—they had taken away his belt—all blurred through puffed eyes, so he knew vaguely that he was alive. He tried to stand up straight, but his legs were pierced by nails, and he sagged again on the manacles. (169)

The overwhelming presence of the physical self engendered by torture is described in such a way as to emphasize—rather than transcend—what Scarry terms the “unsharability” of pain. This is, in turn, emphasized by La Guma’s use of free indirect discourse, as well as the lack of sympathetic involvement displayed by Elias’s interrogators, who neither greet their victim, nor “bother to hold him up” (170), instead letting his physical weakness serve as a symbol of the dynamics of power governing their interaction in accordance with Scarry’s theory of analogical verification: “he felt his legs give with pain as the weight of his body came down

on the floor. He fell on his face and tried to raise himself on his hands which were held in the second pair of handcuffs. After a struggle he was able to sit up” (170). As in *Willemisdorp* and *Episode*, Elias’s identity is elided by his interrogators’ use of generic racial slurs such as “kaffir” and “baboon”,⁴¹ while what remains of his subjectivity collapses into a symbolic, collective identity akin to that found in non-fiction narratives such as those of Mashinini, Pheto and Farasani. Like Farasani’s biographical account of torture, the presentation of Elias’s experience relies heavily on the imagery of the Crucifixion. His narrative, moreover, moves briefly into the realm of personal memory—“He was leaving home and his mother, small and homely—there was ochre powder on her face—gave him the parcel of roasted potatoes and the wiry chicken they had dared to butcher the night before: these were meant for him to eat on the road to the city” (174)—only to modulate into the archaic language of Zulu mythology⁴² and the collective ancestral memory that this evokes:

There was the darkness of the sack again. Talk, talk, talk. But the ghosts waited for him on some far horizon. No words came, only the screaming of many crows circling the battlefield. *Wahlula amakosi! Thou hast conquered the Kings!* The far figures moved along the far horizon. *He! Uya kublasela-pi na? Yes, where wilt thou now wage war?* Far, far, his ancestors gathered on the misty horizon, their spears sparkling like diamonds in the exploding sun. Somebody came out of the bright haze and touched him with a hand. His mind called out ‘Mother’. From afar came the rushing sound of trampling feet. (175)

As Chapman suggests, La Guma’s “remedy for alienation” of the type that occurs on an abstract level in the disavowal of desire fundamental to apartheid policy, and on a concrete level in the torture chamber, can thus be seen to take the form of an attempt “to affiliate the self to changing concepts of community” (251-252). While this may alleviate the distortion of the intersubjective encounter that characterizes torture on the behalf of the (fictional) tortured person, it falls short of the “generative intentionality” that Langsdorf—after Ricoeur—associates with the intersubjective encounter. In this respect, then, *Seasons’ End* appears to emulate the ethical shortcomings of the manifesto form by portraying suffering as “a social issue”, rather than a means of gaining insight into the “struggles of the self” (Frank 122, 92).

According to Rabkin’s reading of La Guma’s earlier novel, *A Walk in the Night* (1962), the impact of violence in his writing is “muted” by the “limited subjectivity which

⁴¹ See, for example, *Seasons’ End* 171.

⁴² See Döhne.

[he] imparts to his characters” (294). Consequently, Rabkin suggests, “La Guma’s purpose is to enlarge our understanding, not of the characters, but of their situation” (294). In this way, La Guma’s oeuvre can be seen to exemplify the “literature of witness” identified by J.M. Coetzee, in which the documentation of “a degraded world” takes precedent over the novel’s capacity to act as—in a phrase that invokes Ricoeur’s evaluation of fiction as a forum for ethical exploration—“a laboratory in which man is the subject of the experiments” (J. M. Coetzee, “Man’s Fate” 345, 360, 347). In the words of Ndebele, then, “[w]hat matters” in La Guma’s work “is what is seen”: “Thinking is secondary to seeing. Subtlety is secondary to obviousness. What is finally left and what is deeply etched in our minds is the spectacular contest between the powerless and the powerful” (43).

With regard to the representation of suffering, I therefore argue that the recourse to a collective identity found in *Seasons’ End* is indicative of a concern with moral achievement—in the sense of compliance to an established set of norms, which, in this case, would be the norms endorsed by the nascent discourse of human rights—above and beyond the ethical intention. As yet another testimony to the tragedy of apartheid, the novel can be seen to have much the same effect as the evidentiary narratives of the early years of apartheid. Ndebele has said of South African “protest literature” that “the more dramatic the information, and the more strikingly perfect it is in its finished form as a symbol of the devastating effects of apartheid, then the more desirable it is as a weapon of moral war” (24). Within the context of the “literature of witness”, then, *Seasons’ End* presents a highly desirable tool of moral edification in the struggle against apartheid. As a fictional work open to the possibility of ethical invigoration, however, La Guma’s novel falls short by failing to address the defamiliarization of the intersubjective encounter perpetuated by apartheid ideology.

The depiction of suffering as an ethical concern in D. M. Zwelonke’s autobiographical novel, *Robben Island*, displays a remarkable homogeneity with that found in *Seasons’ End*. Its narrative structure undergoes a referential shift—from the first person “I” of the free man to the collective “we” experienced during the protagonist’s incarceration on “this devil Island” (Zwelonke 13)—similar to that in La Guma’s novel, and in contemporary non-fiction accounts of detention and torture as described in chapter 4. As in the account of Elias Tekwane’s torture in *Seasons’ End*, moreover, the response of Zwelonke’s protagonist to

the suffering of his friend Bekimpi is described in terms that evoke both the crucifixion of Christ⁴³ and a collective ethnic identity:

The next moment, the warder's hand cut through the air, landing on the face of Bekimpi in a cruel slap...Bekimpi's mouth was locked. His eyes trailed off behind the warder and seemed to focus on me. I deciphered the pain transmitted from them. 'I will suffer like Jesus Christ. I will die like Jesus Christ for my people.' I remembered his words. And the words repeated themselves in my mind, and sang painfully.

I forgot my own suffering and hunger. In my mind I saw the pain on the face of Christ, saw him looking to heaven and in painful gasps crying Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? The map of Africa was imprinted on the face of Bekimpi. The continent of strife and suffering. There is a legend of a little boy and his sister left in the dark forest by their evil stepmother. In that dense forest man-eaters roared, snakes hustled through the grass or hung from the trees. Hyenas and jackals yelped and barked. The little boy led his crying sister through the depths of fear and despondency. When the stepmother took them into the forest he had dropped maize grains on the way to form a trail back home. But the birds of the forest had come and picked the grains. So they strayed into the clutches of a giant.

Africa wanted to walk back to civilisation, but had been trapped in a grim forest. Some fellow human beings will not let him. (17-18)

The novel's introduction, evokes a foundational work of Black Consciousness philosophy, Steve Biko's "I Write What I Like",⁴⁴ in both rubric—Zwelonke titles it "Why I Write"—and rhetoric, as the following extract demonstrates:

If you admire the work of a free mind, why do you restrain the mind of the black man in South Africa? You give it inferior institutes of learning. You brainwash it to accept apartheid, the machinery of its own destruction. You lock it up on Robben Island. (3)

The explicitly accusatory tone sets up a symbolic dichotomy between the powerless and the powerful akin to that dramatized in *Seasons' End*. This dichotomy, moreover, is maintained throughout the novel, with the cast of characters neatly divided into a monochromatic scheme of "symbols of evil on the one hand, and symbols of the victims of evil on the other hand" (Ndebele 23)—as exemplified by the cover image of a black man's body suspended upside down, with the novel's title written across his back in white paint. In an inversion of Bosman and Bloom's early anti-apartheid novels, *Robben Island* can thus be seen to succumb

⁴³ A figure who represents the "whole world", as both Farasani (43) and Cavanaugh (280) remind us.

⁴⁴ A column published in the South African Students' Organisation *Newsletter* from 1970-1972, under the pseudonym "Frank Talk".

to the rigidity of moral ideology—as opposed to the transformative capacity of ethical enquiry—by assuming a shared vantage point from which to regard the suffering of others.

Tendentious Texts: Protest Literature and the Moral Norm

The hardening of ethics into morality is, I suggest, found to an even greater degree in the literary response of writers such as Sepamla and Serote to the Soweto uprising of 1976. Coetzee’s criticisms of their work in “Into the Dark Chamber”, for example, culminates in the accusation of a failure “to imagine torture and death on [their] own terms”. According to Nick Visser, however, Serote’s *Birth* was eagerly received by an intellectual community that had lost faith in the ability of black writers to produce anything beyond the genres of spectacular “journalism, autobiography, short fiction, poetry and...drama” (422). “Here at last”, Visser recalls, “was a novel by a black South African which—approached within the norms of the reigning critical framework—could stand alongside the work of Nadine Gordimer or J. M. Coetzee” (422). In his comparative study of Coetzee and Serote, Viola appears to be of the same opinion, arguing that the novels “share a marked concern about the articulation between the individual and the community, about commitment and the use of violence” (280). My own critical assessment of the texts, however, tends to emphasize their difference rather than convergence; a difference depending primarily on the way in which the texts deal with the ethical issues underlying the representation of torture in literary fiction. Consequently, I am inclined to concur with Paul Gready’s assessment of Serote’s *Birth* as belonging to “a family of novels...written in the aftermath of and in response to the events that began in Soweto in June 1976” (122); an event which, as Serote notes, could itself be distilled to the conflict between two symbols: “camouflage dress and school uniforms” (293). To this family, then, Coetzee’s *Barbarians* is—if, that is, it can be seen to bear any kinship at all—at best “the bastard child” (122). In the following section, I will contest the claims made by Visser and Viola by presenting what I see to be the prevailing concerns of *Birth* and its kindred novels, Sepamla’s *Whirlwind* and Brink’s *A Dry White Season*, as exemplary of moral ossification. I will then proceed to compare this with the intrepid confrontation with the realm of the ethical—in Newton’s sense of “recursive, contingent, and interactive dramas of encounter and recognition” (12)—staged in Coetzee’s *Barbarians* and Ebersohn’s *Store Up the Anger*.

Crucial to this distinction is the ability of a text to resist what Attridge has termed “allegorization” (*J. M. Coetzee* 33), a concept that finds resonance with the superficiality attacked by Ndebele over a decade earlier in *Rediscovery of the Ordinary*. While Ndebele lays the blame for the reduction of fiction to a form of moral prescription with “the average South African writer” (23), however, Attridge emphasizes the role of reading in the construction of a story’s morals. Like Attridge, I do not wish “to deny the valuable insights that this mode of reading has produced and no doubt will continue to produce” (33), but merely to comment on the restricted view that comes from limiting one’s response to fiction within these terms.

According to Attridge, then, South African literature is susceptible to a particular mode of allegorization, one which proceeds from “the widespread assumption that any responsible and principled South African writer, especially during the apartheid years, will have had as a primary concern the historical situation of the country and the suffering of the majority of its people” (33). In consequence, such literature tends to be approached hermeneutically, resulting in the “translat[ion] of apparently distant locales and periods into the South Africa of the time of writing, and [the treatment of] fictional characters as representatives of South African types or even particular individuals” (33). Whereas social realist texts such as *Seasons’ End* and *Robben Island*—as well as their successors, the novels of Serote, Sepamla, and Brink—solicit this type of reading through their explicit concern with apartheid South Africa, the “allusiveness” and “antirealist devices” (Attridge *J. M. Coetzee* 2) of Coetzee’s *Barbarians* enables the novel to sustain a multiplicity of alternative readings beyond the moral pantomime that characterizes most protest literature. If the allegorical reading is located at one end of this spectrum, then, the opposite end is occupied by what Attridge has termed a “literary” reading (40). His description of the literary reading as “one that is grounded [in] the experience of reading as *event*” (39) resonates with Newton’s theorization of narrative ethics, yet differs from this earlier paradigm in its apparent equation of irony—in the Socratic sense—with the optimization of ethical insight.

Before dealing with the exception, however, it is necessary to take a closer look at the rule, as represented by the novels of Serote, Sepamla and Brink. These novels, I suggest, belong to a class of literature that “permit[s] typicalities to predominate”, in which “individuals exist as members of imagined communities” and didacticism forms the governing aesthetic principle (Chapman 396). Indeed, in his discussion of the spectacular as a dominant trope in the literature of black South Africa, Ndebele concludes that, although

Serote's *Birth* "attempts to deal with the ordinary concerns of people while placing those problems within the broad political situation in the country", "[i]n the end...the spectacle takes over and the novel throws away the vitality of the tension generated by the dialectic between the personal and the public" (55). This dialectic collapses into superficiality, and, in doing so, abandons the attempt to engage with the ethical issues underlying the struggle against apartheid, "for the struggle involves people not abstractions" (57). This aspect of the novel, however, is ironically acknowledged by Serote's protagonist when he says of his white colleague, Anne, that "[s]he knew I had contempt for her, for her *symbolic self*, for her having been born into that world whose dreams were my nightmares, whose nightmares challenged my life, luring it to death" (100, emphasis added). This reflexivity suggests that the problems inherent in Serote's "attempt to engage with the ethical issues underlying the struggle against apartheid" are more complex than Ndebele's critique of the spectacular admits.

An illustration of this shortcoming can be found in the uneasy liaison between the extreme exposure of subjectivity inherent in the novel's use of the "confessional mode" to develop its narrative persona (Gallagher 45) and the inauthenticity created by its ostentatious use of Americanisms⁴⁵ and frequent evocation of the iconography of the Black Arts movement. This latter technique is most obvious in the repeated references to African American popular music,⁴⁶ but is also apparent in Serote's descriptions of urban alienation; the stylistic attributes of which imitate the organic, surrealist montage of stimuli found in the African American author Ralph Ellison's seminal novel, *Invisible Man* (1952):

Along Louis Botha Avenue, the traffic was thin; now and then I was the only one on the road. It was pleasant driving at that time of the day. The neon lights, the signs, the colours, all the words, all the tricks that go with advertising night or day, kept leaping into my mind. SHOES. CHICKENS. FLORIST. MUSIC. EGGS EXTRA LARGE. Words, colours kept flashing, as if they were shouting, demanding attention. KENTUCKY FRIED CHICKEN. COME IN AND SEE. COLGATE. And the mind that I have, turned to these verbal signals, kept grabbing the words, pushing them down in there wherever it is that words stick. The sun was sailing

⁴⁵ This ranges from endearments such as "Baby" and "Honey" (3) to Serote's use of the "blues idiom" of "the Langston Hughes-Bessie Smith era" (Gordimer 62), as epitomized by the parallels between his incorporation of short poetic meditations on the metaphor of time as a "mad river" (55, 61) in chapter 4 and Langston Hughes's celebrated poem, "A Negro Speaks of Rivers" (1921).

⁴⁶ Although South African artists, such as Miriam Makeba (5, 211), Hugh Masekela (5) and Dollar Brand (18, 20, 21, 282) are also mentioned, emphasis in the novel is placed upon African American artists. In an act of political and cultural ventriloquism, then, Serote portrays figures such as Nina Simone (3, 22), John Coltrane (17, 50) and Miles Davis (33) as the mouthpiece of the emergent Black Consciousness ideology among young black South Africans. "Nina Simone, for example, is described as "sing[ing] 'To be young, gifted and black'" in an act of ethnic solidarity that causes the "white man [to] become the devil" (113).

westward, but still in the centre of the sky. The leaves of the trees kept up their cultural dance, on and on; Louis Botha Avenue, with its flowers on the islands, went weaving uphill, downhill, to the centre of the city. I followed it, at a slow pace, at ease, thoughtful about Tshidi, about what was waiting for me at work—having been away for so long, a week, and having to explain. I stopped at the entrance to the basement garage. The light was red. Green, I drove in. The basement was busy, its peristaltic movement curling and uncurling. Cars, in all sizes and makes, all shapes and colours, wove in and out of it. I pressed button five. (Serote 95-6)

This is also apparent in Serote's use of metaphor as a tool to both demonize and valorize political forces. Apartheid is estranged as "the holocaust machine" (235); its representation as a faceless, mechanized force primarily achieved through a systematic use of metonymy. The images of apartheid in *Birth* are images of "guns, dogs, Saracens, trucks, bulldozers"; "planes and armoured cars" (21, 262). Insofar as anti-apartheid politics are concerned, the "central ideological operator" in Serote's Soweto is the Movement—which, Visser suggests, is "synonymous with" the ANC (430). Serote's use of organic metaphors associated with the natural world and indigenous South African culture to describe the Movement establishes an aesthetic contrast between the two forces that complements their ideological polarity. The Movement,

like the sea, is deep, is vast, is reflective. It can be calm. It can be rough and tough. Like the wind, it moves and moves and moves. (291)

Like an old tree, the Movement spreads and spreads its roots. It entrenches itself in the soil, issuing root after root, to spread and spread and spread. Some roots end up on rocks, baking in the sun. Some end up in sand. The roots spread and spread and spread. The tall tree, spreading its branches all around, gives shade to the weary. (264)

The Movement is old. It is as old as the grave of the first San or Khoikhoi who was killed by a bullet that came from a ship which had anchored at Cape Town to establish a stop station. The Movement is as young as the idea of throwing stones, of hurling one's life at the armed men who believe in God and shoot with guns. (258)

A strange ambivalence, however, works to undermine this opposition from within. It operates primarily through an ambiguous overlap in the use of animal imagery in the novel. Just as apartheid is mechanized, machines in *Birth* are subject to a peculiar sort of biomorphism. The car, that "white man's machine", "purred, and moved gently back to the tar" (77) as if of its own accord; the train Moloape takes on his journey into exile in Botswana "embraces [him] with its steel arms", and travels "slower than the tortoise itself" (278);

Hippos arrive in Alexandra “with their passengers in camouflage, their FNs peeping out like the noses of curious animals” (245); while “[f]lying low” over Zimbabwe, the “shining round black bodies” of the South African Air Force planes “looked like fish swimming in a tank” (262). This technique effectively attenuates Serote’s use of natural imagery to lend a sense of empowerment and endurance to “the Movement”. The bestial vocabulary of abuse shared by the two opposing groups, moreover, demonstrates the tenuous distinction between the language of political protest and the language of authoritarian abuse:

The crowd [at the funeral] was into another song.

Vorster, Vorster is a dog.
Vorster you own guns, we own history
Vorster, Vorster is a dog. (246)

‘Kill this fucking black dog,’ another man said, and caught Oupa with a kick on the spine. (252)

The liberation cry of the township mourners thus becomes, in the mouth of the white policeman, a death sentence passed by the authors of oppression.

While this overview of the use of symbolism in Serote’s novel provides a compelling case in support of Ndebele’s verdict of superficiality concerning the protest literature of South Africa, it is my contention that Serote’s novel is not undermined by an overdependence on typicalities so much as by a confinement of the intersubjective encounter to the terms of Levinas’ solitude, rather than Ricoeur’s solicitude. Its shortcomings, then, lie not in Serote’s characterization, but in his reluctance to portray their interactions in such a way as to preserve the ethical immediacy of the face to face encounter. The workings of desire in *Birth*, for example, are directed not at achieving recognition, but have a more carnal objective: “I felt Lily’s warm hand touch my terrible muscle, which soon shot up as if it were a spring. It suddenly felt packed and about to burst. She held my head and kissed me full on the mouth. Dazed in her grip, lost in her strength, I gave in to her” (42). Molohe’s relationship with Lily forms the basis for the novel’s representation of love and companionship—of the benign potential of the intersubjective encounter—and yet, despite its moments of tenderness, it is irredeemably marred by conflict and misunderstanding:

She had said to me once, ‘Have care, that is all I need.’ Then I thought I knew what she meant by that, but days told me I did not. Care? Have care? What does that mean? I remember how, many times, we fought, so seriously fought and hurt each other, perhaps forever, because I could not come to saying to her, ‘I love you.’ I

knew she needed me to say that. But I was not going to say so, because she needed me to say so. (45)

Unlike the juxtaposition of sadistic and benign relationships found in many non-fiction accounts of torture, then, the ethical character of *Birth* is defined by Serote's decision to paint his characters from the palette of dissymmetry alone. Tellingly, Molope's narration of his torture is described in strikingly similar terms to his erotic encounter with Lily:

[A]t first, it felt like a relief, right inside the penis, piercing, and I knew I had to hold, hold with all my might. I held on. It was like everything, all the muscles in my body, the shoulders, the stomach, the muscles which close the eyes, even the way my mouth was tight, all seemed to be a power, urging, urging me to release, and now I knew that I was holding with all my strength, I was holding the scream from escaping my lips. I felt my wet hands tighten on the wooden counter, they held so tight they began to hurt. My feet, trembling, wet, seemed to want to assure me that they were still on the ground. Everything now was hurting, was like a huge terror, unleashed, wanting my penis to let go. (72-73)

Similarly orgasmic imagery is used to describe Oupa's torture in chapter 13: 'It was as if his whole body had snapped, was hit by something huge, he felt his sex shoot out, and again he tried to scream. Then he passed out' (253).

Like the nameless, faceless, unresponsive men that torture Oupa, Molope's torturer is abstracted into an impression of his constituent parts—"a loud voice" and a "huge hand" (72)—as they come to bear upon his victim; resulting in an intersubjective encounter defined by defamiliarization. The way in which this abstract manifestation of power fascinates its prey, denying him his voice, bodily autonomy and dignity, is mimetic of Lily's earlier manipulations. It is also significant that Molope feels no compulsion to narrate his experience in order to reestablish his faith in the benign potential of the intersubjective encounter: "Now I could not bear to relate what had happened to anyone. It was my secret. Suddenly a strange, heavy sadness set into my heart, or wherever it is that these things happen" (80). A further ethical complication of Serote's novel, moreover, can be found in his idiosyncratic approach to what has come to be the hallmark of narratives of human rights abuses—both fictional and non-fictional—originating from apartheid South Africa: the incorporation of the stories of (real-life) comrades "whose experiences might otherwise have remained untold" (Jacobs 198). In the case of *Birth*, the story of Ahmed Timol's death—immortalized in Chris van Wyk's parodic poem "In Detention"—is incorporated into

Molope's account of interrogation not as a memory shaped by solidarity and martyrdom, but as a weapon of immense psychological power:

'Molope, you are in a bad place. How did you work your way here? I am sure you have heard of the tenth floor of John Vorster Square?' He stood there, hands in his pockets, looking at me. 'That is the famous window,' he said and pointed to the window behind him. I looked at it...He walked back to his desk and sat down. 'Have you heard of the famous window?'

'What famous window?'

'You have not heard of Timol?'

'I have read about Timol, yes.'

'Didn't you read that he went flying out of a window?'

'I heard that he fell from the tenth floor here.'

'Yes, this is the place, this is the window he flew out of, this very window. He could not take it anymore, so we gave him the choice. Talk or the window. You read what happened, hey?'

'I did read about Timol, yes.' (124-125)

Captain Botha's interrogation of Molope then changes tack, without allowing a definitive version of Timol's death to assert itself—if anything, Botha's account of witness trumps Molope's hearsay evidence. More significantly, the opportunity to redress this imbalance through retrospective reinterpretation provided by Serote's use of the "traditional preterite for narration" (Viola 274) is not taken, again emphasizing the overwhelming—and apparently voluntary—solitude of Serote's protagonist.

The two dominant forms of intersubjective encounter that take place in the novel can thus be seen to succumb to the selfsame "erotic fascination"—in the sense of an incomplete and solipsistic engagement with others—that Coetzee identifies in Sepamla's writing. In consequence, Serote's depiction of human life is, generally speaking, restricted to the realm of the biological phenomenon, rather than the "good life" born of narrative interpretation.⁴⁷ Crucially, the only face to face encounter with any semblance of authenticity in *Birth* is the epiphany described by Molope to his interrogator, Captain Botha:

The death of my nephew, I said to the Captain, had made me stop and look at South Africa, face to face. The country had gone mad. By 'country', I meant the government, those who protected it, those who lubricated it with money, wealth, oppression, violence and their lives. They had had no choice but to go mad. We had no choice but to stop the madness. (279)

⁴⁷ The relationship between eroticism as a limitation of the intersubjective relationship—from which, Levinas claims, subjectivity proceeds—and the good life is manifest in Molope's comment on an encounter with one of his lovers, in which he confesses to undergoing a sudden regression to his childhood as "small boy . . . bewildered by my biology" (93).

Molope's epiphany, as the novel would lead us to expect, is irredeemably one-sided—a single man confronted with the facelessness of “the world of the impersonal ‘third’”, which, in the absence of justice, cannot move beyond a relation of dissymmetry. And although, as Ricoeur reminds us, there exists a “limit imposed on every effort to reconstruct the social bond on the sole basis of a strictly diadic dialogic relation” (*Oneself* 195), without this fundamental relationship, no extension from solicitude to equality is possible. Recalling Scarry's definition of the political situation as “almost by definition one in which the two locations of selfhood are in a skewed relation to one another or have wholly split apart and have begun to work, or to be worked, against one another” (37), then, I propose that novels such as *Birth* are ethically limited through their excessive and solipsistic engagement with the political dimensions of the apartheid experience. By this, I do not mean to side with Coetzee in arguing that South African authors should not take inspiration from their social reality, but rather to say that it is a question of method, rather than principle.

In the case of Sepamla's *Whirlwind*, a lack of objective distance enables the protagonists' Marxist rhetoric to skew the narrative perspective, thus allowing a moralizing ideology to dominate the “relationship between fiction and society” (Ndebele 27-8) constructed by the novel. Soweto, the novel's highly symbolic setting, is personified to an equal, if not greater, extent than many of Sepamla's characters—as demonstrated by the typically Sepamlan sentences “In the late afternoon Soweto began to bend its neck under the mass of a grey cloud of smoke” (29) and “For days Soweto hovered between hope and despair, death and life” (103)—thus emphasizing the novel's symbolic import through the use of pathetic fallacy. Likewise, the template-like nature of Sepamla's characters is reinforced by the interspersed news headlines such as “RIOT TOLL RISES. THIRTEEN BODIES RECOVERED” (9) and the recurrent “NEWS ITEM” sections—an effect also apparent in Serote's less frequent use of the technique.⁴⁸ In contrast to the narrative interpolation that characterizes First's use of the media in *117 Days*, however, Sepamla's use of this technique serves to foreground the symbolic role of his characters, thus

⁴⁸ Sepamla's novel features a total of thirteen “NEWS ITEM” sections, whereas Serote uses a similar technique approximately six times. See Sepamla 51, 61, 81, 98, 106, 139, 161, 168, 179, 183, 208, 226 and 237; and Serote 56, 101, 215, 292, 296 and 297.

causing the anonymity of the reports to undermine the face to face encounter facilitated by literary fiction.

The novel's denouement—in which Mzi joins Serote's Tsi Malope into exile—emphasizes this further by invoking a collective identity: “For Mzi the flurry of his exit from the country was in sharp contrast to the quiet dignity of his return many weeks earlier. His hope was embedded deep in his heart because for the exile there is always the eternal light burning for home-coming. For him there would be a second coming. His faith in the thought was enshrined” (Sepamla 244). Like Tekwane's death in *Seasons' End*, Mzi's departure is described in terms of the Christian paradigm—whereas Tekwane's tortured body is likened to the crucifixion of Christ, Mzi's inevitable return is rendered in language evocative of the resurrection. In both instances, moreover, this serves to emphasize an identity defined by collectivity and symbolism, rather than autonomy and literary realism.

The interrogation and torture of Sis Ida in *Whirlwind* is another case in point. Her face to face encounter with the police when they arrive to raid her house is described in terms of a destructive violence: “The face of the tall officer hit hers with the power of a whirlwind” (126). This metaphor is a portent of the instant transformation of the intersubjective encounter from one of solidarity—as symbolized by her “harbouring of youths she knew full well had committed wrongs against the whiteman's law and were sought for retribution” (14)—to the irreconcilable otherness evoked by the observation that “[i]n her own house she was made a stranger” (127). The imagery of violence and alienation inherent in the interaction of Colonel Kleinwater and Sis Ida is a recurrent motif in the pages leading up to her interrogation. In its preliminary stages, Kleinwater's “heavy breathing smacked her face”, “his voice punching a hole in the air”, while Sis Ida feels herself to be “assaulted by the force of law” and “besieged by cops” (129-33). This is indicative of a pervasive failure to uphold “the esteem of the *other as oneself* and the esteem of *oneself as another*”. Sepamla's use of free indirect discourse as a means of representing Sis Ida's internal monologue recognizes this in the statement that “[s]he was convinced . . . [that] [t]he law-enforcer would never understand any explanation of her humanity” (130). Continuing in this vein, she attempts “to find a part in his eyes which she could read with her heart. There was none. The man's face was all steel. He sat there before her as if he had no beating of his own heart. He was like a machine” (130). The contrast between this idiom of mechanization that characterizes Sis Ida's assessment of Kleinwater and the use of natural imagery in his

description of “the chorus line of [Sis Ida’s] innocence was repeated as regularly as the seawater lashes the coastline at ebb-tide” (152), moreover, invokes the conventions of anti-apartheid fiction established in works such as La Guma’s *Seasons’ End* and Serote’s *Birth*.

This narrative technique, however, is itself guilty of cultivating an asymmetrical view of the intersubjective encounter by presenting the scene in terms of a simplistic moral binary, in which Sis Ida represents “a world of kindness” (132) and Kleinwater, one of evil and inhumanity. The dichotomy is reinforced by the way in which, like Tekwane, Molope and Mzi, Sis Ida perceives herself in terms of a community of faith. In the face of torture, she believes that her “faith in God would make her survive” (133), but if not, [h]er body would be a sacrifice” (133, 134). Furthermore, the juxtaposition of Sis Ida’s interrogation with the torture of Bongzi inflects this presentation of intersubjective estrangement with the solipsism of the erotic gaze. Bongzi’s interrogators rip off her blouse, “exposing the breast in a vulgar way” (156). The sexual objectification of the scene is emphasized, moreover, as “one of [the cops] turned the light on [her] breast”, before torturing her with pliers (157). While Bongzi’s “excruciating pain” is not wholly unsharable—it “linger[s] in the body of her comrade, Boysi (158)—her torturers are “insensitiv[e]” to it (157). This creates a hierarchy of empathetic identification, one which is not necessarily dictated by race—for Roy perceives the black policeman that participates in his torture as “the salt of his body wounds”, his heart “filled with hate for the other black man” (181)—but by political inclination and, more importantly, power. The inequality of exchange in Sepamla’s novel is profound. Sympathetic, highly developed characters such as Sis Ida are capable—like Farasani—of experiencing “natural feeling[s] of human compassion” and pity “for the poor plight of [their] assailant[s]” (225), feelings that are left entirely unreciprocated. In consequence, while Sepamla is successful in portraying his protagonists with a sensitivity that goes beyond the superficial symbolism condemned by Ndebele, he appears to be incapable of portraying incidents of human rights abuse in terms capable of sustaining the complex encounters with intersubjectivity found in, for example, Bloom’s depiction of Swanepoel. It is the limitations placed upon the capacity of prose fiction to sustain “interactive dramas of encounter and recognition”, therefore, that Sepamla’s *Whirlwind*, like Serote’s *Birth*, fails as an ethical narrative.

These limitations are, I argue, found to an even greater extent in Brink’s *A Dry White Season*. As Jolly notes, Brink’s literary output during the apartheid era was marked by his pronounced awareness of the author’s “responsibility” towards the socio-political context of

South Africa (17). In consequence, many of Brink's novels display an overt "alliance between his political and literary prerogatives" (17). Significantly, however, his critical stance during this period evinced a "conviction" that "literature should never descend to the level of politics" (Brink, qtd. in Jolly 17). Rather, when "writing in [the] state of siege" imposed by authoritarianism, the author's primary concern should be to "elevat[e] and refin[e] politics so as to be worthy of literature" (Brink, qtd. in Jolly 17). This suggests that the ethical determinations underlying Brink's fiction are concentrated on obviating the vortex of dissymmetry that tends to characterize the narration of human rights abuses within the context of apartheid South Africa. While Brink's attempt to avoid being caught in this snare gives rise to several aesthetic innovations insofar as the literary representation of torture is concerned, it is my contention that the underlying conflict between his political and literary prerogatives undercuts the efficacy of these efforts, as the following analysis of *A Dry White Season* will show.

The novel takes the form of a multi-layered investigation into the deaths of three figures: Jonathan Ngubene; his father, Gordon Ngubene; and Ben du Toit, a white teacher who knows Gordon as a cleaner at the school at which he works, and for whom Gordon's wife, Emily, once worked as a domestic servant. The chain of events begins with the disappearance of Jonathan "at the height of the youth riots in Soweto" (37). Gordon appeals to Du Toit for help in tracing his son, and they discover that he died in suspicious circumstances while in detention at the infamous John Vorster Square (44-46). "In order to devote all his time to the enquiries which had become an obsession for him" (49), Gordon resigns from his position at the school and continues to pursue the truth about his son's death. In the process, he accumulates evidence of the routine torture of detainees in John Vorster Square. Soon after obtaining two affidavits to this effect, Gordon is taken into custody by the Special Branch (51). After receiving a report from a fellow detainee that Gordon was "unable to walk or speak properly, his face was discoloured and swollen, his ear was deaf, his right arm in a sling" (67), Emily approaches Du Toit for assistance. Du Toit takes up the investigation, and, in doing so, jeopardizes his standing in the local Afrikaans community. He discovers an underworld of police brutality and, with the help of a lawyer, begins to compile a case against the state; an act that ultimately leads to his assassination in a staged car accident.

These events are retrospectively narrated by an unwilling and anonymous narrative persona,⁴⁹ who perceives the burden of telling Ben's story as yet another example of the "occupational hazard[s]" of being a writer, of "being singled out by people who want to pour out their life stories on me . . . in the hope of a small claim on eternity" (10). Although the novel begins, in mimesis of the conventions of the non-fiction human rights narrative, as an attempt to tell the story of a life which "might otherwise have remained untold", this suggestion of solicitude is soon dispelled. The narrator's investment in Ben's story is instead framed, in entirely solipsistic terms, as a selfish desire "to write myself out of my own sterile patch" (33). In terms of form, the novel is presented as a sort of forensic investigation, or autopsy, in which the narrator seeks to construct a coherent narrative from "the litter of another man's life" that has been "dumped" on him (9). The novel's concern with an empirical style of narrative reconstruction, however, emphasises the close relationship between the plot of investigation and the narrator's intellectual—rather than compassionate—impulse to decipher the "bewildering" story of "a stranger" who bore only "a slight and superficial resemblance to the Ben du Toit [he'd] once known" (14). This analytical narrative gaze serves to compound the ethical implications of the dysfunctional intersubjective relationships that dominate the reconstruction of Du Toit's story. The interpolation of the first person, in the form of Du Toit's diary entries, fails to alleviate this aspect of the novel's narrative structure. This is primarily due to the overwhelming anxiety of self that these entries attest to—"Am I a leper spreading disease to whoever comes close enough?" (236)—as well as the implausibly detailed recollection of the action and dialogue they record. It can also, however, be attributed to the degree of control that the narrative persona exerts over this interpolation—Du Toit's diary entries are selected according to the organizing principle used to retrospectively reconstruct the events emplotted in the novel, and the boundaries between these entries and the novel's meta-narrative are often indistinct. In consequence, Brink's novel struggles to move beyond an incomplete and solipsistic view of intersubjectivity, and thus can be seen to anticipate the literary response to atrocity found in the Soweto novels of Serote and Sepamla.

⁴⁹ We are told only that he is the "fiction editor of [a] woman's journal and author of 'popular' novels" (10) and an old, although not particularly close, acquaintance of the novel's protagonist, Ben Du Toit (9).

In addition to the estrangement and intellectualism of the novel's meta-narrative, its confinement of the intersubjective encounter to the realm of dysfunction and solipsism can, I suggest, be attributed to two distinctive features: first, the use of metaphor to create a pervasive state of alienation, and second, the objectification of the erotic gaze. The first of these features bears a close resemblance to the oppositional use of natural and mechanical imagery in the novels of La Guma, Serote and Sepamla, in that the racial other is typically portrayed in terms of a grotesque, barely human figure. In *A Dry White Season*, this is developed further, to include a sense of spatial, as well as interpersonal, alienation. Du Toit's visit to the funeral home in Soweto to see Gordon's body, for example, begins with "[a] sensation of total strangeness as they reached the first rows of identical brick buildings. Not just another city, but another country, another dimension, a wholly different world" (89). The bodies—both living and dead—that populate the funeral home are, in Ben's eyes, more animalistic than anthropomorphic: the mortician has "limbs thin and stick-like like a praying mantis"; the body of an old woman has "nipples large and scaly like the heads of tortoises", while Gordon appears "incongruous and ludicrous in a black Sunday suit, hands crossed on his chest like the claws of a bird" (90-91). The inversion in perspective from the black protagonists of La Guma, Zwelonke, Serote and Sepamla's novels to the whiteness of Ben du Toit and his narrative representative is less significant than the novels' continuity of these figurative norms of interracial distortion,⁵⁰ which serve to relegate the intersubjective encounter to an irreconcilable state of superficial difference.

The second narrative feature of *A Dry White Season*—that of an objectifying erotic gaze—is primarily represented by Du Toit's extramarital relationship with a young journalist, Melanie Bruwer. Instead of emotional intimacy, this relationship is characterized by a desire born of mystique. Du Toit confesses in his diary that what "disturbed him so deeply" about Melanie was not jealousy, but

[r]ather a painful acceptance of the obvious discovery that there were whole landscapes of her life inaccessible to me. However freely she'd confided in me about her life, however readily she'd answered my questions, it had been no more than a narrow footpath on which I'd wandered through her wilderness. . . . Was there any hope of it ever being different? (196)

⁵⁰ In *A Dry White Season*, this is supplemented by the parodic figure of Dan Levinson, the purportedly liberal but fundamentally corrupt Jewish lawyer that Du Toit consults. Levinson is described as "radiating the virility one might associate with an ad for a sportman's deodorant" and, in keeping with the semitic stereotype, ends his last meeting with Du Toit with the words "Incidentally, did you get my last account?" (225) before fleeing the country with large sums of money.

This is reinforced by the subjugation of the romantic component of their relationship to their mutual involvement in the investigation of the deaths of Jonathan and Gordon Ngubane:

What binds us is the mutual devotion to a task we have undertaken: to bring the truth to light, to ensure that justice be done. Beyond that nothing is allowed us, nothing is even thinkable. And apart from what we are allowed to share for Gordon's sake, neither has any claim on the other. Whatever part of my life falls outside that narrow scope, is exclusively mine; what is hers is hers. Why should I *wish* to know more? (196)

A Dry White Season can thus be seen to privilege two modes of narrative discovery: first, the empirical investigation into a politico-legal case of human rights abuse, in which the contested figure of justice is paramount; and second, the narrative quest to discover one's own subjectivity, a quest brought to the fore in the increasingly paranoid interrogation of self found in Du Toit's diary entries. With regard to the concept of "aiming for the 'good life' with and for others, in just institutions", then, it appears that the novel's concern with justice and self-discovery effectively elides the middle term—that of intersubjectivity—crucial to the ethical intention. Brink's failure to acknowledge the critical role of intersubjectivity as the basic dimension of ethics in *A Dry White Season* can thus be seen to encapsulate the ethical limitations of the type of fiction around which the accusations of superficiality and allegory made by Ndebele and Attridge converge. This, in turn, is indicative of the way in which the political prerogative tends to encroach upon the literary prerogative within the context of a politically volatile situation. In consequence, the novels of La Guma, Zwelonke, Serote, Sepamla and Brink demonstrate the difficulty—and, more often than not, counterproductivity—of attempting to negotiate between the two in apartheid South Africa.

The Burial of Allegory:

Narrative Parallax and the Face to Face Encounter

There has been something staring me in the face, and still I do not see it.

J. M. Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians*

According to Attridge, cultural artefacts possess a potential for singularity, which "consists in its difference from all other such objects, not simply as a particular manifestation of general

rules but as a peculiar nexus within the culture that is perceived as resisting or exceeding all pre-existing general determinations” (*Singularity* 63). Singularity, therefore,

is generated not by a core of irreducible materiality or vein of sheer contingency to which the cultural frameworks we use cannot penetrate but by a configuration of general properties that, in constituting the entity (as it exists in a particular time and place), go beyond the possibilities pre-programmed by a culture’s norm, the norms with which its members are familiar and through which most cultural products are understood. Singularity is not *pure*: it is constitutively impure, always open to contamination, grafting, accidents, reinterpretation, and recontextualization. Nor is it inimitable: on the contrary, it is eminently imitable, and may give rise to a host of imitations. (63)

Using this as my point of departure, I will now proceed to an examination of Coetzee’s *Barbarians* and Ebersohn’s *Store Up the Anger* within the ethical context of South African representations of human rights violations. As Newton suggests, certain narrative modes “imply fundamental ethical questions about what it means to generate and transmit narratives, and to implicate, transform, or force the persons who participate in them” (7), while others merely reinscribe authorized ethical—or, rather, *moral*—codes. In doing so, the latter grouping obscure the contingency of these normative codes, thus discouraging the reader from developing a thorough appreciation of fiction’s ability to encourage moral thinking above and beyond the requirement of moral adjudication. Within the context of authoritarianism and resistance, this sort of narrative is likely to conform to Ndebele’s idea of protest literature as endorsing the “ossification” of “complex social problems into symbols which are perceived as finished forms of good and evil” (23). More than this, the “tendentiousness” of these narratives is inclined, I suggest, to solicit “allegorical” readings, in which the reader “look[s] for meaning beyond the literal, in a realm of significance which the novel may be said to imply without ever directly naming” (Attridge, *J. M. Coetzee* 32). In these readings, texts are “taken to allegorize the conflict and abuses that characterize the modern world, or that have been fully acknowledged only in modern times” (33). In the case of Coetzee, this is taken even further, so that the diegetic worlds of his fiction are generally seen to represent a more specific “modern world”: that of apartheid South Africa. Using the work of the philosopher Donald Davidson in tandem with that of Sontag, Attridge suggests that, with regard to the work of Coetzee, we look not at “what they *mean* but what they *do*” (37). Consequently, I will now argue that what *Barbarians* does—and, in my opinion, does

exceptionally well—is to “pos[e] (but not resolv[e]) . . . delicate ethical dilemmas” (48) through the sustained and insightful mediation of the intersubjective encounter.

As the propagator of an orthodoxly Adornean approach to the representation of atrocity within the context of authoritarianism, it could perhaps be seen as ironic that Coetzee himself is the author of a novel about “the impact of the torture chamber on the life of a man of conscience” (“Into the Dark Chamber”). According to Durrant, however, Coetzee’s fiction succeeds in avoiding the dilemma posited in “Into the Dark Chamber” by “refusing to translate [the suffering engendered by apartheid] into narrative”. In keeping with his theorization of the role of unsuccessful mourning⁵¹ as a method of obviating the pitfalls that riddle the approaches to the torture chamber, Durrant states that

Rather than providing a direct historical relation of the conditions of apartheid, [Coetzee’s novels] instead provide a way of relating *to* such a history. They teach us that the true work of the novel consists not in the factual recovery *of* history, nor yet in the psychological recovery *from* history, but rather in the insistence on remaining inconsolable *before* history. (431)

To my mind, Durrant’s repetitive use of the prepositional evokes Newton’s differentiation between the genitive “ethics *of* narrative” as a deontological concept and the prepositional “narrative *as* ethics” as a phenomenological concept. Rather than attempting to portray torture in terms of a monochromatic, normative morality, it is the insistence on an ambiguous, phenomenological approach to the perpetration of human rights abuses that, I contend, makes *Barbarians* stand out as a singular work of literature, as one that goes beyond the “cohesive generational stamp” of his contemporaries’ work and, in doing so, becomes “an ethically charged event” (Attwell 16; Attridge, *J. M. Coetzee* xii). This is, interestingly enough, supported by the historical circumstances of the book’s escape from censorship. As the book history scholar Peter D. McDonald shows, the Directorate of Publications’ committee chose to interpret the book not as an allegory of the South African situation—in which case it would probably have been censored—but as a “literary” work and thus, relatively speaking, harmless:

This is a somewhat Kafkaesque type of narrative . . . The locale is as obscure as Erewhon, and any symbolism more so . . . Further symbolism could with diligence be extracted. All is of world-wide significance, not particularized. Though the book has considerable literary merit, it quite lacks popular appeal. The likely readership will

⁵¹ This theoretical approach is closely allied to Attridge’s assessment of Coetzee’s work as displaying a “permanent possibility of irony, [a] resistance to closure” (*J. M. Coetzee* 7).

be limited largely to the intelligentsia, the discriminating minority. . . . We submit there is no convincing reason for declaring the book undesirable. (Reginald Lighton, qtd. in McDonald 290)

Barbarians is set in a “border settlement” of “the Empire”, and tells the story of a nameless local magistrate who finds his power usurped by the sudden arrival of Colonel Joll, a representative of the Third Bureau, the “unsleeping guardian of the Empire” (*Barbarians* 56, 21). Joll instigates a violent crusade to “safeguard the Empire” (41) against the nomadic peoples indigenous to the area, known only as “the barbarians”. From the very beginning, Joll and the magistrate find themselves at loggerheads, and this initial antagonism escalates over the course of Joll’s stay in the settlement as the magistrate becomes more and more critical of the unjustified raids and “acts of wanton cruelty” (54) inflicted upon the “aboriginal” fishing community (19) and the barbarians. In direct defiance of Joll and his genocidal tactics, the magistrate undertakes “a brief visit to the barbarians” in an attempt “[t]o repair some of the damage wrought by the forays of the Third Bureau . . . and to restore some of the goodwill that previously existed” (62). He takes with him three men and his young barbarian mistress—herself blinded and crippled at the hands of Joll’s men—with the intention of returning her to her people. Upon his return to the settlement, he is greeted by what he initially assumes to be a “welcoming party”, but instead turns out to be a military escort to “march us back like prisoners through the open gates” (82). During his absence, the army has arrived and Joll’s “promised campaign against the barbarians is under way” (83). Even worse, he finds himself accused of “treasonously consorting with the enemy” (85) and is subsequently imprisoned. The magistrate escapes, and leaves the settlement only to inexplicably return and attempt to re-enter the makeshift prison. This attempt is disrupted by the arrival of Colonel Joll and his army with their barbarian captives—the point at which I first stopped reading. The magistrate steps forward from the crowd and protests against the abuse of the prisoners, telling Joll “You are depraving these people” (116)—an act for which he is severely beaten, imprisoned and, finally, tortured himself. When he is eventually released, he becomes a vagrant, surviving off a “beggar’s trade” (145). The soldiers withdraw, leaving destruction in their wake, while the magistrate and the town’s remaining population stay behind, awaiting the inevitable revenge of the barbarians. To occupy himself during this period of liminality, the magistrate is compelled to write a history of—or, rather, “memorial” to—the settlement (168-69). At the time of the novel’s closure, he has embarked upon his

first attempt, which he claims to be “devious . . . equivocal . . . reprehensible” (169). Rather than “the annals of an Imperial outpost or an account of how the people of that outpost spent their last year composing their souls as they waited for the barbarians”, it is a testament to his desire “[t]o live outside history. . . . outside the history that the Empire imposes on its subjects, even its lost subjects” (169). The magistrate’s narrative leaves us soon after this, his final confession one of “feeling stupid, like a man who lost his way long ago but presses on along a road that may lead nowhere” (170).

In contrast to the extensive use of free indirect discourse and direct speech in the novels dealt with in the previous section, *Barbarians* is “notorious” for its present-tense, first-person narrative only sparsely punctuated by dialogue (Visser 274). This technique, I suggest, is effective in “align[ing]” the reader with the gaze of the other *without* absorbing it in an act of “idealizing incorporation” (Durrant 436). In consequence, we as readers are “implicat[ed]” in the events of the narrative, without possessing the agency to resolve them. It is my contention, therefore, that the narrative structure of *Barbarians* exemplifies literature’s ability to cultivate “the esteem of the *other as a oneself* and the esteem of *oneself as another*” without demanding an assimilation of the two. Although the novel explores a range of issues, including the “struggles of the self” and the defamiliarization of intersubjective relations engendered by torture,⁵² the intricacies of the face to face encounter are of paramount concern to the narrative’s development. The deterioration of the magistrate’s social standing in the settlement creates a parallax narrative, by which I allude to a literary version of McDonald calls “parallax” historical narratives, narratives that “privileg[e] no single point of view” (299). In contradistinction to the totalizing retrospective “vantage points” encouraged by most first-person narratives, the magistrate’s account is singular in its provision of a narrative perspective that is wholly subjective without being authoritative. The magistrate’s narrative is exceptionally authentic in its “extreme exposure and sensitivity of one subjectivity to another”, an exposure that continually resists “the political world of the impersonal ‘third’” (Newton 9). This resistance is achieved not only by a refusal to claim

⁵² See, for example, the magistrate’s observation that

my torturers were not interested in degrees of pain. They were interested only in demonstrating to me what it meant to live in a body, as a body, a body which can entertain notions of justice only as long as it is whole and well, which very soon forgets them when its head is gripped and a pipe is pushed down its gullet and pints of salt water are poured into it till it coughs and retches and flails and voids itself. . . . They came to my cell to show me the meaning of humanity, and in the space of an hour they showed me a great deal. (126)

moral superiority on the basis of normative values, but also by a sustained investment in the potential variance of individual interpretation. This latter facet of *Barbarians* is brought to the fore by Coetzee's staging of the face to face encounter as a productive engagement with the dialectic that proceeds from the way in which the existential experience is at once incommensurable, and yet informative in this incommensurability.

Fundamental to this facet of the novel is the magistrate's relationship with the barbarian girl. Like Du Toit's feelings for Melanie in *A Dry White Season*, the magistrate's erotic desire for the barbarian girl is secondary to his desire to know her in the sense of a merging of subjectivities. In *Barbarians*, this is thematized as an attempt to draw out the story behind her disfigurement—the magistrate reads her body as a “scar text” to be deciphered: “It has been growing more and more clear to me that until the marks on this girl's body are deciphered and understood I cannot let go of her” (33). This attempt is frustrated not only by her verbal reticence—“You want to talk all the time,’ she complains” (43), but by the impenetrable façade of her face. In a fit of resentment at her “obstinate, phlegmatic body”, he visits a prostitute at the local inn, but instead of offering temporary escape, this simply serves to remind him of the barbarian girl:

I pay a visit one evening to the rooms on the second floor of the inn. . . . The girl . . . gives a start at my entry, but rises smiling to welcome me and bolts the door. . . . I embrace her, bury myself in her, lose myself in her soft bird-like flurries. The body of the other one, closed, ponderous, sleeping in my bed in a faraway room, seems beyond comprehension. Occupied in these suave pleasures, I cannot imagine what ever drew me to that alien body. The girl in my arms flutters, pants, cries as she comes to a climax. Smiling with joy, sliding into a languorous half-sleep, it occurs to me that I cannot even recall the other one's face. ‘She is incomplete!’ I say to myself. Though the thought begins to float away at once, I cling to it. I have a vision of her closed eyes and closed face filming over with skin. Blank, like a fist beneath a black wig, the face grows out of the throat and out of the blank body beneath it, without aperture, without entry. I shudder with revulsion in the arms of my little bird-woman, hug her to me. (45)

This revulsion, however, is not sufficient entirely to alienate the magistrate from the barbarian girl. His attempts to decipher her continue—“with this woman it is as if there is no interior, only a surface across which I hunt back and forth seeking entry” (46)—only to culminate in an epiphanic moment of self-understanding: “I begin to face the truth of what I am trying to do: to obliterate the girl” (50). What this suggests, then, is that in spite of the impossibility of entering another's consciousness, particularly the consciousness of one who has suffered torture, the attempt to do so precipitates the development of an enhanced

understanding of one's own consciousness. The magistrate meets the girl's blankness with a speculative construction of her thoughts and feelings, and then develops this into a method of questioning his own behaviours, motives and prejudices:

I tell myself that she submits because of her barbarian upbringing. But what do I know of barbarian upbringings? What I call submission may be nothing but indifference. . . . I have hitherto liked to think that she cannot fail to see me as a man in the grip of passion, however perverted and obscure that passion may be, that in the bated silences which make up so much of our intercourse she cannot but feel my gaze pressing in upon her with the weight of a body. I prefer not to dwell on the possibility that what a barbarian upbringing teaches a girl may be not to accommodate a man's every whim, including the whim of neglect, but to see sexual passion, whether in horse or goat or man or woman, as a simple fact of life with the clearest of means and the clearest of ends; so that the confused actions of an aging foreigner who picks her up off the streets and installs her in his apartment so that he can now kiss her feet, now browbeat her, now anoint her with exotic oils, now ignore her, now sleep in her arms all night, now moodily sleep apart, may seem nothing but evidences of impotence, indecisiveness, alienation from his own desires. While I have not ceased to see her as a body maimed, scarred, harmed, she has perhaps by now grown into and become that new deficient body, feeling no more deformed than a cat feels deformed for having claws instead of fingers. I would do well to take these thoughts seriously. More ordinary than I like to think, she may have ways of finding me ordinary too. (60-61)

While the magistrate does not “dwell” on the possibility of unflattering interpretations of himself, he does acknowledge them. This reveals him to be engaged in the cultivation of two faculties that I have established as being fundamental to the ethical intention: “the esteem of the *other as oneself* and the esteem of *oneself as another*”, and the privileging of this intersubjective esteem over moral judgement. In this way, Coetzee's presentation of the relationship between the magistrate and the barbarian girl attests to the pedagogical power of the face to face encounter, and its capacity to act as the supreme test of solicitude by allowing one to transcend the “unequal power” of the encounter with suffering and find “compensation in an authentic reciprocity in exchange”. Once developed, moreover, this faculty is not confined to the relationship between the magistrate and the barbarian girl. It extends to incorporate the magistrate's responses to the barbarians he encounters on his journey, to Joll's tortured captives, to Joll and his brutal army, to the abused river people, and finally, to the anonymous and unknowable inhabitants of both the past and the future: his meeting with the barbarians to whom he hands over the girl is described as a first encounter of equality, in which the barbarians are approached “on their own ground on equal terms” (78); his interruption of the public flogging of Joll's captives appeals to the

condition of being human as being both universal and unifying, beginning as it does with “We are the great miracle of creation” (117); and his putative history is written as both “a gesture to the people who inhabited the ruins in the desert” and a “plea” directed at future generations (168-9). Even where the despotic Joll is concerned, the magistrate’s response is qualified in terms of a reaching out, a reciprocal—albeit imperfectly so—recognition of and engagement with alterity:

I stare through the window at the faint blur against the blackness that is Colonel Joll. . . . An urge runs through me to smash the glass, to reach in and drag the man out through the jagged hole, to feel his flesh catch and tear on the edges, to hurl him to the ground and kick his body to pulp.

As though touched by this murderous current he reluctantly turns his face towards me. Then he sidles across the seat until he is looking at me through the glass. His face is naked, washed clean, perhaps by the blue moonlight, perhaps by physical exhaustion. I stare at his pale high temples. Memories of his mother’s soft breast, of the tug in his hand of the first kite he ever flew, as well as of those intimate cruelties for which I abhor him, shelter in that beehive.

He looks out at me, his eyes searching my face. The dark lenses are gone. Must he too suppress an urge to reach out, claw me, blind me with splinters? (160)

Crucially, this ethical response is portrayed as taking place independently from—and, perhaps, in spite of—moral judgement. As the magistrate develops this faculty, moreover, he becomes increasingly aware of how short of the ideal of justice human efforts:

Would I have dared to face the crowd to demand justice for these ridiculous barbarian prisoners with their backsides in the air? *Justice*: once that word is uttered, where will it all end? Easier to shout *No!* Easier to be beaten and made a martyr. Easier to lay my head on a block than to defend the cause of justice for the barbarians: for where can that argument lead but to laying down our arms and opening the gates of the town to the people whose land we have raped? The old magistrate, defender of the rule of law, enemy in his own way of the State, assaulted and imprisoned, impregably virtuous, is not without his own twinges of doubt. (118)

Within the framework of *Barbarians*, then, the magistrate’s developing ethical awareness enables a reappraisal of the normative moral codes that have hitherto been his guide. The ethical intention in Coetzee’s novel can thus be seen to transcend the requirement, posited by Ricoeur, that the other be perceived as the “master of justice”, for the magistrate is capable of perceiving a complex and vulnerable subjectivity in a man we might go so far as to call the “master of *injustice*”. This suggests that the role of the “diadic dialogic relation” in the construction of the social bond might be more significant than Ricoeur gives it credit for

in *Oneself as Another*. This, in turn, suggests that, at least insofar as the representation of torture is concerned, the attempt to invoke the “world of the impersonal ‘third’” as arbiter of interpretation falls short. Ultimately, then, *Barbarians* contradicts Ricoeur’s statement that “[j]ustice extends further than face to face encounters” to propose that the face to face encounter not only precedes, but is fundamentally limited by the realm of normative morality to which justice belongs. Coetzee’s novel, therefore, is demonstrative of the way in which literary fiction can transcend the plane of prescriptive reality to offer its readers access to a descriptive ideology. Attridge has described the text as “an inventive literary work drawing us into unfamiliar emotional and cognitive territory” (*J. M. Coetzee* 43). More than this, I would suggest that *Barbarians* be seen not as an excursion into unfamiliar territory—implying as it does a sort of lateral movement towards a frontier, much like that dramatized in the novel—but as an archaeological uncovering of the ethical strata buried beneath the topsoil of normative morality. In doing so, this singular novel provides us with a paradigm for the text as “ethically charged event” (Attridge, *J. M. Coetzee* xii).

Wessel Ebersohn’s *Store Up the Anger* has received far less critical attention than *Barbarians*, both in terms of volume and range. Furthermore, most of the criticism that has been published has approached the text from an allegorical tangent. Michael Green has argued for a reading of the novel within the context of Ebersohn’s more popular detective novels, positing the use of this genre as a means of historical recovery that is heavily invested in the socio-political context of apartheid, while Michael Chapman’s assessment of the text perceives Ebersohn’s protagonist, Sam Bhengu, as a fictional analogue for the Black Consciousness icon, Steve Biko. Chapman posits that, in *Store Up the Anger*, “the death of Steve Biko . . . provides the focus for a drama of interrogation, in which the spy or police thriller . . . is given the actuality of physical and psychological menace in the setting of the police torture room” (397). Against this, however, Gready points out that “Bhengu’s past is entirely invented” and therefore should not be interpreted as a fictionalized biography of Biko (123). In addition to its biographical resonance and naturalistic narrative style, the boundaries between fiction and reality in the novel are blurred by the inclusion of real-life characters, such as Nelson Mandela (42), Father Trevor Huddleston (55), the Reverend Beyers Naudé (125), Nelson Mandela (42), Winnie Mandela (145) and Robert Sobukwe (145). While this proximity to real historical figures and events can be seen to solicit an allegorical reading of the kind identified performed by Green, Ebersohn’s use of narrative

parallax creates an immediacy of contact that, I argue, aligns the text more closely with Coetzee's *Barbarians* than the symbolic novels of Serote, Sepamla and Brink. Another criticism levelled at the text focuses on the conflict between the literary and the political prerogative. According to Gready, Ebersohn's novel illustrates "the potential for committed fiction to be both politically subversive and compromised by sometimes intrusive agendas" (14). It is my contention, however, that these agendas are clumsily projected onto the novel by strictly allegorical readings, rather than skilfully teased out through the close analysis of its narrative structure.

Store Up the Anger takes as its subject the detention, torture and death of Sam Bhengu, a "young black political leader" (Ebersohn book jacket) originally from Sophiatown, an area affected by the removals consequent on the Group Areas Act of 1950. The novel's narrative is made up of extensive sections of free indirect discourse punctuated by direct dialogue, representing the narrative present in which Bhengu is dying. This is interspersed with italicized, retrospective sections that allude to scenes from Bhengu's life prior to detention. The italicized sections develop chronologically from his childhood in Sophiatown to his adult life, and record formative personal and political events—as well as the intersection of the two, such as the death of his sister, Winifred, in the Cato Manor riots. The narrative commences with "an acceptance of imminent and inevitable death" (Gready 124): "Sam Bhengu knew that he was dying. Ever since the pain had stopped he had known it. But the reality was not yet upon him. They had killed him and now it was only a matter of waiting, but in his mind it was no more than a vague almost theoretical realisation" (7). This theoretical realisation becomes a substantial reality at the very end of the novel, when Bhengu makes a final statement of affirmation in the face of death: "It was all right. Before it had been very bad, but now it was all right. He would be able to do it now. All he wanted to do was lie quietly until the time came. He knew that he was ready. It had taken time to get there, but he had done it and he was ready" (240). From the series of narrative flashbacks that punctuate the hours between the novel's opening and closure, the reader is led to believe that Bhengu revisits and reinterprets his life in the light of its impending end—a technique evocative of Ricoeur's definition of a meaningful, human life as an "emplotted" life. Like Brink's *A Dry White Season*, Ebersohn's text uses its protagonist's death as a framing device for the narration of human rights abuses in South Africa. This technique recalls yet another of Ricoeur's hypotheses on the relationship between narrative and the existential

experience, that of “the narrative ‘incompleteness’ of life” as proceeding from an awareness of the fact that a person’s death cannot be recounted by that selfsame person, but only by their survivors. Narrative parallax and the “pedagogy of suffering”, I argue, are crucial to this endeavour, and contribute significantly to the ethical character of *Store Up the Anger*.

As Gready notes, the “juxtaposition of going-to-die/ready-to-die is symptomatic of a shift in the balance of power that accompanies the process of dying” (124). The extensive use of free indirect discourse in the narrative present of the novel—as opposed to the retrospective gaze of Bhengu’s flashbacks—records this shift in exquisite detail. Unlike the magistrate’s first-person, present-tense narrative in *Barbarians*, however, the face to face encounter constructed by this narrative mode is characterized by greater distance. As readers, therefore, our gaze is not so readily aligned with that of the novel’s protagonist as it is in *Barbarians*; a feature that, at first glance, would appear to impede the “immediacy of contact” fundamental to Newton’s conceptualization of narrative ethics. What the use of free indirect discourse does achieve, however, is a skilful evocation of Bhengu’s sense of disorientation and progressive withdrawal from the world of the living. A crucial factor in this evocation is the way in which Bhengu’s detachment from his physical existence—“They must have broken whatever it is that feels the pain, he thought” (8)—obviates the problem of the unsharability of pain posited by Scarry, and allows the narrative to focus on his consciousness of impending death, rather than the immediacy of physical pain. *Store Up the Anger* thus becomes a novel of intent, rather than instant.

This intent towards death is dramatized through the narrative parallax created by Bhengu’s growing sense of distance from the material world and its inhabitants. In the novel’s opening scene, for example, the interior of the torture room is defamiliarized into Bhengu’s perception of layers of rhythmic sound:

He closed his eyes and listened to the sounds in the office. The chair, rocking slowly back and forth, the steel frame tapping against the wall and the soft sound of feet moving on the carpet with the movement of the chair, immediately dominated his senses. The sound of breathing was strong, laboured but even, and for a moment he imagined that this was also coming from the man on the chair. Then he realised that the sound was synchronous with the movement of his own chest. From beyond the office walls the sounds of the early-morning traffic, the sporadic beat of a steam engine and the crash of metal on metal from the shunting yards in the docks . . . The coach successfully coupled, the engine’s beat became slow and regular, gradually fading as it moved away down the track . . . In the silence of his departure he heard only the muted sounds of the traffic, his own breathing and the movement of the chair, still regular, as it had been when he first became aware of it. (9)

He also experiences a dramatic shift in his response to events. No longer humiliated by his enforced nakedness, “[t]hat he was naked and [his interrogators] were clothed now only emphasised the distance between them. He knew that in their terms Brown was close to him, no more than two or three paces away, and yet he had the sensation of a wide empty space separating them, making it impossible for them to reach him, or touch him in any way” (11). In comparison to the novel’s episodic flashbacks, the sense of physical and psychological detachment that characterizes the narrative present creates a sort of meta-fiction, in which the novel’s events—and Bhengu’s retrospective self—are as remote from Bhengu as they are from the reader. Bhengu is self-aware, but in such a way as to appear disconnected from the text’s diegesis in a similar way to that of the reader. He passively observes, rather than actively participates, and exercises agency only in the selective nature of his observations, brought about through the opening and closing of his eyes: “He opened his eyes and seeing them seemed to bring them back into perspective. They were again a small group of men, not the overpowering presence he felt when he could not see them” (13). Like the reader, moreover, his perception of Ebersohn’s fictional world is subject to imaginative alteration: “[t]he medium through which Bhengu’s thoughts travelled became perfect so that each mental process was set apart, isolated from the others. Even the air in the room seemed clearer, the objects and people standing out in sharp relief, somehow intensified, seeming to reveal some part of themselves to him that previously had been hidden” (12).

More than this, Bhengu is endowed with an almost omniscient sense of intersubjective insight. In contrast to the conventional portrayal of apartheid functionaries as “finished products: unaccountably vicious, cruel, malicious, fawning and greedy” (Ndebele 30), Bhengu accredits them with a greater complexity, in the style of Harry Bloom’s characterization of Swanepoel in *Transvaal Episode*:

But then there are two parts to you, Bhengu thought. I’ve seen the human side and I’ve seen the business side. He knew that the human side of Lategan and his men faced inwardly only, towards their own little community, excluding all else. And he knew the other side intimately, the closed side, where no arguments are valid, where everything unfamiliar is a cause for suspicion. (35)

Bhengu’s perception of his interrogators, moreover, is characterized by a variety of emotions, including a recognition of naivety, a sensation of fear, and something approaching concern:

He examined the faces of the two young men closely, taking in each feature . . . both faces unlined and immature, still believing in what they were doing, not yet realising that there would be no glamour, only the unceasing pursuit of a security that could never be achieved by such methods; and no pleasure, excepting the pleasure of causing pain and seeing it suffered. What they had been taught so far would eventually become an inescapable mental necessity, exercising an almost total dominance over their lives. (145)

Despite himself Bhengu feared them all. He feared Engelbrecht because of the part of him that was missing . . . He feared Strydom because of his blind conviction that what he was doing was right and good and Christian. He feared Brown and Fourie because they would obey orders no matter what the orders were, and they would always find some way of justifying their actions to themselves. He feared van Rooyen because he was a truly inferior man in a position of great power, and because of what had happened. And he feared Lategan more than any of them, because there was something in the detached resoluteness of the colonel that seemed to indicate that, at least to some small extent, he understood and despite that he was the most ruthless of them all. Lategan knew Bhengu's people suffered as a result of the powerlessness, but to the Lategans, and there were other Lategans, it was simply a matter of either Bhengu's people or his own people being without power. (117-18)

Bhengu knew that Fourie was troubled. He also knew that the policeman would get over it, somehow suppressing the unwelcome emotion, tucking it away into some already cluttered recess of his sub-conscious. (101)

In spite of his fundamental antipathy towards these figures, our narrative access to Bhengu's consciousness in the hours leading up to his death counters the tendency to portray them as "finished products" found in the work of many of Ebersohn's contemporaries. Due to the novel's juxtaposition of chronologies, it can also be seen as both an anticipation—within the context of the novel's retrospective narrative structure—and continuation—insofar as our understanding of the "real time" of Bhengu's life is concerned—of Bhengu's perception of apartheid policemen prior to his detention. During the Cato Manor riot, Bhengu witnesses the violence perpetrated against both white policemen and black residents with equal disbelief and alienation. He turns away from the murder of "a young white policeman" (96)-- "What he had just seen had not happened. Such things did not happen" (97)—and is repulsed by "[t]he sounds of the mob . . . the screams of anger and bloodlust intermingling with the groans of pain and anguish. Now he hated it all" (100). Bhengu's alienation from his neighbours resists the collective identity privileged in much contemporary black writing, while the consistency of his response to violence and human suffering, regardless of race, is

free from the imagery of racial estrangement that characterizes the novels of Serote, Sepamla and Brink discussed previously.

The obstacles to the intersubjective encounter presented in *Store Up the Anger* are indicative not of a failure to appreciate the complex subjectivity of others—which Bhengu does with exceptional acuity—but, I suggest, a widespread failure to appreciate the complexity of one’s own subjectivity in relation to that of others. It is to this latter failure that Bhengu represents the exception. The shift in perspective brought about by his withdrawal from the material world seems to allow him to engage with others without passing judgement on them, a faculty which is, in turn, used reflexively to attribute meaning to both the good and bad aspects of his own life. In his proximity to death, then, Bhengu begins to assimilate these disparate elements into a meaningful whole: his political career, the injustices perpetrated against him by the apartheid system, his troubled marriage and his failure as a father. As such, Bhengu’s narrative bears witness to a life that is meaningful—and thus good—precisely because of the “messier dimensions of human experience”. It is, moreover, only through a cultivation of “the will and the ability to speculate phenomenologically, to emphathize [sic], to approach the limits of reason” (Améry xi), without losing faith in the intrinsic value of living within these limits, that Bhengu is able to achieve this. It is this aspect of *Store Up the Anger*, I argue, that enables the novel to sustain a “pedagogy of suffering” based upon the evocation of a “shared admission of fragility and, finally, of mortality” (Frank 145; Ricoeur *Oneself* 192), an admission that transcends the sadistic communications and defamiliarization of the intersubjective encounter engendered by torture. And, finally, it is this aspect, I argue, that calls for a rejection of allegorical readings, and makes *Store Up the Anger* a singular and ethically significant text.

Metafiction and the Enrichment of Ethics:
Breyten Breytenbach's *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist*

To me literature will never define in a prescriptive sense what it is to be a human being. But literature reminds us that we are human beings. And that is so powerful.

Robert Sullivan, "Literature and Human Rights"

Excepting the limitations inherent in reading *Store Up the Anger* in strictly allegorical terms, the metafictional resemblance of the novel's narrative present to Steve Biko's death in detention—particularly in the light of the TRC's revelations about the event—provides an entry point for the analysis of Breyten Breytenbach's work, *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist*. Although Breytenbach's text has often been analyzed within the context of the non-fiction memoir genre,⁵³ I have chosen to address this "generically ambiguous book" (Gallagher 87) as a means of concluding the comparative study of representations of torture in both non-fiction and fiction texts from apartheid South Africa in part I of this thesis. My primary intention in doing so is to demonstrate the way in which such narratives exemplify the ability of literature to "lead us back from morality to ethics, but to an ethics enriched by the passage through the norm" (Ricoeur, *Oneself* 203).

As many critics have pointed out, Breyten Breytenbach is best known as "the leading poetic talent of his generation" (J. M. Coetzee, "*True Confessions*" 375).⁵⁴ He was also, however, a prominent anti-apartheid activist who has spent most of his adult life in exile. Upon his clandestine return to South Africa from Paris in 1975, he was arrested and sentenced to nine years imprisonment, of which he served seven. While Breytenbach was never physically tortured *per se*, he was subjected to what he describes as "psychological torture" (Interview) and witnessed the violent interrogation of his fellow prisoners—as well as the everyday brutality of prison life in South Africa—during his incarceration. Two of his seven years in prison were spent in solitary confinement, an experience that inspired the works *Mouiroir: Mirrornotes of a Novel* (1983) and *True Confessions*. The majority of *Mouiroir* was written in prison, while *True Confessions* can be seen, Gallagher argues, as a work that "reflect[s] metafictionally" upon the earlier text (87). More significantly, however, much of *True Confessions* takes the form of a reflection on the fictional constructions of subjectivity

⁵³ See, for example, Gallagher 83-94 and M. Sanders, *Complicities* 131-46.

⁵⁴ See also Gallagher 84; Jolly 61; M. Sanders 131.

endorsed by the authoritarian state. It is for this reason that I argue for an interpretation of Breytenbach's narrative as definitively metafictional.

Parallel to Breytenbach's account of interrogation in prison can be found a reflexive interrogation of the author's identity. As Gready notes, in *True Confessions*, "Breytenbach's worldview is inevitably turned back on itself/the self" (53). The text, Breytenbach admits, is thus "the reflection of a search . . . for the identity of the narrator. . . . It is by being, which invokes questioning, that you discover *being*" (338). Recalling the Levinasian theory that "consciousness and even subjectivity flow from, are legitimated by the ethical summons which proceeds from the intersubjective encounter" (Newton 12), this questioning of subjectivity must therefore entail a questioning of intersubjectivity. This is evident in Breytenbach's statement that

[i]t was not my intention to take revenge on a system or on certain people . . . We are too closely linked for that. In the same way that the ideology of Apartheid is only an aberration—a stillness—of what is potentially present in all of mankind, the butchers and the interrogators are not monsters but people like you and me. (339)

As Jolly notes, this results in a "narrative attemp[t] to represent the intersubjective relations that it investigates—the alignments of subjectivity around the poles of self and other—as reflections, not complete identifications, of one another" (99). Breytenbach's use of the first person pronoun, "I", is ambiguous in the extreme, embracing a multiplicity of authorial identities. An example of this ambiguity can be found in his speculation that "Priapus . . . no doubt wanted me to survive so as to be able to confess to you, my dear dead I" (255), which can be seen as both a mournful invocation of Breytenbach's previous self, the self left behind when he entered the prison, as well a gesture of solidarity with those of his inmates who had been executed during his time in solitary confinement. More than this, in addressing the second person "you", Breytenbach alludes to his wife in her role as amanuensis, as well as to its post-publication readership. Within the narrative framework of *True Confessions*, moreover, it is difficult to separate entirely Breytenbach's address to a figure variously referred to as "Mr Investigator", "Mr I" or "Mr Eye" from the narrative persona's use of "I". In this way, the narrator's relationship with his own subjectivity continuously percolates through an array of intersubjective encounters.⁵⁵ As Jolly's analysis of this

⁵⁵ A similar effect can be found in Breytenbach's poetic representation of torture, such as "Letter from Foreign Parts to Butcher" ("*Brief uit die vreemde aan slagter*")—a poem dedicated to then-Prime Minister B. J. Vorster—in the collection *Skryf* (1972). As J. M. Coetzee notes, this poem "attempts to establish poetic authority to speak in

technique demonstrates, however, this evades “complete identification” through a demonstration of the fictional—and thus malleable—nature of subjectivity, both in terms of one’s own subjectivity and the subjectivity that one speculatively attributes to others:

I’ve kept up my intimate questioning of you, Investigator. . . . And I kept on trying to give you a free face. A name. I have seen you as the Minotaur, which is the I, which does not exist since it is a myth. . . . I see you now as my dark mirror-brother. We need to talk, brother I. . . . We are forever united by an intimate knowledge of the depravity man will stoop to. (260, 2nd ellipsis in the orig.)

Significantly, this evasion of “complete identification” with both oneself and others, Jolly notes, pertains to both “positive and negative” forms (98), thus subverting the neat polarization of good and evil found in the overly political, symbolic narratives of Serote and Sepamla, or, for that matter, Mashinini, Pheto and Farasani.

Within regard to Newton’s theory of narrative ethics, then, *True Confessions* can be seen as a prime example of literature’s ability to “crystalliz[e] and recirculat[e]” “recursive, contingent, and interactive dramas of encounter and recognition” “in acts of interpretive engagement” (12). It differs from ethically charged texts such as *Barbarians* and *Store Up the Anger*, however, because of the limitations inherent in the act of relating a story that makes significant claims on reality. In spite of its extensive use of parody and generic ambiguity, *True Confessions* cannot be categorically defined as a work of prose fiction, and thus is not, I contend, open to the virtually limitless potential for experimentation in this genre. It is, instead, engaged in a compulsory—rather than voluntary—tug of war between ethical thinking and moral judgement. The strength of *True Confessions* lies in its prolific response to the demands of the moral norm. After Louis Althusser and Lucia Folea, Jolly argues that

[the] production of the individual as a unified subject by the rhetoric of nationalism becomes apparent, paradoxically, when the ideological machinery fails; that is, when the subject refuses to participate in the discourse of ‘self’ and ‘other’ as it has been defined by the state. The ‘failure’ of the subject to conform to the established nationalist discourse can result in the state’s implementation of violence to impress, physically, its notion of the self on the subject. The state cannot acknowledge that the ideological operations that maintain its sovereignty are faulty. It must therefore place the blame for this ‘failure’ of the individual to conform to its definition of her or his subjectivity on that individual. (69)

the name of the *gemarteldes* (the tortured and martyred) of John Vorster Square . . . whose names (some fifteen of them) are given in an appendix to the poem”. Like *Confessions*, “Letter” implies multiple readers: “a reader directly addressed, “jy” (you), butcher Balthazar, but also an invisible third person, a reader over the shoulder, a “prisoner” ready to question Breytenbach’s authority to speak as I for him” (“The Reader in the Mirror” 76).

Consequently, Breytenbach's interrogation of the intersubjective encounter in *True Confessions* can be seen as primarily motivated by his encounter with normative morality, as construed by apartheid ideology. Breytenbach's response to this is most prominent in the exchange of intersubjective identification for intersubjective reflection—a technique that can be seen to parallel Durrant's comparison of the workings of successful and failed mourning, as well as encouraging the capacity for ethical thinking above and beyond moral judgement. What this suggests, therefore, is that the ethical import of *True Confessions* is extensively enriched by its passage through the norm. This is significant within the context of the representation of human rights abuses in the literature of apartheid South Africa, but also extends further in its capacity to provide a potential text of origin for the prolific use of metafiction in the post-apartheid era.

In chapter 2, it was established that the impossibility of communicating the horror of torture in its entirety without inflicting it upon another stands in conflict with the desire of the tortured to re-establish benign frameworks of interpersonal communication through the act of narration. The existence of an extensive corpus of non-fictional torture narratives, moreover, suggests that aesthetic choices are as fundamental—if not more so—to the non-fiction narration of torture as they are to its fictional representation. Insofar as this sheds new light on Adorno's rejection of a literary response to the Holocaust, it becomes apparent that the finality of his injunction against the aesthetic endeavour to memorialize atrocity is, as Reinhardt suspects, guilty of oversimplification. Just as “the esthetic principle of stylization” is capable of denigrating the “unthinkable fate” of the victims of atrocity, it is also capable of helping to “deepen engagement with and understanding of suffering's meaning, sources, effects, and implications for the spectator” (Adorno, “Commitment” 313; Reinhardt 15). I contend that the above analysis of the writings of Coetzee, Ebersohn and Breytenbach demonstrates the ways in which aestheticization can achieve this deepening of engagement with and understanding of the suffering of both oneself and others; and thus corroborates my earlier claim that narrative method acts as the regnant principle governing the ethical outcome of every attempt to represent human rights abuses in literary fiction.

PART III

AFTERMATH

Chapter 6

In the Fog of Apartheid's End: Grand Narratives and the Literature of the First Transition

In his opening address to parliament on 2 February 1990, President F. W. de Klerk of the National Party made clear his intent to reform South African politics with the announcement that the thirty-year ban on political opposition to apartheid was to be repealed. Soon after, on 11 February, Nelson Mandela was released from twenty-seven years of incarceration, and “the long walk to freedom” began in earnest. Four years later, on the occasion of the ANC victory in South Africa’s first democratic elections, Mandela, the president elect, announced that the time had come to “heal the old wounds and build a new South Africa” (qtd. in Schaffer and Smith 56). This entered national legislation shortly afterwards as the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act of 1995, whose mandate included the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).

A vast corpus of academic literature exists on the TRC. For the purposes of this thesis, however, I will focus my attention on what I perceive to be the main ethical issues at stake in the literary response to the Commission. This requires a brief overview of the way in which the Commission itself dealt with the issue of narration, for which I will rely primarily on the field of critical discourse analysis. Two studies, in particular, have proved indispensable to this overview: Annelies Verdoolaege’s “The Human Rights Violations Hearings of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission: A Bridge Between Individual Narratives of Suffering and a Contextualizing Master-Story of Reconciliation” (2002) and Claire Moon’s *Narrating Political Reconciliation: South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (2008). Their conclusions have been supplemented by wider readings in the field, as well as my own response to the TRC report and available transcripts and recordings of the HRVC Hearings. This overview will be followed by an analysis of Antjie Krog’s *Country of My Skull* (1999), in which I critique Krog’s attempt to obscure the normative demands of the Commission with a narrative simulation of the face to face encounter.

The TRC was intended to obtain and apply a range of evidence, including personal testimony, in order to reveal “as complete a picture as possible of the nature, causes and extent of gross violations of human rights” committed between March 1, 1960 and May 11, 1994 (TRC 1: 140). With regard to the narration of torture, the proceedings of the TRC initiated a process of “general discursive erethism” (Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge* 32), allowing for the emergence of “new forums for storytelling” (Schaffer and Smith 65). This erethism was, however, tightly circumscribed by the Commission’s ideology of emotional catharsis, reconciliation and nation building. In its “construction of . . . a widespread and hegemonic discourse of political transition” oriented towards closure of the past and the prevention of its repetition (Moon 1, 5-7) as well as “national consensus about the new terms of identification in South Africa” (Schaffer and Smith 65), the TRC effectively dominated the discursive horizon during the initial phase of democracy in South Africa. Moreover, the TRC’s provision of a “new template script upon which divergent accounts of South Africa’s history might be made commensurate” failed to acknowledge the “particularly complex and contradictory” needs of its individual participants (Moon 7; Simpson 241). Therefore, although the Commission achieved partial success in its attempt to “gather into its national narrative . . . stories formerly unacknowledged”, it also “elid[ed] other, dissident stories” (Schaffer and Smith 83).

The constraints placed upon testimony in service to the Commission’s mandate to “heal the old wounds and build a new South Africa” is reminiscent of the restitution narrative described by Frank. The restitution narrative is focussed on “the storyline of restoring health”, and subordinates the role of the individual to that of the medical institution in this process of restoration (Frank 77). Likewise, in post-apartheid South Africa, the TRC’s role in actively steering the nation away from apartheid and towards reconciliation is privileged over the contributions of individuals to this shift. This appraisal is supported by Moon’s elaboration of the disease metaphor Ignatieff uses to describe the TRC when she states that the Commission “aimed to lay the foundations for a future story about reconciliation and national unity, where a ‘nation made sick by lies’, as Michael Ignatieff put it, would be made well again” (8). Like the restitution storyline in the narration of disease, the TRC can be seen to subjugate the “struggles of the self” attested to in accounts of human rights abuse to an institutional “master-narrative” of public reconciliation, emotional catharsis and nation building (Verdoolaege). Like the restitution storyline, moreover, this

property of the TRC brought about an abstraction of intersubjectivity, in which testifiers are reduced individual are qualified only by their status as victims of human rights abuses, and the Commission officials to the personification of the TRC as institution. The relation of these individuals to others is thus eclipsed by the symbolic properties attributed to them, resulting in a diminution of reciprocity even while rights are upheld.

Crucially, however, the TRC proceedings were engineered to give the appearance—if not the effects—of an authentic face to face encounter. It is my contention that this aspect of the TRC can be attributed to a recognition—and subsequent appropriation—of narration as an effective mode of rehabilitation in the aftermath of trauma. In keeping with the restitution storyline, the TRC provoked a sense of cultural trauma, which Jeffrey C. Alexander defines as occurring “when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (1). However, by “reducing the totality of apartheid violence to a political contest from the 1960s onwards” while simultaneously presenting itself as “a process through which the nation was to be purged . . . of its violent past in order to found a future reconciliation” (Moon 91-92) it qualified this state of trauma as being both knowable and curable through the face to face encounter of storytelling.

The TRC’s appropriation of storytelling as a putative cure for the nation’s wounds rests upon an acknowledgement of the critical role of narration in both the reconstruction of the tortured person’s identity and the re-establishment of benign frameworks of intersubjective communication. This acknowledgement is evident in the Commission’s appeal to realm of ethics through an “enfold[ing of] the principles of Enlightenment individualism and African *ubuntu*” (Schaffer and Smith 67). As Moon notes, the TRC adopted an approach to individual testimony that was closely aligned with the Freudian concept of cathartic disclosure:

The TRC assumed that the act of testifying functioned as a talking cure, a cathartic process by which memories of past violence might be purged. It understood the testimonial to be integral to the recovery of victims, who, in return for their stories received ‘official acknowledgement’ of their experiences as reparation (131)

This Westernized conceptualization of traumatic narration was combined with a view of public testimony as upholding the “ethics of responsibility and reciprocity”⁵⁶ of *ubuntu*.

Ubuntu has been defined by Archbishop Desmond Tutu as follows:

Ubuntu is very difficult to render into a Western language. It speaks of the very essence of being human. When we want to give high praise to someone we say, ‘*Yu, u nobuntu*’: ‘Hey, he or she has ubuntu.’ This means they are generous, hospitable, friendly, caring and compassionate. They share what they have. It also means my humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in theirs. We believe in a bundle of life. We say, ‘a person is a person through other people’. It is not ‘I think therefore I am’. It says rather: ‘I am a human because I belong.’ I participate. I share. A person with *ubuntu* is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good. For he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are. (35)

Performative narration can thus be seen as one of several media through which the TRC sought to re-establish *ubuntu*. Therefore, the public hearings carried out as part of the Human Rights Violations Committee (HRVC) and Amnesty Committee proceedings were instrumental to the Commission’s attempt to simulate the face to face encounter and thus establish an “authentic reciprocity in exchange” (Ricoeur, *Oneself* 191). The following analysis of the HRVC Hearings will provide an illustration of the way in which this was achieved.

The HRVC Hearings were responsible for the vast majority of trauma narratives in circulation during the time of the Commission. The hearings required individual victims to testify about the trauma they experienced as a result of the National Party’s policy of apartheid, and, as the first stage of the Commission, provided a template for the narration of trauma in the TRC as a whole. Their format was dramatic in nature, in that testifiers were required to perform their submitted written statement as an oral narrative before an audience made up of the local community, Commission officials and journalists. Although subject to significant contextual constraints, the hearings can thus be seen to simulate the ethical intention through their performative mimesis of the “recursive, contingent, and interactive dramas of encounter and recognition” which, for Newton, define narrative ethics (12).

⁵⁶ This definition of *ubuntu* has been used by many critics, and it is thus difficult to trace its first usage—if one exists. For an extensive inquiry into the workings of *ubuntu* as an ethical system, see Mark Sanders’s study *Ambiguities of Witnessing: Law and Literature in the Time of a Truth Commission* (2007).

Given that most testimonies were restricted in duration to approximately thirty minutes in total (Verdoolaege), the scope for “acts of interpretive engagement” (Newton 12) was narrow. In consequence, the testimonies can be seen as “recursive” only insofar as the accumulation of individual narratives of human rights abuse tends to bring common themes to the fore while suppressing difference—in a way similar to the anthologization of testimony described by Schaffer and Smith. For the most part, their interactive element was limited to a legalistic narrative style of examination and disclosure, in which TRC officials regarded the testifiers through a “factual or forensic lens” (Foster et al., *Theatre of Violence* x), as the following extract from Mandla Cele’s testimony demonstrates:

- MR NTEZEBA. Would it be possible for you to remember the names of the medical doctors who saw you after you came out of prison?
- MR CELE. Even if it’s not so easy the one I can remember was Dr. Diliza Umjee.
- MR NTEZEBA. Thank you very much. And the names of the lawyers who represented you when you were charged and were found not guilty?
- MR CELE. Mlaba and Shezi’s company represented me.
- MR NTEZEBA. You mentioned that whilst you were being tortured from time to time you were visited by district surgeons or doctors, is that right?
- MR CELE. Yes, that’s right.
- MR NTEZEBA. Would you be able to remember who those doctors were, or is that asking too much?
- MR CELE. I still remember their names. One of them it’s Dr Kotze, but all of them are based at Utrecht.

Although the TRC claimed to recognise four different interpretations of truth—“factual or forensic truth”, “personal or narrative truths”, “social or ‘dialogue’ truth” and “healing and restorative truth” (TRC 1: 110)—insofar as the hearings were concerned, it appears that the “stockpiling” approach (Foster et al., *The Theatre of Violence* ix) seen in the early records of human rights abuses in apartheid South Africa took precedence over the other forms of truth identified by the Commission.

As performative acts, the HRVC testimonies were intrinsically contingent. Although testifiers had prepared a written statement in advance, this seemed to bear little or no relation to the way in which they told their stories or the concerns they voiced, a factor that created conflict between the testifiers and the Commission officials. Whereas the written statements had undergone a rigorous editing process—described by Moon as a “private rehearsal” (100)—testimonies given at the hearings showed little regard for chronological structure and narrative organization. Instead, as the anthropologist Richard Wilson notes,

they were “jumbled”, “elliptical” and “fragmented”, subject to elaboration and interpretation (qtd. in Moon 83). A case in point is the testimony of Patric Qumza, in which his convoluted and highly traumatic testimony is repeatedly interrupted by the Commission officials mediating the hearing:

DR ORR. Did you lay a charge against those people, did you—did you accuse them of—of assaulting you?

MR QUMZA. Could you let me finish first and then ask me the questions please. This is what happened, when I was in detention . . . The one policeman had a hammer, he wanted to hit my knuckles with the hammer. I told him that I'm not well. He then said—he then said they must prepare for me to be taken to Groote Schuur on the Friday. . . .

CHAIRPERSON. Patric we have listened to you, you have elaborated a lot. Maybe you could tell us how long you stayed in Groote Schuur. Were you taken back to prison, could you please tell us briefly what happened because time escapes us.

As Qumza's hearing demonstrates, although testifier's narratives were contingent in the extreme, this contingency was continually kept in check by the Commission officials. The structural and teleological constraints of the TRC hearings can thus be seen to minimize the intrinsically ethical characteristics of these testimonial narratives, while superficially appearing to encourage the intimacy of the face to face encounter. This is indicative of a movement from the plane of ethical potential to that of moral achievement—which, in turn, recalls Jolly's comment on the danger of assuming that one has resolved the issue at stake simply by describing its parameters. The “immediacy of contact” that one would expect to find at the heart of the TRC is conspicuously absent. Instead, we find the anonymity of the each-to-each encounter, and the normative morality that—unless carefully mediated—this entails.

The sublimation of the face to face encounter can also be found in the extensive media coverage of the hearings, which provided the vast majority of headlines for newspapers, radio stations and TV channels. As Antjie Krog records in great detail,⁵⁷ this process often traumatized those whose job it was to mediate the daily onslaught of distressing testimonies, but was less successful in provoking a similarly empathetic response amongst the wider audience of readers, listeners and viewers who observed the TRC reports remotely. Schaffer and Smith observe, for example, that many white South Africans “tuned out and turned off” during the hearings (73). Consequently, although the hearings rapidly

⁵⁷ See, for example, 254-58.

became the most prominent feature of the TRC in the collective consciousness of the South African people, it was the normative framework of the Commission as a whole, rather than the intersubjective ambiguity of individual hearings, that took narrative precedence.

In addition to logistical limitations, the hearings were also affected by constraints “connected to the higher objectives of the TRC’s agenda” (Verdoolaege). As Mandela’s summons for his people to “heal the old wounds and build a new South Africa” suggests, the TRC was founded on an ideology of public reconciliation, emotional catharsis and nation building. These objectives established what Verdoolaege terms a “master-narrative”, or dominant discursive trope, to which individual testimony was expected to comply. Moon develops Verdoolaege’s initial premise, positing the relationship between individual testimony and the TRC’s master-narrative in terms of the imbrications of individual life-stories—or “micro-narratives”—and the “presiding fictions that are located in social and political contexts at both local and global levels”, or “macro-narratives” (85-86). Macro-narratives “function in order to include, exclude, validate or repudiate” specific micro-narratives (86). More than this, “individuals struggle to craft personal narratives that are consistent, believable, and flattering, both in their own eyes and those of others. To avoid ‘ontological abandonment’, individuals must work out strategies enabling their self-narratives to dovetail with those of others in their community” (86). While the first set of logistical limitations can be seen as an unavoidable consequence of the Commission’s admirable attempt to convert ideology into reality, the subjugation of individual micro-narratives to the Commission’s macro-narrative is more problematic.

This is problematic for several reasons. First, as Moon observes, the South African TRC can—and arguably *should*—be seen in terms of the emergence of a universal norm in the field of human rights discourse:

South Africa’s TRC has provided the undisputed driver of a proliferating politics of reconciliation. Underpinned, broadly, by the mechanisms of transitional justice—amnesty and truth-telling—reconciliation is now not just a familiar trope governing transition, but is an *expected* response in certain contexts to past atrocities and state crimes such as torture, extra-judicial killing and disappearances. Since the TRC’s highly publicized operation, reconciliation has become a ubiquitous and proliferating transnational discourse to the extent that it is now a settled norm governing political transitions. (2)

South Africans were thus charged with the task of coming to terms with an entirely “new kind of justice within the complexities and contractions of a political transition” (Doxtader

and Villa-Vicencio x). The attempt of individuals to “dovetail” their narratives to meet the incipient discursive norm was thus complicated by the need to adapt to its demands as they emerged. The dramatic shift in the moral order brought about by this transition can perhaps be seen as a shock to the systems of ontological cohesion employed by members of the nascent national community. Effectively, the nation was plunged into a state of anomy and forced to swim for its life.

During the initial period of transition, I argue, individual micro-narratives were thus highly vulnerable to the influence of an affirmative macro-narrative, such as that provided by the TRC. After all, like its predecessors, the literature of the TRC also “operat[ed] under intense political pressures”. It is only later—in the post-TRC period I refer to as the “second transition”—that a resistance to the norm and a recognition of the many shortcomings of the TRC come to light, at least insofar as literature is concerned.

Verdoolaege describes how the “predetermined structure” of the hearings brought about a situation in which Committee members effectively guided individual narratives toward embracing the TRC’s tripartite ideology. This was achieved through the use of a template structure, which contained testimony through the use of framing devices such as the Chairperson’s official welcoming and dismissal of the testifier, and a series of standardized questions that served to establish coordinates by which testimonies could be aligned. The effect was often counter-productive, however, creating—in the words of Dorothy Driver— “a narrative mode continually diversifying in disagreement and contradiction even as it tries to unify” (“South Africa”). This can be attributed to two main factors. First, the hearings were fraught with contextual confusion thanks to their invocation of various, often conflicting, modes of testimony, as Schaffer and Smith note when they claim that “[the] utopian desire [of the TRC] for a unifying and healing discourse could only ever be fraught with contradiction, given the different imperatives of African customary tradition and Western law, the different usages of testimony, the deep historical divisions of the past, and the gaps and fissures of memory”(70). Second, despite its emphasis on the importance of “personal or narrative truth” (TRC 1: 110), the Commission’s mandate failed to attend adequately to the pre-existing paradigms for the narration of human rights abuses in South African culture.

It was thus left to literature to address the “ambiguities of transition” that arose from the TRC proceedings (Schaffer and Smith 74). This response brought to the fore the ethical

issues at stake in the Commission's use of storytelling as a vehicle for its grand narrative of emotional catharsis, reconciliation and nation building. As Schaffer and Smith's appraisal of this literary response observes,

Some narratives seek new forms of national unity as they variously address the difficult and contentious task of confronting the apartheid past; enlarge debates about shame, guilt, denial, forgetting, and responsibility; provide healing narratives of heroic resistance and ethical responsibility; and assume a role in the project of reconciliation and nation building. Others refuse this imperative, instead challenging unified or reconcilable perspectives, positions, and identities in recognition of heterogeneous histories and subjectivities. (74)

This retrospective analysis is anticipated by the poet Ingrid de Kok in "Standing in the Doorway" (1996), her preface to an issue of *World Literature Today* dedicated to the effects of democratic transition on South African literature. Herein, de Kok speaks of a reluctance among authors to move away from the "vocabularies of fracture and dissonance" that characterized the literary culture of the apartheid era, and forecasts a reactive resistance among writers to the "new 'official' script" (7) created by the nation's democratic transition, the centrepiece of which was the TRC. A widespread resistance to the "new 'official' script" is indeed apparent in post-apartheid South African literature. In contrast to the dominant critical trend, however, it is my contention that this resistance is rooted in the literary paradigms of the apartheid era. Rather than "vocabularies of fracture and dissonance", singular texts such as First's *117 Days*, Bloom's *Transvaal Episode*, J. M. Coetzee's *Barbarians*, Ebersohn's *Store Up the Anger* and Breytenbach's *True Confessions* provide a sort of practical grammar for narrative *as* ethics—a grammar that is inherently resistant to the deployment of narrative as normative morality found in the TRC. This, I suggest, is taken up by novelists such as Gillian Slovo, Achmat Dangor, Tony Eprile and Zoë Wicomb in their fictional representations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It is also apparent, however, that the literary response to the "new 'official' script" of the TRC was not one of unanimous resistance. In my opinion, Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull* (1998) contrasts with the novels of Slovo, Dangor, Eprile and Wicomb by providing an example of the way in which literature provided a medium for the affirmation of the TRC's normative telos of reconciliation, catharsis and nation building. Consequently, I suggest that Krog's text be seen to legitimize the prerogatives of the first transition. The literature of the second transition—

the work of Slovo, Dangor, Eprile and Wicomb—forms a corpus of critique, in which the prerogatives of the first transition are held up to scrutiny and found wanting.

Shaping the Passage of History:
Grand Narration in Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull*

Every narrative carries the imprint of its narrator.

Antjie Krog, *Country of My Skull*

Verdoolaege and Moon's use of the terms "master-narrative" and "macro-narrative" both provide perfectly adequate expressions for the discursive hierarchy at work in the TRC. With regard to the theoretical framework of this thesis, however, I am of the opinion that Jay Bernstein's definition of the term "grand narrative" is perhaps most suited to the textual readings of chapters 6 and 7. Bernstein draws on the work of Adorno and Lyotard in defining the grand narrative as

second-order narratives which seek to narratively articulate and legitimate some concrete first-order practices or narratives. Typically, a grand narrative will make reference to some ultimate originating principle or ultimate *telos*; it will seek to place existing practices in a position of progress toward or regress from the originating principle or ultimate end. . . . grand narratives have traditionally sought to articulate historical experience with the ultimate terms of human understanding—truth, salvation, goodness, peace, happiness, etc. (102)

The TRC conforms to this conceptualization of the grand narrative in its attempt to articulate the historical experience of apartheid with the ultimate terms of emotional catharsis, reconciliation and nation building. Even more so than the Commission itself, however, the publication of the five-volume final report of the TRC can be seen as a prime example of grand narration. As Mark Sanders notes, "the report of the Truth Commission draws less on testimony from the hearings than on statements taken down beforehand" (*Ambiguities* 148). In consequence, the report loses the "immediacy of contact"—however constrained—that took place during the hearings, and ends up "read[ing] less as a history, more as a moral narrative about the fact of wrongdoing across the political spectrum, spawned by the overriding evil of the apartheid system" (Posel 148). The principle *telos* of this narrative can be seen as a consolidation of the Commission's tripartite ideology of reconciliation, catharsis and nation building. Crucially, however, it also embodied the attempt

to resolve South Africa's traumatic history through the description of its parameters, in consensus with the "grounding purpose" of the grand narrative as an attempt to form and understand "human things" through historical articulation (Bernstein 102). In this sense, grand narratives can be seen to create what might be termed "grand narrative identities"—those that define the higher orders of interpersonal relations, such as ethnic, socio-economic, religious and national communities. In doing so, they might also be seen to give rise to "grand *normative* identities", in which the social bond is constructed not "on the basis of a strictly diadic dialogic relation" but on the basis of a relation that is strictly monologic. Although this relation is still diadic in theory, it is dependent on a process of one-way recognition, and can thus be seen in terms of solitude rather than solitude. In contrast to the "ethics of responsibility and reciprocity" generated by the Commission's recursive invocation of *ubuntu* as its governing precept, in practice—rather than rhetoric—the Commission's grand narrative upheld a conspicuously normative moral order. That this new moral order contrasted sharply with that of the previous socio-political situation was indeed significant, but perhaps not as significant as previously thought.

According to Bernstein, "the grandness of grand narratives has made them almost universal objects of suspicion" (305). As the work of Moon and Verdoolaege, among others, demonstrates, the TRC's grand narrative of reconciliation, catharsis and nation building was no exception. Indeed, as a "thoroughly modernist" discourse operating within a "postmodern" moment (Noyes 51), the TRC's grand narrative was subject to suspicion from its very inception. It is my contention, however, that the suspicious response to grand narratives such as that of the TRC has itself become a sort of post-modern norm. Within the South African context, moreover, suspicion towards grand narratives offered a thread of normative continuity at a time when the presiding moral order was engaged in a dramatic process of flux. In the light of this contention, I will now turn to a reading of *Country of My Skull* that positions the text as an act of normative mimesis, in which suspicion towards the grand narrative is described and thus resolved. In doing so, I suggest, the text creates a space within which to affirm the validity of the TRC's grand narrative while simultaneously appearing to question it. The ostentatious way in which Krog subjects the Commission's grand narrative to doubt, coupled with a narrative stance that is ultimately affirmative of this grand narrative, gives the Commission an artificially forceful aura of resilience and credibility:

In a wild arch of air I rock with the Commissioners in the boat back to the mainland. I am filled with an indescribable tenderness towards this Commission. With all its mistakes, its arrogance, its racism, its sanctimony, its incompetence, the lying, the failure to get an interim reparation policy off the ground after two years, the showing off—with all of this—it has been so brave, so naively brave in the winds of deceit, rancour and hate. Against a flood crashing with the weight of a brutalizing past on to new usurping politics, the Commission has kept alive the idea of a common humanity. Painstakingly it has chiselled a way beyond racism and made space for all of our voices. For all its failures, it carries a flame of hope that makes me proud to be from here, of here. (422)

In a sense, this aspect of Krog's text can be seen to mimic the process of subjecting the ethical aim to the test of the moral norm found in Breytenbach's *True Confessions*. *Country of My Skull* thus acts to reinforce the Commission's grand narrative by giving it the appearance—but not the substance—of “an ethics enriched by the passage through the norm” (Ricoeur, *Oneself* 203). The narrative techniques that Krog uses to do so, I will call “grand narration”.

Although presented as a “major lasting work of non-fiction” (*Observer*, qtd. on Krog book jacket), Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull* confounds the distinction between fiction and non-fiction by juxtaposing a journalistic account of the TRC, and a fictionalized first-person account of a journalist's involvement in covering the Commission, told by a narrative persona that is—and is not—the author herself. Mark Sanders, for example, has described the text as “a hybrid work, written at the edges of reportage, memoir and metafiction” (“Truth, Telling, Questioning” 16). With respect to *Country of My Skull*, I posit that this generic amorphousness provides a fertile environment for the cultivation of narrative techniques that, in combination, culminate in “grand narration”: a narrative form that gives the impression of approaching the grand narrative with suspicion, only surreptitiously to validate it. In *Country of My Skull*, this is created by two interrelated techniques, both of which lend themselves to the parasite-host metaphor. First, Krog's use of narrative interpolation creates a text that plays host to a variety of diverse narratives, in a way that resembles—but is crucially different from—First's use of this technique in *117 Days*. Against Mark Sanders's interpretation of this as an act of solicitude (“Truth, Telling, Questioning” 31-34), however, it is my contention that hospitality in *Country of My Skull* testifies to the impossibility of solicitude. Krog's text attests to a consumption of the self by the other, rather than a mutually beneficial intersubjective encounter. At first, Krog is simply haunted by the

hearings: “The stories stay with me. How they correspond. How they differ. The stylistic traits of oral narrative. . . . the iconic images. . . . Every narrative carries the imprint of its narrator” (131). As Krog’s narrative plays host to more and more stories of suffering and violence, however, the narratives of others begin to imprint upon that of her fictionalized self, obliterating her subjectivity in the process. She confesses that the hearings “have become more real than my own life” (137). This is corroborated in Krog’s account of the support workshop organized for journalists covering the Commission, when the psychologist leading the discussion tells them: “The more you empathize with the victim, the more you become the victim; you display the same kinds of symptoms—helplessness, wordlessness, anxiety, desperation” (258).

As her narrative self is eroded by the narratives of others, Krog is transformed into a personification of the Commission. In the opening paragraph of chapter 5, for example, Krog’s use of “the Truth Commission” seems to become a cipher for the first person pronoun. When she says that “[f]or six months the Truth Commission has listened to the voices of victims” (84), she is, in a sense, also saying that “[f]or six months *I have* listened to the voices of victims”. The “Publisher’s Note” states that the TRC “put real flesh on rhetorical phrases like ‘a just war’ and ‘crimes against humanity’” (ix), a description that can be extrapolated to suggest that Krog’s narrative “put[s] real flesh” on the institutional construct of the TRC. This feature of the narrative is reinforced in the “Publisher’s Note” to the South African edition, which presents *Country of My Skull* not as an archive so much as a sort of ventriloquistic performance:

Many voices of this country were long silent, unheard, often unheeded before they spoke, in their own tongues, at the microphones of South Africa’s Truth Commission. The voices of ordinary people have entered the public discourse and shaped the passage of history. They speak here to all who care to listen. (x)

Just as the HRVC Hearings provide a human face for the evidentiary narratives of the AAM, Krog’s autobiographical narrative persona becomes gives a human face to the TRC, a largely faceless institution. This only appears to reverse the slippage from the ethical plane to the moral plane identified by Levinas by providing the “political world of the impersonal ‘third’” with a recognizable face, however. Instead, by providing the new moral order embodied by the TRC with an ethical mask, Krog diverts attention away from the Commission’s grand

narrative, and thus deflects suspicions that cannot be contained within the limits of her own critical—and yet ultimately affirmative—response to its proceedings.

The second technique of grand narration found in *Country of My Skull* inverts the hospitality of Krog's narrative persona through a process of what could be termed "paradigmatic parasitism". In *Country of My Skull*, this takes the form of ethical plagiarism, in the sense of Scarry's description of "act[s] of perceptual brutality". By this, I mean that Krog's adoption of the techniques of reciprocity in *117 Days* and *True Confessions* fails successfully to appropriate these techniques in their entirety. Instead, these techniques become "utterly split off" from their ethical determinations. To paraphrase Scarry, what happens next is that "the very habit of seeing in the one the proximity of the other" leads the reader to assume that *Country of My Skull* qualifies as an "ethically charged event" (Attridge, *J. M. Coetzee* xii) in the same way as the singular narratives of First and Breytenbach. Returning to Shklovsky's theorization of *ostranenie*, we find that our ethical response to *Country of My Skull* is one of algebrization: through the process of reading trauma, the ethicity of our responsiveness to the suffering other has been pervasively dulled.

The text's narrative and generic hybridity is a key component in Krog's paradigmatic parasitism. It creates what Carli Coetzee has called a "double signature", or "divided identity" in which the authorial presence is split in two, as signified by the two variants of her name and their implicit associations: Antjie Samuel, the SABC reporter and wife; Antjie Krog, the Afrikaans poet and daughter (686). The relationship between these two signatures in *Country of My Skull* is extremely fraught—they are at war with each other, each signature threatening to obliterate the other. She uses "the poet's signature", Antjie Krog, to indicate her authorship, only to "erase it" by writing a work that is defined by its use of prose, rather than the fragments of poetry it includes (C. Coetzee 687). The fictionalized love affair that takes place between the narrator and an anonymous "beloved", moreover, threatens to obliterate both names—that of her father, Krog, and that of her husband, Samuel.

Krog's use of a "double signature" appears to parallel Ruth First's use of two narrative identities—the confessional and the journalistic—in *117 Days*. Furthermore, like *117 Days*, *Country of My Skull* uses a technique of narrative interpolation. In adopting many of the stylistic and generic features of *117 Days*, *Country of My Skull* can therefore be seen to engage in an attempt to purchase the ethical potency of First's carefully wrought narrative of reciprocity. This is also evident in Krog's mimicry of First's empathetic recognition of the

“narrative ‘incompleteness’ of life” through her incorporation of life narratives which “might otherwise have remained untold”, such as that of Looksmart Solwandle Ngudle. In contrast to the sophisticate continuity technique employed by First, however, *Country of My Skull* is at times maudlin in its avowal of narration “with and for others”:

Beloved, do not die. Do not dare die! I, the survivor, I wrap you in words so that the future inherits you. I snatch you from the death of forgetfulness. I tell your story, complete your ending—you who once whispered beside me in the dark. (39)

The dissolution that this “double signature” undergoes as Krog experiences a nervous breakdown in response to the psychological and physical stress of covering the Commission is, moreover, reminiscent of the divided identity Breytenbach dramatizes in *True Confessions*. This is compounded by Krog’s use of a similar technique of metafictional reflection, in the form of a dialogue between the fictionalized Krog and a colleague:

‘I am busy with the truth . . . *my* truth. Of course, it’s quilted together from hundreds of stories that we’ve experienced or heard about in the past two years. Seen from my perspective, shaped by my state of mind at the time and now also by the audience I’m telling the story to. In every story there is hearsay, there is a grouping together of things that didn’t necessarily happen together, there are assumptions, there are exaggerations to bring home the enormities of situations, there is downplaying to confirm innocence. All this together makes up the whole country’s truth. . . .’

‘And the affair you describe in here. Is that true?’

‘No, but I had to bring a relationship into the story so that I could verbalize certain personal reactions to the hearings. . . . What gives a story its real character is the need to entertain—to make the listener hang on your lips.’ (259)

However, the paradigmatic parasitism of this particular aspect of Krog’s narrative is not limited to her use of metafiction. It is also dependent on the way in which *Country of My Skull* solicits allegorical readings. Mark Sanders, for example, “propose[s] reading these references to a ‘relationship’ as an ‘allegory’ for the hearings and what is enacted there between questioner and witness” (“Truth, Telling, Questioning” 29). Unlike novels such as *Barbarians* and *Store Up the Anger*, whose ethical force is undermined by allegorization, *Country of My Skull* uses this propensity to its advantage. The sense of a genuine face to face encounter cultivated in Krog’s text ameliorates the normative demands that the TRC placed upon the South African people during the first transition. Allegorical readings of *Country of My Skull* therefore tend to support, rather than undermine, the process of grand narration.

My intention in this reading of *Country of My Skull* has not been to dismiss wholeheartedly a widely read and critically acclaimed⁵⁸ text that—for South Africans and non-South Africans alike—has provided a point of entry into one of the most significant events of the twentieth century. Rather, it is intended to demonstrate how an awareness of the paradigms for the narration of torture in both non-fictional and fictional prose can inform our understanding of the subtle ways in which texts negotiate between the moral and the ethical planes—a demonstration that will now be supplemented by an analysis of the literature of the second transition.

⁵⁸ *Country of My Skull* received the *Sunday Times* Alan Paton Award for non-fiction writing in 1999 and the Olive Schreiner Prize for prose in 2000, as well as an award from the Hiroshima Foundation for Peace and Culture in 2000. Krog also received the Pringle award for excellence in journalism in 1996 for her coverage of the TRC.

Chapter 7

Remembering the Dismembered: The Literature of the Second Transition

We all know where South Africa is, but we do not yet know what it is. Ours is the privileged generation that will make that discovery, if the apertures in our eyes are wide enough. The problem is whether we have sufficient cultural imagination to grasp the rich texture of the free and united South Africa that we have done so much to bring about.

Albie Sachs, "Preparing Ourselves for Freedom"

In the previous chapter, I took up Schaffer and Smith's division of post-apartheid literature into two distinct categories: literature that attempts to supplement the work of the TRC, and that which "refuse[s] this imperative" (74). *Country of My Skull*, I argue, falls into the former category. This chapter, then, will engage with those narratives that fall into the latter.

According to Schaffer and Smith,

[t]hese latter writings exceed the borders of both nation and identity; allow experimentation with new narrative forms in imaginative and playful ways not possible in the morally exigent climate of the past; refuse the authority of voice; destabilize the language of nation building; and open up spaces for contradiction and incommensurability. (74)

These features, I argue, are particularly evident in the fictional—as opposed to the non-fictional—response to the Commission. This chapter will therefore focus on the analysis of four novels in which the representation of the TRC proceedings is paramount to the unfolding of plot: Gillian Slovo's *Red Dust* (2000), Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit* (2000), Tony Eprile's *The Persistence of Memory* (2005) and Zoë Wicomb's *Playing in the Light* (2006). My approach to these texts will emphasize the features of excess, experimentation and ambiguity identified by Schaffer and Smith. In doing so, however, my intention is not to demonstrate the novelty of the narrative techniques employed in these works. It is instead intended to encourage an appreciation of the ways in which the stylistic and generic shifts these novels display reinvigorate the paradigms for the narration of human rights abuses established

during the apartheid era through an inversion of the relationship between the political prerogative and the literary prerogative that characterized the narration of torture during apartheid. In doing so, I contend, they succeed in bringing to fruition the experimental potential of the previous paradigm and developing an “authentic reciprocity in exchange” (Ricoeur, *Oneself* 191).

The resurrection and reinvigoration of the apartheid-era paradigm for the narration of human rights abuse can, I suggest, be seen in terms of Freud’s conceptualization of the “return of the repressed”. Without adopting a strictly psychoanalytic approach to this body of literature, I shall unpack the concept to provide a fruitful entry point for the analysis of narrative ethics in the post-TRC period. In the essay “Repression” (1915), the concept of the “return of the repressed” proceeds from Freud’s inquiry into the mechanisms of repression at work in the development of “psychoneuroses” such as “anxiety hysteria” and “conversion hysteria” (155). Herein, Freud separates the effects of repression into two categories: the formation of substitutes, and the formation of symptoms. Furthermore, he posits that these two mechanisms of formation not only “coincide”, but are also “widely different” from the mechanisms at work in the process of repression (155). The formation of substitutes and the formation of symptoms, then, are indicative not of active and successful repression *per se*, but of unsuccessful—or incomplete—repression, in which the repressed idea or emotion surfaces from the depths of an individual’s subconscious.

In chapter 5, I referred to Durrant’s discussion of Derridean mourning in the fiction of J. M. Coetzee, an approach that contributed to my analysis of the ethical implications of the literary representation of torture in apartheid South Africa. In their opposition of the successful/whole and the failed/partial, the two theories—that of Derrida on mourning and Freud on repression—appear to converge. This suggests that, within the context of narrative ethics, a “return of the repressed” has the potential to act as yet another “ethically charged event” (Attridge, *J. M. Coetzee* xii) through its refusal to reduce the intersubjective encounter to an act of “idealizing incorporation”. If this literary return of the repressed succeeds in negotiating the ethical terrain of the intersubjective encounter—bounded on the one side by absolute assimilation, and the other by insurmountable solitude—to arrive at solicitude, moreover, it will have contributed significantly to the development of a society in which the ethical intention takes precedent over the moral norm.

In South Africa, the final decade of the twentieth century was characterized by significant political, social and cultural transformation. During this period, the TRC's grand narrative of reconciliation, catharsis and nation building monopolized the discursive field, providing both a forum and—perhaps more significantly—a repository for narratives that countered apartheid's grand narrative of “rigid racial and even ‘moral’ hierarchy” (Gagiano 97). In consequence, one grand narrative was exchanged for another. The impetus actively to resist the grand narrative that the majority of (disenfranchised) South African people cultivated during the apartheid era was, however, repressed during the period of the first transition. For the most part, resistance to the TRC was restricted to factions within ethnic and/or political groups that felt marginalized, as Krog records: “A columnist in the Free State writes: Reject the Truth Commission with the disgust it deserves—on untested evidence it tries to portray the Afrikaner as the icon of all evil. Untested evidence has become the truth of the ‘boerehaters’” (196).

In this way, the TRC can be seen to act in much the same way as the restitution narrative identified by Frank, in which the “struggles of the self” are downplayed in order to place responsibility for the healing of individual and national trauma in the hands of the Truth Commission. Although no longer “trapped in the multiple ghettos of the apartheid imagination” (Sachs 239), the post-apartheid moment thus lacked the discursive antagonism that characterized the apartheid era, in which the National Party's legitimating grand narrative was counterbalanced by the forceful transnational discourse of human rights. The “decompression, relaxation, and cacophony” that Nuttall and Michael attribute to “the post-apartheid moment” (288) should therefore, I argue, be attributed to what could be termed the post-post-apartheid moment, or second transition. The resurgence of a plurality of narratives that questioned, criticized or subverted the prevailing grand narrative can thus be seen as an acknowledgement, rather than a repressive denial. This acknowledgement, moreover, takes the form of an attempt to engage with the post-apartheid moment in all its complexity and contradiction, rather than an attempt to resolve its intricacies through a description of its parameters. To use Durrant's metaphor of incorporation, it sought to digest the moment, rather than swallow it whole. It is my contention that the initial symptoms of this investment to be found in the literary fiction of the post-TRC decade, particularly in its resurrection and reinvention of the paradigms for the narration of torture established during the apartheid era. As such, the novels of Gillian Slovo, Achmat Dangor,

Tony Eprile and Zoë Wicomb constitute a “return of the repressed”. The mechanisms of substitute and symptom formation that constitute this return are most effective—and thus most apparent—in the narrative techniques employed by these novelists, which, I contend, exhibit a sustained attempt to fulfil literature’s potential to act as a “vast laboratory for thought experiments . . . in the realm of good and evil” (Ricoeur, *Oneself* 148, 164).

Finding Oneself: Symbolization-Compulsion, Self-Discovery and the Intersubjective Encounter in the Post-Apartheid Novel

In an essay on South African literature published in 1998, the novelist and critic Elleke Boehmer asserts that:

Now, as writers begin to conceive a post-apartheid art, as they find the opportunity to break away from the mimetic codes of the past, it is significant that a restraint continues to operate. Even while casting about for the symbolic vocabulary with which to imagine and articulate a changing world, writers can still be seen settling for second-hand, borrowed or inherited models: post-structuralist ‘play’; magic realist conjuring tricks; the treatment of history as ‘discourse’ or as fantasy; recuperative autobiography as a way of narrating a self into being (a form which is necessarily end-stopped by the present). . . . writers appear wary or uncertain about addressing themselves to genuine experiment, to the craft of writing as a movement beyond formula and blueprint, as worth doing for itself. (47)

According to Ato Quayson, the use of “second-hand, borrowed or inherited models” identified by Boehmer is symptomatic of a sort of literary psychoneurosis common to “literary texts detailing traumatic states” (754). Using a psychoanalytic framework based upon the Freudian concepts of “the repetition compulsion that was attendant upon the recall of traumatic events, the latency that resided in the memory of such states, and . . . the fear of dismemberment that for [Freud] is central to an understanding of the uncanny” (754), Quayson diagnoses a condition he describes as “symbolization compulsion” in “the truth-and-reconciliation genre of writing that has been evident in South Africa since the end of apartheid” (766). “Symbolization compulsion” is defined as “the drive towards an insistent metaphorical register even when this register does not help to develop the action, define character or spectacle, or create atmosphere. It appears to be symbolization for its own sake, but in fact is a sign of a latent problem” (754). In the realist fiction of post-apartheid South

Africa—such as Gillian Slovo’s *Red Dust* and Achmat Dangor’s *Bitter Fruit*—Quayson sees a pattern of “nervous tics and repetitions”, psychoanalytically significant symptoms that link the “unfolding crises of the lives of the characters” to “the process of truth and reconciliation” that forms the novels’ backdrop (766-67).

In his reading of *Bitter Fruit*, Quayson goes on to interpret these tics and repetitions in terms of a failed attempt at reciprocity, not with others *per se*, but with history, in both its public and private senses: “There appears to be too much unresolved background to the life of each character for any to be able to establish proper relations of reciprocity in the present” (768-69). This assessment is, however, dependent on an interpretation of the novel “as an attempt at allegorizing the task of truth and reconciliation through the lives of the various individuals it represents to us” (769). Quayson’s psychoanalytical approach to the realist fiction of post-apartheid South Africa is thus limited by its use of an allegorical lens. While I concur that the impulse to “thematiz[e] [the TRC’s] institutional apparatus as part of the fabric of the text” (767) in post-apartheid fiction is generally characterized by an “insistent metaphorical register”, and that this register is predominantly derived from “second-hand, borrowed or inherited models”, my engagement with the novels of Slovo, Dangor, Eprile and Wicomb has led me to conclude that this “return of the repressed” is not necessarily detrimental to the state of the South African cultural consciousness in the post-apartheid moment. Rather, I argue that these novels invoke the paradigms of apartheid era fiction only to reinvent them according to an ethics of reciprocity.

Attridge argues for an understanding of formal inventiveness as a “mobilization of meanings”, in which the emergence of a “new form” gives rise to a “new content” through its provision of “an open set of fresh possibilities of meaning, feeling, perceiving, responding, behaving” (*Singularity* 108-109). Furthermore, he suggests that these fresh possibilities are definitively ethical in their provision of new ways of staging “[t]he invention of the other” (108). It is my contention that, for all its generic conventionality, the “truth-and-reconciliation genre of writing” makes impressive use of formal reinvention as a means of exploring fresh possibilities for the literary depiction of the intersubjective encounter within the context of post-apartheid South Africa and its deluge of traumatic narratives. Formally inventive representations of the TRC—such as *Red Dust*, *Bitter Fruit*, *The Persistence of Memory* and *Playing in the Light*—should therefore, I argue, be regarded as ethically singular texts.

At this point, it seems appropriate to provide a brief recapitulation of the narrative techniques employed in the literary representation of human rights abuses during the apartheid era. The salient features of the non-fictional paradigm established during this period include the techniques of narrative interpolation; the appeal to a highly symbolic, collective identity, primarily through the invocation of ancestral history; and the polarization of natural and mechanical imagery. Insofar as the fiction of this period is concerned, the narrative paradigm can be broadly characterized in terms of the following techniques: the erotic gaze, the assertion of collective identity, narrative parallax, and the use of metafictional devices. As Ndebele observes in his critique of the literary response to Soweto, however, the majority of the texts that contributed to the establishment of this paradigm present the apartheid situation in terms of a moral binary between good and evil. In addition to its normativity, this framework is distinctly modernist, and corresponds to the perception of the apartheid period as characterized by a conflict between two grand narratives: the one intent on preserving apartheid, and the other on overthrowing it. In contrast, the literature of the second transition tends to deploy these techniques within a postmodernist framework. My use of this term is based upon Attridge's theorization of this inherently ambiguous concept as a sort of "modernism after modernism", in which he suggests that "modernist innovation [be seen as] a possible source for a political art that recognizes the dangers of a merely instrumental artistic practice—and postmodernism . . . the working out of that practice" (*J. M. Coetzee* 5, 4). Central to this idea of postmodernism as a "modernism after modernism", Attridge proposes, is the continuity that proceeds from their shared concern with the relationship between available discursive structures and the "claims of otherness" (4). "[W]hatever their specific differences", he claims, "works with this kind of responsiveness to the demands of otherness . . . are clearly related to one another in their general strategies" (5). Furthermore, "since nothing could be less modernist than a repetition of previous modes", "[t]his modernism after modernism necessarily involves a reworking of modernism's methods"—evincing not just "a tendency to repeat" these modes, but a tendency to reinvigorate them and thus recapture their initial "disruptive"—and thus, I suggest, *defamiliarizing*—effects (5). Contra Quayson, then, I contend that the "nervous tics and repetitions" he perceives to be symptomatic of the literary response to trauma are, in fact, a prime example of the way in which postmodernist texts respond to the claims of otherness through a reworking of modernism's methods. In the context of South African

literature, moreover, the discursive restrictions of the first transition created a hiatus in the practice of an autonomous artistic response to the political situation. The definitive contours of the “truth-and-reconciliation genre of writing” that arose in the post-TRC period can thus be seen as a postmodern return of the repressed literary modes of political critique established in the apartheid era.

The novels of the second transition frame the TRC as a catalyst for a journey of self-discovery, a topos that evokes Frank’s theorization of the quest narrative as a viable response to the limitations of the restitution narrative that institutions impose upon individuals. According to Frank, the quest narrative can be seen as an attempt to create meaning in the space between denial of illness and submergence in its pervasive depths by “accept[ing] illness and seek[ing] to *use* it” (115). Such stories, moreover, tend to conform to a journey structure, in which the ill person seeks to accrue meaning, discover purpose and form an identity through reflection on their experience of illness. As such, the quest narrative “tells self-consciously of being transformed” in a positive manner as the experience is organized into something “coherent and meaningful” (118). In short, quest narratives strive to *emplot* illness in Ricoeur’s sense of the word. This analogy between the quest narrative and the journeys of self-discovery found in the novels of Slovo, Dangor, Eprile and Wicomb reveals two prominent characteristics of the literature of the second transition: the performance of emplotment, and the use of a metaphorical register and narrative mode that combine to create a strong sense of ambiguity.

The performance of emplotment in the novels of Slovo, Dangor, Eprile and Wicomb is achieved through a mirroring of content and form, and, as such, is heavily imbricated in the creation of ambiguity within these novels. Using a structure similar to that which Hein Willemsse has described as the “uncomplicated, straightforward chronological tale often employed by black South African novelists”—such as, for example, the novels of Serote and Sepamla, although *Barbarians* also fits this description—the protagonists of *Red Dust*, *Bitter Fruit*, *The Persistence of Memory* and *Playing in the Light* develop synchronistically with the plots of these novels. The narrative perspective is thus continually revised as characters emplot and re-plot their self-stories in the light of shifts in the meaning and value of past events—resulting in parallax narratives similar to that of the magistrate in *Barbarians*. Crucially, in the novels of the second transition, this parallax technique is typically accompanied by narrative interpolation, one of the most prominent features of the apartheid

era human rights life narrative. In this way, these novels can be seen to imitate the “jumbled”, “elliptical” and “fragmentary” narrative mode Wilson identifies in the HRVC Hearings, which is, in itself, an act of resistance to the grand narration encouraged by the TRC.

The alliance of narrative interpolation, parallax and the trope of self-discovery in the novels of the second transition can be seen dramatically to rework the ethical determinations with which they were associated in chapters 4 and 5. Instead of playing host to the stories of those “whose experiences might otherwise have remained untold” (Jacobs 198)—an act of narrative hospitality that risks privileging the pedagogy of pity over that of suffering—the narratives of self-discovery found in the second transition are effectively formed by an engagement with the stories of others, particularly those stories that narrate the experience of suffering. What this ultimately creates, I suggest, is a sort of ethical intertextuality, in which the basic solicitude achieved by texts such as *117 Days* is supplemented by the reciprocity inherent in the response to—and responsibility towards—the narratives of others. In this way, the literature of the second transition can be seen to present narratives of human rights abuses in accordance with Ricoeur’s understanding of the encounter with suffering as “the supreme test of solicitude”, in which “unequal power finds compensation in an authentic reciprocity in exchange” (*Oneself* 191).

During apartheid, texts such as *117 Days* used narrative interpolation to evoke a sense of the author *writing* “with and for” others, thus creating the impression of solicitude. In the literature of the post-TRC period, a range of narrative techniques are utilized in such a way as to develop this solicitude into “an authentic reciprocity in exchange”. Crucial to this development is a foregrounding of what Améry has described as “the will and the ability to speculate phenomenologically, to emphathize [sic], to approach the limits of reason” (xi). Slovo, Dangor, Eprile and Wicomb present characters that not only possess the will and ability to speculate phenomenologically about other subjectivities, but also learn to apply this will and ability reflexively. To the narration of torture as an act of solicitude—of writing “with and for” others—the literature of the second transition thus adds a further ethical dimension: that of *reading* oneself through the intersubjective encounter. This ethical dimension is first introduced in the novels of Slovo and Dangor, which present their protagonists’ encounter with another’s narrative of torture as a catalyst for a journey of self-discovery. In *Red Dust* and *Bitter Fruit*, the use of free indirect discourse in combination with

frequent referential shifts brings narrative reciprocity to the fore. This is then developed further in Eprile and Wicomb's use of a central protagonist—rather than a cast of characters—and adoption of the “bildungsroman” (Eprile 272) genre. In both novels, the protagonist's bildungsroman is initiated by the encounter with the suffering other, rather than the experience of suffering oneself. By disposing with the freedom of access to both sides of the intersubjective encounter found in *Red Dust* and *Bitter Fruit*, *The Persistence of Memory* and *Playing in the Light* can be seen to subject the narration of intersubjectivity to “the supreme test of solicitude” and thus achieve “an authentic reciprocity in exchange” that surpasses the attempts of the previous paradigm (Ricoeur, *Oneself* 191).

My analysis of the literature of the second transition will begin with Gillian Slovo's *Red Dust*, a forerunner of the “truth-and-reconciliation genre of writing” identified by Quayson. As such, the text provides a useful introduction to the contours of this genre, which can be broadly described as a reinvention of the paradigm for the narration of human rights abuses established during apartheid, rather than that imposed by the grand narrative of the TRC. Slovo's novel displays many of the strategies of reinvention characteristic of this genre, and can thus be seen to epitomize the literature of the second transition. The following reading of *Red Dust* will therefore focus on positioning the literature of the second transition within the ethical framework established in this thesis.

Red Dust draws on the author's personal experience of the TRC, in which she testified as an opponent to the amnesty applications of Craig Williamson and Roger Raven, the men allegedly responsible for the assassination of her mother, Ruth First. In her discussion of this experience, she admits to perceiving the Commission with a combination of suspicion and admiration, describing it as “passionately contradictory, mixing shortcomings with its own, not inconsiderable, triumphs” (“Revealing”). In many ways, Slovo's fictionalization of the TRC in *Red Dust* can be seen as an attempt at working out this intensely personal encounter with the Commission's grand narrative. The techniques she uses to do so, however, are deeply rooted in the paradigms for the narration of human rights abuses that were established during apartheid.

Set in the rural Eastern Cape in 1998, *Red Dust* tells the story of Sarah Barcant, an expatriate South African lawyer, who is summoned back to her hometown of Smitsrivier by her childhood mentor, Ben Hoffman. Having left fourteen years previously, just prior to the declaration of a state of emergency in 1985, Sarah is caught between the overwhelming

“familiarity of the place” and the “stunning dislocation” from her adult life in New York (9, 8). However, instead of being “dragged into a contemplation of her past”, Sarah is intent on perceiving her return as motivated solely by a sense of responsibility to Ben: “She was here to do a job of work because Ben had asked her to come and because she owed him too much to contemplate refusal. That’s all” (12). She soon discovers that the job Ben has in mind involves representing a local black MP, Alex Mpondo, in the upcoming amnesty application of an ex-security policeman, Dirk Hendricks. In 1985, a year after Sarah’s departure from Smitsrivier, Alex was brutally interrogated by Hendricks for his alleged involvement with MK, and is deeply troubled by the thought of having to “come face to face” with his interrogator once again (31):

Alex could guess at the logic that must have filtered through that twisted brain. Hendricks must have thought that if he didn’t apply for amnesty for torturing Alex, then Alex would somehow turn up like the ghost at the feast at Hendricks’s other amnesty hearing and use the full disclosure clause to stop him going free.

Hendricks couldn’t have been further off-target. The truth was that Alex wanted nothing to do with him. If he hadn’t volunteered the information that he had once been Alex’s torturer, Alex would not have made it public. He didn’t want Hendricks exposed. Or humiliated. Or forgiven. He didn’t want compensation and he certainly didn’t want to have to sit and listen to Hendricks saying that he was sorry. Alex had come to terms with what happened. All he asked was he be left in peace [sic]. (31)

In spite of this reluctance, he is coerced into opposing Hendricks’s application to the TRC by the parents of Steve Sizela, an ANC activist who was detained and tortured at the same time as Alex, and whose body has never been found. The Sizelas are convinced that a local ex-policeman, Pieter Muller, is responsible for Steve’s murder and, on Ben’s recommendation, they intend to “use Alex to twist Hendricks’s arm” into revealing this. In keeping with the TRC’s master-narrative, the Sizelas are concerned not with retributive justice, but with the disclosure of the truth and the recovery of their son’s body in order to “give him a decent burial” and quite literally lay the past to rest (47).

When Sarah takes a preliminary statement from Alex in preparation for the hearing, it becomes apparent that his account of the events surrounding his own torture and Steve’s disappearance is factually inconsistent, leading Sarah to suspect that he is “withholding something” (57). As the hearing progresses, Sarah’s suspicions are confirmed. Hendricks divulges that Alex broke under torture and confessed, “offer[ing] up the information as a gift” (192). Although Alex is publicly shamed for “[h]is betrayal” (192), this disclosure

ultimately leads to Hendricks's own confession, in which he reveals that the torture of Steve and Alex did not take place in the Smitsrivier police station, but on a farm outside of town. Steve's body is traced to this farm and exhumed, along with a document revealing that Muller was responsible for his interrogation. Muller applies to the TRC for amnesty, but before the hearing begins he takes his own life. The novel ends with a strong sense of closure, made all the more so by the consummation of the "electric charge" (183) of sexual tension between Sarah and Alex.

According to Dorothy Driver, *Red Dust* "reads for the most part as a formulaic novel combining for its representation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission elements of courtroom drama and detective fiction. . . . with an appropriately fast pace and characters no deeper than required for a moderately clever and convincing plot" ("*Red Dust*" 107). It also, she argues, presents a "sardonic view of the central tenets of the TRC, a view in which truth and reconciliation are contaminated by power, and where any stability in the concepts of truth and memory is deftly undermined"; a view which, "[i]n the South African critical context . . . may offer little surprise" (108). *Red Dust*, for example, critiques at length both the "objective eye" (67) of the TRC and its dramatic format, which gives rise to a seemingly endless supply of theatrical metaphors: prior to the first hearing, Sarah feels "the performance about to begin" (71), while Hendricks thinks to himself, "[s]howtime" (79). Hendricks enters the auditorium stage "from the wings" (81), while the "grey-bearded judge" is "quite a showman" (123) and sighs "theatrically" (90).

As we have seen in *Country of My Skull*, this suspicious stance towards the TRC can be deceptively controversial. By ostentatiously subjecting its grand narrative to doubt, suspicion towards the Commission is described and thus resolved, which ultimately results in an affirmation of the TRC's "central tenets". However, as Driver observes of *Red Dust*, "[a]lthough there are many moments in the novel of moral certainty and seeming final judgement . . . the novel creates the possibility of a pervasive ambiguity through its generic contradiction and play of perspectives" (109). While Driver sees this ambiguity as "an ethical dimension" that is "particularly invested in gender" (109), it is my contention that the trope of self-discovery evident in the narratives of both Alex and Sarah enables the ethical significance of ambiguity in *Red Dust* to transcend the concept of gender, and focus instead on the performance of narrative reciprocity. Etymologically speaking, "ambiguity" comes from the adjective "ambiguous", which is derived from the Latin prefix *ambi-*, meaning

“both ways”, and the verb *agere*, “to drive” (“Ambiguous”), and thus carries with it the notion of mutual exchange, or reciprocity. As a narrative characterized by “a pervasive ambiguity”, *Red Dust* can thus be seen as a performance that goes beyond the basics of encounter and recognition to provide an “authentic reciprocity in exchange” (Ricoeur, *Oneself* 191).

Several narrative techniques contribute to the crafting of this “authentic reciprocity in exchange” in *Red Dust*, many of which can be seen to originate from the torture narratives of the apartheid era. The narrative parallax engendered by self-discovery, for example, is reminiscent of novels such as Coetzee’s *Barbarians* and Ebersohn’s *Store Up the Anger*, whereas Slovo’s use of narrative interpolation and free indirect discourse alludes to the paradigm established in her mother’s autobiographical account of detention, *117 Days*, and developed in both fictional and non-fictional texts, including Lewin’s *Bandiet*, Brink’s *A Dry White Season* and *Store Up the Anger*. In *Red Dust*, these techniques of referential shift are supplemented by Slovo’s use of intertextuality, a feature that alerts us to the central importance of the characters’ reading and re-reading of themselves and others. Moreover, Slovo’s reinvention of the use of the erotic gaze and natural symbolism found in the post-Soweto novels of Serote, Sepamla and Brink, exchanges estrangement from others for a transformative engagement with others. Ultimately, this series of paradigmatic reinventions not only preserves the solicitude cultivated by the singular texts of the apartheid era, but succeeds in refining the underlying ethical determinations of their narrative techniques even further, creating a text capable of sustaining an authentic ethics of reciprocity.

The “play of perspectives” in *Red Dust* is brought about by Slovo’s choice of multiple narrators and a structure in which the narrative perspective shifts with each successive chapter. Some continuity is achieved by the use of free indirect discourse to present the vastly different narratives of Sarah Barcant, Pieter Muller, Ben Hoffman, Dirk Hendricks, Alex Mpondo and James Sizela. As in Bloom’s *Transvaal Episode*, this narrative framework resists the tendency “to ossify complex social problems into symbols which are perceived as finished forms of good or evil” (Ndebele 23) by engaging with the complex subjectivities of others, whether victim, perpetrator or witness. The following description of Muller’s response to his secretary’s suggestion to fire a black employee for turning up to work drunk is an example of this resistance to the portrayal of perpetrators as “finished products: unaccountably vicious, cruel, malicious, fawning and greedy” (Ndebele 30): “By dropping

two tabs of Sweetex into his coffee and stirring vigorously, Pieter avoided the reproach he knew would be visible in Kristal's eyes. She was a good girl but she was still too young to understand the consequences that sacking Sizwe would have on his whole extended family" (96). As we have seen in *Episode*, this type of narrative structure encourages an engagement with others that takes the form of an "appeal [that] precedes both decision and understanding" (Newton 12), and thus privileges ethical thinking over moral judgement.

Continuity also proceeds from Slovo's usage of Sarah's narrative as a nucleus around which the others orbit. The novel opens with Sarah's arrival in Smitsrivier, and closes with a confirmation of her eventual return to New York: "Soon she would be going back. Of that she had no doubt" (338). In the intervening pages, however, Sarah's perspective shifts in an instance of narrative parallax: "That she had run away from this place, and kept away so long, revealed to her what she had previously refused to acknowledge—that, try as she might to escape it, this country defined her" (338). This "return of the repressed" is a common feature of the multiple narratives of *Red Dust*, from the traumatic resurgence of Alex's repressed memories of torture to the exposure of an intricate web of lies and denial under which the truth is—quite literally—buried. In addition, it provides a point of convergence for the novel's content and its form.

Attridge argues for an understanding of formal inventiveness as a "mobilization of meanings", in which the emergence of a "new form" gives rise to a "new content" through its provision of "an open set of fresh possibilities of meaning, feeling, perceiving, responding, behaving" (*Singularity* 108, 107). Furthermore, he suggests that these fresh possibilities are definitively ethical in their provision of new ways of staging "[t]he invention of the other" (108). It is my contention that, for all its generic conventionality, *Red Dust* makes impressive use of formal reinvention as means of exploring fresh possibilities for the literary depiction of the intersubjective encounter within the context of post-apartheid South Africa, and should therefore be regarded as an ethically singular text.

Slovo's formal juxtaposition of multiple subjectivities mimics the engagement with alterity found in Bloom's fictional evocation of the early apartheid years. By combining this with the trope of self-discovery, however, Slovo contributes to the development of this formal element as an ethically potent narrative technique. *Red Dust* adds to "the extreme exposure and sensitivity of one subjectivity to another" (Newton 9) found in *Episode* by presenting a series of narratives that are fundamentally altered by the intersubjective

encounter. Slovo thus goes beyond the unqualified responsibility to the other presented in *Episode* by staging a series of intersubjective encounters that are characterized not just by responsibility, but also by responsiveness. This begins with Sarah's recollection of her adolescent friendship with the middle-aged lawyer Ben Hoffman, a friendship that "proved a turning point" in Sarah's life (34). We are told that "[b]y opening up for her a world she had only vaguely suspected might exist, Ben changed her life" (34). Frustrated by the opacity of her face to face encounter with Ben's "almost blank" face, she refuses to accept the limitations of the intersubjective encounter, and perseveres in her examination of the other as represented by Ben. She is described as "want[ing] to reach out", which is then translated into "a step towards him" (68). Although Ben's anger "cut down" her attempt to apologize for an argument, the persistence of Sarah's attempt to engage with him is productive. Instead of looking into the blankness of his face, she looks upon his skin—"stretched so tight . . . it was almost translucent"—and "the truth came to her" (68). This truth, moreover, leads her to reassess her own behaviour: "She wondered whether she should follow, calm him down, show him how much he meant to her" (68). This perception of the intersubjective encounter as a pedagogical event that both inspires and requires reflexive interpretation—without guaranteeing any solutions—sets the scene for the series of intersubjective encounters that shape the novel's plot of self-discovery. Mrs Sizela's account of her son's arrest, for example, serves as a catalyst for Sarah's consideration of her relationship to her hometown—the "contemplation of her past" that she is so resistant to—and thus contributes to the development of the novel's topos of self-discovery:

Sarah swallowed and looked down, blinking, willing away her tears and when that didn't work, closing her eyes. I hate this place, she thought, I hate what it does to me, her throat constricting as she forced herself to swallow down her feelings, as she sat remembering scenes from her childhood: a woman of Mrs Sizela's age waiting in vain for the police to come and attend to her after an attack; the voice of a white baas raised in anger; a black man's look, eyes lowered, in sullen resistance; Smitsrivier in all its ugliness, in all its inequality. (53)

Mrs Sizela's account provokes a sequence of involuntary images to appear in Sarah's mind; images of responsiveness that she emplots within a deeply personal narrative of self-discovery. Furthermore, just as Bloom recognizes that "attempting to understand the villain in all his complexity does not necessarily imply a political acceptance of him" (Ndebele 30), Slovo appears to acknowledge that an insurmountable difference in subjectivity is not

necessarily inimical to a pedagogical intersubjective encounter. Sarah's inability to understand Alex's relationship to Dirk Hendricks, for example, serves to deepen Alex's insight into his own psychological state *and* his response to others:

He understood what Sarah had tried to do on the mountain before they had made love. She'd been trying to let him off the hook. He appreciated the effort and he like her the more for her sudden naiveté: that she could think that, by a simple lie, she could so easily let him off the hook! He smiled at the memory of it. The fact that she'd assumed Alex would believe what she'd told him, showed just how long she'd been away. . . .

She was so smart and yet the one thing she didn't seem to get was the extent of the feeling that lay between Alex and his torturer. That's what coming back had taught Alex: how well he knew Dirk Hendricks, perhaps as well, better than he knew or would ever know any other human being. (336-7)

In both cases, this responsiveness to the narratives of others does not erode the characters' subjectivity—as in *Country of My Skull*—but augments it, testifying to an interpretive engagement with both oneself and others. This, in turn, recalls the Levinasian proposition that “consciousness and even subjectivity flow from, are legitimated by the ethical summons which proceeds from intersubjective encounter” (Newton 12), as well as Ricoeur's notion of the ethical value of “self-esteem” as a continuous process of reflexive consideration and narrative re-assessment. *Red Dust*, then, succeeds in deriving meaning from the “messier dimensions” not only of human experience, but also of human interaction. This aspect of the novel thus encourages “the will and ability to speculate phenomenologically” (Améry xi) about others, as well as a reflexive transference of this ability to the self. Furthermore, by using the encounter with suffering—as generally represented by the TRC, and specifically by Alex and the Sizelas—as a catalyst for the novel's plot of self-discovery, the “shared admission of fragility and, finally, of mortality” that constitutes the pedagogical significance of this encounter is extended into a shared admission of the dependence of one's subjectivity on the intersubjective encounter. In contrast to Krog's personification of the TRC in *Country of My Skull*, *Red Dust* is successful in its response to the human consequences of this institutional endeavour. This success can be attributed to two factors, both of which serve to privilege ethnicity over morality. First, Slovo uses individual narratives to portray the ambiguity inherent in the Commission's grand narrative. Second, the intersection of these narratives provides an opportunity for the exploration of this ambiguity as an ethical dimension.

The reinvention of the intersubjective encounter in *Red Dust* is supported by several other techniques. First, the estrangement that accompanies the portrayal of the erotic gaze found in the novels of Serote, Sepamla and Brink is replaced by responsiveness in *Red Dust*. The sexual encounter between Alex and Sarah, for example, is framed as yet another indication of the way in which the engagement with others has a formative effect on the self. In contrast to the “mixture of suspicion and attraction” Sarah had initially felt towards Alex, as the end of the novel approaches she realises that “[w]ithout even knowing it, her feelings towards him had been changed. She felt a tenderness for him: a kind of longing” (328). This, in turn, is symbolic of how the face to face encounter with others—and particularly with Alex, a survivor of torture—has led Sarah to surrender to the compulsion to contemplate her past, and, in doing so, enabled her to engage in a recursive project of self-esteem. Furthermore, Alex’s reciprocation of this longing and its ensuing consummation demonstrates the way in which the estrangement of the erotic gaze found in the post-Soweto novels is transformed into a mutually transformative exchange of affection.

Another technique that can be seen in terms of a reinvention of the previous paradigm for the narration of human rights abuses in South Africa is Slovo’s use of natural imagery. Unlike the polarization of mechanical and natural imagery in the post-Soweto novels, the eponymous red dust of Slovo’s novel acts as a metaphor for the universal condition of being *qua* being, and particularly of the way in which one’s past—whether it involves suffering or not—leaves ineradicable marks that must be continually re-emplotted in order to maintain a narrative identity. All of Slovo’s characters display—albeit to different extents—“the capacity to question [oneself] as to [one’s] own way of being and thus to relate [one]self to being *qua* being”, as well as a complex and continually evolving relationship to their past, and it is this fundamental similarity that the image of red dust appears to symbolize. The dust is a ubiquitous feature of the Smitsrivier landscape. It “saturate[s]” the kombi that carries Hendricks from “his Pretoria jail cell” to his amnesty hearing in Smitsrivier (22); it “work[s] its way into the soft green suede of [Sarah’s] high-heeled sandals” (33); its “particles clin[g]” to James Sizela’s skin (46). Recalling the burial of Steve Sizela, Hendricks “remembered how much [his wife] had complained about the way the red dust had clogged up the washing machine” (334). Another significant metaphor in the novel is that of the jigsaw Ben is assembling, which supplements the equality symbolized by the red dust with a sense of interdependence. Sarah perceives Ben’s interest in the jigsaw in relation

to his career—“After all, the putting together of disparate fragments to build a picture—that had been his lawyer’s speciality” (41)—whereas Driver reads the image as a metaphor for “the contradictory and elusive facts of the amnesty case” (“*Red Dust*” 114). The “putting together of disparate fragments to build a picture” can also, however, be interpreted as a metafictional commentary on the novel’s use of narrative parallax and the trope of self-discovery through engagement with others: it is only by combining all the fragments, all the different perspectives, stories and interpretations, that the complete picture is revealed.

In contrast to the symbolic framework of difference constructed in the post-Soweto novels, then, Slovo restricts her use of symbolism to images of equality and reciprocity. This, moreover, interacts with the novel’s presentation of the relationship between the face to face encounter and the each to each encounter. Instead of attempting to use the face to face encounter to mask the anonymity inherent in the TRC as institution—as Krog does in *Country of My Skull*—Slovo’s use of narrative parallax emphasizes the primacy of the face to face encounter. While the more abstract concepts of equality and justice are indeed present in *Red Dust*, the techniques that Slovo uses to represent these concepts—such as the symbolic significance of red dust—not only retains their ambiguity, but also, in doing so, avoids the trap of attempting to resolve them through description.

A final ethically significant component of *Red Dust* is its use of intertextuality. The novel’s use of a quotation from Shakespeare’s *Henry IV*—“Is not the truth the truth?” (I.ii.4)—as epigraph sets the tone for the rest of the text, in which the trope of theatricality associated with the TRC is taken out of the Smitsrivier auditorium and into the lives of its participants. When Sarah sees Alex in a local bar, for example, she perceives him as “the consummate showman” (105), a perception that is swiftly confirmed by his drunken quotation of Eugene O’Neill’s *The Ice Man Cometh* and Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* (105-107). This use of intertextuality, I argue, is yet another instance of the way in which *Red Dust* reinvigorates previous paradigms for the narration of human rights abuses by enabling formal inventiveness to mobilize the meanings sustained by a text. Both fictional and non-fictional texts from the apartheid era use the self-story as a host for the narratives of others, which—although indicative of a basic solicitude—risks a dissymmetry of power, in which the narrator has control over which of these narratives to include, as well as the degree of detail and the angle of their telling. Slovo’s text, however, places emphasis on the readerly—rather than writerly—aspect of the intersubjective encounter. In *Red Dust*, Alex finds

personal resonance in the plays of Shakespeare and O'Neill, and, in performing this resonance, initiates a process of change in Sarah's perception of him. Sarah's altered perception of him, moreover, gives rise to an enhanced understanding of herself. This suggests that the encounter with the tortured person enhances the ethical dimension of the intersubjective encounter by first encouraging "the will and the ability to speculate phenomenologically" (Améry xi) about the complex subjectivities of others, and then applying this to oneself. The ethical weight of Slovo's novel thus lies in its capacity to acknowledge the limitations inherent in the intersubjective encounter, while simultaneously demonstrating the ways in which the ethical intention can overcome these limitations to achieve an "authentic reciprocity in exchange".

That this claim can be extended to the literature of the second transition *in general* requires a more comprehensive look at fictional representations of the TRC published during this period. To this end, I will look next at Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit*, a novel contemporary to *Red Dust* and remarkably similar in both its thematic content and its formal structure. Like *Red Dust*, *Bitter Fruit* uses the TRC as a catalyst for the return of its characters' repressed narratives and the multiple journeys of self-discovery that ensue. The novel begins with a coincidental encounter between Silas Ali—a civil servant with "an important job liaising between the Ministry of the Justice and the TRC" (63) and former MK member—and François du Boise, a "retired security policeman" (4) responsible for the rape of Silas's wife, Lydia, nineteen years previously. In the months that follow this encounter, Silas pressurizes Lydia to participate in the *in camera* hearings held by the TRC to deal with the sexual abuse of women during apartheid. Lydia is resistant to the idea of revisiting—and thus revoicing—the traumatic experience of her rape within the forum of the TRC, and thus refuses. When Du Boise applies for amnesty and names her as one of his victims, however, she is faced with the inevitable fact of having to testify in public, without even the relative privacy of the *in camera* hearings. As in *Red Dust*, this eventuality is ultimately avoided by the death of the perpetrator, invoking the spectre of retributive justice that haunted the proceedings of the TRC. Unlike Pieter Muller, Du Boise does not commit suicide, but is murdered by Mikey Ali, the child conceived of Lydia's rape and subsequently raised by the Alis.

Like *Red Dust*, the dominant narrative mode in *Bitter Fruit* is free indirect discourse, interspersed with episodes of direct dialogue. Dangor also makes extensive use of narrative

interpolation and parallax. In *Bitter Fruit*, however, the use of narrative interpolation is significantly more fluid than in *Red Dust*. Although Dangor, like Slovo, makes referential shifts with successive chapters, in scenes involving several characters simultaneously he employs a subtler technique in which the narrative perspective appears to wander from character to character:

Gracie feared that her husband would launch into a long and inappropriate technical explanation of the Swazi glass-making industry and cut him short with one of her glances. He grinned and kept quiet, stifling his impulse to say to Silas, ‘Christ, a real cutting Oliphant look. I bet Lydia still *snys* you with them, hey?’ But he had said this so often before, that everyone knew what he meant by the way he was grinning. (23-24)

The causal association between intersubjectivity, self-discovery and narrative parallax in *Bitter Fruit* is far more explicit than in *Red Dust*. In Dangor’s novel, this association is most pronounced in the narrative of Mikey, whose development the novel plots from conception to young adulthood. Mikey’s realization of his violent conception, for example, is caused by his discovery of Lydia’s diary, and is thus intrinsically linked to the reading of his mother’s private account of personal suffering. This realization, moreover, initiates Mikey’s own journey of self-discovery; a journey that we follow up until the novel’s dramatic denouement, in which he assassinates Du Boise and begins a new life as a convert to Islam. The critical stages in this journey of self-discovery are symbolically represented by the trope of name-changing. Soon after his discovery of Lydia’s diary, Mikey chooses to represent his growing self-awareness through the exchange of his childhood nickname for his full name, Michael. This name is bestowed upon him by his older lover, Kate: “Mikey, harbouring a savagery of his own, that manipulative surliness, a ‘mystique’ created by his quiet withdrawn manner, needed a name more dignified than that. ‘Michael, Michael,’ Kate whispered, as if testing the sound of his name, trying to picture him fully grown, his soft, skinny build giving way to something harder and fleshier” (80). Mikey takes it up, however, after reading the first entry in Lydia’s diary. Upon reading the words “Mikey is a child of rape” (129), he erases this part of identity and takes on that provided by Kate:

He replaces his mother’s diary in her desk drawer, deftly uses a knife to slip the rather simple lock back into place. He picks up the phone and dials the number Kate gave him.

‘Hello, Miss Jessup, it’s Michael.’ (131)

That this name-change indicates a break from his past is confirmed by the statement that “Michael, as he has now defined himself, lives only in the future, in the world of young people and young pursuits. He has no use for the older generation” (167). This “Christian name” (88), however, is subsequently exchanged for the name “Noor” upon his conversion to Islam (277), a name that represents Mikey’s attempt to distance himself from his white biological father and align himself with the Muslim ancestry signified in his family name of Ali: “Ali Ali is someone he can identify with. Oupapa Ali, a man who knew the tools of his trade. Pray in hushed tones, a language they do not know, the meaning in its lyrical incantation, bathe it all in hallowed light. . . . Michael Ali, inspired by the mighty Ali Ali, his progenitor” (88). This connection is reinforced by the information that Mikey’s chosen Muslim name, “Noor”, means “[t]he Prophet’s light” (277).

The catalyst for this journey, moreover, is framed in terms of an engagement with the depths of another’s subjectivity—the reading of his mother’s diary. Mikey’s discovery of Lydia’s diary is described in terms of an exhumation of the truth, a metaphor that resonates with the activities of the TRC and with the fictionalized events of *Red Dust*: “Lydia’s diary lies hidden, the only real attempt to conceal anything, underneath a sheaf of ancient legal documents: insurance policies, birth certificates, expired vehicle registration papers, the deed of sale a house disposed of years ago” (31). While this could be seen as an extended metaphor for the work of the TRC, it serves as a caveat, rather than an endorsement, of the Commission’s attempt to contain the traumatic history of apartheid. In contrast to the TRC’s mandate to “heal the old wounds and build a new South Africa”, *Bitter Fruit* presents the work of unearthing repressed memories as an ongoing process that continually evades attempts at resolution. The significance of these resurgent emotions cannot be contained by the novel, which tellingly ends with new beginnings. In the aftermath of Du Boise’s murder, which effectively brings an end to the novel’s main plotline, new chapters begin in the lives of several of its characters. Mikey, for example, is described as “going to a death of sorts. Michael is to die, Noor will be incarnated in his place” (277); while Lydia discovers the news as she is in the process of ending her marriage to Silas and embarking on a journey intended to “free her” from the “[b]urden of the mother. . . . wife, lover, lover-mother, lover-wife, unloved mother” (281).

Crucially, these journeys of self-discovery are prompted by various forms of intersubjective engagement, which prompt a reflexive reassessment of self. This, in turn, is

suggestive of the characters' recognition of the necessity of intersubjective engagement as well as the costs—for both parties—that attend this engagement. The ethical dimension of *Bitter Fruit* can thus be seen to reside primarily in a sense of narrative ambiguity similar to that found in *Red Dust*. Even before he begins to read Lydia's diary, for example, its discovery prompts Mikey to reconsider his perception of his mother—"Now Mikey begins to comprehend the extent to which Lydia, by default, manages the family's affairs"—and, in turn, his perception of the communal identity of the petite bourgeoisie to which his family belongs: "Anyway, collecting obsolete documents, in neat piles but without any obvious order or purpose, is the obsessive habit of people besieged by the constant fear of poverty. Do the rich preserve their past as assiduously?" (31). In *Bitter Fruit*, the continuing project of self-esteem proceeds directly from the esteem of the other. This esteem of the other, moreover, involves a significant investment of the self. Mikey's initial reluctance to "read the first entry" of Lydia's diary is framed in terms of the "unexpected foreboding" he feels when he realizes that "[t]his diary has something to do with Lydia's accident, her subsequent hospitalization, with the name Du Boise that he has heard his parents whisper tensely between them" (32). Mikey's consideration of this reluctance, however, soon reveals that it "is also rooted in a fear of his own" (32), namely that Lydia would have written about

the moment she opened the door to his room and found her son and her sister, Mikey and Mireille, lying side by side, naked, only their hands touching, this somewhat chaste gesture in itself evidence of some dissolute ritual, the aftermath of a brutal . . . here she will hesitate, not say the word 'sex' in her mind, not acknowledge, the carnality of her incomplete thought, and immediately immerse its meaning in a cauldron of shapeless evasions. (32-33)

Significantly, Mikey's remembrance of this moment segues almost seamlessly into Lydia's interior monologue on the subject, before the narrative returns to consider Mikey's more egocentric attempt to revisit the memory of this event and emplot it according to his understanding of life as a young adult. This process of encounter, interpretation and emplotment becomes a recurrent trope in the novel. Soon after his discovery of Lydia's diary and contemplation of the taboo of his intimate—although unconsummated—relationship with Mireille, for example, Mikey is described as "star[ing] at the ceiling, think[ing] of all the flaws he has deciphered in its ornate patterns" (40). This metaphor of interpretation is then extended into one of intentional *mis*interpretation and transcription: "Feverishly, he writes in his head a sarcastic analysis of the prose translation of Homer's *Odyssey* that Miss Anderson

has set as ‘required reading’. He visualizes his words, their icy structure and sneering tone. Later he will type it up, word for word, copying from his mental text” (40). This implies that the ongoing construction of a narrative identity necessitates not just an engagement with both events and other subjectivities, but with the recursive—and irresolvable—attempt to emplot, and thus attribute meaning, to the consequences of this engagement. These attempts, moreover, are always provisional to an extent. Whether or not one’s interpretation is correct, therefore, is relatively inconsequential—or so Dangor suggests. Like *Red Dust*, *Bitter Fruit* is thus concerned with the “messier dimensions” of human interaction and its effects upon the ongoing project of identity-construction.

Ambiguity as an ethical dimension of *Bitter Fruit* is supported by several other techniques. In addition to the novel’s use of narrative overflow as a gesture towards the futility of the TRC’s attempt to contain traumatic narratives, the Commission’s attempt to impose the structure of its grand narrative upon individuals, for example, is critiqued in the novel’s form. *Bitter Fruit* is divided into three parts, entitled “Memory”, “Confession” and “Retribution” respectively. In its appeal to a framework that privileges the confession of one’s sins, “even those committed against you” (127) and retributive justice, Dangor’s choice of rubric can be seen as an ironic commentary on the TRC’s tripartite ideology of emotional catharsis, reconciliation and nation building. While the erotic gaze in *Bitter Fruit* is not characterized by responsiveness in the same way as is its portrayal in *Red Dust*, it does serve as a metaphor for individual characters’ attempts to interpret and re-interpret their own subjectivities in the light of their encounters with others. As Quayson notes, *Bitter Fruit* “determinedly serializes a circuit of apparently interdicted topics almost as if in the form of a checklist of the sexually forbidden: rape, hermaphroditism, incest, adultery, relations between an older woman and a younger man” (768). Sexual transgression is a prevalent trope in the novel—as well as in Dangor’s fiction as a whole—and can be seen as representative not of the metaphorical dead end postulated by Quayson, but of the profound sense of trespass onto and speculation about each other’s individual subjectivities at work in *Bitter Fruit*. Kate’s renaming of Mikey is an example of this, while Silas’s contemplation of Lydia’s brief affair with a younger man also supports this conclusion:

Despite the frantic attempts of his jagged mind, he could not transform the scene into something sordid, so enabling him to dismiss it, to call her cheap, a whore. There was something so ineluctably beautiful about Lydia pulling the young man to her, embracing his black body in her lovely olive-skinned arms.

He would have to live with that. His wife had found release at last from both her captive demons: from Du Boise and from himself. Now not every man would be a rapist to her. (267)

Counterintuitively, Silas's response to Lydia's infidelity serves to reinforce, rather than undermine, their intimacy. In perceiving his wife as having found release, his understanding of her converges with her understanding of herself, in that her infidelity signals the start of her attempt to "free her[self]" (281).

As readers, we are told that the Ali family "live truly secret—and secretive—lives" (162), and thus their attempts to interact, to know each other and thus themselves, must necessarily involve "trespassing onto the secret domain of [each other's lives]" (32). In its performance of intersubjectivity as an encounter fraught with anxiety and violation, *Bitter Fruit* reveals Ricoeur's conceptualization of the pedagogy of suffering to be overly idealistic in its minimization of the costs incurred in the engagement with the other. Nevertheless, rather than valorizing an artificially painless intersubjective encounter, Dangor's acknowledgement of the perils inherent in this engagement ultimately acts to confirm the signal importance of an "authentic reciprocity in exchange". The "ritual[s] of mawkish intimacy" (22) that Mikey derides give way to a series of clumsy collisions that are as destructive to the intersubjective encounter as they are constructive.

Another technique that can be seen to reinvent the earlier paradigm for the narration of human rights abuses in South Africa is *Bitter Fruit's* use of a consistent figurative register of physical vulnerability. Like Slovo's use of the trope of red dust, this register creates a sense of overarching equality, rather than estrangement. A universal sense of physical vulnerability underlies the novel, from the opening description of the cancerous Du Boise's "dead and dying skin" (3) and his "faint stench of decaying metabolism" to Lydia's self-destructive response when she hears that Silas bumped in to Du Boise, in which she "danced on broken glass and experienced a physical pain momentarily more overwhelming than the pain in her heart and mind" (48). In the novel, this latter act is interpreted as a manifestation of repressed emotion, in which "those agonies, physical and metaphysical, fused together into a blend of fury and grief" (48). Silas's panic attack in the aftermath of Lydia's injury is likewise associated with a "return of the repressed", when Lydia recalls that he "had only suffered one such attack before, almost twenty years ago" (49), and thus at the time of her rape. Dangor's use of the imagery of physical vulnerability, however, can also be seen as an

acknowledgement of another sort of fusion in the novel, in which accidents of intersubjective engagement generate sudden transformations in the characters' relation to themselves as beings *qua* being, as well as to others. Like the human body, narrative identity in *Bitter Fruit* is presented as both vulnerable to injury and disease and responsive to repair. Like the ineradicable stains of red dust in Slovo's novel, moreover, this repairwork cannot be ignored, but leaves scars that must be continually re-emplotted in order to maintain a cohesive narrative identity. In *Bitter Fruit*, the contingency of biological life thus acts as a metaphor for the contingency of narrative identity.

Finally, like *Red Dust*, *Bitter Fruit* makes extensive use of intertextuality. The novel's epigraph—"It is an old story—ours. / My father's and mine"—also alludes to Shakespeare via Nadine Gordimer's *My Son's Story* (1990), while the three parts of the novel are also given epigraphs. The first is taken from the French novelist, Afrophile and critic of colonialism André Gide's *Fruits of the Earth*, the second from the Sufi poet Rumi, and the third, once again, from *Hamlet*—texts that provide a sort of commentary on developments in the plot while simultaneously invoking a sense of universality. Within the novel's narrative itself, intertextuality can be found in Mikey's reading of "a prose translation of Homer's *Odyssey*" (124) and "a volume of Kafka's *Diaries*" (125), both of which he "puts aside" (125) to read Lydia's diary. Like *Red Dust*, the use of intertextuality places emphasis on the readerly aspect of the intersubjective encounter and its contribution to the writing of one's own narrative. For although Mikey perceives that, in exchanging Homer and Kafka for his mother's diary, "[i]t is no longer the vast fiction of great histories he is reading, or the marvellous beginnings of stories in tormented minds, but the reality of his own birth" (127), he is, in a sense, doing both. His reading of Lydia's diary is symbolic of both the "contorted history" (223) of post-apartheid South Africa and the beginnings of his personal torment and journey of self-discovery. In this way, then, the encounter with the suffering other not only cultivates the desire and ability to interpret the complex subjectivities of others, but also impels the interpreter to reflect this process of interpretation back upon himself. Like *Red Dust*, therefore, Dangor's novel is intrinsically ethical in its portrayal of an "authentic reciprocity in exchange", in which the rewards of the intersubjective encounter—though frequently erratic and obscure—are seen to outweigh its potential for calamity.

For the most part, Eprile's *The Persistence of Memory* and Wicomb's *Playing in the Light* take up the paradigm of reinvention established in *Red Dust* and *Bitter Fruit*. Like the novels

of Slovo and Dangor, for example, these texts frame the TRC as a catalyst for journeys of self-discovery. In contrast to the referential shifts that characterize the earlier novels of Slovo and Dangor, however, those of Eprile and Wicomb focus on a central protagonist. *Persistence* is the fictional memoir of Paul Sweetbread, a second-generation South African Jew conscripted into the army during the last years of apartheid. Like Lydia in *Bitter Fruit*, Paul is summoned—against his will—to testify in the TRC as part of the amnesty application of Major Lyddie, the commanding officer during his service in South West Africa. By far the most typically postmodern of the four texts discussed in this chapter, the imbrication of Paul’s family history with that of the South African nation in *Persistence* closely conforms to Attridge’s identification of “the compulsion to seek for a historical and genealogical grounding for one’s sense of identity, even as it offers a telling critique of such enterprises” as a “common feature of post-apartheid South African novels” (“Home Truths” 159).

Paul’s first-person narrative incorporates a range of distinct voices, from the “precise English” (13) elocution of his primary school teacher, Miss Tompkins, to the thick Eastern European accent of his grandfather, “his speech the kind music-hall comedians delight in imitating” (37). The effect of this narrative heteroglossia has been described by Stephen Abell as “almost parodically voluble”, yet lacks the perspectival range of *Red Dust* or *Bitter Fruit*. In Eprile’s text, narrative parallax is primarily created by a series of metafictional interpolations addressed to the reader, in which Paul analyses his own narrative:

Fear not, reader, I have no intention of subjecting you to every minute recollection that adheres to the flypaper of my memory. I will be faithful in my transcription, but selective, for otherwise I would be like Borges’ mapmaker who tried to reproduce every feature of the landscape and wound up with a map the size of the world. (69)

As the novel progresses, however, parallax is also achieved through Paul’s training as a South African Defence Force (SADF) cameraman. As will become apparent, this is particularly significant in his encounters with atrocity, which Paul observes through a camera lens.

Like *Red Dust* and *Bitter Fruit*, *Persistence* is loosely structured according to a linear chronological framework. In Eprile’s text, however, this is subverted by the juxtaposition of the preterite that dominates Paul’s life story and the constantly changing tenses and narrative perspectives in his metafictional interpolations, creating a dual chronology—or, rather, a chronological order and an achronological disorder—reminiscent of that found in Ebersohn’s *Store Up the Anger*. This confusion of time is reinforced by Eprile’s division of the novel into three parts, or “books”. Unlike *Bitter Fruit*, however, this triptych arrangement is

not a response to the TRC's ideology of emotional catharsis, reconciliation and nation building, but is explicitly linked to the concept of time. Book 1, which deals with Paul's childhood and early adolescence, is entitled "The Present: 1968-1987"; book 2, which records his military service along the border between Angola and what was then South-West Africa, "Time to Serve: 1987-1989"; and book 3, which deals with Paul's experience of post-traumatic stress disorder following his involvement in a civilian massacre—which takes place within the time frame of book 2, but is not recorded therein—and his participation in the TRC, "Time Gone Awry: 1990-2000". Given that narrative time in *Persistence* is in a constant state of flux due to Paul's complex association of childhood memories, ancestral heritage and the collective historical consciousness of the South African population in all its diversity, the novel's anachronistic temporal structure is surprisingly appropriate. It can be seen as a critique of the Commission's attempt to limit South Africa's history of human rights abuses to the period of National Party governance, and thus its disregard for the historical complexity of the region in the periods before and after apartheid. This comes to the fore when the Commission begins to intrude upon Paul's life:

I have tried to set aside the two chronological realities—my life in the army then, my life as a university student now—to put them in two different plastic containers like those the university shop sells for school files, to follow the advice Dr. Vish had given me years ago about what he called 'compartmentalizing.' You can't live in all time zones simultaneously, he had told me. He had recommended that I create different mental cubbyholes for the different phases of my life. It's an orderly progression through time, he had told me, not a stew. (229-30)

Like Dangor's use of narrative overflow to demonstrate the futility of the Commission's endeavour to contain trauma in *Bitter Fruit*, the fluidity of time in *Persistence* serves to expose the flaws inherent in its attempt to neatly dissect apartheid from South Africa's extensive history of human rights abuses. As Paul notes, "[h]istory, memory, is plastic here in the R. S. A. You remember it the way you would have wanted it to be, not the way it was" (19). Insofar as *Persistence* is concerned, the "forensic lens" and objective aims of the TRC thus stands in direct conflict with the inherent subjectivity of what Paul calls "the national dysmnesia, the art of rose-colored recall" (63).

While *Persistence* contains many of the characteristic features found in *Red Dust* and *Bitter Fruit*, such as a recursive metaphorical register—which, in *Persistence*, revolves around gastronomy and animal imagery—and an overwhelming sense of narrative ambiguity, it is

the most prominently intertextual work of the four novels dealt with in this chapter. My earlier readings of *Red Dust* and *Bitter Fruit* have established that intertextuality is crucial to the development of an authentic ethics of reciprocity in the literature of the second transition, and so it is on this element of *Persistence* that I will focus for the remainder of this reading. *Persistence* is an intricately woven text replete with intertextual references, primarily due to the extensive literary knowledge displayed by the novel's erudite protagonist with the "gift of total recall" (254). This is supplemented by his interest in etymology, resulting in an encyclopaedic text that attests to the subtleties of language use and the myriad ways in which semantics intersects with sentiment to construct—or obstruct—meaning. Paul's engagement with heteroglossia primarily serves to evoke South Africa's multicultural landscape and provide points of entry for historical detours. He acquires this inclination from his primary school teacher, Miss Tompkins, as the novel's opening paragraph indicates:

It was Miss Tompkins who helped me to put a name to the toxin lurking in my being. 'After the war,' Miss Tompkins told our class, her precise English voice nipping off each word like a milliner biting the ends of stray cotton thread, 'the Red Cross, to whom I was attached, sent packages of food and small household items to the German D. P. s—displaced persons, Helen. Don't look so ignorant, girl, we discussed this last week.

'The problem was that the packages were labelled 'Gift,' and no one in England bothered to realize that in the German language, *Gift* means poison . . . that's right, it is similar in Afrikaans. So there were these poor starving people . . . European women and children with bloated bellies like malnourished Africans in Pondoland . . . and rotting away in unopened packages were good British sausages, and scones, and biscuits.' (13, ellipses in orig.)

His use of intertextuality, however, is more problematic. Paul's compulsive allusions to an extensive library of poetry, novels, reference works, ethnographies, philosophical tracts, histories, cookbooks and so on appear to be more an act of deflection than one of recognition and interpretation. This is acknowledged at the start of one of his metafictional interpolations:

'If I had only learnt to get the better of words
For the thing one no longer has to say.'

If Thomas Stearns Eliot had trouble finding the right words, then how am I going to do so for those things I want to say but cannot? (93)

This suggests that Paul's use of intertextuality might be seen in terms of Scarry's proposition that art provides "fictional analogues . . . that can be borrowed when the real-life crisis of

silence comes” (10). The narration of Paul’s encounters with atrocity, however, provide rare moments of relative silence that punctuate the novel’s volubility:

We patrol the street for another hundred meters or so, then find a place to turn around and rejoin our convoy. Near the entrance of the street there is some rubbish burning on the side of the road, emitting an oily smoke. The weapons of these kids seem to be stones and burning petrol-soaked rags. It is only when we get close to the bundle that we realize what it is, as a blackened flaming arm lifts towards us in horrible imitation of a jaunty wave. We stop near this burning human being, aghast, hardly able to admit what we are seeing. One of the soldiers opens the hatch and climbs out, shotgun first, his boot catching me a hard blow on the shoulder as he scrambles past. I’m next, ignoring someone’s shouts that I am stepping on their fucking fingers, and the rest of the soldiers follow. Ignoring the horrible smell of burning petroleum and charred meat, I film the smoldering body, which still seems to writhe in agony, though I tell myself that is just involuntary movement, like the settling of logs in a fire. No one could still be alive in this state. I film the men standing around gazing at this sacrificial pyre, tears running down their faces. ‘Fucking kaffirs,’ one murmurs, and though it is meant in sympathy I hope that these are not the last words heard by whatever remnant of a human being suffers through this awful fate. (184)

The diction used in this description is devoid of the elaborate and often esoteric vocabulary—such as “rachitic” (19) and “holothurian” (170)—that has come to characterize Paul’s narrative in the course of the novel. It employs many of the images and phrases conventionally associated with accounts of such experiences, evoking the archetypal images of township violence that featured “on television and in the newspapers” (169) during the late 1980s. Paul’s gruesome account of his first township patrol—in which he witnesses the burning man—pales in comparison to his recollections of the ambush, massacre and mass burial led by Major Lyddie during the ceasefire of 1989 of “about eighty” returning South West Africa People’s Organization⁵⁹ guerrillas (242). This repressed memory is not included in his account of his military service in book 2, and only resurfaces under the duress of his testimony in Major Lyddie’s amnesty trial. Even then, it requires an extended narrative build-up full of trivial details—such as Lyddie’s impromptu campfire performance of songs by the Beatles, Pete Seeger and the Bee Gees (240)—before Paul can bring himself to narrate the incident in question. This indiscriminate attention to detail is characteristic of Paul’s account, which records the minutiae of action, expression and dialogue. Unlike the ironic persona and caustic humour that we have come to associate with his previous narrative performances,

⁵⁹ SWAPO, the Namibian liberation movement founded in the late 1950s and elected to government upon independence in 1990.

Paul's testimony at the TRC is impervious to the presence of his audience. He does not solicit their attention, and observes their response with an uncharacteristic detachment: "There is nervous laughter in the spectator's gallery when I relate this, and I see some of the reporters busily scratching in their notebooks. They will replace the major's actual words with some innocuous euphemism, perhaps calling it a colorful phrase. There is more I have to tell, though" (246). He is immersed in the task of narrating his memories of the massacre.

The objective register of Paul's testimony is closely linked to his role as an official SADF cameraman. Early on in Paul's career as a cameraman, a significant distinction is made between filming an event and participating in it: "One of the soldiers begins to juggle a soccer ball from foot to foot, then responds to someone's request to pass it. Soon we have a game going between ourselves on the empty schoolyard. I film it at first, but join in shortly afterward" (186). Paul observes the first shot of the SWAPO massacre, for example, through a "175 mm lens", "zoom[ing] in on [the first victim's] expression of surprise" (243), before being forced actively to participate in the killing by a combination of Lyddie's authority and the impulse to survive:

The guerrillas have again formed into fighting groups and are now retreating from the ambush but advancing toward Lyddie and me. He hands me an R4 rifle and tells me to wait until he tells me, then pick off the leaders as I've been trained to do. And I should put the fucking camera down. With the camera lens no longer between me and the death that is everywhere below, I am terrified, *kak*-scared, ready to jump up and run away screaming for my mother. I fumble at the rifle's safety catch, knowing that fighting back is my only chance of survival. (244)

This perception of the camera lens as a protective barrier that exonerates its holder from the taint of atrocity is confirmed by Paul's reluctance to hand it over to Lyddie: "'Here, let me take a turn with the camera, Sweetbread. You go relieve Verster there,' he orders, standing very close to me. I look at his face, aghast, and shake my head. 'I'm not *asking* you, my boy,' he hisses" (250). Both the camera lens and Paul's abstinence from his idiosyncratic use of "associative leaps" (235) and etymological digressions are indicative of what Dr. Vish diagnoses as a psychological "dissociation" from "overwhelming trauma" (259). According to Dr. Vish, this involves the "split[ting of] his psyche into two entities: one, the everyday 'normal' person; the other, a hypertrophied, prodigious recording device that was beyond his control, what he so eloquently called his 'poisoned gift'" (259). If we consider Paul's involvement in the TRC as the catalyst for a cathartic reappraisal of the forked identity he has constructed for himself, then it becomes apparent that the idiosyncrasies of his narrative

style are not deflective, but constitute a concerted attempt to integrate the two. As Paul acknowledges: “So, yes, mine is a *bildungsroman* after all. It’s taken time to get here, but what is time when you think about it? For me it is ever-present . . . nothing that has happened is gone, though it might have changed” (272). This integration, moreover, can be seen in terms of the narrative repairwork that takes place in the aftermath of trauma. Paul’s extensive use of intertextuality, therefore, is indicative of the success of this repairwork. More than this, it suggests that the attempt to do so not only requires the establishment of benign frameworks of intersubjective communication—such as the novel’s metafictional appeals to the reader—but also that these frameworks be authentically reciprocal. Like *Red Dust* and *Bitter Fruit*, the ongoing process of reading, writing, and interpreting—introspectively and empathetically—both fictional and non-fictional narratives that shapes Paul’s attempt to establish benign frameworks of intersubjective communication, successfully conveys the fundamentally ethical dimension of narrative ambiguity through its portrayal of intersubjectivity as an authentically messy reciprocity in exchange.

The final text to be discussed in this chapter is Zoë Wicomb’s *Playing in the Light*, a novel in which the “large colour photograph of a young woman” that accompanies yet “[a]nother TRC story” on the front page of the *Cape Times* provokes the white protagonist, Marion Campbell, to embark on a quest to “claim her inalienable right . . . to know her origins” (48-9, 62). Much later, we find out that Patricia Williams, the young woman in the photograph and “a coloured woman who had been an ANC terrorist” (56), is Marion’s second cousin on her father’s side (172). Like Eprile’s Paul, Marion can be seen to succumb to the archetypal post-apartheid “compulsion to seek for a historical and genealogical grounding for one’s sense of identity” (Attridge, “Home Truths” 159). Marion’s initial suspicion is that she was adopted, and that Tokkie—the coloured woman whom Marion believes to have been “a family servant, [who] had looked after [her mother] when she was a child” (31)—“was, in some way she cannot imagine, party to the adoption” (62). Marion’s mother, Helen, is dead, and her father, John, “speaks guardedly” (58) in response to her questions about Tokkie. Her initial theory is debunked by her visit to Wuppertal and the discovery that she is not adopted, but instead comes “from a play-white family” (102) and that Tokkie was actually her grandmother. This revelation is not of Marion’s own making, but is thrust upon her by Brenda, the young coloured woman that Marion first employed and then befriended:

And so [Marion] tries to tell all: the theft of the newspaper; the ghost of Patricia Williams; her father's lies; Tokkie's death and the oppressive silence, weeks of silence in that house where she crept under the bed to snuggle into the old woman's apron; the dry, white childhood; her recent belief that she was adopted; and now this terrible emptiness.

So it turns out you're coloured, from a play-white family, Brenda says. So what? Haven't you heard how many white people, or rather Afrikaners of the more-indigenous-than-thou brigade, are claiming mixed blood these days? It's not such a tragedy being black, you know, at least you're authentic. And just think of the other benefits: you need no longer speak in hushed tones—you're free to be noisy, free to eat a peach, a juicy ripe one, and free of the burdens of nation and tradition. (102)

Once Marion has dismantled the better part of Helen's "master plan" (140) of racial reinvention and discovered the real story of her "paltry little family" (58), she decides to go on a trip to Europe that becomes yet another journey of discovery—only instead of her family history, Marion now seeks to discover herself as an individual. This culminates in an act of authorship in which Marion begins to emplot her discoveries into a coherent narrative, beginning with an episode from her childhood in which the father of her best friend, Annie Boshoff, is "caught with his pants down on top of a coloured girl" and the family are exiled from the local community—the taboo and treachery of which Marion was not fully cognizant of at the time.

Like *Red Dust* and *Bitter Fruit*, the novel's denouement leaves the reader with a sense of open-endedness through its invocation of yet another journey of discovery. Upon Marion's return home, Brenda—who has been visiting Marion's father during her absence—confesses that she has begun to write John's story down, to which Marion responds with anger and accusations of exploitation:

Writing my own story, I know, is what someone like me is supposed to do, what we all do, they say, whether we know it or not, but Christ, what story do I have to tell? I'm no Patricia Williams, with adventures under my belt. Mine is the story of everybody else in Bonteheuwel, dull as dishwater. . . . Why would anyone want to write about them, invent something around such tedious lives? . . . Now your father, there's a story—with his pale skin as capital, ripe for investment . . .

That's enough. Get out. I know my father's fucking story.

Actually, Brenda says, I suspect you don't. (217-18, third ellipsis in orig.)

In stark contrast to the referential shifts of *Red Dust* and *Bitter Fruit*, or the "volubility" of *Persistence*, *Playing* is a quiet text. Its narrative is, for the most part, restricted to free indirect discourse and reported speech. Furthermore, the sporadic interruptions to this mode of narration conform – almost without exception – to the novel's leitmotif of reading aloud:

See, he says, pointing to a faded, barely perceptible smudge on the back below the text. He has no idea why she kept this one, unless the stamp was illegibly smudged from the start, so the card held no risk at all.

Marion reads the text aloud:

‘As a sheep led to his slaughter or a lamb before his shearer is dumb, so he opens not his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken up from the earth.’

- Acts 8 verse 22

No, John shakes his head. He feels dizzy with the attempt to concentrate, but no, he doesn’t understand it, doesn’t understand what it means or could have meant to her. (118)

Parallax is thus primarily created by narrative interpolation, in which Marion’s narrative is increasingly interrupted by flashbacks to her familial past as the novel—and her discovery of her true identity—progresses. Although the majority of the narrative is presented from Marion’s perspective, a degree of referential shift is also evident in the novel. This resembles more closely the wandering style of free indirect discourse used in Dangor’s *Bitter Fruit* than the narrative compartmentalization of *Red Dust*. In *Playing*, however, this initially serves to frustrate the work of intersubjectivity by allowing the reader access to the complex subjectivities of individual characters while simultaneously portraying an intersubjective encounter limited by these characters’ struggle to articulate their own narratives and interpret those of others.

The narrative structure of *Playing* juxtaposes the present tense narrative of Marion’s adult life in post-apartheid South Africa with the predominantly preterite narration of her parents’ lives, creating a dual chronology similar to that found in texts such as *Store Up the Anger* and *Persistence*. According to Maria Olausson, this formal strategy allows the story of John and Helen—secure in its description of events that have already happened—to preside over that of Marion’s continually evolving narrative of discovery. It “presents [Helen’s] successful mastering of the game of whiteness as a dead end and a failed exit”, while “Marion is presented as the child who was to benefit from their sacrifices but ends up with a legacy of confusion and shame which she finds hard to deal with” (152). In opposition to this, however, I argue that the narrative malleability evident in Wicomb’s portrayal of Marion contributes significantly to the development of a character who progresses—albeit tentatively and not without setbacks—towards an acceptance of her ambiguous identity. This, moreover, contrasts with the rigidity of the identity Helen creates for her family, an identity that ultimately breaks down under close scrutiny. She perceives her “achievement” in

terms of “her legacy to Marion, a new generation unburdened by the past” (150), only for Marion to become a woman who is almost entirely overwhelmed by the “garrulousness” of history (152).

The collision of these two identities—the one rigid, the other malleable—can be found in Marion’s contemplation of “the country-shy couple who betrayed their families, who obliterated their histories, who stripped themselves of colour to be play-whites” (122) that she now sees in her parent’s wedding photograph:

Play-whites: a misnomer if ever there was one. There was nothing playful about their condition. Not only were they deadly serious, but the business of playing white, of bluffing it out, took courage, determination, perseverance, commitment . . . Not even in the privacy of their home, between their own four walls, could they let up, act the fool, laugh at those they’d duped, or mimic their public selves. In the blinding light of whiteness, they walked exposed: pale, vulnerable, geckos whose very skeletal systems showed through their transparent flesh. . . . Playing—as others would call it—in the light left no space, no time for interiority, for reflecting on what they had done. Under the glaring spotlight of whiteness, they played diligently, assiduously; the past, and with it conscience, shrunk to a black dot in the distance. (123)

This demonstrates that “Helen’s successful mastering” of the play-white role is only temporary, and cannot withstand the rigours of reassessment. It is wholly focused on “advancement” (122), and leaves no space for the ongoing project of retrospective narrative re-employment that, Ricoeur argues, is a key constituent of the ethical intention. As a play-white, the project of identity construction is one of continual maintenance in the face of contingency, rather than adaptive reconstruction. John recalls his experience of “being newly white”, for example, as defined by a realization of the permanence of his new identity: “[b]y then, the self was already a mended structure; it was a matter of mixing as best you could your own mortar with which to fill in the cracks that kept on appearing” (123). In spite of her struggle to make sense of her discoveries, Marion is ultimately victorious over Helen in her ability to perceive the irony implicit in the phrase “play-white”, a perception that ultimately, moreover, leads her to replace her resentment towards her parents’ lies with “a flash of sympathy for [them]” (124). Marion is defiant in her statement that “she is not Helen” (54), a woman whose world revolves around an unshaking faith in the necessity of solitude confirmed by the “maxims” that “[i]t is best to keep oneself to oneself; never rely on anyone but yourself” (61).

Like the convergence of the narratives of Lydia and Silas in the aftermath of her infidelity, Marion's critique of her mother's dedication to the "pursuit of whiteness" (152) creates a sense of subliminal intimacy between Marion and John through their shared perception of the play-white identity, as indicated by John's unconscious echo of Marion's interior monologue when he is described as thinking:

Vigilance is everything; to achieve whiteness is to keep on your toes. Which, John reasons, indicates that they cannot achieve it after all; being white in the world is surely about being at ease, since the world belongs to you. But they, it would seem, cannot progress beyond vigilance, in other words, beyond being play-whites, which as far as he can see has bugger-all to do with playing. (152)

In contrast to the rigidity of Helen's compartmentalization of identity—in which she perceives herself as "remade" and her previous, coloured identity as having been "obliterated" (144)—Marion's portrayal in *Playing* is characterized by images of liminality. The novel's opening is set "on the balcony, the space both inside and out" (1), an image that sets the scene for Wicomb's use of an insistent metaphorical register of ambiguity. The novel is replete with references to spatial liminality, such as "the ambiguous space between private house and public street" (9). This is complemented by the symbolism of travel as a "to-ing and fro-ing" (17): Marion owns a travel agency, and pivotal episodes in the novel's plot take place during periods of transit, such as Marion and Brenda's trip to Wuppertal, and Marion's journey to Europe. Tellingly, at the beginning of the novel, Marion admits to having "an aversion to travel" (40), which is overcome as she learns to live with ambiguity, to "tak[e] comfort in the traveller's reprieve, the wash of time that blurs the bars on the clock face" (188). The recurrent trope of the mermaid figure—the Afrikaans word for mermaid, *meermin*, is John's nickname for his daughter (22)—is also symbolic of ambiguity, which is reason enough for Helen to deride it: "It's Campbell's nonsense that prevents him from getting on in life. No good being half woman and half fish, half this and half that; you have to be fully one thing or another, otherwise you're lost" (47).

As the novel's title suggests, light also plays a symbolic role in *Playing*. The revelations of Marion and Brenda's trip to Wuppertal are portended by their encounter with Outa Blinkoog—a metafictional intrusion of a real person, the itinerant Outa Lappies—who gives them a handmade lantern and leaves Marion with the feeling that "[w]ords are fresh, newborn, untainted by history; all is bathed in laughter clean as water" (90). The lantern symbolizes both a literal enlightenment and the ethical enlightenment Améry has described

as “the will and the ability to speculate phenomenologically, to emphathize [sic], to approach the limits of reason” (xi). This latter quality proceeds from the lantern’s confirmation of the growing friendship between Brenda and the solitary Marion—“[t]he lantern that is for both of them, that neither one nor the other will own” (92)—as well as its instrumental role in Brenda’s writerly exploration of John Campbell’s life story:

Brenda says that she will miss the lantern, that it has brought good luck. All her life she has wanted to write, and literally could not get as much as a sentence onto paper, but lately, in the last few weeks, it’s happened, and she has made good progress. . . . It started by lighting the lantern in the bedroom while her mother and the others watched television. Just staring at it seemed to drown out the noise so that, well, lying on her bed she just started writing. (217)

The ethical dimension of ambiguity in *Playing* is most apparent in the development of the trope of intertextuality inherent in the novel’s title, which makes reference not only to its protagonist’s identity as a “play-white”, but also to the African-American author Toni Morrison’s study of the workings of blackness and whiteness in American literature, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness in the Literary Imagination* (1992). This trope surfaces periodically in the text, such as in Brenda’s quotation of one of the Afrikaans poet Leipoldt’s “Slampamperliedjies” when they drive past his grave in the Cederberg mountains, but is only developed during the narration of Marion’s trip to Europe. When Marion reaches London, “she is invaded by the virus of loneliness” (188), and “resolves to immerse herself in . . . South African novels” (189) such as Gordimer’s *The Conservationist* and J. M. Coetzee’s *In the Heart of the Country*. Her reading of these novels swiftly develops into an emotionally exhausting process of intersubjective engagement:

Tears of humiliation scald Marion’s cheeks. Reading over and over the description of the [anonymous coloured girl in *The Conservationist*], she is able to elaborate on it, fill in details of dress and manners from the streets of Cape Town. The hole in her chest seems to fill up with words.

Is this what reading is, or should be: absorbing words that take root, that mate with your own thoughts and multiply? Is identification with a character inevitable, required perhaps? . . . Is the girl not, at some level, a version of herself? Of her mother? Marion is not sure of the story, of what happens at the end, but it is undoubtedly the scene with the girl that drives Mehring away; it is the encounter with the play-white that winds things up.

Has the hole in her chest perhaps been there all along? . . . Marion wonders how many versions of herself exist in the world. . . . how many versions of herself exist in the stories of her country? (190-91)

This experience of reading herself into the stories of others ultimately provokes Marion to take the fragments of identity she has unearthed over the past few months and to begin piecing them together in an act of narrative emplotment represented by her writing of “The Betrayal of Annie Boshoff” (193). As the novel comes to an end, Marion is not entirely convinced of “how good it is to *share* your life with others, how your story ought to be heard” (204), but acknowledges that, through her reading of other lives, her understanding of herself has been enriched. In keeping with the conventions of the “truth-and-reconciliation genre” established in the novels of Slovo, Dangor and Eprile, *Playing* can thus be seen to uphold a “reciprocity in exchange” that is authentic in both its responsiveness and its vulnerability to “the messier dimensions” of human interaction.

Conclusion

According to Geoffrey V. Davis, apartheid “dismembered” South Africa’s literary traditions, resulting in a “literary scene riven by divisions, with no unified identity, many neglected traditions, little cross-fertilization between cultures, its exciting multilingual and multicultural potential largely unrealized” (xii). In my opinion, however, the discursive power of the AAM allowed for the development of a vibrant culture of literary resistance to apartheid. Consequently, the dismemberment of cultural pluralism identified by Davis should, I argue, be attributed not to apartheid, but to the monophony enforced by the grand narrative of South Africa’s first transition. Furthermore, through its postmodernist reinvigoration of the modes of response to the “claims of otherness” established in the narratives of the apartheid era, the literature of the second transition can be seen to initiate a process of remembering. As the novels of Slovo, Dangor, Eprile and Wicomb demonstrate, this process of remembering takes the form of a reinvention of previous paradigms for the narration of human rights abuses in the light of the TRC’s grand narrative. This, in turn, supplements the solicitude found in texts such as *117 Days* with an “authentic reciprocity in exchange”.

In its encouragement of “the will and the ability to speculate phenomenologically, to emphathize [sic], to approach the limits of reason” (Améry xi) with regard to both oneself and others, the literature of the second transition testifies to the dependence of one’s subjectivity on the intersubjective encounter. Furthermore, in its reinvention of the paradigms of the apartheid era, as well as its emphasis on intertextuality, this body of fiction epitomizes the significance of hermeneutic ethics—or “the ethico-critical accountability

which acts of reading hold their readers to” (Newton 18)—to the singularity of literature as a laboratory for ethical experimentation that is informed by—but ultimately independent of—moral adjudication.

Conclusion: Towards a Narrative *Mengelmoes*⁶⁰

Transformation comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs . . . *Mélange*, a hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is *how newness enters the world*.

Salman Rushdie, “In Good Faith”

In “Apartheid Thinking”, his analysis of the writings of apartheid theorist Geoffrey Cronjé, J. M. Coetzee identifies an obsession with the concept of “mixture” (165). This manifests itself, Coetzee argues, in a polarity between difference and mixture; “a polarity that marks not only [Cronjé’s] thinking but the very texture of his discourse” (176). The “semantic poles” of this lexical opposition are marked by terms of separation—“*anders* (different), *eie* (own/unique), *apart* (apart)”—and terms of amalgamation—“*meng* (mix), *moes* (mush), *massa* (mass)” (176). According to Coetzee, the combination of fear and fascination apparent in Cronjé’s discursive response to the notion of mixture reveals an important—but well disguised—subtext in the theorization of apartheid: the “denial and displacement and reprojection of desire” (178) that fuelled the grandiose policies of segregation implemented by the National Party. Coetzee describes this analysis as an act of “reading”, rather than one of explanation; an “analytical movement” that “track[s] . . . the movement by which ideas are displaced” (182). In his conclusion, however, he makes the proposition that by taking up this readerly approach to apartheid theory, “we may be in a better position to read racism, but we are in no position to eradicate it, not only because it has no root (no ‘ultimate’ root), but because a reading position is not a position at all: it is what I can only call a *following*” (184). Therefore, in “Apartheid Thinking”, Coetzee makes two distinct propositions. The first of these is directly concerned with the discursive texture of apartheid theory—a proposition rooted in the specificities of South Africa’s social, cultural and political reality during the latter half of the twentieth century. The second proposition is concerned with the nature of language itself,⁶¹ particularly the interpretation of metaphor and its role in a socio-political context.

⁶⁰ Coetzee translates this as “mishmash” (“Apartheid Thinking” 172).

⁶¹ I say “language itself” because Coetzee engages with the workings of rhetoric in society, rather than the nuances of a particular tongue, such as Afrikaans or English.

During the course of this research project, it has become apparent to me that the claims put forward in “Apartheid Thinking” are of signal importance to the representation of torture in the literature of South Africa during apartheid and its aftermath. Like Coetzee, I have pursued two central ideas in this thesis. As in Coetzee’s essay, moreover, this has resulted in two distinct claims, the one specific to South African narratives of torture, and the other, a more general claim concerning the narration of torture as an “ethically charged event” (Attridge, *J. M. Coetzee* xii). My conclusion will therefore take the form of a tangential response to the claims presented in “Apartheid Thinking”.

My first intention in this thesis has been to trace the development of the “generic contours” (Bakhtin 4) for the narration of torture in South Africa. In doing so, I initially established that the ethical determinations underlying the narration of torture in apartheid South Africa range from intersubjective estrangement to a cultivation of the mutual recognition at the heart of solicitude. It was then demonstrated that the proceedings of the Truth Commission precipitated a series of stylistic and generic shifts in the representation of human rights abuses in the literature of South Africa. This series of shifts took the form of a reinvigoration of the paradigms established during apartheid. In doing so, it brought to fruition the potential of such narratives to act as a prime site of ethical exploration; a potential that had surfaced only sporadically in the literature of the previous era. The fiction of the post-apartheid period combines elements from antecedent narratives of torture in an attempt to move beyond the imperatives of the TRC’s grand narrative and, in doing so, has made a considerable contribution to the development of an acute awareness of the ethical implications of narration in South African literature. Ultimately, I suggest, the narrative experimentation found in the “truth-and-reconciliation genre of writing” (Quayson 754) supplements the solicitude that surfaces in the more ethically aware narratives of the apartheid period in order to achieve an “authentic reciprocity in exchange” (Ricoeur, *Oneself* 191). Furthermore, it is my contention that this effect of an “authentic reciprocity in exchange” can be attributed to a process of intertextual engagement that involves not a rejection of the previous paradigms for the narration of torture, but an engagement with and reworking of these paradigms in keeping with Attridge’s conceptualization of postmodernism as a “working out” of modernist practices in the light of the dramatically “new apprehension of the claims of otherness” brought about by the transition to democracy (*J. M. Coetzee* 4).

The fervent impulse towards mixture abhorred by Cronjé provides an apposite metaphor for this paradigm shift in the narration of torture in South Africa. Although some singular texts can be found in the apartheid period, the literature of the time displayed a tendency towards alienation, as the discrepancy between the non-fiction narratives of detention and torture published during apartheid by white South Africans and those by black South Africans demonstrates. In the post-TRC period, however, an ethically charged narrative *mengelmoes* can be seen to have triumphed over this estrangement by overthrowing the “denial of desire” at the heart of apartheid ideology and replacing it with an “authentic exchange in reciprocity” (Coetzee, “Apartheid Thinking” 164; Ricoeur, *Oneself* 191). The ensuing narrative *mengelmoes* can thus be seen as a manifestation of the way in which “prose fiction both crystallizes and recirculates in acts of interpretive engagement” the “recursive, contingent, and interactive dramas of encounter and recognition” that constitute the basic dimension of Newton’s narrative ethics (12).

My second intention in this thesis has been to use this genre of South African literature as a prime site for the testing of existing attempts to theorize the ethical implications of representing atrocity. In particular, I have sought to counter the accusations of obscenity directed at the representation of atrocity by demonstrating the ways in which an engagement with such narratives can serve to “deepen engagement with and understanding of suffering’s meaning, sources, effects, and implications for the spectator” (Reinhardt 15), and thus develop the reader’s capacity to engage more fully with the ethical implications of the intersubjective encounter performed in narrative. The second component of my response to “Apartheid Thinking” thus takes issue with Coetzee’s conceptualization of the reading position as merely an act of following. It is my contention that, insofar as the narration of torture in South Africa is concerned, it is possible to apprehend a process of ethical evolution in which advancement is largely brought about by an active form of reading that differs from the purely “analytical movement” described by Coetzee (“Apartheid Thinking” 182). It differs in its attention to and reflexive employment of other subjectivities and other methods of narrating oneself out of the state wreckage engendered by torture. As such, the genealogy of torture narration in South Africa attests to the critical importance of what Newton calls “a hermeneutic ethics” to the ethical intention. The trope of intertextuality that emerges in the post-TRC narratives of self-discovery adds to Newton’s definition of hermeneutic ethics as “the ethico-critical accountability which acts of reading

hold their readers to” (18) by revealing the inherent ambiguity—in the sense of a bidirectional speculation into the construction of subjectivity—of responsible interpretation. In this way, the performances of narrative reciprocity in the novels of Slovo, Dangor, Eprile and Wicomb suggests that narrative ethics requires not only an awareness of responsibility towards the intersubjective encounter, but also an awareness of the fundamental role of responsiveness in the encounter with one’s own subjectivity.

Insofar as the theorization of the narration of torture as an “ethically charged event” (Attridge, *J. M. Coetzee* xii) is concerned, the insights of this thesis reveal that—in the spirit of intertextuality endorsed by post-TRC South African fiction—Ricoeur’s writings on narrative identity and the ethical intention and Newton’s theorization of narrative ethics are mutually complementary. Ricoeur’s idea of the “authentic reciprocity in exchange” (*Oneself* 191) fostered by the encounter with the suffering other adds to Newton’s narrative ethics through its emphasis on bidirectional responsiveness, whereas Newton’s theory of narrative ethics adds to Ricoeur’s idea of narrative identity by revealing it to be as much a readerly undertaking as it is a writerly one. This, in turn, suggests that Ricoeur’s definition of the ethical intention might benefit from a modification to “aiming for the ‘good life’ with, for and *through* others, in just institutions”.

Finally, I wish to conclude by returning to Jolly’s comments on the critical encounter with representations of violence introduced in chapter 1 of this thesis. Jolly warns that

[o]ne of the problems of the genre of critical writing is its characteristic defensibility, the consequence of an expectation that it exhibit an armor so impenetrable, that it could never conceive of speaking to its own weakness. This problem becomes particularly acute when one develops the critical language with which to approach scenes of violence. The tendency always exists for the language that explicates violent situations to be perceived—by author, or reader, or both alike—as not merely explaining the crisis, but explaining it away. The mastery that is often posed as the apotheosis of the literary-critical genre tempts the critic to believe that she or he has somehow resolved the violence that the text reproduces by describing its parameters: surely a dangerous assumption. (xii)

With regard to this, I am acutely aware that the combination of the continuity of narrative forms emphasized in this thesis and the discontinuity in human rights abuses symbolized by the TRC risks resolution by leaving one major issue untouched: the narration of human rights abuses perpetrated in the post-TRC period. As Graeme Simpson’s analysis of the Truth Commission forewarns,

[o]ne of the stated aims of the TRC was to ensure that gross violations of human rights do not occur again in South Africa. In evaluating its achievements in this regard, we must not assume that social conflict will play itself out along the same political and racial lines as in the past. On the contrary, it might express itself through new forms of violence. (246)

Simpson's prediction was confirmed in Amnesty International's annual report of 2008, in which it revealed that the "torture of criminal suspects in police custody" ("South Africa") had not been relegated to the apartheid past by the transition to democracy, but is still very much a cause for concern in the present. In this respect, the TRC's grand narrative can be seen to have enduring influence, despite the extensive criticism of its shortcomings in academic discourse, the media and the arts. The human rights abuses of the post-TRC period do not have recourse to the "powerful discourse" of human rights (Douzinas, *The End of Human Rights* 4) articulated—albeit imperfectly—by the AAM or the TRC. Instead, it is possible to identify the beginnings of a narrative regression in accounts of human rights abuses in South Africa. In a similar way to the evidentiary narratives of the early 1960s, these narratives involve an abstraction of the intersubjective encounter and a privileging of the normative morality of human rights law through the use of a "stockpiling approach" (Foster et al., *The Theatre of Violence* ix), as demonstrated by the Amnesty International report of 2008 (fig. 4):

Torture and other ill-treatment

Torture and other ill-treatment by police as part of criminal investigations continued to be reported. Corroborated cases included the use of police dogs to attack shackled crime suspects, suffocation torture, hitting with gun butts, and kicking and beating of suspects all over the body. The assaults took place in a variety of locations including in or near the suspects' homes. In some cases injured detainees were denied urgently needed medical care.

■ Z. S. was attacked by police dogs while handcuffed and held prone on the ground by police in September. His wounds turned septic before he received any medical care while detained at a Durban area police station.

The police oversight body, the Independent Complaints Directorate (ICD), reported that between April 2006 and March 2007, it received 23 complaints of torture and 530 complaints of assault with intent to cause grievous bodily harm. In the same 12-month period it received 279 new reports of deaths in custody and 419 deaths as a result of police action, including 141 suspects fatally shot during arrest. Nearly 50 per cent of these 698 deaths occurred in two provinces, Gauteng and KwaZulu Natal.

Fig. 4. Extract from "South Africa." *Amnesty International Report*. 2008. n. pag. Web. 25 Aug. 2008. <<http://the.report.amnesty.org/eng/regions/Africa/south-africa>>.

Although novels such as André Brink's *The Other Side of Silence* (2002) and Yvette Christiansë's *Unconfessed* (2006)⁶² demonstrate that authors have begun to look beyond the Commission's "reduction of the totality of [the region's] violence to a political contest from the 1960s onwards" (Moon 91), a literary response to human rights abuses perpetrated in present-day South Africa is noticeably absent. It is here, I suggest, that we should look for the emergence of real "vocabularies of fracture and dissonance" as a response to—rather than a precursor of—the reactive resistance to the "new 'official' script" of the TRC (de Kok 7). The true discursive fissures and new narrative modes will arise from the narration of post-apartheid torture in the present day South Africa if, that is, space is made to allow them to emerge. In conclusion, I wish to emphasize the crucial importance of subjecting the evolving contexts and implications of representing human rights abuses to a continuous process of intellectual scrutiny so as to avoid succumbing to the moral complacency that accompanies the "over-automatization" of the encounter with the suffering other.

⁶² *The Other Side of Silence* is set in the early twentieth century, and tells of the rape and mutilation of Hanna X, an orphan shipped to South-West Africa to become a settler's wife; while *Unconfessed* narrates the life of a slave woman, Sila van den Kaap, convicted of murder and sent to Robben Island in the early nineteenth century.

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