THE VULNERABLE BODY IN

CONTEMPORARY SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines a selection of South African literary texts written in English and published after 2000, arguing that these works of literature illustrate the ways in which the exigencies of the vulnerable body – brutal violence, HIV/AIDS, and social inequality – complicate attempts to transcend discrimination in contemporary South Africa. Consequently, the study concentrates on representations of the vulnerable body which specifically destabilise fixed categories of identity, thus instantiating the literary ethics of interconnection that comprises its main focus.

Each of the five chapters, "Sex", "Skin", "Blood", "Taste", and "Tongue", considers a primary text by one South African author, foregrounding a particular body part that plays an important role in the work's exploration of vulnerability. The thesis engages with different genres, which range from narrative non-fiction to cyberpunk, in addition to diverse and controversial subject positions such as "victim", "coloured", "HIV-positive", "cool", and "Afrikaner".

The selected texts develop new modes of understanding the body's vulnerability in order to unsettle the binary oppositions that continue to shape post-apartheid society. Discursive strategies by which this is achieved include Margie Orford's "counter-derivatisation" in *Like Clockwork*, Zoë Wicomb's tact in *Playing in the Light*, Jonny Steinberg's clash of epistemologies in *Three Letter Plague*, Lauren Beukes's aesthetics of cool in *Moxyland,* and Antjie Krog's vocabulary of grace in *A Change of Tongue*.

Following Fanon's plea, "O my body, always make me a man who questions!", the ideal post-apartheid author would be one who draws on the body's potential for self-definition, ambiguity, and change in spite of decades of deep-seated discrimination. The thesis ultimately concludes that sustained critical engagement with representations of the vulnerable body is vital to the project of national reconciliation.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

Except where stated, all of the work contained within this thesis represents the original contribution of the author. This thesis has not been submitted previously for another degree, at this or any other university. This manuscript has not been published before and is not currently being considered for publication elsewhere.

1. INTRODUCTION – BODY PARTS

1.1. Difference and Discrimination in South Africa

The past two years in South Africa have seen the statue of Cecil Rhodes fall on the University of Cape Town's campus, Afrophobic violence strike down foreigners across the country, the Economic Freedom Fighters expelled from Parliament at the State of Nation Address, the sensationalised murder trial of Oscar Pistorius, and the tragic massacre of striking miners at Marikana. These headlines all serve to demonstrate that it is the vulnerable body, a body policed and persecuted, that ultimately lies at the heart of contemporary South African politics.

Over decades of subjugation under, first, colonial and, then, apartheid rule, South Africans have become exceedingly aware of the vulnerability of their bodies, often in relation to ill-intentioned others. Beset by slavery, racial segregation, and military and criminal violence, the body in South Africa has never been a private, secure, or free space. Reinforced by apartheid legalisation, racial stratification reduced the body to superficial physical attributes, restricting physical and intellectual mobility and denying the dignity of both person and culture. Although much has changed in the way of civil rights, the effects of these systems of oppression linger even now as, twenty-one years after the demise of institutional apartheid, South Africa remains a land of contrasts. Notwithstanding political and intellectual efforts to overhaul the damaging legacies of apartheid, deep structural and social inequalities render bodies vulnerable to a myriad of problems – including high rates of crime, rape, HIV/AIDS, drug abuse, xenophobia, and racism. This list includes some of the greatest challenges faced by the new democracy, which all converge at the site of the vulnerable body. It follows that, although the body has been exposed to shifting pressures and processes during the past two decades, the indisputable fact of its

vulnerability remains. In other words, even though some of the conditions that shape South African bodies have changed after the official end of apartheid, the body that features so prevalently in the South African imaginary remains characteristically vulnerable. Consequently, vocabularies of the vulnerable body continue to occupy a prominent place in public discourse, and this is where the main interest of this thesis lies.

Given South Africa's unique history, in which the body features as a primary battleground for human rights and liberties, questions of the body on the one hand and negotiations of individual and collective identity on the other are usually, and productively, construed as one and the same. Often referred to as symbolic violence, which is Bourdieu's term for uneven social relations, discrimination exercises power through the hierarchisation of bodies. It can be defined as any form of prejudicial treatment which delimits and defines a collective as different and inferior on the basis of shared (often physical) attributes. In other words, normative categories of difference, including race, class, and gender, underlie forms of discrimination. Both discrimination and certain forms of vulnerability can be considered societal challenges which are closely related to the body, and produce lasting effects on identity which, as Merleau-Ponty taught us, is always embodied.

Identity and belonging in South Africa are timely subjects: South Africa's new democracy celebrated its twentieth anniversary in 2014, and Nelson Mandela passed away in December 2013, just five months before the "Twenty Years of Freedom" celebrations. The concurrence of these two events prompted worldwide debates on Mandela's legacy, especially with regard to the state of racism and reconciliation in South Africa two decades after apartheid. These debates raised an important question: If South Africans "know better" than to continue to think in black-and-

white terms, why do racism and other forms of discrimination persist to this day? Why do many South Africans keep sealing[1] themselves in separate enclaves?

Based on a selection of literary texts, this thesis will argue that it is the exigencies of the material body – brutal violence, HIV/AIDS, widespread poverty, to list a few – that complicate attempts to transcend binary thinking in contemporary South Africa. The close relation between discrimination and vulnerability is a remnant of apartheid legislation, given that forms of difference, such as race, were hierarchised and institutionalised precisely in order to render the country's black majority vulnerable (in various ways) and ultimately exploitable for economic purposes. In other words, during apartheid, race was the definitive factor deciding one's overall place in society – one's class or position as well as one's particular area of residence and work. This "place" determined, in turn, the extent to which physical and psychological needs would be met by the government. Whether one ended up in an office in Sandton or a mine in Mangaung was, and to an extent still is, determined by race. In an interview on postcolonial thinking with the netmagazine *Eurozine*, Achille Mbembe mentions poverty and racialisation in the same breath in an allusion to the body's vulnerability in the postcolonial era:

> To my mind it's the era both of the end and of reinvention, starting with the reinvention of what has suffered the most damage, the body. But it's also a time of fresh struggles. In the context of extreme poverty, of extreme racialization and of the omnipresence of death, the body is the first to be affected, the first to be hurt.

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[1] Richard Philcox's 2008 translation of Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* includes the phrases "[t]he white man is locked in his whiteness" (xiii) and "[t]he black man in his blackness" (xiv). I prefer Charles Markmann's more evocative choice of "sealed" (11) in the 1968 translation. I cite both translations in this thesis.

In the epic poem, *History is the Home Address*, Mongane Wally Serote evokes the difficulties the myriad of challenges in South Africa pose to speech and language: "speak/ speak of Zimbabwe/ speak of HIV/AIDS/ speak/ say it/ what must he say?/ what must we say?/ there is poverty/ there is disease/ there is homelessness/ there is illiteracy/ there is/ no water/ there is/ no electricity/ […]/ all is here from the past" (19). Ten years since Serote's text appeared, we see the vulnerable body – afflicted by HIV/AIDS, sexual violence, continued racism, and so forth – firmly established as a dominant theme in South African literature. The continued emphasis on the living body is illustrated even in the titles of several South African novels published after 2000, for instance Antjie Krog's *Skinned*, Njabulo Ndebele's *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, Imraan Coovadia's *Green-eyed Thieves*, Niq Mhlongo's *After Tears*, Deon Meyer's *Blood Safari*, and Sifiso Mzobe's *Young Blood*. One can add to this list titles which tackle head-on the racialisation of the body in South Africa by problematising derogatory stereotypes, for example Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut* and Zakes Mda's *Black Diamond*.

A central theme in South African literature which pertains to the body is lasting prejudice across race, gender, and class divides, and the challenges prejudicial thinking poses to reconciling factions that were segregated under apartheid law. It follows that, influenced by the socio-political climate of the times, texts habitually explore the problems of and potential for new bodily proximities after apartheid, as filtered through race, class, and gender difference in particular, and this appears indicative of a larger groundswell of anxiety about a divided and thus vulnerable South Africa. In other words, after the official end of apartheid, writers have continued to portray complex relationships across social divides, which often involve complex negotiations of a body's vulnerability in a community of other bodies.

This thesis, which is a literary study first and foremost, concentrates on the singular role of literature in addressing the problems of reconciliation and belonging in South Africa's precarious environments. To be more specific, it examines the respective ways in which the problems of vulnerability are understood and represented in English literature from and about South Africa. As selection criteria, only literary texts with a distinct focus on post-apartheid contexts in addition to a millennial publication date were chosen. The main literary texts included in this study are Margie Orford's *Like Clockwork* (first published in 2006), Zoë Wicomb's *Playing in the Light* (f.p. 2006), Jonny Steinberg's *Three Letter Plague* (f.p. 2008), Lauren Beukes's *Moxyland* (f.p. 2008), and Antjie Krog's *A Change of Tongue* (f.p. 2003). These primary texts fall within the five year time frame, 2003 to 2008, which forms part of the so-called "post-transitional" phase in South African literature. Although it would have been productive to juxtapose literary works from several of South Africa's languages, I will limit the scope of this analysis to South African literary texts written originally in English, and published after 2000, since I am interested in how questions of representation in a particular literary system are played out in relation to the body of the present day. This consideration relates to one of this study's main objectives, that is, to demonstrate literature's continued relevance in contemporary South Africa, as it plays an active part in shaping the frameworks through which South Africans read themselves and others.

In the literary texts featured in this thesis, bodies cough, bleed, walk barefoot, traverse real and virtual spaces, kiss, and die. They are injured, examined, injected, healed, marginalised, and mutated – and they feel ashamed, bitter, torn, addicted, and exhilarated. In each of the thesis chapters, "Sex", "Skin", "Blood", "Taste", and "Tongue", I analyse a primary text by one of the aforementioned South African authors alongside other critical and creative voices. I chose these writers, leading

figures in genres ranging from creative non-fiction to cyberpunk, to reflect the diversity of South Africa's contemporary literature. A wide range of genres, themes, and subject positions is covered by this relatively short period in South Africa's literary history. Along with a diversity of themes, the thesis engages with four separate genres in addition to various explicitly stated and often problematised subject positions, including "victim", "woman", "coloured", "HIV-positive", "gay", "cool", and "Afrikaner". Although many of the country's literary works engage with the body in thought-provoking ways, including those touched on above, the primary texts in this thesis all foreground one aspect of the vulnerable body in prominent relation to a prevalent, asymmetrical binary opposition. These aspects or body parts are reflected by the chapter titles of the thesis, as the following synopsis demonstrates.

In the first chapter, "Sex", I consider representations of sexual violence in Orford's work of crime fiction, *Like Clockwork*, expressly by way of the stark opposition between male perpetrator and female victim that rape inscribes. In the chapter, I refer to the trial of Oscar Pistorius, drawing a clear link between the threat of violence (and associated feelings of vulnerability) and forms of discrimination. "Chapter Two: Skin" moves on to complicate South Africa's prevailing dichotomy, black versus white, by means of Wicomb's nuanced exploration of the effects of racialisation on the body. The novel, *Playing in the Light*, destabilises racial categories of identity through representations of touch, tactility, and tact. In his work of narrative non-fiction, *Three Letter Plague*, Steinberg tackles the controversial issue of HIV/AIDS and the related stigma that segregates "negative" from "positive", which I discuss in the third chapter, "Blood". Steinberg's text demonstrates that metaphoricity is not only part of the interrelated problems of testing and treatment in rural Ithanga, but also presents a partial solution to curbing the pandemic's spread. The fourth chapter,

"Taste", then shifts gear with its exploration of the tension between cool and class in Beukes's socially stratified cyberpunk metropolis, *Moxyland*. Through her aesthetics of hipster cool, Beukes draws attention to new trajectories of social belonging, irrespective of race, class, and gender, with a specific focus on South Africa's youth. The final chapter, "Tongue", drives home the absolute centrality of language to the problem of reconciliation in South Africa, via *A Change of Tongue*'s complication of Afrikaner identity as the foundation for what Krog calls "a vocabulary of grace". The thesis concludes with a reflection on the death of the archetypal vulnerable body in post-apartheid South Africa, the body of Nelson Mandela.

Together, these chapters share an overall focus on how the South African body is shaped in relation to vulnerability, which is a wide-ranging designation referring to physical and psychological states and processes which include liability to physical as well as symbolic forms of violence. As the preceding outline might suggest, the link between vulnerability and bias is often clear-cut, as in the case of HIV/AIDS for example, where stigmatisation comprises a straightforward attempt to keep contagious bodies at bay. In other instances, like gender-based violence, the correlation between vulnerability and acts of discrimination is less precise. "Sex", the first chapter in this thesis, for instance, explains that poverty and unemployment have given rise to a crisis of masculinity, which is in turn posited as the root of widespread symbolic and physical violence against women and children.

It must be noted that, in the academic world, prominent South Africanists like Sarah Nuttall attempt to move beyond the preoccupation with difference and focus instead on points of intersection across race, gender, and class divides. According to *Entanglement: Literary and Cultural Reflections on Post-apartheid*, "often the story of post-apartheid has been told within the register of difference […] often, too, ignoring the intricate overlaps that mark the present and, at times, and in important

ways, the past, as well" (1). Nuttall posits "entanglement" as a conceptual tool that aims to complicate binary thinking, a term with Merleau-Pontian echoes that signifies

> a condition of being twisted together or entwined, involved with; it speaks of an intimacy gained, even if it was resisted, or ignored or uninvited. It is a term which may gesture towards a relationship or set of social relationships that is complicated, ensnaring, in a tangle, but which also implies a human foldedness. (1)

I agree with Nuttall that it is important to move beyond registers of difference in search of "points of intersection" (*Entanglement* 20) between segregated communities, and think it productive to consider the role of vulnerability in this conversation. However, by invoking "the body" as category of research in relation to pervasive moral panics producing a challenging climate of fear and suspicion – figures bandied about in the media include: 1 in 4 are unemployed ("Unemployment"); 1 in 6, HIV-positive ("HIV and AIDS Estimates"); nearly 50 people are murdered each day (Rossington); and every 26 seconds a woman is raped (Itano) – my project will demonstrate the usefulness of the academic subject of difference.

In order to discuss difference and discrimination in more nuanced terms, I will use two concepts throughout this thesis, which have proven instrumental to my argument: (1) "derivatisation", which will be defined in a subsequent section in the Introduction, and (2) the "grammar of differentiation", which derives from Jean and John Comaroff's *Of Revelation and Revolution, Volume 2: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*. In this historical account, the Comaroffs develop an understanding of (what they call) the "grammar of distinctions" (25) or "poetics of contrast" (26), to analyse binary thinking as a function of power. The

Comaroffs make the central point that "[c]olonial societies rarely consisted, for any length of time, of two discrete worlds, each whole unto itself" and were in reality "increasingly integrated totalities, their various parts bound together ever more indivisibly" (25). They take the argument a vital step further, emphasising that "the more tightly [the worlds of colonizer and colonized] were interwoven, the deeper the conceptual contrast drawn between them" (25). In other words, it is precisely *because* of the increasing fluidity of identities "on the ground" that, as Leon de Kock puts it in an in-depth introduction to a special issue of *Poetics Today*, "a foundational order of representation" was created "in which ironclad binaries operated as metatropes in the long and arduous process of inducing new forms of subjectivity in colonized people" (278). Bearing in mind Nuttall's concept of entanglement, one might rephrase this as: binary structures were implemented during the colonial era precisely *because* of the prevalence of entangled identification between coloniser and colonised. The legacy of these discursive regimes persists in South Africa to this day, in the form of an inflexible "grammar of *differentiation*" (De Kock 286) which is always an asymmetrical binary, with one term enjoying more privilege and power than the other.

Putting the concept to immediate use, this thesis argues that, entrenched by decades of colonial and apartheid rule, the poetics of contrast endures in South Africa's volatile climate precisely because of the illusion of conceptual control provided by simplistic distinctions like victim/perpetrator, black/white, HIV-positive/negative, and rich/poor. There is an acute need for feasible frameworks in post-apartheid South Africa that offer a conceptual grip on unpredictability and suffering *without* fuelling forms of discrimination like racism, not to mention gender-bias and the stigma of HIV/AIDS. Given the lack of conceptual alternatives by which the vulnerable body, or the body under threat, might be appropriately understood and managed, archaic

modes of thinking still come too readily to hand. Ultimately, fear and shame shape the conceptual trajectories underlying many forms of collective identification in South Africa today.

Because the question of language is central to taxonomies of the body, many South African authors have responded with literary attempts to problematise forms of discrimination as enduring impediments to the progress of the country's democracy. Prominent among these authors is J.M. Coetzee, whose inscrutable fictional bodies, for example that of the barbarian girl in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, K in *Life & Times of Michael K*, and Vercueil in *Age of Iron*, comprise a well-known endeavour to approach the Other in an ethical manner. This thesis's primary authors all confront, via different modes, the discursive frameworks that continue to advance derogatory dichotomies in South Africa. In this sense, a genealogical trend in post-apartheid literature can be identified, following Judith Butler's definition of "genealogy" (Nietzsche's term) in the 1990 preface to *Gender Trouble* as "a form of critical inquiry" which "expose[s] the foundational categories of sex, gender, and desire as effects of a specific formation of power" (xxxi). Butler's description of sex, gender, and desire as "identity categories that are in fact the *effects* of institutions, practices, discourses with multiple and diffuse points of origin" (xxix) will be applied in the thesis to other foundational categories like race and class as well.

These authors do more, however, than merely challenge current interpretative frameworks; they actively seek to develop new forms of engagement, new conceptual countermeasures, through which the various vulnerabilities of the post-apartheid body might be appropriately identified, understood, and negotiated. It follows that the significance of this thesis's primary literature lies less in the exploration of how the grammar of differentiation underlies social relations in South Africa's unpredictable contexts than in the development of discursive strategies to

shake loose, or trouble, the labels that cling fast to post-apartheid bodies. The texts tread the fine line between vulnerability's potential to bring people together, on the one hand, and its tendency to push them apart, on the other. Thus, vulnerability might become a source of empowerment, community, and positive identification, instead of keeping others at arm's length to safeguard vulnerability from potential threats as a form of self-preservation.

In the preface to *Precarious Life*, Butler states that "dominant forms of representation can and must be disrupted for something about the precariousness of life to be apprehended" (xviii). I would like to reverse the direction of this statement not for the sake of substitution but supplementation and to argue that it is the precariousness of life, in fact, that has the potential to disrupt dominant forms of representation. Following Fanon's plea in *Black Skin, White Masks*, "O my body, always make me a man who questions!" (2008: 206), the ideal post-apartheid author would be one who draws on the body's potential for self-definition, ambiguity, and change in spite of decades of deep-seated discrimination. The thesis demonstrates that sustained critical engagement with representations of the vulnerable body is vital to the project of national reconciliation in South Africa.

In conclusion, in this thesis, "the vulnerable body" is less the question than it is the answer − the answer to the crucial conundrum of enduring discrimination in South Africa. This thesis will consider the body's vulnerability, not solely as an impediment to reciprocity, but as both prison and key. The root of the problem, here, will also serve to inspire its solution, specifically with reference to the persistence of discrimination in South Africa today.

The remainder of this Introduction will explore the background to my argument by defining, and discussing theoretical frameworks related to, the main terms that

constitute the thesis title: "vulnerability", "the body", and "contemporary South African literature". Although I will not always refer to their work expressly, my analysis is indebted to the theoretical perspectives of Sara Ahmed, Derek Attridge, Judith Butler, Ann Cahill, Steven Connor, J.M. Coetzee, Frantz Fanon, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Sarah Thornton.

1.2. Vulnerability

As embodied beings, we are all vulnerable − vulnerable to the deeds of others, and exposed to our environments. Although vulnerability − from the Late Latin *vulnerare,* meaning "to wound" − bears negative connotations of weakness, defencelessness, and insecurity, it is also an undeniable virtue of the individual's embeddedness in the world. In the first chapter of *Frames of War*, titled "Survivability, Vulnerability, Affect", Butler importantly states that "injury is one thing that can and does happen to a vulnerable body (and there are no invulnerable bodies), but that is not to say that the body's vulnerability is reducible to its injurability" (34). Butler goes on to make the vital point that it is the (supposedly negative) experience of "the body invariably com[ing] up against the outside world" that in actual fact "animates responsiveness" to it (34). In other words, the body's vulnerability, that is, its foundational openness to the world and dependence on others, produces not only "rage" and "suffering", on the one hand, but also "pleasure" and "hope" (34), on the other. Therefore, it does not follow that one can designate vulnerability as either positive or negative when it, in fact, underlies all forms of affect.

Certain studies on vulnerability like Bryan Turner's *Vulnerability and Human Rights*, Butler's *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, and the aforementioned *Frames of War* regard vulnerability as "a basis for community"

(*Precarious* 19) or, put differently, consider physical and psychological "wounds" as possible points of connection between individuals. In other words, these studies suggest that loss and mourning need not isolate or separate, but can actually bring people together. With specific reference to the United States, Butler explains in *Precarious Life* that 9/11 left the state with two options: it could either deny its vulnerability by heightening its defences "through a fantasy of mastery", as the government chose to do, or rather, in "[m]indfulness of this vulnerability" (29), seek common ground with other, similarly vulnerable states. Although Butler is, here, concentrating on the metaphorical body of the United States, her work on exposure and empathy is equally relevant to real, individual bodies, not least in relation to literary representations of corporeal vulnerability.

In *Thirteen Cents*, K. Sello Duiker, a young and highly promising writer who committed suicide in 2005, engages with the body's acute vulnerability in post-apartheid South Africa. This much-studied South African novella gives an unsettling fictional account of life on the streets of Cape Town. The text imparts a sense of extreme vulnerability through the blue eyes of Azure, a black orphan boy exposed to prostitution, gangsterism, and other forms of brutal physical and structural violence:

> I know what fear is. I know what it means to be scared, to be always on the lookout. I know what it means to hear your own heartbeat. It means you are on your own. […]. I know what it feels like to hear your own fear beating in your ear. I know what it feels like to bite the insides of your mouth to control the fear. I know what it feels like to bite your nails till your fingertips are raw and sensitive to everything you touch. I know fear. And I hate it. I live with it every day. The streets, they are not safe. They are roads to hell, made of tar. Black tar. There are things watching us when we sleep. (66)

In literature, pain and vulnerability often serve to bring characters together, to connect them, in addition to stirring the reader's empathy. The character Azure's pair of exceptional blue eyes, marking him as different and consequently a target of malicious gangsters, is in a sense his first "wound" in the text, that is, the primary openness through which he experiences the world. Exposure to unrelenting violence has made his fingertips "raw and sensitive" and his body bare, a sensitivity that animates the reader's responsiveness to Duiker's novella. Through Azure's textual wounds, through his body's "coming up against" a pitiless world (to use Butler's formulation), the reader truly feels the harsh realities of a life exposed. Ultimately, Azure's pain and suffering act as a channel between character and reader, facilitating empathy and interconnection.

Duiker's text evokes the inescapable entwinement of body and mind, as Azure's "wounds" are as complex and composite as they are evocative. Vulnerability, in its relation to the body, is never only affective, only physiological, or only conceptual. Folded in states of physical suffering like hunger and pain, Azure's overwhelming sense of fear is, like his sense of vulnerability, equally physiological and psychological. As a defenceless body amid dangerous others, Azure's struggle for survival, for a safe space of his own, is shaped by vulnerabilities that affect his entire being. The different forms of violence bearing down on this character's body, from racism to sexual abuse, testify to a wholly different form of vulnerability than the universal openness to the world Turner calls "ontological vulnerability" (29). Some are more vulnerable than others. Although it is widely accepted in the developed world that psychological vulnerability is a necessary component of community formation, is this equally true of extreme physical exposure in volatile environments like South Africa's? In *Precarious Life*, Butler asks a compelling question that is equally relevant to the South African situation: "If we are interested in arresting

cycles of violence to produce less violent outcomes, it is no doubt important to ask what, politically, might be made of grief besides a cry for war" (xii). Following Butler, one might ask: Do the origins of a cross-cultural community, a post-apartheid nation, lie in sharing personal narratives, like the story of Azure, which detail brutal violations like rape, torture, and murder – or can extreme vulnerability only lead to heightened defences?

The correlation between self-exposure and risk, on the one hand, and nation building, on the other, is by no means novel in South Africa. Through public confession (as an intentional and liberatory form of exposure), South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) lay the groundwork for a post-apartheid society based on "the powers of mourning", which is the subtitle of Butler's book mentioned above. Though imperfect and controversial at times, the commission comprised a remarkable endeavour to move away from an ever-present "they" to a more inclusive "we" based on the public disclosure of various types of wounds inflicted by the apartheid regime. It signified an important step in the development of a common language by which South Africans would work through the country's turbulent past, and, as Butler wrote, make of grief something besides a cry for war. This challenge has intrigued and inspired many of the country's foremost writers. Before I proceed to discuss the work of these writers in more detail, it is necessary to problematise the field of inquiry, that is, "South African literature", itself.

1.3. Contemporary South African Literature

> I have walked that long road to freedom. I have tried not to falter; I have made missteps along the way. But I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb. (751)

It is from the vantage point of that great metaphorical hill, the concluding image in Mandela's autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*, that Archbishop Desmond Tutu first spoke of the rainbow nation, a nation united through difference. Standing at the anti-apartheid struggle's apex, the African National Congress (ANC) was faced with the challenge of instilling an all-embracing sense of national belonging that would transcend the hierarchies of difference formalised by the apartheid regime. However, if the ANC were to collapse the vertical structure into itself, eradicating difference – if this were at all possible – minority identities would be subsumed into a national cultural hegemony. Instead, the new dispensation opted for rainbow rhetoric, tilting the vertical arrangement on its side, as it were, and proclaiming equal rights for all of South Africa's "colours".

Albie Sachs, the former Constitutional Court judge, used the trope of the rainbow nation in a slightly different guise. In "Preparing Ourselves for Freedom", a paper presented at an ANC in-house seminar on culture in 1989, Sachs envisioned imminent democracy in terms of diverse "cultural tributar[ies]", each "contribut[ing] towards and increas[ing] the majesty of the river of South Africanness" (244). South Africa's national flag also sports these rainbow-coloured tributaries as a visual representation of the different routes that ultimately culminate in the national, in "South Africanness". I borrow the formulation from Stuart Hall who, writing on Britishness in *The Guardian*, complicates the notion of national identity as a single, shared destination: "Since the routes by which the minorities have travelled to this identity are different in some crucial respects from that taken by native people, they are unlikely to feel 'British' in exactly the same way". Although all roads may ultimately lead to Rome, as the adage goes, each road will effect a different experience of, and perspective on Rome. Even though his statement centres on Britain, I cite Hall to indicate that the tendency to imagine multi-culturalism as

different avenues within one nation is certainly not unique to the South African situation. Hall's statement also broaches the general problematic of thinking national identity in terms of a single, shared body of experience. De Kock puts it more boldly: "In cultural politics we need to be wary of the teleology of liberal justice, which seemingly culminated in the democratic elections of 1994, holding us to oppressive fixations of oneness and sameness" (288). Identifying an "ingrained weariness with unitary representation, with national narratives", De Kock flags rainbow readings of post-apartheid South Africa, mentioning that the national television slogan, *Simunye – We Are One*, "will necessarily be met with a snort of derision or an impatient switch to the next channel". As he rightly observes, in post-apartheid South Africa "[p]eople […] know better" (287).

The ways in which national identity has been imagined after apartheid has had a profound influence on understandings of national literature. Prominent research on master narratives in the area of South Africa's literature includes *The Cambridge History of South African Literature*. In the collection's introduction, the editors, David Attwell and Derek Attridge, remark that "[w]ith the literature, […] there is no overriding, definitive principle of unity, although there have been several attempts to find a metaphor in which a principle of unity-in-diversity might be instantiated" (3).

It is indeed important to sound a note of caution as to how the subject area is constituted and defined with temporal, geographic, and socio-linguistic factors in mind. Under general scrutiny, in the first instance, is the prefix "post" in post-apartheid literature. This forms part of a critique of commonplace periodisations that slice clean chronological breaks – "apartheid", "post-apartheid", "transitional", and "post-transitional" – in a univocal and unilinear history of South African literature. This type of categorisation threatens to elide the continuities between past and present, not to mention overlook the normativisation of chronological and, by

implication, politically inflected readings in South Africa. A literary study by definition, however, necessitates temporal, geographical, and/or thematic bounds – as long as the literary scholar proceeds with caution and demonstrates an awareness of the repercussions of delimitation.

In the second interrelated instance, the designation "South African literature" itself comes under frequent fire, especially from the pen of De Kock, who cautions against reading South African literature as a unified, national literary field (or figurative body), given the histories of subjugation hidden within the bounds of many categories of knowledge in South Africa:

> To this day it […] remains problematic to regard "South African literature" as a singular or unified field, although a vast amount of writing has taken place in or about the country. If anything, "South African literature" is an area of enquiry that raises a multiplicity of questions about the colonization of culture; about canonization and tradition formation; and about literary-critical historiography, identity, objects of literature, the materiality of discursive regimes, the construction of culture, and the relations of power to cultural production. (271)

In other words, the critic must take care not to reproduce, in her analysis, the totalising paradigms or master narratives that characterised white rule during the "colonial" and "apartheid" eras (an instance of the inescapability of temporal markers). My interest in the South African body – as a common metaphor for oneness or totality – might at first glance appear to draw on the same trope of unity-through-difference that animates rainbow rhetoric. However, my thesis is by no means ignorant of the challenges posed to this approach, especially given South Africa's protracted history of "representational tyrannies" (De Kock 288). The approach follows in the footsteps of many post-apartheid authors who adopt a critical

stance towards national allegories in so far as these allegories are perceived to merely trade one master narrative in exchange for another.

Literature in South Africa encompasses multiple traditions (oral and written), languages (of which eleven are official), genres, and various cultural and geographical trajectories of textual production and dissemination. Therefore, it might be more appropriate to speak of South African literatures in the plural in order to signify the multiple themes and threads that constitute but also complicate and even exceed the boundaries of this national canon. However, I will continue to speak of South African literature in the singular, given that this thesis centres on texts published originally in English, which all fall within a five year time frame. This period, as stated previously, has been defined as "post-transitional" (versus the broader classification that is "post-apartheid") to enable conceptualisations of literature beyond apartheid. It is possible to identify significant new patterns in the English literary texts published during this period, although they signal less a departure from than a remodelling of former concerns.

In their introduction to a special edition on post-transitionality in *English Studies in Africa*, editors Ronit Frenkel and Craig MacKenzie define "this new wave of writing, which is often unfettered to the past in the way that much apartheid writing was, but may still reconsider it in new ways" (2) as

> exhibit[ing] a reduced obligation to the logics of political commitment […].
> The literature of engagement that characterized the past persists, but as a
> feature to be overcome rather than replicated. (4)

With reference to the subject of the vulnerable body, which is more often than not a body in pain, writing about the body's plight in South Africa often involves portrayals of suffering and adversity. Although Frenkel and MacKenzie's observation is exact and relevant, heightened precarity in post-apartheid contexts

nonetheless appears to solicit literary responses of a sincere, serious, and committed kind, arousing the same sense of injustice that fuelled the literature of engagement during apartheid.

Although much critical discussion has been dedicated to the shifts in literature that accompanied the transition from authoritarian to democratic rule, the emphasis in literature on vulnerability and victimisation therefore remains, although some forms of vulnerability, like HIV/AIDS, have understandably become more prominent than others given changing contexts and new challenges. In an insightful essay written in partial response to the "what now?" confronting authors at apartheid's dénouement, "Literature and Control", André Brink anticipated the persistence of the allure of power in the post-apartheid era:

> A more serious problem to be confronted in the new situation is the disappearance of the obvious and blatant "enemy". […].
>
> Perhaps the key to this aspect of the problem is the acknowledgement that apartheid as such has *never* been the enemy. It has always been only a symptom and a sign, a footprint, of the enemy. For the true enemy to the human is *power*, in all its forms. The power of the lie; the power of the corrupt; of oppression; of injustice; of bondage. These things outlive apartheid: they exist, and have existed, in all human societies, at all times. This is precisely the key to what I shall have to say about literature in a future South Africa – when apartheid may be finally eradicated, but not injustice, not corruption, not lies, not intolerance: in other words, not power.
>
> And this enemy is not so coherent or visible or obvious as apartheid […]. […] [T]his enemy, power, is never "something out there", but very much "in here", in ourselves, part even of our attempts to define and confront

it. *This* is the difficulty inherent to the precarious freedom writers enjoy at the moment, and will have to deal with in the future. (178-79)

Both De Kock's and Brink's statements serve to underscore that representations and constructions of identity in particular are expressions of power. Literature is important in South Africa not because it provides unmediated access to its manifold worlds or realities, but, in actual fact, may render the word opaque and thus visible to the critical eye. The literary works discussed in this thesis lay bare, to varying degrees, the operations of the narratives (the myths, stories, and ideologies) that shape our understanding of "reality" in South Africa. Even crime fiction, a popular genre not commonly celebrated for its literary value, draws our attention to the material effects of language, especially with regard to how language gives expression to vulnerability and shapes, classifies, and organises bodies. Such an approach suggests a materialist conception of language, which Elaine Scarry's introduction to *Literature and the Body* defines as "ordinarily [having] two companion assumptions: first, that language is capable of registering in its own contours the contours and weight of the material world; second, that language itself may enter, act on, and alter the material world" (xi).

I make my emphasis on materiality explicit in response to the ever-present question of literature's relevance in a country that does not read actively, since a large percentage of the population does not have access to public libraries. The matter at stake is the particular contribution literature and literary studies in South Africa do and/or should make to knowledge about vulnerable bodies – compared to, say, medical science or urban planning. The complex ways that real and symbolic violence, which stem from the body's vulnerability, have shaped identities and affects in South Africa solicit a singular mode of engagement, attuned to the complex emotional shades of human relations – in a word, literature. According to Beatrice

Rehl, director of publishing for the humanities at Cambridge University Press, "[w]e live in a time when we crave black-and-white certainty, as reflected in the obsession with quantification. The humanities teach us how to live, thrive and find meaning in a world that is painted in multiple shades of gray". Krog is hopeful about renewal when she suggests "[e]ven if it's piecemeal – questioning the standard will make space for positive change" ("Universal").

As a singular means of complicating the standard, literature in South Africa has always engaged with the body. The editors of the newly released *The Cambridge Companion to the Body in Literature*, David Hillman and Ulrika Maude, put the association of the body with the literary as follows:

> Authorities (medical and socio-economic and political) have powerfully vested interests in *constructing* bodies in particular ways; literature, throughout the ages, works to remind us of this fact and thereby to *deconstruct* these myths, often by reinstating the delirium and the scandalousness [or, in this study's case, the vulnerability] of the body. For the body is never simply a passive depository of cultural fantasy or the workings of power; it resists all reification and fixity. The authoritarian construction instils ideas of normativity, health, discipline […] – ideas that literature often challenges. The literary, like the somatic and through its relation to the somatic, opens the path to the unbinding of all forms of fixity – those of individual identity as well as the stereotypes and hierarchies that accompany them. (5)

The following section takes up this conversation through a consideration of the body as a domain in language and literature. The discussion will enable a succeeding meditation on how the vulnerable body, through its resistance to normative categories of identity, might also instantiate a literary ethics of interconnection.

1.4. The Body in Literature

In 2010, I conducted, as part of an online conference, "Once More, with Feeling", an interview with Xitsonga-translator Jameson Maluleke on the state of translation from and into minority languages in South Africa. I asked why the survival of his mother tongue is of such vital importance, to which he replied:

> Xitsonga is the language of my ancestors which my mom kindly bequeathed through the umbilical cord and breastfeeding. It is my identity book, a symbol of my pride. I cannot call myself an African without my language. For this reason, its survival is my survival. The more it develops, the more my identity is consolidated.

Maluleke's response illustrates why the relation between the body, language, and literature is so intriguing, especially within a South African context. His answer associates identity and ancestry with language, which he in turn finds embedded in the body.

"The body" is, or at least was for a moment in academic time, quite fashionable among literary scholars. Irrespective of its current regard, this thesis will demonstrate the continued relevance of "the body" to South Africa's precarious contexts. Note that my use of the term "the body" by no means tries to impose a delineation of unity or homogeneity on all South African bodies. In other words, I do not use "the body" in its singular form to simplify or reduce all of South Africa's diverse bodies (including the literary) to one, single body of experience. The designation rather denotes an inclusive and interdisciplinary category of research, that is, a discursive domain which allows for a plurality of readings and perspectives, and involves a multiplicity of literal and figurative bodies. Anthony Purdy explains that

> there have always been bodies, but "the body" is a conceptual category produced by specific discursive operations that can be analysed and

described. Yes, "the body" is plural, in the sense that the contexts in which (and the ends to which) it is produced are many and varied. (5)

In this excerpt, Purdy relates real, material bodies to the conceptual contexts within which they are understood. In *Identity and Culture*, Chris Weedon explains in clear terms that "[h]ow we see bodies is an effect of the discursive field within which we are located" (17). Otherwise stated, although bodies, as meat or flesh, exist outside language, they become meaningful only in or through language.

Philosophies of the body generally demonstrate that it is anything but a simple and static whole, and cannot be divorced from language. Although there is general consensus in body studies that mind and body are intimately entwined, the Cartesian split still permeates many public conceptions of identity. Visually apprehended, the body does appear unproblematically delimited and separated from the world by seeming to end and close at the skin. Senses are generally perceived as bringing the world, its sights, sounds, and smells, to the body where meaning is generated. The skin, in this understanding, acts as an interface between self and world. However, the assumption of the body as a singular physical entity, bound by skin, becomes problematic when the direction of meaning is multiplied, and when the embodied mind is understood not only as a recipient of sensory impressions but also as an actor that reaches beyond the skin and into the world by means of it senses. In the human voice, for instance, the body can be said to extend into the world without any definitive end point, complicating separations of body and world. Language certainly plays a crucial part in this understanding, in that it creates, directs, and structures categories of perception, but also actively participates in making meaning.

Literal and figurative bodies are often thought – and written – in analogous ways, as well as effortlessly conflated and interchanged in discourse. According to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, the two authors of *Metaphors We Live by* and *Philosophy*

in the Flesh, human beings visualise and understand abstract concepts through metaphors which are often based on the configuration of the body proper. The body is most prevalent in this regard because it comprises the site of the individual's direct involvement with the material world. The human body, the two linguists argue, thus provides the primary framework by means of which the individual makes sense of the world:

> Reason is not disembodied, as the tradition has largely held, but arises from the nature of our brains, bodies, and bodily experience. This is not just the innocuous and obvious claim that we need a body to reason; rather, it is the striking claim that the very structure of reason itself comes from the details of our embodiment. […]. [I]t is shaped crucially by the peculiarities of our human bodies, by the remarkable details of the neural structure of our brains, and by the specifics of our everyday functioning in the world. (*Philosophy* 4)

What is particularly useful about Lakoff and Johnson's findings is their identification of the two domains that constitute metaphor: source domain, on the one hand, and target domain, on the other. When "the body" acts as the source (rather than the target) domain, it lends a material quality to abstract concepts, emotions, and thoughts. A resonant example is Coetzee's description in his 1987 Jerusalem Prize acceptance speech of South African literature as "a literature in bondage" (98). In this example, Coetzee draws on the source domain of the body to visualise and communicate a visceral sense of the challenges that apartheid's stringent laws posed to literary production. In this sense, the domain of the body is not invested with, but instead *structures* meaning. The body in this regard is an actor which does something; it facilitates the visualisation of an abstract concept and infuses it with weight and import. In other words, instead of treating the body as passive receptacle only, I am interested in the body as agent as well. The point of discussing its

different utilisations is to demonstrate that the body can assume intriguing, multi-layered guises in a text. Especially in literature, which is a mode of discourse that cultivates metaphoricity and ambiguity, the body functions as a literal domain, but also as a figurative one by means of which simple distinctions like literal/figurative and conceptual/material might be troubled.

Perhaps this seems somewhat ironic given that commonplace metaphors often draw on the domain of the body in order to visualise clusters, groups, or unities. In other words, in figurative language, the body often plays the part of not only troubling but also in fact organising conceptions of "the whole" (in, for example, "body politic" and "body of work"). In these instances, the structure of the body serves to impress unity and cohesion; it delimits and defines a whole neatly, unproblematically, and in its entirety. However, to return to the point made in the previous section, the discursive domain of the body in literature may play a pronounced part in destabilising forms of totalisation. It is in relation to this specific function of "the body", the body as a source domain in figurative language, that I extrapolate my readings of vulnerable bodies in selected literary texts, utilising their contours as the source of a reconciliatory discourse in South Africa. Lakoff and Johnson have been influential in suggesting that a bodily way of understanding is built into language, and it is by means of this understanding that I link literature and ethics. Simply put, I approach the vulnerable body in literature through a critical reading which is equally vulnerable, that is flexible and open to change. In this understanding, the vulnerable body acts as an interpretative structure which, by virtue of its openness to the world and others, might dislodge foundational categories of difference in South Africa.

This brings me to back to the thesis's main argument, which treats figurative representations of the vulnerable body as both target and source domain. As a consequence, I consider how the vulnerable body structures encounters with others.

This is not to say that the body is always metaphorical in a text; literature abounds with literal representations of bodies. The discussion rather makes the point that the body is more than just literal, and functions in fundamental figurative ways that make for multidimensional representations in literature.

As discussed in the foregoing section on vulnerability, the body's vulnerability might serve to push factions apart, on the one end of the spectrum, or might also serve as a potential means of bringing them together. In other words, though vulnerability is frequently regarded a problem, it presents the individual – in less dire circumstances, as least – with an opportunity: a choice between closing off the self and assigning fixed definitions to others, keeping them at arm's length in self-preservation, or welcoming instead the transformation of self that an openness to the other necessarily begets. Serote captures in beautiful corporeal terms the relation between vulnerability and embodied identity as "a fragility which […]/ […] seizes the body to express itself/ to make an identity" (*History* 52).

It is the tension between the body's opposing potentialities in contemporary South African literature that this thesis explores. My consideration of the vulnerable body as the grounds for equally productive and destructive relationships after apartheid ties in with David Attwell and Barbara Harlow's broad synopsis of South African literature after 1990, in which they call attention to "the refashioning of identities caught between stasis and change, and the role of culture – or representation – in limiting or enabling new forms of understanding" (3). It follows that the thesis does not comprise an attempt to understand South African literature in its entirety, but instead explores how the open-ended language of the vulnerable body has the potential to dismantle (rather than perpetuate) discursive regimes, including foundational categories of identity like race, class, and gender which, as the

following section will argue, figuratively fragment and reduce the multidimensionality of the lived body.

1.5. Body Parts

This section lays the groundwork for my chapters' respective engagements with vulnerability by concentrating predominantly on race, which has remained a swearword on the tip of South Africa's tongue. According to the findings of 2012's "Reconciliation Barometer", almost half of South Africans seldom communicate with individuals from other races (Lefko-Everett 43) which suggests that, in the so-called New South Africa, "Non-racialism Remains a Fiction", to borrow the title of Shaun Viljoen's article on Richard Rive's and K. Sello Duiker's literature.

The titles of the Introduction as well as this subdivision, "Body Parts", stem from Fanon's description of racialisation as a process which, figuratively speaking, fragments the body and, by implication, one's sense of self. Racialisation converts a feature of the body, like skin colour, into a marker of identity. This process has the effect of reducing the integrity and multi-dimensionality of the subject by allowing one or more body "parts" to govern trajectories of collective identification and belonging. The previous section considered how the material body provides the symbolic structure through which the individual understands the world. As the next step in this argument, one could state that attributes marking the body as different and inferior influence the way the individual perceives the world.

Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* still offers one of the most compelling and influential analyses of racial discrimination and its effects, in particular via the concept of "epidermalisation", which concerns the internalisation of the sense of shame and inferiority that racialisation engenders. Lakoff and Johnson's research on the tight relationship between body and metaphor is particularly valuable in

understanding how the body shapes the interpretation of self and others. The particularities of experience, as felt by and on the body, configure the individual's unique outlook on the world. Fanon's critical account of the experiential realities of discrimination, of how racialisation distorts and fragments the self, is written in the language of the body: The individual is described as experiencing bigotry viscerally, feeling it in the body as dismemberment, "an amputation, an excision, a haemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood" (*Black Skin* 1968: 112).

Thus Fanon's work suggests that a body racialised, which is a body "*fixed*" and "dissected under white eyes" (1968: 116), may give rise to a symbolic framework that is compromised and stunted as well. Because intolerance is targeted at, and experienced through the body, it has a profound impact on self-perception as shaped along the contours of the body: "I am overdetermined from without. I am the slave not of the 'idea' that others have of me but of my own appearance" (1968: 116). More recently, in South Africa, scholar and poet Gabeba Baderoon contends that "despite this argument that the meaning of *race* is constructed, I have lived the reality in which my body was a set of markers of racial meanings". Here Baderoon makes a crucial statement which resonates with Sara Ahmed's counsel in "Racialized Bodies" that efforts to denaturalise difference should circumvent the "de-politicizing or neutralization of the terrain" (47). Literature is a powerful way of denaturalising normative categories of difference, like race, class, and gender, whilst still acknowledging and probing the effects of discrimination on the subject's experiential reality and sense of self. Marked by the brunt of centuries of overdetermination and segregation, bodies experience discrimination differently. Otherwise stated, every single person in South Africa lives processes of differentiation like racialisation in unique and personal ways. In addition, it must be noted that processes of identification are never felt as distinct operations; in other words, forms of difference

like race, class, and gender congeal at the site of the body to jointly shape its contours.

When read in conjunction, Ahmed's two texts, "The Organisation of Hate" and "Racialized Bodies", frame "race" not as a dry scientific fact, but as the effects of a highly charged, emotional process referred to as racialisation, "a process that takes place in time and space" ("Racialized Bodies" 46). In the latter, she provides a lucid definition of race as

> an effect of [racialization], rather than its origin or cause. So, in the case of skin colour, racialization involves a process of *investing* skin colour with meaning, such that "black" and "white" come to function, not as descriptions of skin colour, but as racial identities. (46)

Although the emotions governing race relations in South Africa are varied and complex, Ahmed's discussion of hatred in the second work, "The Organisation of Hate", is particularly useful in that it reveals the role of affect in the process of racialisation or, otherwise stated, in the making of racial identities. It critiques those "model[s] of social structure and power that [neglect] the emotional intensities that allow such structures to be reified as forms of being" (349). With the emphasis falling on emotion, Ahmed explains how race works, that is, "by aligning the particular with the general" (349) and producing "the *perception* of a group in the body of an individual" (350).

Previously I referred to the concept of "derivatisation", conceptualised by Ann Cahill as a convincing and constructive "alternative to the concept of 'objectification'" (32). In *Overcoming Objectification: A Carnal Ethics*, she defines derivatisation as follows:

> To derivatize is to portray, render, understand, or approach a being solely or primarily as the reflection, projection, or expression of another being's

identity, desires, fears, etc. The derivatized subject becomes reducible in all relevant ways to the derivatizing subject's existence – other elements of her […] being or subjectivity are disregarded, ignored, or undervalued. (32)

Although Cahill works within a frame of sexual difference, her conceptual tool is also appropriate for theorising other forms of social inequality and spaces of difference (33). The clarity afforded by the distinction between "difference" and "derivatisation" enables a more nuanced engagement with notions of identity and belonging in literature of the past decade, and will be utilised throughout this thesis. In its thorough encapsulation of the negative, reductive, and asymmetrical forms of difference, "derivatisation" allows a usage of "difference" as that which is particular, unique, and positive. The term plays another important role in my readings of difference, given its implicit association of discrimination with the reduction and fragmentation of the self which, in this regard, also speaks to Ahmed's productive understanding of discrimination as a charged process that transforms body parts into laden markers of identity.

The grammar of differentiation is a form of symbolic violence that renders the body vulnerable in a distinctive manner, producing far-reaching effects. As a consequence, my readings of post-apartheid bodies fragmented and derivatised are mindful of the body's role as the sensory and symbolic framework through which the individual interprets the world. The chapter titles of this thesis – "Sex", "Skin", "Blood", "Taste", and "Tongue" – do not merely signal the different sections or parts of this body of work, but also seek to evoke how forms of derivatisation flatten the body or, otherwise stated, reduce its integrity and multidimensionality to an overriding feature or part, for example "dirty blood", which is a metaphor for HIV in rural South Africa.

However, as I have argued in this Introduction, the operations of derivatisation are, as it were, up for contestation – and many South African literary works have assumed this challenge, given derivatisation's overtly symbolic dimension. In the following section, I consider the ways in which certain South African authors actively seek to develop new forms of engagement, new conceptual countermeasures, through which the various vulnerabilities of the post-apartheid body can be appropriately identified, understood, and negotiated. The literary texts discussed in this thesis develop discursive strategies which certainly unfix (but do not necessarily succeed in overthrowing) labels of identity. In this thesis, I will describe discursive strategies that posit the domain of the vulnerable body as a source of empowerment, community, and positive identification in relation to a language of vulnerability. The concept is reminiscent of Krog's "vocabulary of grace", which is featured in the thesis's final chapter, "Tongue", and shifts the focus from vulnerability's proclivity for segregation to its potential for facilitating interconnection. When identity is fleshed out in the language of the vulnerable body – as my readings of South African literature will demonstrate – identity is ultimately rendered more fluid and mutable, that is to say, an identity in motion which by definition prevents fixity.

1.6. A Language of Vulnerability

As mentioned in a previous section, it can prove difficult to distinguish literal from figurative bodies in literature, where the body proper and the metaphorical body equally exist in text only. In so far as they are all conceived as bodies, the South African individual, the South African nation, and South African literature all find points of connection in the discursive domain of "the body". As a result, the vulnerability of real bodies in South Africa is often taken to signify the vulnerability

of the body politic or the state of the new democracy as a whole. Literature produced during South Africa's period of transition is especially illustrative of the slippage between real and figurative bodies, like citizen and nation, not to mention real and figurative body parts or fragments.

Body parts feature extensively in South African literature after apartheid. During the transitional period, the South African TRC hearings played a major part in disseminating the concepts and images by means of which the new South Africa would come to be understood. As emphasised in Ciraj Rassool's "Human Remains, the Disciplines of the Dead and the South African Memorial Complex", bodies under the apartheid regime were not only censored and over-regulated but also – in countless instances – tortured, maimed, murdered, and, in a very real, material sense, fragmented or dismembered:

> It was the physicality of mutilation that embodied the materiality of apartheid. Heads and burials, bodies and returns, seeking to settle the landscape and finalise the unresolved past were powerful reminders of different histories, provided an inventory of human rights violations and an archive of symbolic reparations. (6-7)

As a result, the images of maimed bodies, of bodies tortured under apartheid, as communicated openly during the TRC hearings, infused many literary engagements with correlated conceptualisations of trauma and suffering. These fractured bodies of literature also reflect a reality fragmented by a history of separateness, of disparities in socio-economic status, and of different ways of reading and responding to the world.

The juxtaposition of the following two quotes from Krog's searing account of the TRC proceedings, *Country of My Skull*, suggest the ease with which literal dismemberment might assume a figurative dimension. The first excerpt is from the

portrayal of the testimony of Yassir Henry, and contains visceral descriptions of actual body parts and pieces, pain and suffering:

> "I was shown an album. […]. I saw something that to this day I have nightmares about. The photograph was that of a severed head of someone I personally trained in Luanda. His lips and kidneys were all up alongside his neck. His eyes were open and there was dried blood on his lips. The rest of the album contained photos of his body parts strewn across a street …." (82)

Later on in the same text, a comment by interpreter Lebohang Matibela, wherein he refers to the immersive experience of interpreting a victim's testimony, takes on a metafictional dimension, describing one of the text's main ambitions: "'[I]t becomes very difficult to interpret when they are crying, then they speak in instalments. He says something, then he keeps quiet and he starts again … you have to bring the pieces together'" (334). Matibela's statement is about the difficulty of putting pain into words, and the way suffering interrupts and fragments memory.

In the same way that fragmentation in South African literature reflects the dismemberment of real bodies, public conceptions of reparation and reconciliation were often associated with the physical and psychological healing of real wounds. Literature after apartheid has made an important contribution to restoring the integrity of subjects derivatised by apartheid's system of racial classification. The chapters that follow pay particular attention to how the selected authors flesh out their characters in languages of vulnerability, starting at the derivatised body parts featured in the chapter titles.

A crucial dilemma confronting contemporary authors regards the discursive frameworks by means of which the "fleshing out" of derivatised bodies occurs – given the historical underpinnings of these paradigms. Renowned instances of literary works that complicate the teleology of healing and the manner in which it

papers over[2] subjectivities include Wicomb's novel *David's Story*, Marlene van Niekerk's novel *Agaat* (originally published in Afrikaans), and Ingrid de Kok's cycle of poems on the TRC hearings, "A Room Full of Questions", in *Terrestrial Things*. Via complex representations of the (female) body, these texts, among others, unsettle the idea of reconstructing the (metaphorical) body of the nation by, to recall the words of interpreter Matibela in *Country of My Skull*, "bringing the pieces together".

In a Blanchotian reading of *Agaat*, Lara Buxbaum proposes that "healing might rather result from the recognition that coherence cannot be achieved, or should not be desired, that 'It's the wrong medicine. Completeness'" (97).[3] Susan Spearey offers a related reading of Ingrid De Kok's "A Room Full of Questions" that also concentrates on critical conceptions of healing after apartheid. Spearey argues that "Body Parts", the last poem in the cycle, "do[es] not posit integration, recovery or recuperation as desirable or achievable ends" (17) – notwithstanding its wistful tone. In the poem, fragments of memory rather function as loose co-ordinates which orientate the self and structure readings of the present: "may the unfixable broken bone/ loosened from its hinges/ now lying like a wishbone in the veld/ pitted by pointillist ants/ give us new bearings" (37). A significant representation of the fragmented body in post-apartheid English literature is the character David's drawing of the guerrilla Dulcie in *David's Story*:

> There are the dismembered shapes of a body: an asexual torso, like a dressmaker's dummy; arms bent the wrong way at the elbows; legs; swollen feet; hands like claws.

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[2] In an interview with Mary West, Ndebele captures the generalising sweep of apartheid's race legislation with the statement: "[T]here is a multiplicity of 'whitenesses' which we don't understand because these differences have all been *papered over* by the official whiteness of apartheid, in the same way that apartheid papered over everyone who was black" ("Whiteness" 117, emphasis added). South African literature is generally celebrated for making marginalised voices, and the particularities of their experience, heard.

[3] Buxbaum is, here, quoting from *Agaat* (219).

[…]. I have no doubt that it is Dulcie who lies mutilated on the page. (205)

According to Meg Samuelson in *Remembering the Nation, Dismembering Women?*, the novel "demythologises nationalist imaginings by representing women's bodies as protean, and then presenting these bodies in a fractured and fluid text that prevents narrative meanings from settling into the fixed forms favoured by nationalism" (5).

In the two extracts below, Ndebele and Krog link in comparable ways interconnectedness to the development of a new language, of new modes of grappling with suffering (although their arguments are understandably couched in terms befitting their respective projects). Krog's keynote address at Winternachten 2010, entitled the "(Universal) Declaration of Interconnectedness or (Universal) Suggestions for Tolerance", makes the case that

[w]e should work hard in developing a vocabulary, finding the words, the imagery and the means to dissolve the root of intolerance. And the root is almost always: poverty with religion, guns, nationalism, patriarchy as strategies to get out of poverty or to hang on to what you have. We should dissolve intolerance without, and this is important, without becoming intolerant ourselves.

Ndebele's sense of the task facing contemporary authors correlates with Krog's understanding, with whom he identifies as a leading figure:

We can no longer depend comfortably on heroic explanations of behaviour derived from rigid understandings of history, or from social and bureaucratic structures we inherited, and which powerfully structure our thought and conduct. While such structures may provide a context, frames for formulating understanding and certitude, they now have the capacity to be experienced as limiting the field of freedom. To what extent do they continue to help us

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understand where we are now? We currently find ourselves in a huge multicultural classroom, and in multicultural work places, which offer new experiences and new ways and forms of knowing ourselves and others. We have to move away from the old rigid certitudes. They no longer hold. What I then hope for is writing that shows there are other avenues of experience that we have not even begun to understand. Writers such as Kopano Matlwa, Antjie Krog, Jonathan Jansen, Phaswane Mpe, Niq Mhlongo, K. Sello Duiker, and other contemporary writers, are helping us enter such new worlds. ("Whiteness" 123)

Indeed, various authors have spoken of the role of literary representation in instigating new, more appropriate and relevant ways in which to flesh out vulnerable selves since, as already indicated, there appears to be a relative lack of conceptual alternatives by which vulnerability in South Africa might be written and understood *without* recourse to the fixed categories of difference that underlie discrimination. In an interview on whiteness, from which the above passage stems, Ndebele asserts that the list of authors

offer[s] us a way out of the anguish. We need to understand one another more, go into a new adventure of understanding the South African experience that is no longer dictated by inherited structures, but that reflects how human beings fashion new possibilities through new interconnections. ("Whiteness" 123-24)

Samuelson's regard for mutable and fluid structures in post-transitional literature is inherent in her critical work, including the succinct overview in a special issue of *English Studies in Africa* on post-transitional literature in English. In the article, "Scripting Connections", Samuelson makes the crucial point that "new lines of struggle are being traced out of old ones" (113): "Rather than a turning away from

political engagement and/or from the past, this literature is, on my reading, characterised more by its *rearrangement* than its *abandonment* of the chronotopes of South African literature and its expanding field of enquiry" (116). In agreement with many of the essays in the volume, Samuelson cautions that

> the category of the "post-transitional" cannot be imagined as slicing a clean
> break into the cultural continuum. Instead, it both bleeds into and draws its
> sustenance from transitional concerns and apartheid struggles, while re-
> circuiting these concerns into new engagements. Yet, even with such
> demurrals, we risk over-categorizing what remains an emergent, amorphous
> body of work. (113)

In "Walking through the Door", Samuelson uses a language attuned not to closure, stasis, and completeness but to mutability: "Rather than wistfully imagining the tearing down of structures, then, it may be more pertinent to think in terms of the renovation and re-habitation of what has been inherited as a means to engage and unsettle the on-going imbrications of past and present" (135). Her impression is not unlike the above-quoted reflections by Krog and Ndebele.

A constellation of concepts – of the same kind as the terms delineated by this introduction – emerges, which suggests that interconnectedness, which is a defining feature of post-transitional literature according to Samuelson ("Scripting" 114), derives neither from the obliteration nor the replacement of inherited conceptual structures, but rather springs from the disruption of these structures. Translating this idea into the discursive framework of my thesis, I argue that a possible way forward lies in the cultivation of vulnerability as an open-ended state of being that, in its exposure to others, facilitates (re)connection. The language of reconciliation sought by contemporary writers is, from this perspective, not predicated on the ability to suture fragments or body parts into a static, closed whole, but rather on a slipping of

chains or the slackening of apartheid's categorical hold on the body. As the foregoing discussion of vulnerability indicates, vulnerability is a figurative wound, an opening that cannot heal or close completely without closing off the individual – it is the site of our interconnectedness, the site that "gives us our bearings". In the literary texts under consideration, the vulnerable body will emerge as a potential basis for the new language Krog and Ndebele inspire – a language by means of which "to feel with us the open dimension of every consciousness" (Fanon, *Black Skin* 2008: 206).

2. SEX:

Margie Orford's *Like Clockwork*

2.1. Bodies Scripted with Violence

> When I came back to South Africa in 2001, I was flooded by victims, the
> horror of them, the sameness of them, the blankness of these bodies scripted
> with violence. Crime and violence are highly sexualised, we know that, but
> what does that mean, in effect? It means that the most mesmerising crimes
> are committed against women. The battered, punctured corpse that surfaces in
> the newspapers, in our public minds, in our fearful collective unconscious, is
> usually a woman's body. It drove me crazy, this casually murderous
> misogyny and how it silences the living, erasing depth, personality,
> difference, life. (Orford, "Writing Crime" 187)

This chapter will focus on literary representations of the most intimate form of
violence in South Africa, the prevalence and pathology of which has provoked public
outrage on a large scale: sexual violence. In the epigraph above, which is an extract
from "Writing Crime", a lecture presented at the University of Cape Town in 2010,
Margie Orford describes sexual violence as a mode of expression inflicted by, on,
and through bodies. Sexual violence, which involves an unbearably intimate,
asymmetrical encounter between bodies, is often depicted as a base, bestial, and to an
extent preverbal act. However, sexual violence does not occur in a discursive
vacuum or, in other words, outside of the field of representation. The violation of
another's body is an expression of power in which the politics of race, class, gender,
and crime combine. Therefore, acts of sexual violence are never meaningless but
profoundly symbolic.

Orford, dubbed the "queen of South African crime fiction", is the author of the popular Clare Hart crime fiction series which to date comprises the five novels, *Like Clockwork* (f.p. 2006), which is the main focus of this chapter, *Blood Rose* (f.p. 2007), *Daddy's Girl* (f.p. 2009), *Gallows Hill* (f.p. 2011), and *Water Music* (f.p. 2013). Orford's oeuvre reveals a wide-ranging concern with the vulnerability of the predominant targets of sexual violence in South Africa, that is, impoverished women and children. They comprise society's most vulnerable and unprotected sector, sorely wanting for financial, health, and legal assistance, secure shelter, not to mention educational resources. In her work as president of PEN South Africa, journalist, and writer of fiction, Orford concentrates on the vulnerability of women and children to many forms of sexual violence, including abduction, rape, prostitution, trafficking, femicide, domestic violence – the list goes on. Her work is not limited to the violence that frequents the socio-economic margins of South African society, but encompasses an array of distorted (power) relationships between men and women from various backgrounds, ranging from sadistic stranger to deranged domestic violence.

Each novel foregrounds a particular form of sexual exploitation in relation to a particular group of victims: Young women fall prey to abduction, rape, sexual trafficking, and femicide in *Like Clockwork*; homeless boys (referred to as street children) face prostitution and the threat of HIV/AIDS in *Blood Rose*; and little girls are kidnapped and killed in *Daddy's Girl*. In *Gallows Hill*, Orford considers the role of women in South Africa's troubled past as a centuries-old mass grave of slaves is unearthed; and in *Water Music*, a gifted female cellist goes missing. The body is central to all of these representations of physically violent acts in which women and children are strikingly portrayed as expendable, tradable, and in the ownership of men in post-apartheid South Africa. In *Daddy's Girl*, Clare conducts and films an

interview with Mrs Adams for her television programme, *Missing*. The woman, whose young daughter is missing, says: "'Tell me, Doctor.' Mrs Adams faced Clare's camera. 'What does one more little girl mean, in a war?'" (20). All acts of violence occurring in the novels bear, in varying degrees, the distinct imprints of the culture of hypermasculinity generally traced back to mass poverty and unemployment. In "Writing Crime", Orford affirms that, in *Like Clockwork*, she "stayed with the victims, the broken, mutilated bodies of rape survivors and femicide victims, those who had not outlived the assaults" (191), writing characters into being which bear the brunt – the physical scars, bruises, and wounds – of a markedly male brutality.

In four interrelated subsections, I will discuss representations of sexual violence and its effects on the embodied personhood of both victim and perpetrator. The chapter will concentrate on *Like Clockwork*'s depiction of how acts of sexual violence, as sexual derivatisation made manifest, script the identities of both victim and victimiser. I also discuss responses to the ubiquitous threat of violence and violation in South Africa, concluding the chapter by means of Orford's analysis of the Oscar Pistorius trial.

Given its engagement with the subject of the body under threat, crime fiction is arguably the most popular genre in the country today. Orford is part of a groundswell of fiction writers garnering attention in South Africa and abroad, including Deon Meyer, Mike Nicol, and Roger Smith. The genre's representation of the vulnerable body in South Africa comprises the necessary first step in my argument, as it clearly illustrates the relation between vulnerability, on the one hand, and discrimination as a form of conceptual self-defence, on the other. However, Orford's novel, as a work of crime fiction, differs from the other literary texts discussed in this thesis, given that vulnerability in this text largely remains a negative quality, a weakness to be

surmounted or avenged, as victims generally remain victims in scenes of criminal rape and violence. Whereas Orford's work builds on the notion of fear, the ensuing chapters all go beyond fear to develop discursive strategies that draw on the domain of the vulnerable body to destabilise the binary oppositions (male/female and victim/perpetrator, for instance) that motivate the genre.

Given that this chapter provides the first opportunity to illustrate fully the thesis's overarching argument, as outlined in the Introduction, I wish to drive home the centrality of language to this specific instance of the body's vulnerability, that is, sexual violence. Writing in the *Mail & Guardian* in 2015, Jane Rosenthal makes the argument that literature is valuable in post-apartheid South Africa because "[a] dip into the world of fiction, the lives of others, is one of the easiest and even most effective ways to learn, to lessen intransigence and ignorance". I hope to demonstrate that literature and literary analysis in South Africa do indeed fulfil this function, but also exceed it − and I do so with specific reference to Orford's debut novel, *Like Clockwork*.

2.2. The "Unbearable Intimacy" of Sexual Violence

> Violence is infused with pain, shame and fear, feelings that silence the victim, binding the victim's future to that of the perpetrator with an unbearable intimacy. (Orford, "Grammar" 221)

In "The Grammar of Violence, Writing Crime as Fiction", an article delineating the conditions and contexts that gave rise to the five Clare Hart novels, Orford states that "[t]he focus of [her] novels has been on the intimate effect − emotional as well as physical − of pain that is individual as well as social, a consequence of moral failure and violence" (220). In this section's epigraph from the same article (221), Orford places the victim's pain and silence (which are profoundly interrelated) in relation to

the person of the perpetrator who is, in this case, a rapist. The rape victim's inability to express or communicate the violation is associated with the inability to escape not only the repercussions of rape, but more specifically the lingering hold of the rapist. Speech, conversely, offers a means by which this conceptual grip might be severed.

As a point of departure for the following discussion of the "unbearable intimacy" of rape, I quote from three news reports to evoke an initial sense of the type of information that is currently in circulation on sexual violence in South Africa, the so-called (and arguably so) "rape capital of the world". The first-cited report, issued by the United Nations News Centre in 2013, states that,

> South Africa has the highest rates of rape reported to the police anywhere in the world, OHCHR [Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights] pointed out. In 2012, the number of rapes documented by the police rose to over 64,000 – or 175 per day. These figures are believed to considerably underestimate the true number of rapes, as many cases go unreported. ("South Africa Must Do More")

To cite another headline, this time by *The Guardian*'s Africa correspondent, David Smith: "One in Three South African Men Admit to Rape, Survey Finds" (2010). In another report, also from 2010, Smith refers to a few particularly dire cases of rape in South Africa, all occurring in the space of a few months:

> A female paramedic was raped by three men in Roodepoort while attending to a toddler who had suffered burn wounds. A 35-year-old doctor was hit on the head with a brick, overpowered and raped while on night shift at Pelonomi Hospital in Bloemfontein. Twelve women in central Johannesburg were allegedly lured to a hotel room and raped by a man due to appear in court next week.

Age is no barrier to the crime: a seven-year-old girl was repeatedly raped in school toilets by three boys aged nine, 11 and 11. An 11-year-old girl was allegedly raped several times by a 48-year-old caretaker at her primary school. A statutory rape incident involving a 15-year-old girl and two boys, filmed and distributed by classmates on mobile phones, has provoked renewed soul searching. ("Major Problem")

Two important academic works on the subject of rape in South Africa, Lucy Graham's *State of Peril: Race and Rape in South African Literature* and Deborah Posel's "The Scandal of Manhood: 'Baby Rape' and the Politicization of Sexual Violence in Post-apartheid South Africa", draw critical attention to the construction of rape in the post-apartheid imaginary, which is to a large degree shaped by media representations of sexual violence. Both scholars make the crucial point that increased awareness of, and intensified engagement with, the subject of sexual violence after apartheid – a conversation to which my study contributes – do not necessarily indicate an upsurge in the actual incidences of sexual violence. Following Posel and Graham, I make the introductory point that representations of sexual violence, including rape, are never politically neutral and, like the act of rape itself, embody a specific set of power relations. Posel considers the construction of the figure of the rapist, explaining how this figure grew to signify a depravity at the heart of the new democracy. She makes the astute observation that, in the new millennium, "[s]exual violence, then, had rapidly become a trope of degradation, violation and moral frailty in all its manifestations. Rape now exemplified the most fundamental political and moral challenges confronting the newborn democratic nation" (247).

The Rape Crisis Cape Town Trust, a prominent organisation of which Orford is patron, provides an authoritative list of the causes of sexual violence on its website, foregrounding, in the first instance, the culture of violence and crisis of masculinity

and, second, the country's political transition from apartheid. Substance abuse, homophobia, xenophobia, and poor socio-economic conditions are also considered correlated factors. Rape Crisis understands the prevalence of rape in South Africa in the context of the country's turbulent history, in particular the apartheid regime's "institutionalis[ation of] violence" and concomitant "perversion of [black and white] South African masculinities". The sentiment that "the home and the intimate lives of men became a battle ground for reclaiming power in another sphere" is reflected in the doctoral thesis of Orford's detective heroine, in which the fictional character argues that the "'unspent violence was sublimated into a war against women'" (*Clockwork* 22). The argument resonates with Fanon's influential statement from "Concerning Violence", a chapter in *The Wretched of the Earth*, that "[t]he colonized man will first manifest this aggressiveness which has been deposited in his bones against his own people" (52).

The following paragraph from *Daddy's Girl* is one example of many from Orford's work which demonstrate the centrality of the body, although this instance includes a particularly metafictional twist:

> "This is where my story is written," [Pearl de Wet] said. "On my body. Maybe I should start here. It's not the beginning but it is all part of the same book." […].
>
> She peeled back her clothes, revealing the script that bore witness to her secret. Tattoos, scars, cut marks – the slender white lines on her thighs – until she stood naked in front of the camera. Clare froze the image. A daughter of violence. (36-37)

In Orford's crime series, bodies are indeed texts which contain hidden messages – and it is Dr Clare Hart, the series's super sleuth, heroine, and primary "interpretive authority" (37), to use Sally Munt's term, who reads these bodies for a living. In

Blood Rose, "[t]he violent secrets encrypted on [the bodies of boys caught, killed, displayed, buried] turned Tamar's mind to Dr Clare Hart" (15). Set in Cape Town, *Like Clockwork* charts a course through various spaces in the city in which women find themselves vulnerable to violence and violation. The novel opens with the discovery of a young woman's corpse on the Sea Point promenade:

> [Clare] scanned the placement of the body, logging each detail with forensic precision.
>
> She noted the faint marks on the bare arms, bruises that had not had time to bloom. The girl's right hand was bound, transformed into a bizarre fetish. It had been placed coquettishly on her hip. Something protruded from the girl's hand, glinting in the low-angled sunlight. Her boots were so high that she would have struggled to walk. But she was not going anywhere: not with her slender throat severed. (9)

The police suspect the depraved hand of a serial killer, and call on Dr Hart to identify and find the criminal in her capacity as a criminal profiler with a PhD in femicide, and thus proficient in the language of violation. With a supporting cast consisting of her partner in detection and romance, Inspector Riedwaan Faizal, and forensic pathologists like Piet Mouton who "peel open any secrets hidden in the body" (Orford, *Blood* 45), Clare is constantly on the move in diverse Southern African spaces, deciphering the clues inscribed on bodies by violent perpetrators to intuit the identities, the personal histories and proclivities, of both victim and victimiser. In *Like Clockwork*, four raped and maimed female bodies turn up before Clare is able to crack the case, tracing the novel's villain, a killer-cum-rapist, to his lair. A concurrent strand in the novel is Clare's journalistic investigation of human trafficking, which relates to the brutal multiple perpetrator (or "gang") rape of her twin sister, Constance, an event which prompted Clare's decision to specialise in

criminal profiling decades ago. Near the start of the novel, she imagines Constance's body:

> Criss-crossed with scars, her thighs and breasts carried the knife emblems of the gang that had used her to initiate two new members. On her back, illegible now, were brutal signatures where they had carved their initials. Her left cheekbone was curved as sharply as a starling's wing, the other had been reconstructed out of the shattered mess left by a hammer blow that had glanced off her skull and spared her life. (45)

The "unbearable intimacy" of violence referred to in this section's epigraph, symbolised by the perpetrator's signature carved on Constance's back, is one of the dominant themes in Orford's oeuvre, including *Like Clockwork*. The novel not only depicts sexual violence, including that most intimate of violent crimes, rape, but casts physical violence as a whole as an intimate, and all the more destructive, mode of expression. In *Blood Rose*, for instance, Clare ponders the "'intimate death'" of street children in Namibia, formerly known as South West Africa, which is described in the text as "South Africa's Wild West" (192): "'Blood would splatter on your hands and face as you fire. Quite a sophisticated rush in a way, the symbolism of it: the union, the consummation'" (238).

The discourse of crime is in fact structured according to the unbearable intimacy of bodies forced together physically but also symbolically. Victim and perpetrator are, as this section's epigraph suggests, bound to each other at the level of language, trapped in an intimate dichotomy which defines one in relation to the other. In *Imagining Crime*, Alison Young describes crime as "a hall of mirrors in which the identities of offender and victim are significant only as the reflection of each in the other" (54). In so far as this mass body of knowledge revolves around the "dyad" or "couplet" of crime (Young 54), questions of identity and difference are vital to the

discourse. René Girard's *The Scapegoat* finds, at the etymological root of the concept of crime, the logic of differentiation. He observes that,

> constantly in our study of stereotypes […] [we] turn to words that are related: *crisis*, *crime*, *criteria*, *critique*, all share a common root in the Greek verb *krino*, which means not only to judge, distinguish, differentiate, but also to accuse and condemn a victim. (22)

Ultimately, the grammar of distinctions, or binary thinking, is a constitutive element of the discourse of crime, which is essentially a system of separation, of in/exclusion. It follows that the remainder of this chapter will focus on *Like Clockwork*'s clear depiction of the relation between crime and identity. To be precise, the unbearable intimacy of the binary opposition is central to Orford's representations of violent crime in contemporary South Africa. The novel locks characters in the offender-victim dyad, which is an intimacy, a form of closeness, at the level of representation which resonates far beyond the actual moment(s) of physical contact. Orford builds this interdependence of the victim's and perpetrator's identities into the language of the text as part of a representational strategy which I call "antithetic characterisation".

Given her overarching concern with sexual violence in particular, Orford's couplets of crime are principally gendered as she "concretiz[es] male sexuality in violence and aggression and female sexuality in vulnerability and trauma" (50), to cite Carol Smart's *Law, Crime and Sexuality*. Thus, Orford brings together crime and gender, two discourses founded on the logic of differentiation, by superimposing onto the crime dyad (offender-victim), the gender binary (masculine-feminine). The distinctly gendered depictions of sexual violence in Orford's work encapsulate how sexual violence locks, in the symbolic sense, both victim and perpetrator in gendered asymmetry. Although crime is always raced, classed, and gendered, the genre of

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crime fiction, as a rule, oversimplifies the complex ways in which these categories intersect. It must be noted that, in its exploration of a wide range of women's individual experiences of violence, violation, and victimhood, Orford's variety of liberal feminist crime fiction does at times challenge various stereotypes regarding women and the relationships with their aggressors. According to Jessica Murray,

> it is through Orford's relentless focus on the ubiquity of violence against women and girls that her work can be read as a form of feminist advocacy, albeit curtailed and compromised by the requirements of the genre. When Phiri mentions Clare's hypothesis about the cause of the gender violence in South Africa, he adds the following: "as she argues whenever she gets a chance" (28). Orford similarly brings her readers' gazes back to women's vulnerability "whenever she gets a chance". (69)

2.3. Antithetic Characterisation

The main plot line of the novel relates to Clare's investigation of a serial killer and rapist in Cape Town. In main events which serve to punctuate and drive the narrative, the bodies of three beautiful teenage girls are found successively: Charnay Swanepoel is discovered on the promenade, Amore Hendricks, between rocks in the sea, and India King, on the beach between palm trees. The three bodies have been precisely and publicly arranged in similar coquettish poses, each with a "bound hand" and "tarty clothes" (187). Following this trail of bodies, Clare is led into Cape Town's illicit sex trade, where she concurrently conducts interviews with abused women for her documentary on sexual trafficking.

The murderer, Clare eventually learns, is Otis Tohar, the wealthy business magnate and owner of Isis Clubs and Isis Productions, a company which produces pornographic films. Through the focalisation of Tohar's fourth victim, Theresa

Angelo, the reader experiences first-hand how he kidnaps the girl, ties her up in a chamber in an underground tunnel near the sea, undresses her, and forces her to watch a film of a young girl, Whitney Ruiters, being gang raped. The scene is alluded to in the two-page prologue, but only described in these final stages of the novel. Resistant to playing the part of the victim, Theresa manages to escape and is rescued by Clare, the book's heroine. After Tohar is taken into custody by the police, Clare falls into a deep sleep next to her lover, Riedwaan.

The prologue of *Like Clockwork*, and thus of the entire Clare Hart series, spotlights – fittingly, given the series's overarching concern with sexual exploitation – the vulnerable body of an anonymous girl (Whitney, as the reader will learn at a later stage) who is being held against her will by an anonymous captor. The prologue serves as a clear illustration of antithetic characterisation via a stark binary opposition that is engendered at the novel's start. Two totally divergent figures, referred to only as the "the man" and "the girl", act as the gendered poles, the two extremes or outer limits of characterisation, that need to be developed for the plot to progress. The prologue contrasts in every conceivable way the female captive, referred to as "the girl", to the male victimiser, "the man": The girl is as innocent, despairing, powerless, and, in a word, *vulnerable* as the man is culpable, callous and in control.

The captor is a sleazy, silk-clad smoker with "lean" wrists and a head that is "close-cropped and scarred in places" (1). Described as "uncoil[ing]" from a chair to pass through a sliding door to the girl's cell, the man's movements are portrayed as measured and languid: "He is used to power, there is no need to swagger" (2). When he reaches the girl, in the prologue's opening scene,

> [s]he looks at him, terrified. He finds this provocative. He holds out
> his hand to the girl. Conditioned to politeness, confused, she gives him hers.

He looks at it. Then he turns the palm – secret, pink – upwards. He looks into her eyes and smiles. He stubs the cigarette out in her hand.

"Welcome," he says. (1)

The victimiser traces, in refined malevolence, the physically present and distinctly feminine contours of the girl's body: the "secret, pink" palm (quoted above), the "plump mound of her thumb", "her long hair" (1), "the rounded chin, her soft throat" (2). Visibly focalised by the perpetrator, the sexually suggestive descriptions of her body further underscore his power over the girl.

"Many hours" (2) are said to pass between this scene and the next, and it is suggested that the girl, also called "the new consignment" (1) and "'[f]resh delivery'" (2), has been raped during this time – although the details of the event are only written in the main body of the work near its end. In the prologue, the reader finds the girl after the event, now

sit[ting] huddled in the corner of a room, unaware of the unblinking eye of the camera watching her. She is alone, knees pulled tight into her body. A blanket, rough and filthy, is wrapped around her. Her clothes are gone. She shivers, cradling her hand in her lap, the fingers trying to find a way to lie that will not hurt the burnt pulp at the heart of her palm. Her skin is tattooed with the sensation of clawing hands, bruised from her brief resistance. She hugs her knees. The effort makes her whimper. She cringes at the sound, dropping her head, unable to think of a way of surviving this. (2)

Characterisation, in this section of the novel, is achieved primarily through references to characters' bodies, as the omniscient narrator alternates short sentences that begin repeatedly with either "he" or "she", that is, the third-person pronouns marked for gender. Differences in appearance, manner, and degrees of composure, comfort, and mobility act as physical manifestations of a relation that is utterly

asymmetrical. Violence resides within the vast conceptual distance produced by the opposing subject positions, the anonymous "he" and the anonymous "she". Smart brings to light the unmistakable link between the logic of differentiation and physical violence:

> [W]e cannot move to a complete reconceptualization of rape and policies on rape as long as we hold to a belief in this essential [acknowledged and agreed upon] difference [between men and women] – and this is the epistemological point. This is because this very belief in essential difference is what is generative of the possibility of rape in the first place. We need to understand the construction of male and female sexuality and how they are rendered fundamentally different rather than taking this difference as our starting point. […]. If we continue to do this, I argue that we merely confirm law's construction of sexual difference rather than subverting it. We also, metaphorically, leave women rapable. (50-51)

Like Clockwork's prologue serves to posit three main questions or knowledge gaps which the reader fully expects the ensuing narrative to pursue and resolve: Who is "he"? Who is "she"? What happened to her, and will it happen again? Thus, in true whodunnit style, the identities of the victim and perpetrator are very much bound up with the unwritten violation that has occurred. As regards these stock identities, the prologue leaves no scope for nuance or complexity as it inscribes a seemingly unbridgeable divide between victim and victimiser from the start. Narratives of violence and violation, however, depend on the individuation of characters for the narrative or story of the crime to exist at all. As long as this rigid binary or deadlock of difference holds, the event remains unwritten. This means that, for the violation of "the girl" to enter language, the labels of victim and perpetrator need to be fleshed out into distinct personalities – a development which coincides with the progression

of the plot, which is driven by Clare's expert ratiocination. As is typical in detective fiction, the details of the crime emerge and enter the realm of the knowable only as the sleuth gradually pieces together the profiles of those involved in the crime. In embodying both conventionally masculine[4] and feminine traits, Clare acts as a mediator between the two extreme subject positions in the text. According to Munt, "[i]n the liberal notion of androgyny as 'balanced' [the heroine] no longer needs the external man, as she has incorporated him, or at least his 'best aspects', thus he can be excised by the narrative" (41).

2.4. The Cycle of Derivatisation

In the Introduction, I made brief mention of Ann Cahill's concept of derivatisation, which is essential to the thesis as a whole. Although the concept is applicable to all forms of asymmetrical social relations in which "one subject is reduced to the being of another" (*Objectification* x), Cahill's work, *Overcoming Objectification*, concentrates on gender specifically. Sexual derivatisation as a phenomenon concerns the one-sided "reflection, projection, or expression of [one] being's identity, desires, fears, etc" (*Objectification* 32) onto another. It refers to any process which constructs women (Cahill's primary subject) as vehicles for the negotiation of masculine identities, an unethical approach that always pertains to questions of gender, power, and vulnerability. In this understanding, a woman's subjectivity is completely reduced to, or derivative of, a man's frame of reference. The perception of women as extensions of male sexuality fails to recognise that they are in truth separate beings. In this sense, sexual derivatisation involves, in the words of feminist scholar Ngaire Naffine, "man […] only having sex with himself" (34) and can thus be described as "hom(m)o-sexual", which is Luce Irigaray's term (*This Sex* 171).

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[4] For a discussion of Clare's masculinisation, see Vincent and Naidu.

In the more detailed discussion that follows, I put Cahill's concept of derivatisation to work, referring to *Overcoming Objectification* in addition to its theoretical precursor, *Rethinking Rape*. Derivatisation is a conceptual tool which builds on *Rethinking Rape*'s considerations of the body's intersubjective and mutual construction, that is, in relation to and in relationship with other bodies (*Rape* 128). It follows that individual identity is always social, shared, and multi-perspectival. Cahill's concentration on sexual derivatisation (one of many forms) is particularly relevant to *Like Clockwork*'s depictions of sexual violence as derivatisation made manifest. Whereas sexual derivatisation relates to "unethical sexual interactions" which "[fail] to recognize the embodied other as radically distinct from the self" (*Objectification* 140), ethical relationships, conversely, require symbolic reciprocity rooted in the recognition of the other's alterity. In *The Politics of Reality*, Marilyn Frye explains that "it is a matter of being able to tell one's own interests from those of others and of knowing where one's self leaves off and another begins" (75), and Cahill, for this reason, equates Frye's notion of the "loving eye" with her own understanding of the "non-derivatizing look" (*Objectification* 46).

Rethinking Rape considers rape, the quintessential act of sexual derivatisation, as "an example of the exploitation of the vulnerabilities that an embodied intersubjectivity necessarily entails" (*Rape* 132). Rape is generally discussed in relation to three interrelated concepts: violence, sexuality, and power. As regards power, rape entails the overpowering of a victim in a very real, material sense – the body is pinned down, and its physical boundaries are breached and violated in the most intimate of ways. Rape, however, comprises a conceptual overpowering as well, in which the rapist, through the act of rape, exerts control over the representational contours of the victim's identity which then "becomes a one-way street, rather than the dynamic engagement that embodiment calls for" (*Rape* 132).

In the introduction to *Real Bodies*, Mary Evans aptly describes sexuality and race as "the contours within which the body […] has been constructed" (6). With this formulation in mind, rape can also be described as an assault on the body's contours, and as the appropriation of the language in which the other's body is defined. Before Tohar abducts the last victim, Theresa, "[h]is gaze *pinioned* her, moving languidly down her curves, then back to her face" (244, emphasis added). As Tohar strips Theresa of her clothes, after the act of kidnapping, he traces the contours of her naked body, leaving his bodily imprint, a "trail of slime", on her skin:

> The man's warm breath moved down her throat and neck, followed by a hand that traced the outline of her body without quite touching it. […].
>
> The man bent close, burying his nose in the hollow of her throat. Slowly he moved up towards her ear, breathing her in, sniffing for the essence of her. His wet lips left a trail of slime on her skin. (287-88)

In the instance of sexual derivatisation above, the derivatiser, Tohar, wrests control of the identity of the victim. Her subjectivity, agency and sexuality are wholly denied as he "reduc[es] [her] to a projection or mirror of […] his identity" (Cahill, *Objectification* 141). With reference to a female victim of rape, the rapist explicitly reduces her, figuratively speaking, to her sexual organs – to an open wound, so to speak. In and through the act, she is physically but also symbolically overpowered; the contours of her identity, pinned down, fixed, and flattened.

Like Clockwork abounds with bodies that have been marked on skin and flesh by violence in its materialisation of the forceful development or expansion of one person's identity to the detriment of another. In the novel's prologue, the reader encounters the first mention of a tattoo, although this is but a metaphor for the bruises on the girl's body: "Her skin is tattooed with the sensation of clawing hands" (2). Later on, in the main body of the work, physical and psychological scarring

assumes a more tangible form as Kelvin Landman brands the flesh of his victims' backs with a tattoo, which is his personal signature. Landman's victims include Clare's sister as well as Whitney, the young and frail girl discovered by Clare after having been severely assaulted and raped. After examining Whitney at the hospital, Doctor Erika September "felt certain that [she] had been burnt with a branding iron – just as her father had marked each year's new batch of heifers. 'There are cigarette burns on her hands and thighs too'" (137). As another instance, Cathy King watches, before committing suicide, a video recording of rape and torture. The film evokes her total subjugation as the rapists, including her husband, inscribe their literal and figurative signatures on her embodied being:

> She […] watched the film in which she starred, with her husband directing her gang rape. Here in her home. She recognised Kelvin Landman as she watched him twist and rip her clothes. […]. She watched as he used his beautiful knife to carve his initials delicately into her back, her hand reaching instinctively to touch the scar. (265)

The blows and scars inflicted on the surface of the body are the outward projection and manifestation of the aggressor's interpretation of self and other. Above and beyond the excision of brute strength, the perpetrator of violence exercises symbolic power over the victim's identity. In the case of rape, the victim's agency and particularity are wholly denied as the rapist expands and inscribes his identity, sexuality, and agency onto her body as an offshoot – or derivative – of his. In *Daddy's Girl*, for example, Graveyard de Wet imagines "[t]he patterns he'd make on [Clare's] skin – a canvas of the pain inside him" (339). In her seminal account of pain, language, and power, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, Elaine Scarry considers the intimate relationship between the torturer and the victim of torture, a consideration which is equally relevant to the relationship

between that of the rapist and the victim of rape. Scarry explains that "[w]hat by the one is experienced as a continual contraction is for the other a continual expansion, for the torturer's growing sense of self is carried outward on the prisoner's swelling pain" (56). To translate into the terms of Cahill's argument the relationship between the victim and rapist depicted in the scene above,

> [r]ape, in its total denial of the victim's agency, will, and personhood, can be understood as a denial of intersubjectivity itself. Here in a radical way, only one person (the assailant) is acting, and one person (the victim) is wholly acted on. This imbalance, in its total nature, renders the victim incapable of being truly engaged intersubjectively. The self is at once denied and, by the totality of this denial, stilled, silenced, overcome. (*Rape* 132)

Often, the bodies of Orford's victims are blank and broken, silenced and shut in their plight: a boy prostituting himself to an abominable older man is described as "[f]ifteen minutes of being there but not being there" and "drifting loose […] above the pool. Mind closed" (96); Whitney, the victim of rape, is described as "[a] rag doll broken by the sea of rage that battered her" (297); and in *Blood Rose*, as an instance from one of Orford's subsequent works, a pornographic film bares a drugged girl, "eyes glazed, limbs limp, a blank smile on her face" (265). Scrutinising the first victim's body "spreadeagled on the promenade in full view of anyone who cared to look" (*Clockwork* 3), forensic pathologist Mouton draws attention to the "incisions that formed a cross on the [victim's] cornea". "'It's like he was trying to cut out her tongue'" (17), he observes to Riedwaan.

The hypothesis that derivatisation involves the encroachment of one subject's identity, sexuality, and agency onto the body of another – that is, of *not* "knowing where one's self leaves off" – resonates with the motif of unbearable intimacy in Orford's work. In *Overcoming Objectification*, Cahill writes strikingly that rape

"forcibly reduces [women's] sexual being to that of another, thereby eclipsing their ontological distinctiveness. The two become one, and the one is the rapist" (141). For instance, in *Like Clockwork*'s climatic denouement, the reader is finally brought into the chamber where Tohar, whose identity has now been revealed, records on film the violation and murder of his young, female victims. By means of the focalisation of the final would-be-victim, Theresa, their relationship is couched as a depraved "union" or "consummation":

> Each [video] had been packed into a red heart-shaped box – the kind often used for wedding videos. Each box swung from a chain attached to a small hook. There was a twist of hair in the small plastic holder where the bride's name should have been inserted. At the end of the row of boxes was an empty hook. Theresa's heart pounded. *Her* hook. (*Clockwork* 294)

In this final sequence, sexual derivatisation reaches a pathological pinnacle. The following extract near the end of the novel demonstrates clearly how Tohar seeks to dictate interactions with his victim. In this straightforward illustration of the reductive projection of one being's desires onto the body of another, Tohar undresses Theresa in an attempt to strip her of her identity, forcing her into a different set of clothes indicative of his own personal fantasies:

> He pulled out a very short skirt and a transparent top. The underwear was sleazy and uncomfortable to wear. She put it on, biting back her repugnance as she slipped the blue garter onto her thigh. The boots were blue suede. They came halfway up her thighs. The boots and the clothes were tight. The man must have had someone smaller in mind when he'd bought them. (289)

To summarise, the novel does more than merely represent different forms of sexual violence; it casts sexual violence itself as a form of representation. Whereas violence is often associated with arbitrariness, chaos, and irrepressible instincts, acts of

violence often rearrange social definitions by conferring a role, a distinct identity, onto a victim which, in turn, shapes the character of, and empowers, the perpetrator. Sara Ahmed puts it well in "The Organisation of Hate": "violence against others is one way in which the other's identity is fixed or sealed; the other is *forced* to embody a particular identity by and for the perpetrator of the crime, and that force involves harm or injury" (351).

Cahill's framework is particularly useful to literary analyses, given its implicit concern with the ethics of representation. "[W]hen you have a camera you have power, pure and simple" (7), says Clare at the start of *Like Clockwork*, emphasising the power of representation. The novel engages with the representational dimension of rape or, in other words, with the symbolic struggle to represent the self. This is illustrated by the somewhat understated though no less important role of pornography in the novel. Firstly, sexual violence is situated in a contemporary context in which individual acts of sexual exploitation are multiplied by means of globally distributed films. Secondly, the reproduction and distribution of pornographic material also evoke a sense of the inescapability of the effects of rape on the individual's sense of self. Referring to a process of victimisation which knows no end because it is recorded on film, Natalie, a victim of sexual trafficking, tells Clare in an interview that she is "never over":

> "I am very ashamed. More than the men because now I am here the men are over. I am safe. But in my film I am never over. Always I do the things, do the things in the film." She wiped the tears that welled in her eyes. "Maybe if you find that film you will bring it back to me so that I can stop." (41)

Derivatisation aimed at an individual such as Natalie becomes emblematic of derivatisation against women as a group. Whitney makes a similar statement:

"Why did they do it? Why did they film it? That's what makes me feel sick. That they did that to me and now it's there for anyone to watch. It feels as if what happened is happening over and over and over. I can never stop it now because it's there on their tape." (*Clockwork* 203)

Thirdly, the camera's "unblinking eye" (2) acts as a metaphor for the manner in which rape ascribes fixed meaning to the body of the victim, meaning which is then captured on film in more ways than one. When Whitney sees herself reflected in the camera's eye during the filming of her gang rape (202), she perceives in effect the videographer's subjective representation of her body. The camera reflects Whitney's derivatised image which is fashioned according to another's fantasies, desires, and pathologies.

Sexual violence, it follows, does not cultivate nuance, chaos, and alterity but locks the victim and perpetrator in real, physical intimacy as well as in the intimate separation that characterises all binary oppositions. As "good" and "evil" are intimately entwined, the duality that runs through this chapter, that is, "victim" and "perpetrator", are defined simultaneously by opposition and in relation to one another. According to Young,

> [c]rime's images are structured according to a binary logic of repression. Oppositional terms (man/woman, white/black, rational/irrational, mind/body and so on) are constructed in a system of value which makes one visible and the other invisible. Thus, for example, the victim is currently marked as the essential term of the victim/criminal opposition. (1-2)

The first chapter in *The Body in Pain*, "The Structure of Torture: The Conversion of Real Pain into the Fiction of Power", comprises an in-depth exploration of the mechanisms of pain in the torture chamber which is especially pertinent to *Like Clockwork*'s representations of sexual violence. *The Body in Pain* makes two claims

about the subject of language and physical pain which help to reveal the link between physical and symbolic violence or, more specifically, between sexual violence and sexual derivatisation. The first claim relates to the "unmaking of the world" from the book's title, which refers to how physical pain can unmake or radically destroy language. The second claim develops this line of reasoning and relates to the reconstruction or "making of the world" that has been obliterated. It is possible to find a way back to language, although pain eludes full expression. Scarry's summation in this regard is as relevant to Orford's *Like Clockwork* as to the novels I will analyse in my thesis's ensuing chapters:

> A great deal, then, is at stake in the attempt to invent linguistic structures that will reach and accommodate this area of experience normally so inaccessible to language: the human attempt to reverse the de-objectifying work of pain by forcing *pain itself* into avenues of objectification is a project laden with practical and ethical consequence. (6)

To use these terms in reference to Orford's novel: How, then, is the suffering of the victims of violence rendered visible? Through which "avenues of objectification" are the traumatic experiences of these characters channelled?

Orford's representation of pain in *Like Clockwork* can be explained as what Scarry terms "'*analogical verification*' or '*analogical substantiation*'" (14):

> To have pain is to have *certainty*; to hear about pain is to have *doubt*. […]. If the felt-attributes of pain are (through one means of verbal objectification or another) lifted into the visible world, *and if the referent for these now objectified attributes is understood to be the human body*, then the sentient fact of the person's suffering will become knowable to a second person. It is also possible, however, for the felt-attributes of pain to be lifted into the visible world but now attached to *a referent other than the human body*. That

is, the felt-characteristics of pain […] can be appropriated away from the body and presented as the attributes of something else. (13)

In simple terms, physical pain is always seeking that vehicle or body through which it might enter language. Scarry refers to the "expressive potential of the sign of the weapon", as a prime instance of analogical verification which "visibly suggest[s]" "human hurt" (17). As the example of the torture tool suggests, the felt sense of physical pain is often concretely represented, that is, seen and spoken, via the cause or origin of that pain. In other words, pain becomes visible – that is, finds expression in, or enters language by way of the object inflicting the pain. For pain to become seen or spoken, the cause of the pain becomes necessarily objectified, set apart, even vilified. As regards rape, this means that the intimate pain of the victim becomes visible only as the malicious attributes of the rapist (the penis, the bottle, the fist, the knife, the lighter or cigarette) come into focus – and this finds expression in *Like Clockwork*'s representations of sexual violence.

In the following scene (the only passage in *Like Clockwork* that actually includes mention of the genitals of the perpetrator), Whitney's suffering is evoked not through any direct reference to the inner world or felt experience of her pain. Rather, the passage is an example of how physical pain is made visible through the near intuitive vilification of the weapon which, in *Like Clockwork*'s depictions of sexual violence, extends to the body of the perpetrator which, then, serves to lift the victim's pain into the visible world. Whitney's pain is evoked, specifically, through references to her "limp", "frail, bloodied body", her "meat", in addition to the predatory character of the men ("prowl", "hyenas", and "fell upon"):

> [Theresa] saw the four men prowl around the cowering girl like hyenas. The girl lifted her head. Her earrings – delicate crucifixes – flashed in the light. The men conferred briefly, then decided who was going to get her first, the

freshest meat. Then the first one fell upon her. The others helped – subduing a leg here, there an arm. That was only necessary at first. It did not take very long for her frail, bloodied body to go limp and then jerk unsatisfyingly. A rag doll broken by the sea of rage that battered her. By now, the men were bored. It was over. They straightened themselves up, wiped themselves clean. One lit a cigarette, flipping the match onto the girl, where it died on her skin. Theresa's flesh crawled when she saw the man kneel over the girl, unzip his pants, and place his penis in her unresisting mouth. His movements were rhythmic, swift, and then he stepped back, satisfied. The girl twitched onto her side and did not choke. (297-98)

To reiterate, the most significant aspect of the passage above, with reference to my argument, is how the representations of sexual violence in the novel push to the forefront the notion of the human body (the penis in the unresisting mouth) as weapon. To recall the concept of analogical verification, in *Like Clockwork* the physical pain of the victim is in actual fact personified by the body of the perpetrator. In other words, in the same manner that the weapon comes to stand for the pain it produces, the body-as-weapon of the rapist comes to symbolise the victim's suffering in the text. The conceptualisation of the figure of the rapist as an expression, or extension, of the victim's pain (by radical opposition) explains why the depictions of the perpetrators in the novel are stereotypical and one-dimensional at times, especially in comparison to the nuanced portrayals of female victims. The inflicter of pain, in the novel, does not constitute a life in so far as he is, according to Judith Butler's *Frames of War*, perceived as a threat to life (42-43). Within this chapter's framework, antithetic characterisation thus recovers and gives credence to the victim's pain, emphasising her humanity, vulnerability, and innocence through the overt simplification and vilification of the victimiser.

In "Writing Crime", Orford describes

> [t]he writer's gift: the small detail that evokes the whole, and provokes a
> sense of deep moral outrage: somehow I had to find a way of […] finding the
> intimate pulse of [the victims'] lives, of making them back into human beings
> again. Not these pared down metonymies of degradation and pain. (191)

Orford's fiction certainly speaks of the struggle to flesh out the identities of victims of sexual violence, starting at the scars. Her narrativisation of the effects of unbridled sexual violence against women and children stems from a desire on the author's part to do justice to victims' pain. In order to reinstate the agency of victims of violence, to make their pain and trauma visible, Orford deploys a particular strategy of representation in her fiction which is not only central to the genre but dominant in the South African imaginary of crime as well. I will call this representational process "counter-derivatisation", given that it involves the reversal of the direction of derivatisation that underlies and accompanies rape. *Like Clockwork* clearly simulates this process in which the victim reverses the derivatisation accompanying the rape in order to develop a new sense of identity. Orford specifically characterises her victimisers in such as a way as to give expression and validation to victims' pain. In other words, the rapist's expansion of agency and sexuality onto the body of the victim during the act of rape is *reversed* in Orford's work. Overturning the expansion of the rapist's identity onto her body, the victim of rape then uses the character of the rapist as a prime site for the renegotiation of *her* identity. Though problematic, the strategy of counter-derivatisation is remarkably innovative since Orford draws on the conventions of the genre, not to sexualise women as the tradition tends to do, but with the intention to empower and liberate them from restrictive subject positions.

Faced with the choice of engaging and emphasising the humanity of either the victim or the perpetrator, Orford's fiction understandably foregrounds the plight of the

victim. In order to establish the victim's pain, innocence, and lack of complicity, the text rules out any ambiguity as to the perpetrator's culpability. Close reading, therefore, suggests that *Like Clockwork*'s primary condition for the victim's "grievability", which Butler identifies as "a presupposition for the life that matters" (*Frames* 14), is the unambiguous malice of the victimiser, given that the recognition of the victim's lack of culpability, and the restoration of her dignity, rests to a large degree on the characterisation of the perpetrator as one-dimensional and vile. As a consequence, although Clare's satisfying sexual relationship with Riedwaan allows for the necessary complication of her condemnation of masculinity, *Like Clockwork*, for the most part, vilifies male sexuality. Recognition and grievability in the text appear to rely on difference and conceptual distance, but it is that very same opposition, as Smart has argued, that generates sexual violence in the first place. In so far as reverse derivatisation incorporates antithetic characterisation, the unbearable intimacy of sexual violence is rendered inescapable, given that the victim's agency is wholly contingent on her retaliatory, retributive, or defensive *counter*-derivatisation of the perpetrator.

It is only in fleshing out a new identity based on the recognition of the perpetrator's distinctiveness, humanity, and complexity, that is, an identity shaped in terms unrelated to that of the perpetrator, that the victim might actually be set free. The victim, therefore, can escape the fundamental intimacy of these enforced subject positions through the assertion of independence, agency, and individual desires or needs, of which Theresa's escape at the culmination of *Like Clockwork*'s plot is a pertinent example. Theresa is the last girl to be abducted and escapes the fate of the serial killer's former victims precisely by refusing to play the part of the helpless female, a role he tries to impose by force:

"I'm cold," she said. "Do you think I could have my clothes back?"

> He looked at her naked body. But Theresa's question had shifted something. Very briefly, he lost the power to direct the interaction. (289)

Refusing to be an offshoot, a by-product, of the male perpetrator's sexuality, she insists: "'My name is Theresa'" (295). This interaction between perpetrator and victim clearly evokes the struggle at the level of language and representation that characterises sexual violence and exploitation. Theresa is fighting over the right to define herself or, otherwise stated, claim ownership of her embodied subjectivity, and this comprises a noteworthy instance of how Orford modifies the male-dominated genre's long-standing reliance on the eroticisation of vulnerability. The text's nuanced engagement with generic conceptions of female sexuality, therefore, merits scholarly attention as she plies the conventions of the genre to trouble the scripts that are quite literally carved onto the victims' backs, albeit at the expense of the complexity of the character of the perpetrator.

2.5. The Stranger

Violence is a means to expel energy, to vent anger and frustration. It is a way of being seen, of forcing others to take notice. In his seminal paper on the six dimensions of violence, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research", Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung first developed the concept of "structural violence". Two prominent categories of violence include personal (or direct) violence and structural (or indirect) violence. What binds these two forms of violence is their relation to the vulnerable body. Vulnerability is the lifeblood of violence: it constitutes both its origins and effect. Hence, we might consider violence as an ongoing cycle of vulnerability, in which actors seek to control, and specifically conceal or overcome, their own vulnerability or openness to the world by exploiting that of others. As mentioned in the Introduction, grief need not engender further brutality, pain, and

suffering. In fact, as Butler's work suggests, community formation is contingent on relationships of mutual dependence, empathy, and trust. However, South Africa's notoriously high rates of brutal rape and murder suggest that its people have yet to develop strategies other than violence by which to grapple with the sense of uncertainty and disempowerment permeating all factions of society.

In this regard, the two foremost scholars on "risk society", Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens, maintain that modern life is characterised by risk. As Giddens explains in *Modernity and Self-identity*, life in risk societies is exemplified by ubiquitous "assessments of risk, and a proclivity for counterfactual thinking" (29) – or, what I simply put as, "what-if" thinking. "Risk", a broad term which includes the threat of violence above and beyond economic, environmental, and technological contingencies, incites "a calculative attitude to the open possibilities of action, positive and negative" (28). I situate forms of discrimination in South Africa firmly within the risk framework in order to suggest that South Africa's exceptionally high levels of risk have bolstered symbolic violence even if South Africans "know better" than to think in black-and-white terms. In Giddens's framework, the grammar of differentiation, of us versus them, has become a principal means of risk calculation, that is, of anticipating future derivations of danger. Galtung specifically mentions "personal violence and the threat of personal violence" as "factors" which "tend to uphold inequality" (31). He also suggests that "personal violence is also there the day, hour, minute, second before the first bomb, shot, fist-fight, cry" (27). Political economist Moeletsi Mbeki made a similar statement in 2015, warning that "South Africa is a bomb waiting to explode, all it needs is a little match to spark it and it will go up in flames" (cited in Matsilele). Within this climate of latent violence (which Galtung distinguishes from manifest violence), negative stereotypes abound as South Africans wait for what they perceive as an(other) inevitable encounter with a

malevolent other. In other words, the pervasive threat of violence holds negative effects equivalent to real acts of violence – as act and threat incite each other in a cycle of derivatisation.

In 2014, Orford made viral waves with her incisive coverage of the scandal (with a malevolent other at the core) that occupied many a South African television screen: the Oscar Pistorius trial. Nicknamed the "Blade Runner" from South Africa, Pistorius is a below-knee amputee and professional sprint runner who received much acclaim for his athletic achievements in both Paralympic and able-bodied events. Pistorius had recently been charged for the murder of his girlfriend, Reeva Steenkamp, whom he had shot, with a firearm, through a closed door in his home in Pretoria. Befitting a crime novel, the narrative begins with the corpse of Steenkamp, the glamorous, young model and apparent victim of an intimate partner dispute which occurred in the early morning hours of Valentine's Day 2013. The truth to be determined beyond reasonable doubt was whether Pistorius mistook Steenkamp for an intruder, as he claimed in his defence, or in fact murdered her in a fit of jealous rage. A definitive moment, Pistorius donned the 11 March cover of TIME Magazine with a caption that called his superhero status into question: "Man/ Superman/ Gunman".

Inspired by discourses of risk in contemporary South Africa, Pistorius's defence allowed commentators like Orford to excavate, what I identify as, the tension between the threat of personal violence, on the one hand, and symbolic violence, as the problematic means by which this threat is negotiated, on the other. Orford took to the case like a shark to blood, publishing in *The Guardian* a shrewd trio of analytical articles on the hearing: "Oscar Pistorius Trial: The Imaginary Black Stranger at Heart of the Defence", "Reeva Steenkamp Was a Victim of South Africa's Macho Culture", and "Oscar Pistorius's Trial Shows that this Society Lauds Men Who Act before They Think". Given her active concern with women's rights, Orford's

engagement concentrates on the sweep of especially sexual violence against women and children in contemporary South Africa, denouncing cultures of patriarchy and misogyny. True to form, Orford condemns in the second piece Pistorius's "aggressively swaggering masculinity" as "one that colours our social and political landscape. It is – as Steenkamp learned by making that fatal female error of being in the wrong place at the wrong time – pervasive, toxic and lethal" ("Reeva Steenkamp").

Questions of vulnerability strongly inform Pistorius's sensationalised defence and the plethora of responses it provoked: the vulnerability of South African bodies to violent crime, the vulnerability of women's bodies to domestic violence, and the powerlessness of men in an era of uncertainty, which, here, is made plain by Pistorius's actual physical disability. According to a transcript of his defence affidavit,

> "I am acutely aware of violent crime being committed by intruders entering homes with a view to commit crime, including violent crime. I have received death threats before. I have also been a victim of violence and of burglaries before. For that reason I kept my firearm, a 9mm Parabellum, underneath my bed when I went to bed at night. […].
>
> It filled me with horror and fear of an intruder or intruders being inside the toilet. I thought he or they must have entered through the unprotected window. As I did not have my prosthetic legs on and felt extremely vulnerable, I knew I had to protect Reeva and myself. I believed that when the intruder/s came out of the toilet we would be in grave danger. I felt trapped as my bedroom door was locked and I have limited mobility on my stumps." (Press Association)

The first of Orford's three articles, "Oscar Pistorius Trial: The Imaginary Black Stranger at Heart of the Defence", made a particularly pivotal contribution to conversations about the event's broader significance, about what it revealed about South Africa. Orford identifies alongside the two bodies of Pistorius and Steenkamp a *third* body "lurk[ing] in the shadows of this relentlessly covered story", which is the body of the imaginary intruder featured in Pistorius's account. Though "nameless and faceless", writes Orford, the phantom body of this "armed and dangerous", "threatening black stranger" – this third body in the courtroom – is an expressly raced and gendered intruder. Grounding the figure in "the paranoid imaginings of suburban South Africa", Orford explains to *The Guardian*'s readership that the fear of violence "has driven many South Africans into fortress-like housing estates, surrounded by electric fences, armed guards and the relentless surveillance of security cameras". Thus she contextualises Pistorius's defence, "that he was beset by an 'understandable' and 'overwhelming' fear of crime – a fear so great that it rendered him incapable of even the most basic thought and consideration" ("Men Who Act"). Safety precautions in South Africa, by those that can afford them, are certainly justified given the pervasive sense of vulnerability the country's high crime rates engender. Orford's article, however, serves as a springboard for a much-needed conversation on finding new ways to manage (middle-class) anxieties and fears, ways that essentially distance themselves from that "atavistic" and "pernicious narrative of 'us' against 'them'" ("Imaginary") so firmly embedded in the South African psyche by decades of minority domination.

Indeed, as Orford points out, Pistorius's plea relies heavily on the atavistic notion of the malevolent Other. As briefly set out in the Introduction, the Other has played an extended and destructive part in South Africa's history of colonialism and apartheid, and still prevails in South Africa's volatile climate. In post-apartheid South Africa

the ubiquitous threat of crime has to a great extent counteracted attempts to eradicate discriminatory categories of difference. Jack Wood and Gianpiero Petriglieri posit a useful concept in this regard, that of "regressive" "polarization" (31). Carved out of chaos, an imaginary form or figure, that is, a body, face, or set of features, is projected onto opaque threats. In uncertain times, these regressive stereotypes function as coping and/or defence mechanisms that aim to "make the world predictable" (31) and, so doing, provide some semblance of control.

The Scapegoat develops the related idea of the scapegoat mechanism by which a community blames a body (whether individual or collective) for its sins, rendering the individual or group liable to expulsion. The community seeks to regulate itself, maintain order, and manage its vulnerability by projecting the origins of tension or conflict, with prejudice, onto this body. Stereotyping's dangerous, discriminatory shadow, the scapegoat mechanism operates at the core of the hate crime, which is an act of violence motivated by bias. According to Ahmed's *Strange Encounters*, the stranger, like the scapegoat, is "a category within knowledge, rather than coming into being in an absence of knowledge" (55). In other words, it is "not *any-body* that we have failed to recognise, but *some-body* that we have already recognised *as* a stranger, as 'a body out of place'" (55). This understanding of the scapegoat is especially relevant in light of the recent wave of violent xenophobic attacks against foreign nationals. Ahmed explains that

> [t]he economy of xenophobia – the production of the stranger's body as an impossible and phobic object – involves, not just reading the stranger's body as dirt and filth, but the re-forming of the contours of the body-at-home, through the very affective gestures which enable the withdrawal from co-habitation with strangers in a given social space. (*Strange* 54)

Whether fact or fiction, the Pistorius courtroom narrative is a clear-cut illustration of how the exigencies of the material body, its vulnerability to violence in this case, keep registers of difference and accompanying negative stereotypes, or scapegoats, in circulation. His account thoroughly demonstrates how, when ethically defensible coping mechanisms are found wanting, and fear cannot be effectively managed or channelled, identities of self and other petrify in crude self-defence. As Orford observes, "[i]n that unyielding construct of threat and danger, of your death or mine, there is no middle ground, no compromise and no space for thought or language" ("Imaginary"). The "phantom stranger", the "criminal bogeyman", and the "scapegoat" are all manifestations of a single concept that endures precisely because it erases middle grounds and grey areas, and tames ambiguities and entanglements. Its tenacity is, in other words, a direct consequence of its inflexibility.

At best, a scheme of self-preservation and, at worst, a form of representational revenge, counter-derivatisation is therefore associated with both manifest and latent violence. As illustrated by the prevalence of negative stereotypes, including the figure of the rapist, the criminal, and the stranger, it is latent counter-derivatisation especially that has characterised, and continues to characterise, social relations in South Africa. Latent counter-derivatisation is particularly problematic because it imagines an actor or perpetrator – based on a community's body of knowledge, that is, its history, crime statistics, and mythology – where there is none. It is, however, necessary to realise that South African writers and non-writers alike all contribute, equally and collectively, to this script of negative race-, class-, and gender-based stereotypes. The upsurge of crime fiction's popularity in South Africa has also given rise, in recent years, to a debate on the literary merit of the genre. The so-called "genre snob" debate pits two views on the role of crime fiction in South Africa: one camp argues that crime fiction has replaced the highly politicised resistance novel of

apartheid's final decades; the other emphasises the constraints of a genre that, albeit socially engaged, seeks to provide easy entertainment and escapism above all. To make my contribution to the debate, any sort of engagement with fixed categories of identity in South Africa cannot be deemed anything but political, irrespective of whether it yields to the lure of stock characterisation, on the one hand, or takes the literary high road, on the other. As Jonathan Amid and Leon De Kock convincingly argue, "[r]ather than being 'accidental' in its socio-political evaluations, the genre is in fact buttressed by its engagement with real-world issues" (60).

According to Chris Warnes in "Writing Crime in the New South Africa" crime fiction in South Africa exploits the current climate of latent violence, which the genre in a sense defuses in its exploration of various possible manifestations, outcomes, or "what-if" scenarios. Warnes argues:

> Always associated with anxiety, threat is to be located in the murky spaces between events, words, and feelings; it is an infinitely more labile – and creatively productive – concept than is danger. "Negotiating threat", part of the work that crime fiction does, means building bridges between physical and affective worlds, identifying and naming danger, managing the sources of fear, deciphering the hidden codes that govern the possibility of violence and death. It means bringing the subject closer to the image of the grotesque that haunts everyday reality, symbolically defusing its power, offering a glimpse of catharsis, and promising the restoration of order. (985)

Crime fiction embodies threat, personifies danger, and puts a face on crime, thus producing fictional scapegoats to carry the burden and blame of South Africa's problem of violence. The crime novel's greatest drawback, from a moral standpoint, thus also comprises its greatest appeal: An *ad hominem* approach to law-breaking, in

which the crime and the criminal, the monstrous act and the monster, are rendered indistinguishable.

Many of Orford's male villains are rooted accordingly in undemanding, simple stereotypes which set male sexuality against female sexuality or aggression and abuse in direct opposition to naiveté. Orford's coverage of the Pistorius hearing appears to suggest that no level of danger justifies the negation of another's humanity – whether that entails firing a gun through a closed door or reverting to racist, classist, and/or sexist stereotypes. Although it comes with the crime fiction territory, the unambiguous, one-dimensional vilification of (many) male characters is nevertheless an unfortunate shortcoming of Orford's fictional engagements with sexual violence in post-apartheid South Africa, even if her representational strategies speak of feminist concerns.

Warnes remarks that, "[i]n conjuring this violence as spectacle, Orford runs the risk of reinforcing some of the very delusions that impede the feminist struggle she is claiming to wage" (990). Elizabeth Fletcher also offers a cautious point of criticism against Orford's third novel, *Daddy's Girl*, concerning the portrayal of "[t]wo important male figures, Voëltjie Ahrend and Graveyard de Wet" (207), a list to which we might add *Like Clockwork*'s Kelvin Landman, a ruthless gangster, pimp, human trafficker, and rapist. These figures, writes Fletcher,

> are given little depth and appear almost to be caricatures of Cape Flats gangsters. While Orford's approach might have been to divest these murderous men of their individuality and humanity to make them all the more disturbing, the ideological implication is that the wealthier, more sophisticated characters are given depth while those based in the outer reaches of the poorer Cape Flats are represented as less interesting and less capable of growth. This reliance on these stereotypes perpetuates negative

assumptions about the Cape Flats being a domain of drug abuse and gangsterism. (207-8)

Ultimately, it is a question of the type of language used to address (the writer's choice of) social concerns – which means that Orford's work in its entirety, in its adherence to crime fiction's constrictive conventions like stock characterisation, cannot achieve the measure of inventiveness encountered in literary texts by Wicomb (see "Skin") and Steinberg ("Blood"), for example. Orford concludes "The Grammar of Violence" by acknowledging that,

[a]fter Marikana, however, I am at a loss as to how to engage fictionally, in an ethical manner, with the incomprehensible complexity of violence of South Africa. I may have erred profoundly in imagining that (crime) fiction might be a means of finding a way back, after the obliterating effects of violence, to some semblance of a language: a different language, an empathic language, a language that speaks of resilience and survival. (229)

As Orford herself admits, her writing is very much bound to the conventions of the crime fiction genre – restrictions she nevertheless tests by placing a woman sleuth at the series's heart, in addition to highlighting the severe plight of woman and children vulnerable to sexual violence and exploitation. In connection with the female victims of rape and other forms of sexual violence, *Like Clockwork* does make great strides in giving voice to trauma and facilitating recovery in a language that aims to transcend victimhood. In Orford's own words from "Eminently Exportable", a piece published in the *Mail & Guardian* in 2009: "The average crime novelist will give you what you paid for – plot, character, action, resolution, some good sex. Good crime writers will give you a lot more".

3. SKIN:

Zoë Wicomb's *Playing in the Light*

3.1. Tact and Tactility

> Identity is not only about contemplation of being; it is bound up with the body and the ways in which we experience the ground beneath our feet, and rest our eyes on a familiar landscape. But then different groups in South Africa experience these differently. (Wicomb, "Writing and Nation" 189)

Focusing on concerns which are eloquently put by Zoë Wicomb in an interview with Stephan Meyer and Thomas Olver, this chapter develops my consideration of identity as "bound up with the body" in post-apartheid South Africa, a body situated within and shaped by overlapping communities and contexts. Enriched by the author's critical understanding of postcolonial and literary theory, Wicomb's fictional texts themselves are shaped in their interactions with both real and other textual bodies, including historical and literary narratives. Delving into her country's "archive [...] of skin and bone", to borrow a phrase from Sara Ahmed's "Racialized Bodies" (49), Wicomb draws attention to the literal and metaphorical skins that affect social interaction between bodies.

In 2013, Wicomb earned international acclaim as one of three inaugural recipients (which also included Jonny Steinberg) of the Windham-Campbell Prizes. Spanning three decades, her fictional oeuvre, including *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* (f.p. 1987), *David's Story* (f.p. 2000), *Playing in the Light* (f.p. 2006), *The One that Got Away* (f.p. 2008), and *October* (f.p. 2014), problematises totalising discourses, most notably categories of racial and gender identity against the background of South Africa's transition from white minority rule to democracy. *Playing in the Light*,

Wicomb's second novel and the central focus of this chapter, portrays the delicate equilibrium between bodies segregated by race, class, and gender in post-apartheid Cape Town. The protagonist, Marion Campbell, a woman classified as "white", learns that her parents were so-called "play-whites" during the apartheid era. The term refers to persons categorised as "coloured" under the apartheid regime who pretended to be "white" to gain access to what Stéphane Robolin's constructive reading of the novel calls "the properties of whiteness", "properties" explained as "both unique qualities *and* legally protected possessions" (351). The discovery that Marion is in fact "coloured", a controversial category of racial identity underpinned by a history of miscegenation, shame, and indeterminacy (of being neither "black" nor "white"), wrenches her from her seat of white insulation and into the streets of South Africa's turbulent, variegated past. As she begins to explore her genealogy in relation to the history of the country, she starts to immerse herself more fully in the world around her, establishing friendships which contribute greatly to her personal development. Though convoluted, Marion's relationships expose her to alternative perspectives which in turn broaden her own, shaping a new identity or figurative skin through which to experience the world.

In *Playing in the Light*, Wicomb purposely underscores the continuities between apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa and the challenges involved in surmounting entrenched racial categories "pot-bellied with meaning" (*Playing* 106). In her contribution to *Writing South Africa* (edited by Rosemary Jolly and Derek Attridge), "Shame and Identity: The Case of the Coloured in South Africa", Wicomb writes that

> the newly democratized South Africa remains dependent on the old
> economic, social, and also epistemological structures of apartheid, and thus it

is axiomatic that different groups created by the old system do not participate equally in the category of postcoloniality. (94)

Through its portrayal of a woman, who defines herself as white, coming to terms with her parents' overtly racialised sense of identity, *Playing in the Light* confronts the hierarchies encoded by apartheid, interrogating categories of racial identity and their supposed properties. In particular, the novel explores the uniquely personal experience of racialisation, of living within a racialised skin, as the façade of whiteness crumbles. The text also considers the extent to which a racialised subject might feel at home in her own skin, and relate to others across this affected interface.

In "Culture beyond Color?", Wicomb writes that it "seem[s] clear […] that an interracial culture is a long way off – that to think of an achromatic writing is simply premature, if not altogether a mistake" (28). As noted in the Introduction, statistics demonstrate that race continues to be a significant factor in community formation and identification. In *The Book of Skin*, Steven Connor understands skin "not in the fixated terms of surface, boundary or container, holding apart self and world [...] but rather as a milieu, mingling and manifold" (282), as the meeting place of body and world which facilitates contact and communication. Connor's main contribution to research on the body lies in moving beyond the usual concern with skin's cultural inscriptions to outlining the "work of sensations in cultural forms" (259). The description of the skin as milieu (which Connor borrows from one of his major influences, Michel Serres) enables considerations of the processes and effects of racialisation, which I described in the Introduction in relation to Ann Cahill's concept of derivatisation. By insisting on the synonymity of skin colour and status, thus devaluing and disempowering the individual's primary interface with the others, processes of racialisation profoundly affect her mingling with the world.

Playing in the Light shares with Margie Orford's crime fiction a concern with how the grammar of differentiation underlies social relations in post-apartheid South Africa. However, Wicomb's novel goes one significant step further in that she explores how new social proximities might unsettle and even transcend hegemonic categories of identity. A number of critics have provided valuable accounts of Wicomb's dismantling of master-narratives related, especially, to race and gender, including "The Struggle over the Sign" by Dorothy Driver, "The Archive, the Spectral, and Narrative Responsibility" by Andrew van der Vlies, and the abovementioned "Properties of Whiteness" by Robolin. Building on these readings, this chapter concentrates less on Wicomb's representations of skin's *visibility*, in its relation to colour and race, than on its tactility, in other words, on its ability to touch and be touched by others.

In an interview, Wicomb explains that "it's important to have chaos on the page, an alternative to the camouflage of coherence that socio-political structures are about" ("Interviewed by Eva Hunter" 92). This chapter considers a particular, somewhat overlooked, means by which Wicomb disrupts the illusion of coherent categories of racial identity, that is, a thematics of touch. It is because the thematics of touch plays such a subtle and significant part in *Playing in the Light* that I have chosen to draw attention to the nuanced depiction of tactility that threads through the novel's representations of social interaction.

In "Sex", the analysis of Orford's *Like Clockwork* focused on brute physical violence between bodies. In this chapter I ask what form a different kind of bodily contact might assume given South Africa's complex history. In the country, touching bodies have always been regulated by race, complicating uninhibited communication between groups that were segregated by law on the basis of skin colour. When it comes to these delicate matters, South Africans generally display a heightened sense

of political correctness and social sensitivity, given that attempts to understand the other might be construed as drawing the other into the realm of selfsame or, in Cahill's terms, subjecting the other to processes of derivatisation.

At a Yorkshire African Studies Network workshop in 2015, Orford made a humorous comment: "South Africans are the nicest people when they're not trying to kill you" (Orford, *Culture and Politics*). Indeed, for all the anxiety about violence in the country, South Africans from vastly dissimilar backgrounds mingle violently, but also exuberantly, intimately, and *politely*: in supermarkets, car parks and taxi rinks, at the hairdresser's and the post office – in other words, in the shared public spaces beyond the boundaries of township and suburb. Following Wicomb, I wish to make the point that South Africa, thus far, has not developed to the extent that different races might embrace one another without restraint, openly and equally. Reciprocity between races is still thwarted by apartheid's legacy of social asymmetry. Although the prevalence of interracial intimacy, including romantic and platonic relationships, are only gently on the rise, South Africans on a daily basis do interact with one another in more restrained, though no less, amicable ways, through pleasantries at the cash register or handshakes between colleagues.

The debate sparked by "The Spear", the controversial crowning jewel in Brett Murray's satirical "Hail to the Thief II" exhibition, demonstrates the complexities of race and representation in post-apartheid South Africa. The painting, which showed at the Goodman Gallery in 2012, parodies the agitprop poster, "Lenin Lived, Lenin Lives, Lenin Will Live Forever!" (Ivanov). The poster's title derives from *Vladimir Ilyich Lenin*, an extensive poem written after Lenin's death by the Soviet poet, Vladimir Mayakovsky. Murray made two significant alterations to this poster: firstly, the artist substituted the face of the communist leader with that of Jacob Zuma, the

country's president and leader of the ANC, and, secondly, he equipped the figure with an exposed penis.

The general consensus in South Africa is that a satirical painting displaying the president's genitals is neither an effective nor intelligent means of criticising Zuma's inadequate leadership, corruption, or philandering. On the other hand, "The Spear" did provoke a second artwork, if you will, when Barend la Grange used a brush to paint two red crosses over, first, Zuma's face and, then, his exposed genitals. This controversial act of iconoclasm was shortly followed by another: Louis Mabokela, who had travelled from Tzaneen to Johannesburg with the explicit purpose of restoring his president's honour, of saving Zuma's face as it were, smeared with his own hands black paint over the canvas. *Independent Online* reported that, "[b]efore his brief appearance at the Hillbrow Magistrate's Court, Mabokela said he was proud of what he had done. Smiling broadly, he said: "'I feel free because the president is covered already'" (Knoetze and Maphumulo).

The defacement of "The Spear" emphasises the persisting sense of violation associated with the white, elitist perspective, a detached gaze from the height of privilege. It speaks of a world of metaphorical skins understandably thin, injured, and sensitive to scrutiny. Mabokela's act of hiding the body from sight, by smearing with his hands a new skin for Zuma, is one of many events in contemporary South Africa demonstrating the need for greater sensitivity and tact regarding interracial representation and communication. Ironically a remnant of colonial civility, tact has emerged in South Africa's fledgling democracy as one of the dominant modes of empathetic engagement, of expressing respect for the other's distinctiveness in the context of gross socio-economic inequalities.

Since identity is understood as bound up with the body, the communication of identity in social settings is equally embodied. In Wicomb's novel, tact, as a sociability, is bound up with the body's tactility, with its ability to touch and feel. By appealing to the material domain of the skin, the meeting place of word and world, Wicomb models social relations on the reversibility of touch.

The remainder of this chapter considers types of social interaction across racial, class, and gender divides specifically in terms of the "skins" that facilitate or restrict contact and communication between Wicomb's fictional bodies. In particular, I will focus on three prominent modes of sociability in *Playing in the Light* which are imagined in terms of real and metaphorical skins as well as concomitantly modelled on touch and sensation. I refer to these domains of human interaction, which are not so much opposed as interconnected and problematised, as isolation, exposure, and tact. The last of these will be discussed as a synthesis between the two interrelated extremes of, on the one hand, confinement, and, on the other, displacement. Neither wholly disengaged nor inappropriately inhibited, tact allows for the intersubjective constitution of identity in a context which is not yet conducive to unreserved intimacy. It is a way of being vulnerable towards others in precarious contexts without lapsing into the negation of self and/or other.

3.2. The Veiled Touch

Those tightly wrapped days did not admit friendship. (Wicomb, *Playing* 61)

Playing in the Light opens on the liminal space of the balcony, "the space both inside and out" (1), with Marion, a "cold blooded" (22) single woman in her late thirties, wrapping the dead speckled guinea fowl at her feet "in a shroud of sage green" (1). A similar veil surfaces in a short story called "Disgrace" in Wicomb's subsequent collection *The One that Got Away*, in which the domestic worker Grace covets her

employer's scarf "which [she] must say is the most beautiful thing she has ever seen. Silk, she supposes, and in shimmering blues and greens that flow into each other, exactly the colour of the sea on Boxing Day, although she no longer gets to the sea" (20). The shimmering blue silk is also reminiscent of the "water-silk gown in shimmering aquamarine" that Marion's mother Helen Campbell loved but never wore for fear of being outmoded. These second metaphorical skins or veils associate wealth and privilege with longing, liminality, and detachment and depict Marion's predominant mode of interaction with the world as a touch that is veiled.

Described as "squeamish about touching" (*Playing* 1), Marion has barricaded herself in a "secure" and "inviolable" (2) luxury apartment with a "cocoon of draped muslin" for a bed where "the noise of the world [is] dampened to a distant hum" (2). Although Marion is the proud owner of MCTravel, a travel agency "she has built from scratch" (25-26) and runs with "clockwork precision" (26), she is horrified by the impermanence and ambiguity, or the loss of secure boundaries, that travelling entails. Instead, she prefers "seeing the world on film or television" (40). Hers is a life filtered through screens and felt through shrouds.

Marion lives alone and friendless, convinced that other people pose a threat to her sheltered existence. The thought that Brenda Mackay, the new, young, and (significant, given the changing times) coloured employee, might visit Marion's flat, the walls of which symbolise her rigid defence mechanisms, sends Marion into a panic that "rise[s] systematically from her feet, as if she is slowly, stiffly being lowered into icy water" (71). Somewhat amusingly, the problem is attributed to "CHAOS", the "Can't Have Anyone Over Syndrome" (71). The inability to socialise is mirrored in her aversion to touch, which, as a recurring metaphor for social contact, associates Marion's insulation with a general lack of feeling. On the "stoep" (veranda) of her aging father John Campbell's house, for example, she "pinches off

the dead leaves of the geranium […]. Marion probes gingerly with a finger. […] – damn, she's ruined her newly varnished nail" (9-10). The idea of dirt and filth disgusts her and she "shudders at the thought of a nest, so close by, where rodents copulate and dozens of filthy little rats come to life". Although she sympathises with "their vulnerability", "the revulsion cannot be overcome" (24).

On Saturdays, Marion dutifully visits her father. The snippets of memory from her "dry, white childhood" (102) (which is a reference to Serote's poem, "For Don M. – Banned"), which are released ever so gradually as the narrative unfolds, suggest a loving relationship between father and daughter, but there is nonetheless a "guardedness", "an uneasy edge to their love, a fringe of cloud" (3). Marion resents her deceased mother, Helen, who was "a calculating woman with no conscience, no heart, no shame" (117) with whom "it [was] hard to imagine any intimacy" (49). Helen's "carapace" (70), "her moulded steel plates, ill-fitting bolts and scraps of rusted corrugated iron, like the sculptures made by township artists" (175) extends to a suspicion of outsiders, including Marion's childhood friend, Annie Boshoff, who paid frequent visits to their house. "Thankfully", Helen "died a self-willed and efficient death" (4) after a bitter, quarrelsome marriage with her husband. Marion's memory of a barren childhood during which her parents locked her, others, and even each other out, is depicted in terms of wrappings or layers of confinement, as "endless dreary rows of parcelled days, wrapped in tissue paper" (61) of secrets and lies, "each with its drop of poison at the core" (61).

On the first call to John's house described in the novel, in a scene marked by racial slurs, Marion considers sending for a gardener to manage the "mice, rats, snakes even, who'd have no regard for the threshold of the back door" (13) of the house. As she is about to leave, she receives a call from the armed-response company she employs warning her of a possible robbery at her office, at which John launches into

a rant: "Look what's happened: kaffirs and hotnots too lazy to work, just greedily grabbing at things that belong to others, to decent people" (14). Marion's own response to the burglary encapsulates her contemptible ignorance at the start of the novel: "Shot them down like flies, Marion hopes, then revises the thought – she wouldn't like to trip over dead bodies" (15). The episode swathes the outside world that threatens to penetrate "her little kingdom" (16) in filth and moral decay and, when Marion inspects her office after the breach, she senses a slight change in the environment:

> This evening, the order of glass and chrome and matt-black furniture is subtly undermined by something else, which she can't quite put her finger on, a whiff of something that makes her stop to sniff for explanation. But it is not a smell; there is nothing to identify, so perhaps she should go home. (16)

In "The City: The Sewer, the Gaze, and the Contaminating Touch", Peter Stallybrass and Allon White's understanding of the balcony in nineteenth-century literature suggests an elite, elevated space separating the surveyor from the working classes and their imagined contaminating touch, yet allowing the desiring gaze free reign: "From the balcony, one could gaze, but not be touched" (274). From Marion's balcony, a fitting symbol of elitism, insulation, and privilege, she is able to see the "finger-wagging Robben Island" (45) – the symbol of the new democracy – from afar, and to enjoy the natural beauty of Cape Town's surroundings while keeping the city's harsh socio-economic realities at bay. However, all is not well in Marion's dominion. Redolent of the vulnerability felt by the white minority during apartheid – which itself was a protective device responding to feelings of vulnerability – the barriers of her detached privilege ensnare and confine her: "[F]or a moment, she seems to gag on metres of muslin", a "fabric that wraps itself round and round, into a shroud from which she struggles to escape" (2).

One morning at the office, Marion tells her indifferent employees of a recurring dream. In her dream house, which is a building pulsating with light, "all the doors and windows are shut; the woodwork is painted black" (31). This description is reminiscent of Breyten Breytenbach's poetic statement in *The New York Review of Books* in 1977 that the white man's "windows are painted white to keep the night in". Marion's parents "were always meticulous, neurotic really, about curtains" (*Playing* 10), the white lace veils that sheltered them from scrutiny. According to Breytenbach, apartheid, as

> a distance of mind, a state of being, the state of apartness [...] has effectively
>
> managed to isolate the White man. He is becoming conditioned by his lack of
>
> contact with the people of the country, his lack of contact with the South
>
> African inside himself.

Although the era of apartheid came to an end in 1994, Marion is still very much "sealed in [her] whiteness" (Fanon, *Black Skin* 1968: 11) in quite a peculiar manner that is simultaneously emblematic of the disconnected state of white privilege after apartheid. Referring to Jean-Luc Nancy's philosophy of touch in "The Ethics and Politics of the Handshake", Rosalyn Diprose considers the effect of isolation on the embodied subject, explaining that an integrated sense of self comes into being only within a community: "[B]odies signify their uniqueness and are the expression of meaning, through community, by being exposed to other bodies" (240). In this sense, Marion's overt discrimination towards the working class in particular[5] can be understood in terms of a "politics of exclusion" (240). Marion sees these supposedly impudent, lazy "skollies" (*Playing* 28), these "opportunistic layabouts of Cape Town" (25), as "a flock of unsavoury people crowding around you, making demands,

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[5] Marion leaves the "parcel of the bird" for her domestic worker, whom she never sees, to dispose of – "[o]ne never knows what uses such people might have for a dead guinea fowl" (1), she thinks.

trying to make you feel guilty for being white and hardworking, earning your living" (28). In "Five Afrikaner Texts", Wicomb writes "that being invisible to itself [whiteness] cannot acknowledge its existence, that it can only articulate itself in terms of the markedness of black, the contract which supplies the meaning of white as the norm" (371).

As another instance of the rich intertextuality of Wicomb's work, "the long house" of Marion's dream, "stuffed inside the house" where she lives, which "in turn is stuffed into the four-poster" where she lies dreaming (30) solicits a comparison with an image from a novel Marion reads at a later stage, J.M. Coetzee's *In the Heart of the Country*. The narrator Magda futilely tries to break through patriarchal confinement, writing: "I live inside a skin inside a house. There is no act I know of that will liberate me into the world. There is no act I know of that will bring the world into me" (10). Magda's struggle to find her own voice, to find a language of equal relations, resonates with Marion's inability to signify her own uniqueness. Her insulation "impacts not just on the bodies targeted, but also on the bodies it is designed to unify and protect. This loss of meaning will be lived by these bodies, not as an open sense of belonging, but as a loss of the familiar and, in the extreme, as violent discord" (Diprose 240).

It is not long, however, before Marion's wrappings of isolation are pierced, setting in motion the gradual deterioration of her seclusion and apathy. From a large colour photograph on the front page of the *Cape Times*, the eyes of Patricia Williams look directly and accusingly into Marion's. Williams, a young, coloured woman participating in the TRC's hearings, having suffered at the hands of the white Security Police during apartheid, seems strangely familiar to Marion. Perpetually projected onto multiple surfaces, like the drapes of her bed, Williams's face takes to haunting and persecuting Marion, awakening in Marion an unexpected interest in the

TRC hearings and a growing awareness of apartheid atrocities. Like her bed which she imagines "grow[ing] into the room, fill[ing] it, grow[ing] large as a ship in which she […] flounders" (54), Marion finds herself suddenly submerged in the tumultuous current of South Africa's history, "step[ping] out gingerly into its strange streets" like "a reluctant traveller who has landed in a foreign country without so much as a phrase book" (74). Thus, history begins to "[assert] itself boldly, threatens to mark, to break through and stain the primed white canvas" (152) of the anaesthetic whiteness that Helen and John bequeathed to Marion.

Eventually, Williams's face reminds Marion of Tokkie, her family's beloved coloured housekeeper who passed away when Marion was a child. Tokkie, a source of nurture, "would squeeze her tightly, stroke her hair, cup her face in the wrinkled black hands […]. She said that Marion was her darling kleinding, her beauty, her sweetest heart" (32). For the Campbells, "Tokkie's visits are a relief. Tokkie brings colour and sound" (152) to their seclusion. Marion starts to suspect (erroneously, as the reader learns at a later stage) that she might have been adopted, and that Tokkie played some part in the process. In a characteristically ironic move by Wicomb, Marion as a result solicits assistance from her latest employee Brenda, an intelligent, educated, and highly perceptive young woman and, presumably, the only coloured person Marion knows. Marion thus starts to emerge from her refuge in pursuit of a new skin of sorts, and together the two women embark on a journey to source her origins and heritage.

3.3. Skinless

Marion scrapes together the skins [of the peaches] into a sorry pile. She stares at her peach; she cannot bring herself to eat it. Naked, slippery – that's me, that's who I am, she thinks. Hurled into the world fully grown, without a

skin. […]. She chants: Skin and bone, by the skin of one's teeth, skinflint, skin deep like beauty, thick skinned, thin skinned – can't think of any more skins. (*Playing* 101)

Brenda's employment at MCTravel signals a political and personal change in Marion's life. Though conscientious and "soft spoken, soothing even", there is "an ironic edge to her voice that is unnerving" (17). In conversations with others, Brenda oscillates between "impressive diplomacy" (17) and abrupt and, at times, combative frankness, often in relation to the subject of apartheid. Marion is unfamiliar with the ways of friendship and treats Brenda tactlessly, without due consideration. She, for example, invades Brenda's privacy by paying an unannounced and wholly unsolicited visit to her family's house in the former coloured township of Bonteheuwel to enquire about Tokkie's background: "The people in the coloured location surely knew each other" (69). When Brenda mentions a lead in Wuppertal, a small town in the Cederberg Mountains known for its veldskoen industry, Marion asks whether Brenda would mind accompanying her to take advantage of this "geleentheid" or opportunity.

Brenda's jarring volubility challenges Marion's ill-informed preconceptions about race, class, and South African politics, thus playing a vital role in the development of her sense of individual and communal identity. Although Marion considers their unbounded sparring, "the strange way in which, out of working hours, they speak to each other" (163), in terms of friendship, the reader remains aware that Brenda "is after all an employee rather than a companion" (82) and that the relationship revolves, for the most part, around the employer's life. The conversation between the two women in the Clanwilliam hotel where they spend the night is awkward, and "the unspoken trots alongside like a faithful dog, in the shadow, with only the faintest of footfalls" (83).

Marion is sick with apprehension as they drive into Wuppertal. Asking for information at a certain Mrs Murray's house, a "blanket of anxiety enfolds her: sweat pours down her armpits, pools between her breasts, bead on her forehead" (94). In addition, "Marion's foot is swollen, taut as dough risen in the confines of its pan" (96). As Mrs Murray nurses Marion's foot, soaking it in water, she imagines the shadow of Tokkie's face falling over Marion's. Thus, the truth of Marion's ancestry is revealed: Tokkie, her family's deceased domestic worker, is actually Marion's grandmother. The swollen foot is suggestive of a prior incident, in which Marion recognised Tokkie in Williams's face for the first time and slammed her thumb in the car door, losing a nail. In both instances, she feels vulnerable, aimless, and alienated from her body. As Marion and Brenda return to Cape Town, Marion "hangs the head that hurts and yet does not belong to her, fixes her eyes on the black fabric of her trousers; she does not recognise her voice, does not recognise the linen-clad legs" (99).

The realisation that Marion's parents were "play-whites" brings to light the artificiality of the metaphorical skins of white insulation that from the outset threaten to consume and confine Marion's family. Thus deprived of a sense of history, of ancestry and community – metaphorical second skins, if you will – Marion feels "light and empty as a ghost" (105). The epigraph to this section, which describes Marion in terms of a vulnerable, skinless peach in search of self-definition, is a revealing reconfiguration of racialised skin. Without a delimited and defined sense of self, Marion is unable to fully experience, understand, and navigate the world. The realisation that Tokkie is, in fact, Marion's grandmother, awakens the urge to "spell out the word, whatever it may be: Grandmother, Grandma, Granny, Ouma, Mamma – a new word, naked and slippery with shame" (107), associating the vulnerability of skinlessness with a sense of shame.

Playing in the Light shifts back and forth between Marion's discovery in the present day and the particulars of her parents' passing during apartheid. During his first visit to the traffic department in Cape Town, the young John was mistaken for a white man, an opportunity which inspired the couple's decision to pass for white in an attempt to escape the sense of shame and inferiority that especially Helen associated with their coloured skins: "Caught accidentally in a beam of light, [John] watched whiteness fall fabulously, like an expensive woman, into his lap" (127). Evocative of her longing for the properties of whiteness, Helen managed an exclusive linen shop which "alerted her to the many shades of whiteness" (128). Slipping between the sheets of whiteness, so to speak, she remembers the first time she felt a bed's second sheet, a protection against the roughness of the blankets which remind her of her childhood.[6]

The acquisition of the properties of whiteness, however, came at a price. Helen suffered sexual exploitation at the hands of Councillor Carter in exchange for an affidavit legally verifying her and John's whiteness. Her body reacted to the pending violation in a manner not unlike the swelling of Marion's foot mentioned above: "A block of blinding pain severed her head from the rest of her body, so that it was an enormous effort to put one foot before another" (140). When John signed a document to relinquish all contact with non-whites, thus forsaking his family and uprooting himself from his community, his body also rebelled against such voluntary dislocation, heaving vomit. In passing from one racial category to another, the couple left the shelter of their communities for a curtailed state of anonymous displacement, a state of a perpetual non-belonging which they conferred on Marion, their only

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[6] Like Helen, Brenda luxuriates in the beautiful white linen, the exclusive pristine fabric of her new bed: "Lying stretched out and wriggling her bare toes on the two-metre expanse that is inalienably hers, she has never felt happier" (66). The containment offered by the new bed, so unlike Marion's prison of muslin, frees Brenda from the forced intimacy of sharing a bed with the "smell and the softness of [her mother's] body" (65).

child. Having relinquished their metaphorical skins, the couple found themselves utterly vulnerable, "walk[ing] exposed: pale, vulnerable geckos whose very skeletal systems showed through transparent flesh" (123). In these examples of skinlessness, the withdrawal from a familiar world and the accompanying loss of secure skins or structures of identification and belonging are experienced viscerally.

Except for Tokkie's company, the couple now found themselves "alone in the world, a small new island of whiteness" that, like the "big constructions" of the bird cages in the Company's Garden, "were cages all the same" (141). Rummaging in her mother's box of treasures, trying to unlock the secrets of her past, Marion finds a Moravian Mission Church card with a quote that associates a sheep's loss of wool (its outer layer or hide, suggestive of skin) with slaughter and the loss of dignity. Within the context of the passing of Marion's parents, this is yet another unflinching image of skinlessness which relates to the loss of an identity so thoroughly embedded in a community.

Playing in the Light is clearly critical of the cocoon of white privilege that persists in contemporary South Africa, illustrating the manner in which the absence of reciprocity that marks this existence ultimately impoverishes identity. Even though the novel does not diminish the importance of material comfort, it critically dethrones the blank, insulated space of white affluence, demonstrating that political and economic privileges do not constitute freedom, if such fortification precludes the constitution of self within a community of others. Liberation after apartheid is not a property to be impersonated or bought. On the other hand, as illustrated by the discussion of the intense vulnerability of Marion's skinlessness, freedom cannot be defined as the absence of limits or "skins". In fact, freedom is a multi-faceted, communal, and, most importantly, intersubjective mode of human agency which is always contextual and necessarily delimited. In the following extract from

"Freedom", the last chapter of *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty considers liberty in terms of limits:

> Even what are called obstacles to freedom are in reality deployed by it. An unclimbable rock face, a large or small, vertical or slanting rock, are things which have no meaning for anyone who is not intending to surmount them, for a subject whose projects do not carve out such determinate forms from the uniform mass of the *in itself* and cause an orientated world to arise a significance in things. There is, then, ultimately nothing that can set limits to freedom, except those limits that freedom itself has set in the form of its various initiatives, so that the subject has simply the external world that he gives himself. (436)

Merleau-Ponty is here suggesting that the limits of freedom are not absolute and independent, but situated, relational and, most importantly, produced by the acts and desires of a subject that is already free through exercising initiative. The vision of a greater, perfect freedom (always out of reach) carves out and defines not only the obstacle but also the boundaries of that particular freedom.

Evans describes the body as both "our means of freedom and the location of our enslavement" (6). Similarly, the skin, especially when subjected to processes of derivatisation, is both a means of confinement and an enabler of self-definition and socialisation. Marion's in-between state at this stage in the novel evokes *Playing in the Light*'s exploration of the complex interplay between skin as obstacle, on the one end of the spectrum, and skin as enabler, on the other, in relation to the types of social interaction that bring these figurative skins into being, and are shaped by them in turn.

In the high tide of apartheid, skin lighteners and hair straightening products[7] were extremely popular, demonstrating the extent that apartheid succeeded in turning the body against itself. By insisting on the synonymity of skin colour and societal status, as a result devaluing and disempowering the individual, racial derivatisation disturbs the primary mode of mingling with the world, the skin, and thus inhibits the development of identity within an integrated community. The salient symbol of the stocking in *David's Story* exemplifies the tension between the racialised body as, on the one hand, an impediment to a better life and, on the other, an anti-apartheid weapon of resistance, in other words, as a productive means of achieving political liberation:

> [T]he charity bags of old stockings […] came to serve the sinister function of fighting the curl in the hair of women who found that it took no more than a swift tug to drag the nylon across the face and radically transform their sleek-haired selves into guerrillas. (9)

We may make a distinction between two types of boundaries or metaphorical skins that regulate contact between literal, metaphorical, as well as textual bodies (Van Heerden, "Strategies of Containment"). While the term "confinement" is used to signify the destructive, negative dimension of limitation and boundedness ("to confine" meaning "to separate", "to imprison", "to control", and "to restrain"), "containment" refers to its constructive, positive dimension ("to contain" meaning "to include", "to hold" and "to foster") ("Strategies of Containment" 43-45). Whereas the veiled touch of confinement forecloses reciprocal relations, the light touch of containment conversely "enables an interrelationship between the interior of the contained space and its exterior" (45). This distinction contributes to my consideration of types of social interaction across literal as well as metaphorical

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[7] Hair, like skin, was an indicator of racial identity.

skins or interfaces by positing containment as a third or intermediate space between the two unproductive extremes discussed in this chapter in terms of, firstly, Marion's veiled touch and, secondly, skinlessness. Put simply, as regards the former, the self is wholly sealed off from others, whereas, in the latter, the self is unbounded and lacking in self-definition. In fact the two poles of this opposition are entirely entwined, since it is the extreme vulnerability of the Campbells' figurative skinlessness, or the couple's lack of identity, community, and heritage after their passing, that gives rise to the figurative wrappings, or skins, of self-preservation and seclusion inherited by Marion. In both cases – the skin as impenetrable, on the one hand, and the skin as absent, on the other – social relations are stunted and hollow.

This brings me to the next topic of discussion, the light touch of containment which, in Wicomb's *Playing in the Light*, is represented through tactile metaphors or figurations of touch. Moving beyond the polarisation of confinement versus total exposure, the novel appears to suggest that a realistic measure of individual freedom lies in feeling at home in one's own literal and metaphorical skins. However, without some form of delimitation or self-definition, without a figurative skin, that is, the individual is unable to relate to, or touch, another. Via interconnected tactile and tactful symbols and scenes, the novel gestures towards a sense of psychological containment which transcends the rigid confinement associated with racial insulation, on the one hand, and the unbounded, unhomed state of dislocation, on the other. In the novel, the opening of the body to touch symbolises an acknowledgement rather than a banishment of vulnerability which, given the reversibility of touch, is shared.

3.4. The Light Touch

> Issuing vigorous instructions instead may well do the trick, but no, as Geoff
> Geldenhuys says, it is best to go with the times, and this is the time of the
> new: a time of hypersensitivity that requires you to recognise the special
> needs of others, to don your kid gloves, to tread gingerly in the New South
> Africa. (*Playing* 25*)*

The ideal of an equal and open interracial dialogue in the new, "hypersensitive"
South Africa described by Marion's suave suitor, Geoff Geldenhuys, is problematic
at best. In the epigraph above, Geoff suggests that, in the workplace, employers
should approach their employees with awareness and sensitivity, referring to the kid
glove which is a metaphor for tact that draws on its linguistic relation to "tactility".
Instead of issuing instructions, he believes that power should be wielded softly and
tactfully.

In "'Our Debt to Lamb'", David Russell presents an extensive interpretation of *The
Essays of Elia*, written by the nineteenth-century essayist Charles Lamb. From
Lamb's writing, Russell extrapolates a framework of politeness within which I now
situate conceptions of courteous communication in *Playing in the Light*. Although
his particular perspective on politeness in Lamb certainly rings true, Russell uses *The
Essays of Elia* as a point of departure for a detailed reflection on tact as a quotidian
civility. Certain formulations and terms which are pivotal to Russell's argument are
entirely his own, including "tact", which is described as an ethical and aesthetic
response to the uncertainties produced by the rapid urbanisation of the early
nineteenth-century. Russell posits tact productively as "a more cautious and tactile
feeling one's way in less certain social conditions no longer governed by absolutist
hierarchies of status" (181). It is his particular account of tact as a localised

"sociability of the transitional" (188) that resonates with "gloved" negotiations of South Africa's period of transition. Given that a wholly open embrace between formerly segregated groups is not yet possible in South Africa, tact has emerged as an intermediary form of social communication which is accompanied by neither a total loss of self nor derivatisation. Here, through politeness, self reaches out to other, bearing the weight of an apologetic awareness of the power relations and injustices of the past.

In a chapter on the delicate or light touch in *The Book of Skin*, Connor writes that "touch is unlike the other senses in this, that it acts upon the world as well as registering the action of the world on you" (263). In *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies*, Serres describes reciprocity in related terms as "[t]he I vibrat[ing] alternately on both sides of the contact" (22). Tact, in other words, owes its reciprocal character to its figurative association with touch, rather than sight, which is so often associated with the differentiation of bodies. Serres writes that the mixture and "variety" of skin rather "tends towards the liquid and the fluid" (67).[8]

As a metaphorical instance of an extra surface or pliable second skin, the kid glove is an additional surface that heightens sensitivity. This touch is lighter, more delicate, in order to sense or appreciate the particularities of the other or, in the words of Connor, "amplify the perversely feeble power of the tip, the fringe, the edge, the hem" (265). Accordingly, the manner in which tact frees up additional space for the other can be understood in terms of a cautious, delicate touch that is "not quite one, a touch that refrains from the vulgarity of grasping or handling" (Connor 264). In this sense,

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[8] In *Reading with Michel Serres*, Maria Assad explains that the "phonetic confusion" (74-75) between *verre* and *vair*, that is, the French words for "glass" (an apt symbol for intransigency and confinement) and "fur" (an image of containment),

> gives Serres the opportunity to underscore the difference between the touch of the soft furry skin which allows for innumerable degrees of tactile sensation blending into each other and, on the other hand, the transparent, rigid material of the glass which allows our senses to slide by or through it, to arrive at a certain knowledge of a clear, distinct measure. (75)

Connor's vision of tact as a "nonconsuming" light touch that preserves (274) and *contains* the other resembles Russell's understanding of tact as a democratisation of space. In acknowledging "the coexistence of many incommensurable life worlds" (203), this particular conceptualisation of tact, as an ethical sociability that respects diversity, counters processes of (racial) derivatisation.

Like other modes of social interaction portrayed in *Playing in the Light*, the light touch of tact is problematic and complex. When Vumile Mkhize, the attractive black owner of the black BMW Marion scratches by accident, comes into the office to discuss insurance matters, Marion gives him her card: "[S]he must make amends, or perhaps she is touting for business" (108). This sentence opposes two possible interpretations of tact, both of which are related to political correctness. On the one hand, it might only mask potential exploitation or manipulation, an interpretation which resonates with Bourdieu's exposition of the power relations tactically perpetuated in what he dubs the "labour of politeness" (*Language* 80).[9] On the other hand, the disproportionate socio-economic relations and psychological wounds inflicted by apartheid are said to require the light or delicate touch of the idiomatic kid glove, a stance exemplified by the novel's tactful, nuanced representation of post-apartheid relationships.

In *Playing in the Light* as well as *David's Story*, the leather of the veldskoen is a more prevalent, natural, and authentic second skin than the kid glove. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the Afrikaans word "veldskoen" is interchangeable

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[9] As another significant example, Marion's friendship with Brenda – sometimes tactful, sometimes candid – includes an oft-unspoken undercurrent of power play. Marion wonders about the sincerity of Brenda's display of innocence and whether some resentment might be lurking in her "sing-song syllables" (78). Unlike Marion, the reader is encouraged to realise that Brenda's employment relies on her ability to conform to MCTravel's "white" office by balancing the necessity for truth with a light, respectful touch that appears simulated at times. On the topic of Brenda's power, Van der Vlies has argued that, in fact, "[t]here are many […] examples of the artful patterning of the narrative *ab initio* which support a reading of Brenda as chief focaliser, if not author" (595) of the narrative.

with "velskoen" in that the element "vel" (the word for "skin") has been assimilated to "veld" (*OED Online*). The veld- or velskoen associates reciprocal communication with the way in which the subject is rooted or grounded in a particular context, tradition, or history. Marion's grandmother Tokkie used to be a veldskoen maker who "loved to feel under her fingertips the texture of tanned leather, its warm peppery smell, red-brown as the sunny earth. The animal shape of the hides […] came to life under her touch" (136). Like the extra surface of the kid glove, the veldskoen's hide, as an organic doubling of the foot's physical skin, envelops, protects and *contains* the foot, enabling a stronger step.

Wicomb's description of the veldskoen is comparable to Serres's account of the *vair* (fur) slipper as "a sort of bonnet or the finger of a glove" that "gently sheathes the foot, like an invaginated pocket" (64). This sensate envelope enfolds the foot: "You can feel its shape, an open and shut tent, made by and for the touch, skin on skin in places where it suffers, pathologically sensitive" (64). With regard to the kid glove and the veldskoen, the skin, as the meeting place of body and world, is in a sense doubled in order to enhance the sensitivity and reciprocity of the encounter. Since metaphorical and literal skins in *Playing in the Light* function in similar ways, the text invites the consideration of interrelated examples of both.

There are as many representations of feet and their soles as there are modes of social interaction in the novel. I wish to shift focus from second skins and related metaphors based on touch to the literal skin and tactility of the bare foot, a symbol of coloured identity in Wicomb's text. On a more basic level, the bare foot might symbolise poverty or a lack of refinement (Helen believed that "only low-class tannies went about with bare legs" [147]) as well as mobility or displacement, depending on the context. The foot, instead of the more obvious choice of the hand, is the text's preferred symbol of the feeling, sensing body's interaction with the

world. The confinement of Helen and John's white insulation kept them on their toes (152) so to speak, and Helen did not allow Marion to remove her shoes and immerse herself fully in her environment. In *David's Story*, the "deep scars on the soles of both [David Dirkse's] feet" (11) represent a literal and figurative scarring that has disrupted his ability to relate to others or, in the words of Wicomb, experience the ground beneath his feet. In other words, his perception of the world is figuratively scarred and fragmented.

The foot's association with personal relationships is established by two similar scenes featuring a husband tending to his wife's feet. The husband of Marion's grandmother, Flip Karelse,

> adored every inch of [Tokkie], took delight in the mysterious darkness of her skin, and on Friday evenings after work […] he tended to his Tokkie's tired feet. She was a talker, which he loved, but she shut her eyes and was silent as he rubbed away the weariness. Then he massaged cooking oil into her feet until they were a lustrous black, were two live black starlings throbbing in his lap. (137)

This is a beautiful example of mutuality, of the "I" vibrating on both sides of the loving, subtly erotic touch. In *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Irigaray writes (of the lover specifically) that "the other's hands, these palms with which he approaches without going through me, give me back the borders of my body" (155). By means of her husband's loving touch, the definitive outline of Tokkie's identity gleams like her black skin in celebration of the beauty and strength of her body as it is touched and given shape – or contained – by another's. The passage is reminiscent of Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*, in which the magistrate loses himself in the act of washing the feet of the barbarian girl and rubbing her body with oil (30-32).

After discovering that her ancestors were "coloured", Marion weeps during a nightmare. Brenda, having slept over on Marion's couch, fights through the confinement of muslin "to soothe her, to try to wake her up. Marion clutches at the hand that strokes her hair, clings for dear life and shudders with sobs" (100). The entire night, Brenda holds Marion in a tight embrace that, in this instance, wraps real skin around skin, gesturing towards a containment created by the literal and figurative touching of bodies. In a rare and complex instance of appreciation and tenderness of the skin, Helen, Marion's mother and Tokkie's daughter, meditates on the usefulness of the "tough leather" of the soles of her feet that protect and carry her through the world:

> [John] Campbell was surprisingly adept; he used his pocketknife to shave off dead skin softened in the water. [...]. Disgusted as she was by her horny feet, Helen had a suspicion that the roughness of her soles was what saw her through the trials and tribulations of life in the city. Something hard of her own between the pale, soft body and the asphalt of the world was perhaps necessary, so that she always left it too long, let things slide, until the skin had grown once more into tough leather. (148)

The passage's depiction of Helen's husband's ritualistic softening of the feet (which resembles Flip's massage) relates to a memory from Marion's childhood, when her father's hand accidentally slipped whilst shaving off dead skin. Marion entered the room and saw "Helen's right foot wrapped in a dark blue towel, through which blood oozed, black as bile. […]. Beside it was a vicious-looking knife and a hideous heap of skin. It was no sight for a mermaid" (149). Ignorant of the significance of skin (colour) to her "play-white" parents and, consequently, of her own racial heritage, Marion's initial disgust at this "heap of crumbly, greyish yellow" follows her into adulthood when, faced with "a bowl of pale, vile-smelling parmesan", she recalls

how, in another restaurant, "it had taken every fibre in her body to fight the tide of nausea" (41-42).

To recall the discussion of the veiled touch, one is able to "touch somebody or something with gloves on, or with [one's] skin anaesthetized, so that [one] do[es] not feel their answering touch" (Connor 263).[10] Whereas Helen appears imprisoned in the trappings of skin, Marion the "skinless peach", so to speak, struggles to find her feet. In fact, "[f]or Marion, the truth is that she is passing over the land, her only contact being through the cushioned rubber tyres of her moving vehicle" (80). In this image, Marion's privilege and security is formulated in relation to the abovementioned metaphors of feet and ground. "Ever since Marion can remember, her father has called her his meermin, his little mermaid" (22), a mythological creature belonging to a different world with impenetrable, "hard, glittering scales" (46) instead of feet. "[S]he was a mermaid under the moon, diving and tossing her tail through the silver waves" (60) until Helen brought the moment of bliss to an end.

In contrast with these images of tactile containment, the novel also shows how one body can confine and do violence to another. Whereas the "black starlings" in Flip's lap signify love, harmony, and intimacy, the throbbing doves in the following sentence signal Helen's sexual exploitation at the hands of Councillor Carter and approximate what Orford refers to as the unbearable intimacy of sexual violence: "[T]he young woman sitting across the desk from him […] had breasts that, if he was not mistaken, throbbed gently like frightened doves" (139). The following is another example of the body's, especially the foot's, association with an openness to and embeddedness in the world. The childhood memory of playing at Tokkie's feet, and

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[10] Whilst Marion used to burrow her fist into the pocket in the shape of a tulip chalice contained in Tokkie's "special apron embroidered with flowers that she called her Garden of Eden" (32), John controlled the city's traffic with "pristine white gloves" (4), a veiled touch that gave him the power to regulate the movement of others, albeit from a stationary position.

of Tokkie's affection, is juxtaposed with Helen's insensitivity towards Marion: When Marion was a little girl playing in the garden and "rolling half naked in the grass" (60), her mother "with distaste, with her shoe, […] shoved the child's clothes towards her", asking how she could "behave like a disgusting native" (60-61). This gesture refers to the novel's opening scene, in which Marion "rolls […] over with her foot" (1) the dead guinea fowl on her balcony, the first indication that the walls of her confined space of privilege are not as inviolable as they seem.

Above and beyond her depiction of tactful sociability in *Playing in the Light*, what defines Wicomb as a tactful writer is her refusal to settle on any one position or perspective in the novel. Questioning her own authority as a writer, she makes the following observation: "I feel as if I'm writing in the faintest of pencils, that I'm frightened, not quite in control" ("Interviewed by Eva Hunter" 85). Written in pencil, so to speak, *Playing in the Light* circulates between different modes of sociability, as metaphorised through skins and layers. In addition, multiple, conflicting focalisations in the novel serve to introduce different standpoints, deepening the reader's insight into the complexities of post-apartheid sociability.

The literary engagements of many South African writers, including Wicomb, can be described as "tactful" in their creative deployment of affect, nuance, and subtlety. These authors' concerted efforts to problematise truth's totalising impulse and create new discursive places "in which to cry"[11] echo André Brink's statement that "unless the work of the TRC is "'extended, complicated and intensified in the imaginings of literature […] society cannot sufficiently come to terms with its past to face the future'" (cited in Barnard, "Rewriting" 658). In the interview with Meyer and Olver, Wicomb explains that "narrative fiction [...] has the capacity for showing truth as a

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[11] The phrase from the novel, "It is a place in which to cry" (*Playing* 191), is also the title of Minesh Dass's article on the novel, "A 'Place in which to Cry'".

complex, many-sided, contingent thing" and that the "'truth' about that period has to be problematised" ("Writing and Nation" 194). Driver, in her thorough overview of Wicomb's oeuvre, emphasises this quality of her writing:

> Wicomb's fine-tuned perspicacity shows these intersecting discourses as ideological contingencies that now readily disintegrate under the impact of the literary, assuming the reader's attentive eye. Her project is to prise open not only any significant or productive gap between discourses, but also between the otherwise tight fit between signifier and referent, and to disrupt what Barthes calls "the (illusory) merging between referent and signified." (526)

3.5. A New Language

> Man, in this New South Africa we can play at anything, mix 'n match, talk and sing any way we like. Because of freedom, he explains. (*Playing* 23)

On the road to Wuppertal in search of Marion's heritage, Marion and Brenda come across a "ramshackle cart decorated with outlandish shiny things and streamers of coloured cloth, piled high with objects made of beaten, painted and pierced tin" (86). The owner of the cart, "a bundle of bric-a-brac" (86-87) himself, is an energetic old man called Outa Blinkoog (which, literally translated, means Bright or Shiny Eye). He is described as "a peacock man, a brightly coloured creature from mythology" whose "extraordinary eyes […] are […] bright as the bits of coloured glass and tin that flash from the cart" (87).

Blinkoog's mode of understanding the world, as he "[keeps] on the move" (89), is modelled on the mutuality of touch: "[H]e really would recommend getting to know one's terrain through the soles of one's own feet". Blinkoog "pats his own [feet] appreciatively, hard as leather; he thinks they have covered a million miles" (91). In

the presence of his bright eyes, the tension between Marion and Brenda, their differences and inequalities, are washed away, opening a new-found space for light-hearted speech that brings to mind the post-apartheid communion sought in the last section of the Freedom Charter, "There Shall be Peace and Friendship!" (African National Congress 3).

Blinkoog's collection of "Pragtige Goeters" (88) or Beautiful Things which he recycles to create new objects might be associated with the renovation of language at the root of fraught relationships in post-apartheid South Africa: "[N]ow people must make new beautiful things" (90), he says. This "man out of a storybook" (90) is a live depository of stories that, like his colourful embroidered cloth, is in a sense read by the women. After delighting the women with stories, Outa Blinkoog presents them with a gift, an "exquisite thing of scrunched-up tin with something of a rim in which disks of red and green glass are embedded" (91). The low, multi-coloured light of the lantern that is "for both of them that neither one nor the other will own" (92) epitomises reciprocity and friendship. In the candle's dying hours, especially, the lantern celebrates the vibrancy, ambiguity, and variability of creativity so that, in the words of Outa Blinkoog, "there's no place for sadness" (91). Like Marion's friendship with Brenda, her relationship with Vumile develops to include exquisite moments of genuine warmth and reciprocity bathed in light. In Glasgow, for example,

> [t]hey walk back to her Travelodge through the streets […] in the stubborn, time-tricking twilight that will slip, as she later discovers, unnoticed into dawn. Vumi has taken [Marion's] hand, or perhaps she has taken his; she can't remember, being tipsy on impossibly expensive wine, weaving through the honeyed Scottish vowels in the gloaming. (200)

After meeting her aunt Elsie at a later stage in the novel, Marion, for the first time, is able to recognise, name, and face her loneliness (177). She decides to take Outa Blinkoog's lantern to Brenda's house where they assemble in the low light of friendship: "The candlelight glows green, red and blue through the rough shapes of glass, spreading a magical warmth. Brenda's cry of delight is silenced by her mother, who turns from the screen to hiss but cannot help smiling her own admiration. They sit in awed silence, like children around the Christmas tree" (184). This emblem of creativity prompts Marion's decision to travel and step outside the limitations of whiteness, as it were, leaving Brenda temporarily in charge of MCTravel. She settles on Western Europe, a trip which will simultaneously allow her to develop an affective life through experiencing mourning and joy. That night, Marion sees a vision of a mermaid holding a child in the waves, a positive image confirming her decision to forsake present shores.

Marion surprises herself by enjoying the trip to Europe. Her inflexibility loosens somewhat, as she finds herself in a foreign space conducive to a more pliable, sensitive skin. In London, "the world imprints itself on her afresh; her days are rinsed in rain" (191). Comfortable in an old house, Marion spends her days reading, feeling vulnerable and emotional. One evening, Marion is moved to tears by a wonderful sight, a shivering dance or "rectangle of light" on the surface of the white wall, a "painting in action" which, like Outa Blinkoog's lantern, is a joyous, magical, and moving image. This "water silk come alive" (192) reminds Marion of her mother's aquamarine gown that would never sweep across a dance floor. In transforming the symbol of the veiled touch into more productive, positive terms, the passage brings life and movement to Marion's "skin". Within a literary context, the play of light on the wall has a similar effect as that of tact which, as conceptualised by Russell,

allows metaphor to stay on the move, and prevents meaning from congealing into a coercive demand for concession to a single consensus. Metaphor, sustaining sameness and difference in a single thought, allows for a transitional space in which many truths and incommensurable desires may interact without impingement. (185)

On the concluding page of *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon writes that the black and the white man "[b]oth have to move away from the inhuman voices of their respective ancestors so that a genuine communication can be born" (2008: 206). The bodily proximities depicted in the novel have yet to arrive at Fanon's sense of "genuine communication" or what Wicomb has described as "a new language for reconstructing ourselves to replace the fixed syntagmas of the discourse of oppression" ("Culture" 28). *Playing in the Light* nevertheless gestures towards such an ideal mode of communication through the vibrant speech of the unconventional character, Outa Blinkoog, whose language is rich, spontaneous, and artless: "With this man, one can say anything: outa, miesies; here language is not the fraught business she has come to fear. Words are fresh, newborn, untainted by history; all is bathed in laughter clean as water" (90). Ever wary of overruling perspectives, and equally cautious of her own authority as a writer, Wicomb leaves not even this representation of unrestrained speech, this free flow of words, without problematisation. Described as "self-centred, like a child, relating all things to himself", Blinkoog "shows little interest in [Brenda and Marion]" (91).

In conclusion, this chapter has demonstrated how images of skin are contrasted and compared in the novel, in which the fluidity and mutuality of touch, enabled by the skin, serves to destabilise racial categories of identity based on sight alone. Through representations of the literal and metaphorical skins that affect social interaction between bodies, *Playing in the Light* contributes to unsettling the poetics of contrast

in post-apartheid South Africa by feeling its way towards a language of tactile reciprocity. The vulnerability of the self acquires a distinctly visceral character in this novel, as bodies try to embed themselves in the world and forge relationships with others by means of sensate surfaces, like the skin of their feet. Fanon puts a concluding question to the reader: "Superiority? Inferiority? Why not simply try to touch the other, feel the other, discover each other?" (2008: 206).

From this vantage point, a recent article by Steinberg explaining his motivations for returning to his country of birth, "Why I'm Moving Back to South Africa", can be read as a celebration of vulnerability in its capacity to inspire creativity, stimulate the intellect, and facilitate sincere human connection across "skins" which are constituted intersubjectively, that is to say, in close proximity to other lives:

> That is what going home means for me. It is to stand outside myself and watch my bourgeois life prodded and pushed and buffeted around by lives quite unlike my own. It is to surrender myself to a world so much bigger than I am and to the destiny of a nation I cannot control. In this surrender is an expansion, a flowering, of what it means to be alive.

4. BLOOD:

Jonny Steinberg's *Three Letter Plague*

4.1. The "Open Secret" of HIV/AIDS

> The truth objectively expressed is constantly vitiated by the lie of the colonial
>
> situation. (Fanon, *Dying* 128)

According to the most recent reports from UNAIDS (2013), South Africa is the country with the highest number of people infected with HIV in the world. To cite a few figures, more than 6 million people in South Africa were living with HIV in 2013, with a 19.1% prevalence rate in the category "adults aged 15 to 49" ("HIV and AIDS Estimates"). On the topic of HIV/AIDS, scientists, sociologists, and laypersons alike continue to speculate as to why the disease has reached such pandemic proportions in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The refusal of biomedical testing and treatment is the enigma at the heart of the South African literary journalist and scholar Jonny Steinberg's third book of creative non-fiction, *Three Letter Plague: A Young Man's Journey through a Great Epidemic* (*Sizwe's Test* in the United States). For this book, which was first published in 2008, Steinberg decided to focus on a central aspect of HIV's rapid dissemination in South Africa, asking why men, more so than women, tend to disregard biomedical calls for HIV testing. For the purpose of this inquiry, Steinberg befriended Sizwe Magadla, a pseudonym (given the stigma and shame surrounding HIV/AIDS) for a bright, spaza shopkeeper from the remote, rural village of Ithanga in South Africa's Eastern Cape Province. Sizwe,[12] a "strikingly beautiful" (14), virile young man with Samsonite

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[12] As in the case of "Hermann" (Dr Hermann Reuter), the text refers to Sizwe as "Sizwe" (and not Mr Magadla, for instance), given his status as a character in the text with whom the reader should come to identify, at least in some measure, as the narrative progresses.

dreadlocks, is the ideal protagonist for Steinberg's investigation of perceptions of testing and treatment in rural South Africa. He is a somewhat marginal figure, at once deeply rooted in his community, and yet adept at dealing with outsiders. With the primary intention of understanding Sizwe's ambivalence regarding biomedical conceptions of HIV/AIDS and its purported medicines, Steinberg proceeds to chart the course of Sizwe's specific responses, in relation to his own, to people involved in and affected by the crisis at various HIV/AIDS-related sites.

When juxtaposed, the two titles of the book, *Three Letter Plague* and *Sizwe's Test*, jointly suggest the importance of examining the role of language and meaning in relation to all aspects of disease (a "test" in the sense of adversity) but also, and more specifically, to the actual HIV test. The concept "three letter plague" refers to HIV's lay term in Xhosa, as a villager in Nomvalo explains: "When they ask what is wrong I say *amagama mathathu*", "'Three letters' – H-I-V" (224). In "An Eerie Silence", a piece Steinberg wrote for *Foreign Policy* in 2011, he mentions that, in an urban context or "on the South African street", "[r]eferences to three letters are implicitly understood to mean HIV. If it is said, for instance, that a man drives a BMW Z3, it means that he is HIV-positive and implies that he contracted the virus by living too fast" (87).

The Human Immunodeficiency Virus derives much of its strength from the ability to hide or lie dormant in the blood without causing symptoms, potentially for years, before ultimately inducing Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. When contracted, AIDS weakens the body's immune system, making it vulnerable to opportunistic infections like tuberculosis and Kaposi's sarcoma. In the oft-cited *AIDS and Its Metaphors*, Susan Sontag writes,

> [t]hat AIDS is not a single illness but a syndrome, consisting of a seemingly
> open-ended list of contributing or "presenting" illnesses which constitute

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(that is, qualify the patient as having) the disease, makes it more a product of definition or construction than even a very complex, multiform illness like cancer. (113)

In other words, AIDS is a syndrome that exposes the body to – or, one might say, in public masquerades as – commonplace afflictions with long-standing colloquial explanations and cures. Since the advent of biomedicine in Sizwe's district, the inhabitants of Ithanga have been educated about HIV to the extent that they do associate certain opportunistic infections with AIDS. However, in *28 Stories of AIDS in Africa*, journalist Stephanie Nolen describes HIV/ADS as an "open secret" (190, 339), whereas Steinberg, in *Three Letter Plague*, describes it in similar terms as that which is "secret but not secret. People don't know, but they do. [Vukani, an HIV-positive man from Sizwe's village] lives his life in a twilight where everything is and isn't" (237). In the absence of biomedical testing to confirm the presence of the virus in the blood – or to render it visible to the biomedical eye – the cause of these infections remain, to summon Nolen's term, an open secret subject to lay speculation.

Keeping in mind the customary distinction between "disease" (the pathological condition of the body) and "illness" (the experience or perception of the disease), the positive HIV test result activates the psychological dimension of the disease, that is, the illness. Stated in slightly different terms, the positive test result marks the point in time when the virus in the blood, in the body, is given a name and thus enters language. The test translates this bodily component, invisible to the naked eye, into three letters, rendering it visible to biomedical discourse and flooding the body with the meaning and metaphors associated with "H-I-V" in that particular symbolic system. One's "status" is an indisputable biomedical fact that is revealed through the HIV test, often with the aid of a white doctor. However, the individual's "status"

does not merely refer to his body's state of his health but also, given the stigma ascribed to the virus, to his resultant rank in society. In the presence of AIDS's "open secret", its visible invisibility, the walls of categorical definitions crumble and fears erupt. For the reason that AIDS is a chameleon-like syndrome masquerading in the guise of everyday diseases, individuals are able to avoid the degradation suffered by publicly HIV-positive individuals by refusing the test's stamp of certainty. Accordingly, Steinberg explains Sizwe's refusal to test for HIV – the rationale behind the book – as stemming, on a personal level, largely from his fear of its humiliating, emasculating associations.

It follows that, perhaps even more so than the other chapters, my reading of *Three Letter Plague* here, at the heart of the thesis, demonstrates the absolute centrality of matters of representation, which are never without context or history. Grappling with questions of blood, disease, and race, my main argument revolves around Sizwe's refusal to test his body for HIV, placing particular emphasis on the life and death consequences of the struggle over the meaning of HIV/AIDS. The crucial dilemma confronting Steinberg pertains to the history of biomedical discourse, in which the vulnerable body's story needs to be told if it is to survive. It comprises the discursive framework wherein the derivatised body, that is, the body reduced to HIV and its accompanying social status, is to be fleshed out. Mike Marais explains the challenge faced by post-apartheid authors pertinently when he argues that Elleke Boehmer's novel, *Nile Baby,* "raises the deeply self-reflexive question of how to respond to suffering from within the language and culture that inscribed the terms and positions that occasioned that suffering" (48-49). This observation is equally relevant to *Three Letter Plague*, in which Steinberg situates HIV testing and treatment within a history of Western medicine in Africa, casting the problem in distinctly post-colonial terms. The text paints a complex portrait of a country still divided after the fall of apartheid,

and concentrates on the perpetuation of asymmetrical relations which are shown to compromise the integrity of traditional forms of knowledge. In particular, *Three Letter Plague* can be described as the enactment of a conversation or even, at times, a power struggle between different systems of knowledge, of which the radically opposed conceptual spheres embodied by Steinberg and Sizwe, among others, are emphasised most.

Antiretroviral therapy (ARVs) rightfully claims supremacy as the only valid treatment for AIDS, but, in the process, problematically threatens to quell other beliefs, like that of Sizwe, regarding the body, disease, and death. In other words, in order to curb the spread of the epidemic and save lives, Western science needs to assert dominance in a post-apartheid public sphere that is by no means sympathetic to Western accounts of black bodies. Fanon's powerful statement in the epigraph to this introductory section, from Fanon's *A Dying Colonialism*, captures the essence of *Three Letter Plague*'s implicit argument, that, firstly, the destructive imperial history of biomedical discourse undermines the validity or truth of its treatments in the present, and, secondly, that this "truth" cannot co-exist with other discourses of truth without seeming to claim supremacy, given the discourse's history of subjugating Africa to a plethora of pathological stereotypes.

Informed by the postcolonial literary tradition in South Africa, Steinberg accordingly represents his relationship with Sizwe in self-reflexive relation to questions of narrative authority, cultural hegemony and, in the terms presented in the previous chapter on Wicomb, racial privilege. In other words, Steinberg's narration shows an awareness of the particular claims that representations of bodies lay to those bodies. Steinberg's engagement with the battle of perspectives over the meaning of HIV/AIDS and its medicine thus "produces" not "an art of anticipated surfaces" as Njabulo Ndebele wrote in the prominent review "Turkish Tales", but "rather […] one

of processes" (32), a work that is attuned to the production of truth and the operations of power. Similar to Coetzee's overall outlook, as David Attwell writes in *J.M. Coetzee: South Africa and the Politics of Writing*, Steinberg's text "implies that narrative is itself a historical product, existing in tension with other discourses of the moment that are also the products of history and the bearers of culture" (13).

I will explore the background to this question of conflicting worldviews, concentrating on Steinberg's subtle representation of Sizwe's refusal to test his blood for HIV. Although the reader suspects that Sizwe is, in truth, HIV-positive, the book's conclusion, describing a phone call during which Sizwe admits to a friend "'[t]hat he'd think about [testing]'" (374), defers indefinitely the answer to Sizwe's secret and the resolution of Steinberg's investigation. A counter-hegemonic strategy in the presence of former oppressors, Sizwe's refusal, as Steinberg will come to learn, aims to protect his cultural economy or, otherwise stated, to preserve the dignity of his community and its knowledge systems. I will draw the final conclusion that, by means of his resistance to testing, Sizwe refuses to yield his body not only to clinical recommendations but also to Steinberg's request (as both character and author), thwarting the text's primary purpose. It follows that the open secret of *Three Letter Plague*, that is, the unconfirmed suspicion that Sizwe is HIV-positive, is, in fact, integral to the text's successful performance of the struggle over the meaning of HIV/AIDS in that it allows Sizwe a life outside the frame of the text, making him seem more real. Though it would have signalled a victory in the fight against the disease, the resolution of this struggle over meaning might have damaged the text's nuanced exploration of post-apartheid society via HIV's complex metaphoricity.

I will make three main points in this regard, involving, firstly, Sizwe's scepticism, and, secondly, Thabo Mbeki's AIDS denialism which, thirdly, both point toward unsettling continuities between apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa,

specifically pertaining to the body's vulnerability in the midst of clashing epistemologies. The next section in this chapter will introduce Steinberg's body of work and discuss how his chosen genre, that is, narrative non-fiction, allows an exploration of the inner workings of an asymmetrical relationship, which is then followed by a consideration of how medicine and treatment are invested with figurative meaning, and the material effects of such conceptualisations on bodies afflicted with HIV/AIDS.

Some key theoretical influences on my research include Mary Douglas's *Purity and Danger*, Fanon's *A Dying Colonialism*, Didier Fassin's *When Bodies Remember: Experiences and Politics of AIDS in South Africa*, Tim Woods's article "South African Literature in the Time of AIDS", Sontag's *AIDS and Its Metaphors*, and a selection of essays from Liz McGregor and Sarah Nuttall's collection, *At Risk: Writing on and over the Edge of South Africa*. The purpose of the first two sections of this chapter is to lay the groundwork for the abovementioned three main points; as a result, only in the fourth section, "White Doctors and Black Bodies", do I discuss the implications of Sizwe's refusal of the HIV test, as a resistance to the cultural meanings of Western medicine and the discourse it represents.

The chapter will follow the inductive logic of *Three Letter Plague*, a logic which is also characteristic of other noteworthy HIV/AIDS-related literary works from South Africa, contextualising the individual in terms of major historical movements and moments especially pertaining to the transition from apartheid to post-apartheid South Africa. Equally, it demonstrates the entwinement of personal and public meanings of the epidemic. This discussion will contribute to this thesis's overall exploration of the tight relation between the vulnerability of the body, on the one hand, and vernaculars of stigma, as yet another manifestation of binary logic, on the other. It will do so by means of *Three Letter Plague*'s intimate, individualised

perspective on bodies exposed to, suffering, and potentially dying from AIDS. Steinberg indicates that, because the upsurge of the AIDS epidemic coincided with the transition to democracy, AIDS has meaningful implications for perceptions of the social body as well. Each of the chapter's sections will open with an instance from the text, mirroring to an extent the constant movement between individual and social body that Steinberg effects in *Three Letter Plague*'s individual unravelling of the convoluted metaphorical knot that is the subject of HIV/AIDS in contemporary South Africa.

4.2. Changing the Subject: Notes on Genre

> The bodies were jammed into the clinic waiting room so tight I did not know whether the damp on my forearm was my own or someone else's. […].
>
> Even here, where the faces were so many they had become interchangeable, she was singular, unmistakable; the promise of death in her face and her body drew you to her like the Hamelin stranger's pipe.
>
> She sat there in her wheelchair amid the crowds, her useless neck dropping her head onto her right shoulder. Her eyes were open wide and unblinking as if she had constantly just a second ago received a terrible fright. Her lips were pulled and drawn, exposing her upper teeth and her gums. She wore a bright pink tracksuit several sizes too big, a sore memory of the space she must have filled before she fell ill. (*Three* 152)

At the University of York in 2013, authors Margie Orford and Gillian Slovo participated in a discussion chaired by Michelle Kelly, *PEN, Justice and the Creative Process*. Orford expressed the difficulty of conveying the communal pain of a post-traumatic society in writing. Literary techniques offer a solution, however, in that "a

writer can make the reader *feel* in the place of the victim, and then the reader can imagine that amplified by the thousands" (Orford, *PEN*). Steinberg is celebrated as one of South Africa's premier non-fiction writers by readers and critics alike for allowing them to feel and understand the different worlds of his individual subjects. Steinberg's interdisciplinary approach, usually described as narrative non-fiction or literary journalism, wields devices more characteristic of fiction to narrate, embody and personalise prevalent social issues like South Africa's extreme levels of HIV/AIDS and violent crime.

Steinberg's genre, that is, narrative non-fiction – which he refers to as "fiction's poorer cousin" in an interview with Daniel Lehman – "borrows the way fiction elaborates a world" ("Counting" 32). With the vividly visceral scene from *Three Letter Plague* in mind (as quoted above), it is just as apt, however, to define Steinberg's approach not only as an elaboration but a fleshing out of real worlds. Whilst contending with literary questions of representation and form, Steinberg's interdisciplinary texts make distinctly personalised and embodied contributions to knowledge about life in the margins, offering a right of entry to a mass of bodies "jammed […] so tight" they, at times, seem "interchangeable" (152). In the context of gross socio-economic disparities, these narratives address serious gaps in knowledge and cross-cultural understanding that persist in South Africa, holding reader and subject at arm's length. With a strong focus on the lived experience of particular individuals, Steinberg's books transport a literate readership across the divide to non-fictional worlds beyond the comfort zone and the insulation afforded by privilege: the farmhouse in *Midlands: A Very South African Murder* (f.p. 2002), the South African prison cell in *The Number: One Man's Search for Identity in the*

Cape Underworld and Prison Gangs (f.p. 2004), and the rural HIV/AIDS clinic in this chapter's focal text, *Three Letter Plague*.[13]

To understand the importance of *Three Letter Plague*'s particular account of the mass AIDS epidemic in South Africa, one must take note of the scarcity in the public sphere of images and imaginings of bodies afflicted with the disease. Search "AIDS" on Google Images, for example, and you will find your screen awash with blood red ribbons, explanatory diagrams, photographs of celebrities at fundraising events, and "Stop AIDS!" and "World AIDS Day" slogans in thickset lettering. However, compared to the amount of text displayed, the photographs of actual bodies afflicted with AIDS are few and far between. Consequently, there is a lot of HIV/AIDS-related talk in circulation in contemporary South Africa, and shelves in libraries abound with sociological, medical, and political studies on the subject. Though the epidemic is prioritised by the media, images of actual bodies sick with AIDS are notably absent from news reports, television programmes, and prevention campaigns like the youth-focused initiative loveLife ("Home") as well as Scrutinize ("Home"), which employs animerts (animated advertisements) to promote its message of safe sex.

In "An Eerie Silence", Steinberg registers his surprise at the relative lack of literary encounters with HIV/AIDS in South Africa: "In the West, AIDS memoirs had long ago become a genre in their own right; in South Africa, it was as if the country and its writers had instead decided to change the subject" (85). Consider the case of *Telling Tales,* a compilation of short stories by twenty-one world-renowned writers published in 2004. The editor, Nadine Gordimer, initiated this international project in

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[13] To date, the recipient of an inaugural Windham-Campbell Prize and two-time Alan Paton Award winner has published the following full-length works: *Midlands*, *The Number*, *Three Letter Plague*, *Thin Blue: The Unwritten Rules of Policing South Africa* (f.p. 2008), *Little Liberia: An African Odyssey in New York City* (f.p. 2011), and *A Man of Good Hope* (f.p. 2015).

order to raise funds for the Treatment Action Campaign, an HIV/AIDS activist organisation that garnered international support in its outspoken opposition of Mbeki's AIDS denialism. According to *The Guardian*, "[t]he only condition Gordimer gave to her fellow authors was that their tales could not be directly about Aids" (Adams). Correspondingly, the last sentence of Gordimer's introduction to *Telling Tales* reads: "The subjects of the stories are not about HIV/AIDS; but the profits go to help succour and support its victims" (x).

Is Gordimer, here, to use Steinberg's formulation, changing the subject? One could read her instruction to the book's acclaimed authors as an attempt to discourage "direct" and, therefore, predictable or unimaginative accounts of suffering and death which, presumably, might impair the project's primary objective, that is, sales. However, that in turn raises the question of the massive surge in the popularity of South African crime fiction, a genre that explores the seemingly unfathomable volatility of violence in the country. Why do readers (and writers) embrace fiction about bloodshed, but, conversely, steer clear of a disease of the blood – both very real threats to the wellbeing of society? Perhaps the answer lies in that a virus which is transmitted invisibly and unknowingly (in most cases) challenges our understanding of "crime", complicating notions of perpetration, responsibility, and justice. Given the scale of the epidemic in South Africa, then, the relative scarcity of imaginative encounters with the subject in literature might be attributed to a collective fear of bringing into language a contagion that knows no bounds, in terms of not only physical contagion but also language itself. Writing on the AIDS crisis in literature, film and culture, Jacqueline Foertsch defines the metaphoric, fittingly, as the "realm of permeable boundaries" (39). With this in mind, one could argue that the challenging metaphoricity of HIV/AIDS rather lends itself to literary engagement

– as this chapter hopes to demonstrate implicitly in the course of its discussion of the meaning of HIV/AIDS in Steinberg's narrative.

In addition, following Chris Warnes's argument cited in my chapter on Orford, crime fiction's popularity to a large degree stems from its ability to negotiate threat, all the while drawing inspiration from South Africa's ostensibly fecund climate of latent violence. Literary works concentrating on HIV/AIDS, on the other hand, tend to do the opposite: instead of dividing the world neatly into the polarisations of good and evil, and victim and perpetrator, literary work on HIV/AIDS generally writes against the grain of public perception to counteract and lay bare the operations of stigma surrounding a disease which sets "negative" so expressly apart from "positive". Cahill's framework, which I adopted in preceding chapters, is equally pertinent to this consideration, given that stigma arises out of processes of derivatisation. This chapter will focus on stigma especially, given the term's associations with taboo and shame in the context of HIV/AIDS.

Perhaps another explanation for the relative lack of literature on the topic emerges when situating *Three Letter Plague* firmly within the history of South African literature. It is clear that Steinberg's utilisation of discursive strategies more characteristic of fiction allows him to elaborate a compelling world which is inhabited by characters embodying divergent perspectives. As a less obvious consequence, this utilisation situates his, albeit non-fictional, text within a particular literary tradition and thus in relation to long-standing conversations about the challenges unequal societies pose to writing. I'm thinking specifically of the debate on realism and responsibility, in the decades leading up to apartheid's demise, between authors Lewis Nkosi, Nadine Gordimer, and J.M. Coetzee, among others. Although Steinberg's mode of writing differs vastly from Coetzee's, not least given its explicitly non-fictional status, *Three Letter Plague*'s critical engagement with

notions of truth is comparable to Coetzee's concern "with narrative and its relation to other discourses [more] than he is with representation per se" (*J.M. Coetzee* 13), to quote Attwell's summation of Coetzee's position in the dispute.

In "Rummaging in Private Worlds", Steinberg reflects on the value of his chosen genre in relation to the country's history of segregation:

> Perhaps non-fiction has an extra kind of power in a country like ours. We live in a place that's changing profoundly and there's a great amount of uncertainty in all spheres of life, and if a book comes out that professes to show life beneath the surface, people urgently want to know that. (66)

Antjie Krog, the writer whose work will take centre stage in my concluding chapter, "Tongue", makes a related statement in "Fact Bordering Fiction and the Honesty of 'I'": she chose to write about real people because truth in South Africa eluded and "surpassed [her] imagination" (38). In other words, for Krog, truth or reality presents the greatest challenge to the post-apartheid writer: "[W]e have been living apart in such a particular Western or African framework that we often do not know what the truth is about ourselves and others" (35). The main rationale behind Steinberg's and Krog's choice of genre relates to this claim: the imagination and fiction fail before South Africa's overwhelming, discordant realities.

In the same article, Krog provides eight intriguing reasons for adopting the "I" in creative non-fiction or, in other words, for examining her own frame of reference and position of authority through and in writing:

> [I]f I say the word "I," I call forth the word "you." You have to respond. And you will allow me to access you under your own conditions, within your own ambiguities and fractious facts. But if the "you" who is not "I" responds, then you and I can at last start trying to find "us" as well as "he" or "she" or "they." (39)

Concerning the incentive of mutual understanding, Steinberg's *Three Letter Plague* confronts and performs the complex challenges involved in creating mutual understanding or an "us" in the face of life-threatening problems like AIDS which, as doctors like the character Dr Hermann Reuter suggest, can only be managed if one discourse or truth (biomedicine) succeeds in stifling another (traditional remedies). Steinberg initiates a dialogue on the body's vulnerability in a setting marked by a deeply rooted dialectic of race, class, and gender, and this explorative journey is narrated in *Three Letter Plague* as a means of understanding and dismantling essentialist claims about HIV-positive bodies.

To return to the case of *Telling Tales*, perhaps Gordimer, in her position as editor, is trying to eschew the art of anticipated surfaces, of bland representations of HIV/AIDS without colour or critique. In *Three Letter Plague*, Steinberg, as the title of this section suggests, changes the subject in returning the embodied subject (in the sense of the individual) to the subject (the topic) of HIV/AIDS in South Africa, but with an awareness of his own authority and privilege, and a sound suspicion of master-narratives. His work is distinctive in that it analyses the material effects of the stories and metaphors, or layers of figurative meaning that his subjects use to experience, understand and structure their worlds. Thus, he reveals bodies that are not passive recipients of meaning but active participants in the creation of stories about themselves and their communities.

In order to draw attention to this important feature of Steinberg's work, it will be useful to consider his razor-sharp account of Cape Town's "revolting underbelly" (*Number* xviii), *The Number*, given its explicit exploration of the relation between identity, story, and the body in relation to power. In *Three Letter Plague*, as an instance of a story's material effects, an envious couple is suspected of bewitching Sizwe with an incurable disease, whilst, in *The Number,* myth embellishes the body

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of the prison gangster with the tattoos and invisible tools and uniforms of his rank. Steinberg tellingly notes how, in the maximum security prison, the Number, that is, the prisoners' highly symbolic legal system, is "*vleis-en-bloed*, 'flesh-and-blood'" (202). He concludes "A Prisoner's Wager", a short supplement to *The Number* published in *At Risk*, in a similar vein by imparting "a lesson [he]'d learn again and again at Pollsmoor: that in prison stories are as real as knives, the telling of them as much actions with consequences as any deed one can perform with feet or hands" (224).

Steinberg's research for *The Number* included extensive, sustained interviews with the inmates and staff members of Pollsmoor Maximum Security Prison in Cape Town. In "A Prisoner's Wager", Steinberg determines that these prisoners are not "merely battered receptacles of stories" (223-24), as short-story writer Herman Charles Bosman wrote in his prison memoir, *Cold Stone Jug*. Steinberg's experience of "step[ping] [...] into the skin" (222) of one specific prisoner, veteran gangster Magadien Wentzel (the protagonist of *The Number*), challenges Bosman's description of prisoners as "tarnished and rusted containers out of which strange tales issued, like djinns out of magic bottles", stating instead that the prisoners *are* the djinns, "emerg[ing] from their tales transmogrified, new beings" (224). Thus, body and story are portrayed as intimately entwined, as aptly evoked by the following phrase from Krog's *A Change of Tongue*: "Several pasts roam across our skin in shades of stone and setting sun" (25). By engaging with the shades, the hues and shadows, of personal narratives − including issues of race, class, and power − Steinberg cuts through the social fabric of worlds on the edge, so to speak, revealing bodies (individual and communal) living through, alongside, and in friction with stories. In addition, narrative's linearity and causality allow Steinberg to trace bodies in perpetual motion, bodies remade and retold as contexts evolve.

Accordingly, key features of Steinberg's creative reportage include, firstly, a revitalisation of the somewhat worn phrase, "the power of story", which, secondly, hints at reasons for the prominence (in addition to the relevance) in post-apartheid South Africa of his distinct brand of narrative inquiry. Jill Bell defines narrative inquiry as a study which analyses the ideas and values that inspire stories (208), a study which, in the case of Steinberg, assumes the form of a story itself. *Three Letter Plague* undergoes many journeys, including a foray into the problems, processes, and material effects of memory, myth, and metaphor. Contrary to strictly sociological methods of narrative analysis, Steinberg's creative inquiries refuse to act as rusted receptacles of stories, to recall Bosman's phrase, or treat his interviewees as such, aiming instead to produce work that is collaborative, inventive, and, most importantly, forthright about the complications the legacy of apartheid poses to his work.

In the same way that the prisoner establishes a sense of identity through an active engagement with the "strange tales" of prison mythology, Steinberg constructs his texts through a dynamic interaction with the personal histories of marginalised individuals. The brief encounter in "A Prisoner's Wager" with Bosman's portrayal presents a key feature of Steinberg's interdisciplinary mode of writing, especially with regard to *Three Letter Plague*, which is the way his work performs a struggle between conflicting systems of knowledge, as represented by its characters. His analytical representations restore to the individual subject a measure of agency, often absent from sociological studies with related subject matter. This allows Steinberg to stage multiple dialogues between different perspectives and principles verbalised by individuals who can hold their own. The individuals portrayed in *Three Letter Plague* are "real", yet Steinberg's characterisation endows them with a near literary significance: Sizwe Magadla, the rural everyman refusing to test for HIV, Hermann

Reuter, the impassioned white doctor and activist, Kate Marrandi, the devoted health worker, in addition to Steinberg, the inquisitive journalist-observer that binds them in more ways than one.

Given that Steinberg's exploration of perceptions of HIV/AIDS care orbits his developing relationship with Sizwe, a relationship between two characters in a book, the construction of Steinberg-the-character (the "I" in the text) should not be overlooked. In an interview with *The Paris Review*, Janet Malcolm, one of Steinberg's stylistic influences, reminds the reader that the journalist is as much a character in the text as her subject:

> The "I" character in journalism is almost pure invention. Unlike the "I" of autobiography, who is meant to be seen as a representation of the writer, the "I" of journalism is connected to the writer only in a tenuous way – the way, say, that Superman is connected to Clark Kent. The journalistic "I" is an overreliable narrator, a functionary to whom crucial tasks of narration and argument and tone have been entrusted, an ad hoc creation, like the chorus of Greek tragedy. He is an emblematic figure, an embodiment of the idea of the dispassionate observer of life.

The veracity of *Three Letter Plague* to a great extent lies in the specific figuration of the Steinberg character (the "I") in the text. Co-incidentally, there is a bit of Clark Kent in Steinberg-the-character's approach: Though driven by the will to knowledge, Steinberg's intentions are noble; his manner, reserved and considerate; and his inferences, incisive and relatively unprejudiced in that he foregrounds the regulatory role his own conceptions play in the construction of Sizwe's world in highly self-aware manner. In an exhibition of honesty that gains the reader's trust, Steinberg writes himself into the narrative – as a character – in order to explore his (largely unequal) relationship with Sizwe in a manner that comes across as rather personal.

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Its collaborative, interactive, and self-reflexive qualities set *Three Letter Plague* apart from other noteworthy AIDS-related narratives, for example, Nolen's series of portrait-interviews, *28 Stories of AIDS in Africa*, on the one hand, and self-directed writing like Adam Levin's memoir, *Aidsafari: A Memoir of My Journey with Aids*, Edwin Cameron's *Witness to AIDS*, and Eben Venter's *My Beautiful Death*, on the other.

In an insightful analysis of prison life writing in post-apartheid South Africa, Daniel Roux makes the important observation, speaking here of Steinberg's *The Number*, that

> [o]ne material catalyst for the prevalence of this kind of auto/biography is perhaps the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), where the testimony of the victims and perpetrators of apartheid were assembled in a social and legal space that foregrounded the idea of personal testimony as *collective endeavour*. ("Jonny Steinberg's <u>The Number</u>" 239, emphasis added)

The TRC's methods were a direct response to the manner in which apartheid's authoritarian government sought to obliterate all forms of thought incompatible with the dominant ideology. As a result, many anti-apartheid authors and artists took it upon themselves to give voice to marginalised perspectives by communicating the reality of lives lived under a regime of systemised oppression. In this sense, different interpretative frameworks could be seen competing for dominance. Roux, here, draws attention to the vital role the TRC played after the fall of apartheid in trying to accustom post-apartheid society to a plurality of valid perspectives. However, the catastrophic nature of the HIV/AIDS epidemic necessitates a single, supreme truth in the form of biomedical testing and treatment, which threatens the TRC's ideal of universal respect for divergent ways of seeing, living, and healing.

Perhaps, then, HIV/AIDS is the "new apartheid", as Desmond Tutu dubbed it in 2001 (Boseley and Vasagar), in more ways than one, in that the urgency and sheer suffering caused by the epidemic (like the suffering under apartheid) puts immense strain on critical engagement, as Neville Hoad is quick to point out in *African Intimacies*. *Three Letter Plague*'s concern with how metaphoricity works in a particular cultural economy speaks to Hoad's chapter, "Thabo Mbeki's AIDS Blues", in which he carefully analyses "Mbeki's invocation of the history of colonial racism in relation to present-day HIV/AIDS" (90) in two prominent speeches. Hoad finds in Mbeki's critiques the pivotal "immobilizing paradox":

> To say that Africans suffer from HIV/AIDS is to participate in the vicious ideological edifice of European racism, and thus fail in the responsibilities of the African intellectual and professional classes. To say that Africans contract HIV/AIDS through sex is to compound the racism.
>
> We are at an impasse; there is no way out or forward here. Both the historical racism that the speeches document and their critique of this racism, insofar as this critique may undermine a comprehensive public health policy that addresses the question of the sexual transmission of HIV/AIDS, have lethal consequences for the lives and bodies of Africans (the racism deliberately, the critique inadvertently). (101)

In spite of *Three Letter Plague*'s adherence to the activist and didactic imperative that characterises many texts dealing with HIV/AIDS, the text is quite remarkable in that it actively seeks to highlight the historical conditions that inform the reception of biomedicine in rural South Africa or, in other words, investigate the impact of its claim to supremacy in a country characterised by manifold, often conflicting worldviews. Thus, instead of merely educating his readership about the necessity of disclosing one's HIV status, Steinberg also problematises the medium of disclosure,

and the history of its operations in Africa. Treading a fine line, he considers the implications of disclosing knowledge of one's body in the language of a former oppressor, questioning whether it is at all possible to impress the authority of Western testing and treatment *without* appearing to corroborate the Western claims to supremacy that reinforced centuries of segregation in South Africa. He does so in a way that does not speak for the other, but instead tries to find, through collaboration and dialogue, a space and a vocabulary in which the other might speak for himself.

4.3. A Plague of Three Letters

> Testing day, it seems, had detonated an explosion in the center of Nomvalo. […]. In the wake of this shock, the meaning of AIDS had shattered in all directions like shrapnel from a blast. Every fear that had ever been whispered came out onto the village paths. Demons with their injections, ARVs and their toxins, foreign sangomas and their dead babies: each splinter scratched out its own tale, but all bore the same warning – evil intention. […] [T]he intention was to kill. (*Three* 219)

The previous section mentioned that certain literary devices allow Steinberg's *Three Letter Plague* to converse with fictional texts about South Africa which have, for decades, demonstrated a concern with the ethics of representation. Steinberg's text espouses a pragmatic concern with representation as an exercise in power which extends from the text's narrative form (in other words, Steinberg's self-aware construction of the narrative) to a real, contemporary setting. Specifically, Steinberg shows that objects related to HIV testing and treatment (for example, pills and needles) acquire different meanings in different contexts. In this regard, I will examine a particular portrayal from the text near the end of this section. However, as a brief point of introduction to illustrate this perspective, I refer to Steinberg's

description of how medicines are invested with meaning in order to facilitate patients' development of a necessary "lively relationship with their medicines, a relationship at once emotional and cognitive" (124):

> [People] must know the name of each pill, its shape, its color, its nickname, all its potential side effects. They are stuck with these tablets for their lives. Their relationship to them will at times be hateful and fraught and unhappy. The tablets will perhaps make them sick, fail to stop them from getting sick, change the shape of their bodies. Best to develop a language with which to speak to them. (124-25)

This section makes the main point that HIV/AIDS and its purported treatments (whether traditional or biomedical) are textual representations that occur within a specific discourse. Because the metaphors of HIV/AIDS and its medicines are contingent upon a society's pre-existing tensions and fears, regional inflections often differ, as demonstrated by Steinberg's particular attentiveness to Sizwe's personal perspective. This understanding of HIV as text and biomedicine as one knowledge system among many is integral to *Three Letter Plague*'s investigation of opposing systems of knowledge, including various remedies as powerful metaphorical constructs that are informed by the underlying values of particular symbolic frameworks.

To explain how the threat of infection shapes Sizwe's sense of identity as a black man living in rural South Africa after the fall of apartheid, I will consider the significance of the medium of contamination as set up by *Three Letter Plague*, that is, the blood. AIDS is a disease of the blood, literally and figuratively speaking, in that it spreads, literally, from body to body via blood components and in the process affects that which is, figuratively, connoted by "blood": life, community, kinship, and continuity. Sizwe's fear of HIV comprises more than a fear of literal suffering

and death. Taking into account that, in Steinberg's Ithanga, the body is depicted as deeply bound up with the mind, the community, the ancestral realm, and the environment, AIDS signals the end of "life" in a holistic sense; it signifies a death that transcends the individual body. In clarification, if contracted, HIV/AIDS would threaten to end Sizwe's own life, but also unsettlingly hamper his ability to *give* and thus prolong life via healthy progeny that would ensure the continuation of his ancestors and family's name and legacy. In other words, "[t]he corrosiveness of AIDS was expressed in the wasting away, not only of one's body, but of one's lineage, and, thus too, of the lineage of the dead ones who walked this earth in years gone by" (290).

Steinberg relates Sizwe's rejection of the HIV test unambiguously to a crisis of masculinity, writing, near the narrative's end, that "Sizwe's failure to test is not simply a tale about health-care services: it is a tale about men" (375). This crisis of masculinity is a predominant theme in literature about HIV/AIDS in South Africa, which often explores the problematic ways in which men try to negotiate their vulnerability in the face of mass unemployment, urbanisation, changes in women's constitutional rights (Jolly and Jeeves), and the proliferation of sexually transmitted diseases. In influencing blood relations, so to speak, the "curse that one carries in one's semen" (290) would additionally signify the end of one's life as a man in Ithanga, an identity founded on sexual potency, virility, and posterity. The following paragraph illustrates this understanding of death through a powerful simile:

> [Sizwe] had likened himself to an ox once before, outside the clinic, when he said he could not countenance the thought of the virus in his veins. Then, as now, he conjured an ox as a metaphor for a castrated man: castrated not in the sense that he cannot father children, but in the sense that he cannot father children he can claim as his own – a man without descendants and thus

without permanence, a man who will leave in this world only his rotting corpse. (289)

The opening image in *Mandela's Ego*, a post-apartheid novel by the South African intellectual Lewis Nkosi, is one of frustration and anxiety. "[U]nable to rise to the occasion", the masculine identity of the protagonist, Dumisa, is wholly wrapped up in sexual performance. Dumisa

> rocked, he swivelled, he crouched like a man demented, moving to rhythms never before seen or tried, crushing her yet feeling crushed himself, because for once, instead of being an ally, his body had become his enemy, it was betraying him at an inopportune moment – the supreme moment of his conquest.
>
> […]. What shame, oh what disgrace! He could not conceal his anger, his feelings of humiliation, which seemed to seize him by the throat, mercilessly choking the life out of him, like one of those boa constrictors of which everyone lived in terror. (7)

In her focus on counter-narratives in "The Literary Responses to HIV and AIDS in South Africa and Zimbabwe", Elizabeth Attree makes a powerful point:

> Linking disease to male bodies and the performance of masculinity ushers in a discourse on the body previously restricted to women's studies and feminism. Degenerative diseases like HIV/AIDS force us to position men within this gendered discourse. Perhaps the diseased male body can be figured as an "Other" which has yet to be recognised? The limitations and restrictions that this recognition would infer have far reaching consequences for the hegemony of masculinity: it is possible to interrogate the myth of a stable masculinity in literature, revealing the inherent instability of masculinity that is highlighted in the context of HIV/AIDS. (118)

The HIV-positive body is always gendered, raced, and classed, as South African literary treatments of the disease generally make clear. Therefore, the body afflicted with HIV/AIDS is often triply vulnerable – to poverty, forms of racial and gender discrimination, in addition to sexual violence. HIV/AIDS, in this sense, preys on and in a sense multiplies existing vulnerabilities, an observation which correlates with Mbeki's accentuation of the foothold in South Africa that poverty extended to the epidemic.

Given the serious threat it poses to the life of the individual, his community, and his culture, HIV/AIDS is generally imagined as a contamination of, or "dirt" (348) in, the blood. The last chapter of Lucy Graham's *State of Peril* concludes with a critical reflection on the myth of the "virgin cure" or "virgin-cleansing" (187) that posits child, including baby, rape as an HIV purification ritual in South Africa. The myth's rapid dissemination reveals that the conceptualisation of HIV as contamination is thoroughly ingrained in the country's collective imagination.

Mary Douglas's seminal anthropological work, *Purity and Danger*, is valuable in identifying reasons for and the repercussions of understanding HIV as a deadly pollutant or toxin. Examining notions of pollution and purity in Africa, Douglas convincingly argues that "ideas of dirt […] express symbolic systems and that the difference between pollution behaviour in one part of the world and another is only a matter of detail" (43). By investigating localised conceptions of HIV/AIDS, including the metaphorical association with dirt in the blood, Steinberg begins to understand how Sizwe structures his personal and communal identity in response to the transition from apartheid to democracy, and the accompanying dissolution of subsistence economy in South Africa.

Douglas's deduction that "pollution behaviour is the reaction which condemns any object or idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classifications" (45) resonates

with the manner in which HIV's "strange twilight" (*Three* 248) or AIDS's open secret confuses the distinction between self and other, healthy and sick. Because of HIV's invisibility (to the naked eye, given that it produces no initial symptoms), it cannot be fenced in or contained, as Steinberg and Sizwe come to realise:

> Together we saw that the epidemic has no boundaries, that those who were ill were interchangeable with ourselves. […].
>
> […]. Wherever we went, the virus was in the healthy and the sick […]. That was precisely what Sizwe had been telling me throughout our journey: that the epidemic had lost its boundaries, that there was no caging it any longer. (247-48)[14]

On the topic of Hepatitis C, an infection which is initially asymptomatic as well, Magdalena Harris writes, in an echo of Douglas's study, that "[t]he maintenance of binary understandings (sick/healthy, interior/exterior, clean/dirty) operates to protect a façade of social and bodily cohesion. That which escapes binary containment can be seen as threatening this sense of unity and must be cast aside, abjected" (35). As touched upon at the beginning of this section, Sontag attributes the metaphoricity of AIDS, "a product of definition or construction" (Sontag 113), to its invisibility. Stigma involves the creation of new boundaries, or binary understandings, to give definition to, or "cage", the confusion that HIV/AIDS's lethal invisibility generates. Stigma operates through metaphors that seek to render this abject anomaly visible, attributing a recognisable image like dirt in the blood in order to pin it down and thus protect the self, at least on a symbolic level. The body's physical vulnerability is thus shown to incite a grammar of differentiation segregating the sick from the healthy. This relates directly to the overall focus of my thesis on the relation between the

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[14] In *28 Stories*, an HIV-positive interviewee, Mthiyane, puts the same issue in slightly different terms: "'When something is "over there," you think its [sic] going to remain over there. And then you wake up one day and it's right here'" (cited in Nolen 368).

vulnerability of the body and prejudicial thinking, which always aims to keep the racialised, gendered, contagious other at arm's length.

The epigraph to this section, describing testing day in Nomvalo, a remote village approximately forty miles from Ithanga, evokes HIV and its test's explosive potential. It lists the various viciously malevolent origins villagers attribute to HIV, including, for example, the physical manifestation of improper behaviour;[15] demons sent by jealous peers to spread infection via injection or coupling; and, importantly, foreign influences like Western antiretroviral therapy and African witch doctors. In the minds of some of the locals, the epidemic "was brewed, not by witches and their demons, but in the vividly imagined laboratories of Western science" (166). This xenophobic understanding of HIV/AIDS as foreign contamination involves a slippage from anomaly to alien which will play an important part in the next section's discussion of white doctors and black bodies in relation to *Three Letter Plague*'s investigation of Sizwe's refusal to test for HIV.

As an example of how medicine acquires meaning through a particular symbolic framework, with subsequent reference to pollution and purification, I will discuss Steinberg's representation of Nomvalo's sole health worker and provider of HIV-related care, the counsellor and distributor of antiretroviral treatment, Kate Marrandi. Steinberg and Sizwe accompany MaMarrandi, a dedicated disciple of ARV therapy, as she travels resolutely from door to door, delivering ARVs and enquiring after the health of villagers living with AIDS. Drawing on religious terminology and employing theological conceptions of sin, purity, and confession, Steinberg fashions a powerful and admired, saint-like character that reveals a great deal about Nomvalo's mores. Though Steinberg's utilisation of stock characteristics runs the

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[15] In Lauren Beukes's cyberpunk novel, *Zoo City*, a text of a totally different kind, sin or guilt over a crime manifests physically, as an animal that is forever bound to the individual's body.

risk of flattening this character, he succeeds in imparting an endearing humanness instead.

Noting how she invests both the disease as well as the pills with meaning, positioning herself between the patient and his biomedical treatment, Steinberg depicts MaMarrandi's indispensable mash of meaning in the following literary moment:

> Perhaps this is a little too speculative […] but it seemed that [MaMarrandi] stood in the space between him and his pills and gave them their meaning. It was almost as if she took the pills first, chewed them thoroughly, spat them out, and then gave them to him. By the time he had swallowed them, which bit was antiretroviral and which bit MaMarrandi had become indistinguishable. She was the affirmation of the idea that there is a daily regimen that keeps one alive, keeps one's children from becoming orphans.
> (203)

A prime example of the manner in which Steinberg brings the body into language to personalise and embody the reality of HIV/AIDS, the highly corporeal metaphor in this extraordinary literary moment equates MaMarrandi's intercession, her mash of meaning, with mastication. The particular portrayal suggests that MaMarrandi's mediation of antiretroviral medication is integral to the patient's acceptance of treatment as a whole. Steinberg both demonstrates the necessity of human interaction to the facilitation of meaning in AIDS treatment, which involves investing something as seemingly unobtrusive and neutral as a pill with powerful meanings and effects. This clearly illustrates that medical treatment is, firstly, situated within a particular discourse and, secondly, that doctors or health workers act as agents in the service of this discourse.

Steinberg describes MaMarrandi as "a blank unit of care" (226), a *tabula rasa* which aids the rewriting of the self which is prompted by the disease, correlating with the so-called "talking cure" of psychoanalysis. She lets the patient take control of his body by describing his state of health: "He sat down and turned to MaMarrandi and in a long, steady stream began describing the state of his body, beginning with his head and ending with his feet" (202). The patient's stream of words is simultaneously an exercise in making meaning, in creating order, and a ritual of purification which impacts directly on the patient's identity and the ability to manage his new status. Woods argues that "[w]ith HIV/AIDS part of everyday life for so many people, it is clearly also a matter of the literary, as people seek to give symbolic form to their personal experience" (308).

The recalibration of identity in response to life-threatening diseases is an important point of intersection for the humanities and medical sciences. In the introduction to *Narrative and Identity*, Jens Brockmeier and Donal Carbaugh make the important point that "self-making (or 'life-making') depends heavily upon the symbolic system in which it is conducted, its opportunities and constraints" (16). In other words, the type of diagnosis and treatment (magical, spiritual, or biomedical) provides the language in which the psychological and moral dimension of the disease, that is, the illness, is to be written and spoken. Steinberg emphasises that the state of being publicly HIV-positive is one that involves constant conversations about the body, explaining that,

> to embrace indefinite treatment is indeed to recalibrate one's relation to the world, and that the primary tool is dialogue. There are networks of ARV takers in many of Lusikisiki's villages, and they talk. Their talk is about far more than drugs: it encompasses sex and love and work and the course of life; it is about the relation between all these things to one's body. (98-99)

Returning to MaMarrandi's HIV/AIDS care, her process specifies that patients adhere to a daily regimen which involves taking their medication on time, eating healthily, reintegrating into the community, as well as alterations to sexual behaviour and personal habits like drinking and smoking which, within her frame of morality, belong to the same "pollution behaviour" (to recall Douglas's term) which, she presumes, led to the contraction of HIV. Based on Mildred Blaxter's explanation of different types of chronic illness narratives in "Life Narratives, Health and Identity", this regimen can be understood as a specifically "moral" system or form, "which account[s] for changes in the illness, the person, and the resultant social identity, and re-establish[es] moral status" (172). This constitutes a framework within which the patient can compose a self that has been cleansed, morally, spiritually and physically, and ultimately empowered. Blaxter explains that "identity *is* a life story" (170), a key notion that I will return to, rephrased as identity-as-story, in the Conclusion, "Tongue".

The patient's report of his body's state of health to MaMarrandi resembles, to a certain extent, the form of a confessional, including spoken affirmations of adherence to her prescriptions and a repudiation of pollution behaviour. "Caging" the disease, or ascribing boundaries to divide the healthy from the sick, seems impossible, not to mention immoral, but MaMarrandi's framework offers to the infected a means by which to structure, order, and define a life with HIV/AIDS in a potentially boundless world, in addition to living alongside others. In an interview with Steinberg for *Three Letter Plague*, Eric Goemaere, head of MSF, reflects on the rules that have arisen quite organically within the society of ARV users as a response to blurred boundaries:

> "It is important for people to believe they are part of a club, perhaps even a church. It is a sense of *ubuntu*. If you want to create a club, you must create

rules. Because otherwise everyone is in, which means nobody is in. It is amazing: they set up artificially a number of rules; it was never pushed by us. And they give challenges to each other." (207)

In an unrelated encounter, a local government councillor in Lusikisiki tells Steinberg: "'I don't trust these ARVs because they are not ours'" (173). MaMarrandi is the embodiment of empathy, acceptance, and forgiveness, the filter, the screen that translates the medication into a local and, therefore, more palatable register. In terms of the previous mention of the metaphorisation of HIV/AIDS as an anomalous, boundary-blurring agent, something that is "not ours", MaMarrandi's efforts can be understood as an attempt to make the ARVs *theirs*.

I would like to call attention to Steinberg's understanding of MaMarrandi's purpose, which is "to drag the virus from the mire of treachery it inspires, to wash off the resentment and the envy and the bile" (227) and "to clean up the surplus of thoughts and fears, to restore to the virus a simple and coherent meaning" (219). In other words, her task is as much to treat the disease, the pathological condition, as it is to regulate the illness, that is, the experience of living with AIDS which is, as I have pointed out, highly metaphorical. Steinberg describes her calling as washing away the "dirty" layers of meaning associated with HIV/AIDS – stigma, shame, and death – in order to present to the community a basic, manageable pathogen. However, he wonders whether MaMarrandi's "own moral imagination has suspended some of the medical knowledge she has learned. […]. It is surely the sex itself, the surfeit of sex that has spilled over the boundaries of orderly categories. As if corrupt human practices are quite literally diseased" (227).

Indeed, MaMarrandi does "wash" HIV/AIDS of its dirt, but not its metaphors. Nor does she relate to the HIV-positive community in a strictly biomedical sense. Her success in promoting biomedical treatment lies precisely in that she offers a *holistic*

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antidote to HIV's perceived contamination of body, spirit, and community. Instead of stripping the virus of its "dirty" associations with pollution, she draws on the communal understanding of AIDS as punishment to offer the patient a means of multi-layered decontamination. According to Steinberg, "Kate's patients […] are cleansing themselves of a judgment, a reproach, that is at once physiological and moral" (208), a "reproach that has gotten into the blood and taken the form of a virus" (209). In other words, though her treatment battles stigma and shame, it neither reduces the metaphoricity of HIV/AIDS, nor refutes its associations with pollution behaviour. Instead, she invests the ARV regimen with purgative power, using one metaphorical framework to fight another. Whereas Sontag suggests that HIV/AIDS should be wholly stripped of its metaphors, Steinberg's work, which is based on fieldwork and experience, presents the occasion to rethink this theoretical position.

Instead of trying to fight one anomalous toxin (HIV) with another (ARVs), MaMarrandi invests the medicine with a familiar, predominantly religious syntax to transform the stigmatised meaning of HIV and manage its impact on personal identity. In other words, she does not claim to strip HIV of its metaphors, but rather incorporates them into her treatment. In drawing on the figurative meanings of HIV/AIDS in Nomvalo, she is shown to have adopted a different approach to distributing antiretroviral therapy than Hermann's insistence on full disclosure and biomedical facticity. Near the end of the text, in a conversation with Steinberg on Sizwe's anonymity in the book, Hermann insists that "[d]isclosure is linked to acceptance of your reality":

> "[Sizwe] must disclose on behalf of his family. That is the beginning of healing. It will heal them."

[…]. "I want to heal people. You just report about it, you don't need to change his life. I wouldn't be able to hear anything about his life without wanting to change him. That's me. I'm a doctor. I want to heal. I think not wanting to disclose a name is part of a big pathology."

[…]. "That for me is the worst kind of disclosure: hidden disclosure."

(367-68)

When comparing the methods of Hermann and MaMarrandi, though, it appears that Hermann's insistence on full disclosure through diagnosis within a seemingly neutral biomedical framework is no different from hers. In both frameworks, the knowledge of one's own HIV status is indeed the most important aspect of HIV prevention. Hence, prevention campaigns encourage HIV-positive individuals to disclose their status, the truth of their bodies, there where they are most vulnerable, to their sexual partners irrespective of the local meanings and metaphors related to stigma. Notwithstanding its claims to objectivity and transparency, the sterile language of biomedicine, which Jean Comaroff has called the "sanitized language of suffering" (197), is as much a construct as MaMarrandi's purgative framework. In both cases, the recalibration of individual identity, after an often debilitating diagnosis of everlasting vulnerability, depends on the symbolic system in which the therapy (physical and psychological) is conducted.

To further illustrate the discursive nature of biomedicine, I refer to Steinberg's description of Hermann's new recruits, new adherence counsellors for the MSF project, as "young people speaking a newly learned language, their very sense of themselves invested in a new vision" (110). Steinberg also writes that, thereafter, "clinic corridors would host a cohort of busy and animated young people, *a new language* issuing uncertainly from their tongues"; "Hermann gave them the prospect of a career, *a new discourse* with which to understand their lives and their town"

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(110, emphasis added). These two extracts from a key passage in *Three Letter Plague* are instrumental in, firstly, emphasising, yet again, Steinberg's concern with the potential and limitations of vocabularies of HIV/AIDS care, and, secondly, that treatment influences the individual's sense of self and belonging, recalibrating the relationships between individuals, communities, and belief systems. Also note that, because the body, in Ithanga, is not conceived of as a separate entity, to be localised or compartmentalised through health care, testing and treatment influence the individual's life as an integrated whole.

Although Steinberg is wary of all the new languages in his midst, MaMarrandi's and Hermann's respective approaches do go a long way in loosening the grip of HIV/AIDS's grammar of differentiation and shame. When identity is fleshed out in figurative terms, especially when incorporating an emotional dimension as seen in the case of MaMarrandi's patients, it is rendered more fluid and mutable, that is to say, an identity in motion which forecloses fixity. Steinberg's analogous portrayals of their methodologies serve to underscore that any type of interaction between bodies – whether between a doctor or health worker and a patient, or a journalist and his interviewee – is always governed by a specific set of principles. Biomedicine, like any other discourse, is always accompanied by a certain set of assumptions and values, and, most importantly, rooted in a specific historical context. In other words, it exists in and as language, and invests the body with meaning that is by no means objective, neutral, or acultural. In emphasising the discursive nature of biomedicine, including HIV testing and treatment, I lay the groundwork for the argument that scepticism regarding the HIV test implicates the country's protracted history of exploitation.

Before proceeding with the next section's discussion of the battle of knowledge systems that has shaped political responses to HIV/AIDS, I make a straightforward

distinction, for the sake of clarity, between the stigma surrounding the HIV-positive *individual* in the context of his community, on the one hand, and the humiliation of a *community* overcome with HIV and forced to face the Western world. As Steinberg's text demonstrates, meanings of the individual body and that of the body of the community are intimately entwined. This is clearly illustrated in the text by ubiquitous conceptualisations of HIV as contaminated blood, a contamination that is understood as being caused, at the level of the individual, by anything from demons sent by envious neighbours to private guilt, and, at the level of the collective, by foreign, invasive, and malevolent forces. The latter is a broad category which includes Western doctors, medicines, pharmaceutical companies, as well as the "makwerekwere", a derogatory term for immigrants from other African countries.

My predominant focus, thus far, has fallen on the vulnerability of the individual. It has regarded Sizwe's refusal of the HIV test in terms of the fear of humiliation and disempowerment before peers. Although the various ways in which local meanings and metaphors of HIV/AIDS shape individual identities invite further consideration, as explored by Steinberg in *Three Letter Plague*, the next section's contribution to the debate rather involves the broader significance of Sizwe's refusal to test for HIV. Although the fear of individual (rather than collective) disempowerment and shame appears to play a greater role in preventing Sizwe from testing, the book also points to the less influential (in terms of Sizwe's personal decision) yet meaningful fear of the "collective humiliation" of Sizwe's community and culture and even South Africa as a whole. Although Steinberg portrays Sizwe as a highly individualised, liminal character, he also imbues his thoughts, feelings, and fears with emblematic potential. Situating Sizwe's scepticism of the master-narrative of biomedicine as a representation of "collective" dissent within a post-colonial context, the next section associates his attitude with the imbalance in power relations which yet permeates

languages of the body after the fall of apartheid. This, to my mind, comprises the text's most significant contribution to knowledge about HIV's unique prevalence rate in South Africa.

4.4. White Doctors and Black Bodies

> He is a black man selling his interior to a white man. [...].
>
> You do not sell your interior to whites, for what is inside you is an instance of a shared, black interior. What you are offering to the white man is not yours, it is everybody's: a collective sphere of privacy bounded by race and politics. You do not hawk a piece of that interior to people who have spent generations trying to extinguish your spirit. (*Three* 355)

In *Three Letter Plague*'s critique of Mbeki's AIDS dissidence, Steinberg admits that "[a]ny serious student of the AIDS epidemic is compelled to answer a difficult question: Why Africa? Why has the epidemic been uniquely terrible here?" (100). Steinberg provides a brief overview of how Mbeki, as one such serious, highly influential student of the epidemic, grappled with the question. There is something quite Mbeki-esque about Sizwe's scepticism about biomedicine, a correlation which is further underscored by Steinberg's discussion of Mbeki's response to the epidemic in a text that moves back and forth between the individual body, on the one hand, and the body politic, on the other. In book's penultimate chapter, preceding the epilogue, Steinberg writes:

> There is no particular reason why Hermann Reuter should stand as an emblem of the quest to heal a country of AIDS. Nor is there a special reason Sizwe's response should reflect that of ordinary people across South Africa. But these are the people I have found through whom to tell a story of AIDS

treatment, and it is hard to stop myself from thinking of them allegorically. (371-72)

The epigraph to this section refers especially to the relationship between Steinberg and Sizwe. Given the shared interests of writer and doctor when it comes to translating the body, as it were, into recognisable registers, it additionally reads as an exposition of Sizwe's refusal of biomedical treatment or, more specifically, his refusal to grant the diagnostician access to the "shared, black interior". The communicative exchange providing such access to the doctor or writer is depicted as a reluctant transaction that constitutes a betrayal of community and culture: "'So what people will maybe say about me,' [Sizwe] continued in a calm, even voice, 'they will say I have sold something that is not for sale'" (354).

In the enactment of a struggle between polarised perspectives, *Three Letter Plague* sensitively probes the boundary of this "collective sphere of privacy bounded by race and politics", the edge of the black interior that Mbeki's critique so fervently protects by refusing to yield the South African body to Western discourse. This associates the crisis of HIV/AIDS with the history and politics of interracial intimacy in post-apartheid South Africa.

In *Three Letter Plague*, Steinberg discovers a "black people's secret" (157, 351) which involves "the idea that Western medical technology embodies malicious intent" (168) and, more specifically, that the white doctor's needle carries and, in the process of extracting blood for the HIV test, actually inserts the virus into the body. It is not so much the content of this secret that serves as a point of entry into Sizwe's refusal to test for HIV, but rather the fact that the secret casts "black people" quite problematically as an undifferentiated collective before their former colonisers. In the excerpt, Steinberg's relationship with Sizwe is also, and necessarily, couched in racial terms. Both Steinberg, the white man, and Sizwe, the black subject – "subject"

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in that his body is subjected to the white man's will to knowledge – occupy historically determined roles that complicate intimacy across the racialised class divide. However, instead of frustrating Steinberg's inquiry into Sizwe's scepticism, this divide in fact animates Steinberg's exploration of the problem of HIV/AIDS in terms of the country's history of protracted segregation, exploitation, and disproportionate representation. Steinberg tackles these complexities, for instance, via Hermann's characterisation as an influential, philanthropic miracle worker, though ignorant of his position of power in relation to cross-cultural sensitivities in post-apartheid South Africa.

As regards his relationships with the individual subjects that enter and shape his work, Steinberg explains that, "I am a middle-class white South African who has generally written about poor black South Africans. Behind the ways in which my subjects perform for me, want to please me, resent me, need to conceal things from me, dislike me, lies the story of a whole country" (Steinberg, "Counting" 32). Although he admits that he always "remain[s] in control", "pulling the levers; […] putting together the product" ("Counting" 36), Steinberg not only acknowledges and problematises but at the same time sensitively thematises the relationship between white author or researcher and black subject in relation to AIDS as one of the new democracy's biggest challenges.

To be clear from the outset, Steinberg is a proponent of general scientific explanations of and biomedical therapies for HIV/AIDS, whereas Sizwe, for the most part, considers HIV/AIDS in terms of personalistic (rather than naturalistic) causation. The term "personalistic causation" refers to the vast array of (often) magical origins attributed to HIV/AIDS, which are all related to persons, families, or foreign groups, which I have mentioned before. Although somewhat apprehensive of traditional medicine as well, Sizwe initially leans towards traditional cures as

administered by a "sangoma", a divine-healer also known as a witch doctor, or an "inyanga", a herbalist. The "journey" in the book's title partially refers to Sizwe's emerging recognition of the effectiveness of biomedical testing and treatment, notwithstanding perpetual oscillations in his attitude towards antiretroviral therapy, on the one hand, and traditional remedies, on the other. Although Sizwe ultimately does come to accept ARV therapy as the most effective way of managing the symptoms of AIDS, he never tests his blood for HIV, denying the book a much sought-after culmination that would have validated biomedicine's hegemony over the black body in post-apartheid South Africa.

The notion of a shared black interior that is "not for sale", of a private, near-sacred cultural terrain coveted by the white man, brings to mind Fanon's analysis of medicine and colonialism in French Algeria: "The dominant group arrives with its values and imposes them with such violence that the very life of the colonized can manifest itself only defensively, in a more or less clandestine way" (*Dying* 130). Given its colonial syntax, medical practice is often perceived as an exercise in power manifesting as a "uniquely intimate, uniquely intrusive" (*Three* 183) form of colonisation that targets the meaning of the body. Although *A Dying Colonialism* was first published in 1959, its analysis of the relationship between white doctor and black patient in a society under colonial occupation is relevant to attitudes regarding biomedicine in Steinberg's Ithanga, suggesting unsettling continuities between apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa. Fanon's understanding of the reactive constitution of identity, of claiming personal space defensively and covertly when faced with a dominating presence, is illustrated by Steinberg's description of Sizwe's first meeting with Hermann Reuter, the white doctor previously suspected of harbouring the virus in his needle:

> Sizwe expresses deference like no one I have seen before. […]. He lowers his eyes and watches the floor, and the shape and weight of his entire body demonstrate that he is in somebody else's space. Yet he loses no poise; his own shrunken space is dignified and secure. (116)

Sizwe assumes a similar pose, pulling into himself, when confronted with Steinberg's questions about his understanding of HIV/AIDS:

> About illness [Sizwe] is not comfortable sharing his thoughts. The tension pulls his head into his shoulders and he observes me warily. I am knocking on the door to a universe in which I do not belong − because I am not family, because I am white, because I am a writer, because there are matters about which one does not speak lightly, and others about which one does not speak at all. (136)

According to Judith Butler in *Giving an Account of Oneself*, "to tell the story of oneself […] performs an action that presupposes an Other, posits and elaborates the other, is given to the other" (81-82). In so far as medical examination is understood in terms of piecing together an account of the body, it is precisely the act of being given to the other via this account that Sizwe is trying to avoid by silently pulling into himself. Fanon affirms that, in a colonial society, "the doctor always appears as a link in the colonialist network, as a spokesman for the occupying power" (*Dying* 131). In this regard, Hermann's belief in "[s]alvation through confession" (368) is reminiscent of the medical officer's attempt to determine or define, even possess, Michael K's "meaning" in Coetzee's *Life & Times of Michael K*: "I appeal to you, Michaels: *yield*!" (208). The following soliloquy by the medical officer reads like an elaboration of Hermann's insistence on disclosure:

"It is time to deliver, my friend. You've got a story to tell and we want to hear it. […]. Tell us what we want to know, then we will leave you alone."

I paused; he stared stonily back. "*Talk*, Michaels," I resumed. "You see how easy it is to talk, now *talk*. Listen to me, listen how easily I fill this room with words. […]. You don't want to be simply one of the perished, do you? You want to live, don't you? Well then, *talk*, make your voice heard, tell your story!" (*Life & Times* 191-92)

In the previous section, I maintained that illness narratives are contingent on the symbolic frameworks that inform treatments. Whereas Mbeki's attitude towards AIDS could be described as a decisive explosion onto the global scientific scene, Sizwe chooses to remain silent, pulling himself into a passive, composed, and "secure" "shrunken space", protecting the dignity of the "black interior". Fanon explains that, if "the colonized escapes the doctor, and the integrity of his body is preserved, he considers himself the victor by a handsome margin" (*Dying* 127-28). This victory involves the denunciation of the supposed supremacy of the coloniser's discourse and serves to preserve individual and cultural integrity. Conversely, if the colonized patient would "[accept] the medicine, even once", in the words of Fanon, he would be "admitting, to a limited extent perhaps but nonetheless ambiguously, the validity of the Western technique" (*Dying* 131). Because Sizwe cannot find a language in which to express his vulnerability, he remains contracted, silent, small – derivatised. His comportment speaks of the urgent need for a discursive framework by which he might understand and communicate the vulnerability of his body in his own terms.

In a short instance of narrative non-fiction, "Who Killed the Rain Queen?", journalist Liz McGregor investigates the death of Queen Modjadji VI, also known as Makobo

the Rain Queen, in north-eastern Limpopo. Like Steinberg, McGregor finds herself barred from a universe to which she does not belong, where secrecy serves as a means to protect the dignity of the individual and his/her community. Given the "opacity of the system" which "does not want to be fully known, not even to its own people" (20), she is unable to confirm suspicions that Makobo – "[s]he who must not be seen" (26) – died of AIDS. McGregor observes that "[t]he most common words used in response to any question about the royal family are: 'It's a secret'" (20). Held against McGregor's depiction of the opacity of royal customs as a means of preserving culture, Sizwe's opaque refusal to test for HIV manifests as a distinctive counter-hegemonic strategy.

With regard to the book's main topic of investigation, that is, Sizwe's unwillingness to yield his body to the biomedical HIV test, Steinberg ultimately does come to understand, at least to some degree, perceptions of testing and antiretroviral treatment in Ithanga. The reason discussed is but one of many convoluted explanations *Three Letter Plague* provides for Sizwe's aversion to testing. To summarise, it is one of the book's most ground-breaking conclusions that, given Western medicine's history of misrepresentation in South Africa, antiretroviral treatment appears to produce the fear of humiliation and the failure of local forms of knowledge. According to Steinberg, "[t]he matter at stake was one of pride and humiliation. [Sizwe] knew that twentieth-century South Africa had gutted his world, leaving it without roads or lights or clinics, or decent jobs. Perhaps he also wondered whether it had left his world without wisdom" (250). In fact, as Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* and Niq Mhlongo's *Dog Eat Dog* also suggest, excessive HIV prevalence rates in South Africa are often attributed to a loss of culture rather than culture itself, taking to task the West's pathologisation of the African body in the wake of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

4.5. "A Knee-high Fence"

In the following episode, which refers to a trip that Steinberg and Sizwe take to the house of Sizwe's cousin, the sangoma Mabalane, to inspect this witch doctor's alleged herbal cure for HIV/AIDS, Steinberg reflects on representation as an exercise in power with respect to the author's own narrative framework. Some time after Sizwe registers the herbal medicine's failure, he reads Steinberg's portrayal of the event which, at that stage, was still an unpublished work in progress. Steinberg recounts and reflects on the ensuing confrontation:

> "When you wrote about Mabalane in your book," [Sizwe] says, "why did you say that the fence around his property was knee-high?"
>
> "I don't remember. Did I say it was knee-high? It is knee-high?"
>
> "It is about the height of the stomach. You exaggerated. You wanted to show that the man's place was fucked up. What fool wastes his time and money building a knee-high fence? Anything can get over it, even a small dog." (258)

Steinberg realises that Sizwe

> wants very much for an end to this, and for the end to be delivered by a dose of Mpondo medicine; a gift from the ancestors that heals one now and forever and puts an end to the lines outside the clinic and the counselors in the school hall.
>
> I have rubbed his face in it. I went to Mabalane's place, and what I saw was a knee-high fence. (258-59)

In "South African Literature in the Time of AIDS", Woods draws on Fassin's study, *When Bodies Remember*, to discuss HIV/AIDS as a contested sign or a "site of conflicting meanings" (309), of which Steinberg's knee-high fence episode is a self-

aware, nuanced illustration. One of the central ideas underpinning Woods's argument, based on the work of Valentin Volosinov, is,

> that within any given sign-community, different classes struggle over the use of the same signs, with each ideological faction seeking to "pull" the sign in its direction. Consequently, Volosinov regards signs as "multi-accentual" and as the site of class battles, as dominant and subordinate social groupings seek to impose their definitions on signs. (307)

Seen in this light, Mbeki's efforts to provide an African solution to the disease, and drive out foreign intervention, could be regarded as an attempt, at the level of signification, to pull the sign from former minority rule in the direction of the country's new leadership. Woods explains that "[i]n trying to 'uniaccentualize'[16] signs, the dominant class aims to empty the social and historical sediments out of signs in order to give them the appearance of being 'natural' and 'given' to social processes" (307).

In his exhaustive consideration of Mbeki's stance, which could be described as an attempt to denaturalise biomedicine and bring its social and historical origins to light, Fassin makes the vital point that "[m]ethodological relativism – which consists in treating both points of view in the same manner – is in no way intellectual relativism, which would mean considering both perspectives as equally valid" (117). *Three Letter Plague*'s performance of Steinberg and Sizwe's asymmetrical relationship fits neatly into Fassin's explanation of methodological relativism. Even though Steinberg refers to Sizwe's "refusal" but once – stating that "I wanted to understand his refusal to test" (155) – Sizwe's oscillating attitude toward antiretroviral therapy can only be described, generally, in terms of negation, since Steinberg fully adheres to the validity of biomedical testing and treatment regarding HIV/AIDS. Fassin

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[16] Here, Woods modifies Volosinov's usage of the linguistic term, "uniaccentual".

problematises the word "denial", explaining that it is "usually presented by those who use it as being merely factual, but it is both prescriptive and polemic. Prescriptive, because it establishes one side for truth and one for falsehood […]. Polemic, because it also constitutes one side for good and one for evil" (115). Notwithstanding Steinberg's problematisation of truth in *Three Letter Plague*, there is a clear distinction in the text between legitimate antiretroviral therapy and hazardous traditional beliefs and remedies. Therefore, it would be erroneous to interpret Steinberg's respectful approach to Sizwe, his methodological relativism in other words, as intellectual relativism.

This means that, even if Sizwe were to contest the meaning of HIV/AIDS, which would constitute an allegorical imitation of the Mbeki debacle, his side of the argument would convert neither Steinberg nor Western readers to the abandonment of Western medicine. As explained in this chapter's opening section, because his contestation of the sign would always occur in the terms provided by Steinberg's framework, the extratextual Sizwe chose a different path, refusing to yield the secret that Steinberg set out to reveal from the start. Sizwe's resistance to HIV testing in "real" life – in the world outside the text – might prove fatal. His resistance *in* the text, however, allows him, as a character, to acquire the agency necessary to validate his perceptions in the presence of the author's in a post-colonial environment – and this constitutes *Three Letter Plague*'s "open secret".

Steinberg's *Three Letter Plague* presents HIV/AIDS as a powerful metaphorical construct informed by the underlying values of a particular environment's symbolic system. As Steinberg carefully disentangles local inflections, he begins to realise the complex entwinement of race, gender, class, and politics in South Africa as a whole, maintaining throughout an implicit focus on the binary oppositions that operate in the pandemic's vast and unruly shadow: HIV-positive/HIV-negative, rich/poor,

black/white, and masculine/feminine. As Nolen aptly notes in *28 Stories*, "AIDS is not an event, or a series of them; it's a mirror held up to the cultures and societies we build. The pandemic, and how we respond to it, forces us to confront the sticky issues of sex and drugs and inequity" (28).

In *J.M. Coetzee*, Attwell suggests that one should ask "what forms of self-definition are *available* within the culture – available, that is, to the *writer*, whose relationship to society rests on the way in which he or she transmits the discourses of fiction" (13). With this formulation in mind, *Three Letter Plague* reveals that, although forms of self-definition appear ample for the privileged (white) writer, the disenfranchised (black) subject of the text chooses to leave his body mute in order to retain the dignity of his person and culture. The South African public sphere portrayed in Steinberg's book leaves little space for traditional knowledge systems. The text enables a more hopeful conclusion, however, by problematising the stigma that plagues the subject of HIV/AIDS.

In conclusion, Steinberg's narrative non-fiction reveals a logic of commitment to the body's plight, incorporating techniques typical of fiction to engage with the multiple, clashing "truths" that shape post-apartheid bodies. Exemplifying the transformative power of metaphoricity, *Three Letter Plague*'s main achievement lies in demonstrating that literature can play a vital part in dealing with problems of vulnerability. The portrayal of MaMarrandi, for instance, clearly shows how bodies suffering from HIV/AIDS can be treated successfully if situated, or read, within their particular cultural contexts. In conclusion, Steinberg's text suggests that, though an undeniable part of the problem, the metaphors defining the disease also present a possible solution to the treatment of HIV/AIDS in South Africa.

5. TASTE:

Lauren Beukes's *Moxyland*

5.1. Cyberpunk City

South African literary engagements with the body's vulnerability tend to adopt a sombre palette, as illustrated by the primary material discussed in the thesis thus far. Enter Lauren Beukes, whose popular and imaginative oeuvre cannot be deemed anything but a bird of another neon-coloured feather when read alongside what one might identify as works of "serious" literature in South Africa. Thus far, the critically acclaimed author has published four successful novels, including two works of fiction set in Cape Town and Johannesburg respectively: her science-fiction debut novel, *Moxyland* (f.p. 2008), and the urban fantasy, *Zoo City* (f.p. 2010). The success of Beukes's third book, *The Shining Girls* (f.p. 2013), confirmed her break into the US market. It is a thriller about a time-travelling serial killer from Chicago that Leonardo DiCaprio's production company, Appian Way Productions, is set to adapt for television (Kit and Lewis). Beukes's most recent thriller, *Broken Monsters* (f.p. 2014), opens in Detroit, with Detective Gabriella Versado finding "Bambi", the corpses of a half-boy and a half-deer "melted together at the seam". The first chapter opens with a relevant refrain: "*The body*. The-body-the-body-the-body, she thinks" (9).

The two novels set in Beukes's home country reveal her knack for capturing the brand New South Africa's socio-political zeitgeist – and credit is especially due to *Moxyland*'s headfirst plunge into the technocratic[17] realities of the twenty-first

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[17] The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "technocracy" as "[a] ruling or controlling body of technical experts; a powerful technical elite" (*OED Online*).

century. In *Moxyland*'s state of corporate apartheid, "government inc." (38) regulates mobility across the rigidly policed borders separating corporate from civilian space by way of smartphones. The novel's mesh of "meatspace" and virtual or game space draws inspiration from the telecommunications revolution in Africa. According to Nmachi Jidenma, reporting for CNN in 2014,

> In a little over a decade, the continent […] has witnessed the fastest growth in mobile subscribers in the world and is on track to hit one billion mobile subscriptions by 2015 […].
>
> Rapid smartphone adoption in large mobile phone markets like Nigeria and Kenya is already quickly birthing significant changes in the lives of the continent's tech savvy youth, ushering in revolutions in a myriad of sectors. […].
>
> As smartphones lower information barriers across Africa, young people are empowering themselves by self organizing into influential youth online communities and demanding better leadership.

According to the book's trailer on YouTube, in which Beukes provides a video blurb, "*Moxyland* is about all the interesting places that culture and technology intersect. It was inspired by everything from surveillance society […] through to […] online identity – the way you're perceived online, how that affects you – how cellphones can be used for social control" ("Moxyland Trailer"). Aside from the fast-paced plot, the exciting futuristic setting itself, that is, Cape Town of 2018, in addition to the accompanying high-tech cyberpunk vernacular, was enough for South African readers to sit up and take notice. As an example of Beukes's bold and vivid style of writing, her own description of the novel in *Clarkesworld Magazine* is chock-a-block with snappy adjectives and trendy themes:

Moxyland is a fast political techy thriller set in the near future Cape Town, in a bright 'n shiny corporate apartheid state utopia where crime is practically extinct and the nasty problems of disease and poverty in the rural areas have been literally shut out. It's a political thriller about surveillance society and genetically modified art, gaming culture, culture-jamming, branding, smartphones used for social control and trading away our rights for convenience. ("Spaces")

In *Moxyland*, the always imminent threat of "disconnection", involving a total shutdown of access to transport and personal funds as a result of illegal activity, literalises contemporary South African society's severe inequalities:

The cop doesn't bother to register a second warning. He goes straight for the defuser. Higher voltage than necessary, but when did the cops ever play nice? Tendeka drops straight away, jerking epileptic and setting off the damn dog with excited yipping. […].

[…]. You can't play nice by society's rules? Then you don't get to play at all. No phone. No service. No life. (32-33)

Raised to the power of post-politically correct cool, *Moxyland* is distinctive in light of contemporary literature's comparative lack of attention to the technological dimension of human interaction, not to mention state-sponsored surveillance and control. One might say this theme comprises something of a blind spot in many contemporary literary considerations of how the South African body is shaped. Many texts instead foreground bodily proximities, that is, real-time human relationships, as filtered through race, class, and gender after apartheid, which seems indicative of a larger groundswell of anxiety about a divided, and thus vulnerable, South Africa. To elaborate, contemporary works of South African literature habitually place real-time, face-to-face encounters at the forefront of explorations of post-apartheid

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relationships: Theresa challenges her abductor, Otis Tohar, in Margie Orford's *Like Clockwork*; Marion invites Brenda into her home in Zoë Wicomb's *Playing in the Light*; Jonny Steinberg forms a rapport with Sizwe in *Three Letter Plague*; and a friend holds Antjie Krog's hand as a symbol of interracial friendship in *A Change of Tongue*. Each of these texts explores the relationship between two individual faces that differ with respect to race, gender, class, and/or health status.

Senses of Culture: South African Culture Studies, edited by Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl-Ann Michael, is an important exercise in "read[ing] South Africa as an open space" which, according to the editors involves an "engage[ment] with multiple lines of connection, the intricacies of which require new work" ("Introduction" 22). With this in mind, I have chosen to focus on *Moxyland*, given its attention to ways and spaces – other than the usual suspects of race, class, and gender – in which the body is shaped, regulated, and fashioned to interconnect and belong in a fast-developing world – its vulnerability to the forces of neoliberal capital vividly exemplified by disconnection, as described in the extract above. The novel certainly expresses concern with relations of difference but puts a much needed contemporary spin on human interaction.

In "Cape Town: Place and Contested Space", the third episode of the BBC Radio 4 programme, *Writing a New South Africa*, poet Thabiso Mohare interviews Beukes on contemporary South African literature. Ever candid, Beukes argues that

> South African writers today who say their work is not political, are delusional. You know, everything is political, absolutely, and I think also, you know, growing up within South Africa, growing up in an unjust society, and growing up in a society where poverty is endemic, where the social issues are, you trip over them in the streets, literally, it's hard not to use that in your fiction. (cited in Mohare, "Cape Town", my transcription)

Finger to the urban pulse, Beukes secured her status as one of South Africa's foremost creatives and is included in 2013's *City Press* list of "100 World Class South Africans". Classed under "Ground Breakers and Thought Leaders", she represents the country's writers in the company of, among others, "National Treasures" J.M. Coetzee, Nadine Gordimer, and Athol Fugard and John Kani. Drawing inspiration from cyberpunk's exaltation of style, *Moxyland* does indeed blast open new creative avenues by tapping into an aesthetic sensibility which reigns supreme among the youth of South Africa across the board, one which I identify as post-apartheid cool. Hence, this chapter considers the power of *taste*, with special emphasis on the aesthetics of cool, in facilitating new (social, cultural, and literary) forms of engagement after apartheid. Subcultural taste not only explicitly governs Beukes's stylisation of people and places in the novel, but also brings characters together in trajectories that, to a certain extent, traverse racial, class, and gender lines.

In 2012, fashion designer and trend analyst Dion Chang published *New Urban Tribes of South Africa*, a chic and user-friendly e-book identifying emerging consumer groups in South African cities, challenging the assumption that race is the dominant demographic category in urban areas. The book's blurb states that, "[i]nfluenced by both global cosmopolitan culture and traditional belief systems, contemporary South Africans are complex, three-dimensional people that cannot be accurately described by traditional demographic segmentation models" (Chang, "New Urban Tribes"). Diamond Chips, Technohippies, Black Pinks, Afrikaans Artistes, and Rainbow Revolutionaries are but a few instances of Chang's inventive labelling based on shared tastes and spending power. In an interview with *LitNet*, he defines the urban tribe comprehensively as

> [a]n emerging pattern of new communities connecting with one another outside of the usual socio-economic benchmarks – like Living Standards Measures (LSMs). Technology has levelled the playing field in various ways. It has made electronic devices smaller, cheaper and faster, democratised media channels and connected people (via social media) to such an extent that geographic, cultural and racial boundaries have begun to dissolve. In their place is a brave new world where communities with shared interests grow and thrive. ("Dion Chang Weighs In")

The world of Beukes's *Moxyland* conveys a similar perspective on South Africa. The novel challenges the fixity and insurmountability of traditional categories of identification (like race and class) by imbuing taste and cool with boundary-blurring potential. Although this problematic space is plagued by class-based divisions, the four plucky protagonists, hipsters Kendra and Toby, DIY terrorist Tendeka, and the rags-to-riches computer programmer and hacker, Lerato, derive strength from their social networks in order to shimmy, not up the city's social ladder, but across seemingly unbridgeable rifts. Albeit from different backgrounds, the characters' paths frequently cross as a result of shared interests and mutual acquaintances. The social mobility afforded by this extended subcultural network translates into actual mobility, as fast-paced interactions across real and virtual borders – powered by subcultural capital – also drive the narrative. These main characters push their own agendas, often trying to outsmart figures or institutions of authority, in self-centred and single-minded attempts to get ahead.

The ruthlessly ambitious Lerato provides technological assistance to her friend Toby, a blatant opportunist who abets Tendeka in acts of corporate sabotage not because he shares Tendeka's anti-technocratic convictions but to obtain authentic and riveting footage for his streamcasts. Toby also documents the effects of Kendra's

nanotechnological mutation which she, later on in the novel, sexually transmits to him shortly before she is to be put down in the manner of a similarly mutated police dog (362). Although the novel's main plot line thus brings the four characters together, the text often strays from this path to exult in the characters' extraneous endeavours, for example Kendra's film photography, Toby's daily streamcasts from his BabyStrange chamo coat, the marriage of Tendeka (who is gay) to a pregnant immigrant to prevent her deportation, and the relationship of AIDS orphan Lerato with her sisters. At the heart of the characters' exchange lies Tendeka's guerrilla-style corporate sabotage, which includes the smearing of a corporate "adboard" above the N2 highway, which is a billboard "playing out various aspirational vignettes featuring unobtainable crap" (117) and the public hacking to pieces (with pangas) of the artwork *Woof & Tweet*, a gruesome animal-tech hybrid by artist Khanyi Nkosi, at an exhibition of Kendra and other artists' work. The novel culminates in a city-wide explosion of coordinated attacks aimed at destabilising technocratic power over the population.

The four characters actively negotiate the race, gender, and class divides featuring so prevalently in the texts foregrounded in previous chapters. Although the ways in which these characters are able to navigate class distinctions, or the ways in which they play the social game, are promising – a prospect which will be discussed at a later stage in the chapter – their struggles are ultimately shown to be empty and futile when the reader learns that government inc. has been at the helm all along, surreptitiously orchestrating all of their endeavours to use fear and bodily control as instruments of subjugating the population.

The novel's title refers to Moxy, the beady-eyed mascot of the virtual children's game *Kiwi Pop,* and this creates an association between the text's projection of Cape Town, which is a self-enclosed urban dystopia, and a social game or competition of

sorts. Even though *Moxyland*'s Cape Town is set in the near future, Beukes's account of interpersonal connections in the city acquires verisimilitude and relevance by tapping into local subcultural sensibilities, or "urban tribes" in Chang's frame of reference, recognisable to a young readership. Discussing "cyberpunk's habit of starring thoroughly unlikeable protagonists", reviewer Paul Raven admits that

> [w]hile there were plenty of times I found myself empathising with Beukes's leads, none of them are people I'd want to sit down and have a drink with. Perhaps that's a function of my background, though; I've known many people much like the archetypes of *Moxyland*'s cast, even shared chunks of their lifestyle at certain times of my life.

It is cyberpunk, a genre fascinated with technological development and subcultural style, that sanctions Beukes's concentration on South Africa's urban centres, where global technologies and cultural flare-ups are most likely to take hold and flourish. Beukes's fictional Cape Town stands in stark contrast to the Rural, a largely unknowable, quarantined space of disease and dearth that lies beyond the borders of the metropolis. Whereas Steinberg's *Three Letter Plague*, for instance, depicts an isolated, impoverished rural setting virtually untouched by technology, Beukes's *Moxyland* portrays the city as a globalised, technologised space with characters "born free"[18] of apartheid – though constricted by rampant consumerism.

One might refer to the simultaneous interaction between real and virtual spaces that shapes an individual's reality as "simultaneous living", a concept which can be used to describe *Moxyland*'s narrative reimagining of Cape Town. In a *Mail & Guardian* inter-review with Beukes following the release of *The Shining Girls*, Ashraf Jamal states that her novels are "otherworldly yet cannily on point as 'ghostings' of the

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[18] The "born frees" is a contentious term for the generation born after the end of formal apartheid in 1994. The term, deemed by some as naïve and idealistic against the backdrop of South Africa's severe socio-economic inequalities, is a topic of much debate.

world we live in: real yet bizarre; visceral yet sublime". The notion of *Moxyland* as a *ghosting*, a faint secondary image that overlays the primary image on a screen, is intriguing, especially given the character Kendra's enduring thirst for the soft drink, Ghost. The addiction is driven by a voluntary nanotechnological mutation which grants Kendra total immunity to infectious disease, the primary segregator of Beukes's futuristic society.

In this sense, Beukes's representation of the city entails not a stripping down but a dressing up as she coats a recognisable Cape Town in locally inflected cyberpunk slang. In addition, familiar city spaces like Adderley Street, Stones, and Khayelitsha are imaginatively projected into the future: Robben Island, for example, is now home to the Robben Island Memorial Industrial Park, whereas the Waterfront has been accessorised with security cameras, Aito police dogs, and phone pass checkpoints. Thus, *Moxyland*'s Cape Town is spectacularly – and even at times spectrally – clad. Waiting for her nanotech injection, Kendra observes how "the southeaster bunches and whirls the clouds over Table Mountain into candyfloss flurries. *Spookasem* in the local. Ghost's breath" (12).

Baudrillard's chapter on "Simulacra and Science Fiction" in *Simulacra and Simulation* demonstrates the genre's ability to elevate the ordinary to the level of the remarkable via the following scene:

> Witness this two-bedroom/kitchen/shower put into orbit, raised to a spatial power (one could say) with the most recent lunar module. The everydayness of the terrestrial habitat itself elevated to the rank of cosmic value, hypostatized in space – the satellization of the real in the transcendence of space. (124)

Following Baudrillard's train of thought, one might say that Beukes, by projecting a recognisable representation of Cape Town into a different era, elevates everyday life

in the city to the level of the extraordinary. A consideration of this elevation as a ghosting emphasises that the scene is not dissociated from its context(s) when projected into an alternative timespace. Instead, the new, superimposed imaginary allows for the hypostatisation, to use Baudrillard's term, or, in other words, the materialisation of abstract forces and flows that structure the original environment. Konstantin Sofianos concludes a noteworthy review of *Zoo City*, "Magical Nightmare Jo'burg", with the impression: "For *Zoo City* shows us what one of Johannesburg's cities sees when it *dreams*" (120). Perhaps, then, one might say that *Moxyland* shows us what one of Cape Town's cities sees on a nanotech-driven Ghost high.

"Is Science Fiction Coming to Africa?", a BBC World Service documentary hosted by Beukes herself, makes the important point that the genre creates a space within which normative perspectives, especially stereotypical ideas about Africa, may be challenged. Accordingly, AfroCyberPunk, a blog dedicated to "exploring the future of Africa through various expressions of Afrofuturism in science and speculative fiction across all forms of media" (Dotse), emphasises the continent's vast cultural diversity, and a plethora of future possibilities it affords. Dick Hebdige, a former student at the leading research centre, the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), did ground-breaking research on youth cultures as forms of resistance in the 1970s. In his seminal book, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, he makes a related point about subcultures, stating that "[e]ach subcultural 'instance' represents a 'solution' to a specific set of circumstances, to particular problems and contradictions" (81). Considered in this light, post-apartheid subcultures can be read as meaningful reactions to South Africa's present circumstances. Expressing the self freely through the stylisation, that is, the adornment and accessorisation, of the body is a crucial development in post-apartheid South Africa. Hebdige's interpretation of

the Bowie cult as a "challenging at a symbolic level [of] the 'inevitability', the 'naturalness' of class and gender stereotypes" (*Subculture* 89) is equally applicable to conceptualisations of post-apartheid youth formations. Although one should exercise caution in associating self-stylisation with total liberation from race, class, and gender, categories of identity which are still dominant constituents of the South African body, self-stylisation can be read as a *redress*, a symbolic means by which to counter the "inevitable" labels of identity that strive to remove agency and deny fluidity of self.

Above and beyond her literary engagements with South Africa, Beukes clearly takes an interest in the conception of style as a means of circumventing "natural" and "inevitable" stereotypes, as Hebdige puts it. Set in the Cape Flats, Beukes's documentary film *Glitterboys and Ganglands*, for example, chronicles South Africa's largest female impersonation competition, the Miss Gay Western Cape pageant: "Deep in the heart of the Cape's most violent ganglands, sequins are being sewn, hair arranged, tiaras polished, stilettos worn in, lashes glued and shimmies perfected" (Kriedemann).

5.2. Cool Bodies in Cape Town

Relative to other, more cautious literary treatments of the vulnerable body (*Three Letter Plague*, for instance), *Moxyland*'s gutsy and ingenious recourse to a cyberpunk aesthetic treads a fine line between tact and cheek. On the one hand, *Moxyland* does engage seriously with South Africa in its representation of a dystopic Cape Town; on the other, when reflecting on Beukes's portrayal, one cannot help but wonder: What could possibly be cooler than a cyberpunk dystopia? In other words, although Beukes's narrative is clearly engaged with, or even haunted by South Africa's history of segregation, her sharp, imaginative speculations are by no means

burdened by past or present politics. Jamal rightly emphasises that Beukes's art thus "breaks the contemplative guilt-stricken mould while holding on to the core quest to redefine the aggrieved human condition that defines that tradition" – and herein lies the appeal for a South African audience. In an interview on *Zoo City*, Beukes explains that it is the genre that offers "a way of exploring ideas around [...] how to live with the legacy of the past in a fantastical way that short-circuits issue fatigue" ("For Books' Sake"). One might easily replace "genre" in Beukes's statement with "the cool the genre creates" given that Beukes's relevance as a South African writer relates precisely to her recognition and exposition of cool as a stratifier of social life in South Africa.

Indeed, no critically acclaimed South African novelist has quite succeeded in laying claim to "cool" quite as Beukes has. Amidst the publishing industry's exclamation marks, Beukes's *Books LIVE* biography detailing her journalist experience projects, above all, an undeniable air of careless cool:

> [Beukes is] currently writing an arc of *Fairest*, an off-shoot of Bill Willingham's *Fables* for Vertigo comics and working on the screenplay adaptation for *Zoo City*, optioned by producer Helena Spring.
>
> She has an MA in Creative Writing from UCT [the University of Cape Town], but she got her real education from 12 years of freelance journalism. Writing for the likes of the *Sunday Times*, *Colors*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, *Nature Medicine*, *Marie Claire*, and *The Big Issue*, among others, she picked up really useful life-skills like sky-diving, pole-dancing and brewing mqombothi [beer]. Journalism also allowed her to hang out with AIDS activists, township vigilantes, electricity thieves, homeless sex workers, teen vampires, reluctant basejumpers and other interesting folk. ("About Lauren Beukes")

The 2011 winner of the prestigious Arthur C. Clarke Award for her second novel, *Zoo City*,[19] admitted to *Something Wicked* that she "can't step out and run to the garage in [her] slippers anymore" ("Feature Interview"), and is often mentioned in the same breath as other trailblazing cultural exports from South Africa, like the futuristic, rap-rave Zef[20] band, Die Antwoord, and Neill Blomkamp, the science-fiction director of *District 9* and the recently released *Chappie*. It is productive and necessary to read Beukes alongside other South African and international works of the same genre, as the emerging realm of Beukes criticism has and will continue to demonstrate − and of which my thesis forms part. However, my approach is also particularly mindful that Beukes, through the discourse of *cool*, positions her fiction in relation to larger subcultural conversations about life in South Africa. Thus, if a study's aim is to develop an understanding of contemporary South Africa, a literary text like *Moxyland* should not be considered in isolation, especially when taking into account the cultural impact of other forms of expression like music and film that appeal to the same sense of (life)style.

In Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, a novel mentioned in the previous chapter in view of its representation of HIV/AIDS in South Africa, the character Refilwe reflects on the state of the publishing industry after the fall of apartheid. She registers the failure of the country's literature to speak to the people, in comparison with its music:

> What frustrated her so much was the extent to which publishing was
> in many ways out of touch with the language and events of everyday life.

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[19]*Zoo City* also won the 2010 Kitschies Red Tentacle for Best Novel and has been shortlisted for various prizes, including the BSFA Awards, the World Fantasy Awards, the University of Johannesburg Creative Writing Prize, the M-Net Literary Awards, the Nielsen's Booksellers' Choice Award, as well as the Grand Prix de l'Imaginaire in France.

[20] Exemplified by South African music groups like Die Antwoord and Jack Parow, zef is a culture trend which displays a "white trash" aesthetic in an ironical and self-conscious manner.

It was a very different story with other creative forms; music for

instance. In the music trade, unlike in publishing, producers and public alike

were receptive to work that broke new ground. To songs that spoke in the

hard language that people used in their everyday lives. That was why rap and

kwaito sold so well, including the more vulgar forms of both genres, that kept

the tongues of the elders clicking with disgust at the immorality of the

children these days. (94)

With Refilwe's observation in mind (from a text that is, in fact, celebrated for being

in touch with everyday life), this chapter thus responds to Hedley Twidle's tacit

invitation in the following statement from the oft-quoted article, "'In a Country

Where You Couldn't Make this Shit Up'?":

Novels, one might say, are too often read alongside other novels; poems are

read alongside other poems, rather than the many other modes of writing

jostling for position in the literary marketplace. Influence is tracked at the

level of the literary, when in fact the literary (especially because of the South

African "reality imperative" and the pressure for a writing of witness) may be

in much closer dialogue with modes of verbal culture that are more topical,

accessible, context-dependent and ephemeral. (20)

But what exactly is "cool"? Since the inception of cool as a category of taste in the

jazz culture of the 1950s, its power has mystified both teenager and cultural critic.

Perhaps so ubiquitous as to have gone unnoticed, not to mention characteristically

obstinate when confronted with attempts at definition, cool is often side-lined or

misappropriated in South African literature – until Beukes, that is, whose work

inspires young, upcoming writers to experiment with styles of writing embedded in

popular subcultures. Beukes forms part of a generation of post-millennial authors

who write well and lay claim, albeit implicitly, to cool. Names of note include the

black female poet, Lebo Mashile, the Soweto-born, kwaito-generation writer, Niq Mhlongo, and the comic book artist of *Coloureds* and poet known for writing in non-standard Afrikaans, Nathan Trantraal. In an interview with *LitNet*, Trantraal writes in the Kaaps dialect that his poetry deals with "history as told by the losers" and "die liewe annie anne kant vannie kantlyn" (the life on the other side of the margin) ("'poetry'", my translation). An awareness of the power of post-apartheid cool opens Trantraal's award-winning collection of poetry, *Chokers en Survivors*, to comparative readings alongside *Coloured*s, which is described on the Trantraal Brothers Facebook Page as "'Manga slash Heidi animation slash local juice flava with lashings of street lingo'" (a review attributed to the *Cape Times*). Equally, Beukes's novels might be read alongside other creative endeavours, such as her contribution to the monthly comic book series, *Fairest*. She describes this story arc, *The Hidden Kingdom*, as "a dark Tokyo twist on the legend of Rapunzel" (Beukes, "Fairest").

The role of cool in the abovementioned authors' success has been underrated in literary criticism. Because cool is the key to attracting readers, because cool *sells*, the potential appeal of an author is undoubtedly taken into account by publishing houses. Cool even plays a part in academic life, as scholars find themselves increasingly under pressure to demonstrate the relevance of their research, and find ways to make their work accessible and interesting to lay audiences. *Cool Rules: Anatomy of an Attitude*, a definitive study by Dick Pountain and David Robins on cool as a cultural category, makes a compelling case in favour of the critical recognition of cool:

> If, as we believe, Cool is destined to become the dominant ethic among the younger generations of the whole developed world and billions of "wannabes" in developing countries, then understanding it ought to be a matter of some urgency for educationalists and health agencies. (13)

According to *Cool Rules*, "being Cool forms part of a risky series of negotiations about becoming an individual while still being accepted into a group – it's about both individuality and belonging, and the tension between the two" (21). In so far as cool is equated with superficial display, with surface, it may be considered insubstantial and perhaps somewhat overlooked by critics. However, contrary to general understandings of cool, the phenomenon in actual fact entails a balancing act of sorts. Beukes daringly takes to a tightrope which spans various tensions between the individual and the collective; past and present; politics and aesthetics; critical engagement and entertainment; surface and depth; and, this chapter's main topic of consideration, class and taste.

In order to understand the significance of a social scheme as seemingly innocuous as cool, *Moxyland* must be read with other post-apartheid texts in mind. Many influential literary works, like Wicomb's *Playing in the Light* and Steinberg's *Three Letter Plague*, demonstrate the perpetuation of deep-seated race and class divides after the fall of apartheid. Race and class are the undeniable principal stratifiers of contemporary South African society. Accordingly, it comes as no surprise that critical engagements with *Moxyland* tend to skim over Beukes's seemingly straightforward substitution of class for race as the dominant societal divider. Louise Bethlehem, for instance, briefly notes that *Moxyland*'s state or "regime […] maintains rigid social divisions on the basis of class rather than race. Privilege here depends on belonging within the corporate milieu" (523-24). Comparable to several other references to social stratification in *Moxyland* (Roos; Stobie; Heyns; Trimarco), Bethlehem's clear-cut reading of privilege and belonging, which begins and ends with the above given statement, is largely confined to class. However, the general assumption that class is the only major social stratifier in *Moxyland*'s futuristic

society overshadows the prominence of the language of *taste* as another significant classifier.

Written in the same punchy style as *Moxyland*'s, Beukes's short story, "Ghost Girl" (published online), serves as a stylistic afterword to the novel given the similarities between, for example, Toby's speech in *Moxyland* and that of the short story's narrator: "Store this for future reference, kids" ("Ghost Girl"). The short story's opening paragraph visualises the city as a language, mapped out according to a particular style of cool:

> You think of a city as a map, all knotted up in the bondage of grid lines by town planners. But really, it's a language – alive, untidy, ungrammatical. The meaning of things rearranges, so the scramble of the docks turns hipster cool and the faded glamour of the inner city gives way to tenement blocks rotting from the inside. It develops its own accent, its own slang. And sometimes it drops a sentence. Sometimes the sentence finds you. And won't shut up.

Like "Ghost Girl", *Moxyland*'s city is written and structured according to a futuristic vernacular related to hipster cool (which is one among many different styles of cool). The novel's aesthetic is firmly embedded in popular culture which usually finds expression in South African written forms other than literature. Ruled by taste, these texts seem to draw a sense of their own relevance directly from cool, as the following discussion will illustrate.

As an instance of how hipster cool organises Cape Town or, more generally speaking, of how tastes might map urban life by carving out new trajectories of belonging, "7 Useful Maps to Help You Understand Cape Town" consists of maps of urban subcultural cliques, exercise and cycling areas, craft beer and wine routes, food markets, and free Wi-Fi spots based on hipster tastes (Jarvis). On the travel website, *Matador Network*, twenty-something writer Mia Arderne draws up a "subculture

clique map" of Cape Town's elite youth cultures that includes "Hipsters, Poppies, Yuppies, and Zef riffraff". Relative to the critical attention that Zef has received on account of Die Antwoord's global renown, hipsterism has been overlooked to a great extent. Hipsters often incite animosity and ridicule on the web, and the Capetonian variety in what is South Africa's hipster capital is no exception. Nothing like the irony of Zef, the irony of the hipster is devoid of humour, of provocative spoof and a lightness of play – without which the hipster seems pretentious and self-important. Unlike Zef's homegrown tang, hipsterism in Cape Town is a global subsidiary that exhibits the same major characteristics, defined by a clever blog dubbed *Symbolicum* as "a set of stylistic trademarks, the ironic use of symbols and icons from the past, and a desire for novelty" (Beier).

> SCENE: café bar, vaguely Middle Eastern theme, with cultural totem such as the Faema coffee machine. […].

> The girl Sybille wears an all-in-one something that could be acrobat tights or a wetsuit with an Aztec pattern, her hair is swept up in a sort of bird's-wing mess with a 1920s bubble fringe held in place with a large clip made from Nintendo game cartridges. She has tried to cover all bases with a Victorian cameo brooch, Adidas sneakers and a beret (Rive Gauche). She arrives on an ancient bicycle with a basket, which she surreptitiously hauls around in the back of her Land Rover passed on by Daddy and very embarrassing because it hardly matches her dishevelled hand-me-down appearance. Props are Moleskin notebook and a book by Voltaire from which she has culled the phrase "il faut cultiver son jardin". She thinks it might have something to do with gardening. (Sampson)

Despite appearances, it is not the voice of Beukes, but that of the South African columnist Lin Sampson who is here nipping at the heels of Cape Town hipsters. In

the *Times LIVE* article, titled "The Hipster Rules, OK?", Sampson fashions a portrait of the Cape Town hipster in a style comparable to Beukes's jazzy style, setting the scene for the brand-besieged urban landscape that inspired Beukes's short story "Branded" which, in turn, gave rise to *Moxyland*.

Like many young bloggers and journalists, Beukes habitually gives precedence to style, as Jeanne-Marie Jackson observes in her critical review of *The Shining Girls* on *SLiPnet*:

> Beukes' well-accessorised hipness – the book is full of vintage props like lighters and My Little Ponies – gives it a sheen of cultural access that does not carry through to her feel for where it takes place. […]. References to local institutions like colleges and media outlets stand in for any felt sense of what those institutions mean, but one suspects this is the point.

This hip curation of scattered references to both home-grown and global icons, products, and places styles South Africa's local textures and colours according to global, hipster fashion. In *Moxyland*, local lingo – "skeem" (257), "*skeefs*" (252), "*[m]al*" (74) and "pantsula" (251) – rubs shoulders with neologisms like "sony" (meaning "OK") and "coke" (for "authentic") whilst the local flavours of rooibos lattes, Kendra's hot pink Black Coffee dress, Zambuk wax, and koki intermingle with the fictive tastes of Ghost and the drug, "sugar". Beukes stages familiar settings through the characteristic use of such "props", to summon up Sampson's colourful description of hipster accessories. The image of the hipster is trademarked by a jumble of accessories from different eras, cultures, and places and provides a fitting visualisation of Beukes's style. The main point I wish to make is that, in *Moxyland*, Beukes's style is analogous to a subcultural lifestyle. Like the "visual ensembles of spectacular subcultures", in the words of Hebdige, the style is "*obviously* fabricated" and "*display[s]* [its] own codes" (*Subculture* 101).

A simple instance from "Ghost Girl" demonstrates Beukes's charming and imaginative juxtaposition of props to distinguish her fictional environments. Accompanied by a gothic female ghost, the protagonist attends a retrospective exhibition on the Mozambican architect, Pancho Guedes. Arriving at the gallery, "the latecomers […] have to be corralled into the 19th Century portrait room. We can't see anything past the bodies standing straight and tall, stirring gently like a field of mealies". This soothing yet memorable image of South African maize against a backdrop of 19th century paintings evokes a pastoral nostalgia at the same time as it invokes South Africa's history of colonisation. Many of Beukes's perceptive references to the past, such as this one, remain unexcavated, serving a different, though no less important, decorative and distinguishing purpose as expressions of *taste*.

In this sense, it might be useful to consider *Moxyland* as a *tastespace*, a term David Lewis and Darren Bridger employ in *The Soul of the New Consumer* to denote a consumer's unique "map of personal preferences" (69). "Tastespace", as a concept, encapsulates *Moxyland*'s exhibition and examination of the ways in which, to cite Bourdieu's principle in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, "[t]aste classifies, and it classifies the classifier" (6). In its pronouncement of preferences, Beukes's fictional "map" of the city of Cape Town also functions as a map of some of the city's taste cultures to which the four protagonists belong. The term "tastespace" also captures how interpersonal compatibility based on shared taste cuts across vertical hierarchies to create shared spaces of consumption.

5.3. Taste Cultures

In order to explain why Beukes's implementation of taste as a means of negotiating social stratification in some contexts is worthy of critical consideration, I first have to

clarify a few important terms, particularly "taste" and its correlation to "subcultural capital". Bourdieu defines taste as "the propensity and capacity to appropriate (materially or symbolically) a given class of classified, classifying objects or practices" that is "the generative formula of life-style" (*Distinction* 173). In basic terms, style (for example, a hipster's style of dress) is a materialisation of taste, whereas taste is an indication of various types of capital: economic, social and cultural. In other words, Beukes's creative style, which I have explained in terms of curation, is governed by and also an expression of a "unitary set of distinctive preferences" (Bourdieu, *Distinction* 173) or, in a word, taste. This set of preferences, in turn, is indicative of social status.

Theorists in the field of subcultural studies have drawn extensively on Bourdieu's differentiation of capital, that is, the different sets of assets that regulate social standing or status in society. Sarah Thornton is one such theorist. In her innovative study on club cultures in Britain, *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital*, she coins two innovative terms, "taste cultures" and "subcultural capital", to signal her deviation from the Birmingham Centre's understanding of subcultures as essentially fixed, class-based social phenomena. Thornton's most instrumental contribution to my argument is the conceptualisation of "coolness" or, the term she prefers, "'*hipness*' as a form of *subcultural capital*" (11), "subcultural capital" being her second coinage. Thornton's conceptualisation of subcultural capital modifies Bourdieu's understanding of cultural capital as an individual's set of knowledge-based resources. This newly articulated subspecies of capital "is not as class-bound as cultural capital" (Thornton 12) as it does not necessarily rely on access to limited or restricted centres of knowledge like tertiary education institutions, but does rely, emphatically, on life experience. Beukes emphasises her street cred in her *Books LIVE* biography in which she also mentions that, although she studied at UCT, "she

got her real education from 12 years of freelance journalism" ("About Lauren Beukes"). With *Moxyland* in mind, it is interesting to note that definitions of "moxie" include "expertise" and "know-how", which are comparable to Thornton's explanation that "[t]o be 'hip' is to be privy to insider knowledges" (6) and thus lay claim to some form of belonging.

Although Thornton continues to refer to subcultures (and subcultural capital) in her study, she proffers "taste cultures" as a viable substitute, underscoring the fact that contemporary youth formations are united by, not necessarily a shared class consciousness, but most certainly by shared preferences or tastes. Thus, Thornton emulates Bourdieu in locating "social groups in a highly complex multi-dimensional space rather than on a linear scale or ladder" (Thornton 10). The type of group formation based on shared tastes, specifically subcultural formation, does not occur in a classless vacuum. It does, however, challenge understandings of social life as rigidly divided along class lines.

In "Tastefully Renovating Subcultural Theory", Geoff Stahl elucidates the importance of acknowledging other means of social classification and organisation above and beyond universals like race and class:

> Tastes, alongside dispositions, preferences and affinities, […] are deliberately amorphous terms denoting social activities and attitudes that influence, as much as they are influenced by, the spaces in which they reside. They suggest a rhetorical move away from rigidly vertical models that rely upon universals such as class, while enabling a nuanced examination of individual identity and group dynamics […].
>
> An emphasis on the specificities of local and regional cultures understood in a global setting […] undermines any notion of a single determinant, often cast in essentialist terms (class, ethnicity, age, gender),

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which might exist as the overarching structuring principle of contemporary cultural practices, preferences and formations. (28)

By no means am I suggesting that economic capital does not play a significant role in Beukes's representation of a deeply divided society. Thornton's explanation of the general relation between subcultural and economic capital is especially relevant to my reading of *Moxyland*. Thornton writes that

> [t]his is not to say that class is irrelevant, simply that it does not correlate in any one-to-one way with levels of youthful subcultural capital. In fact, class is wilfully obfuscated by subcultural distinctions. […]. The assertion of subcultural distinction relies, in part, on a *fantasy of classlessness*. (12, emphasis added)

Adding the field of subcultural capital to the mix endorses the understanding of Beukes's futuristic society as a zigzag or criss-cross of permeable planes in the place of rigid vertical strata. In order to demonstrate how taste cultures in *Moxyland* challenge the vertical class model, I will give an example of Beukes's "nuanced examination of individual identity and group dynamics", to borrow Stahl's formulation, by means of the portrayal of Kendra and her ceaseless thirst for the taste of Ghost.

> I take a seat opposite the boy, Damian. I've realised he's from a new spectro band, Kitten Kill or Killer Kittens, or some other configuration playing off violent acts towards baby animals. The point is that they're bigtime.
>
> Maybe he picks up on it, because the first thing he says to me is, "So, how'd you get with the program?" As in, you don't look the type.
>
> I play it down. "I'm a photographer. Fine arts."

"Oh yeah?" he says, not really interested. "The rest of the guys are pretty peeved," he goes on, just assuming I'll know who he's talking about. Unfortunately, I do.

"That they only wanted me, y'know? It's *swak*, hey. I mean, don't get me wrong, it's awesome, but end of the day, I gotta get up on stage with the rest of the band and perform."

I smile and nod. He is the obvious choice for the next evolutionary.

(*Moxyland* 159)

Kendra's first meeting with Damian, as described in the extract above, serves as an illustration of how subcultural capital subtly governs social interaction in *Moxyland*. Both Kendra, an attractive photographer in her twenties, and spectro star Damian have been chosen by VUKANI MEDIA to act as brand ambassadors for the soft drink, Ghost. Described as "[y]oung, dynamic, creative, on the up" (12-13), Kendra and Damian are accompanied by ten others to comprise "[a]ll Ghost's hipster chosen" (13). Told to "[b]e cool" (159) as a civilian or non-corporate member of the first generation of Ghost ambassadors, Kendra's hipness or subcultural capital is quite literally her (albeit temporary) ticket to privilege.

The first pages of the novel transport the reader, through Kendra's focalisation, into the unfamiliar, futuristic territory of tightly regulated corporate space. Her destination is VUKANI MEDIA, one of the city's "corporate havens" (10) which is bedecked with an impressive "menagerie of vinyl toys" and "hip ephemera" (11). Amidst these tokens of superior status, Kendra the "[a]rt school dropout" is "reinvented as shiny brand ambassador. Sponsor baby. Ghost girl" (7).[21] The most obvious trace of the physical mutation that follows the nanotechnological injection is

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[21] The latter designation reappears in the title of the short story mentioned above, that is, "Ghost Girl".

the green fluorescent Ghost logo that develops on her wrist: "[T]his isn't sub-dermal. This is her skin. The double swirl of the Ghost logo in mint and silver shines luminously from cells designer-spliced by the nanotech she's signed up for" (31). The tattoo acts as a symbol of brand affiliation etched permanently on the skin, and effectively transforms Kendra's body into an instance of "proprietary technology" (9). After spotting the permanent tattoo glowing on her wrist, Tendeka accuses Kendra of being "'a fucking lab rat. A corporate bitchmonkey'" and "'sell-out'" (31). The notion of Kendra's body as a walking advertisement, or skin as a "living billboard" (Webb), is reminiscent of a trend in Japan, where women are being paid to place advertisements on their thighs, to ensure that the messages will stand out in cities inundated by signs and screens.

Kendra's biological upgrade, however, comes at a price. As a consequence of the nanotech mutation, she develops an addiction to the fictional soft drink, Ghost, which, like Coca-Cola, epitomises mass consumption in a culture of excess. Especially pertinent against the backdrop of mass poverty in South Africa, Beukes's critique of a commodity culture on the rise involves a key instance of hypostatisation in *Moxyland*. Beukes hypostatises, or gives material substance to, two interrelated features of a neoliberal South Africa: taste and consumerism. Two meanings of taste – that is, taste as preference and taste as palate – come together in the visceral metaphor of Kendra's constant physical thirst, craving, or taste for Ghost. This permanent dependency is thus built inescapably into her body. Toby logs the effects of Ghost on Kendra:

> The girl is flying now, or drowning, in all the opiate happinesses the body can generate: endorphins, serotonin, dopamine, the Ghost binding with the aminos. Tiny biomachines humming at work in her veins. Voluntary addiction with benefits. (36)

Through hypostatisation, the futility of taste-as-preference is felt by Kendra in and through her body as her taste-as-palate for Ghost intensifies into a basic need. The metaphor draws attention to the way in which consumerism stimulates an appetite or craving for unnecessary goods like fast food, the symbolic value of which confers status (more so than sustenance) upon the consumer. In *Consumption, Food and Taste*, Alan Warde "explores the expression of taste through consumption" (3) or, more specifically, how food choices *style* or fashion identity:

> Food is […] a significant means of cultural expression and is often used as a general means of commentary on contemporary culture. Though partly an aspect of bodily reproduction, culinary practice is also associated with lifestyles and, one supposes, is the ultimate metaphorical source of the concept of taste. In addition, food is a matter of considerable psychological and emotional significance. (22)

The main point is simply that consumers exhibit personal tastes through the consumption of goods, and it is these patterns of behaviour that form the foundation of social identity. According to Warde,

> [n]o longer are people placed in society by way of their lineage, caste or class, but each must invent and consciously create a personal identity. In this process, consumption is considered central, for commodities are principal channels for the communication of self-identity. People define themselves through the messages they transmit to others by the goods and practices they possess and display. (10)

In the introduction to Part Seven of *The Subcultures Reader* (edited by Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton), Gelder declares that "[i]n many cases, style may be a subculture's most readable feature" (374) and subcultural studies, correspondingly, pay careful attention to the accessorisation and adornment of the body's surface as an

articulation of self and culture. Therefore, the creative display of aesthetic preference on the surface of the body is read as a marker of individual distinctiveness as well as collective identity.

With a concluding section that provides "Practical Advice on Getting a Tattoo", *Hot Bodies, Cool Styles* by Ted Polhemus is a visual and written introduction to the art of tattooing as a technique of self-stylisation which signals the self-construction of identity. In the age of the "decorated ape" (Polhemus 19), or the "Do-It-Yourself Body" (143), it is through tattoos and other forms of bodily adornment and accessorisation that "human beings bring their bodies into the symbolic universe" (9). As a result, the tattoo "demands respect as a system of communication", that is, a language written on the body which "provid[es] a crucial databank of the knowledge, beliefs, values and history of so many traditional cultures" (40):

> Social position and cultural background once determined appearance. Today, however, we reach out to others, establish relationships and position ourselves in the universe by means of a self-customized appearance style that signals "I am here". To fail to be distinctive is to disappear socially as well as visually. (Polhemus 157)

The first chapter of *Moxyland* concludes with Kendra's desire to photograph the nanotech mutation on her skin, that is, document her body's transformation into a living billboard:

> If I could embed a camera inside my body, I would. But all I can do is document the cells mutating on the inside of my wrist, the pattern developing, fading up like an oldschool Polaroid as the nano spreads through my system.
>
> My skin is already starting to itch. (16)

Kendra's tattoo, along with the hypostatisation of taste and an overarching emphasis on cool, signals *Moxyland*'s participation in conversations on the role of taste in

forming urban youth groups, and what this self-stylisation says about their place, their belonging in a post-apartheid state. Gelder makes the important point that

> "[d]isplay" is not a politically neutral activity; indeed, it may draw together a range of issues (to do with sexuality, gender, ethnicity, class, and so on) which are then focused, and given expression, *through* such an activity. Style thus has an enabling function. (373-74).

Hebdige echoes this understanding in a chapter published in the same reader called "Posing… Threats, Striking… Poses": "For power is inscribed even in the most 'superficial' *sartorial* flourishes. Power is inscribed in the look of things, in our looking at things" (404).

A comparable text that addresses trajectories of taste-based identification and self-stylisation in contemporary South Africa is Charlie Human's *Apocalypse Now Now* (f.p. 2013). Fun, irreverent, imaginative, entertaining, and non-racial, Human's first book follows in the AfroSciFi footsteps of his MA in Creative Writing supervisor, Beukes herself. The urban fantasy is set in the Capetonian high school, Westridge High, portrayed as a dangerous, viciously competitive, and undemocratic tastespace, where what is "KIF or KAK" (*Mahala*'s South African version for "what's hot and what's not")[22] is governed by powerful gangs: "It's an ecosystem; a microcosm of the political, economic and military forces the shape the world" (*Apocalypse* 16). Thus Human's novel describes "the Sprawl", the pupils' "name for the strip of tar playground that runs from behind the red-brick school hall to the janitor's hut at the edge of the lowest sports field" (17) which is also the main site of rivalry for social domination:

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[22] "KIF or KAK" is a feature in *Mahala*, a popular South African website that describes itself as "a free South African music, culture and reality magazine that strives to report and represent what's really happening along the fault line and in the trenches of South African culture" ("About").

> The juggernaut that runs the school is the Nice Time Kids [NTK], led
> by self-styled warlord Anwar Davids. They're dangerous, organised and the
> prime suppliers of drugs. Their management style is kind of like the Third
> Reich – big, cruel and requiring absolute loyalty of their members.
>
> The other dog in the pit is the Form, led by Denton de Jaager. They
> run a business of fake doctors' certificates, parental permission slips and
> leaked exam papers. […] a networked, guerrilla-style militia that blends into
> the general school populace.
>
> The problem is that the Sprawl isn't big enough for both of them. (19)

Although the two ruling gangs' styles and methods in *Apocalypse* appear class based
(21), it is protagonist Baxter Zevcenko and his geeky gang of mis-fits that packs the
destabilising punch. They possess the ability to extend their reach beyond their
group's borders as their collective name, the Spider, suggests. Race, class and gender
differences have given way to a common purpose: surviving schoolyard enmity by
catering to more inclusive tastes as dealers in the "great democratic product that,
along with soccer, is the world's favourite spectator sport. Yes, I'm talking about
porn" (19). Falling through the cracks, and "remain[ing] neutral among the axes of
power" (19), this eccentric group

> found one another by the kind of freak radar that draws together kids that
> don't really fit in. There's me [Baxter] with my congenital eye condition and
> weird glasses. There's Kyle, the freakishly clever kid. Ty the Inhalant Kid,
> who has found his life's purpose at the bottom of a paint tin, and Zikhona,
> who is big in a sumo wrestler kinda way. When we found each other it was
> like pieces of a puzzle fitting neatly together. (18)

The text highlights that, even as politicians are battling it out in the upper echelons of
government, a new generation of South Africans – born free of apartheid legislation

but certainly not of its legacies – are forging their identities and tastes on fiercely competitive playgrounds and in virtual gamespace.

A guest section called "The Spark" on Beukes's personal blog is dedicated to bright writers from Africa. Promoting his new novel on the site, Human writes in Beukes-esque fashion that

> *Apocalypse Now Now* is not a very deep book. WARNING: THERE ARE NO GRAND METAPHORS ABOUT SOUTH AFRICA HERE. It's dipped in hyperactivity, deep-fried in pop culture, laced with B-grade movie bravado, and all rolled up in a satisfactorily ridiculous premise. ("The Spark")

However, in advocating taste-based forms of identification in popular South African culture, it refreshingly destabilises notions of cultural differentialism – as do the aforementioned works by Chang and Beukes.

Ultimately, what distinguishes these works of literature as innovative, fresh, and exciting is an emphasis on other, new forms of post-apartheid belonging, as a new generation of South Africans start finding one another even in the face of widespread race, gender, and class differentiation. To reiterate, this is not to say, with reference to *Moxyland* specifically, that the relation between race and class, on the one hand, and subcultural capital, on the other, is tenuous. The novel rather evokes what Tim Murphy has called South Africa's "class schizophrenia" in *W Magazine* to describe the complex relationship between gross socio-economic inequalities and the eye-catching means by which these divides are navigated by the country's youth. Especially in South Africa, the identities of actors are always plural and shaped in multiple overlapping, even contradictory spaces. "Such are the confusing fault lines running beneath the city's creative scene that it can often feel like a joyous post-racial melting pot", Murphy writes. The concept is useful when taking into account Bernard Lahire's theory of "the plural actor", which he defines as "the product of an

– often precocious – experience of socialization in the course of their trajectory, or simultaneously in the course of the same period of time in a number of social worlds and occupying different positions" (31).

An anonymous student from Rhodes University made a comment on the Facebook page, "Rhodes Confessions", evoking the plurality of a young South African's identity and the multiple spaces in which he must endeavour to find his place, and thus survive:

Rhodes Confession 7125

- My mother is a single (black) parent.

- Your monthly allowance (of R2000) is TWICE as much as our total monthly income.

- We live in a shack more or less as big as our rooms at Rhodes.

- I am on NSFAS.

- I have a crappy, underpaying job but I make enough to purchase basic toiletries.

- My mothers has to borrow money in order to buy a bus ticket for me.

When I hear things like: ""What do you know about oppression? Your mothers know apartheid, but it died before you were born..."" I get really angry. So, please THINK before you speak, you actually know nothing of my struggles. (original text)

As the student's comment suggests, many youngsters have to deal not with the stripping down, or convergence, of identity in relation to categories of race, gender, and class, but instead with a complex proliferation of pressures and affiliations, which include the aforementioned categories in addition to subcultural and global influences.

5.4. Cool as a "Coconut"?

Kopano Matlwa's debut novel, *Coconut*, which was first published in 2007, deals with precisely these issues in exploring the psychological effects of the complex interplay of divergent cultural spaces. Matlwa, a young author, medical graduate, and 2010 Rhodes Scholar, was awarded the European Union Literary Award in 2007 as well as the Wole Soyinka Prize for African Literature in 2010. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "coconut" as a derogatory slang term for "[a] non-white or dark-skinned person who is perceived as adopting or identifying with white culture as opposed to his or her own ethnic culture" (*OED Online*) and the novel, as the title implies, depicts the lives of two adolescent black women, or "coconuts", from different class backgrounds. The novel concentrates on how the two main characters are "*[s]tuck between two worlds, shunned by both*" (*Coconut* 93). The privileged teenager, Ofilwe Tlou, and the disadvantaged high school dropout, Fikile, who waits tables at the Tlous' favourite restaurant, the Silver Spoon Coffee Shop, negotiate their identities within complex matrixes comprised of race, gender, class, and taste.

The novel portrays centres of learning as formative environments for taste cultures, showing that, as taste unifies and includes individuals from formerly segregated race and class groups, it can also be utilised to justify segregation and exclusion. Although taste might appear organic, intuitive, and personal, it is, in fact, the result of socialisation; in other words, tastes are always acquired. An unfamiliar taste culture is as illegible to an outsider as a foreign language would be; codes governing stylistic and lifestyle preferences have to be learnt. This process requires access to spheres where the "language" is in circulation, which necessitates a certain amount of economic and/or social capital.

Importantly, the language (English, as well as the taste "language" or code) used at the school in *Coconut* is as important as the knowledge imparted by the teachers. Fikile (who calls herself Fiks) finds more opportunities for advancement as a waitress at an elite establishment, than at her former impoverished high school. To both Fikile and Ofilwe, mastering elite tastes is seen as, on the one hand, the gateway to acceptance, but also a loss of heritage, on the other. Through Ofilwe's eyes, the reader experiences the cultural assimilation at work in a predominantly white high school and community:

> In every classroom children are dying. It is a parasitic disease, seizing the mind for its own usage. Using the mind for its own survival. So that it might grow, divide, multiply and infect others. Burnt sienna washing out. DNA coding for white greed, blond vanity and blue-eyed malevolence. IsiZulu forgotten. Tshivenda a distant memory. (93)

Ofilwe's initiation into the cultural hegemony via her father's wealth is marred by her classmates' and teachers' racist attitudes, denting the notion that, in some settings, taste has replaced race as the main marker of identity in post-apartheid South Africa: "*Stuart walks over and says something like 'Nice wheels, Ofilwe, who did your father hijack this one from?'*" (16). In an unrelated incident, a white boy refuses to kiss Ofilwe during a game of spin-the-bottle: "*'No ways! Her lips are too dark!' he protested*" (45).

It follows that in some contexts shared tastes act as a means by which an environment might be desegregated and democratised. In other circumstances, however, tastes uphold existing hierarchies by placing a meritocratic mask on (in the particular case of the novel) white power. *The Youngsters* is a series of pocket books, edited by Mandy Wiener, which feature young South African voices. In his contribution to the series, titled *Becoming*, Shaka Sisulu (Walter Sisulu's grandson)

makes a related statement on the topic of camouflage: "In Cape Town the structural imbalances would perpetuate the once racially determined separation of people and, for many, disguise the non-integration of white, black and coloured Capetonians as either a manifestation of preference or even affordability" (79). He also writes that "[t]he irony of a democratic South Africa is that it has assured society's transition from valuing people and their contributions to valuing people for their material possessions" (27). In this regard, Beukes's replacement of one obsession with surface with another – that is replacing skin colour as a surface marker of group identity (a hallmark of apartheid) with style as a primary indicator of group identification in *Moxyland* – is telling.

Coconut's negative outlook on social mobility in South Africa suggests, quite rightly, that taste in South Africa is *racialised* to a great extent, contradicting *Moxyland*'s principle of the power of cool. From this vantage point, it follows that the rise of subcultures in South Africa has not eradicated the problems of race and class, suggesting that a certain conceptualisation of cool might not liberate but in fact trap a body within a particular subject position, of which the pejorative "coconut" is a relevant example. Matlwa's outlook serves as an essential counterpoint to the over-idealisation of taste-based identification viewed as a foretaste of the unified South Africa to come. As an example of the latter, in proclaiming Johannesburg Africa's "Capital of Cool" in *W*, Murphy follows a general trend in which Johannesburg's class schizophrenia is heralded as a post-apartheid site of urban renewal, creativity, and transformation. The Maboneng Precinct, a New South African utopia in an inner city neighbourhood of Johannesburg, is frequently cited as an example. Here, a commune of approximately fifteen hundred people from diverse backgrounds – ranging from South African artist William Kentridge, who has a studio in the area, to Manthe Ribane, a former member of Vintage Dance Cru – share work and living

spaces and mix socially and professionally in cafés, art galleries, theatres, and a rooftop boxing club. In the documentary film *Maboneng: A Place of Light* (Janssen and Van Gelder), Tebogo Ribane explains her and her sister Manthe's confident, vibrant, and eclectic style of dress which is nothing short of inspired:

> "We grew up in Soweto, so the fact that we were really outspoken, but not verbally, more in terms of how we would express ourselves with how we dress up, is just freedom of expression. […]. We grew up under democracy. So they fight for our freedom, so now we are free to do whatever we want to do, so we dress up as, like, being different every day towards any other ordinary people. It's a blessing." (cited in Janssen and Van Gelder, my transcription)

5.5. #bringbackthesignal

When reading Beukes's interview with *Clarkesworld*, quoted below, Antjie Krog's resounding anti-apartheid declaration– "I write because I am furious" – comes to mind:

> I'm angry about the xenophobia by black South Africans against black Africans that spilled into horrific violence in 2008 and might yet again because the underlying tensions, which boil down not to racism but lack of opportunity, lack of jobs, lack of education – all apartheid-legacy stuff – are still there, still simmering.
>
> I'm angry about the threat of crime that's always lurking in the background in everyone's lives, but especially the poor. I'm angry about how badly apartheid fucked up this country and furious with the people who won't admit that or how terrible it was – with government assassination squads and disappearances and freedom fighters committing their own atrocities.

I'm angry about how long it's going to take us to recover and that we seem to be heading in the wrong direction, the new regime replaying the corruption and nepotism and stupidities of the old regime like we're stuck on a loop. (Beukes, "Spaces")

Vulnerability, as an open-ended state of being or exposure to the Other, has emerged in my study as a key component of forging connections across post-apartheid divides. Like the other primary authors in this thesis who explore vulnerability in contemporary South Africa in a self-aware, insightful manner, Beukes's concern with the vulnerability of the South African body is palpable, as her interview with *Clarkesworld* demonstrates. *Moxyland* is cognisant of the various ways in which the body in contemporary South Africa is exposed to neoliberal capitalism and related registers of difference such as class. In the novel's mad, futuristic universe, consumer-driven bodies are hot, hip, and sexual; they play games – online and off, in virtual and meat space; they mutate and infect; they erupt into flesh and gore; they die shuddering; they are voracious, and thirsty; these branded bodies are both celebrated and criticised by Beukes for *serving* cool – which is presumably why the novel made waves in South African in addition to garnering a cult following abroad. "I love subverting language to my own diabolical purposes" ("Spaces"), Beukes tells *Clarkesworld*.

For an author, South Africa is an exciting place to be, and Beukes makes the most of the country's tumultuous energy in her fictional engagements with its cityscapes. Her work is an example of what *Al Jazeera*'s Yoonj Kim described as the "wealth of creativity and innovation bursting forth from [South Africa's] once-crumbling cities" (2013). As art collector Paul Harris observed in that same year, "'[a]rt thrives where there's a lot of turmoil and emotions'" (cited in Kaufman). According to the website, *British Council Creative Economy*,

South Africa's creative scene has become a burgeoning sector of potential, while the continent as a whole has the youngest population in the world. Both elements are impacting on the future of the creative and cultural sectors, creating and empowering a new creative landscape. ("South Africa")

In "Johannesburg, City of Recent Arrivals", the first episode of *Writing a New South Africa*, Mohare takes to the city's streets, recording literary voices like that of Lebo Mashile, whose hip-hop inspired poetry speaks to a new generation of South Africans. With Jo'burg buzzing in the background, Mashile exudes the creative energy, excitement, and promise that the present moment seems to hold for many a young South African. Referring to the emergence of female voices after apartheid as akin to taking the lid of a pressure cooker, she explains enthusiastically that

[t]here is something really unique about this context – as dysfunctional as it is, as exhausting as it is – it's also, it's transformative and it allows for conversations that are not possible anywhere else. […].

The wonderful thing about South Africa is that it's all on the table, you know. Race is on the table. Gender is on the table. […]. The space forces you to self-examine, and the space doesn't allow you to take your voice out of it; your voice immediately impacts the space, and is immediately impacted by the space – and I love that. (cited in Mohare, "Johannesburg", my transcription)

Although, in *Moxyland*, Beukes revels in the sheer hipness underpinning these lifestyles, she maintains a critical distance in order to critique the cool her text conveys. As an illustration of the currency of Beukes's writing in this regard, I refer to the nation's mood during the Opening of Parliament in 2015, which finds resonance with *Moxyland*'s post-rainbow cynicism.

Prior to the event the oppositional party, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), had been vocal about their plans to interrupt President Zuma's State of the Nation Address (SONA). Inside the National Assembly, cellular networks were scrambled, presumably in an attempt to block the negative real-time press that such a protest might elicit. Upon grasping the extent of the media clampdown, journalists in the chamber responded with the chant that grew into the trending hashtag, #bringbackthesignal. Armed security forces removed EFF MPs, a proceeding to which political commentator Justice Malala (@justicemalala) responded on twitter: "Only in a police state do you jam cellphone signal, take Parly audio away and stand ready to black out proceedings of Parly. #SONA2015". Beukes shared on Facebook the following tweet by fellow writer Alex van Tonder (@alex_vantonder): "Water cannons, cellphone signal jamming, riot police, arrests for asking questions... #SONA2015 is going full #Moxyland right now". Van Tonder is, here, referring to the series of (ludicrous) disruptions that attended the affair and provoked a media- and twitterstorm.

According to *Memeburn* editor André-Pierre du Plessis "right around the time Parliament erupted, some #SONA2015 trended at 30 tweets per second". Du Plessis heralded the broadcast "South Africa's first truly social TV event, as events unfolding on TV were influenced by social media and vice versa". SONA demonstrated one of *Moxyland*'s key tenets, which is that South Africans rely heavily on virtual (including telecommunication) networks to gain knowledge of fellow citizens far removed given structural inequalities. Many South Africans' experiences of people from other backgrounds are limited to (sometimes heated) debates between disembodied avatars on South African opinion pages and online newspapers.

In recent years, freedom of media and freedom of expression in South Africa have been topical concerns in the media. The prominent coalition of organisations, the Right2Know Campaign, was founded in response to the Protection of State Information Bill (also known as the Secrecy Bill), a piece of legislation that aims "[t]o provide for the protection of certain state information from alteration, loss or destruction or unlawful disclosure; to regulate the manner in which state information may be protected" (2). In an interview with eNCA in 2015, Murray Hunter from Right2Know expresses concern that "an extremely undemocratic tactic [is] being used in our most democratic institution, and nobody seems to be at the wheel". The Marikana massacre at the Lonmin platinum mine in 2012, which resulted in the deaths of forty-four people, is the most significant case of excessive force and state intimidation in post-apartheid South Africa. The event sheds light on the vulnerability of miners, and by extension a struggling working class, to poverty, disease, and marginalisation, forms of vulnerability which underlie *Moxyland*'s depiction of a rigidly stratified and policed society.

In connection with a conference at the University of Stellenbosch, the Hearing Landscape Critically network commissioned Aryan Kaganof to film a response to Marikana. The result, *Night is Coming: A Threnody for the Victims of Marikana*, is a provocative documentary, or as one reviewer called it, a "filmic and aural sculpture" (Janssen), on the disparity between the creative, intellectual class, as embodied in the film by the academics presenting at the Stellenbosch conference, and the working class, as epitomised by the plight of the Marikana miners. Framed by evocations of blindness, the film draws a parallel between the sound of rapid gunfire at Marikana, the thud of a worker pounding a nail repeatedly into the ground, and the clapping of hands after a musical performance.

Kaganof's film opens with the caption, "filmed in a POLICE STATE", being spray-painted onto a wall. In an interview with the director, South African jazzpoet Lefifi Tladi sets the tone for the piece when he makes the powerful statement that independence after apartheid "simply means they [the Westerners or the Imperialists] give you the machinery that they were oppressing you with so you oppress yourself". Later on, Marikana footage from 16 August 2012 is played in slow motion with a haunting voiceover by Tladi, who is described by the film as a "Black Consciousness visionary". In a haunting reading of "Gare Itshebeng", a poem to which English subtitles are provided, Tladi says that ideology is a dream which "'skirts logic and cajoles the population into accepting evil as inevitable.'" It "'programs collective desperation'", and "'justifies itself with the false idea that this is a happy and viable world.'" "'It alienates. It defeats. Because its ultimate goal is self-perpetuation'" (cited in Kaganof).

Although the bleak tone and style of the documentary is different from that of *Moxyland*, both works present dystopic views on post-apartheid South Africa, conjuring the vulnerability of the body in relation to loops of state oppression, class division, and blind, futile endeavours under capitalism. Beneath the novel's exaltation of cool lies a sharp critique of the superficiality of taste cultures and the neoliberal exploitation of bodies such as Kendra's, whose invulnerability to disease has been bought at a high price. Kendra's tattoo and ceaseless thirst for Ghost suggest that subcultural style in fact covers or compensates for vulnerability which is, in turn, exploited by the faceless corporations governing Beukes's city. *Moxyland*, it follows, exemplifies the tension between vulnerability as, on the one hand, a source of creativity and reconnection and, on the other, a destructive force which arouses anger and obstructs innovation in South Africa.

Concluding this chapter on cool and subcultural belonging, I would like to draw attention to a comment made by the character Toby that strikes me as a somewhat metafictional gesture on Beukes's part. Toby, immersed in the virtual world of a computer game, faces a giant ultra-realistic mural of a familiar South African shape, that of an Nguni cow, and declares that "[t]he local flavour is a nice touch – a little extra the developers threw in to mod [denoting "modify"] the experience to whatever part of the world you're logging in from – like water buffalo in Indonesia" (177). When this statement is applied to *Moxyland* as a whole, it begs the question: If Beukes's props, meaning the references that provide the novel's South African flavour, are interchanged with objects and calamities representative of other places, what of "South Africa" remains in the text? What defines the vulnerable body in Beukes's text as distinctly and uniquely South African? My answer would be: ever faced with radical uncertainty, a surprisingly unwavering sense of *cool*.

6. CONCLUSION – TONGUE:

Antjie Krog's *A Change of Tongue*

6.1. The Vulnerable Body of Antjie Krog

> to become always towards and thus
>
> beyond the brief banks of the single body
>
> to become of the bodies, the vulnerability of them
>
> of the hearts calibrating
>
> of being included
>
> with all unprotected hissing skins
>
> fragmentary eyes
>
> to see oneself plural
>
> as you see an us-ed me
>
> to begin between the fingers
>
> rolling a silksoft thread towards a word to whole us. (Krog, *Conditional* ii)

In this thesis, I have read South African bodies raped, diseased, and stylised; bodies which are subject to, but also contend with, forms of discrimination on the basis of the interlinked categories of difference threading through every chapter: race, class, and gender. In each reading, I have placed emphasis on a particular form of essentialised difference in relation to the body's vulnerability, although all these forms intersect and interweave in complex ways to give definition to the living body, which is to say that a body is as raced, as gendered, as it is classed. Throughout the study, I have concentrated on the ways in which literature unsettles the polarisations, in which one subject position always enjoys more power and privilege than the other,

that structure South African society. These critiques of the treatment of the body in post-apartheid South Africa simultaneously moved beyond the country's borders through explorations of identity and belonging that have universal application. Through a concern with how contemporary South African authors utilise the conventions of various literary genres to dismantle grammars of differentiation, I have examined literary explorations of new ways in which the vulnerabilities of the body might be written in the South Africa to come. All of the selected texts both use language and are about language; they examine existing vocabularies related to the body, but also to varying degrees imagine a language unfettered by the atavistic conceptions of the past.

To the discursive strategies discussed in this thesis, that is, Margie Orford's counter-derivatisation, Zoë Wicomb's light touch, Jonny Steinberg's clash of epistemologies, and Lauren Beukes's aesthetics of cool, I now add Antjie Krog's vocabulary of grace, with which my conception of a language of vulnerability resonates. This concluding chapter concentrates on Krog's writing since the concerns put forward by this thesis are so expressly embodied by her oeuvre in its entirety. None of the other primary texts investigates and spells out as clearly and resolutely the indisputable entwinement of the body, vulnerability, language, and reconciliation in South Africa as that of Krog's.

A prolific writer and public intellectual, Krog is internationally known for a seminal text mentioned in the Introduction, that is, *Country of My Skull* (f.p. 1998). Two subsequent full-length works of creative non-fiction, *A Change of Tongue* (f.p. 2003) and *Begging to Be Black* (f.p. 2009), are often read in conjunction with *Country of My Skull* as a post-apartheid trilogy of sorts. Although these works of non-fiction were first published in English, Krog identifies first and foremost as a poet in her native tongue, Afrikaans, and is much researched and celebrated in this regard by the

Afrikaans literary establishment. However, in criticism written in English, the emphasis customarily falls less on English translations of her poems than on the socio-politics of the abovementioned works of non-fiction. Christy Weyer, for instance, comments on the general "critical silence which has engulfed and barricaded [the] omnipresent body" (162) in various English language critiques of Krog's literature.[23] With this observation in mind, I depart somewhat from the trend by choosing a subject more often associated with Krog's Afrikaans poetry than her English works of non-fiction, that is, the vulnerable body.

Although the body, in particular the vulnerable body, plays a more prevalent role in Krog's poetry, the reverberations of a poetics (in direct relation to a politics) of embodiment are also felt in her prose. Krog's literary texts converse with one another across genres, and their patent intertextuality is indicative of the conscious creation of an overarching literary project to comprise a meaningful body of work. It follows that there is much to be gained from placing Krog's contributions to different discursive disciplines alongside one another, especially with regard to the primacy of the body.

Ever pragmatic, Krog's conception of a vocabulary of grace, as outlined in an anthology of academic essays, *Conditional Tense: Memory and Vocabulary after the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, includes as well as enacts practical ways in which South Africans, especially white South Africans, might acknowledge their vulnerability. In fact, Krog's literary texts can all be read as comprehensive exercises in vulnerability and grace, as she probes her multiple, overlapping identities as an Afrikaner, a South African, a writer, a woman, a wife, a mother, and a daughter. The sheer exposure of self that characterises Krog's writing

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[23] Given Krog's concern with cross-cultural and cross-linguistic communication and collaboration, it is interesting to note how her bilingual literary endeavours have put in conversation literary critics working in both Afrikaans and English literary studies.

is set forth as the foundational step towards cross-cultural communication, and suggests that vulnerability is the necessary precondition for a new language or, more specifically, a vocabulary of grace to come into being. The epigraph to this introductory section, which is also the epigraph to *Conditional Tense,* demonstrates the overarching concern of Krog's trio of full-length English texts, which is to connect the individual to the collective or, with the poem's formulation in mind, to render the skin or boundaries of the embodied self vulnerable to allow the self to overflow into a community of bodies.

In "'I Have a Body, Therefore I Am'", the Afrikaans literary scholar Louise Viljoen makes the astute observation that Krog "constantly reflects on the difficulties of representing the body and the ways in which her engagement with the body can lead to an extension of the boundaries of the genres in which she works" (99). The notion of the vulnerable body as a literary resource and a field of expansion and inventiveness (which I explored in the Introduction) is crucial to the workings of Krog's non-fictional trilogy. Sue Kossew puts it succinctly:

> All three titles of Antjie Krog's own particular form of life writing – *Country of My Skull*, *A Change of Tongue* and *Begging to Be Black* – highlight a crucial element common to them all: a subjectivity that is in formation along with the changing nation in which it is positioned. The embodied nature of this self, conjured up in their respective titles (skull, tongue, skin colour), is situated within the metaphor of the body politic (country, language, race). These titles provide a powerful indicator of the symbiotic relationship of self and state that is intimately embedded in Krog's trilogy. (189)

Another article by Viljoen, "The Mother as Pre-text", refers to the vulnerable body in Krog's literature, remarking that Krog's "recent texts emphasise that the (autobiographical) body open to change is also open to pain and damage. Her

tenderness towards this body has become a hallmark of texts like *Country of My Skull*, *Kleur Kom Nooit Alleen Nie* and *Verweerskrif*" (137). Viljoen's observation is equally relevant to "Country of Grief and Grace", a cycle of poems in a collection of Krog's translated poetry in English, *Down to My Last Skin*. Here, Krog describes her native tongue, Afrikaans, as a language which is bracingly vulnerable, open to change, and therefore all the more humane: "all our words lie next to one another on the table now/ shivering in the colour of human" ("Country of Grief" 100). This language facilitates a newfound intimacy between self and other which is emphatically visceral: "we know each other well/ each other's scalp and smell each other's blood/ we know the deepest sound of each other's kidneys in the night/ we are slowly each other/ anew/ new/ and here it starts" (100). In an Afrikaans interview with Herman Wasserman, Krog discloses that

> for the first time, I write in a language which feels himself powerless, and it is fantastic. The vibrations within the language are for the first time the vibrations of grace. A more humane tone enters, other voices are drawn in because the language is no longer sure of whom he serves. ("Afrikaans", my translation)

Krog's second work of literary non-fiction, *A Change of Tongue*, is a semi-autobiographical text composed of six loosely related parts, entitled "A Town", "A Hard Drive", "A Change", "A Translation", "A Journey", and "An End". Through a self-reflexive exploration of writing, Krog, the first-person narrator and protagonist, reflects on her place as a white Afrikaans speaker in a transforming South Africa. Set in Kroonstad after the fall of apartheid, the text brims with Krog's memories of life as an Afrikaner in South Africa, during as well as after apartheid. Recollections include her budding defiance of the apartheid regime as a young poet, participation in the 1989 Victoria Falls writers' conference in Zimbabwe, interviewing Nelson

Mandela in Central Park, translating Mandela's autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*, into Afrikaans, travelling from Mali to Timbuktu as part of a poetry caravan, and the death of her father, an Afrikaner farmer. As I will demonstrate, interlinked themes are all underpinned by an ethics of vulnerability. These themes include the transition from minority to democratic rule; the Afrikaans language; Afrikaner identity and post-apartheid belonging; heritage, family, and community; the Krog family's loss of land; Mandela's persona; cross-racial reconciliation; language and literature in South Africa; and translation as transformation. A text always on the move, *A Change of Tongue* travels to-and-fro temporally, geographically, as well as thematically: between past and present, to events in South Africa as well as in other countries, and deeply personal experiences which are usually involved in the politics of the moment. Comprised of narrative accounts and tableaux of varying lengths, the text's interdisciplinarity eludes fixity of form in keeping with Krog's characteristic suspicion of master narratives.

In this chapter, I concentrate on the derivatised body part, the tongue, specifically Krog's racialised tongue in *A Change of Tongue*. The tongue symbolises the relation between language and the vulnerable body. In two main parts, this chapter will consider forms of translation in relation to cross-cultural communication in *A Change of Tongue*. The first half of the chapter concentrates on Krog's vulnerability as an Afrikaner in post-apartheid South Africa, and then on literary translation, or the translation of narratives, as a means of transforming Afrikaans, which was the favoured language of the apartheid regime. Krog posits translation as a practical means of effecting reconciliation in the country without the loss of nuance, introspection, and responsibility that often attends hands-on resolutions. In the second half of the chapter, I focus on Krog's representation of Mandela as a vulnerable leader and cultural translator of sorts, an engagement which aims to

demonstrate the importance of translation to reconciliation in South Africa. I conclude the chapter by reflecting on how the narrative of Mandela's life is understood as entwined with the story of the new South Africa and created stable parameters for open communication across divides.

Krog concludes her article, "My Heart Is on My Tongue", with an arrangement of the terms I will address in this chapter, that is to say, vulnerability, translation, reconciliation, and transformation:

> Translation is essential for us to live in respect of each other. We have to translate each other to ourselves, to transform our behaviour into living a life acknowledging that to be human is to be vulnerable. And to be vulnerable is to be fully human. (236)

6.2. White Mouth, Afrikaner Tongue

Afrikaans is still regarded by many South Africans as a language of oppression. As a result, in post-apartheid South Africa, mother-tongue Afrikaans authors and intellectuals are often seen to grapple with the role of Afrikaans and its accompanying subject positions. Many Afrikaans speakers have adopted the non-racial designation "Afrikaans speaker" in opposition to the ideological stance exemplified by "Afrikaner", which refers to a white Afrikaans-speaking person. Krog, however, clings resolutely to the latter's sullied subject position in order to complicate and destabilise this category of identity from within.[24]

In fact, her entire oeuvre speaks of a wide-ranging commitment to troubling her personal identity as an Afrikaner and a writer, but also as a representative of the Afrikaner community as a whole. Demonstrating a thorough understanding of the

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[24] Christine Marshall (90) and Carli Coetzee (41-43) have made similar observations.

historical and socio-political processes that have shaped her identity as a privileged, white, Afrikaner woman in South Africa, Krog remains situated within this arrested category of identity precisely to question under which conditions it might be transformed. It follows that Krog's primary contribution to the decolonisation of the literary landscape in South Africa lies not in resigning herself to silence but through an unflinching documentation of her own private struggle to repair Afrikaner identity. Accepting responsibility for the past, she lays bare the structures of white privilege that support her pen, without resigning as a writer.

Always, Krog brings questions of identity and belonging back to the matter of language, demonstrating that ways of thinking are always wrapped up in discourse. According to Mollie Painter-Morland, "Krog reflects on how naturally the story about what happened under Apartheid shifts from politics to language. The political reality has crept into the very syllables of the language she speaks" (154). Even as a young Afrikaans-language poet, Krog explored ways to undermine, enrich, and diversify official Afrikaans. Through experimentation at the level of language, Krog's idiolect, which came to be known as "Antjiekaans", sought to depart from the so-called "standard Afrikaans", the kernel of Afrikaner identity, in order to undermine the grammar of differentiation underpinning Afrikanerdom as a whole. It is a challenge and a struggle that only a consummate writer could articulate and accept, and few contemporary writers address the role of language in relation to the problem of reconciliation in South Africa as resolutely as Krog.

The title of *A Change of Tongue* points to a central theme in the text, which is the relationship between two tongues, as it were: the physical tongue, as part of the biological apparatus producing speech, and the figurative tongue, which is a synecdoche for language. The illustration on *A Change of Tongue*'s front cover is of a sole or "tongue fish" (the literal translation from the Afrikaans, "tongvis"). The

image derives from a specific passage in the book which meditates on the differences in meaning between "change" and "transformation", a differentiation which understands "transformation" in terms of a wholly "new vision or attitude" (126) and deep structural (as opposed to superficial) modifications. The passage includes a morphological description of the sole's metamorphosis, which is a means of adaptation or acclimatisation (128-29). According to Christine Marshall, "[b]y adopting the flatfish to illustrate the title, […] Krog therefore represents her poetic project, and particularly the translation phase of it, in terms of transformation and survival" (78). The text, therefore, associates processes of transformation in South Africa with the operations of language which, in Krog, are emphatically situated and visceral. For Krog, body and language are inseparable, and "tongue" emerges as the most prevalent example of her insistence on the material origins and effects of language. With the concept "tongue", which is scattered about Krog's literary landscapes, word and world consequently collide head-on. Krog embeds language firmly in the body, and it is along the contours of this body that identity is shown to take shape.

As an instance of *A Change of Tongue*'s deployment of "tongue" in relation to Afrikaner identity, Krog describes an anguished personal moment at the Victoria Falls conference. Standing in the spray near the waterfall, an anonymous South African recites a poem by the Zulu poet, Benedict Wallet Vilakazi, before walking away. Upon realising that he mistook her for a foreigner, as someone who is not from South Africa, Antjie Krog, the character, who is now alone in the mist, starts to cry:

> My whole inside gives way, flows out like foundation rubble, leaving me raw, empty, bereft, and yet so heavy I cannot seem to lift my head.

> After what feels like hours, I make my way back, dragging the corpse of white skin and Afrikaner tongue behind me. (169)

Although Krog's mouth and pen are resolutely white[25] and her tongue undeniably Afrikaans even in her English prose, she by no means supports the racialisation of bodies in South Africa. Her tongue, as a bodily symbol of the Afrikaans language and Afrikaner identity, is an inhibited, derivatised instrument, but it is the only means by which she might attempt to transform her language and culture. Krog's primary occupation is to imagine a new Afrikaner identity by working, at the level of language, to develop a vocabulary by which this tainted identity might be renovated and re-habited.[26]

Asked to co-conduct "the last-ever interview with Mandela as President" (240) for the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), Krog travels to the village of Qunu in South Africa's Eastern Cape Province where Mandela was raised. Here, Mandela has "built a house […] on the same design as the prison warder's house in which he had lived for the last years of his imprisonment at Victor Verster" (241). She wonders: "Why make his prison part of his freedom?" (241). In the following excerpt, Mandela's house functions as a positive symbol of South Africa's transformation. It encapsulates in concrete terms Krog's understanding of transformation as not the eradication of old structures (like the Afrikaans language) but their restoration and renewal. In the context of the *A Change of Tongue*'s concern with forms of language, it also signals that the grammar of differentiation, a structure of confinement, might well develop into a language of reconciliation, or what Krog would refer to as a vocabulary of grace:

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[25] "I'm not sure what kind of slant a white mouth will give to it" (166), Krog wonders in *A Change of Tongue*.

[26] In the Introduction, I included a quote from Meg Samuelson's "Walking through the Door", in which she argues: "Rather than wistfully imagining the tearing down of structures, then, it may be more pertinent to think in terms of the *renovation and re-habitation* of what has been inherited as a means to engage and unsettle the on-going imbrications of past and present" (135, emphasis added).

I stand at the sitting-room window and cannot help but think of Mandela, standing precisely here, looking out like this in the Victor Verster prison. And I marvel at the kind of man he is. The kind of man who would want to take the same construct, the very same structure of imprisonment, pick it up and put it down in the veld, in Qunu, in freedom. This yellow-brick clot of hostility he transforms into a place of homecoming and care. It may look alien, uncomfortable, but on his insistence, with his example, his personality, his ability to change perceptions, he makes this house his house, filled with the future. He doesn't simply rush for the new, he transforms the old, he forces it to adapt; even if it bursts here and there at the seams, or cracks around the edges, it has made space for the new. The structures of captivity have been transformed into the structures of freedom. It can be done. He has done it. (243)

A less widely known fact is that the Afrikaans title of *A Change of Tongue*, that is *'n Ander Tongval*, literally translated means "Another Accent" or "Another Dialect". Given the play of words with "ander" which means both "another" and "other" in Afrikaans, the title can also be translated as "An Other Accent", in other words a dialect that is other. The change of tongue in the title refers to more than the problematisation of Krog's decision to publish prose in another tongue, which is English. The Afrikaans title also points to the book's main theme, which is the transformation of a language through translation, which introduces other accents and dialects. Like Mandela's house, the language makes room for other perspectives, accommodating alterity.

In Krog, issues affecting everyday language use often serve as metaphors for broader problems of self-expression and cross-cultural communication. The challenges the new democracy poses to the survival of the Afrikaans language is a metaphor by

which to interrogate the Afrikaners' right to belong in post-apartheid South Africa. More broadly, Krog's project is distinctly postcolonial as she, by way of her concentration on Afrikaner identity, also addresses the question of how a formerly authoritarian culture, with a vocabulary encumbered by a history of subjugation and cruelty, might speak or write itself vulnerable. This is one of the reasons why Krog is part of a handful of contemporary Afrikaans authors who have captured the attention of international critics. The third poem in "Country of Grief and Grace", labelled (c), illustrates the poet's concern with finding the right words to reach out to the other:

> speechless I stand
>
> whence will words now come?
>
> for us the doers
>
> the hesitant
>
> we who hang quivering and ill
>
> from this soundless space of an Afrikaner past?
>
> what does one say?
>
> what the hell does one do
>
> with this load of decrowned skeletons origins shame and ash
>
> the country of my conscience
>
> is disappearing forever like a sheet in the dark. (96)

Krog's emphasis on developing a new vocabulary as the basis for cross-cultural, especially interracial, relations after apartheid responds to what she perceives as a failure of language in contemporary South Africa. She asks: "Why do we keep looking as if hypnotized at how criminality, madness, violence and racism breed as commonplace attitudes in our workplaces and homes?" (*Conditional* 258-59). Krog develops her conception of a vocabulary of grace along the lines of "the language of integrity" (*Conditional* 251) which Desmond Tutu established during the TRC, that

is, a "vocabulary of resistance, integrity and goodness" (248) in which formerly divided communities could reach out to another in empathy. Krog however laments what she identifies as the subsequent decline of this vocabulary and, ultimately, the incapacity of South African English, as it current stands, to facilitate transformation two decades after apartheid:

> Almost 20 years and two presidents later, many things have fallen by the wayside. For me, one of the first casualties was our new vocabulary. In speech after speech, Mandela's successor, Thabo Mbeki, in accomplished English, brought back the old, dreaded and suffocating cadences of race and humiliation. (237)

This formulation is reminiscent of Orford's exposition of the atavistic concepts of self and other informing Oscar Pistorius's defence. Centuries of foreign dominion have entrenched destructive polarisations based, especially, on race in South Africa, and Krog's texts respond directly to the lack of conceptual alternatives by which the vulnerable South African body might be appropriately understood and managed. In *Conditional Tense*'s central chapter, appropriately called "A Vocabulary of Grace", Krog writes:

> The dehumanization of the stigmatized often corresponds to the dehumanization of language and discourse. In a country emerging from centuries of fractured morality and dehumanization, it seems that this destructive vocabulary accrued from countless generations forms the very plausibility structures we have to extract ourselves from. If we don't, if we continue to assume that we do not need a vocabulary of care – also and especially for the disgraced – we will destroy everything good that we have achieved over the past 20 years. (251)

It is along the contours of the vulnerable body that Krog develops such a vocabulary of care, or a language of grace, in order to shake loose the grammar of differentiation that shapes post-apartheid bodies, most notably and somewhat controversially in relation to Afrikaner identity. Krog's creative and critical engagements abound with references to a new language as she images what such a vocabulary of care might look and sound like. As an example, "A Translation", which is a chapter in *A Change of Tongue*, ends with a lyrical passage that addresses the river as a space of alterity:

> *How can I talk to you? You with your surface as warm as skin and your icy undertones? Do I need a special language? A new tongue? How?*
>
> *You should imagine yourself through me and I myself through you.*

(282)

As an instance of the pragmatism of her argument, Krog provides concrete evidence for her position on the correlation between politics and aesthetics, between political transformation and discourse. Stating that "[o]ver time, we have become a nation without any language at all" (238), *Conditional Tense* discusses the controversial death of Eugène Terre'Blanche, the founder and former leader of the far-right political organisation, the Afrikaner Resistance Movement. She argues that Afrikaans, as it currently stands, was unequal to the task of accommodating the complex antinomies of Terre'Blanche's character, in particular his alleged bisexuality (246-47). To return to the fundamental question prompted by Krog's critical and creative work: Can a derivatised tongue birth such a vocabulary of grace? It is possible for a culture weighed down by a history of atrocities to reconcile with those cultures that it had made to suffer? Is there a place for the Afrikaners in the democratic South Africa? In South Africa, these questions form part of an ongoing struggle to delimit national identity after apartheid.

Not one to get lost in abstractions – her writing is typically vivid, full-bodied, and theoretically complex – Krog finds in translation the most pragmatic means by which a language can become vulnerable and ultimately, by virtue of this openness to alterity, transform and belong. Placing emphasis on actual, linguistic translation as a precursor for ethical relations between cultures, Krog posits linguistic translation as the most realistic way of approaching the other on the other's terms. As "Christina, a Swedish expert on translation" (270) explains in *A Change of Tongue*, "[t]ranslation is essential if we are to learn to live together on this planet. We have to begin to translate one another" (271).

6.3. Translation and Transformation

In an essay alternating between English and Afrikaans, the South African author Achmat Dangor describes what he calls the "linguistic schizophrenia" that accompanies multilingualism. Although Dangor's preferred mode of communication is English, he professes that his mother tongue, Afrikaans,

> lurks like a subterranean stream in my writing, leaching into its earth a sodden intensity, an inclination towards exaggerated imagery that I find difficult to notice while I write. It takes a good editor to see the mutant metaphors, to observe and help straighten out the often convoluted sentence structure that this mongrel process creates. […]. Rich to some, "gnarled", I suppose, to others.

What distinguishes English, South Africa's lingua franca, is the myriad of languages that inspire and inform it, including the country's official tongues, Afrikaans, isiZulu, isiXhosa, Sesotho, Setswana, Sepedi, Xitsonga, Tshivenda, SiSwati, and isiNdebele. Like Krog, Dangor sees potential in multivocality, and writes accordingly that

every South African should be brave enough to throw his or her precious language into the cauldron of everyday usage, in literature, in commerce, in government. Let the "market forces" of language development determine which "strain" of consequent bastardisation emerges. It may well be English, it may well be a very distinct, Southern African English, and it may take a hundred years.

In an Oxford podcast on South African languages and translation, Peter McDonald interviews Krog. In a slightly flustered moment during the conversation, McDonald helps Krog with the English pronunciation of "Pleiades", the star cluster, as she reads a passage from *A Change of Tongue* (*Change* 185). With reference to her struggle with the pronunciation, she excuses her English saying, "[a]nyway, that's *my* English" ("McDonald", my transcription). This spontaneous statement summarises Krog's outlook on her English writing, which, as she explains in the interview, consciously retains an Afrikaans understructure and thus throws Afrikaans's unique structures and shades into the English melting pot, as it were. In the interview, Krog shares her experience of the English translation of *Country of My Skull*, in *her* English, as she puts it:

> So, *Country of My Skull* I wrote in Afrikaans first. Then, my English was simply not good enough to translate it. So I asked someone to translate, and he sent me a chapter, and I felt completely alienated from the text. It felt as if somebody else translated it; it sounded *English* and I couldn't bear this English-ness that I sounded like. So I asked my son […] translate it as if you, as you would imagine me. So he kept the Afrikaans understructure of the book, and there's lots of literal translations in the book. Because what I wanted to say is two things: I am in English but it is not because I want to be English, or because I want to escape my past or escape the responsibilities

and the damage that my language have done. I am from there, and you must hear it and you must bear it at the back of your mind all the time. ("McDonald", my transcription)

Krog's decision to publish literature in English as well as in Afrikaans therefore does not signal a withdrawal from the Afrikaans literary sphere. On the contrary, her choice to change tongues accords with her work's general aim not to critique a culture from without but from within. South Africa's culture of blame succeeds only in heightening defences and increasing the distance between formerly segregated factions. As an alternative approach, Krog exposes and critiques her own subject position and, by displaying an interest in the viewpoints of others, attempts to diversify and transform this category of identity from within. In the words of Dangor, "[l]anguage not only shapes one's place in society; it *is* one's place in society. The quintessential hybrid is the person who speaks a quintessentially hybrid language".

Krog conceives the enrichment of a language through translation as a feasible solution to the problem of miscommunication in South Africa. Concurrently, Krog not only regards linguistic translation as a foundation for societal change but also uses it in *A Change of Tongue* as a metaphor for cultural translation, that is, an open exchange between divergent epistemologies. In a conversation with Ileana Dimitriu on the "Splendour and Misery of Translation", Krog describes the transformation of language set in motion by the TRC in terms of sound:

If you closed your eyes, you knew that a new sound was now entering the white South African sound. The black stories had been there for decades, but they've only recently entered the old circuit via translation; and once this happened, every piece of literature had to pitch itself against the new sound, this more encompassing, translated world view. (286-87)

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The most prevalent example of the parallel *A Change of Tongue* sets up between linguistic and cultural translation is the fine comparison the text draws between the role of Krog-the-character, as linguistic translator, which is the focus "A Translation", and the role of Mandela as cultural translator, or an interlocutor between cultures, which comprises the main subject of the preceding chapter, "A Change".[27] Thus, Krog's ethics of alterity is made manifest via concrete examples of translation. When translated into one's own, another language brings with it other concepts, processes, and structures. Krog's ideal South African English, it appears, would be one in which a plurality of worldviews are embedded.

In "A Vocabulary of Grace" Krog develops a conception of what she terms "interconnectedness-towards-wholeness". Krog defines the concept, which is the volume's focal point, as "a mental and physical awareness that one can only 'become' who one is, or could be, through the fullness of that which is round one – both physical and metaphysical" (196). She situates this understanding "firmly within the well-defined and formulated broader African 'communitarianism' as well as the more southern African localized term ubuntu" (196), stressing the African intellectual's "responsibility for [the figure of] the stranger as constitutive of collectivity itself" (213). With reference to the work of Xhosa novelist and intellectual Archibald Campbell Mzolisa Jordan, Krog writes that the stranger "who threatens the stability of society, who puts society as risk" – or, to recall Orford's third body in the courtroom, the figure of threat that keeps the "I" barricaded and the dream of Mandela's "we" at a distance – "also provides the possibility of restoring and saving it" (*Conditional* 213).

According to "Ways of Knowing Mrs Konile",

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[27] In the ensuing section, "Mandela's Tongue", I will give an account of the juxtaposition of these two chapters in order to further demonstrate Krog's case for the centrality of linguistic translation to cross-cultural identification, empathy, and reconciliation.

> [f]or [South Africans], the necessity of accessing indigenous languages and knowledge systems to achieve greater understanding of and respect for one another became crucial. Without recognition of the possibility of misunderstanding despite translation, we would have been doomed to continue hearing echoes of ourselves. (Krog, Mpolweni-Zantsi, and Ratele 43)

A vocabulary of vulnerability, in other words, embraces the stranger's frame of reference in order to invigorate the language and broaden its scope. It is a vocabulary of "mutual intelligibility" (Krog, Mpolweni-Zantsi, and Ratele 43), which also happens to be the literal translation of the Afrikaans title of Krog's collection of poetry, *Mede-wete* (*Synapse* in English). Krog thus relates reconciliation first and foremost to the recognition of the distinctiveness of the other, which greatly resembles the framework of ethical relations proposed by Cahill (as the polar opposite of processes of derivatisation). Krog's phrasing "doomed to continue hearing echoes of ourselves" can be read as a more poetic definition of derivatisation, that is, of defining another from the vantage point of one's own frame of reference only. Although its perspective on translation is at variance with Krog's, Carli Coetzee's *Accented Futures* expresses a related concern with monolingualism in a context characterised by a multiplicity of languages and voices: "Being understood, one sees, is to run the risk of being transcribed, and in particular transcribed inaccurately; it is to run the risk of having someone else's desires become the quotation marks around your words" (42).

Dimitriu's interview with Krog probes the relation the latter engenders between translation and vulnerability. Whereas one's mother tongue has the potential to become, in Krog's words, a "straitjacket" ("Splendour" 280), linguistic translation alternatively "prompts you to cross to the other side and be suspicious of the very

monolithic confidence of your own culture" (278). Krog explains the association further: "Creating bridges [between diverse systems of reference] means being prepared to open up, make yourself vulnerable and experience a complete change of heart" (284). From this perspective, a vocabulary can be rendered more vulnerable, more open, in receiving and incorporating concepts from other cultural frameworks. McDonald concludes his interview with Krog by asking what the South African English of the future might look and sound like. Krog answers:

> By pure chance, I stumbled across a piece by Homi Bhabha in which he uses Salman Rushdie, saying how does *newness* enter the world. It's when you translate and you come across something that you see, my language does not have that. *That* moment you know you are moving into the new. ("McDonald", my transcription)

In summation, Krog asserts that one language might aid the process of renewing another by means of translation. By translating her Afrikaans poetry into English, for instance, Krog introduces some of Afrikaans's distinctive linguistic elements to English, to the expansion of the latter. However, when a concept is easily translated from one language to another, posing no problems or challenges to the translator, it does not enhance the target-language text. It is only when a concept from a particular source language resists straightforward translation, relative to the particular target language, that it will benefit and broaden the language's scope. In *A Change of Tongue*, the Swedish expert explains that linguists refer to these difficult points in language, which are never completely translatable, as "rich points":

> "At times […] things will come up that strike you because of their difficulty, their complexity, the way they resist the resources you yourself use, in your language and culture, to make sense of the world. These things – from lexical items, through speech acts, to fundamental notions of how the world works –

are called 'rich points'. And a translator has to be very aware of the rich points relevant to a particular translation task, aimed at opening communication between the groups or subgroups on either side of the language barrier." (271)

Critics tend to overlook this passage in their discussion of the text, although the concept of the rich point is central to Krog's philosophy of (linguistic and cultural) translation. In *Language Shock*, Michael Agar draws a link between rich points and the formation of culture (107), a necessary connection which he refers to as "languaculture" (60). Agar coins the concept of the rich point to "name […] this particular place in one languaculture that makes it so difficult to connect with another. I'll call it *rich*, with the connotations of tasty, thick, and wealthy all intended" (100). Through grappling with a rich point, and thus by dealing with the particular nuances that define another languaculture, one's understanding of the other deepens while there is a simultaneous broadening of one's own outlook. Agar explains that this "problematic bit of language is puttied thickly into far-reaching networks of association and many situations of use. When one grabs such a piece of language, the putty is so thick and so spread out that it's almost impossible to lift the piece of language out" (100). Agar's theoretical framework underpins Krog's unique way of engaging openly, through her writing, with conceptual nodes of cross-cultural contention in South African society, which also suggests that the new South Africa, given its wealth of languacultures, is founded and still being built on a bed of rich points. In summation, "[i]f you hit a rich point, think you've solved it, and haven't changed, then you haven't got it right" (Agar 128).

In the Afrikaans article, "Mede-wete deur Antjie Krog", Helize van Vuuren refers to the English title of Krog's collection of poetry, *Synapse*, making the observation that "the Afrikaans poet, especially through her choice of words, seeks to drill open the

'raw nerves' of a language, away from its 'clogged syllables'" (my translation).

Another reason for featuring Krog's *A Change of Tongue* in this conclusion is the notion of bits of language upon which multiple, incompatible networks of meaning converge, or clog. In *A Change of Tongue*, the translation expert uses the word "forefather" to illustrate her explanation of rich points to Krog:

> "Take the word 'forefather'. Or would you use the word 'ancestor'? Does it carry the same content? A foreign culture can only be perceived by means of comparison with one's own culture, the culture of primary enculturation. There can be no neutral standpoint for comparison. Everything we observe as being different from our own culture is, for us, specific to the other culture. The concepts of our own culture will thus be the touchstones for the perception of otherness." (271)

A Change of Tongue concludes with the funeral of Krog's father. The coffin "sinking slowly […] going down into the stone" (364), leaves the patriarch's "children […] lost in a landscape in which we so often feel we no longer belong" (364). The death of the father and the potential loss of the family farm signal "an end" (which is the chapter's title) as his children stand diminished in the eyes of history. The last paragraph ends: "As we walk back to the car, my mother on my arm, I feel something lightly against my hair, something like a blessing. Like the touch, perhaps, of a forefather" (365). Hence, the last word of *A Change of Tongue*'s last chapter is "forefather", and this has three significant implications for my reading of Krog's text. Firstly, through meticulous placement with the subtlety and skill of a poet, Krog draws attention to the importance of rich points in the book, which corroborates its vital role in her literary project. Secondly, in depicting "forefather" as a rich point, a point in language which is dense and difficult, Krog salutes the rich complexity of

legacy and history in South Africa as multiperspectival. Thirdly, in the single word, "forefather", Krog succeeds in creating such a syncretic identity in her text.

According to Van Vuuren in "Antjie Krog: Towards a Syncretic Identity", *A Change of Tongue* "noticeable striv[es] towards a new syncretic South African identity, a common humanity in which the best of black and white culture may be combined" (220-21). By referring to the touch of a forefather at her father's funeral on the farm, Krog associates the term "forefather" with both her father and her ancestors, thus invoking her Afrikaner heritage. In the context of Krog's representation of Mandela as the father and symbol of the new democracy, "forefather" also brings to mind Krog's African heritage, as a South African begging to belong. The comparison between "forefather" and "ancestor" in the extract above further underscores that "forefather" summons as one Krog's Afrikaner legacy and African heritage. Krog's positioning of "forefather" as a compact, multidimensional point in language, a "raw nerve", implies that questions of ancestry and belonging are rich, complex, and tender in South Africa. It is an inventive instance of how Krog, as an individual but also as a representative of a disgraced community, wields language to accommodate, within a problematic category of identity, the heritages or histories of both Afrikaner and African. The forefather's touch of consolation ends the book on a hopeful note, with the promise of redemption that a syncretic identity might afford. Krog thus forges her identity as a South African shaped by multiple traditions.

6.4. Mandela's Tongue

Mandela's request that Afrikaans be one of the first South African languages into which his book is translated is filled with irony, she realized. He is using this request, with his usual instinct for power relationships, to force Afrikaans to make room for all the people of the continent. He is

forcing Afrikaners to go back to the roots of the word they took so exclusively for themselves, to share it with others, to transform the language of apartheid into a language of coming together, to rid it of the vocabulary of power and retribution.

How strange it is, she thinks, to translate this in a world that so respects anger, celebrates revenge and admires the purity of hatred. But this Mandela man, she has come to see, represents the best, most human face of this country, its courageous spine, its most caring ear. Indeed, this Binder-together, in many ways already the ancestor of the world, has translated her language. (279)

It is only befitting to conclude this thesis's consideration of the vulnerable body in contemporary South African literature with a concise reflection on the country's quintessential vulnerable body, as it were, that of Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela. South Africa's first democratically elected president and father of the post-apartheid nation ("tata") passed away on 5 December 2013 at the age of 95, leaving in his wake an outpouring of popular tributes and critical analyses of his legacy.

The passage above captures the salient fact of Krog's overall representation of Mandela, which is the ability to facilitate interconnection through cross-cultural dialogue. In an array of texts, Krog frames the "Big-Binder-Together" as the nation's preeminent interlocutor who, in effect, embodies the promise of interconnectedness-towards-wholeness. When read alongside one another, references to Mandela in Krog's diverse texts, including *Conditional Tense*, *Synapse*, and *A Change of Tongue*, ultimately piece together a multi-layered representation of the South African icon's body as a site of cultural translation and transformation after apartheid.

Most notably, *A Change of Tongue* juxtaposes the portrayal of Mandela's role as a political leader with a reflection on Krog-the-character's duties as a translator of literature, comparing her work of literary translation to his work of political reconciliation in South Africa. The effect of this nuanced representation, which underscores the centrality of dialogue and cultural translation to Mandela's efforts to reconcile a deeply divided country, is to cast him as a cultural translator in relation to a longstanding theme in Krog's oeuvre, which is the politics of representation. Krog portrays Mandela, having facilitated cross-cultural conversations across the racial divide, as a type of translator and likewise describes Tutu as a "master translator" (*Change* 237).

The conceptualisation of Mandela's style of leadership in terms of cultural translation is communicated less in obvious statements than through the juxtaposition of Mandela's role as a "Binder-together" which lies at the core of the chapter, "A Change", and Krog's role as writer and linguistic translator in the subsequent chapter, "A Translation". As an epigraph to the latter, Krog quotes Derrida: "… for the notion of translation we would have to substitute the notion of transformation: a regulated transformation of one language by another, of one text by another" (267). In light of this understanding, Derrida's formulation underlies the juxtaposition of the two portrayals which, given the placement of these portrayals in two succeeding chapters in *A Change of Tongue*, regulate, supplement, and transform one another. Thus, the political leader's ability to inspire and effect change comes to be perceived as an exercise in cultural translation, whereas the writer's ability to negotiate different cultural perspectives and discursive registers acquires a patent political dimension.

Keeping the question of translation at the forefront of Krog's engagement with Mandela's public image, "A Translation" documents Krog's experience of

translating *Long Walk to Freedom* into Afrikaans. The process includes conversations with other translators of the autobiography in addition to Mandela himself, who makes two key statements to Krog, driving home the association in Krog's text between linguistic translation, on the one hand, and cross-cultural translation and understanding, on the other:

> "This book [*Long Walk to Freedom*] has been translated into practically all the languages of the world. I can go to any place on earth and my story can be found there in that language. Except here. Here [South Africa] I exist only in English. I want to be part of all the languages of my country." (268)

And:

> "One's language should never be a dead end," he says, as he takes his place among them for the usual photograph. "That is why I believe in translation: for us to be able to live together." (268)

Krog furthermore presents concrete examples, such as the following, to demonstrate how the translation of Mandela's autobiography into Afrikaans enriches and expands the boundaries of the Afrikaans language, forcing the language to make room for other realities in South Africa:

> Writers like Frantz Fanon and Es'kia Mphahlele have insisted that it is important after liberation to rethink society and rename it imaginatively, so as to ensure that old concepts and ideologies do not continue in the guise of the new. So for her it is very moving to see how the word "Afrikaan" for the first time finds its balance in a paragraph and rigs its sails to the winds of change: "'n Afrikaan kind word gebore in 'n Afrikaan hospital, huis toe geneem in 'n Afrikaan bus, leef in 'n Afrikaan woonbuurt en woon 'n Afrikaan skool by …" ["An African child will be born in an African hospital, will go home in

an African bus, will grow up in an African township and attend an African school …"]. (278)

In the concept of Mandela as a Big-Binder-Together, Krog combines linguistic translation, as mentioned above, and cultural translation, which comprises the most significant feature of her portrayal of Mandela in the context of my concern with language and reconciliation. As an instance of her representation of Mandela's work of integrating and unifying the nation, I refer to the poem Krog composed in his honour, "Lament on the Death of Mandela" (2014). Based on a Sesotho lament and thoroughly steeped in the language of the body, the poem portrays Mandela as "our Great Binder-Together" (105). Krog writes in the poem that, whilst the nation prepared for the burial, "everything was entangled": the body of Mandela, his people, even the body of the world. The sixth part of the poem, subtitled "*at the grave of Mandela*", opens as follows:

> here he rests now
>
> the one who bound us together
>
> may he find himself always in the fullness of peace
>
> he of the soil of our land
>
> he of the singing blood of us all. (105)

As in *A Change of Tongue*, Krog's written depictions of Mandela as the ancestor or forefather of the nation are often characterised by recurring first person plural pronouns, that is to say, "us", "our", and the prevalent "we" that, in the poem, "hold in our mortal arms/ a person so noble" ("Lament" 106). It seems to suggest that the presence of "Mandela", the signifier, cannot but help to call forth, or signify, the South African people as a whole. The repetitive back-and-forth movement between pronouns signifying Mandela, on the one hand, and the collective, on the other, generates an automatic association between Mandela and an ideology of inclusivity

and interrelation: "'let us now care for each other!'/ we whisper at the grave of the Openhanded One/ 'let us celebrate our connectedness!'" ("Lament" 106). Krog's portrayal of Mandela as translator stresses the symbolic dimension of his political leadership, which is powerfully captured by the following phrase from "Lament": "the battering ram of his tongue/ moulding futures to an interlocking core" (103).

With imagery that is comparable to Krog's description of her father's funeral in *A Change of Tongue*, the poem enfolds Mandela's corpse in the same way that "the land opens and takes him to her in utter silence" (106). The ability to facilitate interconnection is a personal attribute greatly praised in the poem and Mandela is correspondingly described as "the man who saved us from ourselves/ who gave us back to one another" (104) and, in the style of praise poetry, "the one who broke the vengeful assegais/ and bound them together" (105). It is around this "helpless" (104), "dying" (103), "dead" (105) body anchoring the poem, as it were, that the collective does not merely gather in grief but is in fact constituted as a whole, a unity, a "we" in mourning.

Returning to *A Change of Tongue*'s depiction of Mandela as the nation's Binder-Together, the following passage from "A Change" exhibits three interrelated features of Krog's overall representation of his character – physicality, charisma, and interconnection – in relation to his role as cultural translator or his "tongue" if you will. This moving passage describes Mandela's first public appearance on the day of his release from prison, accentuating his capacity to mobilise and inspire the South African people or, with reference to "Lament", to bind them together as a "we":

> It is almost dark when Mandela appears on the balcony. We sit in complete silence as the camera pans across a crowd that seems to go on forever and ever. The sea of people is alive with flags and banners. Then his time is here. He raises his fist and shouts, "Amandla!" His voice. This is his

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voice. Strong, yet choked, his shoulders clenched. I feel shivers down my spine. This sound I will never forget. But everybody in the room is already on their feet, roaring so loudly that the windows rattle, "Ngawethu!" We yell with all our might towards this man, we sling our voices like cables, like streamers – to reach him, to touch him. The veins stand out on our throats. Our eyes are brimming as we take our first real sniff of freedom, as we stretch our arms. As if from our shoulders something loosens, something scooping fragments of air, something quite feathery.

What Mandela says, or the fact that he has to borrow Winnie's glasses to read his speech because he's left his own behind at the prison, doesn't filter through to us. We are suddenly so utterly aware, and linked as we have never been linked before. Each one with every one. He is of us. We could be the most beautiful colour of change the world has ever seen. The man is free and a new time has dawned. (172-73)

Placing this figure firmly at the centre of the regime change in South Africa, Krog returns intermittently to the interrelated notions of Mandela as, in the first instance, the Big-Binder-Together (note the strong linguistic tie between "Mandela" and "we" in the passage above) and, in the second, in Mandela's words, "the product of the people of South Africa" (*Change* 220) as well as of his party, the ANC (245). Krog's portrayals alternate between lyrical evocations ("Lament" for instance) and critical interrogations of Mandela's talent for inspiring the masses, which are consistent with her customary concern with questions of identity and belonging, not to mention the role of literature in tackling these issues.

In a tangentially related reflection on reconciliation in *"A Vocabulary of Grace"*, Krog contemplates the question of belonging in post-apartheid South Africa by way of the metaphor of the rainbow nation. Reconciliation after apartheid, according to

Krog, ultimately involves the restoration of the South Africa's interconnectedness. Allowing a scientific understanding of the workings of a real rainbow's colours to inform her sense of the metaphor, she wonders whether, like a droplet of rain, her white body also "reflect[s] and refract[s] the full rainbow spectrum" (*Conditional* 257):

> Walking back to my office, a white face among black and coloured students, I wondered: Do I reflect all the colours all the time? Do I walk here, teach here on campus as a white Afrikaner woman, or am I reflecting the full South African spectrum – so that when the students see my one colour, they know that the *only* reason why they can see that one colour is because I refracted *all* the colours? If I am to refract exclusively Afrikaner female whiteness, I'll disappear. But – and this is even more radical – if I prefer to absorb only my "own colour", I'll disappear … but so will they. (257)

Krog's portrayal of Mandela conjures his body as a figurative prism, a refractor of light or, in the context of the description above, the prototypical droplet which contains – and binds together – all of South Africa's colours or races. Krog's statement that "the rainbow cannot be what it is if some colours are invisible, powerless or allowed to suffer or die; it can only exist inclusively" (*Conditional* 256) pertains to her understanding of English in South Africa which, like the rainbow, must allow for a diversity of inflections, accents, or "colours" if it is to facilitate interconnection.

In the last paragraph of Elleke Boehmer's *Nelson Mandela: A Very Short Introduction*, which is a book very much concerned with the multiple representations constituting Mandela's image, she writes:

> [I]ronically, there is as yet no representation of Mandela that evokes possibly his greatest achievement, how he came to understand conversation as a

human imperative. If there were such a representation, it would probably resemble improvised ensemble music, a complicated jazz rhythm scattering itself through time, impossible to recover exactly in script. A jazz riff alone would capture at once the risk and tenaciousness of Mandela's commitment to sheer talk: how he placed the idea of the human-in-interaction at the heart of his vision of the future. (181)

Though somewhat concealed, scattered between different themes in six separate parts, *A Change of Tongue* engages unquestionably with, in the words of Boehmer, Mandela's "*lived theory of transformation*" in "converting his respect for the human dignity in each and every person into a political practice through dialogue: making cross-border conversation a culture-wide expectation, and a means of mapping common ground and mutual regard" (177).

In addition, Boehmer observes that Mandela "became an *imaginative force field* in which a variety of different constituencies could invest meaning" (176). *A Change of Tongue* certainly demonstrates interest in Mandela's political leadership, and Krog's portrayal imparts a sense of a courageous, open-hearted, and complex character. However, Krog draws on the imaginative force field that is Nelson Mandela, not only to delve into his public persona in her narrative, but also to lend the authority that lies within this force field to her philosophy of translation. In describing transformation in South Africa in terms of translation, and epitomising Mandela as a cultural translator of sorts, *A Change of Tongue* puts forward translation as the primary means by which South Africans might ultimately find reconciliation. In Krog's portrayals of different forms of translation, the necessary vulnerability of the translator − whether linguistic (Krog) or cultural (Mandela) − is striking, and the vulnerable body emerges as the bedrock of linguistic and cultural translation in relation to a fundamental openness to perspectives other than one's own.

6.5. An End: The Vulnerable Body of Nelson Mandela

In keeping with her characteristically visceral tone of engagement, Krog's portrayal of Mandela in *A Change of Tongue* places his impressive physical presence, and the emotions this physicality stirred in his people, at the forefront: "Mandela is finding it hard to walk very fast. My eyes stray to his hands – the way his fleshy palms bulge out, especially at the base of the thumb. Mandela has unique hands" (177). In the text, Krog draws attention to his corporeality not only to express the materiality of his real, physical body, which would be too simple a task for a writer as incisive as Krog. Rather, Krog's representation has the effect of spotlighting the sheer materiality and power of the imagined body of Mandela, which is the main topic of the following discussion.

Underlying *A Change of Tongue*'s particular perspective on Mandela is the tacit understanding of the public persona as a powerful representation, or rather a corpus of representations, which may or may not accord with private identity. Two decades after his release from prison, the fabric of "Mandela", the representation, in which language and the body are indivisible, now comprises – aside from word-of-mouth anecdotes and stories – a far more official body of audio-visual and written records accumulated over time, which include personal texts like *Conversations with Myself*, a collection of extracts from Mandela's writing, in addition to *Long Walk to Freedom*. As evinced by the establishment of the Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory and Dialogue, which gathers, curates, and digitises his personal archive as one of its core tasks, "Nelson Mandela" is the focal point of a vast body of historical documentation. The value of such an archive lies in appreciating the extent to which the story of Mandela is also the story of South Africa. Expressed in the language of the body, this means that his body and wellbeing were very much wrapped up in the state of South Africa's body politic. Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe conclude that

"[m]ore than anybody else, Mandela embodied this sense of commonality, and his passing is likely to reignite the metaphysical anxiety that South Africa is neither a concept nor an idea – just a place, a geographical accident" ("Mortality" 268).

During apartheid, information about Mandela – including his physical appearance and facts about his life and identity – was difficult to obtain, which meant that public perception rested, to a certain degree, on conjecture. Asked to write and perform a poem in his honour, the young Krog, for example, felt she knew too little of him, as she explains in the following passage from "A Change":

> I ask around. I consult students and activists. But it is clear: Mandela is simply a symbol. Nobody knows what he looks like, nobody knows exactly what he has said. We just know that he is imprisoned on Robben Island for the freedom of us all. So I imagine him here – in our breath, on our tongues, staring out from our eyes. Yes, I see Mandela in a coat on the banks of the Valsch River, among the reeds we see him, we hear him stirring in the sirens, we sit with him behind the school desks, we see his tracks in the dusty streets of the township. Mandela breathes among us like the thorn trees and the grass, he wrestles into the taxis and the buses, he eats in the outbuildings, he raises his fist in the prisons. From the dusty winds blowing across the plains, he will come to us and set us free. (166)

Krog recalls seeing Mandela's real face for the first time, on a T-shirt at a hawker's stall. In this moment, fact meets fiction (albeit in part, since the face on the T-shirt is yet a representation), revealing a disjuncture between Mandela, the man, and Mandela, the abstraction:

> And there they hang. T-shirts flapping cheerily in the spring breeze. Sporting the face of a man. He has a beard and a parting creased into his hair and his eyes seem … sad. […].

> […]. We all stand and stare. Is it actually him? Is this what he looks like?

> […]. The eyes of the woman standing next to me are shining like two wet stones. The man who was just a name, a vehicle of dreams, has now acquired, for us on this dusty pavement, a face and a voice. (170)

As in "Lament", Mandela's body here functions as a point of assembly for, or even a prime mover of, the community. The two extracts above demonstrate that Mandela is certainly "of the people" in a symbolic sense, given that his persona has been shaped collectively and organically in the social imaginary. These particular and quite poetic representations of Mandela are, along with multiple other imagined bodies, fairly distinct from the real body that was imprisoned on Robben Island at the time. In these two evocative accounts Mandela is truly the stuff of legend: an omniscient, godlike figure whose promise of deliverance suffuses everyday life. A few pages on, Krog refers to a praise song by "imbongi" (praise poet) David Livingstone Phakamile Yali-Manisi in which Mandela is equally described as "[t]his man whom all garments fit", who "covers the earth like a blessed watersnake" (180). This is yet another description of Mandela as a powerfully protean figuration of a nation's projected dreams and desires, that is, a larger-than-life body which embraces all others. At the Free State's welcoming of Mandela in Bloemfontein, an event heralding the political transition, Krog once again draws attention to his physicality, observing that,

> [p]hysically, one could not have asked for a better symbol than the imposing figure of Nelson Mandela. […]. Visibly, he becomes the collective of the dreams and yearnings of each of the thirty thousand of us. He walks past us. It is as if he notices me personally. (174)

In *Conversations with Myself*, the book's editor, Verne Harris, explains that "interviewers over the years have found it almost impossible to penetrate Mandela's very formal public persona. He is 'the leader', 'the president', 'the public representative', 'the icon'. Only glimpses of the person behind the persona have shone through" (xvi). During Mandela's imprisonment, it was his physical absence and silence that were, paradoxically, powerful. In other words, the apartheid government's attempts to shut Mandela's body away, to remove his presence and voice, had an adverse effect, as Rob Nixon's influential article, "Mandela, Messianism, and the Media", explains:

> [T]he South Africana authorities had guaranteed the kind of scarcity that provokes media fascination by setting up a gigantic photo opportunity in reverse. Mandela became an off-camera phenomenon, and his silence grew more eloquent than words. (44)

Nixon makes the case that "the ban on photographing Mandela allowed the same few images to keep circulating in a heraldic fashion perfect for the needs of an international political movement" (45). By the time of his release, Mandela looked frail in comparison with the photograph of the young boxer that inspires Dumisa Gumede, the protagonist of *Mandela's Ego*, a novel also referred to above in "Blood". Naming Mandela "his other father" (Nkosi 29), Dumisa models his masculine identity based on folk tales of his hero's valour:

> Dumisa had seen Mandela's picture in the newspaper. He was dressed in boxing shorts and looked like a true master of the ring, sparring with an invisible opponent. Enemies he had aplenty, of course – there were always so many envious spirits surrounding him – but Mandela, the Black Bull, massive, towering, a pillar of strength, was more than their equal. (Nkosi 8)

As *The Cambridge Companion to Nelson Mandela* (edited by Rita Barnard) attests, I am by no means the first scholar to consider public representations of Mandela, with his symbolisation of the new nation as focal point. However, my concern with vulnerability does provide a different slant to the typical reading of Mandela's identity-as-story. The real body of Mandela, which gave rise to this immortal image, was of course vulnerable in real and adverse ways: exposed to the extreme racism of the apartheid government as a black South African, in the first instance, and imprisoned and separated from his family for twenty-seven years, during which he was at times subjected to hard labour, solitary confinement, and heavy censorship. Mandela, however, succeeded in turning a vulnerable body that had suffered for many decades into a source of transformation.

As an example of Mandela's positive philosophy of vulnerability, the previous section includes mention of Krog's translation of his autobiography, and how he rendered his life story vulnerable by requesting its translation into the apartheid government's preferred language of oppression. As the new nation's prime interlocutor, Mandela succeeded in enabling conversations between previously segregated communities, of which the TRC testimonies are a good example. Thus, following Krog, I would like to identify his political strategy as a vulnerable style of leadership based not on a display of brute physical strength (although one cannot discount the role of armed resistance in bringing apartheid to its knees) but on moral strength. This notion of Mandela's style of leadership is neither widely adopted nor novel. In *Think Business*, Darren Hanson for instance discusses Mandela's "open, inclusive and vulnerable leadership style", locating his strength in humility. As another example, Uzoechi Nwagbara's review of *Conversations with Myself* also invokes the ideology of strength-through-others, referring to Mandela's style of governance as "servant-leadership", which she defines as "leadership as service to

humanity" (141). Like *A Change of Tongue*, the publication of *Conversations with Myself* is an exercise in vulnerability which to an extent debunks Mandela's mythical status and exposes his character to scrutiny.

In "Mandela Writing/Writing Mandela", Daniel Roux draws attention to Mandela's deliberate negotiation of his self-representation via the epic life narrative which would come to embody the story of the nation as a whole. Although there is a very strong sense in which the multi-authored script that is "Mandela" lies in the hands of "his people", Mandela, the man, nevertheless put in place stable parameters within which their mythical speculations could transpire. With reference to *Long Walk to Freedom*, Roux poses the following question:

> How do we account for this sense that the figure of Mandela is unassailable, a figure whose mythical status seems paradoxically fortified rather than diminished by his more sublunary human qualities? Representations of Mandela, no matter how varied or even contradictory, continue to produce the effect of a unitary subject, one who is deeply familiar and simultaneously essentially inscrutable. In fact, Mandela's self-representation seems to resist appropriation. Mandela is recognized as an individual with unique but universalizable qualities – despite, or perhaps even because of, his human failings: his irascibility, his occasional intolerance. Indeed, part of his allure rests precisely in his ability to admit his shortcomings, to overcome his own limitations. ("Mandela" 210)

Roux's piece centres on "two interlocked ways in which *Long Walk to Freedom* serves to stabilize the figure of Mandela" (213), that is on how Mandela's identity-as-story (a concept I introduced in "Blood") serves to reconcile the antinomies of his character. Roux argues that "what becomes striking is precisely the way in which [*Long Walk to Freedom*] realizes this essentially modernist project of internalizing

and working with the contradiction between individual freedom and social responsibility by unfolding the tension into a narrative form" (218). Therefore, "[t]o some extent, then, the question about the foundation of Mandela's resilience and stability as a public icon is a question about literary form" (213).

With regard to the stability and permanence of identity, Wicomb's reading of five Afrikaner texts (including an article on the TRC by Krog) makes the crucial point that "the oppressed cannot fully embrace a postmodern theory of decentredness and loss of subjectivity as they cling, if periodically, to the humanist notion of a core self that is essential to the possibility of resistance" ("Five" 367). It appears that Mandela intentionally put in place a fixed narrative, certainly not out of hubris, but to lay down specific, immovable themes and tropes around which the complicated, nuanced work of reconciliation and nation building could occur. As an example of his insistence on certain core nodes or concepts to ground the story of reconciliation in South Africa, a friend of the character, Krog, tells a story near the end of "A Change":

> "Someone […] asked me […] why he repeats some of his stories, word for word, just as they've been written down in *Long Walk to Freedom*. […]. So I discussed it with Mandela's right-hand man, and he says Mandela does it only with certain stories. […]. Mandela is doing it intentionally, he believes, to undermine what he calls the whole postmodernist notion of ever-changing texts or something. As if Mandela wants to say that there are certain truths which should always exist as truths, and that these important truths should continue to exist in precisely the same way if people want to find one another."

> "[…]. In the stubbornly unalterable framework he creates, he opens up safe spaces in which words like 'humanity', 'human dignity' can be

resuscitated. Get breath, as it were, and some colour in their cheeks ….”

(256-57)

Mandela's resolute identity-as-story operated as a bedrock or solid stage upon which the TRC's polyphony of voices could be played out. In effect, the South African people could embrace an ideology of forgiveness precisely because his body in all its significance provided a stable point of reference or anchor from which sensitive exploration towards a mutual vulnerability could depart.

In this thesis I have argued that, following the initial celebratory period of Mandela's single presidential term, the grammar of derivatisation has endured in South Arica, given the relative lack of conceptual tools by which the vulnerability of the body might be appropriately managed and understood. The Mandela phenomenon pertains to his utilisation of narrative devices to shift the locus of safety, security, and well-being from the individual to the collective, that is, from the community-in-isolation to the nation-as-a-whole. The symbolic ground provided by Mandela's body made this phenomenal act possible. In other words, South Africans from all walks of life could start to accept one another because they shared an emotional investment in Mandela's embodied moral authority.

Mandela's initial success was not devoid of consequence. By anchoring his politics firmly in the body of representation signified by "Mandela", Mandela-the-man problematised the continuation, that is, the symbolic health, of this body of ideals after the deterioration of his real, physical health. The decline of the former president's health was problematic given that he had made of his body such an important element in his political life. Subject to speculation and sensationalism, the precarious state of Mandela's condition dominated the world's front pages in the years leading up to his death. Typical headlines included health updates such as the BBC's "Nelson Mandela's Health 'Improving' – President Zuma" and CNN's

"Nelson Mandela's Health 'Perilous,' Court Documents Say" (Smith, Smith-Spark, and Curnow), which would have appeared trivial if it wasn't for his unparalleled stature worldwide.

In two overlapping articles, "Surface, Depth and the Autobiographical Act" and "Wound, Surface, Skin", Nuttall analyses the furore caused by artist Yiull Damaso's *The Night Watch*, generally referred to as the "corpse painting". This pastiche of Rembrandt's "The Anatomy Lesson of Dr Nicolaes Tulp" drew widespread reproach in 2010 for portraying Mandela's autopsy. Nuttall considers how the painting revealed the "multiple anxieties that centre around Mandela's body" ("Surface" 171), above all "the anxiety which exists about having lost a form of politics deeply associated with the person of Mandela" ("Wound" 421). The painting also serves to illuminate the extent that Mandela's reputation is guarded by the South African people. On the subject, Damaso told the *Mail & Guardian* that,

> [i]n 2000 he ran into trouble with the [Nelson Mandela] foundation when he produced a series of painting of the former president, including one of a dreadlocked Mandela, and one an elderly Mandela wearing boxing gloves and a title belt.
>
> "They told me that his image was copyrighted. But how can you copyright the image of a public figure?" (cited in Van Wyk)

Not only humble, sincere, and accepting of others, Mandela, the symbolic body, was and still is vulnerable or open in a representational sense, given that the boundaries of his image, his identity-as-story, are permeable and inviting of allegorical significance. Mandela's self-representation has been styled to transcend his individual body and broaden its reach to encompass an entire nation. Every South African formed part of, and still has a share in, Mandela's narrative, which has

reverberated throughout politics, literature, and culture as the epitome of symbolic interconnectedness.

At Mandela's state funeral in December 2013, the signage of sign-language interpreter Thamsanqa Jantjie was wholly nonsensical due to a schizophrenic episode. Within the context of Krog's representation of Mandela as the prototypical translator or cross-cultural interpreter, the fiasco was undeniably symbolic. According to Barnard, "[w]ithout Mandela's own charismatic mediation, the connection between the global and the national shorted out" ("Afterword" 293). Indeed, without the stability provided by Mandela's body, or his tongue, Jantje's breakdown appeared to suggest that interpretation and translation, in their relation to the transformation of South African society, were doomed to fail – signalling the end of era.

6.6. The Vulnerable Body in Contemporary South African Literature

According to David Hillman and Ulrika Maude, *The Cambridge Companion to the Body in Literature*

> has as its starting point the contention that literature – at least as much as philosophy or science – can help us understand the complexities of embodied life. Literary texts, after all, tend to deal with the more ambivalent and amorphous areas of experience where simple definitions break down or prove inadequate. The greatest literary texts seldom propose straightforward answers, but instead provide us with nuanced representations that question the reductive categorizations that embodiment necessarily resists. (1-2)

Through *A Change of Tongue*'s idea of the tongue, this concluding chapter has drawn into even closer proximity the deeply entwined domains of translation and the body. In engaging directly with emotions, and drawing on the materiality of the

body, literature is a way of using language that is closer to the body than most forms of writing. The text demonstrates that literary engagement, and literary translation especially, can dismantle the fixed categories of identity that shape the body, and accordingly sets about developing new conceptual strategies by which vulnerability might facilitate interconnection after apartheid.

By way of concluding my engagement with the vulnerable body in literary works by Margie Orford, Zoë Wicomb, Jonny Steinberg, Lauren Beukes, and Antjie Krog, I appropriate Michael Agar's understanding of the "rich point" with particular reference to the body parts discussed in this thesis. I do so in order to propose that the struggle over the body's definition plays a crucial role in processes of reconciliation and transformation in the country. Thus, one might say that this thesis has concentrated on literary representations of the South African body's leading sites of provocation which solicit and impart diverse interpretations: its rich points or "raw nerves", if you will. Literary translation has to grapple with rich points, that is, the essence of a particular languaculture, if the target language is to benefit from the exchange and expand the borders of its framework. In this regard, my readings have shown how authors wrestle with the thick putty of meaning around rich points associated with the body, including "victim", "coloured", "HIV-positive", "cool", and "Afrikaner". Dense with meaning, these rich or gnarled points collate different networks of association, different perspectives, within the language or framework of each text. By teasing open the intricacies and ambiguities embodied by these concepts, these works of literature draw on the domain of the vulnerable body to break down grammars of differentiation and lay the foundation for a more inclusive language, a vocabulary in flux that accommodates a diversity of worldviews. Formulating derivatisation in relation to the concept of the rich point, it wholly negates the multidimensionality of the body, that is, the rich range of meaning that

falls outside the derivatiser's frame of reference. However, derivatisation fails at the recognition of the body's multiplexity that an ethics of vulnerability necessarily entails.

In conclusion, this thesis posits an ideal post-apartheid author as one who draws on the body's potential for self-definition, ambiguity, and change in spite of its history of protracted subjugation and suffering in South Africa. The work of Krog, a prime example of such an author, is proof that sustained critical engagement with the language of the vulnerable body, or what she calls a vocabulary of grace, is vital to the project of reconciliation in the country. I have completed this literary study with a reading of *A Change of Tongue* in order to drive home the implicit intention of my successive readings of contemporary authors, which is to demonstrate the importance of literature and literary analysis in South Africa. This objective is a direct response to the erroneous assumption that literary engagement is superfluous, indulgent, and detached from the challenges faced by developing countries. In fact, as this thesis has demonstrated, literary works from South African often draw inspiration from, and converge at, the site of the vulnerable body and in doing so contribute to the process of national growth.

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