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# DIPLOMARBEIT

## The Obsessive Compulsive Imagination

*Rewriting the novels of others*

Verfasserin

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## **Declaration of Authenticity**

I hereby confirm that have conceived and written this thesis without any outside help, all by myself in English. Any quotations, borrowed ideas or paraphrased passages have been clearly indicated within this work and acknowledged in the bibliographical references. There are no hand-written corrections from myself or others, the mark I received for it cannot be deducted in any way through this paper.

Vienna, November 2011

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*Katharina Eder*

***To Mum and Dad***

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## 1. Introduction

*If stories are re-told and re-imagined, the re- is of decisive importance: each new invention happens in the margins of the already-written, or against the background of the already-written. This excludes a reading of the new narrative as a fortuitous invention, as 'mere fiction,' because it engages with the world – the world itself being conceived of as a story.<sup>1</sup>*

Intertextuality is a ubiquitous phenomenon, traceable in the literatures of all ages. It represents the notion that every text constructs itself as a tissue of devices, absorbing and transforming material from other texts. Intertextuality and Rewriting are used in a more specific sense, to refer to the particular set of plots, images, characters or conventions which a given narrative may invoke for its readers.

There are several reasons why contemporary writers engage in the global literary trend of intertextuality. The globality of our cultures lures authors to model their texts on precursor works. As with any other art form, literature depends on the socio-cultural and political realities of the current milieu and therefore, the written and oral texts for its impetus. It does not move within a vacuum<sup>2</sup>.

South African writing is obsessed with the depiction of pain. Hardly any novel can be found without the portrayal of attacks, rapes, murders, incest, or other cruelties and miseries. Various authors compulsively rework these crises and their effects, frequently picking up the narrative of their fellow writers, altering or complementing the plot, thereby suggesting an underlying trauma. Violence and pain proliferated by the causality of apartheid were followed by a crime wave in South Africa, accompanied by the problem of Zimbabwe, the national crises of the HIV epidemic, and the 2008 outbreaks of xenophobic assaults. In addition to these crises, the rights and freedoms promised by the achievement of

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Brink 1998, In: Attridge & Jolly 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Kehinde 2003.

democracy have not been fulfilled. Post-apartheid literature can be regarded as a space of recurring suffering and anguish, ostensibly following the repetition compulsions that have beset South Africa.<sup>3</sup>

The realm once dominated by Apartheid's anguish has been substituted by a new set of wounds, which are repeatedly embraced by contemporary South African authors. This thesis seeks to explore intertextuality and compulsive rewriting as a key stylistic device of contemporary South African Trauma Fiction.

Contemporary South African novelists appear to vacillate between the institution of apartheid and its post-traumatic aftermaths. Their compulsive re-writing of certain themes and motifs can be seen as an expression thereof. Important shifts of focus were made after the fall of the Apartheid regime; however, the mode through which South Africa's writing is interpreted is still one of crisis. Questions arise as to whether South African writers are addicted to an enduring contemplation of pain. Are they neurotic themselves? The fact that Apartheid as something palpable to attack had suddenly dissipated seems significant in this context.

Reiteration mimics the effects of trauma, suggesting the persistent return of the dreadful event, enforced through a disruption of narrative progression and chronology. The motif of an inevitable fate or trajectory, which the author can produce through rewriting, corresponds to Freud's elaboration of the repetition-compulsion in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*<sup>4</sup>. Rewriting is also a way of "working through" trauma, an attempt to cope. Not only are South Africa's writers to some extent neurotic, they also have a certain amount of freedom of choice, expressed in their rewritings. The strategy of repetition is one of the key literary devices in trauma fiction. It can act at the levels of plot, language or imagery. South African novelists evoke the Freudian notion of repetition-compulsion in rewriting their fellow writers' texts. Their characters are subject to the plots of someone else's story. Intertextuality enables the authors to present new perspectives on their fellow writers' works. The overlap between trauma

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Boehmer 2012 (unpublished manuscript)

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Freud 1920.



fiction and postcolonial fiction in the use of intertextuality, grants formerly repressed voices the right to tell their own stories.

In chapter 2, an introduction on intertextuality as a general international phenomenon, with regard to its formation and development, shall be given. After a brief discussion of South Africa as a nation characterized by trauma, the focus shifts to Sigmund Freud and his concept of *Repetition Compulsion*, as well as the various ways in which this correlates to intertextuality and trauma fiction. Formal repercussions and crisis reiteration as an epistemological form will be discussed. Chapters 5-7 present the analyses of the following four novels with regard to their engagement in intertextuality: J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*, Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit*, Ken Barris's *What Kind of Child*, and André Brink's *The Rights of Desire*.

Frequently, the difference between acceptable and problematic change, and variant approaches in dealing with recent history lies in the eye of the beholder. Contemporary South African writers often find themselves at odds with the way their fellow writers deal with the demons of the past and suggest different ways of working through the trauma of Apartheid. Freedom of choice comes in on part of the authors. The analyses of the four novels in this thesis alludes to the fact that South Africa's authors clearly express their ways of how to deal with the past and how South Africa's future should be shaped by means of rivaling opinions. They entrench their respective personal views by rewriting the novels of others.

The four novels closely follow Freudian notions on the thematic level, however, are structured around the concept of repetition in stylistic terms. All four novels share the theme of rape. J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* can be seen as the catalyst, to which the other three novels react. To a certain extent intertextuality can also be detected between the other three novels. Motifs and images echo across the oeuvres, so that the novels mirror the effects of trauma in their continuing returns and repetitions. Correspondences between the lives of the characters are established. Between the four novels to be analyzed in this thesis, repetition undoubtedly fulfills the function of textual binding. Complementation and

alterations of *Disgrace* are going to be discussed, which will exemplify the previously treated theory.

## 2. Origin and conception of an international phenomenon

Comprising devices such as parody, translation, imitation, quotation, adaptation and allusion, intertextuality is a general phenomenon traceable in the literature of all ages ever since antiquity. It has to be noted here that intertextuality and rewriting in the context of this thesis apply solely to the contemporary South African novel. Nevertheless, an introduction on the phenomenon in general, in an international context with regard to its formation and development, shall be discussed previously.

The theory of intertextuality arose in the mid-to-late 1960s, when the basic tenets of the concept were first elaborated upon by Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*, in which literature is regarded as a unity comprising reality and life in a system of verbal relationships.<sup>5</sup> Together with textual techniques such as metafiction or autoreferentiality, intertextuality, or the reference to precursor texts, has come to be described as: "the very trademark of postmodernism [...]. Postmodernism and intertextuality are treated as synonymous these days" (Pfister 209). However, rewriting and intertextual relations are a lot older than postmodernism and certain epochs have produced more intertextual literature than others. Intertextuality might well be called a hallmark of Baroque and Renaissance literature. However, this does not pertain as much to nineteenth-century realism and romanticism.

In spite of its re-emergence throughout all ages of literature, there is something innovative about postmodernist intertextuality which makes itself perceivable predominantly by its frequent appearance and its new functions. Nowadays, intertextuality is connected to an alternate concept of literature, a contrast two writers of the Augustan age may serve to exemplify. In *An Essay of Criticism*

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Kehinde 2003 (Nordic Journal of African Studies 12(3)).

(1711), Alexander Pope exposed the normative value of the canonical authors and advised ambitious poets to imitate them:

Be *Homer's* Works your *Study*, and *Delight*,  
Read them by *Day*, and meditate by *Night*.  
(124-125)

This, in compliance with Pope, refers to what Virgil assessed when composing *Aeneid*, since "*Nature* and *Homer* were, he found, the *same*" (Pope 1961: v. 135). Obviously, Pope did not ask other poets to imitate literary texts instead of nature but that he is confident about a poet best being able to emulate nature if he imitates the classics, for the reason that they simply were closer to nature.

In *Joseph Andrews*, Henry Fielding demonstrates the pursuance of a different line of argument, but reaches the same concept of literature as the one discussed above. Representing one of the most important intertextual novels of the eighteenth century in regards to the amount of intertextual intersections, *Joseph Andrews* confronts the reader with references from the Bible, Richardson's *Pamela*, Cervante's *Don Quixote* and the classical epic. Fielding links his own characters with the ones in his pre-texts and shows the reader what he describes as "not men, but manners, not an individual, but a species" (Fielding, 198). Hence, the intertextual relations do not subvert, let alone deconstruct its mimetic feature; it invigorates it. Fielding adeptly points out that he is mimicking not individual but general nature and that the characters in his works are "not only alive, but [have] been so these 4000 Years, and I hope [...] will indulge [their lives] as many yet to come" (Fielding, 189).

The mimetic concept of literature, which can also be viewed as a moralist one, is quite distant from the concept of intertextuality in the age of modernism and postmodernism. However, many classical authors such as Pope and Fielding already seemed to anticipate some of the (post)-modernist aspects of intertextual relations in their writing. In the case of Pope, a voice of regret can be detected about the fact that poets of his time were no longer able to mimic nature directly, like for instance Homer did, but manage to do

so only via an imitation of literary texts. Pope's regret recalls the postmodernist regrets that the current function of literary texts is to imitate precursor texts. Somehow, Fielding seemed to anticipate the ludic function that intertextuality occupies in our time, when he claims that his intertextual links to the classical epic are also targeted at the entertainment of "the Classical Reader" (Fielding, 4).

The communication process underlying older works featured by intertextual links may well be delineated in the following way:

An author refers to other texts within his own text expecting his readers to understand these references as part of the strategy of his text; and the ideal reader does not only understand these references, but is also aware of the fact that the author is aware of their presence within his text as well as of the reader's awareness of them (Broich 1989: 120).

Certainly, other similarities between earlier forms of intertextuality and newer ones can be pointed out, and one could even read highly intertextual works by authors such as Laurence Stern as postmodernist *avant la lettre*. However, in most cases, early works shaped by intertextuality can clearly be distinguished from the ones prevailing in contemporary and notably in radically experimental works.

The term intertextuality itself has been used by contemporary authors and critics in a drastically different manner. More precisely, those who first used the term actually coined and employed it. Only later was the word used and taken over by critics who were skeptical of the ample postmodernist concept of intertextual reiteration. Hence, they tried to generate alternative ideas to make sure the relationship between texts and their pre-texts is capable of being described in an appropriate way.

Some postmodernist concepts of intertextuality have become classics. The nomenclature "intertextuality" is actually a coinage by Julia Kristeva. She coined

the term *intertextualité* before she abandoned it. Kristeva employed the term and provided several definitions of intertextuality, such as the following:

Any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another (quoted from Clayton and Rothstein, 20).

In the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another (Kristeva 1969: 146).

One of Kristeva's arguments states that a literary corpus displays a reading of an anterior text, thereby absorbing a text of and a response to another literary corpus. The theory of intertextuality purports that the sole reader is the author reading another text, an entity that becomes not more than a literary corpus re-reading itself as it re-writes itself. "When it finds its way into a current text, a chip or piece of an older monument appears as source, influence, allusion, imitation, archetype or parody" (Leitch 123).

For Roland Barthes every literary text constitutes a *chamber d'échos*, a chamber that endlessly reflects the echoes of other literary works (Barthes 1975: 78). According to Harold Bloom (1976),

poems are not things but only words that refer to other words, and those words refer to still other words, and so on, into the densely overpopulated world of literary language. Any poem is an inter-poem and any reading of a poem is an inter-reading" (Bloom 2).

Regarding all the memorable images critics and authors have developed, such as the "echo chamber", the "mosaic of quotations", or the "inter-poem", it quickly becomes obvious that there is a radically new concept of the text behind the previously mentioned three concepts of intertextuality. Gérard Genette (1982) created a fourth image for the concept, called the "palimpsest"<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup>A palimpsest represents a text that has been written upon several times, frequently with remnants of erased text still visible. *Palimpsestes*, originally published in France in 1982, represents one of Genette's most famous works and examines the manifold relations a written document may have with precursor texts. Genette discusses the multitude of ways a later text asks readers to read or remember a previous one. In this context, he treats the nature and history of parody, pastiches, antinovels, caricatures, allusion, imitations, commentary and other textual conjunctions.

There is common consensus between Kristeva, Bloom and Barthes that any text is intertextual in its totality and that a differentiation between intertextual and non-intertextual texts or passages thereof, between intended intertextuality and non-intended, is irrelevant. However, at least if taken out of context, the implications of the images and passages quoted above differ a lot in their radicality. Kristeva seems to focus predominantly on the relationship of a text to a precursor text. Her image of a *mosaic of quotations* holds the implication that various fragments from other texts, which create a new text, can easily be distinguished from each other, similar to the pieces which make up a mosaic in visual art. A thing that is no longer possible if the literary work is considered an *echo chamber*, in which the reverberations of a myriad of texts from the whole history of literature blend. Yet, just as a chamber is separated from what is outside of it, the image of a text as an echo chamber implies that a text can also be separated and clearly distinguished from the extraneous elements. However, if there is only one intertext, such as suggested by Bloom, this no longer is possible. From this position, the ultimate radicalization of this concept of the text is not far away: the hypothesis that the whole world is (inter-)text and no reality is to be found outside textuality, no “hors texte” (Derrida 1967:227)<sup>7</sup>. The image for this drastically radical concept was brought into being by Jorge Luis Borges: the Universal Library of Babel, outside of which nothing exists<sup>8</sup>.

All the critics under discussion consider their notions on the characteristics of texts as ontological, i.e. referring to all literary works of all times. Therefore, they have a radical postmodernist concept of a text in their minds whenever they read and interpret “pre-postmodernist” works, like for instance Roland Barthes when he read Balzac in *S/Z*<sup>9</sup>. One might consider such approaches “postmodernizing” earlier texts strained. However, the radical concept of intertextuality might also be considered adequate, at least as far as highly experimental contemporary works are concerned.

One of the essential tasks of the postmodernist literary critic is probably to emphasize what might be referred to as “intertextual elements” in literary texts. As stated by Peter Barry, intertextuality, in postmodernism, seeks at examining

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. [www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Jacques\\_Derrida.aspx](http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Jacques_Derrida.aspx).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Borges 1974.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Barthes 1970.

major degrees of connections between one text and another. This aside, the postmodernist critic favors the jettison of the divine pretensions of authorship in the scrutiny of the reference.<sup>10</sup> In this context M. H. Abraham's definition of intertextuality presents the aptest composition in this discussion. For him intertextuality is a creative instrument, applied to

signify the multiple ways in which any one literary text echoes, or is inescapably linked to, other texts, whether by open or covert citations and allusions, or by the assimilation of the feature of an earlier text by a later text, or simply by participation in a common stock of literary codes and conventions (Abraham 200).

It becomes obvious that, in conjunction with certain devices and strategies that have been considered typically postmodernist, the concept of intertextuality is central to a postmodern understanding of literature. Typical characteristics in this context include the "death of the author". A literary work which is no longer an original creation but an amalgam of other texts is no longer bound to have an author in the traditional sense, but leans more toward what Foucault (1963) and Barthes (1986) famously proclaimed as the death of the author. The concept of an author who recycles and reassembles material from other texts, intermingling it with his own, finds its adequate expression in "bricolage" or "collage", a concept shaped by Barthes rather than Foucault. The collage can be seen as a remarkably distinct form of literature, and art in general, of our time. Representative examples include Charles Marowitz's Shakespeare collages<sup>11</sup>.

The view of the Deconstructionists, conveying that intertextuality refers to both the affiliation among literary works and the dialogue between them, is akin to Martin Coyle's argument, who maintains that:

Each text takes its meaning from other texts, not merely prior texts, but other concomitant texts and expressions of culture and language. The blank and marbled pages, the squiggly lines, the scrambled chapters, the skipped pages of *Tristram Shandy* are intertextual events because they respond not only to extant literary texts, but to contemporary and medieval ideas of logic, or order or rationality (Coyle 613).

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Barry 1995.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Broich 1997.

Earlier concepts of literature were basically characterized by one meaning that was either found or missed by its readers. Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* provides intertextual links that are frequently intentional, whereas reference to other works of literature is seen as part of its meaning. The assumption that a text is nothing but a collocation of an infinite number of echoes of other literary works and nothings exists outside these texts, the notion that literature is an imitation of nature has to be relinquished. The concept of self-referentiality of literature and the end of mimesis takes hold. Contemporary literature no longer holds "the mirror up to nature", as Hamlet puts it (Shakespeare, Hamlet, III, 2, 25), but is only able to mirror other works and concurrently itself. Therefore, the cabinet of mirrors has turned into another image of postmodernist literature and is to be found as a mise-en-abyme of the literary work's structure, as for example in John Barth's *Lost in the Funhouse* (1968).

John Barth's idea when he refers to contemporary literature as a "literature of exhaustion"<sup>12</sup>, or Borges's notion in "The library of Babel", when he notes the "certainty that everything has already been written" (Borges, 470), makes it clear that intertextual literature can no longer be regarded as traditionally original. In a time in which intertextuality gets so important, literary works in a way will always be imitations of other works.<sup>13</sup> Broich addresses this issue quite radically, asserting that literature depicts nothing but a recycling and rewriting of texts, and therefore holds the necessity of being parasitic<sup>14</sup>. Abandoning the difference between plagiarism and original text, which had been tolerated by literatures of earlier periods and is still retained by less radical delineations of intertextuality, Raymond Federman even proclaimed a "literature of pla(y)giarism" (Federmann 12). A special case represents Jorge Luis Borges by inventing an author named Pierre Menard, who replicated the whole of *Don Quixote* verbatim and in this way created not a copy but an original literary work<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Barth 1967.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Broich 1997: 252-253.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. ebenda.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Borges 1941.



No longer meant to be characterized by unity and homogeneity or a closure, postmodern writers tend to engage themselves with fragmented, polyphonous, dissonant and “open” texts. Syncretism and fragmentation play an important role in postmodernism, and a high degree of intertextuality can contribute towards the aim of creating texts as discussed above. Tom Stoppard’s *Travesties* (1975) is a typical example, to a great extent composed of all sorts of sources and parts of heterogeneous works. Similar to a mosaic of quotations, the elements are taken out of Wilde’s *Importance of Being Earnest*, Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Shakespeare’s plays and sonnets, memoirs, history books, Dadaist poems, biographies, limericks, and many more<sup>16</sup>.

Another concept frequently employed by contemporary writers consists of particular paradoxes in their works that imply infinite regress<sup>17</sup>. An example for the nesting or embedding of various levels of reality in a text, which might go on ad infinitum, is provided by what Brian McHale denominates as “Chinese-box worlds” (McHale 1987: 112-130). This concept of postmodernism can be closely linked to the concept of intertextuality, as Manfred Pfister quite adequately notes:

Quoting a quotation or raising a quotation to the second power is a device which in itself foregrounds intertextuality and substantiates the poststructuralist view, according to which each text refers to pre-texts and those in turn refer to others and so on ad infinitum. (Pfister 217).

Not only new intertextual strategies and devices have been developed during the past decades, but also particular functions, which distinguish contemporary intertextual literature from that of earlier periods.

Canonical writers such as Pope or Fielding were certain of the fact that the imitation of other literary works in a text would stabilize its imitation of nature. Furthermore, as for instance in the Augustan age, intertextuality also had the function to legitimize a literary text. Fielding aimed at convincing his readers that his novel belonged to a legitimate genre when he imitated the epic in *Joseph*

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Broich 1997.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Broich 1992.

*Andrews*. Thus, the functions of intertextual relations were basically constructive. Fielding deconstructed Richardson's notion of virtue, however, when generating his own concept of virtue; as benevolence, he managed to reinforce it by intertextually echoing the Bible as well as various philosophical trends. In general, postmodern intertextuality has a deconstructive function, whereas a deconstructive intention in some cases certainly serves critical or even political reasons, which also becomes obvious in chapters 5-7, when analyzing the four major novels of this thesis. Especially in contemporary works, the trend to expose dominant discourses, genres and literary conventions as bourgeois, male-dominated, logocentric, etc. becomes obvious, as pointed out by Linda Hutcheon in *The Politics of Postmodernism*<sup>18</sup>. A similar function can be detected in Bakhtin's concept of dialogicity<sup>19</sup>, from which the concept of intertextuality has actually been derived. A multitude of contemporary authors relish the play with different genre conventions at the same time and concurrently make them dismantle each other. They frequently write to a readership that is delighted to engage in such highly sophisticated works of arts. This "literature of pla(y)giarism" (Federmann 12) prides itself solely on its ludic function and repudiates all sorts of political or moral purposes whatsoever.<sup>20</sup>

Another function of intertextuality, characteristic of contemporary literature, is conceived in the way that characters in a postmodern context sometimes per se do not reside in a world that depicts a mimetic imitation of our own world, but in textual worlds which imitate other literary works. Contemporary characters suddenly find themselves transported into a totally different textual world and time, such as for instance Tom Stoppard's Ros and Guil in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* (1967). They first exist in a Beckettian world and are unexpectedly transported into Shakespeare's World of Hamlet. Similarly, the two theater critics in Stoppard's *The Real Inspector Hound* (1986) suddenly find themselves in a thriller based on Agatha Christie's *The Mousetrap* (2000). A feeling of destabilization of reality is perceivable when a character is no longer sure to which world he belongs in. In general, it seems easier to establish a distinction between postmodernist concepts of intertextuality and intertextuality such as for

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Hutcheon 1989.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Bakhtin 1981.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Broich 1997.

instance in literary works from the Augustan Age. However, it proves much more difficult to distinguish between intertextual links in postmodernist and modernist literature, which is possibly also concerned with the difficulty of establishing a general distinction between these periods.<sup>21</sup>

Critics have suggested that modernist authors who engage in intertextuality often favor canonical and normative works, whereas postmodernist writers tend to constitute their intertextual relations on the basis of widely diverging works, ranging from the classics to pop (Pfister 218). However, Broich does not see a possibility to sustain this distinction<sup>22</sup>.

In most of Stoppard's plays Shakespeare's dramas are just as privileged as pre-texts as was the *Odyssey* in Joyce's *Ulysses*, and in T.S. Eliot's *The Hollow Men* intertextual references to Dante's *Divine Comedy* [...] stand side by side with references to popular [...] and children's songs (Broich 254).

Furthermore, when T.S. Eliot calls for a continual extinction of the author and draws a comparison between writers composing a new poem from various intertextual parts to platinum as a catalyst inducing different gases to interact, similarities can be found in Roland Barthes' ideas of the death of the author and literary works as echo chambers<sup>23</sup>. Hence, Broich concludes that a general distinction between one modernist and one postmodernist work is just as much an oversimplification as differentiating between a modernist and a postmodernist form of intertextual texts. Broich points out the fact that in modernist literary works, such as works by Virginia Woolf, Ernest Hemingway or Thomas Mann, intertextuality seems to have quite different characteristics than in works by Thomas Pynchon or Tom Stoppard, whereas the intertextual links in the poetry of Ezra Pound, Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* or T.S. Eliot's early poetry are quite similar to that of contemporary literature<sup>24</sup>. Therefore, intertextuality in postmodernism can at best be considered as

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Broich 1997.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. ebenda.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Eliot 1920.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Broich 1997.

a radicalization of that employed in one of the various modernisms, a plural which is much more adequate for the description of early twentieth-century literature than the assumption of one single modernism (Broich 254).

### **3. Traumatization of a country as a gateway for rewriting fiction**

“[...] every South African has to some extent or other been traumatized. We are a wounded people [...]. We all stand in need of healing”<sup>25</sup>.

Between 1948 and 1990 Apartheid was enforced by the National Party government in South Africa. In this system of legal racial segregation, minority rule by white people was sustained whereas the right of the blacks, who formed the majority, was curtailed.<sup>26</sup> A result of white colonization, new legislation of apartheid segregated inhabitants into racial groups. Residential areas were segregated, often by means of forced removals, and many people were forced into exile. Black people were deprived of their citizenship, becoming citizens of one of the self-governing homelands, which usually were situated on infertile soil. South Africa's collective trauma stems from years of oppression by the Apartheid regime. Ethnic struggles and racist actions are deeply rooted in the country's history. However, traumatization is not only attributed to the implementation of apartheid per se. The years of oppression were responsible for a visceral chain reaction of inhumanities and violence that became entrenched in a variety of traumatic ways. Considering the situation in the homelands and townships, the segregation of blacks and whites led to unbearable standards of living for the black population and people of color. All the chicanes and inhumanities implemented by the National Party made life unbearable. The frustration over the situation inter alia manifested itself in the living conditions in the hometowns, which resulted, among other atrocities, in the frequent occurrence of rape, a central issue in the four novels to be

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Opening Address to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 16 Dec., 1995. <http://www.doj.gov.za/trc/pr/1995/p951216a.htm>.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South\\_Africa\\_under\\_apartheid](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Africa_under_apartheid)

analyzed in this thesis. Houses scrambled with people and patriarchic power structures, characterized by total subjugation of the female under male dominance, were the norm. Thus, it becomes evident that, apart from the implementation of apartheid, a great variety of factors triggered the traumatization of the nation. While black people were traumatized by all the injustices that happened to them during apartheid, some of the whites disapproved of the regime and therefore suffered traumatic consequences based on guilt. Colored people in turn were displaced and as a result often suffered from severe identity crises.

The globality of our cultures calls for authors to model their texts on precursor works. Due to similar vicious circles of tumultuous events as consequences of bad leaderships or other ontological and social ills around which human existence revolves, there exist connections and configurations between text and authors within the literary genre. Just as any other kind of art, literature depends on the socio-cultural and political realities of the current milieu, and, therefore, the written and oral texts for its impetus. It does not move within a vacuum<sup>27</sup>.

The reading of a postcolonial novel does not necessarily deal with a “structure”, a “model” or some poetic law, but unveils “fragments, views from other texts, codes which disappear and mysteriously re-appear” (Oyegoke 158). Kehinde stresses the fact that with intertextuality the postcolonial author steadily participates in his nation’s decolonization process, in fact in a literary and political way<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. Kehinde 2003 (Nordic Journal of African Studies 12(3)).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. ebenda.

## 4. The obsessive compulsive imagination

### 4.1. Freud, Repetition Compulsion and Writing Trauma

*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) was Freud's first attempt to understand what he called *repetition compulsion*. The active pursuit of "unpleasure" urged Freud to reluctantly return to what he referred to as "the dark and dismal subject of traumatic neurosis" (1920a: 283).

His dynamic model of the psyche could apparently not account for the symptoms of war neurosis in soldiers, which was typically marked by an obsessive return in waking thoughts and nightmares, to the pain and terror of *Repetition Compulsion* that can be defined as a pattern in which persons mentally repeat actions causing difficulty or traumatic distress in earlier life over and over again. Representing a key component in Sigmund Freud's understanding of mental life, these psychological patterns, in which people endlessly have to face the repercussions of traumatic incidents or its circumstances, also include putting oneself in situations of a "re-living" of the former distressing events or situations in which the incident is likely to happen anew. Such reenactments also appear in the form of dreams in which the emotions and memories of past events are repeated, and might even appear in the form of hallucinations.<sup>29</sup>

The psyche insistently returns to incidents of pain and unpleasure because, by restaging the traumatic incident over and over again, it aims at a belated processing of the unassimilable material and masters the trauma retroactively. Luckhurst (2008) mentions that, in a lucid metaphor, Freud envisaged the mind as a single cell with an outer membrane, that filters material from the outside world, repelling toxins, processing nutrients, and retaining the integrity of its borders, just like the conscious mind did. "A traumatic event is something unprecedented that blasts open the membrane and floods the cell with foreign

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. Luckhurst 2008.

matter, leaving the cell overwhelmed and trying to repair the damage” (Luckhurst 2008: 9). Freud said “we describe as “traumatic” any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield” (1920a: 301).

Such an event as an external trauma is bound to provoke a disturbance on a large scale in the functioning of the organism’s energy and to set in motion every possible defence measure. At the same time [...] there is no longer any possibility of preventing the mental apparatus from being flooded with large amounts of stimulus, and another problem arises instead – the problem of mastering the amounts of stimulus which have broken in and of binding them, in the psychical sense, so that they can be disposed of. (Freud 1920a: 301).

Freud emphasizes the fact that the traumatized patient does not actively remember anything of the distressing events, but has repressed it and forgotten and acts out the event anew, without actually knowing that he is repeating it.

In his essay *Beyond the pleasure principle* (1920) he describes various forms of repetitive behavior: The first one discusses the way in which traumatic neurotic dreams typically take the patient repeatedly back to the traumatic situation, rather than providing him with glimpses of his healthy past. The second aspect stems from a children’s play in which Freud reports observing a child throwing away his favorite toy, only to become upset at its loss, take the toy back and reenact the action all over again. Freud’s theory explains this behavior as an attempt to master the sensation of loss in allowing his mother to leave him without any protest. Noted in 1914, Freud’s third point discusses the fact that a patient who deals with his repressed past is compelled to reiterate the repressed incidents and sensations as a contemporary experience instead of actually remembering it as experiences belonging to the past. The so-called “destiny neurosis” manifests itself in the lives of many men and women as an essential character trait that remains steadily the same and is bound to express itself repeatedly in the same experiences.<sup>30</sup> To Freud such actions seemed to “justify the hypothesis of a compulsion to repeat – something that seems more primitive, more elementary, more instinctual than the pleasure principle which it

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Repetition\\_compulsion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Repetition_compulsion)

overrides” (Freud, *Beyond*, 294).

Additionally, Freud has considered a multitude of more purely psychological pronouncements for the phenomenon of *Repetition Compulsion* he had scientifically observed. He notes traumatic repetitions can also be considered as a result of an effort to retrospectively cope with the arduously difficult situation that caused the original trauma. Therefore, a child’s play could be regarded as an attempt to turn from a passive into an active position. The child manages to take on the active part by repeating a situation in which it had formerly occupied only the passive part.<sup>31</sup> Concurrently, traumatic repetitions can be regarded as “unpleasure” for one system [the ego] and simultaneous satisfaction for the other [the id]<sup>32</sup>.

When the psychological concept of *Repetition Compulsion* passed into the psychoanalytic mainstream, Otto Fenichel emphasized two types of neurotic reiteration<sup>33</sup>. In *Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis* (1942), he mentions repetitions of traumatic incidents for the purpose of gaining a belated mastery. However, the same patterns become evident in repetitive symptoms of traumatic neurotics, dreams and in a multitude of conformable actions of people who repeat distressing experiences frequently before these experiences are actually mastered. On the other hand Fenichel stresses repetitions with the motivation of finding an outlet<sup>34</sup>. In this case the drive of the repressed impetus to gain gratification appears with a renewal of the primary defence<sup>35</sup>: “the anxiety that first brought about the repression is mobilized again and creates, together with the repetition of the impulse, a repetition of anti-instinctual measures” (Fenichel 542).

Erik Erikson describes destiny neurosis as a way people react when they repeat the same mistakes, meaning the individual unconsciously prepares for modifications of an original theme which he has not yet managed to live with or overcome<sup>36</sup>. Object relation theory on the other hand focuses on the revelation of a purpose in the newer conception of repetition compulsion: “[...] unconscious

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Repetition\\_compulsion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Repetition_compulsion))

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Freud 1914.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Fenichel 1942.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. ebenda.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Repetition\\_compulsion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Repetition_compulsion))

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Erikson 1973.



hope may be found in repetition compulsion, when unresolved conflicts continue to generate attempts at solutions which do not really work... [until] a genuine solution is found" (Casement 118).<sup>37</sup>

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud's understanding of the notion on trauma is based on a system of fortification. He describes trauma as an extensive breach in the defensive wall encompassing the psyche. The subject's defenses are weak if the person has not developed a layer of anxiety prior to an unexpected event or a shock. The repetition-compulsion aims at accomplishing a retrospective mastery over the stimulus that has breached the defenses by building up anxiety that was previously absent. By steadily returning to the traumatic incident, the individual can master the amounts of stimuli which haven't broken through by tying them together and concurrently constructing a protective shield against trauma after the incident<sup>38</sup>.

The compulsion to repeat was a rearguard action to come to terms with the traumatic impact, Freud reverting to the original sense of trauma as a harmful intrusion from outside. Observed in children, who staged the distressing absence and return of the mother in obsessive games, Freud assumed "that children repeat unpleasurable experiences for the additional reason that they can master a powerful impression far more thoroughly by being active than they could by merely experiencing it passively" (Freud 1920a: 307).

The strategy of repetition is one of the key literary devices in trauma fiction. It can act at the levels of plot, language or imagery. Novelists evoke the Freudian notion of the repetition-compulsion in returning to canonical texts. Their characters are subject to the plots of someone else's story. Novelists frequently revise canonical texts, however, due to reading them against the grain, they provide new perspectives on them. There is an overlap between trauma fiction and postcolonial fiction in the use of intertextuality to grant formerly repressed voices the right to tell their own stories.

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Repetition\\_compulsion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Repetition_compulsion)

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Freud 1991.

Reiteration mimics the effects of trauma, since it suggests the persistent return of the event and disruption of narrative progression and chronology. Many writers, including Achmat Dangor, André Brink and Ken Barris, repeat quotes, key episodes, or other elements from one narrative to another, suggesting an underlying trauma. This technique implicitly critiques the notion of narrative as cathartic or therapeutic. Even apparently innocuous daily incidents and objects can be drawn into an atmosphere of trauma, as Freud's work on the uncanny reveals<sup>39</sup>. Through correspondence or repetition, the simplest incident can be endowed with a symbolic aura.<sup>40</sup>

"Repetition is inherently ambivalent, suspended between trauma and catharsis. In its negative aspect, repetition replays the past as if it was fully present and remains caught within trauma's paralyzing influence" (Whitehead 2004: 86). In this respect it corresponds to LaCapra's concept of "acting-out" and Freud's notion of melancholia, pathological replies to loss which aims at incorporating the other into the self as an act of conservation. However, repetition can also work towards memory and catharsis, relating to LaCapra's notion of "working-through" as well as Freud's concept of mourning. It acts as a placeholder for the discharging of emotion in the context of loss and the subsequent reformulation of past events. Drawing on the concept of "working-through" in order to describe the role of literary texts in representing trauma, LaCapra

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<sup>39</sup>The Uncanny (1919) is a study of an aesthetic sensation and a literary genre. It forms part of a series of essays in which Freud discusses the trauma of war, commencing with "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death" (1915) and "On Transience" (1916), continuing into "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917) and "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (1920). The uncanny arose as a significant aesthetic and psychoanalytic response to the trauma of war. Freud's essay, written contemporaneously with Beyond the Pleasure Principle, nevertheless precipitated the uncanny into the more disturbing realm of the death drive. For Freud, the uncanny corresponds to a specific class of the frightening, which arouses horror and dread in us because it leads back to what is long familiar and known. Whether this uncanny was itself originally frightening is a matter of indifference. It has become disturbing because it has long been alienated from the conscious mind through a process of suppression. Everything that is uncanny fulfils this condition: it constitutes something that is secretly familiar, which has been repressed and then returned from this state. The uncanny can be considered as a source of dread since it acts as a process of involuntary repetition and imposes upon us the idea of something inescapable and fateful. The uncanny is evocative of our own unconscious and internal compulsion to repeat which represented by the death drive, the drive towards the end<sup>39</sup>. "Arising from the transformation of something homely into something decidedly not so, the uncanny arouses in us the dual responses of spatial fear leading to paralysis of movement, and temporal fear leading to historical amnesia" (Whitehead 2004: 128). Freud argues that in literature, the uncanny is aroused through doublings and repetitions. The constant repetition of the same thing – the recurrence of the same character traits or the same features, the same names, numbers or dates – evokes in us a strong sense of the fateful or demonic.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Whitehead 2004.

argues that writing is an inherently curative process and necessarily implies some distance from trauma. LaCapra's focus on writing as cure echoes Freud's notion in *Studies on Hysteria* (1895) that "*each individual hysterical symptom immediately and permanently disappeared [...] when the patient had described that event in the greatest possible detail and had put the affect into words*" (Freud and Breuer, 1991, III: 57; italics in original). Moreover, LaCapra's concept draws on Pierre Janet's distinction between "traumatic memory" and "narrative memory" (1919-25). While traumatic memory is inflexible and characterized by a reappearance of the past in a mode of precise repetition, narrative memory is capable of improvising on past events so the account of an incident varies from telling to telling. For Janet, the transformation of traumatic memory into narrative memory can be compared to the process of recovery from trauma.<sup>41</sup>

If intertextuality is depicted in a sustained manner in a narrative, the emerging story will already be familiar to the reader from the precursor version the author draws on. The strong impression arises that a character in the story is reiterating the actions of a previously encountered plot, that the reader is already familiar with the end, and that the fate and the decisions of the character are predestined from the outset<sup>42</sup>. The motif of an inevitable fate or trajectory, which the author can produce through rewriting and intertextuality, corresponds to Freud's elaboration of the repetition-compulsion in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*<sup>43</sup>. Freud is intrigued with the pattern of suffering that characterizes the fates of certain individuals, so that traumatic incidents seem to repeat themselves for those who have already overcome them. These reiterations are remarkable, because they do not seem to be motivated by the individual, but seem to be the result of possession by nature.<sup>44</sup>

Working on LaCapra and Pierre Janet's principle with the assumption that South Africa's authors revise the novels of their contemporary writers so often in order to transform traumatic memory into narrative memory and to consequently recover from trauma, this indirectly indicates a traumatization and

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. LaCapra 2001.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Whitehead 2004.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Freud 1991, XI.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Whitehead 2004.

a neurosis on part of the authors themselves. This neurosis could in turn be considered as a major reason for the high amount of repetition compulsions that have beset South Africa's fiction.

## 4.2. Trauma and Narrative

The rise of trauma fiction in recent years is inseparable from the turn to memory in historical and literary studies. Trauma fiction is inextricably linked to three interrelated contexts: Postmodernism, Post-colonialism and postwar consciousness. At first glance, postmodernism seems to work against the stress on memory and history, advancing a "notion of an amnesiac culture based on images and simulations, and suggests that the role of memory has been superseded in the present time"<sup>45</sup>. However, Roger Luckhurst alludes to the fact that postmodernism's emphasis paradoxically intersects with the work of contemporary memory theorists<sup>46</sup>. Pierre Nora (1990) points out that our present-day "era of commemoration" also features an unprecedented degree of forgetfulness. "We speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left" (7). Likewise, Andreas Huyssen (2000) observes that "[m]nemonic fever" is paradoxically attributable to "the virus of amnesia that at times threatens to consume memory itself"(7). Memory and forgetting do not stand in opposition to each other, but are part of the same process. An urgent need to consciously develop meaningful relations with the past is noticeable in the face of mounting amnesia. Emerging out of postmodernist fiction, Trauma fiction is part of this memory project. It seeks to convey the distorting and damaging impact of the traumatic incident and brings conventional narrative techniques to their limit. Postcolonial fiction has often aimed at replacing the collective and public narrative of history with a private and interior act of memory. Memory opposes the ways in which history elides the heterogeneous. Postcolonial novelists strive at rescuing overlooked histories and bring marginalized stories to public

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<sup>45</sup> Cf. Whitehead 2004.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Luckhurst 2008.

consciousness<sup>47</sup>. Trauma Fiction overlaps with Postcolonial novels in its concern with the acknowledgement of the repressed and denied, and the recovery of memory.

The requirement for formal disturbance in trauma novels is often overdetermined by ethical or political imperatives. Robert Eaglestone suggests that Holocaust testimony is marked by temporal disorder, interruptions, refusal of simple readerly identification, disjunct movements in style, disarming play with narrative framing, tense, focalization or discourse, as well as a resistance to closure that is demonstrated in compulsive telling and retelling.<sup>48</sup> Similar formal characteristics can be attributed to the South African Trauma novel, particularly the latter mentioned.

Cathy Caruth (1991) recalls that trauma was inherently a “paradoxical experience” (417). An event might be referred to as traumatic to the extent that it overwhelmed the psychic defenses and normal processes of registering memory traces. Traumatic events are somehow discharged straight into the psyche, and are not subject to the distortions of subjective memory: trauma is “a symptom of history” (3).

Due to this unusual memory registration, it is possible that the most traumatic experiences do not appear in conscious memory. “Traumatic experience”, as Caruth claims, suggests a certain paradox: that the most direct aspect of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it” (91-2). Paradoxes intensify around this critical instant of a defining yet unknown or undefined memory seared in the mind. Under the sign of trauma, “a history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence”, “its truth is bound up with its crisis of truth” (7). Luckhurst (2008) refers to the strange temporality of traumatic memory, which is another Freudian paradox: an event can only be comprehended as traumatic after the fact, through the symptoms and flashbacks and the delayed reactions at understanding what these signs of disturbance create. The “peculiar, temporal structure, the belatedness of trauma” is another aporia: “since the traumatic event is not experienced as it occurs, it is fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. Whitehead 2004.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Eaglestone 2004.

time” (Caruth 1991a: 7). Luckhurst (2008) suggests that for Caruth trauma seems to depict a crisis of representation, of history and truth, and of narrative time. He argues that, repeatedly, there is the claim that psychoanalysis and literature are particular privileged forms of writing that can attend to these perplexing paradoxes of traumatic events.

Lyotard explicitly evoked Freud’s notion of the paradoxically registered yet unregistered trauma, depicting modernity as something persistently haunted by what it had violently forgotten or repressed in the symptom that “would signal itself even in the present as a spectre” (1990: 11).

What McLeod calls “the therapeutic narration of trauma” (1997: 151) is the underlying premise for a lot of work done in the field, including the works of J.M. Coetzee, Achmat Dangor, André Brink, and Ken Barris. Luckhurst summarizes this as: “where trauma was, there narration shall be” (82). Informed by her experience of rape and violent assault, Susan Brison notes that narrative reanimates the fixed traumatic intrusion, reassigning agency:

Narrative memory is not passively endured; rather, it is an act on the part of the narrator, a speech act that defuses traumatic memory, giving shape and a temporal order to the events recalled, establishing more control over their recalling, and helping the survivor to remake a self (1999: 40).

In *The Trauma Question* (2008), Luckhurst argues that our culture is saturated with stories that see trauma not as a blockage but a positive spur to narrative.

Beyond post-structuralist trauma theory and its trauma canon, a wide diversity of high, middle and low cultural forms have provided a repertoire of compelling ways to articulate that apparently paradoxical thing, the trauma narrative. These work from a different aspect of the same problem: if trauma is a crisis in representation, then this generates narrative possibility just as much as impossibility, a compulsive outpouring of attempts to formulate narrative knowledge (83).

Luckhurst not only examines texts where trauma brings narrative to a halt, but where trauma’s stalling actively educes the production of narrative. To do this, he outlines two alternative ways of thinking about cultural narrative in relation to trauma. The first one discusses some archaic resources from structuralism and

formalism to stress the mechanics of trauma's narrative spur. The second discusses a more phenomenological view of what shape aesthetic narrative brings to human experience.

Boris Tomashevsky's essay "Thematics" can be considered a key document of the Russian Formalist School, and has provided an impressive tool-kit of terms for subsequent narrative analysis. He distinguished story, the chronological and causal sequence of events, from plot, the actual order in which incidents are presented in a narrative<sup>49</sup>. Plot coheres because the reader is constantly belatedly sorting and re-sorting narrative units or motifs into sequential, meaningful stories. The time of the narrative cannot be identical with the time of the narrated. Luckhurst notes that one of the definitions of aesthetic narrative is the foregrounding of this anachronic disjointedness<sup>50</sup>.

The reader sometimes has to retrospectively revise the whole plot, because a lost plot twist recasts the significance of every motif. Such narratives with "regressive endings" are usually the ones we feel like reading again, although this is only one of the more severe forms of narrative anachrony. Tomashevsky saw narrative as commencing in a stasis, upset by some sort of "exciting force" that drives plot dynamically forward towards an eventual recovery of stasis.<sup>51</sup> Peter Brooks has reformed this formalism as an explicitly traumatic theory of narrative and borrowed the model of trauma Freud put forward in his speculative work *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in which protective filters are overwhelmed by a traumatic incident evoking unbound excitations into the psychic system. The constraint to relive, dream or relate the traumatic event over and over again, the compulsion to repeat, can be seen as an attempt to bind this energy, adapt it, and return the psyche to a state of quiescence once again<sup>52</sup>. Brooks maps this pattern onto Tomashevsky's abstraction of plot as an exciting force that invades, disturbs, but ultimately returns to stasis, making narrative a working through of traumatic disruption.<sup>53</sup> Brooks argues that plot starts when quiescence is stimulated into a "state of narratability" (291); its trajectory is intended to return again to "the quiescence of the non-narratable"

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. Tomashevsky 1965.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Luckhurst 2008.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Tomashevsky 1965.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Freud 1920a.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Brooks 1977.

(296). Intermediately, this disruption is worked into repeated motifs that generate significant plot: “Textual energy, all that is aroused into expectancy and possibility in a text [...] can become useable by plot only when it has been bound or formalized” (Brooks 1977: 290). “Reading is driven by the desire for the end, for it is only here that the anachronic trauma of plot can be fully assimilated and bound up in a story” (Luckhurst 2008: 84).

In *Reading for the Plot* (1984) Peter Brooks has analyzed *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as a pattern for the processes and workings of narrative plots. He amplifies Derrida’s infernal vision of movement without progress, claiming that in narrative plots a tension exists between the impulsion or the drive towards the close, and a deferral or detour which delays the arrival at that end. Repetition is essential for Brooke’s understanding of a narrative plot, for it functions both to defer the end, thereby developing a pleasant tension on the part of the reader, and to connect the various elements of the text, so the plot acts as a coherent narrative.

*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is discussed by Brooks in its intertextual correspondence to narrative fiction and the processes of plotting. In the essay he discerns Freud’s own masterplot, a model or pattern of how life proceeds from the outset to the end and how each individual life reiterates the masterplot in its own way. The first problem that Freud faces in this context is the evidence of a “beyond” which does not properly fit into the pleasure principle. This is illustrated in the dreams of patients suffering from the traumatic neuroses of war: the dreams seem to haunt them. They return to the moment of trauma, to relive its pain in apparent opposition of the wish-fulfillment theory of dreams. According to Brooks, this “beyond”, which initiates *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, also initiates narrative fiction. Whitehead (2004) concludes that narrative is always in a state of repetition. In Brook’s terms, it is “a going over again of a ground already covered [...], as the detective retraces the tracks of the criminal” (97).

In the context of Freud’s theorization of the death instinct, Brook’s understanding of narrative plot relies on a tension between the impulsion to



reach the end and a contrary process of delay or postponement<sup>54</sup>. We tend to think of instincts as a drive towards change; however, Freud suggests that they tend to portray a manifestation of conservatism.

The organism has no desire to change if the environmental conditions remained stable, it would constantly repeat the same course of life. Modifications in behavior are the result of external stimuli and they are stored by the organism for further repetition (Whitehead 124).

Freud presents an evolutionary image of the organism in which outer influences urge living substance “ to diverge ever more widely from its original course of life and to make ever more complicated *détours* before reaching its aim of death” (Freud, 1991, XI: 311). Whitehead (2004) argues that if Freud’s concept is superimposed on fictional plots, it becomes obvious that what operates in the text by means of repetition is the death instinct, the drive towards the close. In this respect, this drive towards a close the authors aim at, could be understood as the neurotic background those writers who frequently engage in rewriting trauma novels are characterized with. The drive toward the close could be understood as corresponding to an end of suffering, an end of traumatization. The authors apparently strive to portray a final solution on how come to terms with the past.

However, reiteration also postpones or delays approaching the end, so that the creation of a narrative represents an ever more complicated divergence or detour. Brooks (1984) observes that the pleasure of reading inheres in exactly such narrative wandering, an enjoyment which is located in and derives from postponement:

The desire of the text (the desire of reading) is hence desire for the end, but desire for the end reached only through the at least minimally complicated detour, the international deviance, in tension, which is the plot of narrative (104).

In his discussion of trauma, Freud also suggests an alternative function of repetition. In the dreams of neurotics, the repetition of traumatic incidents has

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<sup>54</sup> Cf. Brooks 1984.

the function of retrospectively striving to master the flood of stimuli that has burst through the subject's defenses.

Repetition performs as mastery or binding of mobile energy through developing that anxiety which was previously lacking – a lack which permitted the breach in the defences to occur and thus caused the traumatic neurosis. Repetition works as a process of binding which seeks to create a constant state of energy and which will permit the emergence of mastery and the restored dominance of the pleasure principle (Whitehead 2004: 125)

Whitehead further argues that repetition in literature may act as an adhesive, enabling the reader to relate one textual moment to another in terms of substitution or similarity and therefore make sense of the text. Brooks suggests that literary binding depicts “a binding of textual energies that allows them to be mastered by putting them into serviceable form, usable “bundles”, within the energetic economy of the narrative” (1984: 101).

Only once textual energy has been formalized or bound can it be plotted in a process that leads to significant discharge. “Binding” in a literary text therefore corresponds to those formalizations which enables us to recognize similarity within difference and to relate various textual moments or elements<sup>55</sup>.

“For Freud, the binding of stray energies works towards a state of constancy and the mastery of the stimulus which has broken through the subject's defences” (Whitehead 126). This binding of stray energies also seems to be significant in the context of the contemporary South African novel and of finding way of coming to terms with the past. Whitehead's notion on literary repetition as a form of binding and relating textual moments to each other in order to make sense of the text can be seen as corresponding to South Africa's authors aiming at understanding the traumatic incidents that happened and coming to terms with their nation's past.

Moreover, if we assume that South Africa's writers are traumatized, the reasons for their “subscription” to South Africa's “trauma culture” can also be attributed to what Freud termed “the death drive”, as mentioned above. So, among other reasons, South African writers seem to pick up the novels of their contemporary

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<sup>55</sup> Cf. Whitehead 2004.

authors not only to make sense of the textual elements and hence the trauma they all suffer from. They also strive towards an end thereof. The partly neurotic rewriting in the context of South Africa's novel seems to correspond significantly to the authors' aim of striving towards an end. An "individually appropriate" end of the plot they revise for each of the writers, which in turn can be mapped onto an end of suffering.

### 4.3. Trauma Fiction and Intertextuality

Trauma Fiction makes a crucial contribution to reconsidering the ethics of historical representation in allowing the psychologically and politically repressed to surface to consciousness.

Contemporary fiction is obsessed with the presentation of war. Crises and their effects are compulsively reworked by various authors. Sue Vices observes that the characteristics of trauma fiction do not drastically differ to that of other novels. However, because of the subject matter, these standard attributes are "brought to their limit, taken literally, defamiliarized or used self-consciously" (Vice 4).

Trauma fiction is characterized by an intensification of conventional narrative methods and modes. A number of key stylistic features tend to recur in these narratives, among them repetition and intertextual references. The literary device of intertextuality is spearheaded in many works of trauma fiction. In *Image-Music-Text* (1977), Roland Barthes delineates the multiplicity of the text, which contains a momentary convergence of a variety of intertexts: "citations, references, echoes, cultural languages [...] antecedent or contemporary" (160). This description of intertextuality implicitly bands together with the act of memory<sup>56</sup>. Tim Woods and Peter Middleton (2000) observe that the relation of a narrative to its intertexts resonates with the way "traces of the past emerge in the present as textual echoes, determinations and directions" (84). Intertexts

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. Whitehead 2004.

can suggest the surfacing to consciousness of repressed or forgotten memories.

In the context of trauma fiction, Kehinde (2003) comments on the fact that Intertextuality can be seen as an efficient postcolonial weapon to repudiate the assertion made on behalf of canonical literature. He argues that the concept of intertextuality is to be seen in close connection with the examination of issues of hybridity and (cultural) diversity in literary works. Historical events and their consequences, such as colonialism and slavery, have led to an experience of cultural polyphony and polyvalence on part of the African people. For the most part, African people feel ties to more than one culture, namely their original one, which they acquire through oral and local traditions and customs, as well as the culture of the colonizer, which has been imposed on them by means of a euro-western schooling system, religion, mass media, etc.<sup>57</sup>

Whitehead (2004) claims that intertextuality can also evoke literary precedence - a precedent bound to influence or even threaten the actions of a character in the present. The characters seem bound to replay past events and repeat the downfall of others, suggesting that they are no longer in control of their actions. Whitehead mentions *The Nature of Blood*, in which Caryl Phillips's Othello echoes Shakespeare's eponymous hero in going to Cyprus with his new wife. Suspension is raised on part of the reader, since he is the one left to determine whether the character will repeat the tragic mistakes of his predecessor or not. Similarly, in *Another World* Barker's intertextual references to Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* imply that Miranda is bound to repeat the actions of James's governess, suffocating the boy she is supposed to take care of. However, Miranda is prevented from murdering the boy through Nick's intervention, and the haunting ghosts of the past are exorcized<sup>58</sup>.

Whitehead (2004) argues that in the context of trauma fiction, intertextuality can achieve powerful effects through repetition. It can also embark on a productive critical dialogue with canonical works making new meanings possible. John McLeod observes about the potential for an intertextual work to depart from it

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<sup>57</sup> Cf. Kehinde 2003.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Whitehead 2004.

source text: “A re-writing take the source-text as a point of inspiration and departure, but its meanings are not fully determined by it” (168). By departing from the source narrative, intertextual novels can imply that the past is not necessarily always fated to reiterate itself, but alternative futures can be suggested and played out. Thus, just like trauma, intertextuality is caught in an undecidable and curious wavering between departure and return. Through a return to the source text, the intertextual novelist can enact an attempt to grasp what was not fully realized in the first case, thereby passing beyond or departing from it. Trauma fiction overlaps with postcolonial fiction in the author’s resistance or challenge to the representations of oppressed or marginalized cultures and individuals in the source text. Canonical works have frequently (often unintentionally) constructed racist or stereotyped portrayals of colonized cultures. The novelist’s return to the source bears the potential to grasp a latent aspect of the text, concurrently departing from it into an alternative narrative construct.<sup>59</sup>

Whitehead (2004) argues that intertextual resistance can also take the form of crucial dialogue with the author of the source text. In *The Nature of Blood*, Phillips withstands the racism implicit in Shakespeare’s portrayal of *Othello* and depicts that the racist mindsets of the Venetians shape Othello’s fate.

The author can challenge the source text by repossessing the voices of characters who have previously been marginalized, repressed and traumatized. In psychoanalysis, that which is suppressed will disturbingly and inescapably return to haunt the present.

The uncanny or unheimlich experience occurs when that which has been marginalized or forgotten appears before us. The grand narratives of history, which are frequently constructed on the basis of exclusion, are haunted by those who have been written out or erased. (Whitehead 2004: 91)

McLeod observes: “At the limits of conventional knowledge, these figures return as disruptive “unhomely” presences that cannot be articulated through existing patterns of representation” (2000: 220). These uncanny presences are able to

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<sup>59</sup> Cf. Whitehead 2004.

disrupt the binary logic which colonialist, nationalist and patriarchal texts rely on. Rewriting a novel can powerfully interrupt received modes of thinking and gives voice to these unrealized presences. Therefore, intertextual works, including the contemporary South African Trauma novel, have the potential to assume responsibility for those who were previously unrepresented. The repressed voices articulate their own tales and witness to their former cultural and historical exclusion<sup>60</sup>.

Intertextuality is profoundly disruptive with regard to temporality, as Judie Newman observes of its disjunctions: “intertextuality is achronological and anachronistic, inviting us to consider (in David Lodge’s phrase) the influence of T.S. Eliot on Shakespeare” (1995: 6). Newman alludes to the fact that such atemporality is inevitable to the postcolonial endeavor of disrupting the grand narratives of history, which rely on chronological sequence and temporal order. Temporal disruption also resonates with the symptomatology of trauma, as Caruth observes, claiming trauma is defined by “the peculiar, temporal structure, the belatedness, of historical experience”, which is “fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another time” (1995: 8). Caruth’s phraseology is richly suggestive in the context of rewriting and intertextuality. Writing at another time and in another place, the intertextual novelist is able to make fully evident that which was only partially available to the novelist of the source text.

Whitehead observes that in the context of trauma fiction, the self-conscious literariness of intertextual writing can serve the following purpose: “Modern novelists who represent in their fiction traumatic events of which they have no first-hand or personal experience often feel an undeniable sense of discomfort and unease” (92). A self-conscious use of rewriting parts of a text can introduce reflexive distance into the narrative and, to use Newman’s words, problematise the relation of fiction to the world.

As a result of its high literariness, intertextual fiction emphasizes the role of the reader. “A re-writing often implicates the reader as an *active agent* in determining the meanings made possible by the dialogue between the source-

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<sup>60</sup> Cf. Whitehead 2004.

text and its re-writing” (McLeod 2000: 168). The intertextual novel circles around the gap between the source narrative and its rewriting, and relies heavily on the reader to complete the story and assemble the missing pieces.

Whitehead (2004) notes that Intertextuality does not necessarily refer to an external source of reference but can operate within a single body of work. She argues that a novelist’s fiction can act in dialogue with its own precedents, whether novels, poems, plays or critical essays. In trauma fiction, this can create a sense of eternal repetition across a writer’s work, as if the narrative is haunted by an inarticulate force, which can neither be overcome, named nor confronted.

Intertextuality and rewriting represent key literary devices in trauma fiction. Although the technique is widely used by postcolonial writers, Whitehead suggests that it assumes new significance and meaning in the context of trauma. If the re-writing closely follows the source narrative, intertextuality can be used to evoke the sense of a character in pursuit of an inevitable trajectory or is irrevocably caught in a repetition-compulsion. If the source narrative is considerably revised, it allows the novelist to highlight trauma as a mode of departure and opens up the possibility of progression or change. In stylistic terms, intertextuality enables the novelist to mirror the symptomatology of trauma by disrupting chronology or temporality, and to create a mouthpiece to repossess the voices of formerly silenced characters. Therefore, they are enabled to bear witness to their own exclusion. Intertextuality can mimic the dilemma of the novelist as placeholder for traumatic experience of which he or she has no first-hand experience, or it can emphasize the role of the reader who actively assembles meaning and fills up the gaps of the re-writing.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Cf. Whitehead 2004.

#### 4.4. South Africa's Fiction- a Space of Recurring Pain

After theorizing about Trauma Fiction and Intertextuality, Freud and Repetition Compulsion, this section will focus and address these issues in the context of South Africa and Apartheid.

What has post-apartheid writing proved to be if not a space of recurring pain and anguish, of trauma and continued suffering? In terms of thematic, stylistic, and symbolic preoccupations, South Africa's literature since 1994 has seemingly staggered from one crisis and cry of pain to another, from one inner wound to the next<sup>62</sup>. Despite the conspicuous hope related to South Africa's iconic literature of racial division turning into something new after Mandela's release in 1990, post-apartheid novels predominantly seem to feature an apparent reiteration of further sorrow, or in correlation to Freud, a repetition compulsion. The literature in South Africa has ostensibly followed the repetition compulsions that have beset the nation. Violence and pain proliferated by the causality of apartheid were followed by a crime wave, the problem of Zimbabwe, the national crises of the HIV epidemic, and the 2008 outbreaks of xenophobic assaults. In addition to these crises, the rights and freedoms promised by the achievement of democracy have not been fulfilled. The realm once dominated by apartheid's pain has been replaced by a new, albeit connected, set of physical and psychic wounds, hardly less severe in their effects.<sup>63</sup> This becomes evident in a range of South African novels, including J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*, Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit*, André Brink's *The Rights of Desire*, and Ken Barris's *What Kind of Child*.

Many post-conflict national cultures around the globe, including authors in the post-apartheid interregnum, seem to subscribe, consciously or not, to the contemporary trauma culture. This corresponds to the approach developed by Thomas Laqueur, Richard Rechtman, Didier Fassin and others, that trauma can

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<sup>62</sup>Cf. Boehmer 2012 (Unpublished Manuscript).

<sup>63</sup> Cf. ebenda.



be regarded as a psycho-socially constructed subject category signifying the psychic and also metaphorical trace of past suffering in the present<sup>64</sup>.

Some of the reasons why South African writers pick up their fellow writers' novels and rewrite or complete parts of them were discussed in the previous chapters. However, writers also appear to have supported the interest in the acts of memory and memorialization that the "trauma cultures" proliferate.

A rather embittered view could describe the writers as addicted to the compulsive contemplation of suffering, crisis management and the adrenalin flow. It appears they are not yet able to fully come to terms with apartheid's aftermaths, meaning the loss or lack of apartheid as something palpable to demonstrate against, like a fixed negative that is suddenly at a loss.<sup>65</sup> Post-2000 South Africa can be seen as locked into a non-Hegelian dialectic without an exit, which binds and rebinds authors into the expression of stress-effects as traces without referents. Dominick LaCapra defines the working of trauma as a dialectic, its "unfinished, unfinalizable interplay of forces involving a series of substitutions without origin or ultimate referent" lacking any prospect of redemption or resolution<sup>66</sup>.

Important shifts of focus were made after the fall of apartheid; however, the mode through which South Africa's writing was interpreted was still one of crisis; not just one crisis but a succession of cries of pain. Cultural and intellectual profit was to be gained from the overriding preoccupation with race that South Africa's field of writing was characterized by. Nevertheless, binary conceptual spectres of race have remained pervasive. After the fall of apartheid, South African novels were dominated by issues like the HIV crisis, the treatment of gay sexuality, conflicted environment and the processing of apartheid through trauma memory. The state of emergency of apartheid was substituted by new states of emergency. The represented subjects of literature may now be characterized by certain human rights and a conspicuous amount of freedom, however, little ground for sustainable hope was expressed in post-apartheid writing. As Ato Quayson (2003) states, it was as if the traumatic

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<sup>64</sup>Cf. Fassin &Rechman 2009, and Lacqueur 2010.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Boehmer 2012 (unpublished manuscript).

<sup>66</sup> Cf. LaCapra 1999.

suppressed had infected the “coming into being of the post-apartheid body politic” (95).

The critical subscription of South African writers to the context of trauma is in many ways tied to the contested phenomenon of the 1996 Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The national talking cure, characterized by witness testimonies and perpetrator confessions, contributed to a wide global discussion relating to the possibilities of working through trauma, overcoming crises and pain, and moving on. Its underlying premises derive from a pre-existing trauma discourse as well as Christian ideas of confession and redemption.

Leaving aside the question whether the South African TRC has been successful or not, it is a fact that its institution is the most official project of dealing with a traumatizing past. Regarding the outcome thereof opinions range from rejection and sharp criticism, to endorsing consent and enthusiastic confirmation. That the literature has ostensibly followed the repetition compulsions afflicting South Africa becomes particularly obvious in regards to references to the TRC in post-apartheid novels, including the novels dealt with in detail in this thesis. Within South Africa, the TRC caused a stir and developed into a contentious political debate not only on how a society manages to work through traumata by witnessing the unspeakable, but also with regards to material reparation or spiritual recompense. The debate was continued and resumed in some post-apartheid novels, including J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace* and Achmat Dangor’s *Bitter Fruit*.

The TRC ensured that after a long period of wounding and pain, the new South Africa was in a receptive state concerning the terminologies of crisis and trauma that had developed. Viewed through the prism of repeated crises, post-apartheid literature and its overall national mood is anxious and grim. The question arising is how to avoid an atmosphere of gloom in a field in which writers and critics have become hooked on the contemplation of pain and crisis with an aversion to move beyond trauma and its corresponding vocabularies of healing and mourning. Authors seem to express their awareness with regard to the emotional benefits these still bring. History has its repetition compulsions as well, and it seems as if literature moved in an interpretative two-step dance with

South Africa's history.<sup>67</sup> As Achille Mbembe, Frantz Fanon and others have argued, the Postcolony has emerged out of violence and death, which the attainment of a new polity has not been able to supersede in a straightforward way<sup>68</sup>. This definitely seems to apply to the new South Africa, at least in part.

There are strong possibilities that certain polities, emerging out of apartheid-polities and characterized by death-defiance, impunity, exacerbated by fatalism and insouciance about brutal negation, in some cases instigated or sharpened the crises already existing. Thinking of HIV, the crime wave and other problems the country had to deal with across the past decade, it might have been too optimistic to expect South African authors to delve into anything other than crises and pain. As if on command, further traumatic situations, seemingly scripted in an apt sense, were offering themselves to South Africa's writers, worried what they might write about now that apartheid and its repercussions, which had so forcefully shaped their writing, appeared to have ended.<sup>69</sup>

Even novels not directly pertaining to post-apartheid crises, but rather with an outbreak of new possibilities, betray a fascination for endangerment, death-defiance and risk-taking, as if the cultures and politics inviting pain had compulsively extended on from the time of apartheid. Examples include K. Sello Duiker's *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* (2001), or Damon Galgut's *The Good Doctor* (2003). Freud argues that trauma expresses itself through compulsive symptoms and reiterated dreams, and cannot be assimilated to memory. In this respect, South African literature, as a body of work, mirrors the symptomatology of trauma. It resembles somewhat of a traumatized subject prone to experiencing systemic disorders as reiterated negative affect. Viewing South African literature as a traumatized subject, it seems to be receptive to the repetition compulsions Freud first described; repetition compulsions that seemingly cannot be reformed into an innovative national imaginery.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Cf. Boehmer 2012 (unpublished manuscript).

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Fanon 1985; Mbembe 2001.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Boehmer 1994 & 2012 (unpublished manuscript)

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Boehmer 2012 (unpublished manuscript).

#### 4.4.1. Formal Repercussions and Crisis Reiteration as an Epistemological Form

As might be expected, the repetition compulsion of crisis-upon-crisis has recognizable, distinct formal repercussions in post-apartheid literature. Symbolization compulsions are characterized by a certain metaphoric insistence not supported by plot or character, which often corresponds to an inexpressible traumatic occurrence that can only be communicated through symbolic digressiveness<sup>71</sup>. In Duiker's *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* such symbolization compulsions are highly charged and palpable; various forms of sexual and social entrapment, followed by breakings free, are violently and vividly presented in it. Nevertheless, there are also many other formal effects and versions of repetition compulsion. Structural and semantic incoherence often is suggested, referring back and mimicking the symptoms of an underlying trauma. In particular, instances of hiatus have to be considered in the novels in question. Abrupt halt or suspended action especially occurs at the end of a narrative, however, not exclusively. A related effect is the recurring moment of fade-out, the ultimate seemingly meaningful and glancing impression that lacks a lasting implication or follow-through. These effects can also be seen to represent instances of traumatic digression or sublimation, a disaggregation of identity, indications of systemic disorder, and an inability to face the latent problem.<sup>72</sup>

The mentioned aspects as well as other important textual, structural and thematic dimensions in context of the South Africa's crisis reiteration in writing will be exemplified in the following chapters.

Stepping back from the structural details of texts of reiterated crisis, the consideration of the crisis-upon-crisis-novel as itself an epistemological form proves to be interesting as well. Many South African writers have long recognized the question whether the crisis repetition in South Africa's fiction has not become embedded in the national psyche and is not in part a function

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<sup>71</sup> Cf. Quayson 2003.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Boehmer 2012 (unpublished manuscript).

of a story of spasmodic outbreaks of violence and death, forming part now of the wider society and having become at once over-compelling and compulsive within South Africa.<sup>73</sup> In the context of a collective traumatization, South Africa's recent fiction appears to be shaped by a neurotic repetition compulsion on the part of the authors. However, the modes and methods of coming to terms with the past are a contested issue, and South Africa's authors display diverse, really rivaling ways of working through a trauma, a fact that becomes explicit in the analyses of the novels in the following chapters.

South African writers are hooked on crisis, however, not only due to HIV, the crime wave, and all the other crises that followed hot on the heels of apartheid, which is empirically undeniable. The nation's writers seem to be caught in a repetition-compulsion predominantly due to the trauma culture that the country inhabits, as well as the epistemological rewards and compelling emotional inducements the crisis story brings about. These rewards seem to be more compelling at the moment than that of any other stories, both within critical practice, but also with regard to the world literary market.<sup>74</sup>

Elleke Boehmer suggests in her essay "Endings and New Beginning" that late apartheid's interregnum fiction was characterized by "the curtailment, the closing down of prospects," "a suspension of vision, a hemming in as opposed to a convinced and convincing opening up or testing of options". She talks about a pessimism embodied particularly in forms of "zero ending", thus endings characterized by little to no prospect of working through and moving forward<sup>75</sup>. So early post-apartheid's endings hesitated or shied away when confronted with the future, a fact that some writers seemed discontented with. Compared to previous late apartheid fiction, the questions arising are whether these more personal stories of risk taking, which embrace uncertainty, project a revised syntax to think about the yet unrepresented future or whether we are confronted with a tendency to repetition compulsion and a dominance of repressed suffering as before. Are we still dealing with old anxieties about envisaging the future because of the reiteration of crises, if in new shapes, due to an inability to come to terms with the past? Or is the writing rather characterized by a creative

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<sup>73</sup> Cf. Boehmer 2012 (unpublished manuscript).

<sup>74</sup> Cf. ebenda.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Boehmer 1994.

open end about the prospects-to-come, drawing on Ghassan Hage's notion of hope, a sense of entitlement to the future (see Hage 2003).

In order to find answers to these questions, it is necessary to focus especially on the ending of a narrative, the hiatus point which either explicitly or implicitly, inevitably points onwards. What do these endings indicate and what directions do they take? In what ways do these suggestions impart on and influence our thinking? A significant number of post-apartheid novels end or interrupt themselves on instances of irresolution. They break off on instances of a dogged, but disoriented movement forwards<sup>76</sup>. Taking into account the production of open-endedness, the level of inconclusiveness is noteworthy, which becomes clear in the comparison of J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* and Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit* in chapter 5.

In the Afterword of *At Risk*, Njabulo Ndebele exposes old solutions turning into new problems. This can be understood as suggesting that former hopes for a peaceful future have the potential to become new fears that the anticipated hope for a new community suddenly recedes into an opportunity that was lost because it was feared. Viewed in this context, South African writing could be characterized by an entrapment in time being<sup>77</sup>.

The question that inevitably arises after all is whether there is a way out of seemingly ceaseless repetition of traumatic affect that has beset South Africa's post-apartheid narrative. Are there any alternatives to the continual recurrence of crisis and pain, to the extent to which South Africa's pre- and post-millennium literature manifests as a subject of traumatization? South Africa's condition, tightly caught in a fist of violence, recurring pain and crisis, can really be considered as punishing. So we have to ask ourselves whether it is sufficient to assume that South Africa's fixation on trauma is an apt and predictable answer to the longstanding traumatization of apartheid. Can the state in which South Africa's literature is compulsively trapped be described as an understandable psychological remnant? Or are there any alternative ways to move beyond this

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<sup>76</sup> Cf. Boehmer 2012 (unpublished manuscript).

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Ndebele 2007.

imprisoning subject category, work through it, and move beyond such repetition compulsion?<sup>78</sup>

In *Conscripts of Modernity*, the Caribbean critic David Scott partly provides response to these far-reaching questions. His insightful commentary on the generic structures of postcolonial historiography points a way forward. For him, critical and postcolonial discourses have become too fixated on crisis, loss of hope and conditions of disappointment. He leads this back to the reason that the narrative patterns through which we analyze history are no longer calibrated with the present. Scott argues that the progressive narrative of revolution shaping Romantic and post-romantic readings of history over an extensive period no longer has such a strong influence in the post-colonial world<sup>79</sup>.

According to Scott, it would be necessary to alter the dominant heroic story-form of the oppressed in a way that focuses on the contingencies of the present time as much as promised freedoms of the future, structures that pay attention to accidental living on over end-stopped and conclusive resolution, that picture of the future that is onwards and upwards from now on. He claims that we need to change our anticipation of the futures post-apartheid novels transmit, to look for “less determinative, more recursive directions” (135).<sup>80</sup>

## **5. Reconciliation vs. Retaliation: J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace* and Achmat Dangor’s *Bitter Fruit***

J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace* lies at the heart of the most intense political and critical debates. Frequently regarded as a veritable “state of the nation” account of the new South Africa, the novel has not only encountered high international praise and commercial success, but also triggered heated controversy since its publication in 1999. Many prominent South Africans and even the African National Congress condemned the novel as deploying a damaging image of

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<sup>78</sup> Cf. Boehmer 2012 (unpublished manuscript).

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Scott 2004.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. ebenda.

South Africa and presenting a forceful example of white racist stereotyping. Reactions to the novel were so strong that *Interventions*, a journal of postcolonial studies, felt the urge to devote an entire issue against accusations of sexism and racism to a defense of *Disgrace*<sup>81</sup>.

*Disgrace* is a novel about an arrogant, white university professor, David Lurie, who falls from favor and is disgraced after seducing his student, Melanie Isaacs. Through the course of the novel the protagonist overcomes the egoistic person, who was reducing love to sex only. While Lurie works at the University of Cape Town, his daughter lives at a farm in the Eastern Cape, near a town called Salem. After she is attacked and raped by three black men, Lurie has become some sort of lame dog, asking to be taken in by his daughter. He even has sex with Lucy's unattractive friend Bev. As a professor of Modern Languages, he frequently uses expressions from literature and poetry in order to express his emotions. While he considers himself a modern-day Byron in the beginning, he later on has to discover that he is not the great and attractive lover he had perceived himself to be.

Several members of the African National Congress criticized Coetzee's bleak depiction of post-apartheid South Africa and his inclusion of a gang rape scene. The ANC stated that Coetzee described "as brutally as he [could] the white people's perception of the post-apartheid black man," by implying that in the new South Africa white people would "lose their property, their rights, their dignity, and that white women will have to sleep with the barbaric black men" (Donadio 1).

*Disgrace*'s heated controversy stems not the least from the brutality implied by the way in which David Lurie's daughter Lucy was confronted by her black perpetrators. The reader can only deduce and guess what exactly happened during the prominent scene of rape; however, the variety of marginalia, such as, for instance David's burned head or the way in which the criminals murdered

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<sup>81</sup>Cf. *Interventions: The International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 4.3 (November 2002). Regarding the issue, Derek Attridge notes, "Stating the opposition baldly, Coetzee is either praised (implicitly or explicitly) for unblinkingly depicting the lack of progress South Africa has made towards its declared goal of a non-racial, non-sexist democracy (and Lurie's attitudes towards his lesbian daughter's sexuality may be taken to typify a failure in dealing with homophobia as well) or condemned for painting a one-sidedly negative picture of post-apartheid South Africa, representing blacks as rapists and thieves, and implying that whites have no option but to submit to their assaults" (317).



Lucy's dogs, presents the reader with clues to the brutality with which the crime was conducted.

The novel has also provoked numerous responses on part of Coetzee's literary colleagues. In an interview in 2006, Nadine Gordimer stated that "there is not one black person who is a real human being" in *Disgrace*, further noting, "I find it difficult to believe, indeed more than difficult, having lived here all my life and being part of everything that has happened here, that the black family protects the rapist because he's one of them".<sup>82</sup> However, a variety of academic critics have publicly defended Coetzee's works against such accusations. Homi Bhaba sees *Disgrace* as a narrative of "open seams" rather than "suturing", and states to see *Disgrace*'s power in its "ability to unsettle". In times of "real social, historical, psychic crisis," *Disgrace* "allows people to project onto it some of their own most heartfelt but violent feelings," without resolving them "in the way in which we as progressive liberals would want [Coetzee] to do".<sup>83</sup>

*Disgrace* definitely projects a picture of South Africa many South Africans repudiate. It is a fact that South African writers are knowledgeable of their peers' work. Many of Coetzee's fellow writers directly or indirectly refer to *Disgrace* in their works. Some of them even rewrite or complete parts of it. The interesting subject of exploration is how these reactions and counter-narratives on part of other contemporary South African authors look like, and for what reasons they feel the urge to respond to the novel. In what ways do their opinions on working through traumata differ from Coetzee's, implied in *Disgrace*, and how does their way of coming to terms with the past portray a rivaling view to his?

Among contemporary South African trauma novels, the strongest echo to *Disgrace* is given by Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit* (2003), in which a rape is at the heart of the events as well. As an author of Indian descent, Dangor's fiction focuses more on the Cape's colored community, in way that gives voice to the ambiguities of apartheid as a system of racial segregation.

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<sup>82</sup> Cf. Crews 2009.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. ebenda.

After being shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 2004, *Bitter Fruit* quickly gained conspicuous international attention. The novel is set in post-apartheid Johannesburg and is divided into three sections- Memory, Confession, and Retribution. Three sections which map a narrative arc disclosing the disintegration of a colored family at the end of the Mandela presidency.

In the 1980s, Lydia Ali is raped by a white policeman, Francois du Boise, as a result of her husband Silas' engagements with the MK, an armed wing of the ANC. The novel begins twenty years later with a confrontation between Silas and the officer at a supermarket. The incident triggers a chain of events that eventually ruptures the fragile relationship between Lydia and Silas and reveals to their son Mikey that he is actually a child of rape. Mikey becomes involved with Silas' Muslim side of the family. After fatally having shot Du Boise and his friend's father he flees the country.

The following comparison of *Disgrace* and *Bitter Fruit* seeks to highlight Achmat Dangor's rewriting of *Disgrace* on a thematic, structural and symbolical level. Moreover, it aims at revealing the author's reasons for his endeavor. In Dangor's counter-narrative to *Disgrace* the inability to assume consensual knowledge among nearly all segments of South Africa's socio-cultural system is revealed. In what ways does Dangor react to *Disgrace* through rewriting or even completing parts of it in *Bitter Fruit*? What are the most prominent points of difference and similarity in the novels? What are the counter-messages Dangor wants to convey by rewriting the novel? The following chapters seek to answer these questions, taking into account narrative strategies of the authors, rape, race, the TRC and the plot structure of the novels.

## **5.1. Narrative Strategies**

Both *Disgrace* and *Bitter Fruit* feature a narrative vision of post-apartheid South Africa focalized through unreliable characters, leaving important parts of the stories left untold. Both novels are characterized by the use of free indirect discourse. The narrative style of the two novels combines some of the aspects

of third-person narration with first-person direct speech. In both novels, an indeterminate distance between the narrator, the author, and the character through which the novel is focalized is created by means of free indirect discourse. Despite these similarities, a significant distance exists between the two novels with regards to narrative strategies.

The African National Congress accused Coetzee of maintaining the negative stereotype of black people in South Africa. With regards to the rape of a white woman by three black men perceived through the eyes of a white middle-aged man, the perspective seems to be disturbingly limited, a fact repudiated not only by the ANC, but also by Achmat Dangor. *Bitter Fruit* is told through third-person omniscient narration, focalized through an array of protagonists and minor characters. The novel is characterized by a juxtaposition of conflicting perspectives, enabling an imaginative representation of the subjective experiences of a variety of characters, trying to come to terms with the social and historical processes that violently characterize their past lives.<sup>84</sup>

*Disgrace* is told in the third person, so there is consequently a narrator separated from the focalizing character. This narrator is undefined and almost hidden and the reader doesn't know anything about him or her. According to Chatman, the type of narration we are talking about here is covert: "In covert narration we hear a voice speaking of events, characters and setting, but its owner remains hidden in the discursive shadows" (197). It almost seems as if the narrator is hiding behind the white university professor, letting him do the introductions.<sup>85</sup>

Dangor's choice of a third-person omniscient narration can be seen as a response to Coetzee's strategy of a single narrator. A third person limited narrator would have forced Dangor to sacrifice the exploration of the many layers of reality that he is so intent on pointing out. We see everything through David Lurie's eyes in *Disgrace* and follow him during what seems to be a few weeks. Our perception of space is limited to what the white university professor sees around him. The internal focalization makes it impossible to give a panoramic view. A perfect example of this is Lucy's rape, when the perpetrators

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<sup>84</sup> Cf. Agnevall 2005.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. ebenda.

lock Lurie into the bathroom and this is the only thing he sees. As Bev later remarks: “you weren’t there” (DG 140), the moment when Lurie is not physically present is clearly a narrative choice which makes the rape live only through Lurie’s assumptions and imagination.

The choice of focus in *Disgrace* often emphasizes the lack of grace and innocence which pinpoint David Lurie’s emotionless desire. Furthermore, it makes Lurie seem disconnected from the past. It seems as if he fails to find a sense of coherence and continuity between events, a fact which “denies itself and its readers the capacity to say: these acts and events are over” (Sanders 371).<sup>86</sup> A fact that Dangor seeks to reinforce in his rejoinder novel to demonstrate that there is still work to do in the context of apartheid and its aftermath. However, he seems to be discontented with Coetzee’s solution on how to demonstrate this issue. Instead of a single narrator, who only gives one perspective, he deploys shifting narrative voices cut across generations. This in turn correlates with Dangor’s intention of obtaining not just one, but a multitude of truths when it comes to working through the trauma and coming to terms with the past.

In *Bitter Fruit*, most often the story is rendered through Silas’ voice, whereas focalization through Lydia is frequently delayed and mediated and obscured by the males that surround her. Mikey on the other hand drifts in and out of the narrative. Through conflicting accounts of incidents, augmented by brief periods of focalization through minor characters, Dangor hints at the existence of a multitude of invisible and unspoken traumas, which have not been worked through and are left unaddressed by an overarching, single narrative.

## 5.2. Rape and Race

In South Africa, societal aspects of rape are enhanced by the category of race, which cannot be ignored when analyzing South African novels. On a historic

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<sup>86</sup> Cf. Agnevall 2005.

level, rape is based on the inherent rape of colonized nations and their people. However, rape in a South African narrative does not necessarily stand in for the conquest of the nation.<sup>87</sup>

Both *Disgrace* and *Bitter Fruit* feature rape as major issues in their plots. However, the way in which rape is depicted in *Bitter Fruit* differs drastically to the portrayal thereof in *Disgrace*. When we take into account only the “main rapes” of the novels, *Bitter Fruit* presents the reader with a fairly typical scenario: a colored woman is raped by a white policeman. *Disgrace* on the other hand leaves us with a rather unlikely constellation in which a white woman, Lucy, is gang-raped by three black men. The reader is confronted with the question as to why it was so important for Dangor to rewrite the rape scene and change it into a more typical constellation.

*Disgrace* caused an outrage when it was published in 1999, the reason being that, superficially, it seems to depict very polarizing stereotypes and discrediting clichés referring to both black and white. Many writers, among them Achmat Dangor, seem to condemn this portrayal.

The white university professor David Lurie has sexual relationships with colored women, first a prostitute, then one of his students, which he abuses and exploits. Conversely, native Africans are presented as rapists in *Disgrace*, and the mostly black police are hardly interested in dealing with the case properly. After being gang-raped by three black men, David Lurie’s lesbian daughter Lucy becomes pregnant and does not even consider an abortion. On the contrary, she fails the decision to keep the baby even though she is ignorant about the identity of the actual father of her child, a fact that is outrageous, especially in the context of her refusal of persecuting the perpetrators. Furthermore, Lucy even goes so far as to seek the protection of her black neighbor Petrus, a relative of one of the rapists, and might indirectly be involved in the crime himself. She agrees to marry him and become his third wife, under the condition that she can continue to live on her farm as a tenant.

The main rape in *Disgrace* is not presented directly to reader. The only thing we know is what Lucy decides to tell her father, which does not include any details

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<sup>87</sup> Cf. Harvey 2008.

about the crime. Three men come on foot to Lucy's house and gain entrance by asking to use the phone. They lock David into the bathroom and set him on fire in order to sexually abuse his daughter Lucy. Since details about the rape are not disclosed and the narrative focuses on David, we do not know how the act was conducted. However, what we do know is the fact that a white woman was gang-raped by three black men. Depicting a quite uncommon and brutal constellation for rape, this description provoked a multitude of responses among Coetzee's South African fellow writers.

Read as realistic fiction, the facts that Coetzee presents sound highly unlikely. Hardly any white woman would behave the way Lucy does. The author seems to be putting his readers' "willing suspension of disbelief" to a hard test (Mengel 304). If David really represents the white South Africa's white population, Coetzee's message is obvious: only after white people have endured the same adversity as black people have suffered under their dominance will they know how to proceed and possibly apologize for the deep wrongs.<sup>88</sup>

In comparison to Lydia being raped by Du Boise in *Bitter Fruit*, Lucy's rapists are not only black but also plural. Besides the youngest of the three, they are not named throughout the novel, and they are clearly native. Persuasion is obviously not their main tool in order to achieve their goal. They only communicate the most necessary sentences to get access to the farmhouse. Even though the details of the crime are not communicated, we know that the perpetrators proceed very violently. Coetzee seems to refer to "these men as the mass of people, the underprivileged majority of blacks that have only recently gotten back their freedom and rights and are not able to control this freedom" (Harvey 59).

Through the depiction of the vengeful blacks who go out to rape white women, a biased picture of South Africa's blacks is given. Driven by dissatisfaction with this partisan field of vision Dangor rewrites the facts in order to convey his rivaling view.

The two rapes in *Disgrace* are closely connected and constitute a binary opposition in several points. While in Melanie's case we know both the victim

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<sup>88</sup> Cf. Harvey 2008.

and the rapist by name, we only know the name of one of the rapists in Lucy's case. So, the victim/perpetrator roles are reversed. However, while in Melanie's case her skin color is only alluded to as "dark", the race distinctions in Lucy's case are clear- black and white.

The timing of the rapes is indicative of the historical insinuation. While Melanie's rape- a white male abusing a colored female - symbolizes the oppression of the blacks during the apartheid regime, Lucy's rape is a placeholder for the present and the present-day desire allegedly sensed by the black population. However, the message that remains and probably gave rise to repetition and reiteration on part of various other authors is in how far history is actually speaking through the rapists.

It is he who takes over the driving. Halfway home, Lucy, to his surprise, speaks. `It was so personal,´ she says. `It was done with such personal hatred. That was what stunned me more than anything. The rest was ... expected. But why did they hate me so? I had never set eyes on them´. He waits for more, but there is no more, for the moment. `It was history speaking through them,´ he offers at last. `A history of wrong. Think of it that way, if it helps. It may have seemed personal, but it wasn't. It came down from the ancestors.´ `That doesn't make it easier. The shock simply doesn't go away. The shock of being hated, I mean. In the act ...´ (DG 156)

For Dangor, Coetzee's ostensible simple message of black's revenge apparently was not sufficient. He seems convinced of the fact that within the obvious "payback-message" also other implications are buried. The issue goes further, as we deal not only with a subjugation of Lucy as a white person here, but also with Lucy as a woman. By *Disgrace* Coetzee proposes that "women should bear the cross of giving birth to the New South Africa" (Harvey 61).

While the colored Lydia in *Bitter Fruit* is raped by the white policeman Du Boise, the subplots of the novel deploy two other rapes, namely that of Hajera and Mikey's friend Vinu. Dangor depicts how people try to come to terms with the past in South Africa in public and on a private level. He appears to be dissatisfied with Coetzee's polarizing stereotypes and clichés concerning black and white and plays with Coetzee's clear-cut race distinctions. Characters are

altered in a way that all depict hybrids of some sort: colored people, neither black nor white. Dangor also interweaves different classes and religions in this melting pot of identities. His rewriting demonstrates the author's dissatisfaction with Coetzee's portrayal of people as single individuals with one culture and identity, especially in a country like South Africa, where ethnic diversity is so prominent.

Furthermore, it can be argued that Dangor criticizes Coetzee's stereotypes referring to both black and white with regards to the fact that the traumatization of colored people somehow seems to be swept under the table. Due to the sensation of not belonging to any ethnic group, colored people often suffer(ed) from strong identity crises. Influenced by a colored family background himself, Dangor's dissatisfaction with Coetzee's portrayal might stem in part from the author's personal background.

"That Lydia is a colored, Catholic woman and her rapist is a white police man during apartheid, will strike a chord with the image of Africa being conquered by the Europeans" (Harvey 77). In contrast to Coetzee, who portrays clear-cut race distinctions (even if read on a realistic level the constellations are highly unlikely), Dangor presents us only with a half-hearted metaphor.

As opposed to the main characters in *Disgrace*, characterized by a stereotypical depiction of black and white, Lydia is not depicted as the archetypal black woman. As a colored catholic, we cannot really assume she represents the African continent as such, being raped by male colonists striving to take whatever they can. Lydia is presented as an independent woman and therefore cannot be put on the same level as former black slave women turned into a rape victim just because the white colonizers owned them. Nevertheless, the issue of race is important in this context, bearing in mind that Lydia was raped by a white policeman because she is colored, and her husband Silas formed part of the liberation movement. As a white man it was not considered a crime to rape a black or colored woman during apartheid.

If Lydia is indeed deemed representative for Africa, she depicts an already altered Africa, characterized through a variety of changes. Du Bois is clearly not African in ancestry, however, he was born there and as an Afrikaner his roots



might as well be found in Africa. The distinctions in the novel are no longer clear-cut and one has to consider the metaphor not as the one of Africa being raped and conquered by the whites, but more as the dark-skinned Africans being raped by those of fair skin, who would nonetheless also identify themselves as African people. So Dangor's response to Coetzee in this respect seems embedded in the counter message that the issue is no longer a problem between Africa and white people, but more of an inter-African one. This also corresponds to Mikey's loss of identity, since he represents the new African, who is characterized by variety of ethnicities unable to "place themselves in one group of people (Harvey 77). Mikey feels lost with regard to where he really belongs. "In a country that was built on these exact distinctions based on race, the new generation who are the first to live without these concrete rules of who/what to belong to are at a loss" (Harvey 77). In his intertextual response to *Disgrace*, Dangor seems to be intent on discrediting the black-and-white-manner the novel features. In contrast to Coetzee, who proposes truth and reconciliation with regards to South Africa's outlook, Dangor advocates the need to obtain a majority of truths and proposes retaliation.<sup>89</sup>

### 5.3. A Child of Rape

There are certain things people do not forget, or forgive. Rape is one of them. In ancient times, conquerors destroyed the will of those whom they conquered by impregnating the women. It is an ancient form of genocide. It does not require a Sufi prophecy to see the design in that. The Romans and the Sabine women, the Nazis and Jewish women in the concentration camps, the Soviets in Poland, Israeli soldiers and Palestinian refugees, white South African policemen and black women. You conquer a nation by bastardizing its children. (BF 204)

*Bitter Fruit* presents the reader with the story of a young man, Mikey, for whom retaliation becomes more important than reconciliation. Mikey is a child of rape, the "bitter fruit" of the novel's title, engendered through the rape of his mother Lydia, when she was eighteen, by the white police officer Du Boise (= normal

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<sup>89</sup> Cf. Harvey 2008.

situation). Echoing Coetzee's novel *Disgrace*, Mikey represents Lucy's child to be born with an unforeseeable future. Now we get to know the twenty-year-old son, engendered through an act of violation and hatred. Mikey finds the diary of his mother where she describes the rape, and gets to know the truth about his own genesis and the fact that his father is actually not his real father. He suffers a deep identity crisis and finds himself in a state of denial, similar to Lucy after being raped. However, this does not take too long and after a while he starts to reconstruct his shattered identity and embarks on a quest for his real self. He comes across his nominal father's Arabic and Muslim roots. After shooting his friend's – Vinu's – father, who has been committing incest with his daughter, he shoots his biological father Du Boise and subsequently escapes into exile to India.

Mikey has a very close relationship with his mother Lydia. They enjoy sniffing at each other and Mikey likes this, until he discovers the reason why his mother engages: she wants to find out whether he smells of the same evil as his father.

Suddenly, every tender touch, hug, or kiss on the forehead she had offered him no longer seemed like a spontaneous, simple, motherly gesture. [...]. Lydia had loved him out of pain and guilt. (BF 129-130)

When Mikey enters the quest for his real identity, it is actually Silas's family that he looks for.

He feels immersed in his family, these are his people, these dark-faced, hook-nosed hybrids; he longs to go and look in a mirror, seek confirmation of his desire to belong. Lydia must be wrong! How can Du Boise be his biological father? (BF 189)

Mikey seems almost obsessed with the Ali family, of which he might as well be a spiritual descendent, even if he is not Silas's natural son. He goes to see the family's home, is introduced to cousin Sadrodien's Sufi affiliations, and quickly develops a feeling of belonging. He longs to find a mirror in order to contradict the similarity between his and Du Boise's face. At the same time he desires to reveal resemblances between himself and the Ali family. Mikey develops affinities for Islam while gradually submitting to a new identity as "Michael". Not only does he change his looks, but his whole behavior. He steals and abuses

people in order to achieve his goals. He is introduced to the Imam and the people of the Ali family help him to accomplish his vision of revenge in order to help his friend Vinu.

Michael has a feverish energy that seems to consume his youthfulness. He is taller and leaner, he acquires a dark-clothed attractiveness that strikes Silas's indifference [...] and corrodes Lydia's still tender membrane of guilty remembrance. (BF 169)

Mikey represents the new generation of Africans who feel disconnected, not belonging to any group. They are the first to live without concrete rules and exact race distinctions, at the same time losing their sense of community. Mikey is the one who can change this. He finds the solution to his problems by killing the intruder who derailed his life so dramatically- one way for Dangor to express his counter-message to *Disgrace*, proclaiming revenge instead of reconciliation. Together with the Imam, Michael manages to do fulfill his vision and ends up killing not only his mother's rapist but also another perpetrator, his friend Vinu's father. Mikey admonishes his friend Vinu about the illusion of love between her and her father by revealing the hidden horror. "Vinu, listen. Don't fool yourself. There was nothing beautiful about it. It was rape, Vinu, simple, crude rape." (BF 210). When the girl awakes from her dreams, crying, she realizes that Michael is right, and Vinu's father eventually becomes the victim on whom he can practice his final mission of murdering Du Boise.

There is also a third rape mentioned in *Bitter Fruit*, the one of Hajera, who is the sister of Silas's grandfather, Ali Ali. Moulana Ismail, who represents the ultimate source of truth for Mikey, tells him about the rape. Hajera, named after prophet Mohammed's first pilgrimage, is raped by a British soldier in India and gets pregnant by him. In contrast to Lydia, Hajera clearly stands for the Indian subcontinent that is taken over by the British. In the end, Ali Ali kills the soldier and hangs him from the tree, reflective of the executions taking place years later when black males were hung for their abuse of white women. By this additional sub-plot, Dangor manages to reinforce his message and counter-response to Coetzee's novel of catharsis.

In contrast to *Disgrace*, which ends before the reader gets any insights regarding the path Lucy's baby will embark upon, *Bitter Fruit* provides us with the life story of Lydia's child, starting where Coetzee left off. By showing how the life of a child of rape could look like, Dangor is bent on partly rewriting and completing the plot of *Disgrace*. While Lucy seems to be taking the white sins of South Africa's past upon her shoulders by giving birth to her child of rape, who possibly can be considered as another Saviour of the country, Lydia's son Michael faces the new South Africa not as a Saviour but as an Avenger. The fact that Michael tracks down his biological father Du Boise and shoots him in the face before escaping to India, demonstrates Dangor's replacement of Coetzee's message of truth and reconciliation through truth and retaliation<sup>90</sup>.

The outcome of *Disgrace* is unclear. As compared to *Bitter Fruit*, in which we get insight into Michael's life, we do not witness the birth of Lucy's child and can only guess about the shade of its skin. Lucy's baby represents the New South Africa that has not been born yet. It stands in for an unforeseeable future, just like that of South Africa. While Coetzee implies that, despite the end of apartheid, there are still many uncertainties to bear and overcome before one can talk of a reconciled, "new" South Africa, Dangor starts at the point where Coetzee leaves off and fills this vague and unpredictable gap with his notion of truth and retaliation.

*Disgrace* is characterized by highly ironical overtones and implications. David is called a "Joseph", waiting for "the child" to be born. Christian symbolism infuses the story, when Lucy's child is inevitably turned into a Christ figure. Through his rewriting, Dangor wants to enunciate that Coetzee's glaring allegory seems to call itself into doubt. Lucy's child only apparently becomes the symbol of the future of this troubled nation; it will not be able to save South Africa. Through Mikey's fate Dangor wants to express that the nail on which Coetzee hangs his message is too small to carry all the weight. A child born out of hatred and violence cannot save South Africa. Coetzee's allegorical castle in the air stands in sharp contrast to the political reality of the country.

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<sup>90</sup> Cf. Mengel 2009: 306.

In contrast to Lydia, who cannot be sure whether she would not love a second child more than she loves Mikey, and therefore does not get a second child, Lucy feels she can forgive her rapists and will be able to love her child of rape. Melanie's father is not willing to forgive David Lurie, mostly because he cannot be sure whether the apologies really come from David's heart. This implies that white people are more magnanimous than people of color, as they are able to forgive, which the black population seems incapable of. A reason for this could be because the blacks distrust white people, or they simply feel that too much has happened in the past for a white man to justify forgiveness. The message conveyed here possibly prompted Dangor to present a different portrayal in his rejoinder novel.

Every character finds a different way of getting to terms with the past in *Bitter Fruit*. Dangor points out that one has to stop embracing the idea of only truth and reconciliation that Coetzee proposes in *Disgrace*. Furthermore, he pleads that each of South Africa's traumatized people should be granted his own way of coming to terms with the past and working through the trauma. Through the character of Mikey, Dangor conveys his message of truth and retaliation, concomitantly expressing his discontent with *Disgrace*'s implications. Nevertheless, like Coetzee, Dangor does not come up with a simple political recipe either in *Bitter Fruit*. Both novels are highly complex, postmodern, self-reflexive texts, and the "truth" they construct has to be considered as a highly ambivalent issue. Both novels can be read in an ironic way and both authors actually draw on the idea that simple-minded concepts do not go along with the new South Africa's society. In differing ways both authors indicate how complex the truth actually is, not least by consciously and deliberately failing to account thereof.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Cf. Mengel 2009.

## 5.4. The TRC

On 16 December 1995, Archbishop Tutu expressed his opinion in his opening address to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission when he declared: “We are a wounded people [...] we all stand in the need of healing” (Tutu 1995). Leaving aside the question whether the South African TRC has been successful or not, it is a fact that its institution is the most official project of dealing with a traumatizing past. Regarding the outcome of this 1996 established Commission of witness testimonies and perpetrator confessions, opinions range from rejection and sharp criticism, to endorsing consent and enthusiastic confirmation. The TRC features prominently in a great number of South African novels, among them *Disgrace* and *Bitter Fruit*.

While Coetzee and Dangor have attained impressive sales figures abroad, their engagement at the turn of the century and their preoccupation with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission have been the subjects of critical skepticism and substantial controversy in South Africa.

Providing explanations of the thoughts or motives of humans and building overarching narratives, revealing why things happened the way they did, both *Disgrace* and *Bitter fruit* provide the reader with comprehensive images of reality and may be said to continue the work of the TRC where it was left off in 1998.<sup>92</sup>

The critical subscription of South Africa to the subject categories of trauma and repetition compulsion is in many ways tied to the path-breaking phenomenon of the TRC. That the literature has seemingly followed the repetition compulsions that have afflicted South Africa becomes particularly obvious concerning references to the TRC in post-apartheid novels. Building on Christian ideas of redemption and confession as well as underlying premises derived from a pre-existing trauma discourse, the national talking cure contributed to international discussions concerning the possibilities of coming to terms with the past and moving on from experiences of crisis and pain. Within South Africa, the TRC caused a stir and developed into a political contentious debate not only on how

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<sup>92</sup> Cf. Mengel 2009.

a society manages to work through traumata by witnessing the unspeakable, but also with regards to material reparation or spiritual recompense. The debate was resumed and continued in both *Disgrace* and *Bitter Fruit*.

Dangor extensively deals with the TRC in *Bitter Fruit*, partly in a direct, partly in an indirect way. It seems like Dangor agrees with Coetzee that the functions of the TRC have not led to any reasonable solution, a fact he seeks to reinforce and shed light on through picking up the topic once more in his rejoinder novel to *Disgrace*. Through the characters and the course of events in *Bitter Fruit*, both his dissatisfaction with the TRC and his not being able to fully come to terms with apartheid's aftermath become obvious. By rewriting the topic and dealing with the TRC once more, the author alludes to the fact that the issue is contested by many and still needs to be discussed. Both Coetzee and Dangor criticize the TRC and include several critical allusions to it in their novels.

Some sort of addiction on part of Dangor's response to *Disgrace* becomes apparent, not only to the compulsive contemplation of pain, but also to the adrenalin of crisis management. Dangor seems to question the fact whether the TRC provided the appropriate "setting" for victims in order to come to terms with the past. An issue that also Gobodo-Madikizela faces:

[...] retelling a story over and over again provides a way of returning to the original pain and hence a reconnection with the lost loved one. Evoking the pain in the presence of a listening audience means taking a step backwards in order to move forwards. The question is not whether victims will tell their stories, but whether there is an appropriate forum to express their pain<sup>93</sup>.

The search for truth is of central importance both in *Disgrace* and *Bitter Fruit*. Both narratives make obvious that the truth is not only quite hard to obtain, but that by no means it can be deferred from a legal report.

In *Bitter Fruit*, Silas proposes to Lydia to speak to the TRC, but Lydia does not think that any man could ever understand what she has gone through, not even Desmond Tutu. She does not want to give Silas the satisfaction to testify.

Nothing in her life would have changed, [...] nothing could be undone [...]. Once that violating penis, that vile rock had been inside you, it could not be withdrawn, not by an act of remorse or vengeance, not even justice. (BF 156)

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<sup>93</sup> Cf. Gobodo-Madikizela 2001. Page number unknown.

Dangor takes away Lydia's possibility of coming to terms with her past and overcoming her trauma, by facing the crime and her rapist through telling her story to others. She does not want Du Boise to appear in front of the amnesty committee and therefore asks Silas to stop him. Only in the end, after she has left behind her life as well as the roles she has been playing, is she able to find freedom and peace. With regards to the many roles she occupies, Lydia represents women who have to play many parts in life and who never can be reduced to just one person. During the hearings of the TRC, few women came to tell their stories. Most women spoke only on behalf of someone close to them. Dangor seems to be discontented with the way Coetzee deals with the ability to listen to women's voices. Through his counter-text he creates a mouthpiece for those women who are not able to speak for themselves.

"*Bitter Fruit* confronts the TRC's inability to listen to women's voices and considers the continued effects of this silencing on those still staggering under the burden of traumatic memory" (Strauss 2005, <http://postcolonial.org/index.php/pct/article/viewArticle/436/836>).

Silas believes in the system he helped form, and he is certain about Lydia being freed from her problems after having spoken to the TRC. Silas provides a stark contrast to Mikey, in the way that he would not resort to something as primitive as killing Du Boise for Lydia. Silas is able to distance himself. While in former times he needed alcohol to do so, he now has a new remedy, namely the TRC. He turns to things he is sure he can manage, and is set on leading the nation of South Africa into reconciliation with its past. A contrast is created in the way that he tries to compensate for what he fails to achieve in his own home- to come to terms with the past. His real baby is South Africa's future, however, he has brought the nation to maturity and now he is useless.

A number of ironic allusions to the proceedings of the TRC become apparent in *Disgrace*, such as for instance the white university professor's hearing before the university commission:

He takes a deep breath. `I am sure the members of this committee have better things to do with their time than rehash a story over which there will be not dispute. I plead guilty to both charges. Pass sentence, and let us get on



with our lives.' Hakim leans across to Mathabane. Murmured words pass between them. 'Professor Lurie,' says Hakim, 'I must repeat, this is a committee of inquiry. Its role is to hear both sides of the case and make a recommendation. It has no power to take decisions. Again, I ask, would it not be better if you were represented by someone familiar with our procedures?' 'I don't need representation. I can represent myself perfectly well. Do I understand that, despite the plea I have entered, we must continue with the hearing?' 'We want to give you an opportunity to state your position.' 'I have stated my position. I am guilty.' 'Guilty of what?' 'Of all that I am charged with.' 'You are taking us in circles, Professor Lurie.' 'Of everything Ms Isaacs avers, and of keeping false records.'

Now Farodia Rassool intervenes. 'You say you accept Ms. Issac's statement, Professor Lurie, but have you actually read it?' 'I do not wish to read Ms Isaacs's statement. I accept it. I know of no reason why Ms Isaacs should lie.' 'But would it not be prudent to actually read the statement before accepting it?' 'No. There are more important things in life than being prudent.' (DG 48-49)

The relationship of aesthetics and politics proves to be much more interesting than the direct references to the TRC in *Disgrace* and *Bitter Fruit*. Both novels express political stance through aesthetic structure. Imaginative spaces are opened up, in which the task of facing up to the past can be tested. However, Coetzee and Dangor deploy rivaling attitudes, opinions and methods in this regard. While *Bitter Fruit* can be classified among the so-called "novels of indictment", in which the judgmental quality is still very prominent, *Disgrace* can be seen as belonging to "novels of catharsis", which are characterized by their future-oriented and conciliatory voice. They try to cope with both individual and collective traumata by confronting the remnants of the past, initiating a healing process, and simply striving for cathartic outcomes and the healing of the nation, while opening up new horizons for the country's future.<sup>94</sup>

Ironic allusions to the TRC and the theme of truth and reconciliation play a crucial role in *Disgrace*, even if this happens in an indirect or a contradictory way.

'"Whatever appropriate penalty": what does that mean?'  
 'My understanding is, you will not be dismissed. In all probability, you will be requested to take a leave of absence. Whether you eventually return to teaching duties will depend on yourself, and on the decision of your Dean and head of department.'  
 'That is it? That is the package?'

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<sup>94</sup> Cf. Mengel 2009.

‘That is my understanding. If you signify that you subscribe to the status of a plea in mitigation, the Rector will be prepared to accept it in that spirit.’

‘In what spirit?’

‘A spirit of repentance.’

‘Manas, we went through the repentance business yesterday. I told you what I thought. I won’t do it. I appeared before an officially constituted tribunal, before a branch of the law. Before that secular tribunal I pleaded guilty, a secular plea. That plea should suffice. Repentance is neither here nor there. Repentance belongs to another world, to another universe of discourse.’

‘You are confusing issues, David. You are not being instructed to repent.

What goes on in your soul is dark to us, as members of what you call a secular tribunal if not as fellow human beings. You are being asked to issue a statement. ‘I am being asked to issue an apology about which I may not be sincere?’ ‘The criterion is not whether you are sincere. That is a matter, as I say, for your own conscience. The criterion is whether you are prepared to acknowledge your fault in a public manner and take steps to remedy it.’

‘Now we are truly splitting hairs. You charged me, and I pleaded guilty to the charges. That is all you need from me.’ ‘No. We want more. Not a great deal more, but more. I hope you can see your way clear to giving us that’. (DG 57-58)

One of the members of the committee of David Lurie’s hearing is called Desmond Swarts, referring to Desmond Tutu and the Afrikaans word for *swart*, meaning black. The committee is unable to come up with a real solution to the issue on trial. The refusal to give a statement can be seen as another way of criticizing the function of the TRC. David mocks the committee when he asks them: “[...] and you trust yourself to divine that, from the word I use – to divine whether it comes from the heart?” (DG 54).

Irony comes in also by means of Professor Lurie’s insistence on his rights with regard to him being a servant of Eros:

‘Very well,’ he says, ‘let me confess. The story begins one evening, I forget the date, but not long past. I was walking through the old college gardens and so, it happened, was the young woman in question. Ms Isaacs. Our paths crossed. Words passed between us, and at that moment something happened which, not being a poet, I will not try to describe. Suffice it to say that Eros entered. After that I was not the same.’

‘You were not the same as what?’ asks the businesswoman cautiously.

‘I was not myself. I was no longer a fifty-year-old divorcé at a loose end. I became a servant of Eros.’

‘Is this a defence your are offering us? Ungovernable impulse?’

‘It is not a defence. You want a confession, I give you a confession. As for the impulse, it was far from ungovernable. I have denied similar impulses many times in the past, I am ashamed to say.’

‘Don’t you think’, says Swarts, ‘that by its nature academic life must call for certain sacrifices? That for the good of the whole we have to deny ourselves certain gratifications?’

‘You have in mind a ban on intimacy across generations?’

‘No, not necessarily. But as teachers we occupy positions of power. Perhaps a ban on mixing power relations with sexual relations. Which, I sense, is what was going in this case. Or extreme caution.’

Farodia Rassool intervenes. ‘We are again going round in circles, Mr Chair. Yes, he says, he is guilty; but when we try to get confessing to, just an impulse he could not resist, with no mention of the pain he has caused, no mention of the long history of exploitation of which this is part. That is why I say it is futile to go on debating with Professor Lurie. We must take his plea at face value and recommend accordingly.’ (DG 52-53)

Since *Disgrace* was written during a period heavily influenced by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Lucy can be regarded as a representation of the TRC. However, not everything in her demeanor is in accord with what the TRC represented. Lucy is willing to give up everything in order to be able to live peacefully. Her ideologies and those of her father clash vehemently. While David seeks retribution she wants to be reconciled with her perpetrators. However, on the other hand, she is not interested in the truth coming out, since it could harm her by reminding her of past events. Lucy would rather the truth remain hidden and silently reconcile without further conflict.

The fact that Lucy’s rape happens shortly after Melanie’s abuse, has to be read as intentional on part of Coetzee. David connects his abuse of Melanie with his daughter’s rape, and considers it the punishment for what he did. After deeper insight, David decides to meet Mr. Isaacs and his family in order to apologize for the wrongs he has inflicted on Melanie and her whole family. It is the least he expects Lucy’s rapists to do in order to get some peace of mind. When Mr. Isaacs lectures David on questions of truth and forgiveness, he is similar to Archbishop Tutu, talking about God and forgiveness.

Through picking up the TRC again in his novel, Dangor wants to indicate its shortcomings anew. Dangor’s response to *Disgrace* seems to allude to the fact that the failure of the TRC consisted not only in the endeavor of wanting to obtain a sole truth, but also in the attempt to reconcile all people involved. Dangor utters criticism with regards to *Disgrace*’s proposal of truth and reconciliation and the TRC’s mission of obtaining the one and only truth.

## 5.5. Plot Structure

Dangor agrees with Coetzee that there is a way to come to terms with the past, however, he seems to be dissatisfied with Coetzee's opinion on how to deal with the demons thereof. Next to the obsessive compulsive component in this context, discussed in the first part of this thesis, Achmat Dangor brings in his proposal with regards to a solution on the issue. Dangor rewrites and intertextually revises *Disgrace* in order to express his differing view on how to come to terms with the past.

Regarding the indications both authors give for Africa's future, it is particularly important to compare the plot structure of the two novels. In order to address the question in what ways Dangor's view on how to work through the trauma differs from Coetzee's, it is also essential to pay particular attention to the indicative and symptomatic form of the ending of both narratives. By looking at the allusions the authors provide at this junction, we are given information on their differing views.

Reconciliation of political groupings and different ethnicities is pivotal for a traumatized nation. In contrast to the fictional quality of the *Disgrace*, it is the actual political challenge that South Africa has to confront after the fall of the apartheid regime. In the case of South Africa, reconciliation stands for "coming to terms" with a past in which the political system of the state as well as the struggles against it, have traumatized not only individuals, but a whole nation as such<sup>95</sup>.

Both *Disgrace* and *Bitter Fruit* create semantic vectors with regards to the direction the plots take and the authors' views. The fact that Mikey shoots his physical father in the face can be viewed as a symbolical act of wiping out his identity and clearly presents an act of retaliation. When Michael finally steps in and completes what Silas should have done long ago, there is no poetic justice in the sense that Michael has to pay for his deed. He gets away with two cold-blooded murders- a fact that seems to reject the idea of reconciliation. Dangor's

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<sup>95</sup> Cf. Mengel 2009.

judgmental stance refuses to open up horizons for a better future. The contradictory vectors of the plots of the novels – which might be summarized by the formulas “truth and reconciliation” and “truth and retaliation”- are also reflected by the characters and will be discussed later.

Looking at *Disgrace*, there is a significant irony in what Lucy says to her father on the morning of her rape when she is standing on the porch, watching three wild geese: “I feel lucky to be visited. To be the chosen one.” (DG 88). On the one hand, this phrase can be seen as a biblical allusion to Mary, who was visited by the Holy Ghost. On the other hand, Lucy’s utterance can be understood as a premonition of what is going to happen later that day, when she will be “visited by three men” who end up raping her.

As far as David’s relationship with Melanie is concerned, David clearly takes into account both silence and articulation among his rights. It is all the more ironic that he later on fails to understand why Lucy cannot speak the truth about being raped. The relationship between Lucy and David drastically deteriorates up to the point that they feel “like strangers in the same house” (DG 124). His (ironically lesbian) daughter tells David that he will never be able to understand what she has been going through, and David himself feels humiliated and powerless because he failed to protect his own girl. In the words of Derrida, the fact that David first raped Melanie and then his own daughter gets raped means that society becomes captivated in a vicious circle between victims and predators, in a world in which victims and predators constantly change roles- everyone is a victim<sup>96</sup>.

It is totally incomprehensible to David that Lucy decides to keep quiet and does not want to bring charges against the rapists. However, as David keeps silent about “raping” Melanie, Lucy keeps silent about her rape. David’s sense of justice demands the rapists have to be punished. “Am I wrong? Am I wrong to want justice?” (DG 119). In this passage *Disgrace* seems to resonate with the TRC’s ambition to restore justice. Even if the transition from Apartheid to a new South Africa was characterized “by remarkably little bloodshed, retribution, and

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<sup>96</sup> Cf. Derrida J. & Dufourmantelle A. 2002.

vengeance” (Gibson 410) Archbishop Tutu’s message of reconciliation and forgiveness was highly disputed. The question considering the pain persists: Why does Lucy not decide to prosecute her attackers? Why does she not decide to restore justice? Is this the way to go? One could argue that she regards her rape as atonement for all the crimes that have been performed in the past. However, her father David does not conform to this idea and tries to convince her to stand up for herself:

Lucy, Lucy, I plead with you! You want to make up for the wrongs of the past, but this is not the way to do it. If you fail to stand up for this yourself at this moment, you will never be able to hold your head up again. (DG 133)

In this passage Coetzee refers to the victims of perpetrators who got amnesty. David represents the old generation. Lucy on the other hand builds a bridge to the new nation. Her child will be part of the new South African generation and a mixture between black and white. David wonders how the child will grow up, engendered in violence and hate.

Lucy’s refusal to pursue and identify her rapists can be seen as an inverted commentary on the notion of reconciliation. The silence she uses to deal with the horrible incident is her personal way of coming to terms with the trauma. Lucy does not want to deal with the rape, nor does she want to be comforted by her father. She asks David not to tell anyone about the events. He, in turn, accuses her of burying her destiny and allowing other people to talk about them behind their back. What David does not seem to grasp is the fact that reporting the rape would mean a second victimization for Lucy, who sees the incident as “what happened to [her] is a purely private matter” (DG 112), especially in the new South Africa.

‘In another time, in another place it might be held to be a public matter. But in this place, at this time, it is not. It is my business, mine alone.’

‘This place being what?’

‘This place being South Africa.’

‘I don’t agree. I don’t agree with what you are doing. [...] Do you think what happened here was an exam: if you come through, you get a diploma and safe conduct into the future, or a sign to paint on the door-lintel that will make the plague pass you by? That is not how vengeance works, Lucy. Vengeance is like fire. The more it devours, the hungrier it gets.’

‘Stop it David! I don’t want to hear this talk of plagues and fires. I am not just trying to save my skin. If that is what you think, you miss the point entirely.’  
‘Then help me. Is it some form of private salvation you are trying to work out? Do you hope you can expiate the crimes of the past by suffering in the present?’ (DG 112)

Lucy considers the three black rapists as debt collectors from the past:

‘I think they have done it before,’ she resumes, her voice steadier now. ‘At least the two older ones have. I think they are rapists first and foremost. Stealing is just incidental. A side-line. I think they do rape.’  
‘You think they will come back?’  
‘I think I am in their territory. They have marked me. They will come back for me.’  
‘Then you can’t possibly stay.’  
‘Why not?’  
‘Because that would be an invitation to them to return.’  
(DG 158)

After everything that happened, after a collective traumatization of a nation, Lucy considers it her duty to “pay her share” in order to be able to stay in the Eastern Cape. In order to be able live together in peace, she acknowledges and accepts the fact that she has to pay her due:

But isn’t there another way of looking at it, David? What if... what if *that* is the price one has to pay for staying on? Perhaps that is how they look at it; perhaps that is how I should look at it too. They see me as owing something. They see themselves as debt collectors, tax collectors. Why should I be allowed to live here without paying? (DG 158)

Lucy believes that the whites have to pay for the pain they have inflicted on the black population. She seems to be certain that her possession of the land and her whole presence in Africa has a price and cannot be taken for granted. She considers herself as a tenant only tolerated on the land her forefathers stole.

Mikey is deeply traumatized, and the incidents in his life bear witness to a deeply disturbed mind struggling with the traumatic shock resulting from the discovery of his origins and the identity crisis accompanying it. The gang-raped Lucy likewise is deeply traumatized by the course of the events, indicated through her withdrawal from all public and private contact.

Lucy keeps to herself, expresses no feelings, shows no interest in anything around her [...] Lucy spends hour after hour lying on her bed, staring into

space or looking at old magazines, of which she seems to have an unlimited store. (DG 114)

Similar to Michael, she is not able to talk about her emotions. Both their minds are “possessed” by the trauma, and from a psychological point of view neither of the two can be regarded as being in the possession of a sound mind<sup>97</sup>. They both are unaware of what they are doing. However, the attitude Lucy develops after a certain period of time differs from Michael’s. She develops feelings of inner guilt and identifies with the aggressor, corresponding to Coetzee’s suggested formula embracing propitiation.

Rapes are everyday reality in South Africa, but as soon as a *Disgrace* takes up this theme, the implication seems to be that the time for the whites has come. This didn’t make him popular with the white generation, nor with black people. Critics of *Disgrace* claim that no white woman would act like Lucy. Her behavior can be understood as a symbolic model of what life might look like for whites in the future South Africa. A vision that has met a lot of criticism, as becomes obvious in Dangor’s counter-narrative. While Dangor seems to be advocating truth and retaliation, Coetzee, at least superficially, seems to advocate the notion of forgiveness and understanding. Coetzee manages to convey a vision of propitiation by turning Lucy into a female Christ figure, carrying upon her shoulders South Africa’s burden. Christian symbolism becomes prevalent, which is just too placative. One could argue whether Coetzee just wanted to provoke reactions by his highly artificial symbolic construction, and actually suggests the opposite. Petrus, Lucy’s neighbor, can be regarded as “the rock” on which the Lord wants to build his church. Irony comes in, and many (Christian) symbols are turned around. The adoration of the three Magi is replaced by the hatred of the three rapists, who pay back what history has done to their people. While David stands in for the past of the country, Lucy can be seen as representing the conciliatory future. She tells David that she will take care of the situation herself and thinks further ahead about her future in a part of South Africa “where no one disappears” (DG 133), and where she has to remain and live with her destiny. Her father on the other hand is only interested in retaliation.

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<sup>97</sup> Cf. Caruth 1995.



On the way to the dam Petrus talks about regulators of different kinds, about pressure-valves, about junctions; he brings out the words with a flourish, showing off his mastery. The new pipe will have to cross Lucy's land, he says; it is good that she has given her permission. She is 'forward-looking'. 'She is a forward-looking lady, not a backward-looking.' (DG 136)

While Lucy lives for the future and is unable to continue her life in the Eastern Cape without the protection of Petrus, David only sees the "dog man" in him, and fails to grasp his new position in the modern South Africa. But if Lucy does not live in the past, how can she be so liberal with regards to her black rapists? She seems to bear the results and the repercussions of the rape exactly because of South Africa's troubled past. By letting her rapists go unharmed she tries to make up for the sins of the apartheid regime. Even though she feels ashamed about what happened to her personally, she seems to sense a chance in the situation to undo the wrongs that have been inflicted on the black race by keeping the baby and remaining silent about the rape. Through the character of Lucy, Coetzee manages to convey his message of truth and reconciliation, which Dangor in turn transforms into truth and retaliation, foremost through the character of Mikey.

*Bitter Fruit* initially presents Silas as the one representing movement and change in country while Lydia is depicted as stable, fixed on her daily routine despite her problems and fear. However, the situation changes towards the end of the novel. Lydia leaves her old life behind, and abandons her family, friends, home and job to become an independent woman. She drives a long distance away through the desert relying on no one but herself. Both psychological and physical change and movement is the key to her freedom. By portraying Lydia leaving everything behind and thereby finding her personal peace, Dangor conveys his certainty that South Africa will make its way. However, the end Dangor presents in *Bitter Fruit* differs insofar from *Disgrace* that the course of the events provides a revengeful instead of a conciliatory outlook on South Africa's future. Moreover, by the various fates of the characters, he wants to make clear that there is not just one truth but multiple truths to be obtained when coming to terms with the past.

In his reaction to *Disgrace* Dangor seeks to point out the fact that people have subjective ways of coming to terms with the past. While *Disgrace* gives a quite clear outlook on South Africa's future, presenting the reader with a plot structure implying a conciliatory attitude, Dangor rewrites the events in order and proposes that not everyone is content to seek a peaceful way in order to come to terms with the past.

## 5.6. Conclusion

Although both J.M. Coetzee and Achmat Dangor are perfectly aware and critical of events in the traumatized nation of South Africa, especially with regards to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the exceptionally high rate of rapes, they both repudiate the discrediting clichés on which the novels first seem to be built. Both authors actually question the tendency to think in black and white. The claim that the semantic vectors of the plots contain political recipes on how to solve South Africa's problems, however, is unfounded. Their plots can be read in an ironic way. Not only *Bitter Fruit*, but on closer inspection also *Disgrace*, rejects the stereotypes referring to both black and white. Both authors plead for more differentiated approaches to reality. However, as becomes obvious by the different plot structures, the ways they manage to demonstrate this vary. In their different solution-oriented approaches, each author draws the reader's attention to the fact that simple-minded and one-sided conceptions are at odds with South Africa's contemporary society and the political realities of this traumatized nation<sup>98</sup>.

On both a realistic as well as an allegorical level, it is tempting to read *Disgrace* as a political statement:

Pay off the debt which your people have amassed in the past; accept the status of tenant on the farm your fathers owned; turn the act of hatred –

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<sup>98</sup> Cf. Mengel 2009.

through which your (hybrid) offspring was created – by meek acceptance into an act of love; trust him to be the torch bearer into a brighter future.<sup>99</sup>

The author has overcharged the highly unlikely plot structure with a kind of symbolism that amounts to glaring allegory<sup>100</sup>.

One of the things that Achmat Dangor seemed to reject is the fact that Coetzee's attempts to open up new perspectives through highly symbolical references to salvation smack of irony, while the conspicuousness and blatancy thereof draws the reader's attention to the fact that it has no foundation in reality. *Disgrace* deconstructs and subverts what it first seems to transmit, and the portrayal of Lucy as a Christ figure is not able to provide a role model that could save South Africa and solve the traumatized nation's problems<sup>101</sup>. Dangor not only sought to reveal this in *Bitter Fruit*, but also aimed at pointing out his alternative view on the issue, by resuming and rewriting parts of the novel.

Dangor's polyphonic work is not content to narrate the story of an individual in relation to the events of his or her own past, but reaches beyond convention where individual trauma is always tied up with the trauma of another. Each of the narrators' experiences is inextricable from the stories of the other speakers and profoundly connected. The question that Coetzee leaves unresolved, and that haunts the reader at the close of the narrative, is whether Lucy's child can really bring an end to all the suffering and whether there can be an end to the repetition-compulsion of apartheid and its aftermaths. Dangor seems to imply that it is precisely that which is not fully known in the first instance that returns to haunt us later on. In a way Dangor seems to gesture towards an innovative way of reading and listening which, Caruth suggests, trauma "profoundly and imperatively demand[s]" (1996a: 9).

Dangor seems to take an implacable stance in *Bitter Fruit*, however, just like in Coetzee's *Disgrace*, the question is whether it is really necessary to read the novel on this realistic level. Mengel (2009) raises the question whether we should not grant Dangor what we have already granted Coetzee, namely that

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<sup>99</sup>Cf. Mengel 2009: 306 – Chris van der Merwe's and PumlaGobodo-Madikizela's reading in *Narrating our healing: Perspectives on trauma, narrative and forgiveness*.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. Mengel 2009.

<sup>101</sup> Cf. Mengel 2009.

no simple and straightforward correlation exists between a novel and its political reality and that a fictional text must not necessarily be understood as a manual for political action.

Whatever the reference to the political reality might be like in the two novels, both indicate the spectral limits of vastly differing positions in the debate about truth and reconciliation. While Coetzee seems to be inspired by a Christian spirit of reconciliation and pleads with the whites to accept to the culpability and debt accumulated in history, Dangor seems to be dissatisfied with this concept. He reverses Coetzee's scheme and embraces the opposite idea, substituting the notion of truth and reconciliation through truth and retaliation.

While in *Disgrace* Coetzee symbolically diminishes the "religious-redemptive" (Wilson, 104) understanding of reconciliation to absurdity, Dangor seeks to transmit a retributive idea of justice in his counter-narrative, and demonstrates that this equally fails to grasp the point. With these rivaling views both novelists deliberately and consciously fail to account for the intricacy of reality, and thereby demonstrate that the truth is a much more complex matter.

A crucial message of Dangor's intertextual response to *Disgrace* is that individuals deal very differently with the past and come to terms with it in various ways. Dangor's rejoinder novel underlines the fact that everyone has to find an own way of coming terms with the past. He manages to portray that by the diverse ways the characters in *Bitter Fruit* cope with their past. While it proves helpful for Lydia to literally leave her past behind after a renewed painful confrontation, Mikey chooses an extreme and sees no other option but retaliation. Silas represents the TRC and the first government after the fall of the apartheid and does not get over the past. He is stuck in his state of mind and has to give up.

In opposition to *Disgrace*, *Bitter Fruit* does not provide us with a happy outlook on South Africa's future. As far as the TRC is concerned, the outcome is pessimistic and Dangor clearly voices his dissatisfaction with the way the Commission has tried to give the nation's people a possibility to cope with the past. In his intertextual engagement with *Disgrace* Dangor wants to convey that coming to terms with the past for can only be of substance if we stop talking

about truth and reconciliation, but start grasping the fact that working through the trauma needs to be accepted in the context of multiples truths. Only by acknowledging different verities and granting everyone his own way of coping will coming to terms with the past work, whether this happens by reconciling, ignoring or pure retaliation.

**6. “What kind of child can seed like that give life to, seed driven into the woman not in love but in hatred ... “ Ken Barris and *What Kind of Child***

*What Kind of Child* tells the life stories of three very different persons living in Cape Town: Luke Turner, a young journalist, Malibongwe Joyini, a joyless child doomed to a life on the streets, and Bernal Diaz, a tattoo artist about to die.<sup>102</sup>

Rich in symbolism and allegory, Ken Barris follows Achmat Dangor, and picks up where Coetzee leaves off in *Disgrace*. He provides the reader with insights on how the life of a child of rape can look like. It has to be noted here that this chapter does not provide a thorough analysis of the novel, but merely focuses on those parts regarded as a re-writing of Coetzee’s *Disgrace*, whether by means of alteration or complementation.

That fact that Barris’ novels can be seen as a response to Coetzee’s *Disgrace* is instantly revealed by the title, which Barris’ takes from Coetzee’s novel:

What kind of child can seed like that give life to,  
Seed driven into the woman not in love but in hatred ...  
(DG 199)

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<sup>102</sup> Cf. <http://www.litpark.com/2007/05/16/ken-barris/>

While Coetzee leaves the reader in uncertainty about the path Lucy's child will ultimately take and whether it will be able to save South Africa, Barris complements his storyline and deals with the question what happens to children conceived through rape. In contrast to Dangor, who presents the example of Mikey, engendered by the rape of his mother Lydia by a white policeman, Barris presents us with two different storylines, namely the lives of Luke Turner and Malibongwe Joyini- both children of rape, however, with two very different backgrounds. The description of their lives and the author's underlying implications will constitute the major part of this chapter.

Apart from Luke Turner and Malibongwe Joyini, Barris includes a third major voice, the one of Bernal Diaz, a man who claims to be a 500 year old veteran of Hernán Cortés' conquest of Mexico, and now acts as a tattoo artist in a shabby neighbourhood of Cape Town. Diaz is intent on leaving something behind before he perishes and Luke agrees to offer his skin to Diaz to tattoo stories of his life onto it.

Barris also incorporates the minor character of Rupert Chapman into the novel, which clearly resembles David Lurie in *Disgrace*. Just like Lurie, he is an older professor who invites a younger student into his house and cooks for her, however, with the precursor that nothing happens between them.

## 6.1. Two Children of Rape

A quote from Coetzee's *Disgrace* provides the title for Barris' novel. At the end of *Disgrace*, Coetzee's protagonist David Lurie discusses Lucy's pregnancy with his daughter, unable to understand that she refuses an abortion and actually wants to give life to the child. He wonders what a child's life conceived through rape could be like:

The gang of three. Three fathers in one. Rapists rather than robbers, Lucy called them – rapists cum taxgatherers roaming the area, attacking women, indulging their violent pleasures. Well, Lucy was wrong. They were not raping, they were mating. It was not the pleasure principle that ran the show but the testicles, sacs bulging with seed aching to perfect

itself. And now, lo and behold, *the child!* [...] What kind of child can seed like that give life to, seed driven into the woman not in love but in hatred, mixed chaotically, meant to soil her, to mark her, like a dog's urine? (DG 199).

The title instantly reveals the author's intent to seek answers to the question what happens to a child of rape. He does so on a narrative level, corresponding to who this child of rape is, as well as on a thematic level, which can be understood as allegory of postcolonial birth. Curiously, the author not only gives one example but presents us with two different storylines about two very different boys.<sup>103</sup>

While Luke has a white mother, who is not well-off but enough to get by, Malibongwe's mother Xoliswa is black and doomed more or less to a life on the streets. The only thing that connects the two characters is the fact that they are both colored. Their worlds are contrasted and played off against each other. While Luke seems to have too many options in a life characterized by no commitment, privilege and freedom, Malibongwe inhabits a harsh world, in which his only choice lies in surviving or dying. Their worlds randomly intersect at exiguous intervals – coincidental events in a city like Cape Town, where the the rich and the poor are close to each other. The voice of the two characters start off from connected positions, however, are unable to find any concordance.<sup>104</sup>

In comparison to Dangor's response to *Disgrace*, Barris realistically contrasts the worlds of two different children of rape – Luke and Malibongwe. Their lives are related and characterized by a variety of problems; identity loss, and for one of them even death as salvation. Despite their different backgrounds, both lives are presented as bleak, deeply miserable and dreadful.

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<sup>103</sup> Cf. <http://www.litpark.com/2007/05/16/ken-barris/>

<sup>104</sup> Cf. <http://www.litpark.com/2007/05/16/ken-barris/>

### 6.1.1. Luke Turner

Echoing *Disgrace*, Luke Turner represents Lucy's child to be born. Luke is a womanizing young journalist, engendered through hate and violence by the rape of his mother by a black man. The reader does not get any further insights or details on the rape scene and no detailed information is presented about Luke's father as a person. This relates to *Disgrace*, in which the reader can only guess and deduce what happened during the prominent scene of rape.

*Disgrace* leaves the reader uncertain about how Lucy's child will turn out to be and whether Coetzee's very symbolical insinuation of the child being the one to save South Africa will become real. Like the character of Mikey in *Bitter Fruit*, the reader now gets to know this child engendered through an act of violence, who at the start of the novel is depicted as "a young coloured man, slightly plump, probably in his early twenties" (12). *What Kind of Child* is characterized by structural incohesion and shifts of voices, therefore mirroring the symptomatology of trauma. Shifts between Luke as an adult and as a boy take turns throughout the narrative. Until the day his grandfather, Arthur Turner, unexpectedly stands in front of their door, Luke is uncertain about his origin. However, even before this incident, the repercussions of the rape make themselves felt in Luke's life, especially with regard to the relationship between Luke and his mother Caitlin, which deteriorates drastically. Not only Caitlin, but also Luke seems traumatized:

He presses his face into the back of her neck. There is the jogging of her stride and the milky odour of her body. The breeze coming off the sea tugs at her hair; wisps brush against the side of his face. Then his mother walks into the sea, and stands ankle-deep in the surging water. She lets him down. The icy shock is a relief to his foot. They stand together looking at the horizon, holding hands. 'It's getting too cold,' he says. Reluctantly she turns away, and they begin their walk down the beach. He crouches over a large stranded jellyfish, a pudding of flesh almost a metre across, with a mob of whelk boring into it. 'Is it dead?' he asks. 'They're eating it.' 'I don't think so,' she replies. 'I don't know.' 'Can it feel?' 'I don't know. I don't think so.' [...] There is no-one else on the beach. They are alone with the white light, the noises of sea and wind,



the long converging lines of the shore. Am I alive or dead, he asks. Is my mother alive or dead? Can we feel? He hears his mother's voice reply: I don't think so. I don't know. (35-36).

Similar to *Bitter Fruit* (and a variety of other contemporary South African Trauma novels), in which Lydia writes a diary in order to come to terms with the past, also Caitlin engages in writing, translating traumatic memory into narrative memory:

She has been writing a book as long as he can remember. [...] Most of the notebooks are thin, and the wire coil sticks out like the ribcage of a starved animal. He knows he must never speak to her, when his mother writes (74).

While Luke's mother has not seen her father for years, and by his return is reminded of the horrible incident that has shaped her life so substantially, Luke doesn't even know that his grandfather exists until the day Arthur Turner shows up. His arrival deeply impacts on them both:

Luke limps to his mother's side. Half his fear is her speech, her voice: usually when she speaks, it is as if she moves through deep water, or is caught dreaming in a heavy rain. Now it comes out too quickly and tastes sour. The old man has changed her into a different mother (38).

Arthur Turner is of the opinion that his grandson has a right to know about his origins. Urging his daughter to tell him the truth about his own genesis:

You might hate me for saying this: you will have to tell the boy one day where he comes from. These things always come out, and when this particular thing does come out – as inevitably it will – both of you will regret your silence. He will resent it to the day you die, and long after (77).

There are frequent allusions and hints on part of Luke's grandfather with regard to Luke's begetting. Foreshadowing relates to Luke's later confusion or even loss of identity, such as his grandfather's dream in which Luke occurs without a face:

‘You don’t say much, do you?’ Luke looks down on the floor. ‘You might find this hard to believe, boy, but I dreamt about you once. You had no face.’ Luke raises his hand to his face. It is still there. There is a strange hissing sound, which frightens him; he realizes that his grandfather is laughing. ‘You can understand that missing face,’ says the old man. ‘Your mother kicked me out of her life before you were born. What do you think of that?’ [...] ‘She’s like that,’ he says. ‘She can be an obtuse mess in moments of crisis. Mass, I should say, a doughy but unyielding mass of silence. It has an almost religious quality, you know, a religious mass. You can’t really penetrate that, can you? It’s baffling and tormenting, and of course utterly demoralizing. To suffer like that in silence; to turn the other cheek – it’s an abuse of power and a bloody lie, my boy, but I suppose you know that, better than most. Oh yes, you’re an expert yourself’ (42).

The fact that Arthur Turner refers to his daughter in a context that has religious quality, correlates with *Disgrace*’s Lucy, who is characterized by highly symbolical religious connotations, and can be seen as an allusion to Mother Mary, being visited by the Holy Ghost, about to bring the Savior into the world- a fact that is denied Caitlin, since her son Luke cannot be considered as a Savior by any means.

The relationship between Luke and his grandfather is ambivalent. On the one hand Arthur Turner is depicted as rude, intrusive and insensitive, on the other hand he quickly turns into some sort of substitute for the lost father that Luke never had. Hence, like *Disgrace* and *Bitter Fruit*, also Barris’ novel treats the issue of fatherhood as an important theme. Before Luke knows the truth about his origin, he tries to figure out what his grandfather is really like, whether he is a good or a bad man:

The stink reminds Luke of rotting seaweed. Does his grandfather come from the sea too? (41).

Even though they have just met, it quickly becomes obvious on part of Arthur Turner that he loves his grandson, expressed through the way that he worries about Luke’s clump foot:

‘I don’t suppose you’ve met your father?’ Luke shakes his head. ‘Has she ever told you about him?’ ‘No,’ replies Luke, his first word to his

grandfather. `Of course she hasn't, with bloody good reason, too.` He lies back in the tub again, and mutters wearily, `But she should have done something about your foot. She's let you down there, old son. Not my business, of course...` (42-43).

Arthur Turner not only blames his daughter for not doing something about the boy's club foot, but also for withholding the truth from Luke, who learns of his origin, overhearing a conversation between his mother and his grandfather:

[...] You've neglected the child horribly, says one voice. A club foot can be rectified these days. You can ignore the fact that it mars his beauty – but think of the pain of every step that he takes! It is shameful! [...] “If anything is shameful, it is you – practically telling Luke that he is a child of rape. (77).

The fact that Luke finds out himself about how he was begotten resembles *Bitter Fruit*, in which Mikey actually reads his mother's diary containing the truth. Arthur Turner makes a few attempts of telling his grandson, however, he manages to restrain himself, usually turning his remarks into compliments for his grandson:

`Has she ever told you?` Luke shakes his head, not knowing what question he answers. [...] `She should have told you. She should have told you that you're good-looking. No, that's not quite right: you're a beautiful child` (43).

Without even knowing about his genesis, Luke senses that something is wrong with him. He suffers an identity crisis and finds himself in a state of denial. He is uncertain about his real self and rejects his outer appearance. This correlates to many other colored people who felt displaced during apartheid and as a result often suffered from severe identity crises- a fact which continues to apply to today's society. While black and white people are characterized by clear-cut race distinctions, many colored people still find themselves at a loss:

There is a tarnished mirror above his work table. He climbs onto his chair and kneels on it to look at his reflection. A solemn brown face stares back. He is slightly plump, with full lips, dark eyes and curly black hair.

His grandfather is wrong. It is an ugly face; the image makes him feel mildly ill. But he forces himself to look at it, and after a while the figure splits off from himself and becomes a picture of someone else. He thinks he can see that other person grow older, and become a dark, strong person, grow into a life that isn't his own. He prefers then to look at the space behind and around the image. He peers in at the sides of the mirror, both sides, trying to see more. It is a clear world that he cannot get into – everything in it is hard and clean and real. It is a better world (43).

Finally, Arthur Turner partly confronts his grandson with the truth, asking him whether he knows his father and expressing similarities between the boy's features and his father's:

‘Don't you ever speak child? You're depressingly like your mother. I'm surprised you can speak at all’ (45). Luke swallows, and says, ‘I can speak.’ [...] Cruelty flickers in Turner's face, in his eyes. ‘I can see your father now. In your features, in your demeanour. But you don't know your father do you? [...]’ ‘I know my father,’ he says. It isn't true. He has never seen his father before. [...] The old man straightens up, his mouth the same bitter gash that is his daughter's mouth, and lets his hair fall. ‘I was conscious, most of the time. I saw it, I saw most of your getting. But I couldn't move. Your mother couldn't speak, and still can't.’ He smiles than, in horrible satisfaction. It is unbearable for Luke (46).

Luke's confusion of identity turns into a loss of thereof, leaving the boy puzzled, still not quite sure what his grandfather is talking about:

The room has gone dark, and he doesn't know why. He finds it hard to breathe; he doesn't fully understand his grandfather's words; he knows they mean something about his own life. It has to do with his mother, how he was made the wrong way (46).

Arthur Turner talks about how the perpetrator cut up his chest with a brick, resulting in a huge scar, before he raped his daughter Caitlin in front of his eyes. “The scar is a shiny pink-brown, with florid stitch-marks on either side. Luke wonders why his grandfather has been cut open, and what has been

taken out” (41). He repeatedly comments on the fact that Luke hardly speaks- a fact that corresponds to the boy’s loss of identity:

That brick summed up everything, says the old, dry voice. `It was his personality. You see things clearly when you’re on the floor, broken and bleeding. It was the imprint of his personality, I should say. There is a relationship – in such moments – that surpasses everything [...].`  
`Perhaps,` he says quietly, `that is why you have so little to say` (47).

Luke confronts his mother about the fact that his grandfather saw his “getting”, seeking to obtain any further information on what he actually means by that. This results in a sort of re-traumatization on part of Luke’s mother, expressed predominantly through silence:

`Grandfather saw my getting,` says Luke. [...] `What does “getting” mean?` `“Getting” means where you come from,` she replies, walking too fast for him now. [...] There is something about this that upsets her badly. Perhaps it is his grandfather’s fault, perhaps his own: he shouldn’t have spoken about his getting. The light fails as they walk. His loneliness mounts up, until it batters at him like an onshore wind. He will have to wait for her, perhaps several days. There is no bargaining with her silence. That is the first rule of the world (73). [...] Her normally pale face is white; he chews his food vigorously, looking at her from time to time through his surly eyes. Luke begins to tremble. In the distance, faintly, he can feel rage and fear. Is it his own? (81).

The only facts the reader really gets to know about the adult Luke is his excessive engagement with women, who no longer interest him once he has conquered them, and the fact that he agrees to supply his body for Bernal Diaz to tattoo scenes of his life onto it.

In comparison to Malibongwe, whose life will be discussed in the following, the reader does not really get any details on what course Luke’s life takes or how it ends. The reader is left with indications of his loss of self, characterized by total confusion, insinuating the consumption of alcohol or drugs. Barris employs a vast tenderness for human nature, expressed in the amused compassion for his characters. “He punctures their own vanities at the very moment when it seems

they will be realized”<sup>105</sup>. Intoxicated, Luke swims to Robben Island, only to find himself waking up knee-deep in the moat of a residential complex:

At last I summon the energy to lift my head again and look around, realizing at last where I am. This can only be Woodbridge Island, a suburban property development just off Milnerton Lagoon. I’ve swum in a great circle, and landed not far from my starting point. A broken laugh wrings its way out of my chest: I’m relieved that I don’t have to find my way back alone from Robben Island, a country famous for its terrible desolation (196).

### **6.1.2. MalibongweJoyini**

“Malibongwe Joyini is born in a clinic in Khayelitsha, in Cape Town. His mother does not know how to love him. The father of this child is a dog of the government, a policeman” (120). The story of Malibongwe starts out with the detailed description of his mother Xoliswa getting raped by a white policeman, which results in her pregnancy with the boy. Both mother and son live a poor life, struggling to survive in Cape Town. Their relationship is characterized by ambivalence. When Xoliswa looks at her boy she is reminded of his father:

It troubles Xoliswa that her son is ilawu, a coloured boy. His slight-brown skin is beautiful, and she doesn’t wish it any darker. But does he really come from her own flesh? Sometimes she sees the policeman staring out of her son’s eyes, even though they are still unfocused (121).

Xoliswa learns to ease her pain by drinking with a group of women who take shelter under a nearby railway bridge. She drinks whatever they drink and sometimes smokes dagga. “It makes Malibongwe sleep deeply too; she is breastfeeding, and he drinks whatever is in her blood. They sleep huddled together to defy the cold, and for safety” (121). Xoliswa is unable to love her child due to its origin; however, she condemns herself because of it. “She has come to hate herself. She struggles to understand what has happened to her –

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<sup>105</sup> Cf. Barris 2010.

is she a victim or a sellout? The child is a poisonous thing that has come out of her own body (120).

In Malibongwe's third year, there are general elections. For the first time in South Africa, Africans are allowed to vote for their own leaders in their own country. "Xoliswa doesn't vote. She no longer has an identity document, and lives outside the official world where these things matter" (122). That same night, Malibongwe, who suffers from a chest infection, nearly dies. He is kept in a hospital overnight. Xoliswa cannot stay as there is no room for her.

While the rest of the country celebrates, she celebrates her own day of freedom. For the first time in nearly three years, she is without the burden of her son, even if only for a limited time. She is tempted to leave him there, and walk freely away into a new life (122-123).

One day, Xoliswa and Malibongwe are separated on the streets by the crush of people around them. Xoliswa's mind is dulled by a severe hangover, so it takes her a while to realize that her son is gone. She panics, which prevents her from thinking clearly. She makes short runs in various directions, calling him, her voice hoarse with fear. "Darkness clouds her vision. It becomes too much for her, and near-fainting, she sits down on the kerb. It is like death itself is closing in" (123). All of sudden a man from her home village, Griffith Masica, turns up, who finally helps her find Malibongwe. "His face is twisted with anxiety. Xoliswa swoops down on him and lifts him up. Tears roll down her cheeks. It is the first time she has wept since she was raped nearly six years before" (124). The experience of actually losing Malibongwe is crucial in the relationship between Xoliswa and her son. From then on, she genuinely cares for the boy. Xoliswa and Malibongwe move in with Griffith Masica, and it soon becomes obvious that Griffith would not accept Malibongwe in his house if it weren't for his mother:

She worries terribly about Malibongwe. She knows that he has been missing school – he often comes home far too late – but she doesn't have the strength to question him. He lives according to his own rules now. This freedom makes Griffith angry when it becomes too obvious; it is visible in his eyes when Malibongwe arrives home late, in the set of his shoulders, the way he holds his pipe. It becomes a pressure that they all feel, flooding the silence in this dimly lit shack. Yet he says nothing, and allows the boy to eat. His anger terrifies Xoliswa. She knows that once

she is gone, he will evict Malibongwe. Long before his time, the child will have to live like a man (170).

In comparison to Luke's mother Caitlin, who keeps silent about the rape and prefers the truth to remain hidden, like Lucy in *Disgrace*, Xoliswa Joyini sometimes talks to the policeman who raped her:

Malibongwe's father. She wants him to account for his action; she needs to inform him about her son. There is no forgiveness, the old hatred is undimmed, but she needs to talk to him anyway. She tells him that her bitterness, her hatred, is too great. It spills over onto Malibongwe, it always has. [...] This is exactly what she cannot forgive: the policeman has poisoned her love for the boy (169).

Living together with Griffith Masica, Malibongwe often overhears him and his mother sleeping together, something that's always accompanied by sounds like pain. None of this is surprising to him since men have done this before in Malibongwe's presence.

One day when Xoliswa reaches out for the matches in order to heat water, she sets the hut on fire and dies as a consequence. It is not quite clear whether her death was intentional or not. Xoliswa moves out of her body and actually sees herself dying. At the moment of her death, Xoliswa rises out of her body and sees herself truly for the first time<sup>106</sup>:

She sees even beyond the physical mass, into the texture and grain of her life. It surprises her, how bad things have become without her really noticing. [...] There is no pain in her new understanding, only regret and a mild astonishment that begins from her centre and spreads out in a widening ripple.

After his mother's death, Malibongwe moves into a new house with Griffith, however, soon finds himself on the streets, sniffing glue and daydreaming about acting as an acrobat in the circus.

The novel closes with Malibongwe, having no luck begging, wandering aimlessly through the city streets. "No-one notices him: he could be a ghost"

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<sup>106</sup> Cf. Barris 2010.



(216). He spends the night in an alley, sleeping in a dumpster. After climbing out in the morning with his eyes gummed together, he is chased by a security guard who throws a brick at the boy. Running away, Malibongwe veers into the path of a speeding minibus taxi. He is hit head on. The taxi lurches over him and drags his body sixty feet down the asphalt:

Malibongwe stares up at the dizzying sky. It is quiet now, and the crowd that gathers round him makes no noise. [...] The steady drizzle doesn't matter any more, he no longer shivers. He isn't hungry either, and his eyes have stopped itching and aching. He sinks down into the bitumen, into the bitter salt of the road. It is warmer here, embedded in the sub-base, the stone and lime compacted, the scraped earth. Perhaps he will rest for a while until he thinks of something better to do. Perhaps he will become part of this Sea Point road, embedded forever in its garish lit consciousness (217).

The fact that death is actually welcome for the characters dying in *What Kind of Child*, highlights the grimness of the novel and gives insight into the bleak existence of many people's lives in South Africa. Barris answers Coetzee's highly artificial symbolism by harsh reality. He responds to *Disgrace* by giving a realistic picture of what a life of a child of rape can look like. Malibongwe, his mother Xoliswa and Bernal Diaz, the old tattooist, all find relief in demise, which the following passages illustrate:

'My gravestone,' he whispers tiredly. 'You must kindly arrange to inscribe this on my gravestone, if I have one.' 'I will see that you have one. What does it mean?' [...] Still staring up at the ceiling, mumbling and hissing through his gums, he manages a translation: 'After a long absence, it pleases death to arrive.' (145).

Standing there, attempting to beg, Malibongwe becomes aware of time. Very few people are using the car park this morning, and so far, everyone has brushed him off. There is so much time in which nothing happens. Much of his life is nothing but waiting (186).

## 6.2. Depiction of Rape and Implications for South Africa's Future

The main rape in *Disgrace* is not described in detail to the reader. The only thing we know is that it was a gang-rape by three black men. Due to marginalia as Lurie's burned head or the shooting of Lucy's dogs, the reader learns that the boys proceed with great brutality. The novel's intimation that the time for white people to suffer has arrived caused a maelstrom of controversy and criticism.

*Disgrace* was condemned by many as portraying a detrimental image of the new South Africa, depicting a vigorous example of white racist stereotyping. While Dangor sought to reverse this picture, Barris provides the reader with two different storylines of two children of rape.

While Luke was born to a white mother, raped by a black man, Malibongwe was born to a black mother, raped by a white policeman. The only thing we really get to know about Luke's mother being raped is the fact that her father was physically present while it happened and unable to help her. This strongly correlates to *Disgrace* in the way that David Lurie was only one room apart from Lucy when she was gang-raped equally unable to come to rescue her. Arthur Turner apologizes to his daughter the day he arrives, indicating that she is the one who cut off contact after the rape:

Arthur puts down his empty cup, his hand trembling. 'No quarter given, Caitlin. I should have expected it. I'm sorry, I made a mistake. I was stupid to come back here.' Her shoulders hunch; she leans forward and asks, 'What was a mistake, Arthur? Coming here like this, or staying away for five years? I'd really like to know.' 'I didn't come here to fight with you,' he replies, rising, his lower lip trembling visibly. As he does so, his chair falls over backwards; they both wince as it crashes. 'I'm sorry,' he repeats, bending over to pick up the chair. He straightens his face white under the grime. 'I'll leave you now. But please bear in mind that it was you – it was your decision – it was you who refused all contact, afterwards, after it happened' (40).

In contrast to the attack on Luke's mother, where no details are revealed, Barris describes the rape on Malibongwe's mother Xoliswa in great detail, presenting cruel and bleak details.

He allows her to get out. He has to help her, because she is nearly paralysed with fear. He then forces her down onto the ground. Her knees buckle, co-operating with the policeman. On the side of her is the car, on the other side a prickly-pear bush. That is all she can see, except for the man lying on top of her. She hears a distant sound of screaming. It is a woman's voice, or some wounded animal? This is her own voice, she realizes, her own screaming (119).

Like Dangor, Barris responds to Coetzee's contrary constellation and biased picture of South African's blacks, by turning the rape into a more common pairing - a white policeman on a colored woman. However, unlike Coetzee or Dangor, he seems intent on portraying a more balanced picture, accounting for the fact that South Africa's problems traverse the spectrum of social status and ethnicity. While Dangor reverses Coetzee's ostensibly clear-cut and stereotypical scheme through the depiction of a more common type of rape, Barris seems intent on giving a more balanced view, in which he explores and demonstrates the complexity of South Africa's problems and the way Apartheid continues to influence all aspects of life, regardless of ethnic background.

The incidents in both Luke's and Malibongwe's lives bear witness to a deeply disturbed mind, struggling with the traumatic shock resulting from the discovery of their origins and the identity crisis that accompanies it.

As already mentioned in chapter 5, the way Lucy behaves after the rape is highly unlikely. Barris appears dissatisfied with Coetzee's unrealistic depiction of Lucy's behavior, in which a symbolic model of what life might look like for whites in the future South Africa is portrayed. For Barris, the nail on which Coetzee hangs all this seems to be too insignificant to carry the weight. Thus, he presents us with two more probable storylines. While Coetzee presents a highly artificial symbolic construction, with a glaring allegory that seems to question itself, Barris provides a realistic portrayal of what the life of a child of rape in South Africa could really be like. Lucy's child is a symbol for South

Africa's future, born to be able to save South Africa- a fact Barris rejects because it is too placative. Moreover, Barris is discontented with Coetzee's implication for truth and reconciliation regarding South Africa's future. Like *Bitter Fruit*, *What Kind of Child* does not provide a happy outlook on South Africa's future, but presents the grim facts of common life in post-apartheid South Africa. Barris neglects Coetzee's implication of reconciliation brought about through Lucy's child and presents a very dismal, bleak picture of the new South Africa, exemplified through the realistic life stories of two very different children of rape.

Responding to Coetzee, Barris portrays conflicting perspectives, with an imaginative depiction of subjective experiences through a multitude of characters. This correlates with Dangor's intention of obtaining not just one truth, like Coetzee, but a multitude of truths relating to South Africa's trauma and coming to terms with the nation's past. While Mikey's cold-blooded murder of his father definitely rejects the idea of reconciliation, and refuses to open up for a better future, Barris seems to imply a similar notion, however, replacing Dangor's retaliatory, cold-hearted picture through a more sober, realistic one. With regard to the women being raped, Barris clearly shows that everyone has its own way of dealing with the past. The silence Lucy brings to deal with the rape reflects her traumatization and is her personal way of coming to terms with the past. Caitlin's story in *What Kind of Child* demonstrates clear parallels to *Disgrace* in this respect. Caitlin does not want to deal with the past or be confronted about it by her father, just like Lucy. While Luke's mother prefers the truth to remain hidden, like Lucy in *Disgrace* or Lydia in *Bitter Fruit*, Xoliswa frequently talks to her rapist, trying to hold him accountable for his crime.

Barris manages to relativize Coetzee's stereotyped and clinical race distinctions through the depiction of both a black and a white woman being raped. Similar to Dangor, Coetzee's ostensible payback-message of the black's revenge obviously wasn't sufficient for the author. Also Barris hints at an existence of a multitude of traumata and a variety of voices. *Disgrace* implies Lucy carries the fate of South Africa's future, bringing about a Saviour to South Africa. *Bitter Fruit* on the other hand implies the opposite, depicting the boy as an Avenger.

For Barris both plot structures seem to be implausible; instead he presents an equally grim yet more realistic picture.

### 6.3. An Everlong Oppression of Women

Through the character of Lucy, about to give birth to her son the Savior, Coetzee implies that women should bear the cross of giving birth to the new nation. Barris clearly states his discontent with the implication that women are the ones to bring the newness to South Africa. He complements *Disgrace* in the way that he gives voice to women, and highlights their never-ending suffering. He alludes to the fact that for decades, women have been the ones to suffer, and accounts for their longstanding oppression in various ways.

Luke Turner constantly engages in relationships with women, just to let them down after a few dates, leaving them disillusioned and hurt. Like David Lurie in *Disgrace*, Luke considers himself a contemporary Byron. He perceives himself to be a great lover, enjoying one woman after the other, disposing of them like toys he's not interested in anymore. He even takes a sample of pubic hair from each conquest:

We talk a great deal, and much later, make love. When I explain the curious habit Lord Byron and I have in common, she allows me to take a sample (with patience, with a lack of comment I find charming). It is a struggle – her pubic hair is short, lies flat against the flesh – but her stolid grace is admirable, reflecting her economy of design. She honestly doesn't mind that I'm like an ape, picking through the fur of its mate (66).

The fact that Luke actually keeps some sort of trophy from every woman he has had sex with can be seen as an allegory to colonialism. Luke Turner conquers one woman like the colonizers conquered countries, leaving its inhabitants astray, helpless and lost, like Luke Turner's women. Also, conquering a nation always goes in line with conquering the nation's women, often by impregnating them.

The reference to Lord Byron depicts a clear parallel to *Disgrace*. David Lurie writes on opera on Byron, and like Luke Turner, identifies himself with the poet. Like Byron, both David and Luke consider themselves irresistible. Their idol Byron suffered from erotic confusion ever since his sexual instincts had been aroused as a child, when a nurse manipulated the boy's body performing various sexual experiments. Byron was bored by women the moment he finally made love to them, a pattern perfectly congruent to both David's and Luke's behavior.<sup>107</sup>

We are arrested in that position, her head lifted against the pressure of my hand. Then she gives over, allowing me to do what I must. I snip off a tight curl of her pubic hair – it is more densely white than the hair on her crown – and carefully place it in my breast pocket. I thank her solemnly. Later, it will go into my collection. Laughter gurgles from her, relief escaping, 'You are a pervert, do you always do this?' 'I always do this.' 'You are a snatch.' 'Byron did it too.' 'Who is Byron?' 'A poet. He was a lord, an English lord who wrote poetry.' 'This Byron was a snatch. Are you an English lord?' 'No, I am an ordinary South African peasant like you.' 'I am an ordinary Flemish peasant. You talk like an English lord.' 'I wonder how many English lords you've heard talk.' 'You are too brown to be a lord of England. You could only be a lord of chocolate.' I bow mockingly, bend down, and kiss her where it matters most: in the centre of the universe (26).

Curiously, all four novels featured in this thesis feature references to western literature and deal with characters that are either literate, "bookish" men, or correspond to western literature in another significant way, like Luke Turner:

The condition of women as the ones suffering is also depicted through the scene during Cortés conquest of the Aztec empire, when four women are about to be sacrificed:

They burn incense before Cortés to honour him, but their manner is insolent. 'If you are savage demons,' they say, 'take these women and sacrifice them, and eat their flesh. Otherwise, if you are gentle demons, we have brought you copal and parrot feathers with which to make your sacrifice' [...]. The four old women who have been offered as sacrificial victims stand by through these speeches, which they can understand because everything that is said goes through Cortés translator. [...] Their

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<sup>107</sup>Cf. Grabanier 1970.

lips are bruised by their lives of suffering, their dark flat eyes never turn to anything in particular. They show no relief when they learn that they are not to be torn open. [...] He is mystified by the nature of these hags: four bodies that appear to be without fear of passion, without even the will to live. Perhaps, he surmises, they do not understand that they have souls, and so must be led about the earth like poorly bred cattle. He is unable to feel sorry for such women“ (87-88).

There is a frequent depiction of Bernal Diaz´ neighbor, a little girl called Quanita Galant, portrayed with a violet stain on her cheek, indicating that she is a victim of domestic violence:

Glancing sideways, he discovers a little girl at this door, which is open, watching him toy with his food. She is nine years old, and lives next door. She has a cicatrix of ringworm on her cheek, which her mother has daubed with gentian violet. Her gaze is serious, unwavering. `Good morning, little girl,´ he says, with corresponding dignity; however, he cannot remember her name at the moment. He lifts a forkful of kipper and points it at her: `You want some?´ She shakes her head. `You don´t want to eat, because you are young. I am not hungry, because I am old. Appetite only comes with the middle years. Your history is in the future,´ he says, wavering the fork at her (10).

The fact that Diaz sees Quanita´s history in the future, corresponds to the never-ending pain inflicted on women that Barris wants to point out. Through Bernal Diaz´ remarks to the little girl, Barris manages to point out the cross women have had to bear throughout history, implying that it will not be any different in the future:

You will have children, he muses. You will take men as lovers, or they will take you. You will labour, bear the bruises of life with fortitude, toil till your strength is gone. There will be no statues made of you. It is wearying to turn his head to the side for so long. He looks away from her, at the peeling wall beyond, at nothing. The child goes away. (11)

Quanita Galant clearly represents the large number of children growing up in violent surroundings. The fact that she barely speaks correlates to the silencing

of women Barris seeks to indicate. He implies that a girl's future is destined to be disappointing:

At last he notices the little girl from next door. She is like a cat, waiting for him to see her, expecting nothing more. The gentian violet stain on her cheek has faded, the ringworm has grown more pronounced. He raises the glass to her, this time remembering her name: 'Your health, Quanita.' Of course, she makes no reply. He says, through the distorted sweetness of rum, 'To your history and your future, and the many strange things that will happen to you.' You are a child consecrated to suffering, he thinks, merely because you are poor and a woman, and your mother neglects you. That is only the beginning of your misadventures. You will flourish briefly, give life, and wither away, your biography unrecorded (22).

Barris' amplifies the women's pain accompanied by rage and anger, and men's inability to account for it:

He closes his eyes and waits for Ana to get off. She does move then, he feels the warmth of her face approaching. Her mouth presses down on his, her tongue enters his mouth. He gives the mental equivalent of a shrug, and reaches out. Throughout the painful sex that follows, and long after, Luke is preoccupied by a single but burning question – what is the cause of her great rage? – but fails to imagine any answer (58).

The author also indicates that men are supposed to provide and care for their women, however, frequently neglect to do so.

'I'm fine,' says the young man. 'Don't worry about me.' 'I never worry about my clients,' replies Bernal Diaz, 'when they are men. When they are women, it is my duty to worry' (54).

This correlates to one notion the main rapes of the three novels discussed so far (*Disgrace*, *Bitter Fruit*, and *What Kind of Child*) have in common: They are all characterized by powerless men unable to help their loved ones. David Lurie, being locked in the bathroom while his daughter Lucy is gang-raped, Silas, watching his wife Lydia being raped by a white policeman, and Arthur Turner, being present while his daughter is raped in front of his eyes, unable to come to her aid.



## 6.4. Further Considerations

The main focus of this analysis of *What Kind of Child* clearly lies on the re-writing of *Disgrace*, via a depiction of Luke's and Malibongwe's lives. Barris breaks with Coetzee's highly symbolical, unrealistic construction and depicts a realistic picture of what the lives of two very different children of rape can look like in post-apartheid South Africa. Nevertheless, apart from his complementation of *Disgrace* in this context, there are a few other points worth commenting upon.

South Africa is often referred to as the *rainbow-nation*, a term used by Archbishop Tutu to account for the vision of the liberated nation of South Africa. Nevertheless, apartheid's economic aftermaths are still being felt in South Africa, ramifying strongly into many parts of South Africa's socio-cultural system.<sup>108</sup> Through his depiction of two different children of rape, Barris manages to transmit this reality much more forcefully than Coetzee and gives voice to everyone. He includes frequent allusions to the Rainbow nation, such as Quanita Galant's indication about the monkey's wedding<sup>109</sup>:

‘What do you want, Quanita?’ he asks again.  
‘Nothing’, she replies, shaking her head [...].  
‘What are you doing here then, if you want nothing?’  
‘Nothing’, she replies. ‘I’ve got nothing to do.’  
He rests for a while. He forgets that she is present. When he starts awake, she is still in the doorway, watching him.  
‘Tell me something, Quanita,’ he asks, his voice barely audible, ‘do you think it is going to rain soon? Is it sunny outside?’  
‘It’s a monkey’s wedding.’

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<sup>108</sup> Cf. <http://www.litpark.com/2007/05/16/ken-barris/>

<sup>109</sup> A sunshower is a meteorological phenomenon in which it rains while the sun is shining. If the sun is at a low enough angle, this condition often leads to the appearance of a rainbow. In South African English, a sun shower is also referred to as a “monkey’s wedding”, a loan translation of the Zulu expression *umshadowezinkawu*- a wedding for monkeys. The term “Rainbow nation” refers to the concept of “Unity-within-racial-difference” (Farred, 175).

In contrast to Coetzee, whose clear-cut distinctions with reference to skin color in *Disgrace* have encountered vigorous antipathy, Barris addresses the issue of skin color with every character he introduces in a distinct way:

Gemma's touch is light and firm; she clasps and holds my hand a shade too long. She studies my face – a more fashionable word would be *interrogates* – her hazel eyes filled with demanding intelligence. Her hair is reddish-brown. Her skin colour and texture of a macadamia nut, freshly broken open. No single word describes that surface (68).

Responding to Coetzee's stereotypical depiction, Barris often describes his characters with a variety of shades and colors, never portraying them as just black or white:

Her pale skin gradually turns the colour of stained ivory; yet it retains its soft texture, despite the wrinkles that develop around her eyes and mouth and under her chin (80).

The fact that Luke Turner provides his body for Bernal Diaz, to tattoo his life story on it, on the one hand can be seen as filling the vacuum of Luke's lost identity. On the other hand, Luke, who considers himself "blind to his own colour" (30) supersedes skin color through this extensive tattooing.

She brings me a glass of whisky. It helps to ease the discomfort. In that release, briefly, I trust her enough to talk about my motive. 'I can't see colour properly,' I explain to Ana. 'I'm colour-blind.' 'Is that true? Are you really colour-blind?' 'Yes. No. Not really.' Her ears and scalp twitch, like an animal's. 'What do you mean, Luke?' 'I'm blind to my own colour,' I reply. 'I don't know what it is.' 'You bloody South Africans,' she says, shaking her head" (30).

*What Kind of Child* is full of references to Colonialism, invariably symbolized through negative objects or entities, such as Bernal Diaz's brain tumour:

'I have a tumour in the brain. I have three tumours.' He grins darkly. 'One important one, and two satellites.' 'The Nina, the Pinta, and the Santa Maria,' says the carpenter. 'Soon you will discover America' (60).

Bernal Diaz and both children of rape in the novel can be seen as a parable of colonialism. The character of Bernal Diaz can be considered an answer to *Disgrace* (and other contemporary South African novels) in the way that it represents an “ironic gesture [...] towards the South African literary canon, which has focused in a very enclosed way on the problems of apartheid” (Barris, 2007, Interview). Through the character of Diaz, Barris suggests “in an oblique way that there have been other colonial tragedies” as well, “rich both in difference and similarity” to the one in South Africa (Barris, 2007, Interview).

There is a variety of themes and symbols in *What Kind of Child*, representing parallels to *Disgrace*. Dogs act as an important metaphorical device in *Disgrace*, representing the development of the characters and Barris frequently draws analogies between humans and dogs.

There are many dogs in the street. They are mostly comfortable dogs, like Labradors and old Staffordshire, and a black dog with three legs that can run swiftly. They lie about on the pavement or in the yards, like seals basking in the sun. It is a good life. [...]. There are big birds too that inhabit the upper stories of Observatory: heavy white-necked crows, strutting guinea fowl, Egyptian geese with handsome chocolate-edged wings that hiss as they fly overhead, and ibis releasing their trumpet blasts. Luke likes the crows best of all (111).

A variety of other animals act as symbolic objects. Part of what makes Barris’ novel so nightmarish are his random dystopian slips, such as the depiction of the flying lizards, called pterosaurs, which can be seen as the evil remnants of colonialism and apartheid, “still ramifying forcefully into so many aspects of common life” (Barris, 2007, Interview).

Picking up Coetzee’s quote from *Disgrace*, *What Kind of Child*, the question really provides its own answer. Barris picks up where Coetzee leaves off, coming to similar conclusions, as life is short, people are selfish and power is everything. *What Kind of Child* presents a realistic picture of two children of rape, both damned, unable to get what they want, unable to live fully in the present<sup>110</sup>.

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<sup>110</sup> Cf. Barris 2010.

## 7. “I rest my case on the rights of desire ... On The god who makes even the small birds quiver”: André Brink and *The Rights of Desire*

Would we make the temptingly arrogant generalization, and suggest that the leading white male authors this part of the thesis is concerned with are representative, we would have to argue that white South African males of a certain age find themselves in crisis. While André Brink’s novel *The Rights of Desire* (2000) is not as unremittingly grim as *Disgrace*, the Booker Prize winner written by Brink’s fellow at the University of Cape Town, English Professor J.M. Coetzee, the two novels are joined in bleakness. For both novelists, life in the new South Africa seems to be a disturbing affair of diminishment and decline.

Like Achmat Dangor’s *Bitter Fruit*, Brink’s novel is in discourse with the novel of his more eminent colleague J.M. Coetzee. *The Rights of Desire* can be seen as an answer or analogue to *Disgrace*.<sup>111</sup> There are many similarities to be found between the two novels, however, Brink’s plot has some alterations on key elements in *Disgrace*. In addition to the title, Brink draws the following quote as an epigraph from Coetzee’s novel:

I rest my case on the rights of desire ... On  
The god who makes even the small birds quiver  
- J. M. Coetzee

The quote runs along with the following lines from Wallace Stevens:

The obscure moon lighting an obscure world  
Of things that would never be quite expressed,  
Where you yourself were never quite yourself  
And did not want nor have to be  
- Wallace Stevens

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<sup>111</sup> Cf. <http://partners.nytimes.com/books/01/06/17/reviews/010617.17woodlt.html>

Does desire really have rights? Brink seems to point out the fact that the right of desire is something we will never be able to fully express. “If I claim desire as my right,” Brink’s protagonist Ruben Olivier asks himself rather uneasily, “does not my right to desire invoke the right of the other to refuse me? And does that not make a mockery of “right”, as much as of “desire”? The most I can claim for desire is the right to be frustrated, to be denied” (154). The question is what would urge someone to claim a right that seems to be more of a deprivation? Or what would make someone calmly rest a case on such a basis? He would have to be entangled in something similar to the plots of either *Disgrace* or *The Rights of Desire*.<sup>112</sup>

## 7.1. Plot Structure and Parallels

Of the many similarities between *Disgrace* and *The Rights of Desire*, the most remarkable is the destiny of the authors’ protagonists, David Lurie and Ruben Olivier.

Both men live in an increasingly violent Cape Town. They are both of a certain age, Lurie 52, Ruben 65, and live alone: Lurie twice divorced, Ruben a widower. Both protagonists are compulsively attracted to women, a student in *Disgrace*, a lodger in *The Rights of Desire*. The two of them are highly literate, “bookish” men, Lurie a university professor of English, Olivier a librarian. Both men are cashiered and both are destined to discover all sorts of things about themselves and their lives as a result of their troubled and haunting relationships. Interestingly, Brink also incorporates a smart young lawyer in his counter-novel, who is called Mike Coetzee.

Like Lurie, Brink’s hero Olivier finds himself on the wrong side of the reconstruction and transformation processes in post-apartheid South Africa. A librarian, and like the university professor Lurie, a highly literate, bookish man, he “retires early”. Confessedly bitter, he ascribes his redundancy to inverse

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<sup>112</sup> Cf. <http://partners.nytimes.com/books/01/06/17/reviews/010617.17woodlt.html>

racism: "I got booted out just because I'm white and male" (97). As represented by Coetzee and Brink, in contemporary South Africa it is not only blacks and colored people, but also white middle-aged males who register, most pervasively, the injustices of a racism in which they were implicated and from which they apparently cannot be freed. Desperate, out of a job and with failing health, Olivier's children persuade him to take in a lodger. The first caller, Tessa, an agent of a self-knowledge both chastening and ennobling, quickly becomes the centre of the man's life and his object of desire. Obviously seeking shelter from the proverbial storm, the young woman, who seems troubled and is not always given to veracity, captures Olivier straight away.

The story between Brink's hero Ruben Olivier and his lodger Tess goes on for a few months, in which the young woman represents both rejuvenation and madness. She turns thirty during the course of the events, and her life is characterized by an abortion and an almost-rape. Even though Tess caresses Ruben, she refuses to have sex with him and even brings home other guys. The relationship between Olivier and Tess features genuine intimacy and confidence, however, Tess does not depend on Olivier's proximity like he depends on hers. Brink's protagonist always wanted a daughter, and the novel circles around the loss of his daughter and his wife who died at childbirth.<sup>113</sup>

When Lurie remarks on the rights of desire, he is talking to his daughter Lucy about the accusation of harassment at the Cape Technical University. "So males must be allowed to follow their instincts unchecked? Is that the moral?" Lucy asks her father sharply. "No", responds Lurie, "that is not the moral."

Lurie claims the rights of desire (89), inspiring Brink's protagonist that the right of desire is to desire, meaning, to be frustrated. Yet, in the course of the novel, Lurie discovers that he is lacking in fire and possibly always has (195). His powers of seduction have faded and it seems that in order to return to grace he has to empathize with women. "Does he have it in him to be the woman?" he asks himself (160), thinking that Byron's Teresa, keening for her lost lover in her stout middle age "may be the last one who can save him" (209). At the

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<sup>113</sup> Cf. <http://partners.nytimes.com/books/01/06/17/reviews/010617.17woodlt.html>

beginning of *Disgrace*, Coetzee's protagonist renounces hope by renouncing the possibility of change. His motto is "Follow your temperament" (2).

Lurie doesn't seem to suggest one cannot regret desire's consequences or that desire should never be tamed, but that one is not able to regret desire itself, and nobody should have to apologize for it. Just like Olivier, Coetzee's protagonist works through a variety of South Africa's conflicts, such as his daughter's rape, in which he was totally helpless.

The first encounter between Olivier and Tessa bears many similarities to *Disgrace's* Lurie and Melanie. Olivier listens to Tessa on the phone and deduces from the sound that she has an "unusual voice, with a kind of liquid darkness in it, and hidden laughter, reminding somewhat of Francoise Hardy in the sixties" (7). He immediately associates her with the childlike beauty known for her love ballades. When Tessa arrives at his house for an interview, this romanticized association underpins his description:

Was it really only on Saturday, the night before last, that she arrived with dirty feet and a smudge on her cheek, an hour late? Her black hair, hacked off unevenly and very short, was plastered wetly against her small neat skull. She was wearing a large shapeless sweater that sagged down to her bare knees and massive clodhopper boots (16).

The emphasis lies on Tessa's natural beauty and her unspoiled natural looks rather than her sexual attraction, which is very similar to David Lurie's description of Melanie in *Disgrace*:

She smiles back, bobbing her head, her smile sly rather than shy. She is small and thin, with close-cropped black hair, wide, almost Chinese cheekbones, large, dark eyes. Her outfits are always striking. Today she wears a maroon miniskirt with a mustard-coloured sweater and black tights; the gold baubles on her belt match the gold balls of her earrings (11).

While Coetzee's Lurie forces himself on his young student Melanie, Olivier, by contrast, has to endure his desires unrequited, and advance from his sexual longings to an act of renunciation. Although both Olivier and his lodger Tessa declare their disbelief in God it, paradoxically, seems as if part of this

announcement is a reworking of Christian asceticism. It seems like Olivier reaches a degree of spiritual and personal freedom through self-overcoming and self-denial during the course of the novel.

Olivier mentions that having Tessa in his home is as if she “had always been there, a child at the home” (21), which implies that she acts as a substitute for his daughter who died at childbirth. However, the emphasis on Tessa’s childlike state is definitely an attempt by Brink’s older protagonist to turn her into a sexual object to satisfy his desires, which correlates to the relation between Lurie and Melanie.

Tessa asks Olivier how he finds sexual satisfaction. From his “notes on sex for the aged widower” the reader gets to learn more about the sexual desires and needs of an older heterosexual Afrikaner man. Olivier’s only consolation comes from calling an escort agency and engaging in sexual encounters with anonymous women- one more parallel to Coetzee’s protagonist David, who does the same.

From Olivier’s interaction with his lodger it becomes evident that Tessa is sexually more enlightened and experienced than he is. However, her use of obscene language (her use of “fuck” in reference to sexual intercourse) indicates her affinity to a younger generation. As a result, Olivier starts to feel a “tingling in [...] his loins” (27), reinforced when Tessa needs to go to the bathroom. Olivier expresses his delight when he can hear her urinate in a floral and poetic language (“Ah sweet bird of you”, 39) similar to the one employed by Coetzee’s protagonist Lurie. Olivier uses the word “pee”, possibly to be as open-minded as Tessa. The bodily functions of the female subject arouse him and he experiences delight. A perfect example of Olivier’s growing awareness of Tessa’s body and his voyeuristic gaze thereupon is exemplified in the following paragraph:

She looked hard at me, then came past me to the couch and flopped down on it, swinging her legs with a charmingly casual flash of the small white triangle of panties between her thighs, the sort of thing which the sex-starved hermit I’d become cannot fail to notice” (39).



The paragraph illustrates what Jeremy Hawthorn (1994) points out as the essence of the male gaze. By not focusing on Tessa as a person, but solely on her white triangle of panties, she is deprived of her subjectivity and of power. She is turned into someone to be viewed, an object of desire. This corresponds to the conversation between Lurie and Melanie in *Disgrace*, in which Lurie claims that a woman's beauty must be shared:

She does not want a liqueur, but does accept a shot of whiskey in her coffee. As she sips, he leans over and touches her cheek. 'You're very lovely,' he says. 'I'm going to invite you to do something reckless.' He touches her again. 'Stay. Spend the night with me.'  
'Across the rim of the cup she regards him steadily. 'Why?'  
'Because you ought to.'  
'Why ought I to?'  
'Why? Because a woman's beauty does not belong to her alone. It is part of the bounty she brings into the world. She has a duty to share it.'  
His hand still rests against her cheek. She does not withdraw, but does not yield either.  
'And what if I already share it?' In her voice there is a hint of breathlessness. Exciting, always, to be courted: exciting, pleasurable.  
'Then you should share it more widely.' (DG 16)

Olivier's relationship with Tessa echoes an earlier incident with the young Lenie, when he felt the need to protect her against his brothers as a young boy. In the present he wants to protect Tessa from her suitors, in an act of jealous rage he even punctures one of her suitors' car tyres. This correlates to the relation between David Lurie and Melanie's boyfriend in *Disgrace*.

As soon as Tessa moves into his house, Olivier starts his seduction game and has to admit that he "[was] behaving like a twenty-year-old" (73). While in the beginning he considered himself as a sex-starved recluse, he now indicates remarkable signs of his desire when he wakes up in the mornings "with a more powerful morning hard-on that [he had] had in years" (93). Olivier even matches the preparation for his sexual intercourse with Tessa in terms of a conquest: "The little packet [of condoms] lives in my sock drawer. I feel like a freedom fighter keeping sticks of dynamite in his room" (100).

Olivier's obsession is reiterated in language resembling a pornographic catalogue. Referring to Lenie, he points out that "she'd shaved her mound" (113), that there was an "exquisite vulnerability to the exposed sex" (113) and later that she ought to allow him "to kiss her pussy" (116). There are a variety of passages in which the female other is reduced to a mere sex object.

The question arises whether both Tessa and Melanie can be considered allegories for virgin territories that need to be conquered and colonized. Both relationships between the young girls and the older men can be seen as emblematic of the power relations characterizing South African society.

A parallel also emerges between Tess' father and Coetzee's protagonist Lurie, who both engage in a relationship with one of their very young students. Olivier asks Tessa about her father, whom she initially claims was killed:

‘Let me get this straight, I say. ‘He just left?’  
‘Right. Went off with a bitch he used to teach at university. Maths. Everybody said he was brilliant. But then this little student got the hots for him and off they went. Quite a scandal because she was only eighteen or nineteen, so her parents went to court and he had to skip the country. Never heard from him again.’ (78).

## **7.2. Antje of Bengal and the Condition of Women**

One of the critical cruxes in contemporary South African literature is the discussion and rather unhelpful dwelling on whether there does or does not exist a direct break with our recent past. Consequently, it doesn't come as a surprise that Brink blends past, present, memory and desire in his novel.

Olivier's housekeeper is called Magrieta Daniels- a woman who has been with Brink's protagonist for thirty-nine years.

She was driven from her home by the old regime and isn't housed by the new – Because if she'd been too black for the old government ... she now turned out to be not quite black enough for the new people in power. (<http://partners.nytimes.com/books/01/06/17/reviews/010617.17woodlt.html>)

Moreover, Olivier has a ghost in his house called Antje of Bengal, Antje is a former slave who was abused by her master Willem Mostert in the 17th century, and executed for the murder of her master's wife. Talking about the Antje, Tess responds to Olivier : "It's a terrible story. I guess all those historians were men?" Her question addresses the fact that Antje is hardly visible in her own story.<sup>114</sup>

Antje's presence enables Brink to complicate the relationship between documentation and narrative, fact and fiction. But predominantly, Antje of Bengal acts as a vehicle for Brink's own intensification and elaboration of *Disgrace's* rather overlooked state on the condition of women and their longstanding suffering. Antje represents just one of the work's many exploited and abused women. The historicism of Brink's work is fostered by the creation of a remarkable set of parallels between Antje's existence and a variety of other contemporary women, especially Tessa.

Antje of Bengal's death and her master's role signify the start of a long history of exploitation of women, especially black ones, in the Southern African context. Willem Mostert's suicide can be seen as an attempt to seek penance for his misdeeds. His burial of Antje's corpse under the floorboards of his own house is an attempt to restore their former relationship. It also signifies that the remains of abused women will lurk forever in the historical psyche of South Africa and the Afrikaner male<sup>115</sup>. As heir to this historical past, Ruben Olivier has to find Antje of Bengal a place of rest, which explains also his attempts to support his housekeeper Magrieta, a descendant of Antje. To an extent, the narrator creates the impression of mutual consent and passion between Antje of Bengal and her master- in view of Antje's age and because of the power imbalance that would have been impossible though. A parallel to David's relation to Melanie in *Disgrace* is drawn hereby.

Ruben Olivier does not seem to be interested in anything except his books and his complicated emotions in the beginning of the novel. He is constantly surrounded by women- something very similar to David Lurie in *Disgrace*.

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<sup>114</sup> Cf. <http://partners.nytimes.com/books/01/06/17/reviews/010617.17woodlt.html>

<sup>115</sup> Cf. Crous 2006.

Olivier is surrounded by females, such as his housekeeper Magrieta, the ghost of Antje of Bengal, who usually only appears to women only, and his new lodger Tessa. Nevertheless, the story constantly circles about himself and the confusion of his desire. Olivier recalls Tessa's opinion that men "always let you down. I comes with the job description," (84) and apparently he tolerates the charge.<sup>116</sup>

His childhood was spent in a family of women. As mother, aunts, sister fell away, they were replaced in due course by mistresses, wives, a daughter. The company of women made of him a lover of women and, to an extent, a womanizer (DG 7).

Like its precursor *Disgrace*, *The Rights of Desire* suggests that the condition of women is a key index for our broader social and political context. Brink seemed to be dissatisfied with the fact that Coetzee neglected the issue of a longstanding oppression of women. *The Rights of Desire* is deeply preoccupied with issues of gender and sexual politics. Sexual politics seem to be used as a way of exploring questions of rights, freedom and duties. "If I had any respect for her freedom it had to start by granting that I had no claim on her," (98) Brink's protagonist muses at one point, referring to Tessa.

Having forfeited their political power, it appears as if the white patriarchs of both novels are now required to re-examine their conjugal and sexual relations. Or, to put it differently, such a re-examination holds the key to comprehending something of what is entailed in their broader marginalization.

Taking into account the oppression of women, *The Rights of Desire* also bears similarities to Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit*. Dangor also seems to be discontented with the way Coetzee deals with the issue of a decades-long oppression of women and their ability to voice themselves. Both Brink and Dangor re-create a mouthpiece for repressed women, missing in *Disgrace*, and concurrently confront the TRC's inability to listen to women silenced under the burden of traumatic incidents.

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<sup>116</sup> Cf. <http://partners.nytimes.com/books/01/06/17/reviews/010617.17woodlt.html>

Another parallel arises between *Disgrace* and *The Rights of Desire* in the way that both authors seem to be highly critical of the TRC. Acknowledging the need to confront the truth about the past, Brink recognizes the need for the TRC. However, like Coetzee through his ironic allusions, Brink observes that the Commission was flawed and probably even failed.

### **7.3. From Egoism to Empathy or “The Reasons for Change in a Man”**

At the outset of *Disgrace* and *The Rights of Desire*, both Lurie and Olivier evade social responsibility. They neglect family and friends. However, during the course of the novels both discover the need for community and with it the possibility of renewal. Tessa’s rampant sexuality enables Olivier to rediscover a crucial part of his humanity- not merely sensual pleasure but foremost love and the need for solidarity and fellowship. This corresponds to Lurie’s change of attitude when he starts to take care of Bev’s dogs. Throughout the novels, both protagonists manage to emerge from egoism to an extent- a process bearing vital social implications.

Both Lurie and Olivier initially are depicted as totally self-absorbed in their dealings with others. Olivier is predominantly concerned with his complicated feelings and the tangles of his desire. Lurie routinely reduces women to sexual objects in order to satisfy his desires. This becomes most obvious in his sexual encounter with Melanie Isaacs, in which Lurie possesses her despite the fact that she shuts down during the act, basically holds her against her will, and in Lurie’s own words experiences the whole thing “undesired to the core” (25). Lurie’s lack of empathy is further evident in his subsequent defense of his violation of Melanie referring to his “rights of desire” (89). Lurie clearly conceives of himself as a man free to realize all of his desires, even if this stands in for a violation of the rights of other people.<sup>117</sup>

“I can’t pretend that I do not desire you,” Olivier says to his new lodger in the beginning of the novel. “Because what I feel for you I haven’t felt for anyone in

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<sup>117</sup> Cf. Marais 2006.

years. [...] But one thing you've got to know is that I cannot deny the fact of my own body" (117). This passage is indeed very close to Lurie's claim on the rights of desire.

Although Tessa to a certain extent has "ruined [his] world" (305), her presence was like a "miracle of rain after three years of drought" (305), and Olivier is filled with hope, certain that there is "the world outside" (306) which he feels part of again. He is able to continue with his life and his desire is also intact, which immediately takes us back to Olivier's "notes on desire" (154) at the beginning of the novel. He is sure of his position as a "redundant" older white man, however, he feels that he has "the right to live, to move, to breathe" again (154). His notes about the fulfillment as the end of desire and the possibility of fulfillment are apposite in this context. Ruben Olivier did not manage to reach a fulfillment of his desire with Tessa and her "adolescent naiveté, her arrogance, her bitchiness [and] her untouchability" (151). At the end of the novel he is still an aloof, self-centered man, who "never felt much of other people" (8). Nevertheless, he is willing to adapt to the new South Africa, even if it is unclear whether he would really be able to re-enter that world. Olivier mentions that what "has to be faced" (306) is something that "all life [he has] tried to turn away from" (306) by which he means "the world outside" (306), or in other words, to take responsibility for others, and the new South Africa. Another interesting parallel between *Disgrace* and *The Rights of Desire* is the fact in both novels the "newness" is brought about by women.

Brink builds upon Lurie's development in *Disgrace*, in which there is also a movement towards responsibility and love to be discerned. His acceptance of charity work at the Animal League Society can be regarded as an act of redemption. There is certainly an element of self-immolation in the sacrificing act of putting all his attention on the dog being killed. Lurie himself refers to the experience as making "reparation for past misdeeds" (77). Mike Marais sees in Lurie's offer of death for the dog as an expression for the transformation of his desire into self-substituting responsibility.<sup>118</sup> The same process can be discerned by the behavior of Brink's protagonist. Olivier's initial encapsulation

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<sup>118</sup> Cf. Marais 2006.

can be seen as a refusal to assume responsibility for the creation of a new South Africa. Tessa is the one who enables him to rediscover a vital aspect of his humanity, which is, apart from sensual pleasure, the need for love and community:

A kind of confused resignation remained. But it was not emptiness, not numbness; it wasn't that feeling of irredeemable age that had possessed me the previous time. It was, perhaps, concern; it was care. Care for *her*, this lovely stranger in my house who'd come from the night, like some dark moon, to invade my occluded life, to expose my vulnerability, to grant me no mercy, yet to show me a way to love.  
(RoD 115).

This need for community happens to both Coetzee's and Brink's protagonist. It relates to a way of taking responsibility and entails the possibility of renewal. Renewal on a personal basis, but maybe also in terms of a new South Africa and allows coming to terms with the past:

How can I thank her for a desert space, for loneliness, for anguish, even for despair? How can she understand — how can I myself understand — that a desert holds the promise of flowers, that the dark of a moonless night is a condition of the light, that only in solitude can we discover the need of others, that even after a storm like the one outside the little birds can begin to sing? Yet it is nothing new. It is something I grew up with. The miracle of rain after three years of drought. The flowers bursting from the parched earth.  
(RoD 305)

In spite of an aching desire, Olivier's refusal to take advantage of Tessa in her moment of emotional distress seems to liberate both him and her. It indicates a new selflessness for Olivier, an emergence from egoism with obvious social implications that, again, relate to David Lurie when he accepts to work for the Animal League Society.

Discovering a vast distance between his world and the one of his housekeeper Magrieta, Olivier denies the possibility of bridges. That distance, of course, is further intensified by Olivier's dread of assuming the responsibility to ameliorate the woman's condition through personal, direct intervention:

I honestly didn't know what to do. Worse than anything else, I think, was the sense of the distance that separated us. There was only a kitchen table between us, but we might have been creatures from different worlds who just happened by the purest coincidence to be sharing the same space. She, the large mother from the townships, in her shapeless housecoat and her slippers with the pink pompoms, harboring somewhere inside her global body the violence and the rage, the raping and killing and burning of her everyday world, its poverty, its meekness and patience and suffering, its anger and rebellion and despair, its affirmations and denials, its witches and witch-hunts; in her ears still the shouting of a lynching mob, the screams of a victim; on her retinas the imprint of a hacked-off head; in her nostrils a smell of smoke and blood. [...] How could I ever reach out from my world to touch hers? No way, no way at all (RoD 142).

At Tessa's departure, Olivier notes: "And then she was gone. The door was closed, I faced the day" (305). Olivier eventually affirms his assumption of responsibility for community, society, and history:

I am alone now, in this tumultuous desert where Tessa has left me after disrupting the flatness of my old world. But I am also not alone. Antje of Bengal is here. She will help me – and, no doubt, also make it more difficult – to face what has to be faced, what all my life I've tried to turn away from (306).

Olivier's commitment is to redeem the new South Africa while for Brink restitution matters. The protagonist's initial contemplation of his position in the new South Africa sees death as a welcome oblivion: "When I think of death I think: acquiescence. I think: space. I have no fear of it. Or very little. I certainly have no fear of what comes after (144). He dismisses the picture of a young African who could possibly replace him at the library: "he'd need another year to find his feet" (9). There is a clear disgust evident in his thoughts on having to take directives from blacks. "Dead wood had to make way for the previously disadvantaged – the new catchphrase" (9).

Brink's character clearly follows Coetzee's, who is adamant in his delusions of his racial superiority and still deeply entrenched in colonial conceptions of the Dark Continent. For both Olivier and Lurie, black political ascendancy in South



Africa seems to represent a rebirth of chaos in the beginning of the novels. Like Olivier, Lurie is initially repelled by an instinctive awareness of the need for sacrifice as a basic condition of life in the new South Africa. He responds with cynicism when he finds his house burgled:

No ordinary burglary. A raiding party moving in, cleaning out the site, retreating laden with bags, boxes, suitcases. Booty; war reparations; another incident in the great campaign of redistribution (176).

Resolving the Afrikaner's estrangement from the new dispensation in the country as well as the discovery of human responsibility for history is at the heart of Brink's counter-narrative. Especially through Tessa, who follows her passions wherever they lead, Brink leads his character to a discovery of the ideal of taking responsibility for the creation of society and history. Tessa challenges Olivier where everyone else expects miracles and is inconsolable not to have found any. To her mind everybody is responsible to make a change. She completely excludes the conception of South Africa as an abstraction, but exalts human responsibility for history and change:

It's no use thinking of 'this country' as if it was some great abstraction Ruben. It's all of us. If we don't make it work [...] And there's no point in complaining. The country is not just crime, and corruption, and failure, and whatnot. We must believe there's something more to it, something larger than all of us, a kind of hope, a kind of potential. It's something like Antje of Bengal: even if one doesn't see her, we must be prepared to believe in her (206).

Appraising the impact the young woman has on him, Olivier pays her tribute for enabling him to discover his responsibility to the world outside. Brink's character Olivier rises beyond his fear of involvement and finds fulfillment in community and social commitment shunning the pressure of his children to emigrate. One of Brink's central message seems to be that the valid expiation of white guilt for the sin of apartheid should be depicted in terms of selfless involvement in social action.

### 7.3.1. The Interplay of Past and Present and ‘Bookishness’ as a Form of Political and Social Irresponsibility

The interpenetration of past and present is emphasized to a large extent both in *Disgrace* and *The Rights of Desire*. This is expressed in terms of literature, bookishness and music as spheres of interest on part of both protagonists. Like Lurie, Olivier seems awkwardly positioned in relation to his cultural heritage of musical scores and western texts. Olivier is a bibliophile, even more so than Coetzee’s protagonist. *The Rights of Desire* is rife with quotation. A great variety of authors, including Homer and Joyce, Rilke and Heidegger or Larking and Levinas, are called upon to help him read his personal predicament.

In both *Disgrace* and *The Rights of Desire*, the initial self-absorption of the protagonists can be seen as an evasion, an escape from community and social responsibility. Rather than books enhancing their grasps of the substance of life and society, they offer both protagonists the ultimate distraction:

My library was – all libraries are – a place of ultimate refuge, a wild and sacred space where meanings are manageable precisely because they aren’t binding; and where illusion is comfortingly real. To read, to think, to trace the words back to their origins real or presumed; to invent; to dare to imagine. And then to reread, a new Columbus let loose on endless worlds beyond unnamed seas (32).

The more Olivier exalts his books as “a place of miracles” (107), the deeper his renunciation of the responsibilities to his family:

I’m afraid I withdrew more and more into my work, spending hours longer than necessary in the library, doing research, or simply reading, reading, [...]. The most effective way of getting away from Riana, from the endless cleaning and nagging, the noise of children growing up (184).

The political implication Brink brings into this self-absorption is that his conception of democracy rules out individual social responsibility. With cynicism Olivier refers to the “last elections – that famous moment when we were supposed to become a democracy and our lives changed utterly for at least three months” (8-9).

My world is shrinking. Yet as long as I could withdraw into my work at the library I cannot say it bothered me. Books have always offered me almost all I need. But then, without warning that last, small, safe sanctuary was invaded too (8).

The consciousness of the gap between words and worlds embraces an inevitable political bias. Olivier's library acted as his sanctuary from the upheavals outside and the world outside that never mattered to him. His retrenchment can be seen as a fall into his past history. Dumped by his employer, he loses his place of ultimate refuge and is evicted from his paradise. Both Coetzee's and Brink's highly literate protagonists have to reconsider whether their cultural patrimony and biases can be seen as beneficial or more of a hindrance is debatable. Bookishness can perhaps be identified as a form of political and social irresponsibility. Brink possibly wants to allude to the fact that the public, outside world cannot be shut out by books, which correlates to *Disgrace* and Lurie's engagement in literature.

Like *Disgrace*, *The Rights of Desire* is concerned with survival. Brink creates a blend of the physical and the cultural in his work. It is one of the novel's telling ironies that, at the close, Ruben Olivier calls on another piece of western literature to emphasize his rediscovered optimism as well as a new-found political imperative: "There is the world outside – how did Rilke phrase it? – which requires me and strangely concerns me" (306).

Through their references to literature, both Coetzee and Brink seem to want to claim that the decrease in the number of people who are able to read serious literature has led to a predicament and an impoverishment of us as a community. Society can be seen as characterized by a general level of callousness, a lack of caring. Brinks shows his faith in the novel, with the assumption that good literature will help us to become better citizens- a hope that underpins not only Brink's but also Coetzee's work. Good literature well understood, and a good life, politically are perceived as crucially intertwined. Through his insinuations and allusions to western literature, Coetzee

demonstrates that cultural well-being and political survival are two sides of the same coin- a fact Brink seeks to reinforce through his counter-novel.

#### 7.4. Rape and Preoccupation with Post-Apartheid Violence

A central passage in the *The Rights of Desire*, which inevitably calls for comparison with Coetzee's *Disgrace*, is the incident when Tessa gets attacked. Earlier in the novel, she notes that they "say one out of every two women in the country will be raped in her lifetime" (25). While Lucy is gang-raped by three black men in *Disgrace*, Tessa eventually is helped by anonymous passers-by who prevent a rape at the last minute.

There is a foreshadowing of the attack, when Olivier mentions that Tessa was not wearing a bra during their walk in Newlands forest. This hint is not intended to describe Olivier's desire, but "because [the details] are relevant for what followed" (292).

The setting for the attack is significant in the sense that the characters all find themselves in the forest, the primeval place of violent encounters in which all behavior is reduced to animalistic fights. Tessa, who can be regarded as the modern descendant of Antje of Bengal or a representation of the new South Africa, manages to save her own and Olivier's life with her screams, described as shrill, ominous sounds. ("I'd never thought that such sound could come from her", 295). While in *Disgrace*, Lucy's rape happens silently and no details of what really happened are revealed to the reader, the almost-rape of Tessa happens loudly, which bears strong similarities to Lydia in *Bitter Fruit*, who also screams her mind to the heavens when the white policeman rapes her. Tessa's shouting can be seen as an allusion to "the crying voices of South Africa". Furthermore, the screams can be interpreted as an exclamation against all males attacking defenseless women, such as Antje or Magrieta. They can also be regarded as an exclamation to end a silencing of women,<sup>119</sup> like David's

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<sup>119</sup> Cf. Crous 2006.

daughter Lucy, who put up with her ordeal in silence. It is significant that Olivier “[touches] his throat” (296) after the attack, since he was silent then; Just like Coetzee’s protagonist, Olivier represents another Afrikaner male who is unable to protect his loved one against the brutal violence of other males.<sup>120</sup>

Like Lurie in *Disgrace*, Olivier is powerless to do anything during the attack. He even feels that he “should have brought a cane” (294), signifying his impotence during the attack, even if a cane is a less violent weapon than a gun. A reversion to the notion of the protective, powerful, and underlying violent male is given. A symbolic picture is presented through the old, white male with the cane and the younger men with the fast-moving knives. The choice of weapons indicates the different symbols of phallic masculinity. A representative of the old white hegemonic order, Olivier is associated with a cane, a remnant of colonialism, when one could move around the woods freely. The cane could be seen as an instrument of authority making a reversion to physical power unnecessary.<sup>121</sup>

#### **7.4.1. Social Contract vs. Helplessness**

At the novel’s close, Brink’s bibliophile and salacious old protagonist is brought to reevaluate the imperatives of what he calls a shared history. Like in *Disgrace*, feelings of self-laceration and guilt are expressed at the end of the novel on part of the protagonist. “All those cries for help from a clamouring world. While I chose not to listen. I couldn’t bear to get involved... I prefer not to listen, not to respond” (299). Against such apparent selfishness, the author seems to want to situate the claims of a community. Unlike *Disgrace*’s unremitting atrocities and opportunisms, Brink seems to offer a community that, at least partly, is still functional: “she screamed for help, and people heard, and came, and saved us” (299). Only rhythm of the phrase and its punctuation embody both the cynical protagonist’s disbelief as well as a rediscovered awe at revealing an abidingly

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<sup>120</sup> Cf. Crous 2006.

<sup>121</sup> Cf. ebenda.

human reflex. Brink expresses an easily identifiable and necessary demonstration of the social contract, emerging out of the anonymity of life.

Olivier's initial insularity can be seen as a simple refusal to assume responsibility for the creation of a new South Africa. Like *Disgrace*, *The Rights of Desire* is preoccupied with sensuality, and the movement is towards responsibility. However, the way and the circumstances among which this should be taken in the new nation differ between the two novels. The fact that Brink turned *Disgrace*'s brutal gang-rape into an "almost-rape" is of great significance and has vital implication concerning South Africa's future and a way of getting to terms with the past.

Rescued by strangers during the attack, Olivier is led to the realization that his life was irresponsible, even treacherous:

She screamed for help, and people heard, and came, and saved us. I haven't even asked their names. But they were there. They helped. [...] How many other voices have there been shouting for help throughout my life, shouting for me to help? [...] All those cries for help from a clamouring world. While I choose not to listen. I couldn't bear to get involved. [...] I complain [...] of how the place is going down the drain. Misery, violence, terror, the lot. All the voices, voices. Yet I prefer not to listen, not to respond. [...] And by turning a deaf ear I help create the very space in which the world can sink into the morass. The mindset that makes atrocity possible. (RoD 299-300)

Brink seems to leave out the skin color of the attackers, however, he clearly seems to present an alteration to Coetzee's brutal picture of three black men raping a white woman. Through his depiction of the "almost-rape scene", Brink gives a quite clear picture on his opinion of reconciliation. By neglecting Coetzee's grim picture of the white woman being gang-raped, unaided, turning it into an almost rape that is prevented through help from passers-by, he implies working through apartheid's aftermaths together and moving into South Africa's future in solidarity. He proposes a spirit of community rather than hatred and individualism. Not only Tessa's screams, but foremost the community, the others, came up to help them during the attack, preventing the worst.

## 7.4.2. South Africa's Future

In contrast to Coetzee, Brink's contention in *The Rights of Desire* seems to be that the destiny of the new nation is the responsibility of all, which is symbolically expressed in the almost-rape of Tessa. The way the (almost)-rapes are conducted in both novels, bear implications on how moving on in South Africa's future can be possible. Brink's complementation to *Disgrace* is based on a spirit of community, illustrated through Tessa being helped during the attack, rather than one of individualism, exemplified through Lucy being raped without any intervention. While Coetzee proposes that the time for the whites has come, Brink seems to embrace a conciliatory attitude that includes all parties concerned, working through the trauma together in order to come to terms with the past.

Another alteration of key elements takes place in the way the novels deal with the issue of history. While *Disgrace* proposes an affront against history, *The Rights of Desire* supports an acceptance thereof. Repeatedly, Coetzee's protagonist despairs that his daughter's response to history is self-mortification:

Is this some form of private salvation you are trying to work out? Do you hope you can expiate the crimes of the past by suffering in the present?" (DG 112). You want to make up for the wrongs of the past, but this is not the way to do it. If you fail to stand up for yourself at this moment, you will never be able to hold your head up again" (DG 133).

The past provides Lurie with time-honored paradigms in which Petrus, his black neighbor, transforms from a dog-man into his son-in-law. Lurie recognizes the virtue of self-denial in Lucy and Teresa making negotiation with history possible. His deep disenchantment also correlates to his anguished contemplation of his mortal condition: "A grandfather. [...] What pretty girl can he expect to be wooed into bed with a grandfather?" (217). Since it implies the defeat of time, fatherhood in itself is a terror for Lurie. Old age is a threat to the gratification of desire and sensuality. Lucy's engagement with history is at variance with her father's. Although a victim of rape, she is certain of the fact that her perpetrators

treat her as an object of vengeance. Lucy considers her attempts a self-crucifixion as a form of restitution and her will is to achieve absolute self-abnegation:

It is humiliating. But perhaps that is a good point to start from again. Perhaps that is what I must learn to accept. To start at ground level. With nothing. Not with nothing but. With nothing. No cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity (205).

Her father Lurie calls it humbling herself before history (180). Coetzee's white characters in *Disgrace* seem to be invariably doomed and Lurie's categorization of people as socially unequal and unchanging can be understood as an affront against history, which runs contrary to Brink's protagonist. Olivier moves from a sense of revulsion at the contemplation of black ascendancy towards approval of black people as kindred human beings and really as partners in the building of the new South Africa. Inherent in his newly found acceptance of community and responsibility is also an acceptance of history. Similar to Lurie, Olivier initially is unable to rise beyond tribal allegiances to appreciate underlying political and historical problems of South Africa. Nor can both protagonists understand the personal discomforts to power shifts in the emergent nation. However, the foretaste of death seems to offer Olivier ample space for the reappraisal of his life. Mortified by the revelation of betrayal as a constant in his life up to then, he transforms his dread of involvement into an acceptance thereof, not only in his relationships to others, but also in the sphere of politics. History remains a potential space for a new beginning in *The Rights of Desire*, rather than imposing a closure as for Coetzee's protagonist in *Disgrace*.

## **7.5. Fatherhood and the Representation of Masculinity**

A repetitive theme in both *Disgrace* and *The Rights of Desire* is the one of "Fatherhood". Be it the relationship between David Lurie and his daughter Lucy, between Ruben Olivier and his children, Olivier as a young boy and his own father, or Tessa and her father, with whom she does not have any contact-



throughout the plots of both novels, special emphasis is put on the relationships between fathers and their children.

Whereas Olivier can be seen as a symbolization of the resilience of Afrikaner who helped mould South Africa, Tessa is an embodiment of the modern, beautiful, but also dangerous nation. In the new South Africa, of which *The Rights of Desire* stands as both a narrative about and metaphor for, the position of white men, especially the Afrikaner male, has changed, essentially because of the change with regard to the loss of political power and social status. Andries Visagie (2001) argues that the “death knell” for the white hegemony became a reality in the new nation, resulting in “a new definition of Afrikaner masculinity” that had to take shape in order “to compensate for the severing of the bond between white masculinity and political power” (139). Sandra Swart (2001) claims that in the new nation, Afrikaner masculinity has moved “from a hegemonic, indeed an exemplary identity to a socially marginalized, and in many sectors, an actively dishonoured identity” (77). Interestingly, Morrell (2001) notes that one of the core issues in the study of masculinity is fatherhood and the role men assume as fathers. Within the context of the family, men as fathers “reflectively and reflexively act out their masculinity” (127). It is also within home that the father’s position of power is “contested and challenged and therefore has constantly to be defended and reasserted” (127), a fact that becomes obvious in both *Disgrace* and *The Rights of Desire*.

Olivier’s childhood was characterized by “the hard, masculine world of the farm” (29) where only the Bible was read and books and libraries were the only escape from reality for him, “a place of ultimate refuge” (32). Olivier’s own father confirms a variety of the Afrikaner’s traditional notions concerning masculinity and fatherhood. As an outsider child of his father’s farm, the only real companion for the young Ruben was the farm worker, or the Other, later echoed in Olivier’s relation to his neighbor Johnny MacFarlane, who is ‘othered’ by society as well, due to his alleged homosexuality.

“He would recognize in me the child he himself had once been – a studious boy, a dreamer, driven by an ambition to explore the secret world beyond the confining realities of the Old Testament” (84). The relationship between Olivier

and his father is characterized by ambiguity, particularly since it becomes evident his father had lived out his dream through his son:

My own future had been decided from that first day when Pa had forgotten me in the town library. And he supported me, though he hardly ever spoke about it directly. When it was time for me to go to university, he took me to the bank and made me sign some papers already drawn up. Only then did I discover that over the years he'd saved the money to make this possible. It was all signed over to me: a convoluted process, as I was still a minor and a sympathetic teacher had to be found to act as a shield (85).

So Olivier's father had a clear vision of what his son should be like, which strongly correlates to *Disgrace*, in which Lurie does not seem too pleased with the fact that his daughter Lucy engages as a lesbian farmer in the Eastern Cape, and has other plans for her.

According to Gallipeaux (2001), Olivier is depicted as "an unfaithful husband and a cold, aloof father", particularly since he himself accepts that "there has always been a distance between [his] sons and [himself], for which [he is] willing to take the blame" (260). This relates to the relationship of Lurie and Lucy in *Disgrace*, which is also characterized by distance and detachment.

One of the main reasons why Olivier's son Johann moved to Australia, is the increasing crime rate in the new South Africa, and "the way hospital services are going down the drain" (25). Louis, who lives in Canada working as a civil engineer, chose to emigrate mainly because it is more profitable, at least that is what he claims. Both sons are educated white men who base their decisions to leave South Africa on the loss of privileges and standards typical of the old, white-controlled nation. The interaction between Olivier and his children provides the reader with an obvious example of what Morrell (2001) describes as "the contesting and challenging of authority" (127), which in turn relates to David's and Lucy's relation in *Disgrace*.

## 7.6. Further Considerations

Even if *The Rights of Desire* on the whole is not as grim as *Disgrace*, it presents a catalogue of civil disintegration and remains intent not to elide the current quota of attacks, murders, rapes, hijackings, robberies or miseries. While dwelling on a popular topic of white privilege whether to remain or go, Olivier utters the fearful truism that, whoever elects to stay cannot expect to remain unscathed. The implication that beforehand one was unscathed is pointed and maintains the interplay of past and present that *The Rights of Desire* insists on. Just as it was the case for his Boer ancestors, for Ruben Olivier, South Africa remains a place of exposure and dangerous frontier (Coetzee situates *Disgrace* on the Eastern frontier).

The protagonists of both novels initially refuse to take responsibility to create a new South Africa.<sup>122</sup> Like Lurie in *Disgrace*, Olivier is initially aloof and cynical in his evaluation of the post-apartheid South Africa under black leadership and is unable to rise beyond tribal allegiances to acknowledge the underlying political and historical problem the emerging nation is facing. Nevertheless, both characters manage to transform their dread of involvement into an acceptance of commitment. For Brink, salvation seems to be the assumption of responsibility.<sup>123</sup>

Both Coetzee and Brink propose a conciliatory attitude with regard to South Africa's future. Brink's depiction thereof, however, is sober, and not as bleak as Coetzee's. While *The Rights of Desire* implies a future characterized by solidarity, where people assist each other and take responsibility together, *Disgrace* presents a rather solitary picture, characterized by a refusal of history, and individualism rather than social cohesion. While history imposes a closure for Coetzee's protagonist, it retains potential for a new beginning for Brink's character.

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<sup>122</sup> Cf. Diala 2001-2002 (Journal of Modern Literature, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Winter, 2001-2002), pp. 50-68)

<sup>123</sup> Cf. Diala 2001-2002 (Journal of Modern Literature, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Winter, 2001-2002), pp. 50-68)

The title of Brink's novel, taken from Coetzee's *Disgrace*, has various connotations relating to more than the male's assumed sexual rights, implying everyone has the right to experience desire, however, not necessarily to assume or appropriate that right as in the case of rape or other physical abuse.

Crucial in his counter-novel to *Disgrace* is the way Brink deals with the condition of women, which always acts as a key index for a country's broader political and social context. By means of imagery and symbolism, foremost the character of Antje of Bengal, the author indicates the issue of a longstanding oppression of women and clearly expresses his discontent with Coetzee's neglect thereof.

Both *Disgrace* and *The Rights of Desire* remain firmly anchored in history and politics. Given the epic effort, as manifest in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, to absolve the sins of apartheid through communal expiation aimed at the generation of a new model of public morality, both Coetzee and Brink elucidate the circumstances underlying the tension within persistence and the transition of apartheid's legacy by probing the past itself.

Through their invocation of the past, both authors aim at exorcizing the present of its enduring traumata. This is realized through a variety of parallels between the two novels, however, also some alterations of key elements on part of Brink's counter-novel to *Disgrace*. In the context of a national reconstruction rooted in reconciliation, both authors affirm the substance of the entire transformation process of the new nation: that recrimination and guilt should be transformed into an acceptance of responsibility. Brink's conscious participation in the current discourse of transformation in the new nation becomes obvious in his work, particularly in his preoccupation with post-apartheid violence. He reacts to Coetzee's brutal manner of representation, indicating that the culture of violent resistance has turned into the perception that violence is the sole solution to life's problems.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Cf. Diala 2001-2002 (Journal of Modern Literature, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Winter, 2001-2002), pp. 50-68)

André Brink argues,

if stories are re-told and re-imagined, the re- is of decisive importance: each new invention happens in the margins of the already-written, or against the background of the already-written. This excludes a reading of the new narrative as fortuitous invention, as 'mere fiction,' because it engages with the world – the world itself being conceived of as a story (1998: 22).

Moreover, he notes that it is through observing the world as an endlessly reshaped and unfinished story that the reader is actually encouraged to act upon it. Once life is perceived as a story, with an infinite capacity for metamorphosis and renewal, literature becomes more, not less, potent. Nothing is final or fixed, and by generating a polylogue of versions, the writer faces the reader with the responsibility to choose<sup>125</sup>.

## 8. Conclusion

South Africa is still beset by a variety of problems years after the demise of Apartheid. South African writers are obsessed with the portrayal of pain and suffering. The analyses of J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*, Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit*, Ken Barris' *What Kind of child*, and André Brink's *The Rights of Desire*, give insight on the ways in which the nation's writers are caught in web of repetition-compulsion. This could be attributed to an addictive contemplation of pain, with undertones of partial neurotic behavior on part of the authors. Working on the assumption that South Africa's authors revise the novels of their contemporary writers in order to transform traumatic memory into narrative memory, to consequently recover from trauma, indirectly indicates a traumatization on part of the South African authors themselves, which could in turn be considered a significant reason for the amount of obsessive rewriting that has beset South Africa's fiction.

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<sup>125</sup> Cf. Diala 2001-2002 (Journal of Modern Literature, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Winter, 2001-2002), pp. 50-68)

What McLeod calls “the therapeutic narration of trauma” (1997: 151) is the underlying premise for an abundance of work done in the field, including the four novels analyzed in this thesis. If Freud’s concept of *Repetition Compulsion* is superimposed on fictional plots, it becomes obvious that the operative mission in South Africa’s narratives is the death instinct, the drive towards the close<sup>126</sup>. South Africa’s authors apparently strive to portray a final solution on how come to terms with the past. The drive toward closure respectively corresponds to an end of suffering from apartheid’s aftermaths, an end of traumatization.

On the other hand, the trauma culture inhabiting the country, as well as the epistemological rewards and compelling emotional inducements the crisis story brings about, appear significant. These rewards seem quite compelling and currently relevant, both within critical practice and with regard to the world literary market.<sup>127</sup>

South Africa’s writers have differing views on how to deal with Apartheid’s remnants and the vision of South Africa’s future. Each of the novels analyzed in this thesis arguably offers an illumination of South Africa and its inhabitants in its totality. However, each novel, with its preoccupation with violence, with varying positions on the expiation of guilt, justice, reconciliation, and the transfer of power for blacks, takes part in the on-going discourse on the transformations in the new nation in its distinct way. The analyses of *Disgrace*, *Bitter Fruit*, *What Kind of Child* and *The Rights of Desire* clearly demonstrate that the authors employ rivaling views on how to come to terms with the past.<sup>128</sup>

Due to a brutal depiction of life in post-apartheid South Africa, stereotypical race distinctions, and a highly symbolical plot, which seems to call itself into doubt, Coetzee’s novel *Disgrace* has been subject to vehement criticism.

While Coetzee leaves the reader uncertain on how the life of Lucy’s child will unfold and whether it will be able to save South Africa, Achmat Dangor picks up where Coetzee leaves off, and complements the story in *Bitter Fruit*. He shows

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<sup>126</sup> Cf. Whitehead 2004.

<sup>127</sup> Cf. Boehmer 2012 (unpublished manuscript).

<sup>128</sup> Diala 2001-2002. (Journal of Modern Literature, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Winter, 2001-2002), pp. 50-68)

what this life of a child of rape could look like through the character of Mikey. The novel underlines the fact that everyone has to find his or her own way of coming to terms with the past. Dangor manages diverse portrayals in which the characters in *Bitter Fruit* cope with their past. While it proves helpful for Lydia to literally leave her past behind after a renewed painful confrontation, Mikey chooses an extreme option and sees no other way but through retaliation. Silas represents the TRC and the first government after the fall of Apartheid and cannot reconcile with the past. He is stuck in his state of mind and has to give up. In opposition to *Disgrace*, *Bitter Fruit* does not provide us with a happy outlook on South Africa's future. Dangor reverses Coetzee's implication of truth and reconciliation and proposes truth and retaliation instead.

Ken Barris complements Coetzee's storyline in his counter-novel *What Kind of Child* as well, also responding to the question of what happens to children conceived through rape. He answers the question on a narrative and a thematic level, as an allegory of post-colonial birth. In contrast to Dangor, Barris portrays the lives of two different children of rape, one born to a black, one to a white mother. As distinct from *Disgrace* and *Bitter Fruit*, Barris gives a very realistic picture on what the life of a child of rape might look like.

André Brink's *The Rights of Desire* and *Disgrace* have a variety of parallels. Both Coetzee and Brink propose a conciliatory approach with regard to South Africa's future. However, Brink's depiction is sober, yet not as bleak as Coetzee's. While *Disgrace* presents a solitary picture, characterized by a refusal of history, and individualism rather than social cohesion, *The Rights of Desire* implies a future characterized by solidarity, in which people take responsibility together. While history imposes closure for Coetzee's protagonist, Brink's character retains potential for a new beginning. Brink reacts to Coetzee's brutal manner of representation, indicating that the culture of violent resistance has turned into the perception that violence is the sole solution to life's problems. Crucial in Brink's counter-novel is the way he deals with the condition of women- an issue that usually acts as a key index for a country's broader political and social context. Like Barris, Brink indicates a longstanding oppression of women, clearly expressing his discontent with Coetzee's neglect thereof.

Something all three authors ostensibly reject is Coetzee's attempts to open up new perspectives through highly symbolical references to salvation. They appear to agree that the conspicuousness and blatancy thereof draws the reader's attention to the fact that it has no foundation in reality. The portrayal of Lucy as a Christ figure is unable to provide a role model to save South Africa. In their reactions to *Disgrace*, Dangor, Barris and Brink can agree on the fact that Lucy's child is unable bring an end to suffering, solving the traumatized nation's problems.

Through a juxtaposition of the four novels, it becomes obvious that South Africa's authors have opposing opinions on what the new South Africa should be like and how coming to terms with the past is best achieved. This leads us to the notion that working through the trauma needs to be accepted in the context of multiples truths. The novels analyzed in this thesis indicate that only through the acknowledgement of different truths and each individual's right in dealing with the past can closure be achieved, whether this takes place through reconciliation, denial or retaliation.



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## 11. Abstract

Kontemporäre AutorInnen partizipieren am globalen, literarischen Trend der Intertextualität aus diversen Gründen. Die Globalität unserer Kulturen sowie gescheiterte Führerschaften oder andere ontologische und soziale Zivilisationsschäden, welche die Menschheit charakterisieren, rufen Beziehungen und Konfigurationen zwischen Texten und Autoren innerhalb literarischer Genres hervor. Interdependenz herrscht zwischen Literatur und den sozio-kulturellen und politischen Realitäten einer Nation oder eines gegenwärtigen Milieus. Die vorliegende Diplomarbeit beschäftigt sich mit Intertextualität als Stilmittel im gegenwärtigen südafrikanischen Trauma-Roman.

Südafrikanische Literatur scheint besessen von Leid und Elend. Apartheid, die daran anschließende Gewaltwelle, die Probleme in Zimbabwe, die nationale Krise der HIV Epidemie und xenophobische Übergriffe prägen die Nation nach wie vor. Auch die durch die Errungenschaft der Demokratie versprochenen Rechte und Freiheiten konnten nicht erfüllt werden. Südafrikanische AutorInnen novellieren diese Krisen auf zwanghafte Art und Weise, wobei sie vielfach auf die Werke ihrer Kollegen zurückgreifen, diese umschreiben und ergänzen.

Post-Apartheid Literatur kann als Raum für ständig wiederkehrendes Leid betrachtet werden. Zeitgenössische südafrikanische SchriftstellerInnen scheinen sich zwischen der Institution Apartheid und dessen post-traumatischen Folgen zu bewegen. Zwanghaftes Wiederschreiben von gewissen Themen und Motiven kann als Ausdruck einer zugrundeliegenden kollektiven Traumatisierung angesehen werden. Es stellt sich die Frage, inwieweit die AutorInnen dieser fortdauernden Kontemplation von Schmerz und Leid verfallen sind. Können sie selbst als neurotisch bezeichnet werden? Die Tatsache, dass sich Apartheid als etwas Greifbares, wogegen man demonstrieren konnte, plötzlich aufgelöst hat, scheint signifikant in diesem Kontext.

Für südafrikanische SchriftstellerInnen stellt Intertextualität einen Weg zur Verarbeitung und Bewältigung des zugrundeliegenden Traumas dar. Die AutorInnen können somit teils selbst als neurotisch bezeichnet werden, finden

jedoch durch Intertextualität auch einen Weg zum Ausdruck künstlerischer Freiheit. Rivalisierende Ansichten und persönliche Standpunkte hinsichtlich einer Vergangenheitsbewältigung werden zutage gebracht durch Intertextualität. Ständige Wiederholung im südafrikanischen Roman ahmt die Effekte von Traumata nach, indem sie eine fortdauernde Rückkehr der schrecklichen Vorfälle impliziert. Dies korreliert mit Sigmund Freud's Konzept des *Wiederholungszwangs*, elaboriert in seinem Werk „Jenseits des Lustprinzips“ 1920.

Diese Diplomarbeit gibt zunächst Aufschluss über Intertextualität als universales Phänomen, fokussierend auf deren Formation und Entwicklung. Südafrika als Krisennation, sowie Sigmund Freud's Konzept des Wiederholungszwangs werden thematisiert. Nach einem Diskurs über Intertextualität im Kontext südafrikanischer Traumaliteratur, werden formale Auswirkungen und die ständige Wiederaufnahme von Krisen als epistemologische Form diskutiert. Das Hauptaugenmerk dieser Diplomarbeit liegt in der Analyse von den folgenden vier Romanen, welche als Beispiele für die vorangegangene Theorie dienen: J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*, Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit*, Ken Barris's *What Kind of Child*, und André Brink's *The Rights of Desire*. Alle teilen die Thematik „Vergewaltigung“, wobei J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* als Basis gilt, worauf die anderen drei Autoren mit ihren Werken reagieren.

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