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Writing, Interpreting Fiction in South Africa: The Last 30 Years

Michael Chapman

Responding to the theme of this issue, 'The Last 30 Years: Looking Back, Going Forward', the article assesses the work of several writers of fiction who have garnered attention in both South African-based literary journals and literary journals abroad: Vladislavić, Wicomb, Van Niekerk, Krog, Mda, and, under the grouping '"A Tumultuous Urbanism", and More', Mhlongo, Mpe, Duiker, Galgut, Beukes, and Matlwa as well as others of briefer reference. The fiction is considered in relation to the predominant interpretative frame of the last thirty years: namely, the 'postcolonial'.

Keywords: fiction; South Africa; last thirty years; white writing/black writing; interpretation; postcolonialism; 'thing' theory

In this critical overview, I consider select works which over the last thirty years have garnered attention in South African-based literary journals. These are mostly the same works that have attracted attention in journals and articles from abroad. My consideration is linked to the interpretation of the works and, by association, to the standing of the respective authors.

The last thirty years signal a distinct period in South Africa (after institutionalised apartheid) and globally (after the fall of the Berlin Wall). If the starting date has a 'neatness', the period has moved beyond the hopes of the Mandela years (a 'rainbow nation' phase in the early to mid-1990s) to a disillusionment with the anti-intellectualism and kleptomania of the Zuma presidency (2009-2018). Energy has been expended on segmenting the last thirty years into 'state of the nation' phases. We speak of anti-apartheid and post-apartheid while for millions of people apartheid has not in economic measurement ended. We have read or heard the horror stories related to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). We have listened to ex-president Thabo Mbeki's peculiar crosstalk: AIDS denialism – a conspiracy of Big Pharma against Africa – alongside his dreams of an African Renaissance, the latter given ancient embodiment in the Egyptian pyramids and the stone traces of Great Zimbabwe. The last ten years or so have added such words and phrases to common currency as tenderpreneurship, state capture, and white monopoly capital: the last coined by a now-defunct British public relations company and chanted on political occasions by the radical-Africanist Black First Land First movement and the minority opposition political party, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF). President Cyril Ramaphosa expresses 'shock' at each, almost daily exposure of corruption among his so-called comrades in the African National Congress (ANC), the ex-liberation movement and, since the first democratic election in 1994, the governing party of the now tarnished 'new' South Africa. While such delineations can lend contextual precision to literary works, I wish to retain a literary focus.

The period celebrated two Nobel literature laureates, Nadine Gordimer and J M Coetzee. The books that sell well, however, do not fall into the category of serious fiction but into the category of genre fiction, both the local crime thriller (as in Deon Meyer and Margie Orford) and books that

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have no connection with South Africa, but which feature on the best-seller lists in London and New York. Bigger sellers than fiction, whether serious or mass, are to be found on the shelves of non-fiction: in self-help books (usually from abroad) and, locally, in political biographies and both descriptive and analytical accounts of South Africa as a *gangsta* state. While it describes symptoms more than it analyses causes, Jacques Pauw's *The President's Keepers: Those Keeping Zuma in Power and out of Prison* (2017) has undergone several reprints. Perhaps more compelling from a literary point of view, Themba Maseko's *For My Country: Why I Blew the Whistle on Zuma and the Guptas* (2021) intrudes its non-fictional frame story upon a painful personal story. A life-long member of the ANC, Maseko – the former head of the Government Communication and Information Service (GCIS) – refused an instruction from President Zuma's 'state capturers' (the Gupta brothers) to divert the entire annual advertising budget to a Gupta-owned media company. Branded as disloyal to the ANC by several of his own comrades, Maseko takes his readers into the emotional turmoil of being cast out of his ideological home even as the option of turning to or voting for another political party remains unthinkable to him.

I confine this overview to works of serious fiction, fiction attracting more attention than poetry or playwriting. Of the two literature laureates, Gordimer now occupies a backseat. A small flurry of response, nonetheless, accompanied what is her last novel before her death, *No Time Like the Present* (2012). Coetzee continues in South Africa to occupy his 'local' terrain, which ended with *Disgrace* (1999). His 'Australian' novels and his 'Jesus' novels evoke less attention locally, more attention globally. Of a post-Gordimer and post-Coetzee generation, the names that recur at home and abroad are Ivan Vladislavić, Zakes Mda, Zoë Wicomb, and (in English translation from Afrikaans) Marlene van Niekerk, Etienne van Heerden, and Eben Venter. There is a certain curiosity – sociological as much as literary – in what has been dubbed a fiction of 'black masculinity' by young, urban-based African and Coloured writers, prominently by K Sello Duiker, Niq Mhlongo, and in a novel that has gained a kind of cult status, Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (2001). Zakes Mda stands somewhat apart from the inner-city detritus of black masculinity to pursue more intricate explorations of African tradition in modernity.

Tradition in modernity remains the recurrent theme of much neglected African-language novels and novellas. In a publishing venture, Africa Pulse,[1] nonetheless, Antjie Krog plays a leading role in an initiative to recover an 'archive' of works in the African languages of southern Africa. At the same time, she continues to feature as a key voice in her own right in work that has moved from her involvement in TRC testimony, through her poetry – her own in Afrikaans and English translation and in her reworking of San/Bushman oral expression – to ongoing explorations of identity, belonging, and belief. How, after apartheid, does the 'Self' co-exist with the 'Other', or vice versa?

Self and Other, or commonality and difference, or centre and periphery, of course, are the recognisable tropes of what has come to be termed postcolonial literary studies. With Salman Rushdie's epigrammatic comment 'the Empire writes back to the Centre' providing the epigraph to *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (1989), authors Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin consolidated numerous texts (creative and critical) as constituting a project of 'post-colonial writing' (the authors insist upon the hyphenated form of the term). The principal aim was 'to interrogate European discourse and discursive strategies from its position within and between two worlds; to investigate the means by which Europe imposed and maintained its codes in its colonial domination of much of the rest of the world' (196). Over the last thirty years and more, the 'postcolonial' – as Young (2001), Attwell (2005), and others have noted – can no longer be regarded as 'the chimera of a [single] position', or even a 'common theoretical explanation', but must denote a naming of 'these institutional spaces in which people [across cultures] can at least talk to one another' (2005: 13).

An expansion of literary discussion beyond metropolitan 'great traditions' notwithstanding, postcolonialism has accrued to itself a by now predictable political and theoretical purpose: as a voice of advocacy for social justice (the rest versus the West). In a pursuit to 'uncover' the controlling ideology of the work, the interpretative frame embodies combinations of French post-structuralism and neo-Marxism, the former proceeding by a deconstruction of *what is* and the latter proceeding by a reconstruction of *what should be*. Concepts and keywords include the Self and the Other, the metropolitan centre and the 'Third World' periphery, and, in various manifestations of 'nervous condition', difference, gender, patriarchy, queer, haunting, memory, diaspora, hybridity, orality, violence, mapping, language, and rewriting.[2] Alongside a Fanonist 'afterlife', the theoretical vocabulary relies heavily on Derridean and Foucauldian exposures of unequal power relations. The language, as in the writings of the two Continental philosophers, is dense and abstract in an articulation of response in which the literary text is too often treated as handmaiden to a big, socially responsible Idea.

Whether postcolonial literary studies, as summarised above, has best served the literary work is a question of pertinence to literature from South Africa, at least if South Africa may be described as a postcolony. It is, in any case, an ex-colony of sharp differences and disparities in the economy, in race, language, culture, and belief. More accurately perhaps, it is a postcolony that is not quite a postcolony but a disjuncture of Australia and Nigeria in a single geographical space. When in 2005 De Kock posed the question of whether South African literature still exists, he intended to provoke debate on the role and value of the local literary work. His provocation, however, was taken up by several academics as a singular endorsement of the need to escape a localised literature and enter a wider, transnational world. De Kock's question, however, was less than singular in intent, and he felt compelled subsequently to clarify his own argument:

> A couple of years later I asked the rhetorical question whether many of us who had previously regarded ourselves as scholars of 'South African English Literature' had not now become, or wanted to become – in the wake of the poststructural turn and the death of the author as a revered figure – academic 'rock stars' in our own right, more interested in writing in our names on any number of sexy topics (cities, oceanic discourse, jazz, metropolitans, whiteness studies, ugly/beautiful aesthetics, self-styling, to name a few) than the more modest tasks of assessing, describing, and evaluating the writings of others demarcated as imaginative SA writers. (2011: 19-20)

The South African literary establishment prior to the late 1970s had displayed a 'colonial cringe' in an imitative Leavisian language of high moral seriousness; the 1980s and 1990s witnessed a new version of colonial cringe in an adherence to Continental theory. Yet as we arrive near the end of the thirty-year period, we begin to see more clearly both the potential and the limitation of theorisation: its potential of understanding the work in the shaping power of its context; its limitation of imposing a predetermined 'position' upon the experiential subjectivity of the text.

From Coetzee to Vladislavić

Back in the year 2000, Bethlehem noted that the turn to theorisation had led to philosophical abstractions being applied, too often without precision of adjustment, to the particular experience of the author's text and that, in consequence, J M Coetzee had begun to function 'virtually by default as a convenient point of reference through which to hone what had become predictable aspects of postcolonial theory in its metropolitan guises' (153). Is the Magistrate – in *Waiting for the Barbarians* – a Self? Is the Barbarian Girl an Other? Or one might choose to attach this novel, together with other Coetzee novels, to any one or more of the key 'postcolonial' concepts and/or terms that I listed above. Or one might choose to apply a similar exercise to Ivan Vladislavić's fictional and semi-fictional works.

Since the 1990s, Vladislavić has attracted more attention than Coetzee or any other single author in South African-based literary journals. His novels and stories are amenable to what is a recurrent concern: the relationship of a postmodern style to a socially responsible art, an issue not unfamiliar to earlier Coetzee criticism. Like Coetzee before him, Vladislavić disrupted the mimetic realism of the apartheid/anti-apartheid confrontation. He would no doubt agree with Coetzee that fictional forms do not 'supplement', but 'rival' history (Coetzee 1988: 2). His short stories – *Missing Persons* (1989) and *Propaganda by Monuments* (1996) – together with his novella, *The Folly* (1993) – present an 'absurdist' perspective on apartheid, whether in its commemorative edifices or its 'safe' white suburbs. Because of bad planning, the prime minister's coffin must be conveyed to its burial site in the narrator's father's wheelbarrow, the father's Saturday afternoon gardening routine reluctantly interrupted ('The Prime Minister Is Dead', *Missing Persons*). In *The Folly* an imperious eccentric, Nieuwenhuizen (literally, New House), has a Plan to construct a fantastical mansion on a vacant plot while in the distance the old order implodes. The satirical novel, *The Restless Supermarket* (2001), depicts Mr Tearle, a proofreader, who is obsessed with correct English while at a loss as to how to relate to the new 'Englishes' of transition, whether in the jargon of low-grade consumerism or in the 'liberation' rhetoric of the newly empowered. Tearle's much-frequented Europa Café in Hillbrow cannot compete for custom against the spread of fast-food joints as Hillbrow changes from a Johannesburg suburb of slightly bohemian ambience to a run-down black African inner-city 'hood. Shifting in the middle of the novel from realism to fantasy, the tale of a Proofreader's Derby accentuates by ironic contrast Tearle's subscription to a utopia that never was, as another instance of folly.

The discrepancy between a 'pure' white world that was always a delusion and the brash mining town that Jo'burg has always been also shapes the thematically interrelated stories of *The Exploded View* (2004), the form itself a challenge to novelistic convention. Three of the four stories explore, again satirically, white displacement in a society in transition. The fourth story is no less cutting in its satire. Is the protagonist, Simeon Majara (a black African), a creator of artworks or a peddler of curios? How does one square the allusions to genocide in Majara's wall hangings with his intention of extracting euros or dollars from naïve tourists?

Whether focusing on white people or black people, Vladislavić's critical eye for detail is scathing. In 'Afritude Sauce' Egan, a white civil engineer, is tasked with inspecting cheaply built government houses in the black townships. He meets with a housing official from the local council. Dressed self-consciously in a Madiba [Mandela] shirt, Egan hoped to strike a note of 'interracial' camaraderie. The official arrives at the eatery and through the narrative device of third-person, free indirect speech we, the readers, enter the subjective, judgmental tenor of Egan's thoughts:

> He'd been expecting Bhengu, the town clerk, but the great man was otherwise occupied. Mazibuko was the council official in charge of housing subsidies […]. He was a small round man in the cruel grip of fashion – thickly treaded shoes that made him look like a wind-up toy, a Nehru collar as tight as a tourniquet, a watchstrap like a manacle on his wrist. (52)

If the description is cruelly comic, so is the sketch of Egan inspecting a complaint that the toilets in the township houses have a design flaw: Mrs Ntlaka's over-generous buttocks dwarfs the size of the toilet seat. Egan finds himself pondering why, if Mrs Ntlaka the occupant is so hard done by, so deprived as she informs him, why then is she so fat (67).

The Exploded View clarifies its title in the last story. A constructor of billboards (he had wanted to be an engineer) recollects his childhood impressions of his father's collection of the magazine, *Popular Mechanics*, in which each part of whatever device, when 'exploded' in

one-dimensional representation, had perfect justification for its design. But the constructor (now an adult) experiences a crisis of coherence in a society that seems always to be on the edge of its own explosion. In the final paragraphs of 'Crocodile Lodge' passengers from a passing mini-bus taxi walk threateningly towards the billboard constructor's stalled motorcar. One passenger has a thick metal pipe in his hand.

Vladislavić's powerful visions do not heed the comforts of political correctness. This presents a problem for those who value the challenge of his fiction. Again, we can identify links with the reception of Coetzee as we return to the foundational question: how to square 'postmodern' technique and socially responsible art? As in Coetzee criticism, the abstraction of Theory (with a capital T) is marshalled to the barricades of defence. As in Coetzee criticism so in Vladislavić criticism, a 'postcolonial' vocabulary figures recurrently:

> There is no singular opposition because there is no monolithic power structure, particularly within post-apartheid South Africa […]. Vladislavić's project is to widen cracks in the systematic by displaying its contradictions and hypocrisies via an insurrectionary playfulness …
>
> These destructive techniques promote a certain hermeneutic indeterminacy that gives Vladislavić's fiction an allusive and elusive quality …
>
> Such allusive and elusive aspects appear to be a result of Vladislavić's postmodern leanings. His is a deconstructive project; Kristeva's jouissance and Derrida's critiques of structure come to mind in his attempt to limber up the systematic.
>
> In a postcolonial context such as South Africa, the political is diffused: it is engaged in the micro-modalities of the everyday, it is no longer the sole province of the state, it is unremittingly global, and it is no longer legible through the racial binarism of the apartheid past. But it is a world in which race (and the history of race), particularly in conjunction with economic class, is irreducibly present. (Gaylard and Titlestad 2006: 6-7)

The extract is taken from the Introduction to a special issue of the journal, *Scrutiny2* (11.2 2006), subtitled 'Controversial Interpretations of Ivan Vladislavić'. Not really controversial, however, in that most articles, whether quoting De Certeau's theory of improvisational practice, Bourdieu's notion of habitus, or Derrida's différance, arrive at a similar conclusion about the value of the work.

To consolidate the consensus that – as in Coetzee – Vladislavić's metafiction be granted its social responsibility, Thurman returns to Jameson who, four decades ago, had argued that what was required was a 'new aesthetic' which would 'resist the power of reification in consumer society'. This new aesthetic would be a 'new realism' which addressed 'structural relations between classes' while incorporating the innovation and artistic self-reflection emphasised by (post)modernism (Jameson 1977: 211-13). Thurman (2007) recognises in Jameson's 'new aesthetic' various aspects of Vladislavić's work: ' … thick with the brand names of consumer culture', Vladislavić 'articulates an aversion to the pervasive commerce that masks political and economic injustice' (83). Certainly, one can find such instances in Vladislavić's fiction. As I have noted, a negative authorial judgement is implied in *The Folly* in the discrepancy between the protagonist's plans to construct a mansion in a country of insecure housing. But mostly, Vladislavić's attachment to or evocation of things in the city is more ambivalent than Jameson's words would suggest: 'consumer society'; 'structural relations between classes'. If the latter phrase (classes) strikes me as a little odd in Jameson's US context (hardly a labour versus capitalist context), then the former phrase (consumer society) locates the aesthetic where it no doubt belongs: at Jameson's North American consumer base. A postcolony, however, ill-fits the notion of a consumer culture with the inevitable connotations of excess. The shopping frenzy that accompanies Black Friday (a copycat US importation) will result in shortages of bread and milk on too many supper tables.

The above references and extracts may grant the reader a 'taster' of Vladislavić criticism. There is erudition, even though erudition too often struggles to surmount the clotted terminology and syntax of its own expression. Should it be felt to be compulsory to attach Vladislavić's work to a theory, one might apply what has come to be called 'thing theory':[3] a theory that borrows Heidegger's distinction between things and objects (2001 [1954]). A thing becomes an object when it is released from its common function to provide a change in its relationship to the human subject. In the process, the thing presents itself to us in new ways through a suspension of our habitual response: in short, in the ways in which things in Vladislavić's texts refuse distinction between image (say, in Mazibuko's attire) and metaphor (the attire suggestive of Mazibuko's character, even if filtered through Egan's subjective thoughts). Or we can return to the image of Simeon Majara's masks, which are metonymic of Majara's ambiguous personality. As Vladislavić phrases it in 'Curiouser' (*The Exploded View*):

> The masks had come into his hands by chance a year before. It was startling how one lucky find had changed his artistic course – although the gap between corpses and curios was narrower than people thought. An acquaintance, a woman who framed his prints from time to time, had been commissioned to design the decor of Bra Zama's African Eatery. Deciding that he knew more about authentic African style than she did – he was black, after all, never mind the private-school accent – she had asked for his help.
>
> …
>
> He hit on the answer soon enough: Bra Zama's Eatery would have masks. The budget stretched to no more than a handful of shop prices, but he wanted dozens …
>
> Excess was always interesting. In a flash, 'S. Majara' was calculating whether the grant money he had left over from the Genocide III show was enough to buy the whole lot for himself. He could use them in his own work, the real work, after the Eatery potboiler. (2004: 106-7)

Like *The Exploded View*, *Double Negative* (2011) has attracted considerable attention. The novel focuses on a doubly displaced protagonist who, having returned to Johannesburg from London, cannot find a purpose in his dabbling in photography, let alone in his dabbling in life. Neville describes himself as a 'wishy-washy liberal' (9) who does not understand the workings of the new South Africa. In comparison with the story of the professional photographer Auerbach, Neville's own story (to quote Neville himself) was 'full of holes' (197). In short, Neville's story of a returned exile is developed in relation to its absences in the 'double negative' of exile abroad and exile at home. Global mobility escapes Neville: a location back home offers him no consolation.

I return to my point that thing theory – a theory that acknowledges the depth of surface – might be applicable to Vladislavić's work. It is applicable, at least, to how we respond to Neville's visits together with the photographer Auerbach to arbitrarily selected locations in Johannesburg. Auerbach photographs a black woman sitting together with her two small children in her humble dwelling. At its upper edge, the photograph – unintentionally or not, but probably intentionally – captures an inset photograph from the wall behind the woman where a third child, now deceased, 'witnesses' the encounter between his mother and the photographer.

Is this another exploded view? The focus of the photograph – the woman and her two children – embodies in its surface image the vehicle of metaphor: the photograph is metonymic of a history of stunted possibilities; a history that continues to blight the country beyond apartheid. In the inset photograph, however, the third child keeps an unwavering, almost spectral watch over his mother and his siblings. His presence captures a stability of possession that escapes Neville, the doubly displaced, wishy-washy liberal. If Neville is not captured in any photograph of Johannesburg, then Vladislavić immediately thwarts the reader's temptation to reduce the experience to a white/black dichotomy. Rather, the double negative is allowed to produce a positive force. Auerbach, a white man, is captured beyond his photographs, metaphorically, in his signature of

reputation: in his life-long commitment to his locality. (As Vladislavić alerts us, the character Auerbach was inspired by the internationally renowned photographer, David Goldblatt, who devoted his career to 'capturing' the South African environs.)

It is a story of locality, humanised and complicated, which also characterises Vladislavić's novel, *The Distance* (2019). Why does the young Joe from a conservative, white Pretoria family living under apartheid choose the controversial black boxer, Muhammed Ali, as the 'hero' of his scrapbook of newspaper clippings? As in *Double Negative*, however, the novel is not confined to a story of race and identity. Rather, it explores the changing nature of representation as South Africa moved from its pre-television years to a culture of global diffusion with which the adult Joe must contend. Where, in a 'reality hungry' world, does hard fact meet subjective opinion? The integration of the idea and the thing returns me to my observation on Coetzee: that despite the critical paraphernalia loaded upon his work, his style is concrete in the lucidity of its insights. The same can be said of Vladislavić.

'A Tumultuous Urbanism', and More

In an interview with Seidel (2017), Vladislavić spoke about living in Johannesburg, a city that challenges you to think about your own position. For a new wave of young black African writers, living in Johannesburg is less about thinking of a position, more about defying an early death, whether by violence or the AIDS virus. As Green summarises the fiction of what has come to be called black masculinities: ' … no concentration on race and little attention to apartheid […]. Instead engage with one or more of AIDS, crime, xenophobia, homosexuality, returning exiles, urbanisation, new forms of dispossession and identity displacement' (2005: 6). Or as Donadio has it in her *New York Times Magazine* interview with one of the 'masculinity' novelists, Niq Mhlongo:

> Mhlongo and his cohort have in one short decade made social and economic leaps that might previously have taken generations. Born to a poor family in Soweto under apartheid, he came of age in a culture of post-apartheid possibility and has joined, however precariously, a black middle class that's a small but growing fraction of the population. As such, he and other young black novelists carry the full promise – and burden – of their country's future. (2006: n.p.)

In Mhlongo's *Dog Eat Dog* (2004), we meet Dingz, a streetwise hustler, who has learnt the art of lying to survive. Not having met the criteria for financial aid to university, he cajoles and bamboozles the female finance clerk as he explains to us, the readers, how he had his hands under the edge of the table so that she could not see his gold-plated pulsar watch. We have shifted from Vladislavić's urban bric-a-brac to the detritus of the inner-city. More relentless than Mhlongo's early work, Kgebetli Moele's *Room 207* (2006) points the reader to a dingy bedsitter, overcrowded with testerone-charged young men eager to 'jackroll' whatever woman they can grab, whatever female orifice they can penetrate. Why did *Room 207* win the 2007 University of Johannesburg Literary Award (Debut Category)? Characters remain undeveloped, at best 'types'; the narrative pace, nonetheless, is fast and reckless; one reads on, almost mesmerised. We should not underestimate the need of a literary establishment, in which adjudicators are still mainly white, to concur with Donadio's observation that.

> Since the end of apartheid, the national and international spotlight has been shifting to black writers, driven by an expectation that this is their moment to write the next chapter of South African history: the political, social, and economic coming-of-age of the 80 percent of the population that was formally disenfranchised. (2006: n.p.)

Despite such a generalisation, Mhlongo has gone on to pursue more complex characters and plots than the escapades of his earlier streetwise hustlers had allowed. *Way Back Home* (2013) runs two stories in parallel. Returning from political exile to Johannesburg Kimathi establishes himself in business but brings back home the curse of his crime in an ANC guerrilla camp where, his sexual advances having been rejected by a woman-comrade, he had tortured, raped and killed her. No 'Macbeth', Kimathi's attempts to still the ghost of his victim do not lead so much to his searching his own conscience as to his indulging his grosser appetites for expensive whisky, fast cars, and fast women. At one level, Kimathi's story is familiar to African literature: the decline and fall of a man of promise. It is a story that can count its apologists among those who, quoting selectively from Fanon, argue that the fault lies not with the frailties of the individual person, but with the neo-colonial structure of the newly independent state. Mhlongo, however, locates Kimathi's flaws firmly within his own conduct even as – with Lukacsian typification – he stamps his personality on the wider excesses of a disgraceful decade.

What does the writer do, however, when the disgraceful decade persists in its disgracefulness? After Zuma's recall from the presidency by his own party (the ANC), Cyril Ramaphosa, the current president, promised a cleansing of the stables. The task is proving to be intractable. Does the writer, specifically the black African writer, therefore, pen yet another story of corruption among the ruling elite? In his novel, *Rumours* (2013), Mongane Wally Serote, a loyal ANC cadre, turned from the eye of corruption to the healing potential of ancient African beliefs. Like Serote, Mhlongo in his novel *Paradise in Gaza* (2020) turns from the corruption of returning exiles to the apartheid near past where the protagonist Mpisi Mpisane, together with his eight-year-old son, returns to the apartheid-created 'bantustan' of Gazankulu (the 'Gaza' of the title). This is the place of his birth and the home of his first wife. His son mysteriously disappears, however, at the same time as Mpisane's second wife (in Soweto) bears a boy with a birthmark that suggests a sign. Do such journeys from the disgraced present to other, more elusive worlds enlighten the reader or do the journeys represent escapes from having to confront the failures of the ANC in power? How one responds to such questions is likely to involve more than a literary judgement.

Similarly, the fact that Mhlongo's characters or Moele's characters inhabit a Johannesburg quite different from that inhabited by Vladislavić's characters amounts to more than a matter of narrative or aesthetic preference. Rather, it reflects the fact that most people in South Africa continue to live in areas which, under apartheid, were reserved for their 'race group' or where, before 1990 in the inner cities, 'group area' laws had ceased to be policed. Vladislavić's characters live in the still predominantly white suburbs; young black African writers depict life in the townships or the inner-city: the Hillbrow of fast-food joints that proofreader Tearle lived to regret. Coloured writers write nostalgically of District Six (the Coloured suburb, in Cape Town, which was demolished by the bulldozers of the apartheid state), or they write defiantly or with bitter humour of life on the gangster-ridden Cape Flats, the ghettoes to which the people of District Six were 'removed' under the Group Areas Act. In K Sello Duiker's *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* (2001) the protagonist, a Coloured homosexual, meets white men only when working at an inner-city brothel while, in his mean flat, he is abused, physically, sexually, and financially, by his Coloured ex-convict partner. South African Indian writers chart the trials and tribulations of Indian-community life, whether historical (memories of indentured labour on colonial sugar farms) or contemporary (the foibles of 'keeping it in the family' or, less humorously, the small lives of a minority caught between white and African power blocs). Aziz Hassim's *The Lotus People* (2002), at least, enters class divisions at the frayed edges of the Indian community while Imraan Coovadia reaches beyond the Indian family (*The Wedding*, 2001) to explore corrupt links not only between the North and the South, but also (in *Tales of the Metric System*, 2014) within South/South diasporas.

In the writing of several younger white men, a common theme involves the psychological damage attendant on their conscription into the apartheid army. It is a theme that shaped Damon Galgut's early novel, *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* (1991), and that has entered, tangentially, into his subsequent fiction including *The Good Doctor* (2003) and his 2021 Booker Prize-winning novel, *The Promise* (2021a). With existential anguish at the centre of his characters' lives, the 'promise' of the title has drawn commentary on an issue of racial polarity: the other-worldly Amor – one of three children – thinks she overhears her dying mother place her father under an obligation to transfer the ramshackle servant's house, on a ramshackle farm at the edge of Pretoria, to the faithful domestic servant of many years' service. As we see, however, Amor's assumption functions more as a vehicle for the story of the larger Swart [Black] family, half-Afrikaans, half-Jewish: a family not 'unusual or remarkable … oh no, they resemble the family from the next farm and the one beyond that, just an ordinary bunch of white South Africans … something rusted and rain-stained and dented in the soul' (186). Perhaps the youngest of the three children, Amor, is an exception. She is occasionally a nurse in a hospital HIV ward, a vegan, sometimes lesbian, sometimes not, a wanderer who insists that a promise is a promise. Switching in and out of first-person attachment and third-person ironic detachment, Galgut has the older brother, Anton, desert the (apartheid) South African army in the 'struggle' years of the 1980s only to blast off his head with a shot gun in the Zuma years of the 2010s, the years in which his sister, Desiree, is killed by a car hijacker. In his haphazard attempts to structure a novel out of his experiences Anton asks, 'Is this a family saga or a farm novel? […] Is this a comedy or a tragedy?' (231). The novel embodies all these characteristics, simultaneously, as the Swart family fails to rise above the dents in its soul at the same time as the country fails to sustain the promise of its Mandela years. As Galgut puts it, ' … if one loves South Africa, it has to be a dark kind of love' (2021b: 37).

The nuclear family provides the focus for several younger white women writers among whom Lauren Beukes is an unusual exception. Beukes's *Moxyland* (2008) is set in a not-too-distant cyberpunk future of corporate power, rights-abusive technology, and brutal 'robocop' police, in which we follow the 'self-destruction' of edgy, but fragile young identities. *Zoo City* (2011) transforms Hillbrow into a 'zootopia', in which the 'othered' are recentred while in *Afterland* (2020) readers accompany a mother and her son on an American road trip with a difference. Although in the US, the two are South African; the pandemic that threatens is not Covid but a virus that induces terminal prostate cancer resulting in the death of billions of men. Is this a novel of what is called speculative fiction? What awaits a male-centred, multi-industrial complex in a world of women? But, as Beukes said in interview, again upsetting expectations: ' … a world of women is not necessarily going to be a kinder, gentler, friendship-bracelet and communal gardens kinda place' (qtd in Moonsamy 2020: 117). With film opportunity perhaps in mind (Beukes resides in the United States), *Afterland* foregrounds the more intimate story of the mother and her son, the individual not the group being the focus of the movie director.

Young black African women have begun to question their typecasting by both white men and black men as child-bearers and homemakers without agency of their own. Angela Makholwe's protagonist in *Red Ink* (2007) appears strong-willed, independent, and less interested in love than in transaction; nonetheless, the pain of her past continues to haunt her. Angelina N Sithebe's *Holy Hill* (2007) also suggests that there is no easy passage from tradition to modernity, in her case in conflicts between African spirituality and her Christian-convent education. Perhaps the most engaging of these novels by young black women writers is Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut* (2007), which explores the dreams and delusions of two young 'born free' women, the one whose parents have escaped the township for the previously 'whites only' suburbs; the other who

each night must return from the city to her uncle's township shack. Despite the lively characterisation of the potential of a coconut – that is, of the black person who is white inside – Matlwa seems to be uncomfortable with the unfolding of her own story and wants to impose on her purpose a more essentialised 'African-race identity'. Fortunately, the compulsion of the tale supersedes the intention of its teller.

To return to the fiction of black masculinities, the novel that has attracted most critical attention is *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (2001), in which Phaswane Mpe wraps his realism around an alluring, if confusing, literary-aesthetic frame of storytelling. The second-person voice of the narrator ('you') either addresses us, the readers, or himself (Refentše) who, in despair at having been betrayed by his girlfriend, has already jumped to his death from a high-rise block of flats in Hillbrow. Together with frequent and abrupt shifts of time and place, the style could be said to signal a search for a new 'black aesthetic' of storytelling, in which the magical realist mode is localised within the character of the African oral tale. Accordingly, we might point to traits such as time as recurrence; a hyperbolic, participatory mode that is empathic, subjective, and situational ('Welcome to our Hillbrow'); and to dialogue which hovers between originality and the formula. The argument is that in countries where written culture is uneven and where people, particularly in rural areas or urban townships, retain considerable face-to-face contact, the oral style has real and continuing value. The obverse is that the 'oral' can be invoked in defence of garrulous talk and ill-designed structure simply because the oral is presumed to be authentically African.

Whether such elements are to be found in Mpe's novel, we learn at the outset that the narrator is (or, as he is dead, was) a severely damaged being among other damaged beings:

> If you were still alive Refentše, child of Tiralong, […] You would remember the last occasion in 1995, when Bafana Bafana won against Ivory Coast and, in their jubilation, people in Hillbrow hurled bottles of all sorts from their flat balconies. A few bold souls, boasting a range of driving skills, swung and spun their cars in the streets, making U-turns and circles all over the road. You would recall the child, possibly seven years old or so, who got hit by a car. Her mid-air scream storing in your memory. When she hit the concrete pavements of Hillbrow, her screams died with her. (2)

If Hillbrow is violent, crime-ridden, a hangout of drug pedlars and streetwalkers, a return to the village of Tiralong offers no tranquillity. The village seethes with gossip, resentment, and a cruelty of revenge. Superstition is rife; generalities endorse prejudice. Thus, all Africans from beyond the South African border are branded as rapists and drug-dealers; all women who leave the village for the city are branded as whores.

In a plot of multiple sexual indiscretions including partner-swapping among supposed friends, Refentše betrays his partner and, in turn, is betrayed by the same partner, the event that literally propels him over the ledge. Refilwe, who like Refentše hails from the village of Tiralong, leaves the steam of Hillbrow for a university in England. There she meets a Nigerian man who has AIDS. Belatedly, we learn that Refilwe herself has been HIV-positive for several years and that now she too has full-blown AIDS. We are reassured by the dead narrator, nonetheless, that Refilwe has grown as a person. She had been a xenophobe and a gossip, but she returns to Hillbrow, soon to die, as 'a very different person from the one who had left' (118). As we have been shown no redeeming action, we must take the narrator at his word. Blair, I think, pithily captures the dilemma:

> With the suicide of Refentše and the imminent departure of Refilwe, 'the few voices of reason' (123) are fewer; but to these must be added Mpe's own – the intimate narrative that devastates and consoles, compelling us to his moral by way of the macabre. (2001: 168)

The Sophiatown shebeen culture of the 1950s resisted apartheid 'retribalising' policies (send 'Bantus' back to the native reserves) by adopting the swagger of American B-movies according to which one had to live hard, drink hard, die young, and have a beautiful corpse. (The journalist and short-story writer, Can Themba, prematurely robbed the literary world of his talent by being true to the credo.) Among the writers to whom I have referred here, Duiker committed suicide, young; Mpe spoke of receiving a call to leave the city and be mentored by a traditional healer; however, he too – like his narrator – died prematurely.

If we are left grasping for connection between white and black Jo'burg writers, we might turn to Murray's observation, in which she begins by noting Nuttall's comment on Vladislavić. According to Nuttall, Vladislavić has little grasp of present-day Johannesburg or South African realities. Rather, his writing is marked 'by aporias, a racial and generational aporia, typical of a white man of a certain generation' (2009, 93;106). In response to which Murray – an academic, a poet, and the author of a compelling coming-of-age novel, *Small Moving Parts* (2009) – transfers her creative bent to the critical act:

> So, there's that distance again. The fact of always having to mind the gap. White. Black. Old. New. … As I read it, white eyes or none, Vladislavić's writing of city Johannesburg is variously heartfelt and mindful, fictive and analytical. Everywhere in this citiness – on street corners and in manholes, in art galleries and standing guard outside local supermarkets, surfacing suddenly from the messy depths of the heart's past – is a tumultuous urbanism that calls out to be written. (2011: 92)

If the observation applies to Vladislavić, it can with adjustment also be made to apply to Mpe.[4]

Zakes Mda's Creative Uncertainty

Less innovative than Vladislavić, less frenetic than Mpe, Zakes Mda – a playwright of note in the 1980s – emerged in the1990s as a novelist of note. *Ways of Dying* (1995) sought to transform the 'interregnum' (Nadine Gordimer's adaptation of Antonio Gramsci) from an old order dying to a new order struggling to be born. As Gramsci (and Gordimer) added, the in-between time would be a time in which all sorts of morbid symptoms arose.[5] In Gordimer's *The Conservationist* (1974), we had dead bodies rising from the mud to reclaim the land. Mda does not follow the spectral route. His protagonist is a funeral singer, but his songs embrace life.

It was death, nonetheless, that figured pervasively in the early 1990s in so-called black-on-black violence: a struggle for power between the then recently unbanned ANC, top-heavy in Xhosa leadership, and the Zulu-nationalist Inkatha movement. (Running confrontations were fuelled by the apartheid security forces, black division being perceived to add an obstacle to impending change.) Mda stepped beyond any Manichaean psychodrama. Instead, we follow Toloki from the village – not from the mean village of Mpe's novel – to a shabby but vibrant squatter camp on the outskirts of a contemporary South African city. Toloki learns that ways of dying must be transfigured into ways of living, as he begins the task of healing the past. Indeed, characters in and readers of Mda continue intermittently to meet up with Toloki. In *Wanderers' Hymns* (2021) it is an encounter between Kheleke, a wandering musician, and Toloki that grants Mda the opportunity to explore the social history of famo music (the accordion and drum music of Lesotho migrant workers) in relation to hard living in the city of gold, thirty years into the 'post-apartheid' democracy.

Linking the conceit of singing to his playwright's penchant for the spoken word, Mda in his fiction attempts to lend immediacy to re-interpretations of historical narratives, in which the author tackles the trope of the West in Africa, or Africa in the West. The 'Self' must learn from the 'Other', or is it the other way around? Given an element of ambiguity, Mda has been seen by some as an apologist for African tradition while others have interpreted his recourse

to African tradition as a device to unsettle any singular response to the question of how to make tradition live in modernity.

Such issues are germane to *The Heart of Redness* (2000), its title hinting at Conrad's controversial novella as the subtext invokes an equally controversial issue: that of the so-called National Suicide of the Xhosa. On the self-declared British eastern Cape frontier, the Xhosa by 1856 had been driven to millennial desperation by the repeated incursions of colonial forces onto their ancestral land. Succumbing to the prophecy of a young girl, they left their crops unattended and killed their cattle on the promise of miraculous intervention. The result was that colonial authorities dispersed the near-starving Xhosa to serve as cheap labour on British settler farms. The event aside, however, Xhosa communities were internally riven by a growing divide between 'School' people (those who had absorbed Christian missionary teaching) and 'Red' people, the red-brown ochre on the face and blanket signalling adherents to the ancient, 'pre-colonial' world. Mda interweaves myth and history, past and present, as tensions simmer between those who see an advantage in plans to build the tourist-attraction of a casino and those who regard such a development as an insult to the past. The wide canvas focuses on the relationship between the Western-educated Camague and the villager, Qukezwa. Despite a hint of binary alternatives, both characters prove to be flexible in their respective attitudes and responses to the old and the new. In consequence, the plans for a casino yield to the development of a co-operative community, in which sustainability is sought in the harvesting of the sea. Tradition evidently can enrich modernity provided modernity tempers its hubris.

Having lived in the United States since 2002 Mda has begun to turn to North American conjunctions of myth and history. His 'South African' novels include *She Plays with the Darkness* (1995), in which traditional song and art are set in illuminating contrast to a history of military coups in Lesotho, the country in which Mda spent his early life. *The Madonna of Excelsior* (2002), however, employs what to me is a strained parallel: a miserable apartheid story is played off against a world of art. The story – or scandal, as it made headlines in the daily press – involved the entrapment by over-zealous Afrikaans policemen of Afrikaans dignitaries who, in the small town of Excelsior, had engaged in sexual liaisons with their African domestic workers. The problem with *The Madonna* returns us, I suggest, to my earlier comment on the application to the literary work of postcolonial tropes, the danger being that an attachment to a big Idea can supersede an attachment to the literary text. In *The Heart of Redness*, the National Suicide is made to subserve a story of character interaction, in which – to invoke another postcolonial trope – the Western Self and the African Other, or the African Self and the Western Other, avoid diagrammatic illustration of a 'thesis'. In *The Madonna*, in contrast, the national event (in this case, a consequence of the Immorality Act)[6] and an adjacent reference to works of art are just too far apart to fold around a compelling human story.

It is a compelling human story that characterises the *The Whale Caller* (2004), unusually so as The Caller in kelp-horn serenades communes with a Southern whale. It is communion, nonetheless, that does not lose touch with the Caller and his woman partner who, like Toloki and Noria, must hold onto mutually redeeming moments amid the grit of economic hardship. A love story in counterpoint to an historical dimension has almost become a Mda signature. In *The Sculptors of Mapungubwe* (2013) the royal sculptor in a timeless kingdom has twin sons, the one a master carver of animals, the other a carver of fantastical creature from his dreams. Conjoining love, envy, and the power of art, the narrative poses as complementary questions what makes the better art (mimicry or inspiration) and who makes the better wife (a princess or a mysterious dancer). In *The Zulus of New York* (2019) a story of unrequited love – again, a princess is involved – accentuates by ironic contrast the shabby story of 'Farini's Friendly Zulus', a group of men who in 1885 were taken to America as performing curiosities.

We may define Mda's salient strength in comparison with that of Phaswane Mpe. Whereas Mpe in *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* leaves the reader in muddled uncertainty, Mda crafts his stories around creative uncertainty, most fully realised, it seems to me, in *The Heart of Redness*.

Krog and the TRC

Creative uncertainty requires its own qualification when applied to the harrowing stories related by victims of state terror to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1996). The central issue concerned a closure of a 'chapter of the past' in order to strive for a future as the 'rainbow people of God', to quote the late Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who chaired the Commission (TRC 1.193).[7] Several accounts – fictional and non-fictional – track the testimonies at the TRC. As far as literary studies is concerned, the key commentator is Antjie Krog; the key text is Krog's *Country of My Skull* (1998).

As a radio journalist and witness of TRC testimony, Krog (under her married name, Antjie Samuels) impinged her graphic reportage on the consciousness and the conscience of a wide listening public. *Country of My Skull* ties her 'literary' skills to her journalistic talents. To quote Samuelson, her text is a complex tapestry, a 'multi-generic patchwork of narrative fragments, testimony, poetry, philosophy, dialogue and interviews' (2003: 96). It is a work of what we can call creative non-fiction, in which Krog confronts the uncertainty of what it can mean 'after apartheid' to continue to be an Afrikaner. As she painfully analyses her own 'complicity', she almost intuitively knows the secret policemen with whom she probably went to school and who now, as torturers, go home to their families, to their church, and to their political justification in the by then disgraced (Afrikaner) National Party.

Samuelson deftly articulates the underlying philosophical question. Integrating in her discussion Friedlander's insights (1994) which, in turn, are indebted to Adorno, Samuelson distinguishes between common memory and deep memory. Common memory hopes for a quick forgetting of the past and for reconciliation (what the religious inclination of the TRC wished to achieve); deep memory, in contrast, must learn to live with and acknowledge the continuing presence of the past while simultaneously striving to rework radical discrepancy into a difficult connection with current time. Here we turn to Adorno (1986) who, writing in the stench of Auschwitz, implicitly rejects an easy turning of the page, or a wiping away of the memory. Samuelson refers next to the essay, 'Cracked Heirlooms' in which, drawing on Derek Walcott, the poet Ingrid de Kok suggests that any reassembling of the past must accentuate, not conceal, 'the whole scar of reassembled fragments' (1998: 66).

Has Krog's voice been submerged beneath an accumulation of authorities, as in Gaylard and Titlestad on Vladislavić? I do not think so. Although benefiting from citation, Samuelson keeps Krog firmly in her sights. She identifies the key to Krog's difficult and ongoing search for connection amid difference. Cognisant of the demands of deep memory, Krog sutures together a fabric of past narratives to negotiate between the impulse to rework the past as a set of fragments and the desire for seamless healing. The scars, nonetheless, retain their jagged memory. Recollecting Nomonde Calata's anguished wail at the TRC – Calata's son had been gruesomely murdered by the security police – Krog writes:

> For me, this crying is the beginning of the Truth Commission – the signature tune, the definitive moment, the ultimate sound of what the process is about. She was wearing this vivid orange-red dress, and she threw herself backwards and that sound … that sound … To witness that cry was to witness the destruction of language … was to realise that to remember the past of this country is to be thrown back into a time before language. (1998: 42)

But Krog, the author, fights back in language. The TRC must seek ‘to get that memory, to fix it in words, to capture it with the precise image’ (42).

Zoë Wicomb, Displacements at Home

While I acknowledge Samuelson’s integration of ideas on common and deep memory with the ‘autobiographical’ voice of *Country of My Skull*, she is less successful in her response to Zoë Wicomb’s *David’s Story* (2000), one of two novels to have accumulated an unusual number of critical responses. (The other is Marlene van Niekerk’s *Agaat*, to which I shall turn in the next section of this article.) The focus of Samuelson’s research is summarised in the title of her study, *Remembering the Nation, Dismembering Women? Stories of the South African Transition* (2007a). Yet in an article on *David’s Story* (2007b: 840), she gives short shrift to David’s wife, Sally. As Álvarez (2011) observes, Samuelson devotes just a few paragraphs to Sally whom she evidently regards in a faintly disparaging light: as a woman who is trapped in the routine of domesticity. Samuelson is not alone in her dismissive response. Álvarez goes on to list several other treatments of the novel that engage only cursorily with Sally’s claim to purpose. Driver (2001), for example, refers to Sally only a few times and usually in passing while Marais (2005), in discussing the representation of discourses of blood and corporeality, mentions Sally only twice, in both instances as a minor figure in the entanglement of the novel’s narrative. Attridge places Sally in a subsidiary role as David’s ‘sensible wife’ (2005: 159).

The representation of ordinary life does not seem to have stirred these critics. The flesh-and-blood Sally cannot compete for their attention against the ‘unrepresentable’, the suppressed, or un-homely Dulcie. As Coloured women, both Sally and Dulcie had served in the predominantly black African, predominantly patriarchal, liberation movement. To be precise, they had been stationed at the then banned ANC’s notorious Quattro camp in neighbouring Angola. As it has since been reported, sexual abuse was rife in ANC camps. So was the torture by camp commanders of those suspected (often without corroborating evidence) of being traitors. Both Sally and Dulcie experienced the ‘rape culture’. To minimise her own rough-handling, Sally took a fatalistic attitude: Get it over with. Dulcie’s body, we are told, bears the scars of ill-treatment. More so than his wife Sally, Dulcie intrudes her ghostly presence upon David’s story even though the nameless female narrator of his story – his amanuensis – begins to doubt whether Dulcie exists; or whether she is not a decoy invented by David ‘to cover up aspects of his own story’ (2000: 124).

An ex-ANC operative, David Dirkse seeks to deflect his own trauma of displacement. As a ‘Coloured’ man, now back home, he feels marginalised in the white/black dichotomies of post-apartheid South Africa. In reaction, he begins a search for his roots by tracing the genealogy of the Griqua people. Who were/are the Griquas? To unclog the historical detail, even though subjugated to David’s consciousness, will not be of primary interest to most readers of the novel. For elucidation, nonetheless, we may indicate briefly that the Griquas comprised people of ‘mixed union’ – whites in liaisons with the Khoi or, in colonial parlance, the Hottentots – who had been excluded by social convention from ‘respectable’ colonial society at the Cape. Known as Basters (Bastards), such people were renamed by early nineteenth-century missionaries less crudely as Griquas. Under apartheid, the by then genetically stable Griquas were classified for convenience as ‘Other Coloureds’. No wonder that as David gathers bits and pieces of information, his story never amounts to a coherent story. Ironically, his story begins to echo the delusions of apartheid separateness: in his case, in a quest for an essentialised Griqua homeland. As his increasingly frustrated amanuensis puts it, ‘“Who could keep going in a straight line with so many stories, like feral siblings, separated and each running wild, chasing each other’s tails?”’ (201).

The narrative veers backwards and forwards from past detail of the Griqua people to David’s current ambiguities of relationship with both his family and the phantom-like

Dulcie. The scenes of Sally's domesticity – Cape cooking, managing the children, her suspicion that her husband might be having an affair with Dulcie – are sidelined in a postmodern mode of telling, in which memories are unreliable and histories are arbitrary. It is a narrative susceptible to a-logical intrusions, in which the pain of 'Colouredness' attaches the abuse of Coloured freedom fighters in the ANC camps to the splintering of the Black Consciousness movements which, in the 1970s, had regarded all of the disenfranchised in South Africa simply as black people. Now, most people in the Cape – the primary habitat of 'Coloured' South Africans – are more likely to support white politics or Coloured politics than black African politics.

If this is a 'shame', then shame in more insidious forms is linked to popular – colonial and apartheid – myths of Coloureds as biologically concupiscent beings. In the archive, both historical and literary and guided by the white hand, the Khoi woman, Krotoa, is depicted as the archetypal Hottentot Eve, whose wiles had ensnared a hapless seventeenth-century Dutch administrator into marriage. Then there is the unfortunate Sarah (Saartjie) Baartman, who had her steatopygic (protruding) buttocks exhibited in the freakshows of Europe before her premature death in 1815 and her subsequent dissection by Georges Cluvier, the French anatomist, in his pursuit of so-called scientific research.

The two women in David's story bear a steatopygic resemblance to each other, or so David leads his readers to understand. Perhaps the women do bear such resemblance: steatopygia is not abnormal among women descendants of 'First People' San/Bushman and the off-shoot Khoi in the semi-desert regions of the Northern Cape. By this stage, however, we have been dragged into David's fevered imaginings at the same time as his amanuensis signals her failure to shape his notes and clippings into a cumulative life story. On the day of a chaotic ANC Youth League Rally in Cape Town – and in heavy-handed symbolism – a bullet explodes into the back of the amanuensis' computer and 'its memory leaks a silver puddle onto the desk' (212). Truth has been reduced to the palindrome TRURT, as the word is often pronounced by those of 'underclass' accent on the [Coloured] Cape Flats.

If we classify *David's Story* as a postcolonial novel, we can list an accumulation of conceptual markers: difference; rewriting; violence; maps; gender; haunting; memory; home as belonging or displacement. But among all these issues, what about Sally? Both Álvarez and Barris remind us that despite Wicomb's foregrounding of a hyper-real style, realistic representation is not absent from the narrative, even if almost absent from David's own story. To lighten her husband's anxieties about 'Coloured' identity – cohesive or endlessly conflictual? – Sally says to David:

> 'Ours are all mixed up and tangled; no chance of being uprooted, because they're all in a neglected knot, stuck. And that I'd have thought is the beauty of being coloured, that we need not worry about roots at all, that it is altogether a good thing to start afresh […]. There is nothing to reclaim. We are what we are, a mixture of this or that.' (2000: 27-8)

The words are given flavour, or spice, by the aroma that permeates the family dinner table, where Sally tries to return her husband's distracted mind to the here and now:

> ' … bredie with potatoes and rice, or on Sundays roasted chicken. With sweet potato, browned and ginger-sweet, sometimes curry […]. Nice flavoured food. Not the stiff pap with meat eaten by blacks. Nor the meagre pasta and pesto favoured in the homes of white comrades.' (25-6)

Such reassuring moments and comforts, however, do not seem to be Wicomb's preoccupation, or the preoccupation of most commentators on the novel. Rather, the closing scenes cram together

David's suicide, Dulcie's decomposing body crawling with goggas and, as I previously noted, an exploded computer spewing out bits and pieces of text. As Wicomb put it in an interview: David's 'inchoate story […] threatens to fall apart; only the reader can hold together some of the events' (qtd in Meyer and Olver 2002: 197). Such comments have been interpreted, I think, as postmodern 'game-playing'; that, at bottom, the author is in control of her text. I am not sure that, in this novel, Wicomb is always in control of her text.

I base my supposition on two of Wicomb's articles: 'Shame and Identity: The Case of the Coloured in South Africa' and 'Setting, Intertextuality and the Resurrection of the Postcolonial Author'. In 'Shame … ' (2018a [1995]) Wicomb turns somewhat heatedly to the recurrent depiction in the South African archive of the Coloured person as the concupiscent 'Other', in-between white people and black African people. (Casual talk has it that, under apartheid, Coloureds were not white enough while now, under African-majority rule, Coloureds are not black enough!) In similar vein to Erasmus's study (2001), Wicomb in 'Setting … ' (2018b [2004]) rejects the notion of 'hybridity' in that it can harbour connotations of impurity and degeneracy. She extends her argument to a rejection of Bhabha's 'in-between' space (1994) where, in northern-institutional postcolonialism, we are led to expect a daring and creative challenge to the dominance of the 'coloniser', whether in past or present guise. Barris (2010) suggests, however, that in her representation of Dulcie, Wicomb the author seems emotionally over-attached –

> Each circle is a liverish red crinkled surface of flesh, healed in the darkness under garments that would not let go of the blood (Wicomb 2000: 19) –

and that, in consequence, she has lent credence to the clamour of the 'spectacular' that has characterised much of the critical response to the novel.

Certainly, Wicomb's remarks suggest that, as Barris notes, she regards a postmodern narrative strategy as more appropriate than realism to the tenor and temper of a fragmented society. The novel, to me, suggests also a deeply fragmented author. To be in *David's Story* is to be in a hothouse. The temperature is reduced somewhat in Wicomb's next novel, *Playing in the Light* (2006), which embodies another trope of so-called shame: the light-skinned Coloured who, in seeking advantage amid apartheid separateness, crosses the colour line to live as a white person. On discovering that her parents had played in the light, Marion suffers a crisis of identity.

A further reduction of the heat is perceptible in the short-story collection, *The One That Got Away* (2008), and in the novel, *Still Life* (2020). Published 200 years after the arrival in 1820 on the Cape eastern frontier of settlers from Scotland and England, *Still Life* transports a motley cast of characters from the frontier to contemporary London where a reluctant author takes up the task of writing the biography of the settler, Thomas Pringle.[8] Advocate of a free press, adversary of the governor of the Cape Colony Lord Charles Somerset, poet, and anti-slavery campaigner, Pringle – having been bankrupted by Somerset – returned to Britain where he edited and added a supplement to the life story of the ex-slave (from the Caribbean), Mary Prince (1831). In Wicomb's novel Prince appears as an eccentric woman who defends Pringle's memory against several less complimentary views including those of Hintza, the 'Bechuana boy', whom Pringle had adopted, and Vytje Vaal, the Khoi (on the frontier, the Hottentot) servant in the then Pringle household. In a witty use of her character mouthpieces (the novel proceeds by a high degree of direct speech), Wicomb retains the temper of a satirical stage play with asides on correct and incorrect attitudes to several issues of current concern while, in a dark intrusion, Vytje recounts the cruelties of the Cape frontier. In the authorial slant Pringle, a man of his time, is granted little of his relative enlightenment; more is made, unfairly I think, of the

limitations of his opposition to what the novel implies is a conservative, racist Settler legacy, the moniker, 'the father of South African poetry', repeated mockingly throughout the narrative.

When *The One That Got Away* was adjudged a runner-up in the 2009 M-Net Literary Awards, adjudicator Jane Rosenthal remarked that the collection was 'elegant, clear, if sometimes over-clever in pursuit of "hot topics" such as gender relations and the cross-currents of intercultural marriage'. She then added, 'Hopefully, now Wicomb can and will move on from these old bones that she keeps on digging out of the sloot' (2009: 54). One is tempted to retort that in the racial hothouse of South Africa Rosenthal, a white woman, is still regarded as a 'Self', not an 'Other'. Nonetheless, if *David's Story* in its manner of telling may be described as 'postcolonial heavy', then *Still Life* in its manner of telling is 'postcolonial lite'. In *October* (2014), Wicomb achieves a finely tuned modulation in her ongoing pursuit of hot topics.

Linking this novel to Toni Morrison's *Home* (2012) and Marilynne Robinson's similarly named novel *Home* (2009), *October* –Jacobs opines – provides 'the most searching revision of the notion of home in contemporary South African fiction' (2016: 94). Is a home, a place? asks Brah (1996). To paraphrase Brah, is a home where we belong, territorially, culturally, existentially; where our community or family or loved ones reside, where we can identify roots to where we return when we are elsewhere in the world? Or is such a harmonious conception of home and belonging (to quote Hedetoft and Hjort) 'organicist' or 'prepolitical'? (2002: xii). In her discussion of *October*, Dimitriu (2019) invokes Heidegger's conception of how to learn to dwell in an imaginative embodiment of home (Heidegger 2001 [1954]). It is a conception that allows Mercia Murray – Wicomb's (near-autobiographical) protagonist – to learn during her 'home visit' that to be at home does not necessarily depend upon a specific or predetermined dwelling-place.

Sharing the motif of the return visit with Anne Landsman's *The Rowing Lesson* (2008) and Michiel Heynes's *Lost Ground* (2011) *October* has Mercia answer a plea from her alcoholic brother in her home district of the desolate northern Cape to rescue his son not only from his own failure, but also from the limitations of his under-educated and over-worked Nama (Khoi/Griqua) wife. He wants his sister, Mercia, to be the guardian of his 10-year-old son, Nicky, who – he thinks – will have greater opportunities in Scotland where, for the last several decades, his sister, Mercia, has been located – at home? – as a university academic.

The visit to Kliprivier proves to be both traumatic and, perversely, healing. Unlike *David's Story*, *October* resists a pile up of old bones; Mercia, nonetheless, is not spared a confrontation with a skeleton in the cupboard. Left (Mercia's choice of word) by her Scottish partner and struggling without dedication to writing a book on postcolonial memory, the somewhat prim Mercia discovers that at the heart of the family is a shocking and still suppurating wound. Her patriarchal, 'Old Testament' father – a Coloured man of mixed black and Scottish settler blood – regarded himself as a 'superior' Coloured to the surrounding Nama people. But, as Mercia discovers, he had betrayed his religiously upright wife in a sexual liaison with a 12-year-old Nama schoolgirl, Sylvie, now the 35-year-old wife of her brother and mother of the boy, Nicky. Mercia learns, further, that what contributed to her brother's alcoholism was that he had heard the story of his father and the girl in loose talk among his peers at the local pub. As he curses his father – a vark (a pig) – he succumbs to his despair and dies in the claustrophobia of his bedroom, curtains drawn, windows shut.

Sylvie accepts the hand that fate has dealt her. Proud of her skill as a butcher's assistant, she prepares food for guests at the funeral. Meanwhile, Mercia's slow bonding with her nephew – walks in the veld, the identification of local plants, land reptiles, and insects – lends her the courage to suggest to Sylvie that she take Nicky back to Scotland. Sylvie is shocked that this person, Mercia – who seems to be at home nowhere – should even think of usurping her, Sylvie's, motherly responsibilities. If Mercia is chastened by the response, she begins to

recognise a substance of commitment in Sylvie that she herself lacks. Her return to Scotland – with Sylvie's agreement that Nicky be permitted holiday visits – resolves little about where Mercia 'belongs'. Nonetheless, Mercia seems able to understand that identity and belonging do not necessarily reside in any 'in-betweenness', but in a conception of place that exceeds mere setting as habitat. In her critical writing, Wicomb resorts to a physiological reference, 'proprioceptivity', which denotes stimuli produced and perceived within an organism, especially in relation to position and movement of the body. But, in Wicomb's words, 'bound up with the body's sensation of occupying a point in space, and with the terms under which it does so' (2018b: 239). In short, Mercia finds that her academic discourse is inadequate to encompass what it is to be at home; what it is to feel 'home' seeping into the being of one's accumulated life experience.

As Dimitriu notes (2019: 172; 177), the chain of events in *October* cannot capture the complex emotion, simultaneously, of home in exile, or roots in routes. To capture such a problematic, almost paradoxical 'place' of belonging, whether Mercia is in Namaqualand or Scotland, Wicomb reinforces event in symbol. To mate, the salmon swim upstream to their death; the baby turtle, over-attached to its mother, must learn to negotiate its own current; the tortoise, which Nicky and Mercia see in the veld, carries its home on its back and, therefore, is simultaneously a dweller and a nomad; and the month of October signals, tenuously, the transition from one season to another, whether in the North or the South of the world. Prior to her home visit, what to Mercia had been an intermittent musing attains gravitas in a lesson of experience in how to live, how to belong, amid the ongoing uncertainties of life:

> If nowadays ambition cannot accommodate the old notion of home, there has always been ambivalence, the impatience of something new, the moving on, across the world, whilst at the same time, at times, feeling the centripetal tug of the earth. (2014: 28)

Marlene van Niekerk: Looking Back, Going Forward

Does Marlene van Niekerk also dig old bones from the sloot, from the eroded gully? If so, is the act of digging the real issue for literature or is it what the imagination makes of the excavation? Originally written and published in Afrikaans (2004) and translated by the academic and novelist Michiel Heyns, *Agaat* (2006, in English translation) has enjoyed positive reviews both in South Africa and abroad. Taking its title from the name of the Coloured servant on a white-owned farm, the novel, as in the case of Wicomb's *David's Story*, probably owes a great deal of its notice in literary circles to a global recognition of postcolonial markers. A well-established Afrikaans literary trope (the plaasroman, or farm novel) is imprinted upon a story of gendered power-relations, of racial and cultural confrontation, of language as facilitator or barrier to communication, and of domineering or repressed psyches. In its Afrikaans original, however, *Agaat* speaks less globally, more locally, to the insecurity of 'Afrikaans' in a changing South Africa.

The plaasroman initially advocated a patriarchal culture with a stable centre (farm ownership) at a time, in the 1930s, of a 'poor white' problem among rural Afrikaners. From stories of blood, soil, and toil (in which African farmworkers and farmhouse servants were mute to the action) the plaasroman underwent modernist modification by Sestiger writers: that is, by a then new generation of avant-garde Afrikaans writers of the 1960s, several of whom had travelled to or lived in Paris and had absorbed Camusian and Sartrean existentialism together with Robbe-Grillet's 'fictionalisation' of narrative. Translated into English as *Seven Days at the Silbersteins* (1964), Etienne Leroux's *Sewe dae by die Silbersteins* (1962) transferred the backveld farm of mealies, sheep, and cattle to the Cape wine estate on which beautiful, citified guests consider the metaphysics of good and evil. Leroux's wine estate undergoes a further

transformation in Van Niekerk: from modernist existential anxiety to the instabilities of postmodern relativism.

Van Niekerk's earlier work, *Triomf* (1994; in English 1999) is a postmodern inversion of Afrikaner domination. Here the author catches the incestuous remnants of a dream of superiority in the Benade family: a family of poor whites in Triomf (in Johannesburg), the suburb which was built on the rubble of the 'mixed-race' Sophiatown, the latter bulldozed to the ground to make way for the migration to the 'better-off' cities of Afrikaners from the (rural) platteland. But if Afrikaner hard power ended in 1994, Afrikaans soft power retains economic, educational, and cultural influence. Afrikaans publishers enjoy patronage from Afrikaans-capitalist institutions which, in turn, received the financial and political support of the National Party government (1948-1994). The print and e-commerce behemoth Naspers (originally, Nasionale Pers), for example, spreads its tentacles across Africa and into other markets, including Chinese telecom. Given such cultural capital, it is not surprising that Afrikaans literary academics are attuned to Continental theory and topics of current interest to academic journals and the international conference circuit. Ever since André Brink realised in the 1970s that his novelistic ambitions required his work to enjoy translation into English, Afrikaans writers have sought to follow in Brink's path.

Agaat, nonetheless, presented peculiar difficulties of translation. While Van Niekerk is alert to postcolonial literary conventions and expectations, she remains true to a variety of Afrikaans speech rhythms. If white Afrikaners speak a 'standard' (educated) Afrikaans, the character, Agaat, speaks an Afrikaans which is inflected with a 'Coloured' regional accent and syntax. To add to the complication, Agaat indulges in a kind of mockery of her now speechless mistress (Milla is dying of a motoneuron disease). Once a servant, once the suckler of Milla's son Jakkie, Agaat now follows a tradition in which Cape slaves parodied the picnic songs of the early Dutch colonists. Influenced by the Dutch East Indian pantum, the ghoemeliedjie translated stern Dutch courtship practices into lewd songs, in which the slave cuckolded the master. It is a taxing task for any translator, as Heyns explains in an illuminating article in which he turns to both Eco and Venuti in support of his method: 'a negotiation [which] entails the correlation of two cultural contexts, each sacrificing something of itself in return for gaining something from the other' (from Eco 2003: 1) and, as Venuti says of 'the practical sense of what a translator does': 'I would describe it as an attempt to compensate for an irreparable loss by controlling an exorbitant gain' (2004: 20).

The 'travels' of the novel, *Agaat*, stand almost as a test case of whether a postcolonial literary syllabus can or should ignore the challenge of translation, as it usually does in its selection of works. Translation notwithstanding, the novel presented other challenges to literary criticism. How might we comment on a book that can be separated into two books, but not quite? To highlight the question, I refer to two articles, one by Carvalho and Van Vuuren (2009), the other by Fourie (2016). Whereas Carvalho and Van Vuuren focus on the 'postcolonial' *Agaat*, Fourie reminds us that there is another story in the novel: that of the plaasroman. He suggests, nonetheless, that the older story is permitted by the author to intrude upon the newer story.

The 'newer' story has been tied to Spivak's question of whether the subaltern can speak. In repetitive citation Carvalho and Van Vuuren pursue the character, Agaat, as a subaltern, 'a person without lines of social mobility' (from Spivak 2006: 28), and one who appears principally through Milla's vocalisation. The question of the silent subaltern is somewhat disrupted, however, in that Milla, the white owner of the farm, literally cannot speak. She is a mistress without the power of voice while Agaat, the Coloured functionary, can speak and can taunt her mistress, as if she, Agaat, now occupied the dominant role. Is agency vindicated when an 'Other' triumphs over a speechless 'Self'? Carvalho and Van Vuuren qualify such a binary reversal of roles: 'Agaat's mimetic means of expression, whilst unquestionably

subversive, do not ultimately succeed in collapsing Milla's authority over her' (2009: 52). But do Carvalho and Van Niekerk go on to confront what is no doubt scandalous to many: that the Coloured Agaat, not the white Milla, represents the future of Afrikaans in South Africa? There are more Coloured speakers, after all, than white speakers of the language.

To turn to Fourie, he reminds his readers that while most commentary on *Agaat* has been directed at the preoccupation of who speaks, Van Niekerk's treatment of the plaasroman is not necessarily without its anticipation of the later Milla/Agaat relationship. Van Niekerk almost rebelliously transfers farm ownership from Milla's Afrikaner-ideologue husband, Jak, to Milla herself. If neither a feminist nor a 'green' ecologist, Milla had challenged both rigid male Afrikanerdom and its rigid farming methods with a softer, female power. Yet in a shockingly unexpected culmination Milla, who is expected to be the dutiful Volksmoeder (the Mother, submissive, homebound), mounts her financially near-bankrupt husband and relentlessly drains him of the last drops of his manhood. (Soft power or hard power?) Thus Van Niekerk 'explodes' the hierarchy of the plaasroman, a male hierarchy that was still dominant in Leroux's 'wine estate' novel of the 1960s. Perhaps the success of *Agaat* is not unconnected to the fact that Van Niekerk is a skilful weaver of tales and that her wider audience has had the advantage of a skilful translator.

'Radical tenderness'

The writers on whom I have focused all arrived on the literary scene prior to the last decade of the thirty-year period to which this 'theme' issue is devoted. My critical overview can be supplemented by the Introduction and detailed chapters in *Current Writing* 21(1&2), 2009,[9] the double issue that celebrated the 21st anniversary of the journal, the focus on 'South African Literature beyond 2000'. In addition to journals, readers can turn to several relevant monographs and edited editions. (See Note[10]) Of the fictional works to have appeared in the last few years, relatively few so far have elicited detailed commentary. I offer in closing, my response to two quite different novels that have captured my critical imagination.

In her acceptance lecture, 'The Tender Narrator' (Stockholm, 7 December 2019), Nobel literature laureate Olga Tokarczuk surveyed the world of letters with dismay. What happened to its power and promise? she asked. What happened to its mandate to yank us out of our lives and into confrontation with the universal; to bind us to history and one another? Instead, we are deafened by a cacophony of first-person narratives, 'a choir made up of soloists'. Tokarczuk lamented the decline of the fable as a form, and the loss of literature as a site for radical tenderness that might militate against self-assertion and refresh our sensitivity to the world. I am not sure that things are quite so bad, whether in the North or the South. With Tokarczuk's words in mind, nevertheless, I turn to Ntikeng Mohlele's *Michael K: A Novel* (2018) and Finuala Dowling's *Okay, Okay, Okay* (2019), neither of which is a 'first' novel by its respective author.

Mohlele resurrects J M Coetzee's Michael K from his obscurity as a figure in the apartheid landscape (*Life & Times of Michael K*, 1983). The ostensible purpose is to spur debate in post-apartheid times on the quarrel of poetry and philosophy. That no conclusion can be drawn from the contemplations of the first-person narrator and Gustaf von Ludwig, an eccentric academic in Johannesburg, might be because to nurture one's pumpkin seeds, as Coetzee's Michael K did, is truer than either poetry or philosophy, at least as expounded in the self-absorbed contemplations of the two characters. (I use the word contemplations rather than dialogue, for each talks more to himself than to the other.)

> What do you believe in? Gustav von Ludwig had asked me. I have since given the question much thought, have attempted to answer it as best I could, but always fell short of an exhaustive answer. I suspect I am a humanitarian at heart, I told him, a democrat, but I cannot say with any measure and finality if being humane and democratic is a personal ideology. (2018: 133)

It is not his own slightly over-inflated thoughts, however, that grant the narrator his insight. It is a single memory that 'somehow overpowers even [his] most potent tablets, rescues his mind from the fogginess of medical side-effects':

> With an old windmill creaking overhead, Michael never once extended a hand of friendship to either birds or lizards – but neither did he in any way threaten them. He seemed to have no interest whatsoever in living, breathing things – save for the seeds; dead and dried things that could sprout into life when conditions allowed, that could bloom and bear fruit […]. Maybe, I think, poetry is like that. Like seeds. At once dead yet alive. That to extract that life from the seed, nurture it, one needs much more than patience, but a rarer kind of spiritual awakening. (135-6)

If a seed can nurture the spirit, then we should not blunder into a discourse about the irreducible otherness of the 'Other'; rather, we should permit the Buddha-like moment to linger, to realise that a first step towards human connectedness is to learn to curb one's own ego.

When Mohlele's earlier novel *Pleasure* (2016) won the 2016 University of Johannesburg Main Prize for South African Writing in English, much was made of the author's richly lyrical style. In several press reports, it was remarked that Mohlele, although a black writer, wrote like a white writer. No doubt well-meaning, the remark is quite insulting, both to Mohlele and to other black writers. Rather, we might say that if at times Mohlele allows his gift of language to overpower his meaning and unnecessarily curtail narrative progression, then his talent, like Michael K's seed, is well deserving of nurture.

Just as Mohlele finds inspiration in the literary archive, so does Dowling. Why did Olive Schreiner – she asks in *Okay, Okay, Okay* – never complete what she hoped would be her magnum opus: the novel, *From Man to Man*, would be published posthumously, only in 1926. Why did Miriam – a character in Dowling's novel – die early without having completed her doctoral thesis on Schreiner? Dowling unobtrusively draws parallels between the two women, both of whom had a heart condition which in the world of men was granted lesser importance than the surrounding public life. Miriam's husband, Simon, presents a deaf ear to his wife's concerns about flutters in her chest as he relies on her to be the perfect hostess to his tedious colleagues in university administration. A professor of English, Simon had sacrificed his title to join the Vice-chancellor's senior management team, a position which, in the new managerial universities, carries richer financial rewards than the neglected corridors of the academic departments.

It takes the suicide of a black woman student, an ensuing student riot (or protest?), and his own humiliation in the eyes of his colleagues for Simon to regain something of his self-respect. In the heated context of a student revolt – its demands unrealistic and delivered with racial insult – an illustration of semantic ambiguity, which Simon had used as a teaching tool over twenty years ago, appears in the daily press: 'THE STUDENTS ARE REVOLTING'. In Coetzee's *Disgrace*, David Lurie sacrificed his lecturing post rather than grovel in appeasement before the self-righteous Chair of the university-wide committee on discrimination. As Simon faces the VC and his senior managers, Dowling sketches the scene in the deft integration of the serious and the farcical that is the characteristic style of the novel:

> 'Even an illustration, for example, can be offensive,' said [Professor] Sitoba.
>
> 'Indeed,' said Hilda. 'You should rather have used an example such as: "I am revolting".'

> 'It could be argued that you are, in fact, using the two senses of the word "revolting" synonymously,' said Gemma.
>
> …
>
> Simon put his head in his hands. He took a deep breath and looked up. 'So this is the new politics of humiliation,' he said, 'which the protesters have taught us very well, apparently. I am to be publicly shamed and then thrown to the lions.'
>
> 'There's no need to exaggerate. But if this is the way you see it, Simon, there are other options,' said Kort [the Vice-chancellor].
>
> Gemma's voice came in softly, with a faux sympathy: 'You could think of early retirement.' (2019: 279)

Dowling lends her own twist to a story of change in contemporary South Africa, a 'postcolony' that might not quite be a postcolony. Despite severe inequalities in gender relations, education, and opportunity, the 'Big Man' syndrome – still a characteristic of too many postcolonies – has not yet trumped the rule of law, even in the looting and arson that immediately followed ex-President Zuma's gaoling in 2021 for contempt of court. If she avoids optimism in the societal arena, Dowling is not entirely pessimistic. Through experiences – sad, funny, mean, generous, and ultimately compassionate – most of her characters become better people, whether the weak-kneed Simon or the pompous Africanist, Professor Sitoba. On reflection, more better people may be the key constituent of a better society. *Okay, Okay, Okay* could take up occupation in Olga Tokarczuk's 'site for radical tenderness'.

Notes

1. The Africa Pulse series, published by Oxford University Press (Cape Town), has so far published four novels, one play, and an anthology of poetry, all translated from the African languages of southern Africa.
2. See Edwards (2008) on postcolonial concepts and keywords.
3. See Brown (2001) on 'thing theory'.
4. 'Urbanism' of another kind characterises the African rom-com, a genre that has accompanied the turn to streaming for watching film and television series. These popular films explore a re-emergent Johannesburg of urban middle- and upper-class black lifestyles and aspirations. To quote Frassinelli, films such as *Tell Me Sweet Something*, *Mrs Right Guy*, and *Happiness Is a Four-letter Word*, challenge a 'discourse of stereotypes on "African backwardness"'. The films are set against a background of 'global urbanism' in 'aerial or high-angle shots of skylines and through images of glossy, gentrified, and glitzy' cityscapes. The characters are 'mostly young, hip, affluent, good-looking heterosexual black people falling in love with one another.' But Frassinelli – a professor of communication and media studies – goes on to add that 'these films are not simply a celebration of consumerist lifestyle. They also represent the tensions and dislocations that accompany the black majority's occupation of affluent urban spaces in its embrace of the consumptive practices from which it had so long been excluded.' See Frassinelli (2021: n.p.)
5. See Gordimer on the 'interregnum' in South Africa of the late 1970s (1988) and, more generally, Gramsci (1971).
6. The Immorality Act of 1927 criminalised interracial sex between a white person and an African person. Amended by the apartheid government in 1950, provisions were extended from the African person to 'any person of colour'. (The Act was repealed in 1985.)
7. See Tutu's book on forgiveness (1999).
8. Pringle (1789-1834), an 1820 Settler, moved from a farming allotment on the eastern frontier to Cape Town where he became the librarian of the Government (later, the South African) Library. He established the *South African Journal* and fell foul of Governor Somerset over an article, 'Some Account of the Present State of the English Settlers of Albany'. Active in the matter of press freedom, he returned not to Scotland but to England, where an article on slavery at the Cape helped him secure the post of Secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society. He edited, together with a substantial supplement, the life story of the slave, Mary Prince (see Prince 1831). His poetry – the first serious poetry on 'South African' concerns and subject-matter – appeared in *African Sketches* (1835), Part 1 comprising 'Poems Illustrative of South Africa' while Part 2 is devoted to his autobiography, 'Narrative of a Residence

in South Africa'. Together with journalistic commentary, the poems appear most conveniently in *African Poems of Thomas Pringle*. (See Pringle 1989)

9. The double issue of *Current Writing* was re-published with minor editorial amendments as *SA Lit: beyond 2000*, ed. Chapman and Lenta (2011).
10. See References (below) for critical studies of the last thirty years by the following authors and editors: Attwell (2005); Attwell and Attridge (2012); Barnard (2007); Brown (2020); Chapman (1996; 2022); Chapman, ed. (2007); Chapman and Lenta, eds (2011); Coullie, ed. (2001); De Kock (2016); Demir and Moreillon (2021); Frenkel (2010); Govinden (2008); Graham, J (2009); Graham, S (2009); Hemer (2012); Heywood (2004); Nuttall (2009); Popescu (2010); Poyner (2020); Sameulson (2007a); Titlestad (2004); Van der Vlies (2007; 2017).

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