

Social Spaces and Literary Spaces in Post-Apartheid South African Fiction

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Preface and Acknowledgements

I always tell my students that engaging in intellectual activity should feel like participating in a conversation. What I mean is that no one's ideas occur in a vacuum; when we speak and write we are always responding to the ideas, words, and thoughts of others.

Nowhere have I found this to be truer than when writing this dissertation. From its very inception this project has been inspired by conversations begun long before I could hear them and that will endure after I no longer can. Of the many voices I have engaged with in this project, by far the most influential has been that of my advisor Olakunle George. In the classroom, in his office hours, and in his brilliant body of work, Kunle has taught me that you cannot talk about a book until you have learned to listen: to hear the words on the page.

In a preface, one typically gives thanks and offers praise; however, I would have to write much more than a preface to pay tribute to everyone who has contributed to this project. To those I neglect to mention by name here, know that I honor and remember your contributions and support. I am particularly grateful for the guidance of my advisors and colleagues and for the love of my family members and friends. And, while my degree will be from Brown, I have a special place in my heart for the University of Colorado at Boulder, where my academic journey began under the direction of Professor Jane Garrity. Jane played a pivotal role in my decision to pursue first the M.A. and then the Ph.D., and has been a constant source of encouragement in a sea of uncertainty and change. I deeply respect her both personally and professionally.

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As my mentors, Olakunle George, Rey Chow, and Daniel Kim offered support far beyond what was required and talked me down from many a precipice along the way. Every time I walked into one of their offices feeling confused, they offered wisdom, advice and direction that clarified my thinking. In addition to being well-respected and distinguished scholars, they are also approachable and inspirational teachers. I will never forget the many tools these three have given me: from Kunle, the insight that “literature theorizes itself;” from Rey, the reassurance that one does not have to give up one’s “self” in pursuit of an academic career; and from Daniel, the understanding that a novel’s argument is almost always more complex than what appears on the surface.

Of course, I can recall a moment from every class I took, every professor I spoke with, and every student I taught at Brown that contributed to my intellectual development. Such is the culture at Brown that one learns of recent publications or exchanges lesson plans while making coffee or chatting during the many department functions. I am convinced that there was no better place than Brown for me at that time in my life. While many say that they have “earned” their Ph.D., I say that I have been given a gift; not just from Brown, but from my family and friends.

Like anyone who pursues a long-term goal, I have experienced many bumps along the road. However, I have learned from those wiser and more experienced than I am that “failures” are actually opportunities for growth. I owe my success to the people who stood by me and encouraged me: who taught me that “difficult” does not mean “impossible.” Here I would like to thank my mother Chey Ness, my father John Genette, my stepmother Andrea Genette, my grandparents Dolly and Walt Biggs, and all of my extended family. I would also like to thank Mike Becker, Marcy Becker, Nancy Becker, and their families. I am blessed to be surrounded by such strong, loving people, and am constantly awed by their hospitality and generosity.

Many loved ones have passed or fallen ill in the writing of this dissertation, and I would like to honor their memories here. My Uncle Kerry’s vision is present in these pages, as is the strength and vigor embodied by Carl Becker. Even in the pain of mourning I have drawn great solace from the fact that love and hope live on when people die. I believe that the spirit of the dead continues to inspire those of us who remain; it makes us glow like alabaster in the sunshine.

Finally, I want to thank my family, new friends and colleagues in Colorado for making my return a pleasant one. They helped to create the space from which I could write again. It has been a long journey, and it is nice to finally feel at home. For a while I used to think that I had given my dissertation my life; now I see that it has been the one to give me life. The places I have been, the people I have met, and the lessons I have learned have all made me who I am today. Ultimately, I dedicate this prologue to the dissertation itself for giving me a seemingly insurmountable challenge and the satisfaction of having done my best.

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Social Spaces and Literary Spaces in Post-Apartheid South African Fiction

INTRODUCTION

The recent special issue of *Safundi*, titled “Beyond Rivalry: Literature/History, Fiction/Non-Fiction” (January 2012), gives an overall impression that while the fields of literary production and scholarship are changing, we do not yet have a language that can describe that change. The increasing critical attention to change within the discipline resonates with a roundtable address on the “Arab Spring” moderated by Olakunle George at the 2012 American Comparative Literature Association Conference. Speaking specifically about the influence of the Arab Spring on African literature and culture, George stressed that scholars should focus on change rather than crisis in order to account for modes of writing and expressions of identity that are neither traditional nor Western, and that cross spatial and temporal boundaries. Like George, the contributors to *Safundi* seek to move “beyond” the binaries that have so long structured our thinking: not just between literature and history, but between aesthetics and politics, tradition and modernity, and what, in this dissertation, I will be calling “commitment” and “indifference.” The word “beyond” itself goes some way towards deconstructing these oppositions, because it connotes a time and place we are unable to categorize or define.

The word beyond also has a particular resonance in the field of South African literary studies; it featured prominently in the now-famous exchange between Jacques Derrida, Rob Nixon, and Anne McClintock in the 1986 issues of *Critical Inquiry*. In “But, beyond...(Open letter to Anne McClintock and Rob Nixon)” Derrida responds to and claims to share Nixon and McClintock’s desire “not to dissociate words and history”

(157). Derrida characterizes his original aim in deconstructing the word apartheid as an “appeal:” a call to remember the specific, local, and material conditions signified by the word “apartheid” without reducing the word to history (158). While he reiterates that there is “nothing ‘*beyond* the text’ ” he also insists that the word text indicates a “field of forces” rather than just words on “*paper*” (167, 168). Here, Derrida challenges his readers to reconsider not just the definition of the word “text,” but also its relation to history. Rather than seeing history and politics as apart from or situated “beyond” the text, Derrida treats them as part of the “field of forces” that constitutes the text. According to Derrida, it is Nixon and McClintock that have severed the text from history by creating an artificial distinction between those who express “progressive commitment” by paying attention to history and those who show a “turning inward” by focusing on the text (168). In the exchange with Nixon and McClintock, Derrida points to an opposition that has become even more entrenched, particularly in postcolonial studies and South African studies, where the notions of political commitment versus inwardness have great ideological purchase. In these fields, the debate over whether there is a “beyond” to the text has tended to divide critics who take either a textualist or materialist approach to literature. While in practice these approaches inevitably overlap, prominent critics and writers such as J.M. Coetzee have tended to frame them as opposites and even antagonists. As many of the contributors to *Safundi* point out, J.M. Coetzee’s 1987 talk on “The Novel Today” generated a controversy that continues to this day over the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction: between modes of representation interested primarily in language and those focused on facts, information, and experience. In the editor’s introduction to *Safundi*, Rita Barnard writes that “in refusing a position of

supplementarity,” Coetzee seems to “declare an outright rivalry between literature and history” (1). The essays in *Safundi* trace the impact of this purported rivalry, mainly seeking to counter what they see as a false opposition with notions such as the limit, seam, or entanglement that show how literature and history overlap and together facilitate the representation (however problematic or incomplete) of human experience. Read alongside George’s comments with which I began this introduction, Derrida’s response to Nixon and McClintock, and Coetzee’s pleas on behalf of literature, this special issue of *Safundi* can be read as an appeal: a call for scholars to act in the spirit of change and in response to a future yet to come.

My aim in this dissertation is to contribute to the body of scholarship that seeks to undo binary oppositions such as literature/history, textualist/materialist, and commitment/indifference. As demonstrated by the etymological resonance between the words “antonym” and “antagonism,” we tend to view the two terms that make up a binary not just as opposites but also as enemies, each bent on reigning supreme over the other. Framed as opposites, commitment and indifference seem to occupy the extremes of both the literary and political spectrum; commitment tends to be associated with political action, engagement, and literary realism whereas indifference seems synonymous with political inaction, disengagement, and literary experimentalism. While the terms commitment and indifference take on more specific connotations in local contexts such as the Russian Revolution and the American Civil Rights Movement, they have generally been used in historical situations that seem to demand the engagement (or disengagement) of the writer. It is important to note that while the terms commitment and indifference can travel, crossing boundaries such as time and place, they can also

reinforce these boundaries by emphasizing division and difference over unity. In this dissertation I argue that post-apartheid South African writing offers a unique perspective on the value-laden distinction between commitment and indifference.

As I will discuss in more detail later, my entry into this field has been shaped by two main groups of theory; deconstruction and Marxism. While I recognize the differences between these two groups, part of my project is to challenge what I see as an artificial divide between textualist and materialist approaches to literature. Those writers and thinkers who do not neatly fall into either group, such as Said, Parry, and others, become more interesting as their approaches also need to come to terms with the large conceptual trends set by deconstruction and Marxism. My own approach borrows strategies from both groups of theory; my aim is not to privilege the local South African context over the global or to reinforce the distinction between literature and history. Rather, I wish to read South African writing as part of a local and global “field of forces” that includes the words on the page and the political actions they signify (Derrida 168). In my methodology, I heed Hedley Twidle’s warning that “if one is to avoid reproducing a narrative of South African exceptionalism, such works must also be placed in context of a wider, international turn” (7). In other words, I note what makes each text unique while also pointing out what it shares with other texts, both from South Africa and beyond.

In this introduction, I trace the implications of the opposition between commitment and indifference for the fields of postcolonial and South African literary studies. Debates in these fields have long centered on two different approaches to literature, which I refer to as materialist and textualist. The intellectual history of the terms commitment and indifference can actually shed light on the seeming opposition

between these two approaches to literature and offer a potential way to combine them. By way of illustrating how the textualist / materialist debate has affected South African literary studies, I offer a brief history of criticism on Nadine Gordimer and J.M. Coetzee, arguably the two most canonical writers of both fiction and non-fiction. Critics have tended to view Gordimer and Coetzee as literary opposites, describing her work as mimetic and politically engaged and his as postmodern and disengaged. In my dissertation, I set aside these binaries and ask how the writers themselves allow us to contest standard formal and generic categories. My choice of authors is meant to dramatize the way literature disrupts binary oppositions. In addition to Gordimer and Coetzee, I focus on a younger, less canonical group of writers including Zoë Wicomb, whose work does not fit neatly into generic categories and who cannot be classified in terms of a black-white binary. In addition, I pay attention to the relatively unknown and understudied authors Rayda Jacobs and Darryl Accone, whose perspectives on Islam and the Asian diaspora challenge the standard account of racial and social hierarchies in South Africa. My specific purpose is to re-read well-known figures such as Gordimer and Coetzee with a renewed attention to the subtleties of their prose and the complexities of their engagement with South African spaces and identities. In addition, I hope to expand the field by paying attention to diverse writers whose fiction has been underrepresented and whose work consistently undermines standard definitions of place, race, and gender.

My project has broad implications for South African literary studies in particular as well as for Postcolonial studies in general. First, I counter the tendency to read South African fiction as exceptional because of the unique experience of apartheid. Instead, I point out how South African fiction is always already in conversation with transnational,

global, and cosmopolitan themes seemingly beyond the scope of its regional focus. It is true that Gordimer, Wicomb, Jacobs and Accone create fictional landscapes from a recognizable South African lexicon informed by apartheid. However, their narrative forms do not simply reflect their particular historical contexts. By alluding to a diverse range of authors such as Toni Morrison and James Joyce, and by adapting narrative strategies from modernism and postmodernism to suit their particular concerns, Gordimer, Wicomb, Jacobs and Accone illustrate that in the modern world, the “local” is always already traversed by the “global.” These insights illustrate what the fields of South African literary studies and postcolonial studies might look like if they did not position “literature” in opposition to “history” or “text” against “the world.”

I. On the Concepts of Commitment and Indifference

Even though the Derrida-McClintock / Nixon exchange took place almost three decades ago, it highlights the ongoing need for a conceptual framework that moves beyond binaries such as textual-material, literature-history, and indifference-commitment. As Jonathan Arac points out, the seeds for such a framework might be found in the work of Edward Said (42). As an aside, it is interesting to note that McClintock and Nixon were students of Said at Columbia, and that Arac worked directly with and was influenced by Said. A discussion of Said, particularly his notions of traveling theory and ethical commitment through literature (rather than in spite of it) offers a way to flesh out the key concept-metaphors that anchor my analysis: the queer situation, entanglement, and the dangerous supplement. These terms are particularly helpful for illustrating the

relationships between the local and the global that were so important to Said. For example, in “Traveling Theory,” an oft-cited essay in *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, Said argues that “ideas and theories travel – from person to person, from situation to situation, from one period to another” (226). Said’s formulation helps to complicate the binary between textualist and materialist approaches to literature because he uses a spatial and geographical metaphor to describe the way intellectual ideas develop, moving through time and space. According to Said, a “theory in one historical period and national culture becomes altogether different from another period or situation” because the “movement into a new environment” requires a “process of representation and institutionalization different from those at the point of origin” (226). On the one hand, we might account for “traveling theory” by tracking the movement of intellectuals and their texts through time and space and describing their new environment. However, Said reminds us that “traveling theory” also becomes a new text, requiring an entirely different “process of representation” (226). What Said means is that because people and ideas travel, we must constantly seek new ways of seeing, knowing, and understanding. Putting the stress on Said’s understanding of ethical commitment allows me to articulate the general debates in postcolonial theory and exemplify a perspective that – like Gordimer, Wicomb, Accone, and Jacobs, dissolves false binaries and respects the national as well as transnational, the local as well as the global. Following Said, ideas such as commitment and indifference do not have a discernible “point of origin;” rather these terms form part of a trans-geographical and trans-temporal fabric that is constantly being used, reimagined, and remade (Said 226).

In order to relate the concept of commitment as it is conceived in the Western literary and philosophical tradition to the notion of commitment as a particular concern of South African writing, I turn to Ian Maclachlan's opening remarks in "Engaging Writing: Commitment and Responsibility from Heidegger to Derrida." Here, Maclachlan writes that the speaker in Hölderlin's "Brot und Wein" laments the "desolate experience of the present," which is an "interregnum" or "meantime" (109). According to Maclachlan, Hölderlin interprets the poet's place as one of "wandering exile" and views the poet's role as "mediator between contemporary humanity and the vanquished gods" (109). Hölderlin's interest in the interregnum resonates strongly with the concerns of South African writers, particularly in the turbulent decades just prior to the fall of apartheid. Nadine Gordimer sets the tone for her novel *July's People* (1981) with an epigraph from Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*: "The old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum there arises a great diversity of morbid symptoms." Gramsci's understanding of the "interregnum" can be compared to Hölderlin's notion of the "meantime" as an intermediary space between the past and future and between the human and the divine.

Taken together, Hölderlin and Gramsci make it possible to see the "interregnum" as a temporal/geographical space one occupies and as a literary space from which one writes/speaks. In *July's People* the "interregnum" refers on one level to the novel's content; it takes place when the "old" regime of apartheid is "dying" and the "new" democratic South Africa "has yet to be born." At the same time, the "interregnum" refers to the form of the novel itself, which draws from the traditions of political realism favored by many South African writers in the 1980s and also uses techniques of modernism and postmodernism. Read metaphorically, Gordimer's epigraph means that

the “old” ways of writing in South Africa are “dying” but that new forms have yet to emerge. For Gordimer, the interregnum represents not just the specific period of time between two regimes, but also the “unmapped” geographical and ideological terrain where differences collide (“Great Problems” 133)¹. In “Living in the Interregnum,” an essay written two years after *July’s People*, Gordimer elaborates on this theme, arguing that the struggle against apartheid has uprooted white South Africans from their place in society. She writes that finding a “home” in a soon-to-be majority-ruled South Africa “depends also on our finding our way there out of the perceptual clutter of curled photographs of master and servant relationships, the 78 rpms of history repeating the conditioning of the past” (382). While Gordimer makes it clear that white South Africans must abandon old ways of seeing and being, she does not articulate what new ways of living might look like. Instead, Gordimer defines the committed white as “the one who has declared himself or herself for that future,” implying that white South Africans must abandon the representational apparatus inherited and reinforced by a racist regime in order to make way for the “new” (382). For Gordimer, then, commitment requires reorienting oneself both in space and within language, and involves turning away from the past and towards the future.

Given that Gordimer seems to share Hölderlin’s sense that the writer (and in particular the white writer) occupies an in-between space of “wandering exile” it might be tempting to read contemporary South African writing as expressing some of the sentiments Machlachlan finds in Hölderlin such as desperation and nostalgia. In South African writing, however, commitment does not conform to platforms of conservative,

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all essays by Nadine Gordimer have been referenced from the following collection: Gordimer, Nadine. *Telling Times: Writing and Living, 1954-2008*. WW Norton, 2010.

backward looking politics or to progressive utopian desires. For example, in *Disgrace* (1999), Coetzee contrasts David Lurie's immersion in the past with his daughter's orientation to the future. And, though readers might assume that both David and Lucy will become obsolete within the new social order, Coetzee's argument is more subtle; he suggests that they both need to adjust and reposition themselves, experience shame, and make sacrifices. In this way, *Disgrace* suggests that learning to be indifferent to their place, both literal and figural, might be the only way for David and Lucy to express their commitment to the New South Africa. As this novel shows, the concept of commitment has specific connotations related to the history of apartheid. However, insofar as South African writing is also always already engaged with philosophical traditions from other historical periods and geographical places, its apparently narrow focus on commitment can also be read as inter-textual and global. The genealogy of commitment that Machlachlan provides, then, offers some ways to understand how this wider tradition has emerged intertextually in South African writing.

Machlachlan carries the concept of the interregnum across from Hölderlin to Heidegger, a philosopher who sees the poet as both engaged and disengaged. In Machlachlan's words, "It is the apparent disengagement of poetry from the world of effective actions and decisions that reveals the essence of language as that which founds a world in which we always already find ourselves engaged" (112). For Heidegger, the poet's role in textual production goes hand in hand with being situated in the material "world of effective actions." Machlachlan goes on to say that for Heidegger, "the poet's place is a perpetual exile, and the poet's time is a meantime in which the foundations of the present have withdrawn and cannot here and now be restored" (113). As in

Hölderlin's poem, Heidegger's poet acts as a mediator between the past and present: between the text and the world. Heidegger's account of the poet can be compared to the way critics have approached writers like J.M. Coetzee. For example, David Attwell opens his 1993 study of Coetzee with a question that resonates with Heidegger's observation that the poet cannot help being situated in the world even when he or she appears to turn away. Attwell writes: "The problem now confronting us can be defined sharply: is the turn toward textuality in Coetzee a turning away from History?" (17). Like Heidegger, Attwell believes that the position of indifference actually permits the writer to convey social reality, even if that social reality can only be accessed through language. According to Attwell, Coetzee's "relative detachment enables him to be more explicit and more honest about his own social placement than more obviously engaged white writers can be about theirs" (26). Here, Attwell counters the common assumption that seemingly committed and engaged writers can accurately represent what Heidegger would call the "world of effective actions" – the material world – through literary modes such as realism or non-fiction. Instead, he suggests that writers we might consider experimental or postmodern can also convey the material implications of ideological constructions like race, class, and gender.

Machlachlan traces Heidegger's influence on Sartre's thinking in a way that has a direct bearing on debates in South Africa about whether writing can effect political change. According to Machlachlan, Sartre differs from Heidegger in that he is interested in more than just "politically committed literature." "for Sartre, human existence is always already committed or, to retain a more literal translation of his term, engaged: we are situated in a world and inescapably responsible for that situated existence in the form

of our projects” (114). Here, Machlachlan suggests that the writer’s position, however liminal or intermediary it may be, is not exceptional; instead, it is representative of the general human condition. While Sartre famously writes about the responsibilities of the writer and about the reader’s freedom, he is also interested in “freedom in general” (114). This resonates with the South African context, in which writers such as Gordimer have pointed out the direct correlation between the freedom of writers and readers and the freedom of the community at large. In addition, the distinction that Sartre makes between the “direct referentiality” of prose and the “opacity of poetry” can shed light on discussions of South African writing in terms of realism and non-realism (116). According to Machlachlan, Sartre values prose for its ability to “*reveal* the world,” which appears to align Sartre more with realism than with experimental fiction.

In South Africa, the opposition between “referentiality” and “opacity” has been discussed in terms of realism and non-realism, or political and non-political fiction. Critics tend to align Gordimer with Sartre’s conviction that writing “has the status of an action in the world” and that writing “already brings the possibility of change” (116). By contrast, critics describe Coetzee’s prose in terms of “opacity” and as more skeptical of referentiality. As Attwell points out, Coetzee has explicitly positioned himself against the realist tradition by arguing that the novel cannot represent history because “history is a kind of discourse” (qtd. In Atwell 16). The seeming opposition between Gordimer and Coetzee shows that the literary concepts of “referentiality” and “opacity” take on their significance only in the “world of actions,” in light of specific local concerns. Even Gordimer, who arguably advocates for and writes within a certain genre of realism, takes issue with writers who seem to take the prescription for documentary writing too literally.

Conversely, Coetzee has been portrayed as a “philosophical idealist whose fiction graphically portrayed the breakup of the dominating, rationalist subject of colonialism but who offered – depending on where the argument was grounded – neither an analysis of the play of historical forces nor a moral anchor in the search for a humane response to colonialism and apartheid” (Attwell 1). Recent efforts to reconcile the apparent differences between Gordimer and Coetzee show how a writer’s position, particularly in South Africa, cannot necessarily be attributed to the intentionality of the writer alone, but is related to the demands of the writer’s social situation.

Machlachlan presents Blanchot and Derrida as thinkers who temper Sartre’s insistence on intentionality and emphasize instead the unpredictable and open nature of the writer’s commitment. According to Machlachlan, Blanchot does not view writing as a choice between engagement and disengagement, but as a constant negotiation between the two: “to write in order to act is always to submit one’s writing to the vicissitudes that await writing in the world, to be at the mercy of the unmasterable powerlessness of words whose fate cannot be determined” (119). As Machlachlan points out, what allows language “to have these effects in the world is what also frees it from any given context, what allows it to work in ways that no one can ultimately predict or control” (120). In this way Blanchot critiques the notion of intention that drives Sartre’s understanding of engagement. Both Gordimer and Coetzee have taken up the open-ended nature of the writer’s craft, placing their responsibility as authors in context with a social future that cannot yet be imagined. The end of Gordimer’s *July’s People* has been interpreted either as a running towards or a running away from that uncertain future. For his part, Coetzee uses tropes of silence to call attention to the ultimate powerlessness of language. *Foe*

closes with an image that epitomizes negation: the “0” of Friday’s unrepresentable speech. For South African writers, as for Blanchot, to recognize the powerlessness of language is not to renounce the task of writing itself. To write is to participate in making the future, whatever form that future will ultimately take.

Machlachlan suggests that Derrida’s philosophy offers the most freedom for both writers and readers by calling attention to the writer’s “responsibility” as well as to the writer’s openness to an “unknown future” (120). According to Machlachlan, Derrida insists that engagement is not a choice; however, this does not mean that the effects of one’s engagement can be determined in advance. As Machlachlan writes,

For Derrida, responsibility and the decision will not wait: before I say or do anything, I am always already engaged by and towards the other; and my responsibility and decision are always situated, always take place in a context that is not just of my choosing. But for there to be a context in which the other might emerge as other, and in which, for example, there might be a decision that is more than the mere calculation of the already-known, that context must be and remain constitutively open, as yet never fully decided. (121)

Derrida’s position here can be compared to the ethical situation of a South African writer who finds him or herself “always already engaged towards the other.” In “The Essential Gesture,” Nadine Gordimer writes that “The creative act is not pure. History evidences it. Ideology demands it. Society exacts it...The writer is *held responsible*” (409). For Gordimer, all acts of language carry a “social significance” related to the time and place in which the writer is situated. She goes so far as to claim that “Art is on the side of the oppressed” (414). For Derrida, however, the fact that the context of writing cannot be

“decided” means that writing may be at once engaged and committed and disengaged. In Machlachlan’s words, “any utterance, no matter how restrictively ‘engaged’ it may seem in relation to a given context, set of referents or, in short, reality, remains constitutively haunted by the possibility of fiction: a certain ineliminable ‘disengagement’ is the condition of possibility of all engagements” (122). Rather than seeing engagement and disengagement as opposites, Machlachlan sees the possibility of disengagement as a positive way to keep the “imagination” accountable and open to the presence of the “unknown” (123).

Machlachlan’s conclusion points out the benefits of leaving aside the binary oppositions between engagement / disengagement and reality / fiction. Machlachlan writes:

I would like to suggest that this possibility of becoming literary, of a disengagement that haunts every engagement, is what gives a chance to the imagination, provided once again that the imagination be understood otherwise than as a power of negation as conceived in Sartre’s Hegelian terms. We should rather understand imagination in the sense of an opening to the unknown, to the unfamiliar, to whomever or whatever is not already present; the imagination, in short, as a form of what Derrida calls *teleiopoiesis*, an imaginative engagement that, even as it closes on a given context, destination, or end (*telos*), discovers that such closure cannot but remain open to what is distant (*tele*). (123)

Here, Machlachlan points out that the literary imagination works by engaging with its “given context” even as it announces itself as fiction and as a text. Machlachlan, via Derrida, shows how understanding the literary imagination requires both a textualist and

materialist approach. On the one hand, writers and readers find themselves always already entangled with one another in specific times and places that are not of their choosing. On the other hand, this historical situation does not negate the unpredictable power of language as text, nor can it predict the outcome of the relationships between readers and writers: between words and the world. Derrida's influence in the South African context can be illustrated by the intellectual preoccupations of critics such as Derek Attridge, who edited Derrida's *Acts of Literature*. In addition, Derrida's articulation of the writer's responsibility can shed light on the conflict between David and the narrator in Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story*. David accuses the narrator of being disengaged and of using language as an escape from reality. In light of Derrida's reading, however, the narrator is always already engaged in the struggle against apartheid by virtue of being situated in South Africa in the 1990s. However, by realizing the potential for "truth" (as advocated by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the conventions of realism) to become "fiction," the narrator opens herself up to what Derrida might call the unknown future or yet to come. This openness is what makes it possible to read the end of the novel as an ethical gesture of the writer's responsibility rather than as a complete refusal to participate in acts of mimesis.

While Machlachlan's account draws out some of the key aspects of commitment that have influenced South African writing, it does not address significant contributions made to debates about commitment by thinkers such as Adorno, Benjamin, Bloch, Brecht, and Lukács. In addition, Machlachlan takes a predominantly textualist approach to the concept of commitment, tracing its impact within the world of ideas. To account for what a more materialist approach to commitment would look like, I turn to the useful

collection of essays in Frederic Jameson's *Aesthetics and Politics*. Like Machlachlan, Jameson stresses the ways that questions of commitment have informed the longstanding debate about the role of art and literature in political life. Like the concepts of textualism and materialism, the broad categories of aesthetics and politics tend to be represented as opposites; in common parlance, aesthetics refers to artistic practices that are removed from everyday life while politics refers to activities in the real world. Jameson's collection, however, points out how the concept of literary commitment emerged in response to specific social and cultural demands. By presenting a series of connected essays that often directly respond to one another, Jameson offers a textual but historically situated account of aesthetics and politics. Not unlike Derrida, Jameson maintains an openness to the future by encouraging the reader not to take sides:

To take an attitude of partisanship towards key struggles of the past does not mean either choosing sides, or seeking to harmonize irreconcilable differences. In such extinct yet still virulent intellectual conflicts, the fundamental contradiction is between history itself and the conceptual apparatus which, seeking to grasp its realities, only succeeds in reproducing their discord within itself in the form of an enigma for thought, an aporia. It is to this aporia that we must hold, which contains within its structure the crux of a history beyond which we have not yet passed. It cannot of course tell us what our conceptions of realism ought to be; yet its study makes it impossible to us not to feel the obligation to reinvent one. (213)

Despite Jameson's self-positioning and critical reception as a materialist, his language here bears remarkable resemblance to Derrida's. In this passage, Jameson asks his readers to remain open to "irreconcilable differences" and to accept rather than seek to overcome

the “fundamental contradiction” between “history” and the “conceptual apparatus.” The words “discord,” “aporia,” and “enigma” can be compared to Derrida’s notion of undecideability. Like Derrida, Jameson writes against the notion of determinism and in favor of that which is yet to come. For Jameson, it is necessary to both account for the past and to not allow history to “tell us” what the future will look like. While Jameson seems to be interested only in the particular social and cultural contexts that inform the ideas of Adorno, Benjamin, Bloch, Brecht, and Lukács, their ideas have been carried across in ways that neither the thinkers themselves nor Jameson could predict. For example, while the publisher explicitly addresses the “Anglo-Saxon reader,” this address has not limited the circulation and readership of the anthology in non-Anglo-Saxon contexts (7).

The issues raised by the essays in Jameson’s collection provide some helpful ways for thinking about the writer’s responsibility in South Africa. For example, the demands made by both Sartre and Brecht regarding the freedom of the artist can be compared to the demands placed on South African writer’s to adopt literary realism as a way to counter the oppressions of apartheid. As Attwell points out, Coetzee’s strong arguments in favor of formal experimentation must be read in light of the overwhelming tendency to privilege realism and works with overt political agendas. Like Brecht, Coetzee seems to commit himself to the “unforeseeable” or the yet to come rather than to the verifiable facts of the past or present (Jameson 64). Unlike Brecht however, Coetzee does not think it is possible for literature to convey the texture of reality or for the artist to communicate directly with the masses. Coetzee’s departure from Brecht can be partially attributed to the fact that Coetzee works primarily within the genre of the novel while

Brecht's chosen medium is the theater. However, Brecht argues that even the novel should take on realism as a way to communicate with the masses. He writes:

The demand for a realistic style of writing can also no longer be so easily dismissed today. It has acquired a certain inevitability. The ruling classes use lies oftener than before – and bigger ones. To tell the truth is clearly an ever more urgent task. Suffering has increased and with it the number of sufferers. In view of the immense suffering of the masses, concern with little difficulties or of little groups has come to be felt as ridiculous, contemptible. (80)

The language of this passage makes it possible to see the demand for realism as both a local, historically determined problem and as a more global textual strategy. In this particular passage, Brecht is responding to the political and economic unrest in 1930s Germany. As Jameson points out, however, the way that Brecht addresses the conflict between the “ruling classes” and the “masses” continues to resonate with more contemporary revolutionary movements. Jameson writes: “Brecht's positions have, in fact, won very wide assent on the Marxist Left in West Germany since the recent publication of his texts, on the eve of the political rebirth of 1968” (64). In my view, Brecht's positions can also illuminate some of the core concerns within the fields of Postcolonial and South African Literary Studies. As I will argue below, these fields have been driven by questions of how to represent forms of what Brecht calls “immense suffering” in a historically sensitive way. In addition, Postcolonial and South African literary studies call the role of the writer into question, asking whether writing really has the potential to make a difference in the material circumstances of ordinary people.

II. Commitment and Indifference in Postcolonial Literary Studies

Debates in Postcolonial and South African studies have long centered on the relative value of two different approaches to literature, which Benita Parry has categorized as “discourse analysis” and “historical materialist analysis.” Parry’s essay appeared in the 1980s, but, over three decades later, the issues it raised remain relevant. In her account, discourse analysis tends to focus on language, often using deconstruction to draw attention to the instability of binary oppositions. Historical materialist analysis, by contrast, is derived from Marxism and focuses on how texts shed light on social, economic, and historical conditions. These paradigms have generated enduring scholarly conflicts such as the one in the 1986 issue of *Critical Inquiry* between Jacques Derrida, Anne McClintock, and Rob Nixon about how to theorize the word “apartheid.” As previously mentioned, Derrida denies McClintock and Nixon’s claim that the methodology of deconstruction divorces the language and discourse of apartheid from its historical reality. In the decades since Parry’s essay, materialist critics have continued to argue that Postcolonial and South African studies privilege “discourse analysis” over “historical materialist analysis,” thus neglecting the social, economic, political, and geographical contexts of Postcolonial fiction.

It makes sense that the textualist / materialist debate has framed both Postcolonial and South African studies, because the fields emerged at relatively the same time. The fields of postcolonial literary studies and South African literature are both relatively young, as the former was established in the academic setting in the 1960’s and 1970’s, and the latter in the 1980’s. Before I trace the central arguments in these fields, then, it makes sense to articulate how and why the broader discipline of postcolonial literary

studies became interested in South African literature. One reason, of course, has to do with the chronology of South African history; at the very moment when postcolonial studies was becoming established as a discipline in universities, South Africa was in the midst of its most violent period of transition to democracy. South Africa thus provided an immediate case study for the emerging postcolonial nation. The critical articulations of South Africa in the postcolonial context can be placed in two categories; those that view South Africa as an ‘extreme’ or ‘exceptional’ case, and those that view South Africa as ‘non-exceptional’ and related to other postcolonial contexts. *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) provides a representative example of the former view. Here, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin write that

Because the control of the means of communication is so pronounced in South Africa, it provides one of the clearest and most extreme examples of how the political condition of colonized people is bound up with language. This is not to say that there is no speech possible within that double (literal and metaphorical ‘silencing,’ but that such ‘speech’ can only demonstrate that neither the language nor the means of communication have been fully appropriated. In effect, all writing in South Africa is by definition a form of protest or a form of acquiescence. Which it is depends on how it situates itself within the political realities of the daily struggle against apartheid. (84)

In this passage, the authors posit a direct correlation between the “physical condition” of South Africans and the “form” through which literary authors express this condition. Since the conditions themselves are “extreme,” the choices for formal expression must be between extremes: either “protest” or “acquiescence.” In other words, *The Empire Writes*

Back suggests that the ‘extreme’ case of postcoloniality found in South Africa demands specific or even valorized modes of representation.

Not all critics would agree that South Africa represents the most “extreme” example of postcoloniality; to the contrary, critics such as Elleke Boehmer see South Africa as “prototypical” of “white colonies” in general (112). By using South Africa as a heuristic category, Boehmer generates a global analysis of “white settler society” from a specific local context (112). Likewise, in “The South African Ideology: The Myth of Exceptionalism, the Idea of Renaissance,” Neil Lazarus argues explicitly against the view of South Africa as exceptional. First, he denounces the “categorical *differentiation*” of South Africa from the rest of Africa; according to Lazarus, such a view encourages its proponents to disassociate South Africa from the colonial and postcolonial histories of the rest of the continent, thereby claiming that South Africa can and will follow a different path (610). Furthermore, Lazarus critiques the “nationalist discourse of the ‘New’ South Africa” because “the construction seems dematerializing, utopian in the bad sense” (620). In other words, the discourse of the “New” South Africa implies that words alone can create a multi-racial community premised on economic and political equality. Lazarus claims that “To actualize reconciliation, to make it real so that social life can unfold not as it was before, it is obviously necessary for the material conditions of existence to change in South Africa” (622). What Lazarus goes on to show, however, is that South Africa’s rhetorical adoption of a Western-style democracy does not necessarily led to enduring changes in everyday life. Lazarus’ position on the non-exceptional nature of South Africa has consequences for his perspective on ‘the real’ and forms of representation. For Lazarus, South African ideology struggles to accommodate both the

local promises made during the struggle against Apartheid and the global demands of international capitalism. In other words, Lazarus views South African ideology as a local narrative strategy that also has worldly concerns.

Whether critics describe South Africa as ‘exceptional’ or ‘non-exceptional,’ their arguments tend to overlap with debates in postcolonial literary studies about the relationship between history and form. For example, Lazarus argues that the “official discourse of reconciliation and rainbow nationality” operates as a formal strategy that attempts to represent the nation as multicultural and democratic despite pressing economic realities (622). Furthermore, Boehmer’s understanding of South Africa as a “prototypical” (and hence non-exceptional) white settler colony serves as the basis for her generalizations about the forms of postcolonial response. Thus, in the fields of postcolonial literary studies and South African literature, many critical debates can be summarized by the following two questions: first, what forms and languages should be used to tell the histories and stories of colonialism and postcolonialism; and second, what relation do those forms and languages have with the realities they seek to represent? In *The Political Unconscious* (1981), Jameson provides an oft-cited account of the “dilemma” posed by history and form: “is the text a free-floating object in its own right, or does it ‘reflect’ some context or ground, and in that case does it simply replicate the latter ideologically, or does it possess some autonomous force in which it could also be seen as negating that context?” (38). For my purposes, the “context” or “ground” can be understood as the ‘real’ economies, geographies, and social relations that relate to the processes of colonialism, postcolonialism, and Apartheid.

While some critics view writing as a direct response to history, others maintain that history itself cannot be accessed except in textual form. The very title of *The Empire Writes Back* suggests that its contributors largely understand writing as a direct response to the historical circumstances of Empire. Indeed, the authors claim that

Language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of ‘truth,’ ‘order,’ and ‘reality’ become established...For this reason, the discussion of post-colonial writing which follows is largely a discussion of the process by which the language, with its power, and the writing, with its signification of authority, has been wrested from the European authority. (7)

In this passage, the authors argue that language plays a crucial role in the contestation of both literary and political authority. For Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, the conversation between history and form creates the basis for studies of postcolonial literature and South African literature. Importantly, many questions of history and form in the postcolonial context draw on the vocabulary of crisis; according to Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, postcolonial literary studies emphasizes concepts such as language, place, and identity because the conditions of colonialism and postcolonialism have produced crises within these categories (6-11). The notion of crisis serves as a reminder of Jameson’s claim in *The Political Unconscious* that “History is what hurts;” for Jameson, however this “History can be apprehended only through its effects, and never directly as some reified force” (102). Combining the account of crisis in *The Empire Writes Back* with Jameson’s approach to form makes it possible to read representations of the city and the world in postcolonial and South African literature “through its effects” rather than as a “reified

force” within the texts. First, however, it is important to consider how both fields situate the concepts of social and literary spaces within larger conversations about the nation.

Because the discipline of postcolonial literary studies emerged in response to national liberation movements across the globe, many critics discuss the notion of space in relation to the nation. For example, the contributors to Homi Bhabha’s seminal *Nation and Narration* (1990) seek in different ways to trace the concrete and discursive dimensions of national spaces. In “The National Longing for Form,” Timothy Brennan argues that analyzing the narrative strategies of postcolonial fiction can actually provide insights into the historical and geographical processes of nation building. In Brennan’s words, “*cultural* study, and specifically the study of imaginative literature, is in many ways a profitable one for understanding the nation-centeredness of the post-colonial world” (128).² Here, Brennan assumes that “literature” can provide somewhat of a window to real events and circumstances. By way of contrast, other postcolonial critics do not see literature as a reflection of reality and suggest instead that the real is only present in mediated form.

Occupying the opposite of the critical spectrum to Brennan, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak use the theoretical discourses of poststructuralism and deconstruction to read colonial and postcolonial texts for moments of resistance. Benita Parry contends that the interest both Bhabha and Spivak express in language and forms of representation have resulted in an overall privileging of “discourse analysis” over and against “historical

² It would be interesting to consider how other materialist critics would respond to Brennan’s use of the term “profitable” (128). For example, in *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*, Graham Huggan critiques what he sees as the recent concessions made by postcolonial literary scholars to the demands of the marketplace. See Huggan, Graham. *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*. New York: Routledge, 2001.

materialist analysis” (67, 70). While Bhabha and Spivak are actually profoundly different thinkers, Parry tends to lump them together as representing a shared critical paradigm. Parry’s account of Bhabha and Spivak overemphasizes the discursive dimensions of their positions and does not point out how their views take the real world into account. According to Spivak, the postcolonial scholar occupies “the heritage of imperialism intimately but deconstructively,” and is therefore obligated to challenge or interrupt “the authority of Europe’s story-lines...reversing, displacing and seizing the apparatus of value coding” (qtd. in Parry, 67). Bhabha, in turn, suggests that the postcolonial critic should “intervene in and interrupt the Western discourse on modernity” (qtd. in Parry, 67). It is to these positions that Parry refers when she characterizes “the beginnings of postcolonial studies” as “colonial discourse analysis” (67). However, what is interesting about Bhabha and Spivak is that they both emphasize the scholar’s responsibility to use language in a certain way. At the same time, they both contend that acts of language can make a difference in the real world. In adopting what appears to be a primarily textualist position, both Bhabha and Spivak end up making claims about the real.

The emphasis that discourse analysis places on responsibility offers a potential response to claims by materialist critics (Benita Parry, Stephen Slemon, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, Aijaz Ahmad, and Arif Dirlik among others) that textualist critics (Bhabha and Spivak among others) privilege textuality, privilege the texts of the colonizer, and provide no agency for the colonized. In fact, both discourse analyses and materialist analyses recognize the power that language has to shape the world in addition to offering some form of social explanation. Graham Huggan, for example, concedes that postcolonial texts seek to “rewrite the social text of continuing imperial dominance,” but

goes on to argue that this writing responds to and has direct measurable effects on the real (ix). The main difference between discourse analysis and materialist analysis is that the former embraces the techniques of poststructuralism, deconstruction, and new historicism while the latter rejects them. In addition, materialist analysis tends to critique what Parry calls “the institutionalization of postcolonial studies” (Parry, 74; see also Huggan viii). For Parry, “the location of the discussion within English and Cultural Studies faculties has had the effect of promoting an indifference to social explanation” (74). Here, Parry decries the lack of emphasis offered by postcolonial studies on the social, economic, political, and geographical contexts of postcolonial fiction. For his part, Graham Huggan argues that a material account (what Parry calls a “social explanation”) should be offered for postcolonial criticism itself: “Postcolonial studies, it could be argued, has capitalized on its perceived marginality while helping turn marginality itself into a valuable commodity” (viii). In other words, Huggan puts postcolonial literary studies in the awkward position of arguing for the “marginality” of its own enterprise while actually participating in the commodification of that very enterprise.

In order to evaluate the opposition that critics such as Parry create between “discourse analysis” and “historical materialist analysis,” it is helpful to turn to critics who think beyond the materialist / textualist divide and who offer a middle ground for critical approaches to literature (67, 70). Both Jameson and Said have sought to understand history in ways that are not incompatible with the textualist approach to language. In his foundational *Orientalism* (1978), Said explicitly combines a Foucaultian approach to discourse analysis with a materialist use of the Marxist concept of hegemony. Critics such as John MacKenzie have characterized this hybrid approach as a “major

theoretical inconsistency” that “arises from the problems of attempting to reconcile Foucault with Gramsci. Foucault is less concerned with historical process; yet hegemonic activity must always imply chronological dynamic” (12). Yet, materialist critics such as Parry acknowledge that Said’s work, while traditionally understood as privileging language and discourse, can in fact bridge the gap between “discourse” and the “real-world” (69):

Said’s own writings, then, can be seen to negotiate an alliance between metropolitan theory and the analyses developed by liberation movements, in the process producing elaborations which were not in either source, while always retaining a usage of colonial discourse as necessarily implying its source and effects in real-world situations. (69)

While Parry goes on to appropriate Said for a Marxist paradigm, her words here encourage a more nuanced reading of Said’s understanding of history and form. In *Orientalism*, Said is less interested in the “brute reality” of the East than in “the internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient (the East as career) despite or beyond any correspondence, or lack thereof, with a ‘real’ Orient” (5). In other words, he argues that the dominant discourses of Empire actually produced the Orient as a category that existed outside the specific geography and people of the ‘real’ Orient. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said returns to the category of ‘the real,’ and argues that “It is difficult to show the involvements of culture with expanding empires, to make observations about art that preserve its unique endowments and at the same time map its affiliations, but, I submit, we must attempt this, and set the art in the global, earthly context” (7). In *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson uses the concept of “mediation” to insist that “the

individual narrative, or the individual formal structure, is to be grasped as the imaginary resolution of a real contradiction” (39, 77). Jameson quickly qualifies his categorization of ‘the real,’ however: while “history” itself is “*not* a text,” that “history is inaccessible to us except in textual form...it can be approached only by way of prior (re)textualization” (82). Both Said and Jameson thus offer a middle ground between the position that would read history and reality as purely textual phenomenon and the position that would insist on the *a priori* nature of the real.

The debate in postcolonial literary studies has a direct bearing on South African literature, because the latter field is also constellated around questions of history and form. However, no matter what the formal concerns might be, the historical concern is so immanent that it is foregrounded in even the most deconstructionist, new historicist, or poststructuralist projects. In other words, regardless of the nature of critical conversations surrounding form, these conversations inevitably return to the category of history. Notions that are central to the field, such as Apartheid and urbanization, cannot be isolated as purely linguistic phenomena because they are products of history; neither Apartheid nor urbanization are timeless. Therefore, the problem of form in South African literature can never be completely a-historical. Just as in the field of postcolonial literary studies, however, the field of South African literature can be delineated according to those that privilege either history or form.

Stephen Clingman’s account of Nadine Gordimer’s novels (*The Novels of Nadine Gordimer: History from the Inside* 1992) provides the best example of a thoroughgoing materialist approach to literature. Gordimer, Clingman argues, is literally a product of history: “It is not because Gordimer’s fiction transcends its historical situation, but

because it is significantly linked to it, that its value is created...Gordimer's work is valuable insofar as we are able to use it to explore South African history" (19). While Lazarus presents a more nuanced reading of Gordimer than Clingman, he nonetheless replicates the latter's model of history as that which shapes individual consciousness, and form as that which has the capacity to resist the forces of history. In "Modernism and Modernity: T.W. Adorno and Contemporary South African Literature," Lazarus re-frames Adorno's definition of modernism in order to read white South African writing as a political response to the social conditions of Apartheid. What troubles Lazarus most about Adorno, and about poststructuralism in general, is the threat of the obliteration of the individual; by revising Adorno, Lazarus thus retains a focus on individual agency and on resistance as an ideological strategy.

Critics often contrast the works of Nadine Gordimer to those of J.M. Coetzee, claiming that the latter attempts to abstract the specific history and geography of South Africa. Whereas Gordimer's novels lend themselves to materialist analysis due to their explicit references to contemporary historical geographies and situations, Coetzee's novels are more often read as experiments in poststructuralist or postmodernist style.

In *J.M. Coetzee: South Africa and the Politics of Writing*, David Attwell traces the opposition between Gordimer and Coetzee as one informed by the debates on realism and representation. Attwell writes that

in South Africa, life under apartheid seems to demand a realistic documentation of oppression. Both the white liberal tradition since Olive Schreiner, continuing down to the radicalism of Nadine Gordimer today, and contemporary black prose narrative since the era of *Drum* magazine since the 1950s have adopted various

forms of realism as the unquestioned means of bearing witness to, and telling the truth about, South Africa. (11)

Attwell's comments here resonate with Clingman's reading of Gordimer in the sense that both understand realism (a particular style of writing) as a response to historical conditions. According to Attwell, the relative privileging of realism has forced Coetzee to adopt an artificially oppositional stance that is often interpreted as "a form of ethical and political evasion" (11). As an example, Attwell cites Coetzee's 1987 remarks about the relationship between fiction and history: "In times of intense ideological pressure like the present, when the space in which the novel and history normally coexist like two cows in the same pasture, each minding its own business, is squeezed to almost nothing, the novel, it seems to me, has only two options: supplementarity or rivalry" (qtd. In Attwell 15). Quoting again from Coetzee, Attwell points out that a novel that acts as a supplement to history would offer a more straightforwardly realist account of "experience" while a novel that rivals history would "show up the mythic status of history" (15).

Surprisingly, Attwell does not comment on the way Coetzee makes an argument about textuality (supplementarity or rivalry) that is nevertheless couched in materialist terms. Coetzee stresses that the historical conditions of the present have influenced the formal strategies available to writers. In addition, he uses a spatial metaphor to convey the relationship between two approaches to South African writing. Coetzee raises the stakes of the literary debate by describing the novel and history as "two cows on the same pasture" – a metaphor that speaks to Jennifer Wenzel's observations that conflict in the South African context must inevitably return to the question of land. Writing about the

recent spate of farm murders in South Africa, Wenzel notes that “the web of meaning that entangles the farm murders with land reform emphasizes the importance, even and especially in a post-apartheid era, of South African cultural and political understandings of land that J.M. Coetzee has consistently examined” (92). Wenzel’s observations here open a potential dialogue between Coetzee and Gordimer, who refers metaphorically to the Sahara to describe the space separating the committed from the indifferent. While Coetzee may seem to be more interested in the discursive implications of the novel’s relationship to history, he shares with Gordimer the sense that the novel is also situated in historical time and geographic space. The difference in emphasis comes from Coetzee’s seeming insistence on preserving the gap between fiction and history and Gordimer’s efforts to dissolve it. As Attwell goes on to show, however, Coetzee’s own fiction undoes the very binary he attempts to establish between supplementarity and rivalry. Attwell goes on to complicate the common understanding of Gordimer and Coetzee as literary opposites: “just as Gordimer cannot be accused of being narrowly realist, neither can Coetzee be placed on one side of the theoretical conflict between textuality and history. Despite the discursive orientation of his fiction, it also establishes a historical narrative” (13-14). While Attwell works hard to convey the historical sensitivity of Coetzee’s novels, he ends up implying that what Coetzee does is unique and exemplary rather than representative of the South African literary tradition. For example, Attwell argues that Coetzee’s “relative detachment enables him to be more explicit and more honest about his own social placement than more obviously engaged white writers can be about theirs” (26). Put slightly differently, Attwell privileges Coetzee’s formal indifference over and above the commitment embodied by writers such as Gordimer. In addition, while Attwell

rightly points towards the centrality of history in Coetzee's writing, he also describes Coetzee's work teleologically as trending towards the transcendence of history. Referring specifically to *Age of Iron*, Attwell suggests that "South Africa means not only death – the renunciation of authority and the end of discourse – but also, because it is these things, the 'dust between the teeth,' an engagement with history that is in itself an act of transcendence" (125). I would argue, however, that the phrase "between the teeth" actually works against the very idea of transcendence. To say that "Life is dust between the teeth" is, in a sense, to say that life is death. At the same time, it is to say that life brings the body into intimate contact with the elements. When one bites into the dust, one brings the earth into the body in a form of intimate entanglement. This relationship is not one that is easily transcended. In sum, while Attwell rightly gestures to Coetzee's historical impulses, he is too quick to maintain Coetzee's exceptionality and to overstress the eventual transcendence of history.

In *Apartheid and Beyond: South African Writers and the Politics of Place*, Benita Parry writes about the ways in which Coetzee's writing engages with the so-called "dream topographies" or "ideological blueprints" that white writing "has projected on the land" (27). Although Parry is referring specifically to the pastoral genre, Coetzee's comments in "The Novel Today" also seem to frame supplementarity and rivalry as two specific ways of writing about or mapping a particular place. By referring to the shared terrain of the novel and history as a "pasture" Coetzee foregrounds the centrality of land in South African politics and literature. In a later collection of essays called *White Writing* (1988) Coetzee elaborates on the prominence of the pastoral mode and in particular of the plaasroman or farm novel. In "The Novel Today," the word "pasture"

draws attention to the ways fiction and historical discourse situate themselves in relation to space. However, the word “pasture” also calls attention to the idea that South Africa itself is a contested space in which competing interests vie for their own territory and access to resources. It is worth pointing out that Coetzee chooses the word pasture, which is intended specifically for domesticated animals. In so doing, Coetzee stresses the implicit opposition between nature, which would be signified by terms such as “veld” and culture. What Coetzee means then is that the relative distance or closeness between the novel and history is not natural, but rather has been determined by cultural forces. This resonates with his observation about the “intense ideological pressure” of the present. As Attwell points out, Coetzee is writing during the States of Emergency, which means that it is not possible for anyone in South Africa to “mind” his or her own “business” in any space. Under the state of emergency, the government assumed widespread control over the movements of people in space. Thus, while Attwell is right to frame Coetzee’s argument as fundamentally literary, it is important to keep in mind that the cultural politics of the 1980s were closely entangled with struggles over material resources such as land. By aligning himself with one topography over another – the novel over history – Coetzee implies allegiance to a certain kind of story about a particular place. While Coetzee’s seeming renunciation of history makes it look as though he turns away from the vulgarities of experience, his topography – true to the etymology of the term – actually embodies a commitment to locality. While his novels certainly operate in their own terms and challenge binary oppositions, they also ground themselves in South African soil. His novels, one might say, have the South African dust between their teeth.

It is important to note that Attwell's study, published in 1993, cannot possibly anticipate how the fall of apartheid would influence the literary landscape. One could argue that his approach to Coetzee would be quite different were he to include later novels such as *Disgrace* that seem more openly invested in and committed to the category of history. Since the early 1990s critics have recognized the emergence of a post-apartheid literary tradition that breaks from past literary traditions such as realism without completely abandoning them. Coetzee is just one of many writers who use the strategies of postmodernism to write about specifically South African locations and themes; even as these writers address local concerns, they situate South Africa in an international and global context by alluding to international literary traditions.

A brief comparison of the fiction of J.M. Coetzee with that of a younger writer, Ivan Vladislavic, demonstrates the complexity of the relationship between history and form in South African literature. Despite apparently different formal concerns, the historical concern remains immanent in both authors' works; recalling Howard's formulation of realism, it becomes possible to read both Coetzee and Vladislavic as using strategies of 'the real' to manage "that sense of discomfort and danger" generated by "the large social questions" specific to South African history and geography (ix). In *The Life and Times of Michael K* (1983), for example, Coetzee attempts to abstract specific markers of time and place; at no point does the novel identify its setting as South Africa during the State of Emergency. However, the novel does identify the city as the construct (literal and figurative) that the main character must escape, but to which he inevitably returns. Thus, the category of the Apartheid city enters the text even as the text claims its own universality and removal from history. In *The Restless Supermarket* (2001), by

contrast, Ivan Vladislavic explicitly identifies the setting as Johannesburg and the period as the 1990s. The novel does not deny that the historical event of the elections and the geographical space of Johannesburg are ‘real;’ to use Jameson’s words, however, the novel does insist that history and geography “are inaccessible...except in textual form” (82). In fact, the novel operates under the assumption that media attention to South African cities during the fall of Apartheid has resulted in an excess of legibility; by making the main character of the novel a proofreader, Vladislavic ironizes the over-saturation of realist ‘readings’ of the city. Here, Vladislavic can be read alongside social theorist Henri Lefebvre; in *The Postmodern Urban Condition* (2000), Richard Dear cites Lefebvre’s position that “spaces made (produced) to be read are the most deceptive and tricked-up imaginable” (qtd. in Dear 52). To borrow a phrase from Richard Dear, Vladislavic thus uses formal innovation to counter these realist accounts and highlight the subjective nature of reading the “spatial text” of the city (52).

III. Towards “Texturealism”

In the preceding paragraphs, I have elaborated some ways that commitment and indifference have been understood over time, by different scholars in critical theory and postcolonial studies. For me, commitment and indifference represent two sides to the same coin – a notion I borrow from Rey Chow’s discussion of sacrifice and mimesis. In “Sacrifice, Mimesis, and the Theorizing of Victimhood,” Chow rejects the definitions of mimesis as presence and sacrifice as absence. Instead, she suggests that mimesis is the trace that remains in the aftermath of a process of sacrifice. In my view, the notions of

commitment and indifference work in a similar way; particularly in the South African context, the one cannot always be easily distinguished from another. As we have seen, Coetzee's fiction has been criticized for seeming to be indifferent to everyday experience in South Africa. And yet, this indifference can be seen as an aspect of his commitment to a non-mimetic politics of representation. By way of contrast, Gordimer's fiction has been heralded as embodying the writer's political commitments and sense of responsibility to her particular historical circumstances. Gordimer recognizes, however, that actions and words expressing commitment do not always 'make a difference.'

As an alternative to the binary ways in which South African writings have been conceived, I offer a "texturealist" reading that combines the seemingly disparate elements of textualist / materialist, realist / non-realist. Texturealism is not a new theory or approach to literature, since what it designates is actually quite common and has been present all along. The word texture is appropriate for my purposes because it draws attention to both the surface qualities of a narrative and the ways in which it has been put together. To use the example of cloth, its texture can be described on a surface level as either coarse or fine, loosely or tightly woven. The texture, however, also tells a story of how the cloth was made and from what materials. The model of surface and depth can also apply to literature; the texture (or grammar) of a literary work tells us not only about the relationships between the words on the page but also about the conditions that contributed to the production of those words. In sum, a "texturealist" approach works as an interlocutor in the textualist / materialist debate, asking not just what words mean but also thinking about why, for whom, and in what times and places, they matter.

By combining the word “text” with “realism” I illustrate Jameson’s point that reality can only be accessed in textual form. At the same time, I assert the reverse: texts can also point us towards the world. A texturealist reading does not seek to identify reality in the word; nor does it assert that reality cannot be represented by the word. Instead, a texturealist reading approaches writing as one of many ways of being in the world. In this sense, I sympathize with critics such as Said who describe texts as “worldly.”

In the chapters that follow, I engage with three core concept-metaphors that do not stand alone, but rather complement each other and provide a theoretical focus for my intervention in the textualist / materialist debate. In Chapter 1, I read three of Gordimer’s novels alongside her own notion of the “queer situation.” My aim in this chapter is not to claim Gordimer for queer theory per se, but to explore the suggestiveness of her term “queer situation” as a metaphor for the critique of apartheid’s oppressive rhetoric of otherness. In Chapter 2, I continue my discussion of the “queer situation” in relation to Zoë Wicomb’s novels, suggesting that Wicomb both draws inspiration from and is skeptical of the themes treated by Gordimer. I also introduce Sarah Nuttall’s theory of “entanglement,” which I see as analogous to the “queer situation” in its focus on the inevitable connections between cultures, geographies, and histories. In Chapter 3, I draw on Derrida’s articulation of the “dangerous supplement” to show how works by Darryl Accone and Rayda Jacobs contest apartheid’s racial and cultural categories. I view these chapters not as distinct entities, but as a series of interconnected essays that use related concepts to demonstrate how the textual is powerful as text not because it transcends the historical, but because it incorporates and mediates the historical.

CHAPTER 1

Commitment and Indifference in Nadine Gordimer's Writings

In "Great Problems in the Street" (1963), Nadine Gordimer writes:

For the gap between the committed and the indifferent is a Sahara whose faint trails, followed by the mind's eye only, fade out in sand. The place is not on the map of human relations; but, like most unmapped areas, there is a coming and going that goes unrecorded; there is a meeting of eyes at points without a name; there is an exchange of silences between strangers crossing one another far from the witness of their own kind – once you are down there on your own two feet you find the ancient caravan trails connecting human destiny no matter how much distance a man tries to put between himself and the next man. (132)

It is tempting to gloss over the complexity of Gordimer's reflections on the "committed and the indifferent" by focusing on the word "gap." Gordimer, it seems, sees the "committed and the indifferent" in binary terms, defining the latter as "kindly and decent, within the strict limits of their 'own kind'" (132). While the "indifferent" seek to maintain discrete categories of identity and preserve spatial boundaries, the "committed know" that it is possible to find the "caravan trails connecting human destiny" (132). For the committed, the desert offers a space for "coming and going," "meeting," and "exchange." The "indifferent," by contrast, see the desert as "absolutely foolproof, reassuringly impassable" (132). In this and other essays, Gordimer invokes the notions of commitment and indifference to describe the fundamental choice faced by all South Africans: to remain complicit with Apartheid or take a stand against it. In "Great Problems in the Street," she defines the "queer situation" as the space and time "when the

indifferent stray into the company of a committed person, as it were by mistake” (133). According to Gordimer, the queer situation complicates the opposition between the indifferent and the committed and offers an alternative to traditional notions of self and other. The concept of the queer situation provides a useful way to approach her novels, which often feature a crisis that disorients the characters in space and time and demands that they redefine their relationships with others. In addition, this concept highlights the importance of gender to Gordimer’s explorations of space and identity.

While Gordimer does not necessarily prioritize sexuality in her understanding of the queer, it still makes sense to analyze her texts in relation to contemporary queer studies. First, Gordimer’s writings show how queer theory can be used strategically to talk about national identity. Second, Gordimer’s writings also show that contemporary queer theory itself tends to focus too narrowly on sexual identity performativity. Gordimer’s queer situation has both broad and narrow applications, and resonates in both universal and particular contexts. On the one hand, Gordimer seems to see the queer situation as particular to Africa and specifically South Africa. She identifies the confluence of spatial relations and historical events that define this queer situation and make it integral to identity formation. At the same time, Gordimer’s intertextual references suggest that the queer situation actually links South Africa’s apparently unique experience to a more universal human condition. As I will discuss in more detail below, Gordimer’s interest in the universal and the particular comes through in her use of pronouns, which challenge readers to question relationships between individuals such as “me” and “you” and redefine collectives such as “us” and “them.”

Given Gordimer's explicit interest in the extra-literary dimensions of her social milieu, it makes sense that critics have historically focused on the political aspects of her content. By contrast, interpretations of her fellow South African writer J.M. Coetzee's work tend to emphasize the elements of form, style, and technique. The tradition of reading Gordimer in terms of political commitment can be exemplified by Stephen Clingman's *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer: History from the Inside* (1992). In Clingman's words,

The address of Gordimer's work to the black world is at some level a writing *in favour* of that world, for this domain then becomes the arbiter of significance, value and action on Gordimer's side of the social dividing line. Simultaneously the future becomes the arbiter of meaning and action in the present. This dual address, therefore, in part seems to be responsible for the historical commitment of each of Gordimer's novels. In weighing up, against the realities of the present, the implicit demands made by both an oppressed black world and the future, in each given instance for Gordimer the appropriate form of her commitment in fiction is produced. (214-215)

In this passage, Clingman describes commitment as a form or type of fiction ("the form of her commitment") and as a particular relationship to society and history ("historical commitment"). Commitment thus embodies a literary response to historical and social demands. Clingman also defines commitment as occupying a unit of space-time between the past and the future. Clingman's account resonates with Gordimer's own perspective that committed white writers have "something to offer the future" ("Living in the Interregnum" 376). Both Clingman and Gordimer imply that the indifferent refuse to

answer the demands of the present or to orient their work to the future. Indeed, in “The Idea of Gardening: J. M. Coetzee’s *Life and Times of Michael K*,” Gordimer takes Coetzee to task for allegedly expressing “the desire to hold himself clear of events and their daily, grubby, tragic consequences in which, like everyone else living in South Africa, he is up to the neck” (397). Like the indifferent whites Gordimer describes in “Great Problems in the Street,” Coetzee keeps the “grubby” reality of South Africa at a “safe distance” (“Gardening” 397, “Great Problems in the Street” 133). Elsewhere, Gordimer has defended her decision to remain in South Africa and pointed out that Coetzee has chosen to live abroad.³ Gordimer’s self-positioning along with the canonical status of critics such as Clingman have provided the fuel for mainstream literary criticism, which has created a seemingly “impassable” Sahara between Gordimer and Coetzee (“Great Problems in the Street” 132).

In this chapter, I seek to reconcile the seemingly incompatible approaches to Gordimer’s “politics” and Coetzee’s “form” by reading the notions of commitment and indifference as related modes of response to the crisis of space and identity presented by the South African situation. Because contemporary criticism has gravitated overwhelmingly towards Coetzee, I focus my own analysis on Gordimer, reading three novels that represent the span and depth of her work from the 1980s to the present: *July’s People* (1981), *The House Gun* (1998), and *The Pickup* (2001). While each of these texts provides its own set of questions and problems, they share a number of intellectual concerns. First, each text represents apartheid primarily as a spatial logic: a form of

³Dominic Head summarizes Gordimer’s position that “the necessary task of historical transformation is really best served by working from within the nation, rather than from a position of self-imposed exile” (4). See Head, Dominic. *Nadine Gordimer*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994. By contrast, Coetzee moved to London in the 1960s, taught in American universities, and eventually emigrated to Australia where he now has citizenship.

architecture designed to control the movement and interaction of bodies in space. Second, each novel also depicts apartheid as a gendered system that positions the white heterosexual male as the norm. Third, each work complicates the seeming opposition between the committed and the indifferent. These three intellectual concerns can be related by the notions of gender and genre, broadly defined as forms of taxonomy. For Gordimer, the demise and eventual defeat of apartheid results in a queering of the apartheid imaginary: an unsettling of apartheid's spatial practices and systems of classification. The queer situation, which Gordimer defines in "Great Problems in the Street" and represents in fictional form in these three novels, starts to dismantle the hierarchical taxonomy that has defined people according to type. Furthermore, the queer situation brings to light what apartheid has marginalized and made unnatural. Gordimer does not intend for *July's People*, *The House Gun*, and *The Pickup* to be read solely as straightforward allegories for progressive politics or as apologies for commitment. Instead, the queer situations depicted in these novels denaturalize the series of oppositions at the core of apartheid ideology, including the one between commitment and indifference.

The complexity of Gordimer's position on the committed and the indifferent is overlooked by emphasizing the supposed "gap" between them. Such a narrow focus tends to replicate the very problem that Gordimer associates with indifference, namely the tendency to "keep at a safe distance" those others who seem easy to categorize and define (133). While Gordimer criticizes Coetzee for being disengaged from South African events and places, her own work demonstrates the impossibility of being engaged with the *real* South Africa. For example, *July's People*, *The House Gun*, and *The Pickup*

depict apartheid not just as a set of spatial practices but as a perceptual apparatus predicated on a self/other mechanism. This tendency to define the self as opposed to others makes it difficult for characters to encounter one another as equals. Instead, characters adopt attitudes of indifference that preserve their conceptual biases towards and physical distance from one another. While the novels do relate indifference to apartheid's ideology of separatism, they also suggest that indifference can facilitate a kind of commitment that avoids the pitfalls of either separatism or liberalism. This more nuanced treatment of commitment and indifference resonates with J.M. Coetzee's fiction, which often suggests that indifference is the most ethical response to a social and political context that demands commitment.⁴ Whether embodied by an author's explicit avoidance of geographical specificity or by a character's failure to connect with another, indifference attempts to avoid the will toward domination that often comes with commitment. Apartheid, after all, can be understood as a commitment to a certain social order. Both Gordimer and Coetzee, however, understand that indifference has its own consequences, and their characters often replicate the very apartheid structures they seek to avoid. Given their shared concerns, it makes sense to read Gordimer and Coetzee as using different literary forms and genres to *engage* with (not merely *respond* to or *reject*) the queer situation of South Africa's transition. Gordimer's novels in particular depict the permeability of spatial boundaries, disrupt categories of identity, and grapple with the residue of apartheid's obsession with genre: its compulsion to preserve the distinction between types and kinds of people and places.

⁴ In "Conserving the Cogito: Rereading Nadine Gordimer's *The Conservationist*," Tamlyn Monson summarizes the work of critics such as Marais who read Coetzee alongside notions of ethics and politics. See Monson, Tamlyn. "Conserving the Cogito: Rereading Nadine Gordimer's *The Conservationist*." *Research in African Literatures* 35.4 (2004): 33-51.

On the surface, Gordimer's texts seem to suggest that indifference only has value insofar as it can be converted into a different form of currency: namely, commitment. As I will discuss later in relation to *July's People*, characters such as Julie adopt indifference as a form of commitment to a new social order. However, it would be an oversimplification to suggest that Gordimer sees indifference only as a version of commitment. In fact, Gordimer treats indifference as a moral economy of its own, based on the specific dynamics of apartheid. As Derrida points out in "Racism's Last Word," all acts of signification are ultimately about the act of setting apart. Apartheid is, by this logic, setting apart raised to an extreme degree. The notion of setting apart can also be described as differentiation or difference making. The racism that is apartheid, then, is differentiation/difference-making taken to an extreme degree. It is in this sense that indifference – voiding or suspending of the fundamental act of differentiation – begins to acquire a provocative prospect, one that should not be reduced to a precondition (or a preliminary form) of commitment. For example, in *The House Gun*, Gordimer argues that an entire generation has adopted indifference in opposition to the religious and ethical / moral economies of the previous generation. At stake in this novel is the status of differentiation at the very point of transition between the old value systems like religion and institutionalized racism on the one hand, and new value systems like indifference on the other.

In addition to presenting a complex account of commitment and indifference, Gordimer's novels also redefine the relationship between self and other. The queer situation depicted in each text challenges the conventional understanding of indifference as self-involvement and commitment as an orientation towards the other. When Gordimer

uses the word queer, she might not have in mind the bodies of work we now loosely refer to as queer theory and gender studies. However, a brief review of the etymology and intellectual history of the word queer reveals that this term is particularly appropriate for conveying Gordimer's resistance to binary oppositions. The Oxford English Dictionary Online gives two apparently incongruous definitions of the term "queer:" "Strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric. Also: of questionable character; suspicious, dubious" ("Queer"). The word "also" almost conceals the cultural logic that has naturalized the analogy between that which is "strange" and that which is "suspicious." According to this definition, that which deviates from the norm *is the same as* that which cannot be trusted. It makes sense that the term "queer" was adopted to describe persons of questionable sexuality and gender, who were perceived as deviant, unnatural, and even diseased. In light of this history, Gordimer's use of the term queer signals her interest in questioning the way that certain identities have been marginalized. In "Great Problems in the Street," Gordimer describes the "queer situation" as something that happens by "mistake." Here, the word "mistake" seems to suggest that the queer situation is extraordinary. In fact, however, Gordimer suggests that the queer situation has always been integral to society, even when apartheid attempted to marginalize and silence all those who opposed its practices.

As outlined above, Gordimer depicts apartheid as a commitment to a certain social order predicated on the difference between self and other. While the self-other mechanism operates most obviously through the spatial logic of segregation, it also manifests itself as a normative gender system that defines the self as a white (usually Afrikaner) male. Apartheid can thus be understood as a form of narcissism that seeks to preserve the self against the threat of the other who is not white, not male, and/or not

heterosexual. The queer situation disrupts this gender system by dismantling the hierarchical taxonomy that forces people into categories of race and gender. As Gordimer describes it, the queer situation brings to light what has been marginalized and made unnatural by apartheid. The defeat of apartheid is thus a queering of the apartheid imaginary: a disorientation of its spatial logic and its hegemonic ideologies of race and gender. For Gordimer, the queer situation begins when the normative boundaries of space and identity can no longer be taken for granted. Within the unmapped terrain of what she calls the desert, all preconceived oppositions must be reimagined, including the binary between the committed and the indifferent. In the context of apartheid, the terms committed and indifferent represent two extremes on the continuum of self-other relations. In "Great Problems in the Street," for example, Gordimer defines the "indifferent" as those who keep "within the strict limits of their 'own kind'" (132). For the "indifferent," the other represents a threat to the integrity and insularity of the self. The "committed," by contrast, know that it is not possible to keep the other "at a safe distance" (133). Given the way the word queer deconstructs oppositions, it would be inaccurate to assume that Gordimer valorizes the committed and vilifies the indifferent. In fact, Gordimer seems skeptical of the "liberal and leftist politics" expressed by the "committed" (132). In the queer situations Gordimer describes, both the committed and the indifferent must reconsider their notions of self in relation to the other. While apartheid ideology tries to circumscribe self-other relations within its taxonomies of race and gender, Gordimer shows that these categories have always already been deconstructed. The oppositional pairs that Gordimer's novels take on, such as active/passive, culture/nature, father/mother, and logos/pathos, are all versions of the

fundamental self-other mechanism that is at the heart of apartheid. When her novels deconstruct these binaries, they are also placing apartheid's fundamental ideology under erasure, positing a continuum of human relations in place of the extremes of commitment or indifference. On this continuum, it is not necessary or even possible to choose between identifying with and protecting the self and responding to the other. As Gordimer's novels show, the other has always already been part of the self in spite of apartheid laws. Far from aspiring to a utopian version of unity with the other, however, Gordimer reminds readers of the persistence of power relations. Just as the indifferent cannot keep the other at a complete remove, the committed cannot unproblematically embrace the other as an equal.

Gordimer's depiction of apartheid as a form of heterosexual narcissism resonates with Michael Warner's foundational essay "Homo-Narcissism; or, Heterosexuality." Here, Warner summarizes Simone de Beauvoir's account of the self-other mechanism at the heart of heterosexual ideology: "This identification of the male as subject and the female as Other, she argues, underwrites all the asymmetries of gender throughout history" (1499). While Warner agrees with de Beauvoir, he adds that "In the modern West, having a sexual object of the opposite gender is taken to be the normal and paradigmatic form of an interest either in the Other or, more generally, in others. This is why in our own century it has acquired the name *heterosexuality* – a sexuality of otherness" (1499). What dates Warner's formulation is the fact that he self-consciously interrogates his own use of the term "modern" but leaves the category of the "West" unexamined. Subsequent theorists of race and gender have pointed out the similarities between gender systems that position the female as other and hierarchical systems of race

and class that identify the white subject (often Western, and usually heterosexual male) as self and the non-white subject (often non-Western, non-male, and/or non-heterosexual) as other. Warner's own analysis assumes the "modern West" to be "normal and paradigmatic" of gender relations more generally, referring exclusively to European theorists such as Habermas, Freud, and Lacan. Nevertheless, the concept of homo-narcissism remains useful for describing apartheid's hegemonic ideology.

Another aspect of Gordimer's queer situation that can be related to queer theory is her interest in silence and secrecy. Foundational works such as Eve Sedgwick's "Epistemology of the Closet" articulate queer identity as an open secret that the dominant ideology seeks to repress or keep in the metaphorical closet. Gordimer describes the workings of apartheid in a similar way, and criticizes its use of repression and censorship to enforce silence. In "Great Problems in the Street," she writes: "The speakers who defend human rights against the attrition of one repressive apartheid measure after another, all committed to this over and above their varying political standpoints in the opposition – all are banned, in exile, or under house arrest... There is silence in the streets. The indifferent are left in peace. There is nothing to disturb them, now, but the detonations of saboteurs, and the hideous outbursts of secret savage society" (136). To draw on Sedgwick's metaphor, apartheid legislation against public gatherings has forced the queer situation out of the street and into the closet, thus marginalizing the "opposition" from public space and discourse. Under apartheid, the queer situation takes on the qualities of a dangerous and violent "secret" that threatens to "disturb" the false "silence" and "peace" left in the streets. The "hideous outbursts" Gordimer describes represent attempts to contest the spatial boundaries of the apartheid closet and disrupt its

hierarchical gender/genre system. As Butler writes in “Imitation and Gender Insubordination,” “identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes” (1514). Were the queer situation to emerge from the apartheid closet, it would threaten the identity categories at the heart of apartheid’s “regulatory” mechanisms. As Gordimer’s language implies, this disruption would be experienced as a violent rupture.

While queer theory offers many productive avenues for reading Gordimer, only a few critics have done so. As a notable exception, Brenna M. Munro writes that both Gordimer and Coetzee invoke the figure of the queer as allegories for the New South Africa. Munro does not cite Jameson directly, but her use of the term allegory calls to mind the critical controversy generated by his 1986 article “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism.” Here, Jameson argues that the “third-world novel” is preoccupied with the “national situation” (65). In what would shortly become one of the most contentious statements in debates about form and nationalism, Jameson claims: “Third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic – necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: *the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society*” (69). While many critics continue to agree with Jameson’s observation that the personal converges with the political, theorists such as Aijaz Ahmad took issue with the all-encompassing category of “third-world literature” and with the words “necessarily” and “always” (Ahmad 4). While it is not possible here to revisit these debates in detail, it is clear that postcolonial and South African literary studies remain influenced by the concept of national allegory. For Munro, the “coming-out narrative” can be read as a “national allegory” that both celebrates and

critiques the new nation (399). However, while she suggests that the queer often serves as a figure for the nation, it does not follow that the queer only has allegorical value or that it is only used in the service of the political. In sum, Munro's analysis demonstrates that the concept of national allegory can be useful so long as the particular details of different literary traditions and historical contexts are taken into account.

While I agree with many of Munro's points, her analysis tends to replicate binary oppositions that Gordimer works hard to undo. For example, Munro concludes that Gordimer ultimately marginalizes white queer characters because their private behaviors cannot usher in the kind of public democracy demanded by the New South Africa. In her analysis of *None to Accompany Me*, she writes that "Ultimately, the juxtaposition of Annie's and Vera's choices suggests that the valorization of gay identity offers whites a model of inclusion in the nation based on how one acts in one's personal life, rather than addressing the question of material privilege and the ways in which South Africans are literally located in geographies of race and class" (419). However, Gordimer has consistently suggested that one's "personal life" cannot be experienced apart from the space in which one is "literally located." In fact, she argues that distinctions such as personal/political and public/private represent fictions propagated by the apartheid imaginary. Apartheid legislation claims to protect the public and maintain racial purity by regulating private behaviors such as sexuality and legislating categories of personhood such as race and gender. However, Gordimer points out that under apartheid, there could be no such thing as privacy, because the Immorality Laws regulated even the most intimate of behaviors. For example, *July's People* demonstrates that the fierce protection of privacy forms the foundation to apartheid's social inequalities. When Bam and

Maureen abandon their suburban home and follow their servant July to his village, they inhabit a hut without a door that he can enter at any time. However, even in Johannesburg, July had the keys to their house and permanent access to their possessions. In Johannesburg, Maureen and Bam maintained their illusion of privacy by assuming an attitude of indifference to July's presence within their home. Furthermore, they denied that he could have a life or interests outside of their home. Their experiences in the village queer their assumptions about privacy, gender, and race. As this example from *July's People* shows, Gordimer does not necessarily align the queer situation or queer identity with what Munro calls the "model of inclusion" (419). In fact, Gordimer does not offer a clear or consistent role for either heterosexual or queer identity, partly because she does not see the one as separate from the other. In "Speak Out: The Necessity for Protest," she writes that "there has always been some recognition that the privileged whites are not quite so privileged as they like to think, that while the Dorian Gray reflected in the swimming pool remains eternally bronzed and fit, fear, guilt, shame or that coarsening and blunting of the spirit that is the price of indifference, presents a different picture when he is alone with himself" (102). The character of Dorian Gray has of course inspired numerous theorizations of narcissism and queer identity. Eve Sedgwick, for example, refers to Dorian Gray in discussing the conflict between the "sameness of identity" and the possibility of difference. Writing about the dissonance between the painting of Dorian Gray and his image of himself, Sedgwick writes: "As the picture's initial similitude concealed its homographic otherness, so Dorian himself, as an embodiment of undifferentiated sexual difference, threatens to confound the security with which the sameness of (heterosexual) identity can be known" (1496). In other words, the

painting threatens to reveal that the image of the self is also the image of the other, and that the self cannot be protected from this other. Here, Sedgwick uses the word “security” when describing the failures of heterosexual identity to police its boundaries. Gordimer uses a similar phrase – “security measure” – in her account of the insularity adopted by the indifferent. In light of Sedgwick’s analysis, indifference can actually be read as a commitment to the self/same and an aversion to the other/different. For Sedgwick, the painting of Dorian Gray embodies the inevitable dissolution of the “sameness” of identity by “undifferentiated sexual difference” (1496). Likewise, Gordimer suggests that the narcissism of the indifferent conceals their fear that the image of the self already contains the possibility of difference, which threatens their sense of security. The queer situation that breaks through this security measure thus not only forces the (heterosexual) indifferent into the company of the (queer) committed; it also queers the very categories of commitment, whiteness, and heterosexuality.

If Gordimer’s novels imagine new directions for the South African social body, they do not associate these new directions with either homosexuality or heterosexuality. Instead, Gordimer imagines a mode of relating to the other that attempts to side-step the confining self-other mechanism that overshadows our understanding of human sexuality and social behavior. This brings her more in line with Coetzee than critics such as Munro would claim. While Munro begins by pointing out that Gordimer and Coetzee share an interest in queer identity, she interprets their fiction as achieving opposite ends:

However, I would suggest that while Gordimer indicates that a gay identity politics can be put to use in the service of white class interests, *Disgrace* is a warning that the utopian possibilities of new narratives about race and sexuality,

including Gordimer's, might be lost if the problems of poverty and land are not solved. *Disgrace* mourns the loss of, or is haunted by, Lucy's lesbianism as a sign of the fragile promise of postapartheid democracy, given up as payment for the sins of the fathers, while the novel also indicates that new sexualities cannot reconstruct the social body without other modes of social justice. (421-422)

Here, Munro presents the "problems of poverty and land" as obstacles to "narratives about race and sexuality," and aligns Coetzee with a more cynical perspective on the realities of "social justice." Both novelists, however, would resist the notion that it is ever possible to ignore the "problems of poverty and land." In fact, as my own analysis will suggest, Gordimer tempers any utopian possibilities embodied by the queer situation with a consistent reminder of the need for "social justice."

Ultimately, Gordimer's novels echo an underlying theme in her essays, which is that finding one's self in the space of an other does not necessarily combat the narcissism and will to power associated with indifference. In her essay "A South African Childhood," Gordimer describes the village to which her family would venture on vacation: "My sister and I would push and slither our way into these dim, secret places, glimpsing, for the instant in which we leaned over, the greenish, startling image of our faces in water that endlessly reflected back to the ferns the Narcissus image of their own fronds" (15). According to the tropes made universally familiar by *Heart of Darkness*, the explorer ventures into unknown territory seeking a truth larger than the self. What Gordimer's essay suggests is the reflexive relationship between knowledge and the self. Even in unknown territory, what one finds is inevitably a reflection of the self. However,

the reverse is also true: one finds that the other has always been present in the known territory of the self.

In *July's People*, *The House Gun*, and *The Pickup*, Gordimer stages encounters between the committed and the indifferent in purposely symbolic landscapes where pre-conceived categories of space and identity break down: the village, the prison, and the desert. In "Great Problems in the Street," Gordimer writes that "Where the pretty suburban garden ends, the desert begins. This 'security' measure brings about some queer situations when the indifferent stray into the company of a committed person, as it were by mistake" (133). To walk into the desert is to enter into proximity with strangeness, whether in the form of a human being, a foreign location, or an unfamiliar progression of time. For Gordimer, the "queer situation" embodies the conflict between those who stick to their "own kind" and those who embrace the "exchange of silence between strangers" (133, 132). Gordimer goes on to explain that "it is not in private, drawing-room encounters that indifference meets commitment most openly. Nietzsche said, 'Great problems are in the street'" (133). For Gordimer, then, a "queer situation" forces formerly private encounters into the public realm and demands a new approach for imagining space, time, and proximity to others. The "great problems" in *July's People*, *The Pickup*, and *The House Gun* do not literally take place in the "street," but they do occupy public spaces with archetypal significance within the South African context. The village, the prison, and the desert provide the spatial parameters for the "outbursts" she describes in "Great Problems in the Street" that "disturb" the indifferent (136). It is possible to align a reading of these novels with Gordimer's apparent position in her essays by mining each

text for evidence that the committed have triumphed over the indifferent.⁵ Such an interpretation would be suggesting that the main characters shift alliances and reach new realizations by the novel's end, and that the characters experience epiphanies with respect to their spatial and social relationships. In this chapter, I want to change the nature of the questions posed of these key texts. Rather than asking whether main characters embody commitment or indifference, I ask how each novel manages the burden of commitment and indifference in fashioning a response to the queer situation of apartheid and its aftermath. By re-interpreting these three novels, my chapter raises questions about the easy association of Gordimer with the realist tradition and places pressure on the false opposition critics have created between Gordimer and Coetzee. Even beyond the field of South African literature, however, my chapter raises important issues for the fields of Postcolonial literature and 20th Century English Literature more broadly. For decades, these fields have categorized the literature of the so-called colonies or "Third World" as either committed or indifferent. What my chapter suggests is that these categories have outlived their usefulness as a binary, and must be considered as aspects of the same problem: how to respond to the queer situation of social and political transition.

⁵ For an example, see Hunt, Emma. "Post-apartheid Johannesburg and global mobility in Nadine Gordimer's *The Pickup* and Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to our Hillbrow*." *Ariel*. 37.4 (2006): 103+. Web. Here, Hunt argues that Julie, the main character in *The Pickup*, expresses a sense of solidarity with the people of a foreign country when she decides to remain there even after her husband leaves.

July's People

I. Inhabiting the Interregnum

July's People takes place in a village to which the main characters, Maureen and Bam, flee to escape the violence of Johannesburg. The novel presents a queer situation insofar as it describes a series of events that force Maureen and Bam to redefine their relationships to space, time, and others. Though the novel presents a fictional account of the political unrest in South Africa, it does refer to actual crises such as the labor strikes in the late 1970s and the Soweto uprising in 1976. By explicitly setting *July's People* in a period of political turmoil, Gordimer emphasizes the novel's overall theme that the established boundaries of space and identity can no longer be taken for granted. As many critics have already pointed out, the opening epigraph from Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* sets the tone for the novel: "The old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum there arises a great diversity of morbid symptoms." Like Gordimer's notion of the queer situation, Gramsci's term "interregnum" can be defined as a temporal and spatial category; in addition to representing the period of time between two regimes, the interregnum stands for what Gordimer would call an "unmapped" terrain where differences collide ("Great Problems" 133). In "Living in the Interregnum," an essay written two years after *July's People*, Gordimer elaborates on this theme, arguing that white South Africans have been disoriented from their place in society. She writes that finding a "home" in a soon-to-be majority-ruled South Africa "depends also on our finding our way there out of the perceptual clutter of curled photographs of master and servant relationships, the 78 rpms of history repeating the conditioning of the past" (382). In order to align himself or herself with the black community, the committed white – "the

one who has declared himself or herself for that future” – must abandon the representational apparatus inherited and reinforced by a racist regime (382). Here, Gordimer uses photography as a figure for the ways in which the indifferent have sought to “keep” others “at a safe distance” (“Great Problems in the Street” 133). It is possible to read *July’s People* as a fictional precursor to Gordimer’s argument in “Living in the Interregnum;” this reading would align Bam and Maureen with the indifferent whites who, having been thrust into a queer situation in July’s village, face the challenges of orienting themselves to an uncertain future (“Great Problems in the Street” 133). This reading, however, would neglect the novel’s nuanced perspective on indifference and the fact that the novel does not unequivocally endorse commitment as a form of response to the other. Through the characterization of Bam and Maureen, the novel actually theorizes indifference as a mode of inhabiting the interregnum that neither denies the persistence of the “old” regime of apartheid nor romanticizes the non-racial possibilities of a “new” South Africa.

II. Gender

By depicting gender norms in *July’s People* as unstable, Gordimer suggests that the gender revolution constitutes a sociocultural phenomenon in its own right and an inevitable aspect of political revolution. Her point is that the imminent crisis of apartheid stems from the untenable marriage of white supremacy with patriarchy; when one crumbles, so must the other. For example, Gordimer depicts Bam as a character who has all the trappings of conventional masculinity, but who doesn’t understand the uselessness of these objects in the new context of the village. He is obsessed with objects that tell

time and mark space, such as the watch, the water tank, the gun, and the radio. Maureen, however, describes Bam as a “man without a vehicle” (98). The remark refers to the literal fact that July has taken the family’s truck. Metaphorically, the language of Maureen’s statement deprives Bam of masculine agency and self-direction. The novel does not offer a neat substitution for the space evacuated by Bam’s masculine subjectivity. Even July himself is shown to be obsolete in the new order. The novel opposes the versions of masculinity represented by Bam and July with the emergent sexuality of the new generation, as represented by Maureen’s children and the young Daniel.

The intellectual tradition of ethics that Tamlyn Monson invokes in her reading of *The Conservationist* can also provide a useful vocabulary for understanding the gendered subject-object relations in *July’s People*. Monson draws attention to Kristeva’s concept of the “borderline state, where the subject fails to make the appropriate distinctions between subject and object. This state can be described as a kind of ethical relation to the Other, as the semiotic takes the subject hostage and denies it its ontological solitude, putting it in a state of perpetual negativity” (37). In the borderline state, the boundary between self and other breaks down and the subject is denied the singularity of a discrete individual identity. The borderline state does not respect the rules of type or kind, and instead shows a “disregard for borders, positions, rules” (37). Kristeva’s borderline state can be compared to Gordimer’s notion of the queer situation, which also describes a situation that “threatens to dissolve the borders of the subject” (Monson 37). For Kristeva, this event takes place primarily in language; she describes how literature in particular “exhibits this borderline character” and has the ability to “call language into question”

(37). For Gordimer, however, the queer situation also “threatens to dissolve the borders” created by apartheid ideology around categories of space and identity. In *July’s People*, Gordimer critiques the conventional categories of gender by suggesting that heteronormative gender roles have been *misplaced* along with apartheid’s racial hierarchies – but not yet *replaced* with a new system.

The queer situation not only disorients characters such as Bam and Maureen in space and time, but also challenges their basic assumptions about gender. For example, Bam discovers that his gun does not work as a phallic symbol in the context of the village: “Bam pulled the gun out of the rotten thatch and appeared with it before July’s villagers. He did not know everyone knew he had the gun; that the children who made free of every hut as the cockroaches, knew everything and chattered all. He walked among them harmlessly; look, he and his gun were theirs” (75). Despite the fact that Bam has carried this object with him from Johannesburg, it becomes what Kristeva would call a “phobic object” in the village because it no longer signifies masculine authority and autonomy (Monson 37). The gun fails to differentiate Bam as a privileged subject, and the villagers view him not as having power over them but as belonging to them. By evacuating Bam’s gun of its gendered signifiers, Gordimer suggests that his performance of masculinity does not translate to the space-time of the village. As Maureen observes, “what was he here, an architect lying on a bed in a mud hut, a man without a vehicle. It was not that she thought of him with disgust – what right had she, occupying the same mud hut – but that she had gone on a long trip and left him behind in the master bedroom” (98). In the village, Bam has entered what Kristeva might call a “state of perpetual negativity” that has deprived him of the signifying gestures of masculinity

(Monson 37). Using the metaphor of the vehicle, the passage suggests that Bam has lost his agency along with the objects that formerly defined him. The novel further estranges Bam from the gun as a phallic symbol by transferring it to Daniel, a character whose youth and physical appearance do not conform to traditional notions of masculinity. Daniel, who is described as “wearing a necklace,” holds the gun as though ignorant of any sedimented meanings: “He pointed towards himself the gun that was back in Bam’s hands until the barrels were looking him right in the eyes, two blue-steel tunnels with an immaculate burnish, a precision of echoing roundness spinning away with the light that whirled along them – something more perfect than any object in the settlement or that he had ever seen, anywhere” (76). In contrast to July, who is older, Daniel shows absolutely no fear when handling the gun. For example, he violates a seemingly fundamental rule when he turns the gun towards himself rather than a target. For Bam and July, the gun occupies a definite context associated with hunting, killing, and protection. None of these words factor into Daniel’s perception of the gun. He does not see the gun in relation to other objects, but rather as “more perfect” than any object he has ever seen. Whereas the gun has accreted meanings for the generation of men represented by Bam and July, the gun has yet to occupy a discrete category for the new generation represented by Daniel. Daniel’s possession of the gun thus signifies the dissolution of the old masculinity under the threat of new forms of unarticulated identity.

The text also demonstrates Bam’s failure to establish a fixed context for the gun through the depiction of his argument with the chief. Through his Socratic mode of questioning, the chief brings out the ironies and contradictions of gun use. Speaking through a translator, the chief expresses disbelief that “white people are not shooting, the

government is not killing those men” who have taken up arms in the resistance (117). Bam immediately recognizes what the chief’s questions reveal: “Us and them. Who is us, now, and who them?...What he’s really asking about: an explosion of roles” (117). From the chief’s statements, Bam infers that the transfer of weapons from “white people” and “the government” to “those men” has initiated the dissolution of the boundary between “Us and them.” According to the chief’s logic, white people have been deprived not just of literal guns, but of the corresponding power to determine the use and function of those guns. Dropping the dissembling façade of the questioning method, the chief states unequivocally in English that “they want to kill you” (117). Here, the chief points out that the position of authority assumed by Bam and white people in general cannot be sustained against the threat of the other. Furthermore, the chief calls into question Bam’s assumed possession of the symbolic objects that defined this position of authority. The chief demands: “You bring your gun and you teach how it’s shooting” (119). Bam’s response – “My gun” -- expresses his attempt to hold on to the symbolic role played by the gun in policing the boundaries of individual identity. By ending the chapter with a repetition of the chief’s demand – “You teach me” – the novel depicts Bam’s possessiveness as hopelessly nostalgic and impossible to maintain in the queer situation.

The disappearance of the gun demonstrates Bam’s failure to locate the gun in time and space and force it to conform to his law of genre. By the end of *July’s People*, the gun belongs to no particular time or place. The time of its disappearance cannot be recalled, and July does not know where Daniel has gone. In a sense, the gun can be anywhere at any time. What Gordimer suggests is that the borderline state or queer situation does not merely substitute a new system for the old one it dissolves. To use

Monson's language, the queer situation undermines "the subject's unitary, clean, and perfectly delineated symbolic identity" and disturbs the subject's relationship to language, space, and time (37). Near the end of *July's People*, Maureen sees Bam as a "man who had nothing, now" (145). In other words, the queer situation has translated Bam's positive articulation of masculinity into an expression of negativity coextensive with the time and space of the other – the "now" of the village.

III. The Distance Effect

Much critical energy has been devoted to the last scene of *July's People*, which depicts the arrival of a mysterious helicopter at July's village. This scene has divided critics who suggest that Maureen runs either toward the helicopter or away from it; because her actions at the end are ambiguous, critics have described them in such varied terms as the abandonment of her responsibilities as a mother or the enactment of feminist principles of emancipation. While this final scene is important, the novel does not present Maureen's run as a solution to the queer situation. Instead, the novel suggests that her run embodies a mode of response where apparent indifference becomes one way of becoming committed to an unknown future.

By placing this final scene in context with the rest of the novel, I draw attention to other scenes that are easy to overlook but that challenge accounts of the novel as arguing for or against the possibility of commitment. *July's People* initially presents Maureen as a character who keeps to the "strict limits" of her "own kind" and who, when presented with a "queer situation," chooses to run rather than enter the desert of meeting and exchange ("Great Problems" 132). At the same time, the novel highlights Maureen's

awareness of the perceptual distortions and socioeconomic inequalities that were normalized under apartheid. While *July's People* makes references to the formal laws and spatial regulations associated with the apartheid regime, it also focuses on what I will call the distancing effect that is produced by the ideology of separatism. According to the novel, apartheid has conditioned both whites and blacks to perceive the other as essentially different and to comply with de jure segregation. Recalling the terms of the novel's epigraph, *July's People* presents the distancing effect as a "morbid symptom" of the queer situation for which there is no easy cure. Characters such as Maureen do not simply transcend apartheid's entrenched system of racial classification and spatial regulation by feeling at home in the village or befriending the village women. Neither do Maureen and Bam return home; by juxtaposing the village ("here") with Johannesburg ("back there"), the novel suggests that Johannesburg is part of the dying past and can no longer function as a home. Given the seeming impasse presented by the queer situation, it makes sense that critics read the end of the novel as embodying either a commitment to or an indifferent rejection of the future. What I suggest, however, is that the final scene supports a reading of the novel as articulating a form of indifference that attempts to reconcile the distancing effect with the political and social demands of commitment.

July's People describes the perceptual distortions produced by apartheid using metaphors drawn from anthropology, photography, and visual media. Instead of focusing on these discourses as ones that preserve apartheid's efforts to separate the (white) subject from the (black) object, the novel imagines the village as a space where this distinction cannot be maintained. In fact, the village disorients Bam and Maureen in both space and time and dissolves their definitions of self and other. For example, the

pronouns “he” and “she” replace Bam and Maureen’s proper names once they arrive in the village. Rather than subsuming Bam and Maureen within the generic/gendered categories indicated by these pronouns, the novel suggests that identity exceeds the boundaries of genre and gender. For example, in the village Maureen’s nakedness does not signify intimacy as it did in Johannesburg, but rather “a castration of his sexuality and hers” (90). While the novel unsettles the position of the gendered subject, it also questions the relations between self/other and subject/object. For example, Maureen often confuses her observations of objects in the seemingly unfamiliar present with objects from her own past. Maureen’s response to this confusion might be seen as indifferent, in that she perceives things and people through the essentialist terminology endorsed by apartheid: “July’s wife with those great hams outbalancing the rest of her – Maureen laughed back at her, at her small pretty tight-drawn face whose blackness was a closed quality acting upon it from within rather than a matter of pigment” (92). The way the narrator draws attention to the black female body and defines blackness as an internal quality provides fuel for writers such as Zoë Wicomb, who critique Gordimer for perpetuating stereotypes about black women. It is important, however, to place this passage in context with Maureen’s expressed desire to work next to July’s wife in the fields. Maureen’s efforts seem to distance her even more from the women in the village, as they “ignored her, or greeted her with the squinting unfocused smile of those who have their attention fixed on the ground” (91). When July’s wife does pay attention to Maureen, her gaze suggests that Maureen’s body is out of place in the fields: “July’s unsmiling wife was laughing; looking straight at those white legs: she did not turn away when Maureen caught her at it” (91). It is to this silent, unapologetic laughter that

Maureen responds, laughing in turn at July's wife and her "hams." On the surface, this passage frames both July's wife and Maureen as indifferent, in that they view one another through the stereotypes of race. And yet, the exchange of silent laughter in the field recalls Gordimer's description of the "exchange of silences between strangers" that takes place in "unmapped areas" ("Great Problems in the Street" 132). Re-read in light of Gordimer's essay, this meeting between Maureen and July's wife can be read as an attempt to find a mode of connection in spite of seemingly impassable social differences. Maureen and July's wife both recognize that they cannot work side by side as equals in a society with such a long history of social stratification; their indifferent laughter illustrates that the liberal notion of non-racialism is still a fantasy. At the same time, the scene highlights the absurdity of the rigid social roles assigned to white and black women. Through this exchange, *July's People* suggests that indifference can facilitate a mode of encounter with the other that is more productive than either the liberal notion of friendship or the separatist insistence on segregation.

In *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*, Johannes Fabian defines the "denial of coevalness" as the refusal of Western anthropological discourse to recognize that the other can share the same time and space as the self (33). In *July's People*, Gordimer attributes a similar tendency to apartheid discourse, which constructs concepts such as the tribe and village as part of a distant past, unable to participate in contemporary modern life. Gordimer then complicates this perception by bringing the other into the present tense of the novel. Maureen encounters a seemingly timeless space when she visits a "special hut where no one lived" and sees the dust-covered traces left by a villager who had been sorting beans: "Maureen saw the arrangement as broken

beads set aside from good ones, choices made by someone momentarily absent – the dioramas of primitive civilizations in a natural history museum contrive to produce tableaux like that” (24). Here, Maureen sees the inside of the “special hut” as though it is an exhibit in a natural history museum that has captured and frozen the action of village life. By emphasizing Maureen’s perception of the “beans” as “beads,” the passage suggests that Maureen comprehends the evidence of subsistence through a vocabulary more appropriate for describing art objects. Terms such as “diorama” and “tableaux” are often used in the context of museums that purposefully arrange objects to evoke a picturesque scene and symbolize a larger context. However, the passage also highlights the dissonance between museum exhibits and the remains of lived life. As suggested by the verbs “contrive” and “produce,” museum exhibits perform life-like scenes without ever capturing life in its natural state (24). While Maureen uses the vocabulary of art to understand the scene in the hut, she does not actually see an image of village life. Maureen does not encounter the bean-sorting activity as one forever suspended in time, but as one that has been interrupted: begun “by someone momentarily absent” (24). Here, the passage opens up the possibility that “someone” might return and resume sorting at any time. This “someone” would occupy the same time and space as Maureen and animate the activity seemingly relegated to a distant past.

In the final chapter, the indexical markers of time and space change as the narration shifts from the past to the present tense. Instead of telling events through dialogue and filling in the details of the past through flashback, the narrator in the last chapter takes on the perspective of a character experiencing the action. Through the grammar of this chapter, Gordimer suggests there can be no fixed position from which to

view the other. For example, the description of the village prior to the arrival of the helicopter highlights the subjective nature of perception: “At this moment in its span, its seasons, the village coincides with the generic moment of the photographer’s village, seen from afar, its circles encircled by the landscape, held in the pantheistic hand, the single community of man-and-nature-in-Africa reproduced by skilled photogravure processes in Holland or Switzerland” (156). The photographer’s version of the village is like a third person omniscient narrator’s account that claims to present an authoritative and all-encompassing view. The “pantheistic hand” of the photographer creates a totality out of the diverse elements of the village by focusing on “the single community” that can be “reproduced” by technology. It is important to note, however, that the passage distinguishes between “the village” and “the photographer’s village” as two distinct objects that only temporarily occupy the same place and time. While photography might be able to create an image of “man-and-nature-in-Africa,” this image will not be able to capture the temporal dimension of life in the village; the terms “span” and “seasons” give the village a duration that the “photogravure processes” cannot replicate. The passage thus satirizes the “skilled” efforts of the outsider to artificially reproduce the natural life cycles of the village.

IV. The Unmapped Area

When the “generic moment” of the photographer’s village ends, the queer situation begins. In other words, when the knowable parameters of space and identity break down, the characters enter those “unmapped areas” where indifference meets commitment (“Great Problems in the Street” 132). In the final chapter of *July’s People*,

the queer situation is initiated by the invasion of an outside sound – the beating blades of a helicopter – into July’s village. The way that the helicopter registers a fundamental change in the expected order of experience returns readers to the beginning of the novel. In the first chapter, the phrase “The knock on the door” marks the collapse of the old order, in which “black hands” brought breakfast to their masters (1). By contrast, in the new order of July’s village, there is “no door,” “No knock,” and no grounds for the binary between master and servant. In the absence of physical privacy and the conventions of privilege, Maureen and Bam find themselves disoriented in time and space: “jolted out of chronology” (4). The helicopter represents a similar breach in the expected order, in that Maureen perceives its arrival as a “change in the fabric of subconsciously identified sounds and movements that make up the silence” (157). July’s village can no longer correspond with the serene “photographer’s village” because the expected “sounds and movements” are replaced with noise and chaos. The narrator describes the helicopter’s spectacular landing as a “racket of blows:” “A high ringing is produced in her ears, her body in its rib-cage is thudded with deafening vibration, invaded by a force pumping, jiggling in its monstrous orgasm – the helicopter has sprung through the hot brilliant cloud just above them all, its landing gear like spread legs, battling the air with whirling scythes” (158). By depicting the helicopter’s arrival as an orgasmic sexual experience, the passage creates the atmosphere described by the opening epigraph: one in which “The old is dying and the new cannot be born.” Maureen makes her body available to the sounds and movements of the helicopter, even though she does not know exactly where it comes from or on whose behalf: “she could not have said what colour it was, what markings it had, whether it holds saviours or murderers; and-even if

she were to have identified the markings – for whom” (158). By changing the very nature of sound and movement in the village, the helicopter has changed the parameters of what can be known – Maureen cannot read the helicopter. When Maureen begins to run towards the helicopter -- the source of disorientation – she might be seen as orienting herself towards the future. According to Stephen Clingman’s influential reading, Maureen’s run represents a form of commitment:

In this context at the end of the novel Maureen is running. The circumstances in which this occurs are ambiguous, but their significance surely is not. An unmarked helicopter has flown over near July’s village and is coming down to land. No one knows whether it is manned by freedom fighters or by the South African Army. But Maureen knows she must run. She is running from old structures and relationships, which have led her to this cul-de-sac; but she is also running toward her revolutionary destiny. She does not know what that destiny may be, whether it may bring death or life. All she knows is that it is the only authentic future awaiting her. Nor does she do this out of weakness. For the first time since leaving Johannesburg – and perhaps for the first time in her life – she has found some personal integration; she runs, says the text, ‘with all the suppressed trust of a lifetime’ (p. 160). And so we are left at the end of the novel with a runner held moving in flight. In part it is a flight from, but also it is a flight towards: towards what she cannot quite properly see, but which she knows is drawing her on. (203)

By repeating the phrase “she knows” Clingman suggests that Maureen acts in accordance with her inner convictions. Clingman then places a positive value on these convictions by

describing what awaits her as a “revolutionary destiny” and an “authentic future,” and by insisting that she has discovered some “personal integration.” The way that Clingman evaluates Maureen’s run as a “flight towards” resonates with his definition of Gordimer’s “historical commitment” to the “black world” and the “future” (214-215). According to Clingman’s terms, the committed move forward both in time and space out of loyalty to a set of inner principles. On the one hand, Clingman’s reading of Maureen’s sudden decision to run can be supported by the way the novel describes the helicopter’s arrival; it initiates a shift in Maureen’s consciousness and alters the very sound and shape of the space around her. Clingman’s account also rightly highlights Maureen’s purposeful pursuit of the unknown; according to the novel, Maureen “did not see it [the helicopter] land” but “knows what it has taken in; in what direction and area the shuddering of the air has died away” (159). If Maureen’s run embodies a form of commitment, it is oriented towards an undefined future. However, by placing a positive value on the forward “direction” of Maureen’s run, Clingman creates a binary between what she runs “from” (the past) and what she runs “towards” (the future). Furthermore, by describing the run in terms of commitment, Clingman privileges the concepts he argues Maureen “knows” about – her destiny and the future. The novel, however, places equal weight on what Maureen does *not* care about. For example, she runs “like a solitary animal at the season when animals neither seek a mate nor take care of young, existing only for their lone survival, the enemy of all that would make claims of responsibility” (159). Here, Maureen’s run seems to embody the precise opposite of commitment – her solitary concern for the self actually takes the form of indifference to others. She runs *away* from the very “claims of responsibility” that Clingman associates with Gordimer’s “historical

commitment.” What this means is that *July’s People* actually presents a more complex account of commitment than Clingman’s account can explain; Maureen runs not just to declare herself “for” the future but to enter the desert where the boundaries between the past and the future have broken down. In this “unmapped” area, indifference can operate as a form of commitment that refuses liberal notions of “care” and “responsibility.”

Prior to the arrival of the helicopter, *July’s People* provides a sense of what this form of commitment might look like. When Maureen goes to confront July about the gun that has been stolen from her hut, she encounters July’s wife Martha as the latter bathes a baby boy. As in the earlier scene that depicts Maureen and Martha working in the fields, this passage presents their potential connection as haunted by the roles and identities of the past. For example, Martha greets Maureen with a look of “servility, as if they had not walked and worked in the fields together” (146). This performance of the master-servant relationship seems to open an impassable gap between the women: “There was a moment when Maureen could have got on her hunkers beside Martha and helped hold the baby’s head while its hair was washed” (146). The conditional past tense of this sentence suggests that Maureen’s desire to get down “beside” Martha cannot be realized in the present. In fact, the novel describes this imagined form of intimacy as a fantasy from the past: “Maureen saw Martha securely petrified, Madonna drawing snuff into one nostril above a baby’s head, *pietá* with a machine-gunned son across her lap. Martha had laughed at white veined legs. At one time (the longings of Maureen from back there) it seemed a beginning. Something might have come of it. But not much” (146). In this passage, Maureen recognizes the impossibility of “a beginning” that would usher both women into the future side by side. In fact, Maureen sees Martha as “petrified” –

immobilized – by an immense and incomprehensible burden of suffering. While Maureen attempts to comprehend Martha's suffering through Christian symbolism, the substitution of the "machine-gunned son" for Christ implies the inadequacy of the Christian paradigm. The fact that Maureen cannot perceive the entirety of Martha's experience points out the limitations of "the longings of Maureen from back there." The vast discrepancy of experience between the two women makes easy intimacy impossible.

Although the novel seems to make a friendship between the two women impossible, it does imagine a different way for Maureen to respond to Martha. Maureen orients herself to the future without assuming that she and Martha will share the same journey. In the novel, "She left the women and their hearth and jogged down into the grass below the village" (146). As the passage continues, Maureen's jog eventually becomes a run. It is possible to interpret Maureen's run as a foreclosure on present and future forms of intimacy with the village women. The passage reminds readers that running is part of Maureen's past life of privilege, self-preservation and leisure: "The habit of the pace came from spare-time attention given to many things, back there" (146). Faced with her inability to communicate with Martha, Maureen behaves according to a "habit" from "back there" that substitutes the care of self for the care of others. While Maureen seems to behave indifferently towards Martha, what she in fact turns away from is the false notion that she and Martha can communicate as friends or equals in the present. What she turns towards is a space by the river that embodies the possibility of communicating with others as *strangers*. The novel maintains an ambiguous attitude towards this space, characterizing it as one Maureen merely passes through temporarily on the way from her meeting with Martha to her argument with July. This latter

confrontation seems to reinforce the futility of communication in the shadow of apartheid's legacy: "their words sank into the broken clay walls like spilt blood" (153). If human relations seem doomed to repeat the patterns of history, the space by the river appears timeless in a way that resonates with the "unmapped areas" Gordimer describes in "Great Problems in the Street: " "Even here, when there was nobody, there was little sign that there was ever anybody" (147). As opposed to spaces such as Johannesburg and July's village, which have been traced and re-traced with the patterns of existence, this space by the river seems untouched by human presences. The narrator continues: "The slight rise and fall of her breathing produced no ripple of her counter-existence in the heavy peace. The systole and diastole needed only to cease, and she would be ingested, disappeared in this state of being that needed no witnesses. She was unrecorded in any taxonomy but that of Maureen Hetherington on her points to applause in the Mine Recreation Hall" (148). Despite Gordimer's criticisms of Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K*, this passage resonates with Coetzee's desire to disentangle time from space. The main character in Coetzee's novel believes that if you mark space you also mark time, and associates this coincidence with the geographical terrors of apartheid South Africa such as forced removals and labor camps. By contrast, Michael K seeks to escape the policed boundaries of the cities, prison camps, and institutions by subsisting on the seasonal rhythms of the land. Similarly, *July's People* describes Maureen as though she ceases to make an impact on space and time. According to the novel, "she had the feeling of not being there" (148). Here, the passage measures Maureen's existence not by her place within some scientific or objective "taxonomy" but rather according to the rhythms of the human body: the "slight rise and fall of her breathing" (148). She disappears from

the map of time and space, existing in a realm defined by subjective experience. The way that Maureen – and Michael K – orient themselves towards unknown spaces suggests that the old, hyper-demarcated spaces have become uninhabitable.

The House Gun

I. A “Queer” Genre

Critics such as Stephen Clingman and Brenna Munro argue that *The House Gun* is different in both content and form from Gordimer’s earlier work. Clingman argues that *The House Gun* “is much quieter, more intimate, more introspective, and it might appear that Gordimer has at last been freed from the constraints of writing within and against the context of apartheid to explore a wholly different genre” (140). Munro would agree with Clingman that *The House Gun* participates in a “different genre.” In contrast to Clingman, who defines genre primarily in terms of narrative structure and style, Munro approaches what she sees as an emerging South African literary tradition by focusing on the themes of gender, sexuality, and democracy. She draws an analogy between Gordimer and Coetzee, arguing that “The depiction of legibly gay characters is something of a departure for these two straight-identified writers, and the fact that they are both taking on this theme indicates its salience” (398). My own approach to genre combines these two elements by paying attention to innovations in both form and content. In addition, I argue that Gordimer’s novels have always offered a queer supplement to the binary patterns that emerge on the surface. *The House Gun* represents less of a departure than a continuation of her previous works. As discussed previously, *July’s People* contrasts the explosive and fatalistic antagonism between July and Maureen with the

futuristic promise embodied by characters such as Daniel. The novel seems skeptical of conventional masculine identity, stripping Bam of his symbolic objects and depicting July as archaic and misogynistic. Daniel, on the other hand, represents a version of identity not yet scripted into gender and power relations. While Daniel may not be “legibly gay” according to Munro’s criteria, his character participates in what the novel terms the “explosion of roles” or queering of conventional structures of race and gender (Munro 398, *July’s People* 117).

In *The House Gun*, Gordimer depicts another version of the queer situation that deconstructs gendered subjectivity and further complicates the supposed opposition between the committed and the indifferent. The novel opens with Harald and Claudia’s discovery that their son Duncan has been arrested for murder. While the infinitive phrase “to commit” remains unspoken in this opening scene, it is implied by the single word – “Murder” – that the messenger proclaims when he brings Harald and Claudia the terrible news (4). This “obscene word” connotes a type of violence more unspeakable than “a car crash, a street mugging, a violent break-in,” and bears the inevitable threat that Duncan will be committed to prison (5). Duncan’s trial tests Harald and Claudia’s commitment to their son and to the emerging democratic legal system that seeks to indict him. Even though the novel takes place after the fall of apartheid, the queer situation of the murder and trial can be described using the same terms as the epigraph that defines the interregnum in *July’s People*. In *July’s People*, the “morbid symptoms” arise in the uneven transition from apartheid to democracy; in *The House Gun*, these “morbid symptoms” remain as traces of residual violence sedimented beneath the new nation. Both *July’s People* and *The House Gun* describe a fundamental rupture or breach of

security and privacy that threaten the nature of identity. In *The House Gun*, the messenger penetrates Harald and Claudia's domestic enclave and brings the unwelcome word "murder" into their previously unaffected lives. This destruction of insularity and privacy recalls the opening scene of *July's People*, in which Maureen remembers the "knock on the door" that used to distinguish the servant from the master (1). The village negates this distinction, and Maureen and Bam occupy a hut with no door and retain none of the privileges of privacy associated with their lives in Johannesburg. By way of deconstructing the series of binary oppositions associated with apartheid ideology, both *The House Gun* and *July's People* take place in the buffer zone between two seemingly incompatible chronotopes. Gordimer sets *July's People* in the village, which is a space and time apart from the apartheid past but not yet part of the future. Likewise, *The House Gun* juxtaposes the futuristic fantasy of a non-racial postapartheid democracy with the lived space-time of the characters, which remains influenced by patterns of suffering and violence. Critics such as Clingman and Munro suggest that *The House Gun* focuses more on the private concerns of its characters than on the public topics of revolt and revolution depicted in *July's People*. Likewise, David Medalie argues that "irruption of the calamitous event – ushered in by the words '[s]omething terrible happened' (p. 3) – is always primarily a matter of private anguish" (637). Medalie is right that Duncan's crime isolates Harald and Claudia from their former lives, but he overemphasizes their "tendency to withdraw hermetically into their grief" (637). In fact, the novel depicts their grief as contiguous with the suffering of others they have previously denied or ignored. When the doorbell rings, it interrupts the quotidian rhythm of their evening, and the messenger encroaches on their protected domestic space bringing the explosive news of

Duncan's crime. However, the text points out that Harald and Claudia's privacy has always already been invaded by violence, as represented by what they see on the evening news: "Something terrible happened. They are watching it on the screen with their after-dinner coffee cups between them. It is Bosnia or Somalia or the earthquake shaking a Japanese island between apocalyptic teeth like a dog; whatever were the disasters of that time" (3). By mediating the immediacy of disaster, the television allows Harald and Claudia to pretend that they are not affected by these outside events. However, the images on the screen penetrate the hermetic seal of domesticity by bringing the *outside* ("the disasters of that time") *into* their living room. As the novel progresses, Harald and Claudia begin to identify their own, seemingly private disaster as a version of the sufferings experienced by others who lack the privilege and power to feign indifference.

By referring to Harald and Claudia as a unit that behaves according to a certain set of rules in order to protect itself from outsiders, Gordimer suggests that their heterosexual marriage represents a commitment to a certain social order. When "the intercom buzzes," the resulting intrusion queers this social order along with its conventions of space, time, gender, and genre. In addition, it unsettles Harald and Claudia's position on the continuum of commitment and indifference by redefining what it means for the self to encounter others. The novel suggests that the couple has consciously chosen a life of insularity: "They made the decision to give up the house and move into this townhouse complex with grounds maintained and security-monitored entrance only recently" (3). The word "decision" reveals the act of will required to create the seemingly normative and universal domesticity evoked by the couple's "after dinner coffee cups" (3). The couple does not come upon the townhome as a pre-defined symbol

of home that can be inhabited passively. Instead, the couple defines the townhome as an alternative to their previous home: a contingent space that the couple has only “recently” occupied. By repeating the pronoun “they,” the passage implies that Harald and Claudia’s newly acquired space is governed by the ideologies of collective identity and heterosexual marriage. “They” maintain this normative system by observing a set of rules and practices they refer to as “the covenant of living together” (3).

The passage begins to unravel the heterosexual gender dynamic by invoking the sentence fragment “He, She” to describe Harald and Claudia. In the phrase “He, she” the comma appears to act as a conjunction joining two like terms. The sentence could read “He *then* she” or “He *and* she.” United by the comma, Harald and Claudia form part of a connected series where one follows logically from the other. On the surface, the grammar of this phrase seems to protect the integrity of their pairing. Because the sentence is literally composed of two subjects and lacks a subordinate clause or verb, it separates the unit “He, She” from actions or direct objects that might come between them or change their relationship. By not immediately revealing Harald and Claudia’s names, the novel suggests that the structural relationship implied between the gendered pronouns actually transcends individual identity. Even as the phrase “He, She” describes a conventional heterosexual pair, it also suggests that this unit ultimately fails to exclude that which appears to be outside its boundaries: namely, queer identity. For example, while a comma is often used to separate nouns that are part of a series, this series normally consists of three or more terms. The phrase “He, She” thus implies the presence of a third term, which unsettles the gendered binary logic of heterosexual ideology. As Stephen Clingman has argued, Gordimer introduces such “triangular structures” as a supplement

to the more obvious “binary relationships” (144). According to Clingman, the triangles in Gordimer’s earlier fiction “seem to be sealed and confining” because they do not offer the main characters “a way out” of apartheid’s confining spatial logic and social hierarchy (144). The triangles in *The House Gun*, by contrast, “suggest a world of new relationships growing out of the old; though they in some sense replicate previous social structures, they do so through significant differences or accents, requiring new forms of codification or understanding” (150). In spite of his emphasis on “new relationships,” Clingman actually creates another binary structure by contrasting the supposedly closed triangular structures of Gordimer’s earlier novels to the seemingly open triangles of her post-apartheid novel. However, *The House Gun* actually presents a much more nuanced perspective on the ways that apartheid notions of space and identity have been queered by the transition. While it is true that the novel introduces third terms as a supplement to the binary relationships, it is not always the case that these third terms offer something “new” or a “way out.” In fact, as is the case with Duncan, the third term may seem to offer the possibility of release from apartheid’s suffocating logic only to be revealed as another version of hierarchical power. In presenting post-apartheid society as both “new” and “old,” both “open” and “closed,” Gordimer rewrites the nationalist ideology of the New South Africa as unified by democracy. While the characters in *The House Gun* may come together in triangulated relationships of seemingly new dimensions, these characters also remain separated by unbridgeable gaps of experience. These gaps temper the novel’s – and the characters’ – seeming faith that it is possible to reach the “Other Side” of one’s own life of privilege (128).

Prior to their knowledge of Duncan's crime, Harald and Claudia understood their world from the perspective of their heterosexual bond, which was protected by the collective grammar or "covenant" of their union and the architecture of their suburban surroundings. The enunciation of the "obscene word...Murder" queers the couple's sense of space and time by violating the seemingly natural exclusion of such an act from the protective sphere of domesticity. Everything that once seemed natural, including the grammatical link between male and female, now becomes unnatural. With the messenger's arrival, "Everything has come to a stop. What can be understood is a car crash, a street mugging, a violent break-in" (5). The novel's grammar registers the disruption caused by the arrival of the messenger by transforming the connected series "He, she" into the oppositional pair "He/she." While the slash still binds Harald and Claudia together as a unit, it foreshadows the physical and emotional distance that begins to erode their notions of gendered subjectivity. Everything, including the act of conjugal union taken for granted within their marriage, "has come to a stop" (5). The "obscene word" and its aftermath later makes the seemingly natural and normal act of sex impossible: "Harald and Claudia had not made love since the night the messenger came. It was not possible for them. It might have been good, it might have helped – after all, they had been able to laugh – but there was a witness, from a prison cell, closing her body, making him impotent" (51). In light of this passage, Duncan can be described as the slash that acts as a third term between "He" and "She," rending Harald and Claudia's heterosexual union and placing under scrutiny their previously unquestioned identities as sexual subjects.

II. Redefining Modernity and Progress

Far from a utopian depiction of a postapartheid “Rainbow Nation,” *The House Gun* is a meditation on the paradox of South African modernity; while the nation seems unified by a new ideology of freedom, it is also oppressed by the now equally shared burden of crime. As Harald and Claudia navigate the spatial landscape designed to integrate society based on shared morals and laws, they actually become more and more disenchanted and detached. For example, the novel describes spaces such as the courtroom and prison that have been established to protect democracy as claustrophobic and oppressive. After a meeting with Motsamai, Harald and Claudia share an elevator: “Sinking down in the lift they were alone. Enclosed together. What a mess” (117). This passage ironically reverses the usual connotations of an elevator as a representation of modernity and mobility. Instead of lifting them up and allowing them to move, the elevator brings them “down” and confines them in their shared “mess.” If the elevator still works as a symbol of modernity, it is a version of modernity in which the freedom of the individual is under constant surveillance. Although the passage describes Harald and Claudia as “enclosed together” in the elevator, the illusion of their unity is exposed by their refracted reflections: “The mirrored box that caught their private images from all angles, a camera identifying them, halted with a shudder and Harald stepped back in an exaggerated gesture of convention for her to precede him” (117). By emphasizing the elevator’s stuttering movements, the passage continues to undermine a straightforward association of elevators with progress. Furthermore, the passage suggests that individual and collective identities are the product of a performance rather than an expression of an inner essence. Even though Harald and Claudia are “enclosed together” in the elevator,

the passage does not associate their shared space with a fixed form of identity. Harald and Claudia do not find themselves in the elevator, only their “private images” as reflected and captured by an audience of others. The glass walls refract the supposedly unified subjects into multiple angles, and the camera frames the otherwise dynamic subjects within the parameters of a given space and time. Here, the elevator is a symbol in an allegory of modern identity in which identity is not so much a defined category as an *effect* of how it is perceived by others. For example, Harald’s “exaggerated gesture of convention” reproduces just one of the many subject-effects made possible by the refractions of the “mirrored box.” *The House Gun* draws an analogy between the elevator whose glass walls reflect Harald and Claudia’s images from multiple angles and the space of the court that refracts multiple versions of Duncan’s story: “He is the vortex from which, flung away, around, is the court. If he cannot understand why he did what he did, there will be the explanations of others. Versions” (191). In this passage, Gordimer upsets the generic understanding of a trial as a process that discovers a criminal’s identity and the singular account of his or her motivations. Instead, the trial reveals Duncan himself to be absent: a negative space surrounded by multiple “versions” of his story.

The House Gun relates the concepts of absence and negativity with marginality, and suggests that the fall of apartheid brings formerly repressed and oppressed identities back into view. For example, the text initially presents Duncan’s black lawyer Motsamai as the type of scheming, untrustworthy black male most feared by the apartheid imaginary. According to Harald’s colleague, Motsamai “has the kind of aggressive spirit – controlled, mind you, by strong intelligence – that puts him on a high level of competence in cross examination. Very clever – some would say exceptional” (37).

Apartheid ideology would perceive Motsamai's "aggressive spirit" as a threat to apartheid whiteness and masculinity, thus defining his place in society as outside the rule of law. Postapartheid ideology, however, legitimizes Motsamai's background and reinterprets his social place as a conduit of the law. As Harald's colleague explains, Motsamai is no longer marginalized by the apartheid regime: "He's what the popular press would term much sought-after" (38). Whereas apartheid ideology would define Motsamai's African characteristics as expressing a backward form of tribalism, postapartheid ideology perceives his appearance and speech as modern and cosmopolitan:

with the wisp of beard just under the point of the chin that asserted a specific traditional African style, another order of dignity and distinction. His staccato and fluent English was strongly accented, he retained the drawn-out rounded vowels of African languages and established the right of the reverberating bass murmurs customary to their discourse, in dismissal of those other wordless conjunctions, the ums and ahs of white speakers. A new form of national sophistication. In his elegant grey suit, he is a man who has mastered everything, all contradictions that were imposed upon him by the past. (40)

On the one hand, this passage merely reverses the negative connotations of Motsamai's distinctly African qualities. What apartheid would have considered to be markers of otherness – his beard and his speech – have now become assets. The passage, however, does not merely celebrate Motsamai's success as emblematic of the nation's progress. While the novel does describe Motsamai as "A new form of national sophistication," it also underscores the power relations that structure his relationship with Harald and Claudia: "They study him; whatever is there is what they are dependent on as neither has

ever before been dependent on anyone” (40). Here, Motsamai’s power over Harald and Claudia can be likened to July’s power over Bam and Maureen. In both *July’s People* and *The House Gun*, the roles have been reversed. This power reversal, however, does not go far enough towards dismantling the hierarchies at the heart of apartheid social relationships. Thus, while both July and Motsamai queer the representation of the black male, they maintain certain aspects of male authoritarianism. The text, therefore, remains skeptical of the kind of “national sophistication” represented by Motsamai (40).

While Motsamai may very well represent a third term between Harald and Claudia, his presence signals *both* the permeability of racial and class barriers *and* the impossibility of leaving these barriers behind. Reflecting on Motsamai, the novel states:

Not only had he come from the Other Side; everything had come to them from the other side, the nakedness to the final disaster: powerlessness, helplessness, before the law. The queer sense Harald had while he waited for Claudia in the secular cathedral of the courts’ foyer, of being one among the fathers of thieves and murderers was now confirmed. The instinct to go and worship in the cathedral among people from the streets, which had seemed a way of avoiding the sympathy of his suburban peers, had been the taking of his rightful place with those most bowed to misfortune. The truth of all this was that he and his wife belonged, now, to the other side of privilege. Neither whiteness, nor observance of the teachings of Father and Son, nor the pious respectability of liberalism, nor money, that had kept them in safety – that other form of segregation – could change their status. In its way, that status was as definitive as the forced removals

of the old regime; no chance of remaining where they had been, surviving in themselves *as they were*. (127)

In this passage, Motsamai has affected Harald and Claudia by exposing them to what previously remained beyond their vision and understanding. Under apartheid, Harald and Claudia might have identified themselves with (or at least complied with) the rule of law; in their respective fields of insurance and medicine, they might also have claimed to represent the interests of those who were less privileged. Now, however, Motsamai represents their interests in the context of a legal system that no longer respects the boundaries of white privilege. In this passage, Harald recognizes himself as an other: “one among the fathers of thieves.” Harald’s “queer sense” of having become other denaturalizes the spatial practices that accompanied his prior sense of privilege. Even as he recognizes that he has become “one among the fathers of thieves” – an other – he realizes that he has taken “his rightful place with those most bowed to misfortune.” The “Other Side” thus represents an identity as well as a geographical location that evacuates signifiers such as “liberalism” and “money” and denies white identity its “safety” and insularity. The passage, however, also highlights a discrepancy between Harald’s identification with the “Other Side” and the fundamental inequalities perpetuated by apartheid’s spatial logic. For example, Harald draws an analogy between his own spatial disorientation and the “forced removals of the old regime.” Like those forced to leave their homes by laws such as the Group Areas Act, Harald and Claudia have “no chance of remaining where they had been, surviving in themselves *as they were*.” The simile in this passage implies that Harald and Claudia’s experience can be compared to the experience of people who were removed by force from their homes because of arbitrary apartheid

legislation that allocated geographical spaces according to racial categories. While it is true that Harald and Claudia have experienced a fundamental change in “status” that affects their relationship to space, it is not true that they have suffered the same physical and emotional traumas of those removed from their homes by the military and police. Harald’s analogy reveals that he sees “the Other Side” as an existential, spiritual place rather than a historically bound, material place.

III. Postapartheid South Africa on Trial

In her account of *The Conservationist*, Monson summarizes Kristeva’s position that “contemporary literature...purposefully displays the perversity of the abject and bears the function of putting the seemingly autonomous subject ‘in process/on trial’” (38). In *The House Gun*, Gordimer puts the notion of genre itself “on trial” by writing outside the boundaries of literary conventions and questioning accepted definitions of gendered subjectivity. Gordimer’s characterization of Duncan initially appears to align non-heterosexual identity with the liberal values of postapartheid South Africa.

According to Munro, “The idea of gay rights played an integral yet often overlooked role in producing the new imaginary of the ‘rainbow nation,’ a phrase that itself encodes the intersection of multiracialism and gay rights. The gay or lesbian person became a kind of stock minor character in the pageant of nationhood, embodying the arrival of a radically new social order and symbolically mediating conflicts over race and class” (398). In light of Munro’s observations, the Bohemian household Duncan shares with individuals of different racial and sexual identities can be read as symbolic of post-apartheid South Africa’s proclaimed commitment to racial and sexual equality. The fact that Duncan is

defended by a black lawyer is also consistent with the pattern Munro identifies because the character of Motsamai challenges accepted notions of a black man's place in society. As in *July's People*, the events in *The House Gun* force characters to adjust to what Munro terms "a radically new social order."

However, while Munro uses the terms "arrival" and "radically new" to signal a distinct break from the conventional categories of the apartheid past, Gordimer's novels actually depict the past in terms of residual traces that remain in the present and will persist into the future. Gordimer does emphasize the boundary-crossing potential embodied by Duncan's non-normative sexuality. However, she also draws attention to his domineering and authoritarian impulses, which bring him more in line with heterosexual male characters such as Mehring in *The Conservationist* and Bam in *July's People*. In her article on *The Conservationist*, Tamlyn Monson argues that "Mehring embodies the conquering violence of the same" (41). What she means is that Mehring sees the other only in terms of the self, and seeks to incorporate the unknown into his own frame of reference. While it is possible to read Mehring's "conquering violence" as a general metaphor for self-other relations, it is important to keep in mind that Mehring owns a farm and that his domineering attitude towards racial others corresponds to his desire to impose himself on the land. Gordimer also links masculine identity to the control of space in *July's People*, where she characterizes Bam as an architect invested in the conventions of ownership. As discussed in the previous section, Bam defines the gun as "My gun" and categorically rejects the possibility that it will be used in a context contrary to its original purpose: as a weapon in a complex war of resistance rather than as a tool for self-protection or selective hunting. Like Mehring and Bam, Duncan is

obsessed with rules, categories, and structures. While he takes up residence with journalists, poets, and artists who defy gender norms, Gordimer emphasizes Duncan's preoccupation with structures and plans and associates him with a more conventional masculine will to power. In this way, Gordimer reminds readers of the well-known metaphor that describes apartheid itself as a form of architecture designed by (predominantly) white male architects. In addition, she qualifies the celebration of postapartheid queer identity by juxtaposing Duncan's transgressive sexual behavior and indifference to social norms with his commitment to boundaries and desire to control others.

The novel's focus on sexuality, family, and types or kinds of people resonates with Derrida's account of genre, which describes the concept as a method for policing both language and space. In "The Law of Genre," Derrida introduces the phrase "Genres are not to be mixed" as an "authoritarian summons" that tries to preserve the distinction between types and kinds (56). Derrida's terms provide a helpful vocabulary for describing apartheid in general, which embodies the ultimate "authoritarian summons" that the races "are not to be mixed." Apartheid issued this command through a complex linguistic and legal apparatus and attempted to enforce it through spatial practices and military force. Placing Gordimer's characterization of apartheid in general and Duncan in particular alongside Derrida's notion of genre makes it possible to read Duncan's trial as an examination of the place of autonomous subjectivity in the New South Africa.

Although the novel emphasizes Duncan's domineering personality and his obsession with rules, the novel does not place Duncan at the center of the text. By describing Duncan primarily in negative terms – as a kind of absent presence – the novel emphasizes the

queer dimensions of his character as well as marginalizes the totalitarian claims of his subjectivity.

Gordimer's characterization of Duncan also ironizes Sartre's well-known definition of commitment as a dedication to the freedom of the other. In fact, the meanings of commitment that resonate with Duncan seem to embody the very opposite of what Sartre means by freedom. For example, Duncan has been committed to a prison cell for committing murder: an act of free will which nevertheless deprives both his victim and himself of the freedom to live. Furthermore, Duncan's actions leading up to the murder can be read as attempts to control the freedom of others. According to Duncan's former girlfriend, Natalie, Duncan can't help but intervene in people's lives: "Duncan takes on other people. Forces. Can't leave them alone. He likes to manipulate, he can't help it. And he's pretty ugly when you resist, and you're resisting because what he's doing, what he's got to offer, isn't what you want. And the more he fails, the worse he gets. I don't think you know what he's like" (58). Here, the word "manipulate" refers to the way Duncan "Forces" people to become something other than what they "want." Given the etymology of the word "manipulate," Duncan's domineering behaviors can be read as a form of masturbation. In other words, what Duncan has to "offer" other people actually only provides pleasure to himself. Ultimately, this passage describes Duncan's behavior as a form of auto-eroticism and self-gratification that causes pain and suffering to others.

Duncan's commitment to rules can be read as a version of Derrida's law of genre in the sense that he seeks to preserve the distinctions between kinds. In a long passage, Duncan's lawyer relates Natalie's account of Duncan to Harald and Claudia:

She says he is a spoilt brat. Her words. A spoilt brat. She also uses big words, nê: ‘over-protected’, so that he’s not used to any opposition, anything that threatens his will, the way he thinks things ought to go. The rules are his rules – I questioned this, suggested that the kind of set-up these young people have has no rules except perhaps the most basic ones, you know, who has the right to take the beer out of the fridge – and of course they had the black man Petrus Ntuli do the dirty work for them. No, she says, his rules were made for himself, it didn’t mean they were the kind of conventional rules someone like me, a lawyer, would think of. Then what were they? Well, they were about who went with whom, and so on. Sex, I gather; but also friendship, she insisted, the set living on that property seem to have complicated friendships, what you’d call loyalties. He ‘went along’ with the way everyone lived on the property, he thought this coincided with his ideas, his rules, if you prefer but at the same time he was the ‘spoilt brat’ who couldn’t tolerate it when this style – which he’d taken on for his own, mind you – came into conflict with the other rules he freed himself from. From the older generation. Yours. She says these were still there in him although he believed they were not. She said something now: he’s in prison now, but he was never free. And of course she means *she’s* free. – (73-74)

In this passage, Motsamai suggests that Duncan orients himself towards the future by rejecting the rules of the “older generation.” However, Duncan’s own rules resemble the ones used by apartheid to regulate relations between races and genders. Furthermore, as Motsamai’s satirical comment about Petrus points out, the “New” South Africa as embodied by the bohemian household has not managed to rid itself of social and racial

inequality. The persistence of the master/servant relationship supports Natalie's observation that the old rules "are still there." In addition, Duncan's ideas about "who went with whom" recall the numerous apartheid acts that categorized people according to racial and sexual types and attempted to regulate their encounters. By emphasizing the special enclosure of "prison" and the fact that Duncan was "never free," the passage indicates that commitment can lead to confinement instead of freedom.

In her essay "Censored, Banned, Gagged," Gordimer refers to the long list of journalists and fiction writers who have been silenced by the apartheid regime. For Gordimer, apartheid articulates a positive, implicitly heterosexual male identity by silencing oppositional voices and forcing them into the margins. Gordimer thus looks forward to the fall of apartheid as a return of the repressed: a bringing to light of the voices and identities abjected by apartheid as dangerous and unnatural. In *The House Gun*, each member of Duncan's household has an occupation that would have been threatened with censorship under apartheid. For example, Khulu is a journalist, and Carl works with an advertising agency. Instead of occupying the margins, however, Khulu and Carl live in the main house while Duncan takes the garden cottage. While his relationship of tenancy indicates an attempt to annex himself to progressive social, political, and sexual ideals, his act of murder betrays his perception of these very ideals as a threat to his own existence. In piecing together his evidence, Motsamai asks Harald and Claudia: "Could you give us an idea of how, at all, Duncan could have been mixed up in this, how his – what shall I say? – his position as some sort of tenant, his relationship to the men in the house – these friends – could have led to the *circumstantial* evidence there seems to be against him?" (21) Motsamai's language suggests that the spatial arrangement of

tenancy might explain Duncan's involvement in the crime of which he has been accused. Duncan's position actually signals a power reversal in which he has been made peripheral to a social order that would have been repressed under apartheid. The household's postapartheid arrangement of sharing objects and property demonstrates the absurdity of Bam and Mehring's stubborn insistence on individual possession. For example, each member of Duncan's household has access to the house gun of the novel's title. However, the novel also demonstrates the irony of this communal form of ownership. For example, while the fall of apartheid encourages non-traditional identities to express themselves openly, it does not protect them from the threat of indiscriminate violence. While the novel seems to associate non-heterosexual identity with freedom, it also suggests that no one can be free in a society held hostage by violence.

The House Gun emphasizes that even though postapartheid ideology expresses tolerance of racial and sexual difference, it does not prevent the widespread circulation of violence. Although Duncan is now an architect, he once served in the military, an institution Harald and Claudia describe as a war machine that grants "the right to take a life" (67). While the "license to cause death" was meant to operate in the context of war, Duncan uses it in a way that crosses generic boundaries. Duncan exercises his "right to take a life" against a member of his own household, which violates the unspoken rules that a house gun should protect insiders from intruders. In this way, Duncan's actions dramatize Derrida's observation that the law of genre cannot actually defend itself against impurity. Derrida writes that "as soon as genre announces itself, one must respect a norm, one must not cross a line of demarcation, one must not risk impurity, anomaly, or monstrosity" (57). And yet, *The House Gun* depicts violence itself as a monstrosity that

does not respect any boundaries. To invoke Munro's summary of Kristeva, violence in the postapartheid context threatens all subjects equally with its "disregard for borders, positions, and rules" (37). Gordimer thus complicates the relationship between the dominant and the repressed, not satisfied with merely reversing the positive and negative values accorded to each.

IV. The Zero Point

For Gordimer, the queer situation of political transition occupies an interregnum between the dominant and the emergent; she describes this border zone as a negative space dominated by Duncan's destructive form of narcissism. During the period before Duncan's trial, Harald reads the following passage:

...the transition from any value system to a new one must pass through that zero-point of atomic dissolution, must take its way through a generation destitute of any connection with either the old or the new system, a generation whose very detachment, whose almost insane indifference to the suffering of others, whose state of denudation of values proves an ethical and so an historical justification for the ruthless rejection, in times of revolution, of all that is humane... And perhaps it must be so, since only such a generation is able to endure the sight of the Absolute and the rising glare of freedom, the light that flares out over the deepest darkness... (142, ellipses in original)

This passage queers the new generation through the repetition of terms that carry connotations of destruction, negativity, and lack: dissolution, destitute, detachment, indifference, denudation, and rejection. First, the "zero-point of atomic dissolution"

embodies the spatial disorientation that results from the destruction of existing structures and patterns. Second, the new generation's destitution describes a lack or loss of a "connection with either the old or the new system." The detachment and indifference expressed by this generation can be likened to a state of disorientation, understood as "The condition of having lost one's bearings; uncertainty as to direction. Also, a confused mental state, often due to disease, in which appreciation of one's spatial position, personal identity, and relations, or of the passage of time, is disturbed" ("Disorientation"). In other words, the transition from one value system to the next disrupts the new generation's relationship to space, personal identity, time, and human relationships. The "state of denudation of values" is an effect of transition and the resulting "dissolution" or condition of disintegration. This state has been divested and deprived of the old value system and remains naked, yet to be clothed by the new. While the terms "insane" and "ruthless" seem to critique the generation's "indifference" and "rejection," the passage also characterizes these qualities as necessary products of "transition" and as preconditions for "freedom." The passage concludes that the "rising glare of freedom" shines "only over the deepest darkness." The new generation thus embodies a commitment to the future in spite of its seeming indifference and "rejection of all that is humane." The creative potential of the "rising glare" and "light" of the future can only be realized against the apparently negative backdrop of the "deepest darkness." In addition to facilitating freedom, indifference as negativity permits survival in the face of unspeakable violence: "Without the rejection of all that is humane, in the times only just become the past a human being could not have endured the inhumanity of the old regime's assault upon body and mind, its beatings and interrogations, maimings and

assassinations, or his own need to plant bombs in the cities and kill in guerilla ambushes” (142).

Ultimately, what this passage suggests is that the new generation has adopted indifference as a response to the negative space created by the transition. While this indifference appears to be destructive, in that it manifests itself as dissolution, destitution, detachment, and rejection, the passage suggests that it actually constitutes the preconditions of freedom. This freedom, however, comes at a great cost. Because indifference also provides the strength to endure the unspeakable violence perpetrated by the “old regime’s assault upon body and mind,” it lingers “beyond its time,” carrying forward its callousness beyond the revolution for which it was intended. Whereas indifference was once the product of transition and a necessary step in establishing a new social order, it is now the enemy to freedom. Harald thinks, “Violence desecrates freedom, that’s what the text is saying” (142). In queering the new generation, this passage suggests that its negativity facilitates the destruction of an undesirable social order even as it carries violence and suffering forward to the new one.

While the word zero is most commonly understood as a synonym for “nothing,” the phrase “zero-point of atomic dissolution” refers specifically to a state of potential energy. The Oxford English Dictionary Online supports its definition of the “zero-point” with a quotation from J. Dougall’s *Atomic Physics* (1935): “According to the classical theory, the state of least energy of an oscillator is that of zero energy... This zero-point energy can be explained by Heisenberg's uncertainty principle” (qtd. In the OED). In light of this quotation, the zero-point can be characterized as a state of energy whose

properties cannot be precisely predicted or determined. Given the presence of uncertainty, the zero-point can be read as a form of disorientation or loss of direction.

In general usage, the terms “transition” and “revolution” denote dramatic political and social changes, and are often used as synonyms for forward motion and progress. The novel, however, introduces the notion of transition in the context of cycles and repetition, which undermines the teleological account of historical progress. For example, Harald encounters the long passage quoted above in a book that he has read before: “Harald, once again, comes upon his text. It is there one night when he has quietly left the bed not to disturb her, taking up a book he has read before but doesn’t remember” (141-142). According to the novel, Harald is not reading anything new, but rather encountering the same words he has already known in a new context. This sense of repetition can be carried forward to the account of revolution within the passage itself. According to the passage, the generation that occupies the zero point between the old value system and the new value system has lost its connection to “all that is humane.” And yet, Harald understands that the perpetration of violence by this generation is only another version of the sufferings inflicted by the old regime. According to Harald’s reading, the violence of the new generation can be explained by the “necessities of that revolution” (142). What could not so easily be predicted or explained is the fact that this violence would live “on beyond its time, blindly roving” even after the time of necessity had passed. At the zero-point, violence has lost its meaning as a political and historical response, and begins to repeat itself in seemingly random and unpredictable permutations. For Harald, the Jesuit, this knowledge comes not as revelation but as the repetition of something he has read before and therefore always known.

Duncan's occupation as an architect both emphasizes the productive potential of the zero-point energy and renders this productivity ambiguous; while the plans Duncan draws from his prison cell offer the promise of a future, this future will not necessarily be able to divorce itself from the violence of the past. This characterization of Duncan prevents an easy identification of the figure of the artist or queer with progressive postapartheid ideology. On the one hand, his plans from the future are written from prison, which indicates the possibility of a future beyond his incarceration. By endowing Duncan with the architect's creative powers, the novel suggests that the future of the city lies in the hands of a queer subjectivity. His buildings, however, use familiar materials and his drawings represent forms of enclosure: "Plan. The plan their son is going ahead to draw in a prison cell – office block, hotel, hospital – what is it – predicates something that will come about. Ahead. Belief. Steel and cement and glass, in this form; yet an assumption of a future" (109). Duncan's insistence on finishing his plans runs counter to the novel's earlier assertion that "To be in prison is to be dead to connection with consciousness outside, to exist there only in the past tense" (25). In short, to be in prison is to have no part in building the future. Under apartheid in particular, the architects of apartheid depended on prisons to remove and silence individuals seen as a threat to the future of the apartheid state. Duncan's plans thus symbolize the possibility that the future will be drawn by those previously considered marginal. Furthermore, they suggest that the future can be imagined through a discourse other than that of heterosexual reproduction. At the same time, the passage does not suggest that Duncan's plans will produce anything new. Instead, his plans reproduce recognizable structures ("office block, hotel, hospital") constructed from conventional building materials ("Steel and

cement and glass”). Duncan’s version of the future, however different in content, will nevertheless assume familiar forms. The very elements of “Steel and cement and glass” suggest a certain inflexibility and rigidity that recalls the confines of the prison cell in which the plans are drawn.

Thus, while Duncan’s creative capacity and sexual identity create the potential for what Clingman calls “new relations,” these relationships do not necessarily offer a way out of the novel’s enclosed spaces (“Surviving Murder” 156). The fact that the constitutional court’s ruling spares Duncan’s life only partially disassociates his queer identity from the death drive. At the end of the novel, Duncan reflects: “Can you break the repetition just by not perpetrating violence on yourself. I have this life, in here. I didn’t give it for his. I’ll even get out of here with it, some year or other. The murderer has not been murdered. My luck, this was abolished in my time” (294). Here, the novel invests Duncan with a hope for the future that can nevertheless only express itself from the confines of the prison cell. Duncan reflects further: “But he thought sometimes how his own work was already achieved: the structure of this cell was his accomplishment, designed to the specifications of his life” (286). As an architect, then, Duncan’s role has only nominally been in the service of building a new and different future for the nation. Ultimately, Duncan’s plans serve the cyclical purpose of reinforcing his own confinement within the society that has kept homosexual identity in the closet. On the last page of the novel, Duncan thinks that “Violence is a repetition we don’t seem to be able to break” (294). In other words, the system of confinement that imprisons Duncan reproduces the sameness of identity rather than expressing a tolerance for difference. Duncan observes the behavior of the inmates as evidence that the future can only embody an endless

repetition of the same: “I look at them when we’re in the yard for our exercise, and they tramp and they lope round and round, round and round” (294). By describing human behavior as animal-like, the novel characterizes repetition as a form of degeneration. The prisoners “tramp” and “lope” without agency or free will, and without any expressed desire to cease the seemingly biologically ingrained impulse towards repetition. This final image of social reproduction as repetition offers neither a reimagined heterosexuality nor a liberating queer sexuality; instead it offers only an image of hopeless degeneracy. Rather than ushering in a new and different future, Duncan has been confined among the degenerate, who are doomed to replicate the same violence over and over again.

V. A Conditional Future

At the end, the novel invests the future not in Duncan, but in the child, whose untraceable origins seem free from the cycle of “repetition” (294). Here, Gordimer suggests that the future (both literary and social) may lie beyond any known genres, even those previously understood as progressive. On the one hand, Duncan’s action of murder violates the type of kind of person his parents imagine him to be. In addition, his refusal to explain his motivations also violates the genre of the detective story, which conventionally concludes by revealing the ‘truth’ of the crime. Furthermore, while the novel presents several classic literary heroes as potential doubles for Duncan, the novel also portrays Duncan as a queer variation of these heroes. However, while Duncan’s queer identity violates these notions of genre as well as the heteronormative ideology of apartheid, he also expresses a commitment to boundaries of type and kind. By explicitly comparing Duncan to traditional male heroes from the works of Dostoevsky and Homer,

the novel emphasizes his actions as repetitions of archetypal literary patterns. These literary patterns reinforce the sense of cyclical violence to which the end of the novel refers. In Duncan's words, "I've found out that you think it's a *discovery*, it's something that's come to you that has never been known before. But it's always been there, it's been discovered again and again, forever. Again and again, what Odysseus did, and what Homer, whoever he was, knew. Violence is a repetition we don't seem able to break" (293-294). What this passage suggests is that while the act of murder may seem incongruous with Duncan's character, the act has been present all along as part of the cyclical repetition of violence. In this way, the passage actually domesticates Duncan's queerness, subordinating its apparent difference to the narrative of the same story he seems doomed to repeat. The novel, in turn, characterizes this repetition as a form of animalistic degeneration: "oh look at them my brothers – *Bra*, they have the right to claim me, we crowd of feasters on our own carrion in this place made secure for us alone – I look at them when we're in the yard for our exercise, and they tramp and they lope round and round, round and round" (294). Duncan's use of the pronouns "I" and "them" seems to establish a distance between himself as the observing subject and the other criminals as the objects. The passage also, however, uses the pronoun "we," which includes Duncan as part of the group he refers to as "them." Like Harald and Claudia, who have reached the "Other Side" of privilege, Duncan seems to have reached the "Other Side" of violence. He has now become one of the common criminals endlessly tracing the outlines of their own enclosure.

The final paragraph does reinstate futurity as a potential break in the repetition of violence. This futurity, however, embraces the death drive embodied by the endless

perpetration of violence: “Carl’s death and Natalie’s child, I think of one, then the other. They become one, for me. It does not matter whether or not anyone else will understand: Carl, Natalie/Natasya and me, the three of us. I’ve had to find a way to bring death and life together” (294). Duncan’s paradoxical situation between death and life can be compared to the way that Lee Edelman describes the figure of the queer in *No Future*. According to Edelman, the queer occupies “the place of the social order’s death drive: a place, to be sure, of abjection” (3). Furthermore, he defines “queers” as those who are “stigmatized for failing to comply with heteronormative mandates” such as “the familiar familial narrativity of reproductive futurism” (17). The term “reproductive futurism” refers to society’s investment in the figure of the child as a positive sign of life and the future. While Edelman focuses on these negative connotations of the queer, he also insists that queers embrace this negativity in order to upset heterosexual norms. For example, he argues that “the queer must insist on disturbing, on queering, social organization as such...For queerness can never define an identity; it can only ever disturb one” (17). Edelman’s observations provide a productive vocabulary for reading Duncan: as rejecting the heterosexual notion of “reproductive futurism” and embracing instead an “indefinite future” (17). Furthermore, Edelman’s suggestion that queers embrace their status of negativity helps explain Duncan’s peripheral status in the novel and his ultimate confinement in prison. Rather than positing Duncan’s queer identity as antithetical to the reproduction of a new, more liberal society, the end of the novel describes the narcissistic, self-involved, and death driven qualities of his character as integral to both the old and new nations. In fact, the very patterns upon which human behavior is based relies on the presence of this death drive. Therefore, the end of the novel re-invests queer

identity with reproductive potential, albeit without the utopian optimism of the “Rainbow Nation” ideology. The society to be reproduced will not be new, but will inevitably be an extension and repetition of past societies along with the old forms of violence. For Gordimer, there is not necessarily anything inherently new or progressive in the defeat of apartheid’s official brand of racism so long as its effects remain.

It is important that the novel does not end with Duncan’s reflections, but returns to the perspective of Harald and Claudia. In this way, the novel seeks an alternative to Duncan’s destructive narcissism and self-gratification in the characters of Harald and Claudia, whose lives are supposed to be dedicated to the care of others. Like Duncan, Claudia also “manipulates” the bodies of her patients, but with the aim and intention of healing their bodies rather than harming them. The novel seems to present Harald and Claudia as characters that become self-aware of their indifference through the commitment of their son to prison. At the same time, however, the novel demonstrates that their awareness does not necessarily embody commitment in the straight-forward sense of political engagement. The end of the novel in particular points out that Harald and Claudia’s version of commitment to South Africa incorporates a distance from which they can contemplate the land:

Wherever it was that they did go, flew, took the car, the beckoning world was beautiful. He was in his cell and a wretched child covered his head with his arms as he slept in the streets of Cape Town beneath the eternal mountain that made you want to live, as it does, forever. What looked, from the perspective of a moving car, like a refuse dump of a city was a vast low surface of board, tin,

plastic rags and people reduced to detritus under a sky gloriously feathered, a cosmic bird, cirrus gilded by light shining from billions of miles away. (285)

By juxtaposing the quotidian rhythms of human life in Cape Town to the “beautiful” and “eternal” elements of nature, this passage makes a surprising comparison between South Africa and the Christian holy land. The passage depicts actions that already happened by using the simple past tense: “He was in his cell and the wretched child covered his head with his arms as he slept.” In these lines, human suffering occupies a definite unit of time (the past) and space (the prison cell, the streets of Cape Town). The “eternal mountain,” by contrast, occupies a space seemingly untouched by time because it endures far beyond the span of a human life. From “the perspective of the moving car” – which seems to correspond to Harald and Claudia’s point of view – the vastness of the landscape transcends the time and space bound “detritus” of the people and their homely objects. According to Harald and Claudia’s point of view, the sky is “glorious” because its light comes from “billions of miles away.” Likewise, the “splendid night” is extraordinary because its storms reverberate “in all directions.” Finally, the ocean is “serene” because its waves negate the distinction between “ancient wrecks” and “present pollution.” In the context of this “cosmic” rhythm that transcends history, miracles seem as possible as the everyday events of imprisonment and poverty. From Harald’s perspective, “You could have walked upon that water, no wonder Harald could believe it once happened.” The first sentence uses the conditional perfect to express that which seems contrary to fact: the possibility of walking on water. The second sentence, which has been connected by a comma splice, expresses belief in a past event based on the conditions of possibility observed in the present. Because Harald believes you “could have walked upon that

water,” he also “could believe it once happened.” According to the grammar of the passage, it is not possible to establish whether anyone has walked on water in the past or could in the present. What matters is that the contemplation of the landscape has created the conditions of possibility for Harald’s belief. While it is possible that the passage treats Harald’s faith ironically by rendering it in the conditional tense, it is also possible that the passage presents hope and faith as possible antidotes to the contemplation of everyday violence.

The Pickup

In “Genre/Gender in Nadine Gordimer’s *The Pickup*,” Stephanie Genty argues that the novel “encourages readers to rethink notions of ‘difference’ and ‘otherness’ as well as the nature of home and exile which are fundamental for an understanding of post-colonial identity ” (84). Put slightly differently, *The Pickup* reimagines the definitions of gender, culture, and race at the same time that it questions the boundaries of space. While Genty recognizes the ambiguity of the novel’s ending, she ultimately concludes that it ends in a reversal of gender roles that creates “Order” from “chaos” (89). Genty qualifies this conclusion with a series of questions about the novel’s overall gender politics, she nevertheless states that the novel has “succeeded in upsetting the connotations of this gendered space” (89). However, as Clingman points out in his account of *The House Gun*, Gordimer is interested in more than simply upsetting the hierarchical terms of binary structures: “On one level it appears to be a reversal, but reversal is not simply what this novel is about. In many ways, on the contrary, it is an attempt to see beyond reversal, and how and why this occurs is of some larger significance” (140). Clingman

uses the concept of “triangulation” to describe Gordimer’s attempt to escape the confinement of binary logic. In contrast to Genty’s efforts to determine whether Gordimer’s depictions of gender are regressive or progressive, Clingman recognizes that Gordimer depicts “new relationships” in ways that may “in some sense replicate previous social structures” (150). Despite Clingman’s investment in complicating binary structures, both he and Genty tend to describe Gordimer as progressive. Of *The House Gun*, Clingman writes: “Murder can be survived. Identity will be defined not simply by genetics or the hard lines of closure, the rigid orders of location and birth, but through dispersion, relocation, and realignment” (156). Like Genty, who suggests that “the end represents a beginning,” Clingman continues that Gordimer depicts the “profusion of voices that must make South Africa’s future, transcending the past by building new relations beyond the fixed geometry of the old, offering a vision of possibility” (Genty 89, Clingman 156). Both Genty and Clingman attribute a directional quality to the situation of “gender trouble” depicted in Gordimer’s novels and suggest that this situation resolves itself in favor of the future.⁶ In my reading, however, the ambiguity of the queer situation does not resolve itself into either extreme of “closure” or “realignment.” Like *July’s People* and *The House Gun*, *The Pickup* queers the categories of gender identity in order to disorient apartheid’s hegemonic ideology. At the same time, Gordimer maintains that even these queer identities perform aspects of the old regime’s commitment to ‘genre,’ understood as type or kind. In *July’s People*, Maureen’s run can be seen as a version of her escape from the city: another attempt to secure insularity from the violence of transition. In *The House Gun*, Duncan’s architectural plans and efforts to rescue his

⁶ While this term was originally used by Judith Butler in her landmark *Gender Trouble* (1990), I borrow the term from Genty, who uses it to describe the specific gender politics of *The Pickup*.

girlfriend echo apartheid's domineering spatial practices and social engineering. In *The Pickup*, Julie's decision to stay can be read as a form of occupation whereby the privileged self takes over the space of the other.

As Genty points out, Julie is first described "through the idea of the feminine as other (in relation to the masculine norm), as creatures with negative characteristics (they have no penis, no phallic power). Julie is from the start described in terms of 'gender trouble.'" (88). Here, Julie can be compared to Duncan, whose difference from the masculine norm can be measured by his sexual experimentation. Furthermore, both Duncan and Julie negate the system of values embodied by an older generation. As in *July's People* and *The House Gun*, neither the queer situation nor queer identity have the capacity to reverse entrenched relations of power or lead to an entirely new social order. The ambiguity of the queer situation certainly resonates with Judith Butler's notion of "gender trouble" as defined in her foundational text by the same title. In her preface to the revised edition of *Gender Trouble*, Butler writes that

Gender can be rendered ambiguous without disturbing or reorienting normative sexuality at all. Sometimes gender ambiguity can operate precisely to contain or deflect non-normative sexual practice and thereby work to keep normative sexuality intact. Thus, no correlation can be drawn, for instance, between drag or transgender and sexual practice, and the distribution of hetero-, bi-, and homo-inclinations cannot be predictably mapped onto the travels of gender bending or changing. (xiv)

Here, Butler describes "gender ambiguity" as a condition of uncertainty rather than as a predictable route to change. Butler evacuates the notion of "gender ambiguity" of either

positive or negative connotations, focusing instead on the multiplicity of possible outcomes. Butler's conception of gender ambiguity offers a productive perspective on the apparent contradictions in Gordimer's depictions of queer identity. While Gordimer does not invoke ambiguity solely in the context of gender and sexuality, these notions haunt her description of the space between the committed and the indifferent. To rephrase Butler's terminology somewhat, the queer situation sometimes disturbs or reorients normative sexuality. And yet, following again from Butler's logic, the queer situation sometimes works to "keep normative sexuality intact" (xiv). Rather than leading predictably to the first (seemingly positive) outcome or the second (seemingly negative) outcome, the queer situation occupies the ambiguous territory embodying both normative and non-normative practices at the same time. In this context, it makes sense that Duncan disturbs exiting gender norms but remains in prison, and that Julie reverses the roles of self/other and masculine/feminine only to re-inscribe notions of colonial occupation. In these novels, the queer situation enacts a microcosm of the larger pattern repeated throughout history: not that of teleological progress, but that of repetition. Gordimer is not saying that nothing changes in the midst of these changes; as Derrida reminds us, every repetition is also accompanied by a difference. What Gordimer draws attention to is the fact that change and progress do not always entail a radical break from the past.

The Pickup opens by describing the scene of a car accident: "Clustered predators round a kill. It's a small car with a young woman inside it. The battery has failed" (3). When the battery fails, the queer situation begins, and the as yet unnamed young woman finds herself in an unfamiliar section of Johannesburg surrounded by people, gestures, and words she does not know. A man helps the young woman bring her car to a nearby

garage, and a woman selling her wares on the street “yells out to him what must be a teasing remark in a language the young woman doesn’t understand” (4). The young woman finds herself stranded in this part of the city, both out of place and out of time; the accident has altered the course of her daily routine and brought her out of her geographic range. The prophetic heaviness of the phrase “The battery has failed” makes it obvious that the accident will have wide ranging consequences (even before the narrator intervenes to say as much). Like “The knock on the door” in *July’s People* and “Something terrible happened” in *The House Gun*, “The battery has failed” initiates the main character’s disorientation in space and time. This event also creates the conditions for her eventual journey to an unnamed Arabic country, which the novel represents as an actual desert as well as a figurative no-man’s land. According to the self-proclaimed omniscient narrator, “There. You’ve seen. I’ve seen. The gesture. A woman in a traffic jam among those that are everyday in the city, any city. You won’t remember it, you won’t know who she is. But I know because from the sight of her I’ll find out – as a story – what was going to happen as a consequence of that commonplace embarrassment on the streets; where it was heading her for, and what. Her hands thrown up, open” (4). In this passage, the narrator views the “gesture” as something that can be observed, decoded, and arranged as part of a “story.” By juxtaposing the words “You won’t remember” and “you won’t know” with the phrases “I know” and “I’ll find out,” the passage implies that the narrative structure or “story” provides the only way to make meaning out of the seemingly “commonplace” event of the accident. On the surface, it does seem possible to read the car accident that propels the main character on a particular

course. However, *The Pickup* is also full of ironic reversals that do not seem to conform to the arc of the surface “story.”

One such ironic reversal occurs at the end of the novel, when she decides to remain in Ibrahim’s home despite the fact that he has left to seek work in the United States. Shocked, Ibrahim demands: “Where did you get the idea from, how, where? And while his anguish batters them both she now knows where. The desert” (262). *The Pickup* ends with a “tap at the door” that brings the desert into Julie’s room (268). As in *July’s People* and *The House Gun*, this moment is meant to mark a shift in relations between self and other. At this point in the narrative, the main character Julie has followed her husband Ibrahim to an unnamed Arabic village. When he goes to the United States to seek work, she remains in his family home. After saying her goodbyes, she retreats to the room she and Ibrahim used to share and is approached by Khadija, Ibrahim’s sister-in-law:

Unnoticed in the house’s customary bustle of hospitality and the rising voices of the company, she took her tea and went to the lean-to. She drank it slowly, placed the cup and saucer on the window-sill and was standing at the window when there was a tap at the door. Before she could answer it was opened; Khadija there.

Khadija has never come to the lean-to. Khadija dragged the ill-fitting door closed behind her with her often-heard scornful sigh, dangling a bunch of dates, her strong red-painted lips twisted as she savoured what was in her mouth.

Khadija put an arm around her conspiratorially, smiled intimately and held out the bunch of sweetness, smooth dark shiny dates. She spoke Arabic, the foreigner understands enough, now. (268)

Julie's earlier assertion – "I'm staying here" – suggests she has found her place in Ibrahim's village and among his family. This passage, however, begins by emphasizing Julie's peripheral status. Since she is not a core member of the family, she is not missed when she slips away. The space she retreats to – the "lean to" has been constructed as a supplement to the main house. Julie's superfluity to the scene does not make her an outsider in the same sense as she is described in the opening scene of the novel. In this opening scene, the narrator focuses on the boundaries between self and other, pointing out that which "the young woman doesn't understand" (4). By contrast, the language depicting the scene in the "lean to" makes it difficult to determine whether the women are strangers or friends. Like the desert, the "lean to" provides the conditions of possibility for overcoming the distance between self and other that has been reinforced through social norms and stereotypes. For example, the passage self-consciously presents Khadija's "tap at the door" as a narrative of the exotic other. Khadija arrives "dangling a bunch of dates" which, together with the sensual tone of the passage, depict Khadija as an object of desire. Khadija's body takes center stage as the narrator describes how "her strong red-painted lips twisted as she savored what was in her mouth." Here, the passage appears to focus on Khadija's presence as one that draws Julie into the intimate orbit of Arabic female sexuality. The passage, however, actually offers a much more complex account of intimacy, in which Julie and Khadija seem to find the "caravan tails" connecting their destinies.⁷ According to the form of intimacy described in the passage, it

⁷ In "Great Problems in the Street," Gordimer writes about the desert as a figurative space that allows one to see "the ancient caravan trails connecting human destiny" (132). However, it is clear that Gordimer's works also account for the material history and significance of the African desert. In *The Pickup*, Gordimer invokes the date as a symbol of the actual "caravan trails" that were created to transport this vital fruit across the desert. In so doing, Gordimer emphasizes the human dimensions of the desert, which has so often been figured as empty space. In the *Encyclopedia of Fruit and Nuts*, Jules Janick and Robert E. Paull write that "Without the date, no large human population could have been supported in the desert regions.

is not necessary for Julie to define herself as either an outsider or an insider. When Khadija speaks to Julie in Arabic, the passage indicates that “the foreigner understands enough, now.” Here, the passage suggests that partial understanding can occupy the buffer zone between the total incomprehension depicted at the beginning of the novel and the fluency we might expect at the end. Furthermore, the passage defines self-interest as an integral part of commitment rather than its antithesis. At the end of the novel, both Julie and Khadija find themselves without a man. Khadija offers the statement “He’ll come back,” which can be interpreted either as comfort given to Julie or as “a reassurance offered for herself.” Whether Khadija has come to the lean-to in order to support Julie or console herself, the encounter shifts the terms of what it means to encounter, and commit to, the other.

The caravan routes existed for centuries mainly for the transport of dates” (138). Here, Janick and Paull describe the date as a source of sustenance and as a figure for transnationalism. The authors continue that the “long history of date palm cultivation and the wide distribution of date palm beyond its original ranges have made it difficult to pinpoint its centre of origin” (138). In Janick and Paull’s account, the date crosses geographical boundaries and confounds notions of origins and categories of identity. In addition, dates have also become symbols for fertility because of their high sugar content and concentration of nutrients. When Khadija approaches Julie “dangling a bunch of dates,” she can be read as bearing the fruits of a successful journey across the desert.

CHAPTER 2

Playing in the Light of the Harlequin's Lamp: Gender and Genre in Zoë Wicomb's

David's Story and *Playing in the Light*

I. A Postapartheid Genre?

I open this chapter on Zoë Wicomb by returning to the final scene of Nadine Gordimer's *The Pickup*. As previously discussed, Gordimer concludes this novel with the ambiguous embrace between two women of different national, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. I referred to this scene as one of the many "queer situations" in the novel that destabilizes the binary between commitment and indifference. By using the word queer, I was able to focus not just on issues of gender, but also on the question of genre in the sense of "type" or "kind." In this chapter, I emphasize these concepts as ones shared by Wicomb, even though she emerged on the literary scene almost a generation after Gordimer. By gesturing to a literary-historical ancestry that is at once local and transnational, Wicomb gives attention to her influences and to her unique specificities as female, "coloured," and a product of a post-apartheid juncture (even more so than Gordimer and Coetzee). While I address the issues of literary influence in more detail at the end of this chapter, I want to open with some brief comments on Wicomb's relationship to Gordimer that illustrate the networks connecting the former to her literary predecessors.

Zoë Wicomb has been both influenced by and departed from the techniques and traditions of her more canonical predecessor. Like Gordimer, Wicomb proves difficult to situate with respect to genre. In "Adapting the National Imaginary: Shifting Identities in

Three Post-1994 South African Novels,” Annie Gagiano describes *David’s Story* as “insistently postmodern in its design” (818). While Derek Attridge concedes that *David’s Story* “will probably be more often labeled postmodern,” he insists that “as with Coetzee’s work, it is from the modernist tradition that it derives most of the technical resources it exploits” (160). Dorothy Driver, in turn, cautions against reading Wicomb’s works as a straightforward “postcolonial critique:” “in her strong pull to poststructuralism, in literary theory and practice, and postmodernism, in aesthetic practice, Wicomb departs from what may be seen as a standard postcolonial position” (525). What Driver means, and what both Gagiano and Attridge imply, is that Wicomb draws liberally from extant literary traditions such as realism, modernism and postmodernism, and yet creates a genre of fiction that is irreducible to any single category. In Attridge’s words, “*David’s Story* is also, I believe, one of the most original, powerful, and important South African novels of the post-apartheid era” (160). To read Wicomb, then, is to enter a “queer situation” where established traditions and patterns come into contact with the new, leaving their trace on the so-called “original.” On the surface, Wicomb critiques standard South African literary forms such as the pastoral and the protest novel; at the same time, she does not whole-heartedly embrace new South African discursive formations or share their enthusiasm for democracy, multiracialism, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. As a result, her fiction comes across as ambiguous, contradictory, ironic, and self-reflexive. None of these terms, however, seem adequate for addressing Wicomb’s complex perspective on pre- and post-Apartheid South Africa. The framework of the “queer situation” actually provides a more

productive way to discuss Wicomb's thematic concerns insofar as they push the boundaries of both gender and genre.

In this chapter, I add a dimension to Gordimer's notion of the "queer situation" by introducing the term "entanglement." Following Sarah Nuttall's recent book of the same title, I use the word entanglement broadly to refer to the process by which what was once kept separate is brought together in new ways. While Nuttall recognizes the diverse contexts to which the term entanglement can apply, she is especially interested in the term's relevance to South Africa. She writes, "In the South African context which I will examine here, the term carries perhaps its most profound possibilities in relation to race – racial entanglement – but it brings with it, too, other registers, ways of being, modes of identity-making and of material life" (2). The way that Nuttall invokes these multiple registers of entanglement to analyze aspects of South African life and culture makes the term particularly useful for analyzing Wicomb's fiction. Entanglement, for Nuttall, signifies both a global, universal "condition of being twisted together and entwined" and a unique historical situation resulting from the process of colonization (1). Like Nuttall, Wicomb is interested not only in the particulars of South Africa's history of "racial entanglement" but also in the relationships between people and places within South Africa and beyond. Each of the rubrics that Nuttall offers for understanding entanglement can offer some insight into how Wicomb understands the local and the global in her fiction: historical entanglement, the time of entanglement, ideas of the seam, and of complicity, the entanglement of people and things, the DNA signature, and the idea of racial entanglement (Nuttall 2-9). I use Nuttall's terms not so much as a prescriptive lens through which to view Wicomb's fiction but as a way to point out how Wicomb's fiction

can be viewed as part of the larger intellectual conversation occurring in South Africa and elsewhere about concepts such as the local and the global.

Given Wicomb's expressed interest in the stories of under-represented groups (non-white in general and women in particular), one might expect her to advocate for the kind of multicultural entanglement conjured by phrases such as "The Rainbow Nation." However, Wicomb recognizes the paradoxical history of entanglement in South Africa, which traces its roots to colonization, slavery and segregation. Wicomb's fiction depicts situations of entanglement (or "queer situations") that simultaneously bring the horrors of this history to light and produce new ways of seeing, knowing, and understanding.

Like Gordimer, Wicomb queers the apartheid imaginary by undermining and complicating its taxonomic, hierarchical logics of space, race, and gender. By way of complicating the rhetoric of separate development advocated by apartheid, Wicomb's novels explore the situations of entanglement that both reinforced and helped to deconstruct the architecture of that regime. Ultimately, Wicomb suggests that entanglement enables the production of new spaces, identities and histories in spite of the inevitable repetitions of past patterns. While the novels seem to advocate on behalf of some of these patterns, such as the transmission of stories through female narrators, they remain skeptical towards others, such as the never-ending search for cultural or ethnic roots.

II. The Queer Situation, Sacrifice, and Entanglement

In my analysis, I trace a series of tropes that emerge in the context of “queer situations:” times and places that bring together identities, places, and histories formerly kept separate. I use entanglement and the queer situation as umbrella concepts for discussing related ideas such as journeys, sacrifice, secrecy and the closet (as adapted from its use in Queer theory), negativity, absence, lack, chasms, and voids. In addition to undermining the overall logic of apartheid, these situations also interrogate the boundaries of gender and genre. The larger thematic of entanglement that I pursue throughout this chapter is a metaphor for mixing, getting mixed up, bringing opposites together, and so forth. Entanglement is, in my argument, interchangeable with “queer,” and “queer,” as writers such as Butler indicate, is largely about identity performativity. However, side by side with this democratizing line of thought (whereby all identities are a matter of performance) I also introduce questions of another kind: sacrifice, the dangerous supplement, and the secret. This other cluster is not exactly about the democracy engendered by performativity; rather these concepts are about the violence that accompanies the setting of boundaries, the divide between inside and outside, knowing and not knowing. In Wicomb’s work, as in Gordimer’s, there is an unresolved tension between these two conceptual clusters – that is, between notions of democracy and notions of violence. For Wicomb, the conflict between these two sets of ideas has both positive and negative consequences for the future of writing and identity in South Africa. In both *David’s Story* and *Playing in the Light*, Wicomb maps the social and spatial terrain where destructive acts like sacrifice converge with positive acts of performance and mimesis. Her point is that the postapartheid landscape – both literary

and geographical – cannot be reduced to an either / or logic of repressive violence or multicultural democracy. By Wicomb’s account, the New South Africa is “committed” to differentiation as a way out of apartheid’s boundaries even as it remains “indifferent” to the persistence of inequality.

Since apartheid represents a commitment to a given social order, it would make sense for these novels to advocate for disorder or indifference to order. Instead, the novels offer their own subtle perspectives on the inevitable repetition of past forms amidst attempts to articulate the new. Ultimately, Wicomb offers contrasting perspectives on the possibilities of storytelling in the New South Africa. In both *David’s Story* and *Playing in the Light*, female writers tell stories that are not their own. The final scene of *David’s Story* seems to express anxieties about the loss of narrative authority while *Playing in the Light* seems optimistic about new forms of writing. In the former novel, the narrator wonders what can come of a story that no longer belongs to her. By contrast, the latter novel celebrates the release of the (female coloured) self from the obligations of autobiography. Both *David’s Story* and *Playing in the Light* revise the generic expectations placed on South African literature to tell the “truth” about race, gender, and place. Writing the truth, in these texts, is like “playing” in the “light” provided by Outa Blinkoog’s lamp; one may never possess the truth but may give it shape and color through words. As described in *Playing in the Light*, Wicomb’s model of storytelling positions the story itself as a gift offered in a moment of exchange and intimacy. While this moment may be temporary, it provides a future less bleak than the one imagined by the narrator of *David’s Story*, whose words literally explode from the force of an intruding bullet.

I invoke the notion of the journey as a literary trope that speaks broadly about the connotations of travel in general and that also symbolizes specific forms of movement in South Africa. For example, in both *David's Story* and *Playing in the Light*, the central characters embark on a journey to discover their ethnic “roots,” which brings them to new geographic locations. While the search for ethnic identity is a motif that her novels share with postcolonial fiction in general, Wicomb specifically sets these journeys in South African landscapes, emphasizing modes of travel that are specific to the South African context. *David's Story*, for instance, presents a fictional account of the Griqua “trek from Namaqualand” (75). In addition, Wicomb uses the phrase “The Movement” to signify both an entity – the South African liberation organization known as the African National Congress – and the nation’s trajectory towards democracy. In *Playing in the Light*, Wicomb uses the phrase “to and fro” to describe how the central characters cross the arbitrarily imposed boundaries of apartheid. While this “to and fro” movement can certainly be compared to the situations of hybridity and creolisation described in other postcolonial novels, Wicomb reminds readers that the experience of coloured identity is also unique to South Africa.

My treatment of sacrifice is inspired by Rey Chow’s discussion of the term in “Sacrifice, Mimesis, and the Theorizing of Victimhood.” In this article, Chow complicates the definition of mimesis as “imitative representation” and pushes against the negative connotations of this term within postmodern and post-structuralist thinking (137). She re-defines mimesis as

the accessible portion of a certain foregone transaction, a transaction, moreover, during which something was for some reason or another lost, given up, or

surrendered – in other words, sacrificed. Rather than being a static replication or re-presentation of a preexisting plenitude, mimesis, one may argue, is the sign that remains – in the form of a literal being there, an externalization and an exhibition – in the aftermath of a process of sacrifice, whether or not the sacrifice has been witnessed or apprehended as such. Mimesis is the (visibly or sensorially available) substitute that follows, that bears the effects of (an invisible or illegible) sacrifice. (137)

Essentially, what Chow is saying is that mimesis should be understood in terms of presence as well as absence. In the case of a novel, the act of mimesis can be described as the literal process of putting words on the page. However, the appearance of these words (In Chow's terms, their "literal being-there") should be understood as more than a mere imitation of what they seek to represent. Instead, the words function as a supplement or "substitute that follows, that bears the effects of (an invisible or illegible) sacrifice" (137). What makes Wicomb's depictions of sacrifice unique is the way she emphasizes the spatial dimensions of the operations of sacrifice and mimesis. In both *David's Story* and *Playing in the Light*, Wicomb depicts sacrifice and mimesis as operations that take place in specific spaces, and that involve both physical travel and metaphorical transportation. Dulcie's sacrifice, for example, involves transporting herself away from her own body to escape the physical experience of torture. In addition, Le Fleur sacrifices a goat in order to commemorate his people's arrival in the "new territory" (101). Wicomb's account of this sacrifice illustrates Rey Chow's point that "loss and gain are existentially palpable phenomena impinging on individual and group identity formation" (137). For example, the Griqua community appears to have gained a new space far from

the “desert wastes of Namaqualand” (102). However, as Antjie observes: “That the promised land was barren and the shrubs dwarfed with thirst was only proof of God’s mysterious ways” (103). While the goat’s blood is intended to symbolize the community’s new beginning, it also symbolizes the death and anguish promised by the barren, unforgiving land.

My treatment of entanglement follows the work of Sarah Nuttall, who defines the term broadly as a situation that brings together that which has previously been kept separate. For Nuttall, the most enduring forms of entanglement have emerged from colonial encounters, and include the racial and ethnic mixing that inevitably resulted from these cultural contacts. In my analysis, I refer to entanglement as a situation whose variables include space, race, gender, and sexuality. Wicomb’s novels depict entanglement as both a physical and conceptual event taking place between bodies and categories brought into new and different relationships. On the surface, both *David’s Story* and *Playing in the Light* seem to draw a distinction between those who are committed to the struggle and those who are indifferent. In the former novel, David insists that the narrator’s world of art is different from the real world, and that she will never understand the struggle: “Keeping your hands clean is a luxury that no revolutionary can afford; there’s corruption in every institution. It’s only you arty types who think of such problems as something special, something freakish that can bring about a climax in a story. Stick to the real world and you’ll find the buzz of bluebottles deafening” (196). Here, the phrases “keeping your hand clean” and “arty types” can be read alongside the definition of genre as kind. According to David, the narrator’s kind keep themselves removed from the “real world” through the artifice of their craft. Indeed,

the narrator expresses her anxiety about expressing herself “above the rude buzz of bluebottles,” and ultimately concludes that she will have “nothing more to do with” *David’s Story* (213). Seemingly following David’s advice, she washes her hands of what he calls the “real world” when faced with the apparent impossibility of representing it. The novel, however, does not endorse David’s position of commitment or vilify the narrator’s indifference. Instead, the novel depicts situations of entanglement that demand both a turning away and a turning towards. This dual mandate is one that *Playing in the Light* emphasizes as well, suggesting that writing offers one way to inhabit both positions as once.

David’s Story

I. Gender and Genre

In what seems to be two simple words, the title of *David’s Story* immediately calls attention to the novel’s core concerns with gender, the future of storytelling in South Africa, and the nature of the writer’s responsibility. If we take the title too literally, we expect to read a straight-forward narrative about the title character; the opening pages quickly dispense with this expectation by introducing an unreliable female narrator who seems more preoccupied with herself than with her subject matter. By positioning the narrator as the mediator between David and the readers of the novel, Wicomb poses the broader question of whether it is possible to own a story at all, especially when it is difficult to determine its origin. Wicomb’s frequent literary allusions suggest that she views the question of ownership in both global and local terms. Ultimately, though, however universal the themes of the novel may seem, Wicomb carefully traces the

implications of concepts like commitment and indifference in the particular context of post-apartheid South Africa. While the novel does not end with a definition of what post-apartheid writing should look like, it does offer a glimpse into a genre no longer controlled by seemingly opposed concepts such as male and female, realism and non-realism, or fact and fiction.

II. Torture and Sacrifice

David's Story uses the strategies of deconstruction most notably in its depictions of torture and sacrifice, which demonstrate the entanglement of seemingly opposed concepts like death and life, torture and endurance, presence and absence, and loss and gain. The way Wicomb describes the supposed victims of sacrifice calls to mind Derrida's definition of the "dangerous supplement" (*Grammatology* 141). In his essay on Rousseau, Derrida defines the "dangerous supplement" as a category that undermines "conceptual oppositions" such as presence / absence, inside / outside, and writing / speech (145). Derrida's interest in the dangerous supplement centers primarily on language and the way that writing replaces or serves as a substitute for speech. While Wicomb has clearly been influenced by deconstructive approaches to language, she does more than simply dismantle the binary oppositions implied in the grammar of torture. For her, torture works according to a spatial logic, edging its victims towards empty, negative places: the spiritual one of pain and loss and the real one of death. The victims, however, can choose to occupy a different place; a psychological one that is distant from the body in pain or a real one from which they can re-imagine life and a future.

Wicomb's description of the hit list can be understood in Rey Chow's terms as a form of sacrifice and mimesis. As a particular genre of writing, the hit list takes a material form, brings the unknown author's intentions to light, and reveals the victims' identities: "The secrecy, the silence of this operation, where all that is required is for the intended to catch an uncertain glimpse, is replaced in the hit list by stark revelation, by making public, for there in black and white is your name in a column with the names of others" (112). The word "replaced" suggests that the hit list functions as a supplement to other cultural practices such as the voodoo dolls mentioned earlier in the passage. In one sense, the hit list adds to the cultural practices of violence that are already present. In another sense, the "black and white" writing on the hit list acts as a "public" substitute for the "secrecy" of the voodoo doll practice. It is precisely this duality between presence and absence that unsettles David the most: "The hit list, a handwritten sheet of paper left under his chair, is an addition rather than a removal of something, so that in searching for an absence, he is disarmed" (113). In this passage, David expects the hit list to function as a form of "removal" by first symbolizing and then enacting the elimination of those it names. However, he is surprised to encounter the hit list as a presence: what Chow might describe as a "sign that *remains* – in the form of a literal being-there...in the aftermath of a process of sacrifice, whether or not the sacrifice has been witnessed or apprehended as such" (137). What David gains from the addition of the hit list to his room (the knowledge that he and Dulcie have become targets) is negated by the loss he incurs to his gender identity. The hit list initiates a queer situation that "disarms" David by corroding his militarized, masculine exterior and casting him in the role of both (male) self and (female) other. On the hit list "you are separated from yourself through reading your own

name and wishing that you were not the signified, the bearer of that name. You are careful not to utter it, although your lips move in silent articulation, as if to verify the writing” (112-113). In separating the signifier from the signified, the reader of the hit list makes it possible to imagine less bounded forms of identity. If “you” are not the same as “yourself,” you might actually be someone else: the other. Later in the passage, David identifies himself as the “intended,” Conrad’s female victim of the sacrificial logic of empire. By entangling David not just with the other names on the hit list but with Conrad’s lady-in-waiting, the novel suggests that sacrifice forms the underlying fabric of local and global social and spatial practices. These practices rely on a form of substitution that Chow, in her summary of René Girard, calls a “vicious cycle of reciprocal violence, in which the antagonists become increasingly indistinguishable from each other – become what Girard calls ‘monstrous doubles’” (143). In *David’s Story*, it is not just the antagonists, but also the victims who become “monstrous doubles.” Conrad’s “intended” replaces David, whose identity has already been replaced by his uncanny intimacy with the other names on the list, especially Dulcie’s:

He stares at the writing on the page, the names that swim towards each other, coupling them in an intimacy that surpasses the charged and awkward moments of their chance meetings, an intimacy of death that displaces all. And if he has ever considered such a thing, the possibility of infidelity, it is the schoolgirl writing of her name beneath his own that has driven him into this naked embrace, for which he blushes. (114)

The language of “intimacy” and “infidelity” in this passage invites a reading along the lines suggested by Brenna M. Munro in her account of the “queer family romance.” In a

recent article of the same title, Munro argues that post-apartheid novels “appropriate” tropes such as sexuality and queer identity “in order to talk about the possibilities and failures of the national transition” (400). In *David’s Story*, Wicomb uses themes like infidelity to point out that gender norms can be challenged and re-enforced at the same time. For example, Sally suspects that David might be cheating on her, which violates the heteronormative values of marriage but reinforces David’s sense of hyper-masculinism. What is at stake, however, is not just David’s individual relationship to Sally but the entire apparatus of gender relations rendered so precarious by the impending transition to democracy. In the struggle between competing value systems and regimes of power, gender has become detached from identity: a free-floating signifier leaving the signified “naked,” without a name, and blushing in shame. It is partly the act of mimesis – “the schoolgirl writing of her name beneath his own” – that brings David and Dulcie together, because the list shows no respect for the genres of comradeship and marriage. It is also the act of sacrifice – “the intimacy of death” – that opens up the “possibility of infidelity” because their shared loss “displaces” David’s relationship to Sally and its basis in heterosexual gender norms. David “blushes” out of shame, experiencing the “intimacy of death” as an unacceptable transgression. Once again, David has been “disarmed” and made “naked” before the other.

If we continue to read *David’s Story* at least in part as what Munro calls a “national allegory,” the hit list uses gender indeterminacy as a way to “talk about the possibilities and failures of the national transition,” and in particular, about the role of truth in that transition (Munro 400):

He takes the loathsome thing out of his pocket and looks once again. The list is now marked by four fold-lines, across the girlish writing. He rests it in the brown veined hand, a hand unmarked by manual work that has been waiting these thirty-five years to be on this day transformed into that of the intended, the hand of a girl to be married, a girl in a haze of innocence – and he laughs harshly – waiting in the ambiguous light for the truth that will be withheld from her. Can it be, he asks, can it be true that he does not know the truth? Or worse, that it stares him in the face, the truth which he cannot bear? And is truth not what he has been pursuing all these years of trouble and strife and dalliance with death – the grand struggle for freedom? (116)

Whereas many passages in *David's Story* queer the logic of apartheid, this one also queers the value system of The Movement. It makes sense that this passage begins with the transformation of David's hand into "that of the intended," because the hit list confronts him with a situation in which what was previously familiar and known becomes unfamiliar and unknown, including his own body. David becomes estranged from himself when he considers the irony that the truth to which he was so committed might be "withheld," forever unknown, or impossible to bear. By replacing David with the "intended" and describing truth as a void, infinitely deferred, this passage draws an uncomfortable analogy between colonialism, apartheid, and The Movement; they all profess commitment to the truth but are indifferent to those who wait in vain for its revelation.

Through her representation of Dulcie, Wicomb suggests that the void at the center of apartheid, The Movement, and even her own novel carries the dual capacity to destroy

old value systems and create new spaces, within which new relationships and identities might be formed. In *David's Story*, the void can be likened to a state of chaos that dissolves the generic rules of narrative, language, and space. As the Oxford English Dictionary defines it, the term chaos can be understood as “a confused mass or mixture, a conglomeration of parts or elements without order or connection” (“Chaos”). Chaos can also be defined as a “void, gulf, chasm, or abyss” (“Chaos”). Wicomb considers the notion of chaos as “mixture” in contrast to the concepts of purity and truth to which both apartheid and nationalism profess commitment. In addition, Wicomb uses chaos as a way to talk about the ironic gaps between experience and representation. When the narrator tries to tell Dulcie’s story, she faces an insurmountable abyss because, as Dorothy Driver writes, “Dulcie’s is the story that needs to be but cannot be told...She is the unrepresentable body in pain” (218). While the standard poststructuralist reading of *David's Story* would conclude its analysis with the impossibility of representation, the novel actually depicts the “unrepresentable” as a beginning. When the narrator finds herself unable to tell Dulcie’s story using standard narrative forms or using familiar gendered language, she produces a “new” genre in which Dulcie’s indeterminate gender queers both the closed gender system of apartheid and the patriarchal structure of the resistance movement.

Dulcie’s torture opens a gaping void between what her body experiences and what her mind (and the narrator’s) can contemplate. Driver refers to this gap as the reason that Dulcie’s story “cannot be told.” According to the narrator, however, Dulcie’s torture does not bring her to a place of emptiness and finality, but rather to a productive place of

narrative plenitude and possibility. It is actually as a result of her torture that Dulcie can imagine “enduring” beyond it:

Dulcie believes that there comes a time when physical pain presses the body into another place, where all is not forgotten, but where you imagine it relocated in an unfamiliar landscape of, say, bright green grassland cradled in frilly mountains. In such a storybook place the body performs the expected – quivers, writhes, shudders, flails, squirms, stretches – but you observe it from a distance. It is just a matter of being patient. Of enduring. Until the need to relocate once more. (178)

While *David's Story* describes how bodies are “relocated” through the spatial practices of forced removal and migration, this particular passage describes relocation as a figurative practice that counteracts the discourse of “unrepresentability.” Here, the “storybook place” is one in which it is possible to transcend the supposed limits of representation by reframing the “expected” in “unfamiliar” terms. While the act of relocation does not put an end to pain and suffering, it provides a linguistic terrain whose “green grassland” and “frilly mountains” provide relief from the usual vocabulary of torture. The “storybook place” is actually a hybrid genre, in which “the body performs the expected” but without the expected narrative foreclosure. Instead, the passage focuses on the future – on the possibility of “enduring.” In the state of endurance, “the need to relocate” signifies the need to constantly re-write and re-imagine torture in terms that affirm life over death, plenitude over dissolution.

To invoke Chow's terminology, Dulcie's torture can be described as an act of “sacrifice” that labels Dulcie as the “scapegoat” and “surrogate victim” in a “vicious

circle of reciprocal violence” (143). In *David’s Story*, the act of relocation makes it possible to interrupt this cycle and evade the seemingly endless substitution of victims:

Then you can run through the vocabulary of recipe books, that which is done to food, to flesh – tenderize, baste, sear, seal, sizzle, score, chop – so that the recitation transports you into yet another space. Keeping on the move, like any good guerrilla. Which brings a sense of clarity, as if the mind, too, is being held under a blindingly bright light, and clarity is conferred by the gaze of others. And from that distance, that place, with the promise of future travel, it is possible to endure forever. (178)

Here, Dulcie re-writes what happens to her body as that which happens to “food,” thereby putting torture in the seemingly harmless genre of “recipe books.” This re-writing changes the expected and seemingly inevitable outcome of torture by making it productive. While actions such as chopping and searing literally break food down, they are also performed as part of the preparation of a meal. The food, like the victim of torture, does not cease to exist, but is rather reconstituted in a new, and possibly more palatable form. Still, it would seem that the “recitation” of the grisly words from the recipe books would replicate the “recipe” of violence rather than permit endurance. However, by transferring the “vocabulary” of torture from “flesh” to “food,” the passage demonstrates that the victim is actually a moving target: one whose travels counteract the “wholly destructive” outcome of torture (Chow 143). The passage does not dismiss the body in pain as “unrepresentable,” but instead translates the very language of pain into one the body can endure.

In the preceding paragraphs, I have discussed Wicomb's depiction of Dulcie primarily at the linguistic level; however, it is important to note that Wicomb sees torture in historical and material terms as well. Wicomb historicizes torture by mapping its coordinates in South African time and space and theorizing its effects upon the material body. For Wicomb, torture is not merely a figure or a metaphor, but a tangible weapon wielded by pro- and anti- apartheid forces. In the earlier passage, it would be easy to conclude that Dulcie's mental exercises do transport her to "another space," but that this space offers only figurative relief (178). As the passage continues, however, Wicomb depicts space in its more literal form as a sublime backdrop for Dulcie's commitment to endure. The narrator contrasts the specificity and familiarity of the South African landscape to the anonymity of Dulcie's torturers; Dulcie fears that identifying them "is where death lies" (178). And yet, she repeatedly brings herself to the brink of death by ritualistically driving to Chapman's Peak after each visit:

Marinated in pain, viewing herself from an unfamiliar place, she would hear a voice repeating the name of Chapman's Peak. Where the familiar road bends sharply to the left – it would take no effort at all, no decision as such, simply a matter of not turning the wheel but rather of carrying straight on, flying off into the unspeakable beauty of the blue below, the bay cradled in the mountains.

Where she would feel the macerated flesh grow weightless in the water, dissolve in the white spray that beats against the rock. Atomised at Chapman's Peak. (180)

Rhetorically, this passage begins in the metaphorical "place" to which Dulcie transports herself by translating the language of torture, and ends in the concrete place named as Chapman's Peak. Wicomb's prose symbolizes Dulcie's journey from the figural to the

concrete; she composes the majority of the paragraph as a series of complete sentences with multiple subordinate clauses. The last two sentences, however, are actually sentence fragments that de-emphasize the traditional subject-verb formation. In these last two sentences, what matters is what happens to the body and “where” rather than the narrative details of how she got there and why. The narrator’s word choice here foreshadows an argument she later has with David, in which he vilifies “arty types” for not being able to understand “the real world” (196). In this context, the line “Atomised at Chapman’s Peak” can be read as the narrator’s attempt to express only the concrete details of what happens to the body and where. Complicating this effort, of course, is that there is no reliable source for the scene at Chapman’s Peak. It is not clear how much of this scene has been invented from the narrator and how much may have been conveyed from Dulcie to David and then to the narrator. While the narrator wants to write about Dulcie’s real body and her relation to space, the unreliability of the narrative seems to make that seizure impossible.

Instead of describing Dulcie exclusively in terms of either presence or absence, the narrator sees Dulcie as both there and not there at the same time: an embodiment of the uncertainty principle according to which the more that the narrator seeks to understand the less she seems to know. The narrator describes Chapman’s Peak as an abyss that counteracts the physical limitations of bodily existence; the words “weightless,” “dissolve,” and “atomized” all connote the disintegration of the body’s concrete dimensions. To refer to the Oxford English Dictionary, a body that has been atomized has literally been “Reduced to a fine spray; (also, of a solid) reduced to minute particles” (“Atomised”). Read in this light, Dulcie is literally and objectively destroyed at

Chapman's Peak. At the same time, a body that has been atomized has been "Disunited, dissociated; *esp.* having lost social unity" ("Atomised"). In this more figurative sense, Dulcie has been cut loose from her bonds with society. At the brink – and within the void – Dulcie imagines her body not only as a collection of elements without order, but as an object without connection to the external order of society. According to its most violent and literal connotations, to be atomized is to be completely destroyed without the possibility of resurrection. And yet, resurrection is precisely what the void offers to Dulcie. It is here that she imagines both her potential death and her continual rebirth: "She likes to believe that it is the thought of David that resurrects her at this moment. It seems equally likely that the voice is dispelled by the comic behavior of the baboons" (181). Here, the passage renders resurrection as both divine and secular – as something extraordinary and yet mundane. Indeed, the narrator suggests that "Dulcie longs for the quotidian" (184). She finds the "quotidian" in the everyday rhythm of driving to Chapman's Peak, despite (or even because of) the fact that this spatial practice brings her face to face with the unfamiliar horror of death.

Dulcie's ritualistic drive on the "familiar road" replaces the pattern of torture with the one of self-sacrifice and renewal. It is the combination of Dulcie's literary imagination and spatial trajectory that allows her to interrupt – or at least forestall – the seemingly endless repetition of torture. While the passage pays tribute to sacrifice as a figurative concept, the language also wrests sacrifice from the generic terrain of the divine to a mountain in South Africa, thereby rendering it as domestic, concrete, and local. Dulcie's journey performs a kind of reverse death drive whose familiarity makes it possible to "resist" the seeming inevitability of death: "And so each morning as they

leave, as a matter of pride and despair, she summons all her strength to get dressed and drive to the sea...only then would the voice recede, would she wake from her trance, only yards before the beckoning bend on the road, to remember that she will resist, as she has done all her life” (180). Here, the narrator draws an analogy between the seemingly mundane – what happens “each day” – and the apparently transcendent – her will to “resist.” One might say that Dulcie has fled the “tyranny of place” – as the narrator points out, Dulcie “has known since childhood that tyranny must be overthrown” (179). However, Dulcie’s resistance should not be read as an escape from the specific and local forms of power exercised on her body. The scars on Dulcie’s body remind David, the narrator, and the reader that deconstruction on the page cannot erase the effects of violence on the body. Dulcie cannot run from the “tyranny of place” because it is written on her skin.

The way Wicomb raises and explores issues of power, sacrifice and oppression brings her into conversation with multi-disciplinary theorists such as Rey Chow, whose work encourages us to re-think notions like violence and victimhood. Whereas Chow directs her comments to the philosophical tradition and postcolonial studies, *David’s Story* offers a historically and geographically specific account of power, sacrifice, and the sublime. Despite their apparent differences, both Chow and Wicomb focus on the intimacies between oppressors and the oppressed that make it impossible to see power relations in binary terms. According to Chow, Agamben thinks of power as the power to “taboo, exclude, and annihilate” (132). Quoting Agamben, Chow writes that the victims who are subject to this form of power “live today in the ban of a law and a tradition that are maintained solely as the ‘zero point’ of their own content, and that include men

within them in the form of a pure relation of abandonment” (qtd. In Chow 132). Chow critiques Agamben for seeing power in purely negative terms and insists that positive acts of mimesis always accompany negative acts of annihilation and exclusion. Chow’s understanding of power as both creative and destructive can shed light on how novelists like Wicomb and Gordimer bring seemingly contradictory elements together: life and death, torture and transcendence. In Gordimer’s *The House Gun*, the “zero point” symbolizes each character’s sense of loss and disorientation. Harald, in particular, feels abandoned by his God. In *The House Gun*, however, the “zero point” also signifies a time and space that produces something new. The various spaces Gordimer depicts in her fiction can accommodate both the utter destruction threatened by sacrificial violence and the creative mimetic potential offered by the experience of the sublime. Like Gordimer, Wicomb theorizes South African spaces as playing a crucial role in staving off what Chow calls “the threat of immolation” by bringing contradictory elements such as death and life together in productive ways.

Wicomb brings a uniquely South African perspective to categories such as the sublime by showing how the visceral experience of torture breaks down binaries such as vast / small and secular / divine. While Wicomb engages with the philosophical aspects of the sublime as articulated by thinkers such as Edmund Burke, she also offers a more geographically and temporally specific account of terror and beauty. Unlike Burke, who tries to categorize aesthetic experience as either beautiful or sublime, vast or small, Wicomb sees the contemplation of beauty as a practice that encompasses and accommodates extremes. For Wicomb, the sublime is a space where “vast” and “small” come together in unexpected ways (Burke 36). More importantly, however, the sublime

is a real space and not just a metaphorical or imagined one. In *David's Story*, the narrator's spatial metaphors bring to mind Burke's idea that "danger or pain" might actually become "delightful" when perceived from "certain distances" (36). For instance, the "recitation" of the body's experience "transports you into yet another space," which creates the safe distance that Burke sees as necessary for perceiving the sublime (178). It is only after achieving this distance that the mind can experience "clarity." Lest the reader conclude that Dulcie has somehow transcended or forgotten the source of her pain, the narrator draws an analogy between mental enlightenment and the "blindingly bright light" that the torturers hold over her body. While Dulcie may get far enough from her pain to experience it as sublime, she can never get very far from the scene of its repetition. Nevertheless, *David's Story* does describe Chapman's Peak as a place in which Dulcie can at least imagine breaking the cycle. As the narrator writes, "Keeping on the move" offers the "promise of further travel" and the will to "endure forever." The fact that the narrator attaches the words "further" and "forever" to movement and life rather than stasis and death suggests that violence and endurance, like sacrifice and mimesis, can coexist.

Dulcie's experience of torture destabilizes the opposition between commitment and indifference by suggesting that indifference is necessary for surviving situations of grotesque and terrible intimacy. Furthermore, the novel points out that it is precisely Dulcie's commitment to the Movement that has brought her into contact with her abusers. Dulcie becomes horrified when she visualizes the identities of her torturers: "She thinks that she recognizes some of the voices, but recognition hovers just beyond consciousness. She hallucinates, turns them into friends, family, comrades. Which brings a moment of

pure terror, of looking into the abyss” (179). By using a sentence fragment that lacks a subject to describe the “moment of pure terror,” Wicomb suggests that the abyss has swallowed Dulcie with its vastness. In this state it no longer seems possible, as Dulcie had earlier imagined, to “endure forever” (178). Previously, the narrator has only described the torturers as metaphorical doctors and nurses, referred to collectively by the vague plural pronoun “they.” The metaphor positions the torturers as unfamiliar visitors, staving off their actualization as “friends, family, comrades.” When Dulcie imagines herself entangled with her torturers in these familiar relationships, she can no longer hold the threat of death at bay. In order to survive, Dulcie turns away, refusing intimacy: “Never again does she try to identify them. That is where death lies” (179). It is not just ironic but perverse that Dulcie’s commitment should lead to death and indifference to life.

Ultimately, *David’s Story* offers the idea of pure inertia as one way to outrun the forces that threaten annihilation. The narrator writes that Dulcie will “Resist. No matter how rickety the boat, how choppy the sea, she would remain alive to resist tyranny, to cling with idealism – she knows it to be embarrassing – to that which they wish to break down” (180). This passage uses verb forms that emphasize continuing action and duration. The word “resist” initially stands alone, signifying a state of being rather than a single action taken by an individual. In the next sentence, the infinitives “to resist” and “to cling” suggest that Dulcie will endure *in spite of* the choppy sea of violence. Rather than choosing to drown, thereby ceding victory to the “tyranny” of place, or to leave the sea altogether for solid ground, Dulcie chooses to ride out the waves. She does not, however, allow these waves to seduce her into driving off the cliff. It is enough to

contemplate “the unspeakable beauty of the blue below” and to “drive at breakneck speed with the sea roaring below” (180). At the “zero point” of Chapman’s Peak, Dulcie takes an equal and opposite action for each one taken against her.

III. The Performance of Identity in the Context of Violence

Although *David’s Story* seems to advocate for a form of pure energy that counteracts violence, the concluding scenes temper any easy hopes that resistance can unravel the patterns of apartheid. On the one hand, the ANC rally can be read as the instigator of and setting for a “queer situation” that brings together groups previously kept separate by apartheid legislation and custom. When Ouma Sarie joins the dancing mass, she observes that their collective action negates individual racial and geographical origins: “And so she toyi-toyis gaily up Buitenkant Street, where a contingent from one of the black townships joins in so that they get all mixed up together, actually holding onto the bony waist of a sisi – and oh, how good it is, with everyone out in the warm winter sunshine today” (207). By getting “all mixed up,” the participants queer the doctrine of separate development, forcing the recognition of entanglement out of the closet and into the public streets. As an antidote to apartheid’s commitment to racial purity, this scene offers Ouma Sarie’s perception of togetherness as “good.” Sarie goes so far as to describe the rally as the utopian fulfillment of divine prophesy: “What a pity Joop is not there to see how the world has turned out, how they are all together like Jesus said, singing and dancing” (207). The kind of togetherness advocated by Jesus seems to triumph over apartheid’s determination to keep people apart. Collective inertia inspires the mass to act out their rejection of apartheid’s spatial practices: “they all take the

opportunity to rest on the shimmering granite wall of the old Standard Bank building, defying the steward who tries to shoo them along” (207-208). While the crowd generates enough force to oppose the will of the steward, an individual emissary of Standard Bank’s power, the individual has less power over the comprehensive ideological system of repression that the bank represents.

As soon as Ouma Sarie tries to enter the bank, it becomes clear that the patterns of apartheid will continue to coexist within the patterns of democracy. Wicomb writes, “Her face is aglow with well-being, and emboldened by the events of the day, she tries to take the children into the grand Standard Bank building in search of a toilet. But she stands at the threshold, a child in each hand, looking at a familiar tiled floor, a geometric pattern of blue, white, and terra-cotta, her heart tilts, and for a moment she is not surprised to find the heavy doors before her are being firmly shut” (208). In this passage, the steps of the Standard Bank symbolize the ironic gap between the appearance of togetherness and equality and the persistence of old “patterns.” The ANC rally has attempted to make apartheid seem strange by occupying public space and advocating common humanity over separation. In this passage, however, the “familiar pattern” is not one of democracy and non-racialism but one of black and white binary oppositions. Apartheid makes itself present in this passage as more than a metaphor or rhetorical device, because the service that Ouma Sarie is denied – access to a toilet – draws attention to the historical reality of resource inequality. Apart from being a metaphor for the foreclosure of opportunity, the “heavy doors” of the standard bank speak quite literally to the barriers faced by people of color. And yet, Ouma Sarie does not seem to see these barriers as being insurmountable; she “beats at the carved doors and shouts, To hell with the Logan; to hell with the

Farquhars. This is now Mandela's tiled floor, Mandela's bank, Mandela's toilets" (208).

While Sarie cannot enter the Standard Bank, she can re-possess South African space through acts language. By using the possessive form of Mandela's name, a name that represents the collective mass organized at the rally, Sarie claims access to the very spaces that seem inaccessible: the "tiled floor," "bank," and "toilets." From the seemingly confused mass, then, emerges a new social order that redefines access to property and ownership based on a collective identity defined by the personality of Mandela. Sarie invokes Mandela's name as a counter-authority to the apartheid regime and to undercut the "familiar pattern" of racism and segregation that prevents her from physically occupying these spaces. Sarie's chant, which the mass then adopts and translates into a battle cry, attempts to bridge the gap between the bitter reality of segregation as symbolized by the Standard Bank and the optimistic performance of democracy at the ANC rally.

The way that the ANC rally breaks down the boundaries between indifference and commitment can be compared to Sartre's understanding of engagement. According to Sartre, the engaged writer must be capable of aesthetic withdrawal from his or her subject in order to convey his or her passion. This means that true commitment actually requires the writer to turn away. In *David's Story*, the narrator describes Ouma Sarie as both rooted in and detached from her physical surroundings: "Ouma, overcome by the beauty of it all, feels, first in her heart, the transformation, turning her inside out, turning her into a princess – yes, nothing short of a princess, waving her fist like a magic wand in this fairyland" (209). Contemplating the "beauty of it all" transports Sarie away from the immediacy of her environment to a distant and unreal "fairyland." This transformation

seems to make Sarie indifferent to her surroundings, because the “fairyland” could be anywhere at any time. However, Sarie’s transformation occurs simultaneously with her engagement in the political actions of the crowd: “Ouma zealously holds her left fist up, stamps her feet, oblivious of the beer being smuggled under her very nose” (209). Just as Sartre’s reader becomes responsible for the book as soon as he or she opens it, Sarie becomes committed to the rally as soon as she arrives. Even as she performs her commitment with her body, her “heart” experiences a form of aesthetic withdrawal that removes her from the immediacy of time and space into a distant and seemingly unreal “fairyland.” However, Sarie’s magic wand brings the “fairyland” into being in familiar, concrete terms as a new South Africa. Immediately after the word “fairyland,” the narrator includes the lyrics to what would become the South African national anthem. Sarie’s “wand” can be read as an accompaniment to – and perhaps as a conductor of – this anthem that professes commitment to South Africa. Here, Wicomb has used irony to point out the gaps between democratic ideals and political realities, but also to undercut the supposed chasm between political engagement and aesthetic contemplation. For Wicomb, the “queer situation” affords an opportunity to create a new social order that does not transcend history, but that emerges from the old patterns.

Ultimately, *David’s Story* suggests that the primary pattern of South African life will neither be that of apartheid nor democracy, but that of entanglement: historical, geographical, and racial. The narrator’s entanglement with David and David’s entanglement with Dulcie serve as two primary examples of the overall point that the novel is trying to make about intimacy. For Wicomb, it is neither possible nor desirable

to hold oneself apart from others because one is always already engaged with the spaces, people, and histories to which one is (however accidentally) related.

Playing in the Light

I. Entanglement

In *Playing in the Light*, Wicomb describes a series of “queer situations” that bring characters into contact with one another in ways that undermine the language and practices of separate development and notions of racial purity. The “queer situations” or situations of entanglement depicted in the novel demand a mode of analysis that combines the synchronic and diachronic: that pays attention not only to the formal elements of Wicomb’s text, but also to the ways in which her text engages with and mediates the historical and geographical coordinates of human relations in South Africa. *Playing in the Light* is set mainly in Cape Town after the fall of apartheid, and tells the story of Marion Campbell, a travel agent who mistakenly believes that she is white. Over the course of the novel, she learns that both of her parents have a mixed racial heritage and were designated “coloured” under apartheid. Though the fall of apartheid has dissipated some of the negative connotations associated with coloured identity, Marion still has trouble coming to terms with the fact that she is not white. *Playing in the Light* is not a bildungsroman, and does not include a moment of epiphany in which Marion accepts her newfound identity. Instead, the novel highlights the changing nature of identity itself in the post-apartheid context: in a time and place where previously established boundaries (between self and other, inside and outside, black and white) are being broken down.

Like Gordimer's *The House Gun*, *Playing in the Light* begins with an event that ruptures the main character's spatial and conceptual security perimeter: "It is on the balcony, the space both inside and out where she spends much of her time at home, that it happens. A bird, a speckled guinea fowl, comes flying at a dangerous angle, just missing the wall, and falls dead with a thud at Marion's feet" (1). The phrase "both inside and out" marks the balcony as a space of entanglement where seemingly unlike things come together. Marion's balcony symbolizes the meeting point between her aloof illusions of security and her actual connections to the people and places of South Africa. The balcony is also a synecdoche for Marion's "luxury" apartment, which affords her both "Security" and "the classic view of Table Mountain" (2). From her apartment, she can look at the beautiful South African landscape while avoiding the dangers of actually being outside. The entire apartment complex seems designed to keep the outside world at bay, but the balcony cannot keep out the uninvited guinea fowl. The fact that this particular species of bird is native to Southern Africa foreshadows Marion's unsuccessful attempts to purge all that is native from what she assumes to be a white middle class life. The passage goes on to describe Marion's panic attacks as a way to illustrate her entanglement with the very history and geography she hopes to avoid:

But lately, the four-poster has turned against her. There have been times, propped up with her magazines, when something buzzes in her ears, a sense of swarming that grows louder and louder, even as the sunset, which she can see from the bed, curls in serene pink and gold across the horizon and the cool Atlantic laps at Robben Island. Then, for a moment, she seems to gag on metres of muslin,

ensnared in the fabric that wraps itself round and round her into a shroud from which she struggles to escape. (2)

The maritime imagery in this passage resonates with both senses of entanglement: a point of difficulty and an obstacle meant to impede movement. Marion designs her apartment in order to avoid the difficulties of everyday life and move uninhibited by insecurities. Earlier in the passage, Marion describes her apartment and her bed in particular as a “retreat” from “the noise of the world” (2). She almost succeeds in keeping the outside world from coming in by designing the inside to mimic the pictures in English magazines. The passage, however, suggests that Marion is intimately connected to the particular histories and spaces of South Africa. Marion’s sense of security is undercut by her view of Robben Island, the infamous former prison where suspected activists and militants were held under apartheid. Together, the reference to the guinea fowl and Robben Island suggest that Marion is “ensnared” in a “fabric” that connects her to the history of human suffering under apartheid, which she cannot escape behind the “barricades” of her “luxury” apartment (2).

The novel emphasizes Marion’s preoccupation with social order by highlighting her disgust towards her father’s disordered body and home. When Marion visits her father, she draws attention to the “slipping standards” of John’s housekeeping (12). The word “standards” resonates with the apartheid-era ideology associating white identity with cleanliness and colored identity with filth and shame. As J.M. Coetzee and Wicomb have both observed, apartheid discourse consolidated earlier colonial associations between the non-white population (later classified as coloured) and notions of shame and

idleness.⁸ Marion's repeated references to John's untidy home and the smell of urine symbolize the residue of these discourses in the post-apartheid moment. Speaking of John's yard, Marion notes that "Really it is no garden anymore" (12). John confirms: "I grew up in the veld, he says; I don't mind things going a little wild" (12). Here, John contrasts the freedom of the "veld" with the tyranny of a new social order he describes as "the young terrorizing the old" (13). John's "slippage into slovenliness" thus represents his refusal to commit to a social order that disavows what is naturally "wild." By not cultivating his garden, John abstains from the project of nation building and clings to old racial hierarchies that demonize blacks as criminals. By letting his personal garden go "wild," John hopes to keep the New South Africa (along with its 'kaffirs') out. He will not do the work in the garden himself because "They kill you in your own garden, hack your head off with your own blunt spade. Haven't you seen in the papers?" (13). He will not hire anyone to do the gardening for him, because "these kaffirs of the New South Africa kill you just like that, just for the fun of it" (13). John's efforts to keep himself apart from "kaffirs" have the paradoxical effect of reproducing the effects of shame and idleness associated with coloured identity. In performing his indifference to the new social order and to "kaffirs," John actually ends up committing himself to apartheid's prejudiced view of coloured identity.

In *Playing in the Light*, both Marion and John find themselves in situations of what Sarah Nuttall would call "*racial entanglement*" (9). For Nuttall, racial entanglement refers to the unavoidable reality of mixture: "Eduard Glissant, reflecting on the issues of race, identity and belonging in the Caribbean (1992), used the term entanglement to refer

⁸ See Coetzee, J.M. *White Writing*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988. See also Wicomb, Zoë. "Shame and Identity: the Case of the Coloured in South Africa." *Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid and Democracy 1970-1995*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998:91-107.

to the ‘point of difficulty of creolized beginnings. ‘We must return,’ he wrote, ‘to the point from which we started, not a return to the longing for origins, to some immutable state of Being, but a return to the point of entanglement, from which we were forcefully turned away’” (9). Glissant’s observations can shed light on the way that Marion and John “return” to their pasts, “from which [they] were forcefully turned away.” In addition, the term “*racial entanglement*” can describe the paradox that indifference, defined as turning away, is actually the other side of commitment, defined as returning or turning towards. In *Playing in the Light*, situations of entanglement have unexpected consequences. When Marion turns away from her own spatial environment and holds herself apart from others, she commits to a social order based on white privilege and security. When John turns away from the social order based on the cultivation of cleanliness, he commits himself to prejudices about the dangerous “kaffir” and slovenly “coloured.”

Like Gordimer, Wicomb does not present a straightforward account of indifference as regressive and commitment as progressive. The novel expresses its suspicion of political commitment through its ironic portrayal of Boetie, one of Marion’s co-workers. During an argument over the relative merits of Elvis Presley and Roy Orbison, Boetie remarks: “Nonsense, everybody must choose. It’s a question of commitment; you have to take a stand, that’s what I always say. Nail your colors to the mast” (21). The trivial subject matter of the debate seems to divorce the word “commitment” from its associations with the movements and groups that mobilized either for or against apartheid. At the same time, Boetie’s flippant comment underscores the fact that apartheid ideology was in fact a form of absolutist “commitment” to a certain

social order. Boetie may intend for the phrase “nail our colors to the mast” to be taken metaphorically, but it speaks directly to the strategies of the Nationalist Party, which adopted apartheid as part of its explicit policy of nation building. Overall, Boetie’s observations can be read as part of the novel’s argument that commitment does not necessarily lead to progressive politics.

By way of deconstructing the opposition between commitment and indifference, *Playing in the Light* depicts a series of queer situations that demonstrate Marion’s entanglement with the people and places of South Africa. Early in the novel, Marion comes across a picture of Patricia Williams, “a coloured woman who had been an ANC terrorist” (56). Later, she begins to develop a relationship with her co-worker Brenda, who identifies herself as coloured. Finally, Marion uncovers information about her own past that suggests she herself is coloured. To paraphrase Gordimer, Marion becomes increasingly unable to stick to her own kind and instead begins to recognize the “other” as an aspect of herself (Gordimer, “Great Problems,” 132). Wicomb does not, however, depict Marion’s emerging racial consciousness as an epiphany. Instead, the novel focuses on Marion’s ambivalent relationship to a racial identity she associates with shame. On the one hand, the novel offers different versions of coloured identity to which Marion must respond. And, while Marion does respond, the novel differentiates between her conscious, rational efforts to uncover the truth and her unconscious feelings of panic and claustrophobia. Marion finds out that racial identity is more complex than a mere fact she can unearth by tracing her genealogy, because this identity implicates her in human relationships and histories from which she initially holds herself apart. The fact that Marion experiences the exposures of her past as traumatic runs counter to the discourse

of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which posited that the truth would bring a fractured nation together and allow it to heal. *Playing in the Light* offers a more critical perspective on notions of truth and reconciliation by drawing attention to the lasting consequences of apartheid's rhetoric and policy of separate development.

II. Truth and Acts of Differentiation

The novel takes up the genre of the testimonial popularized by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and argues that the truth is part of a human, subjective storytelling process rather than being a concrete end product. While at her office, Marion picks up a newspaper featuring a photograph of a woman named Patricia Williams and her story of torture. By writing off the piece as "Another TRC story," Marion seems to deny any potential involvement with Williams or other victims of apartheid (49). And yet, the language of the passage suggests that Marion has been captured by this photograph of Williams and ensnared in the story her picture represents: "There is something arresting about the face...Marion scoops up the paper and tosses it onto Boetie's chair, but then she picks it up after all, folds it hurriedly, carelessly across the face and stuffs it into her bag" (49). The photograph arrests Marion by encouraging her to "dwell upon" that which she would prefer to pass over ("Arrest"). Marion's dual impulses – to abandon the story and take it with her – can be compared to the narrator's command in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: "This is not a story to pass on." Here, the narrator suggests that the traumatic story of slavery and its aftermath should not – or perhaps cannot – be repeated. At the same time, the narrator insists that the story *must* be told. In *Playing in the Light*, Marion expresses annoyance at the TRC stories and wishes that the

ugly stories of apartheid would not be endlessly repeated. Yet, her compulsion to take the newspaper home with her anyway suggests that Williams' story – and the stories of other apartheid victims – is not a story to leave on someone else's chair.

After she becomes haunted by the face of Patricia Williams, Marion remarks to her boyfriend Geoff: "something strange has happened" (56). Her observation can be compared to the narrator's observation in Gordimer's novel *The House Gun* that "something terrible happened." Like Gordimer, Wicomb uses the passive voice to indicate her character's attempt to distance herself from the events. The passage in *Playing in the Light* goes on to say that "Nothing, in fact, has happened to Marion, who has never had anything to do with terrorists" (56). Like Harald and Claudia in *The House Gun*, who watch scenes of violence on their television screen, Marion reads about events assuming they have nothing to do with her. And yet, the novel goes on to show that what Marion sees as "strange," defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as "Other than one's own," is actually a part of her story ("Strange"). Like the ghost that haunts 124 in *Beloved* and forces the history of slavery to the surface of Morrison's story, the face of Patricia Williams draws Marion towards a different kind of story than the one she has told herself about her past. Tracing Patricia Williams turns out to be more than just a story, however, because it brings Marion closer to the land and to the history of coloured identity. The phrase "something strange has happened" purposely leaves placeholders for who initiates and receives the action. The fact that anyone, including Marion and Patricia Williams, can occupy the grammatical position of either the subject or the object suggests that "something terrible has happened" to everyone under apartheid, and that everyone in South Africa also bears partial responsibility.

Marion seems to widen what Gordimer calls “the gap between the committed and the indifferent” when she expresses her frustration for the upper and lower classes of Cape Town: “It is the hard-working middle class that she admires, which is to say people like herself”(Gordimer, “Great Problems,” 132, Wicomb 25). Here, Marion seems unsympathetic towards those who do not share her values of work and individual accomplishment. However, Marion also recognizes the futility of turning away from the people and places of South Africa. Her job at the travel agency is to offer the illusion of escape even though she knows her customers are “kidding themselves that it is possible to get away” (39). In her dreams, she is compelled by an unconscious attraction to the “other” as embodied by “the palpable absence of a woman who threatens to materialize” (30). The woman in Marion’s dreams can be compared to Dulcie in *David’s Story* in that both characters embody the limitations of categories such as race, class, and gender. Marion’s dreams can also be read as queer situations: spaces that cannot be located on a map, but where there is “a meeting of eyes” and “an exchange of silences” (Gordimer, “Great Problems” 132).

Marion’s dreams draw attention to South Africa’s specific, local architectural and spatial practices as well as to the more global processes of modernity and capitalist expansion. Marion sees a “house in a green valley” that “is long and narrow with rooms running into each other like train carriages” (29). According to the passage, the house looks like a “nagmaalhuis: an economical design for the up-and-coming, who built little two-roomed houses in villages where they stayed over for the monthly celebration of Holy Communion. As they prospered, they would add extra rooms” (29). Here, the novel refers to a design popularized in the early 1800s, when South African farmers began to

move from the cities into less populated areas of the country. In the absence of permanent churches, these farmers would build a nagmaalhuis in order to observe communion. Given this historical context, Marion's dream can be read alongside Rita Barnard's conception of the "'dream topographies' that the South African pastoral projects upon the land" (10). What Barnard means is that the South African pastoral imagines the land in ways that deny the presence of the native population. She then writes about authors such as Coetzee and his project of "bringing whatever is marginalized or occluded into view" (10). On the one hand, Marion's dream seems to resonate with discourses of capitalist expansion based on notions of progress and prosperity. The "train carriages" symbolize the forward motion of modernity, and the architectural logic of the house is based on the notion of accumulation: "As they prospered, they would add extra rooms." At the same time, Marion calls attention to the human presence in a spatial practice seemingly dominated by economic principles. In other words, Marion's dream seeks to restore the presence of someone who has been marginalized: "If only Marion could ask the dark shape who eventually settles on the beach with her coffee, an outline of an old woman who has not quite materialized" (30). Here, the old woman can be read as what Rita Barnard calls the "occluded element" in the South African pastoral's "dream topographies" (10). Marion's desire to fill in the shape of this woman suggests that she wants to restore the specifically female presence to the exclusionary narrative of settlement, expansion, and progress.

By focusing on the gender norms that structure Marion's relationships with the woman in her dreams, her boyfriend Geoff, and Brenda, *Playing in the Light* calls attention to the fact that apartheid was a patriarchal, heteronormative system of gender

relations. While the post-apartheid setting of the novel emphasizes the new possibilities for making connections across boundaries of race and class, the novel also describes Marion's difficulty inhabiting spaces and experiences other than her own. For example, Marion's dream about the woman sorting peaches can be read as a frustrated unconscious desire to be "invited" into an intimate, feminized space:

An old woman sitting on a low stool is illuminated; the light falls on a white enamel basin on her lap. Her face, sunburnt and cracked like tree bark, is framed by the starched brim of a white bonnet. She is surrounded by a sea of peaches, their shriveled halves drying on sheets of brown paper. The old woman is busy, does not look at her. Her hands are sorting through peaches in the basin; her eyes are fixed on the task. Marion waits to be invited into the loft, but eventually gives up and starts going down the ladder, one foot guardedly following another in a backward descent so that the old woman disappears slowly in bands of darkness.

(31)

The act of peeling peaches foreshadows a later moment of intimacy in the novel, when Brenda wakes up in Marion's house and they converse over a "bowl of peaches." As in the later scene, the peaches in the dream tell a story about female sexuality. In the dream, Marion wants to share the space occupied by the old woman, whose face is "cracked" just like the "shriveled" and "drying peaches." These words suggest that the old woman is no longer ripe; her age and occupation as a laborer make her distant and different from Marion. The dream seems to dramatize the gap between the committed and the indifferent, because the old woman's eyes remain "fixed" on her "task" while Marion "eventually gives up and turns away." However, Marion does attempt to cross over into

this woman's world by climbing up the ladder in the first place. In addition, while the dream does not result in what Gordimer calls a "meeting of eyes," it does arguably lead to an "exchange of silences" ("Great Problems" 132). Ultimately, the dream suggests that while shared gender does not necessarily provide a common ground, it does create the potential for a queer situation: a coming together across differences.

In her dream world, Marion starts to shed her tendency to stick to her own kind and her obsession with keeping things in their place. At work, Marion markets travel as a form of getting away from the "tedious nonsense" of everyday life; at night, Marion dreams of a world where travel offers her a glimpse into the lives of others. Her dreams represent the challenges to building relationships across social boundaries in the form of spatial obstacles like closed doors, endless hallways, and a seemingly inaccessible attic. These architectural barriers resonate with the way Marion's work place and domestic space are designed to maintain appropriate social boundaries. The travel agency, for example, has a "private room" where all the workers eat lunch: "All except for Tiena, who disappears over the lunch period to wherever cleaners and tea ladies go, swallowed by the crowds of workers who congregate at street corners or under trees in search of shade" (34). Tiena's disappearance reinforces the hierarchical relationship between the quiet, inside table of the middle class and the noisy, crowded streets outside. However, the political discussion that erupts in the kitchen brings the boundary between inside and outside under scrutiny.

III. Conversational Communities and Democracy

The argument between Brenda and Boetie dramatizes the range of possible responses to the social and political aftermath of apartheid. By focusing on the apparent divide between characters of different races, classes, and genders, the novel highlights how the chaos of political transition has redefined what it means to be committed or indifferent. Chaos can have either positive or negative connotations, but in general denotes a “confused mass, mixture, or conglomeration of parts or elements without order or connection” (“Chaos”). Marion’s co-worker Boetie evaluates this sense of disorder negatively: “So this is what democracy has brought us, hey, he sighs. Just chaos and violence, that’s what we can thank the new government for. In this country, you’ll get killed for the twenty rand in your pocket” (36). By focusing on the “new government,” Boetie defines chaos paradoxically as a new social order based on the proliferation of disorder. And, while Boetie decries the random and disproportionate acts of violence that characterize this new order, he recognizes that this “chaos” is a form of “democracy” that has replaced the repressive and obsessively ordered regime of apartheid. Social chaos can be compared to what Wicomb has referred to as “chaos on the page,” which she sees as “an alternative to the camouflage of coherence that socio-political structures are about” (qtd. in Driver 525). The new society removes the illusion of innocence and redistributes guilt. Brenda asks: “And don’t you think you should take any responsibility for it?” (36). Here, Brenda introduces the notion of complicity and challenges Boetie’s claim of indifference: “Really? You don’t think that years of oppression and destitution and perversion of human being, thanks to the policies that you voted in, have anything to do with you?” (36). Here, Brenda argues that even though Boetie technically “never voted

for apartheid” he demonstrates commitment to the “policies” of the National Party by expressing indifference towards the violence of apartheid and its aftermath (36).

Brenda expresses frustration with her conversation with Boetie, thinking that “it is not possible for people from the different worlds of this country to talk to each other” (38). However, the intense dialogue in *Playing in the Light* can be read as producing what Dorothy Driver calls a “conversational community” (527). Driver argues that Wicomb’s 1991 work “ ‘Another Story’ uses tellings and retellings to quite different effect: to cast off the dead weight of ‘the same old story’ said to be the South African coloured story, and then also to project a conversational community more important than any construction of nation” (527). What Driver means is that Wicomb uses dialogue to dramatize the gaps in dominant discourses and to offer new ways of speaking and being together. In light of Driver’s observations, Brenda and Boetie’s dialogue can be read as a movement towards a “conversational community” that recognizes the inconsistencies of apartheid discourse and embraces chaos as an opportunity to construct new identities. The “conversational community” seems particularly relevant to the South African context since oral testimony, dialogue, and negotiation played a crucial role in the transition to democracy. In addition, by violating Marion’s injunction of “No politics in this office,” the “conversational community” works against the doctrine that politics should occupy a separate sphere. Instead, the office debate demonstrates how politics invade aspects of everyday life. The fact that this conversation occurs indoors resonates with Gordimer’s observation in the 1960s that “there is silence in the streets” (136). Here, Gordimer refers to the repressive apartheid laws that prevent public gatherings and debates. What Gordimer feels should take place in public – the meetings between the committed and the

indifferent – now take place in private, if at all. *Playing in the Light* offers a contemporary response to Gordimer's observation, suggesting that the dismantling of apartheid has created more opportunities for commitment to meet indifference. At the same time, these meetings often reanimate what Gordimer calls the "prejudices" and "fears" at the heart of apartheid ideology ("Great Problems" 133). By staging Brenda and Boetie's dialogue in a travel agency, Wicomb draws attention to what Driver calls the "interface between the imaginative world and external reality, or between what is commonly known as writing and history" (524). The "private room" encounter in the travel agency brings the "imaginative world" of glossy posters and magazines together with the "external reality" of politics in order to question the very social boundaries that differentiate between these two worlds.

Marion's travel agency seems to construct primarily an "imaginative world" in the sense that it markets a literal and figurative mode of escape from the realities of South Africa. Marion subscribes to the ideology of mimesis and decorates the office with glossy posters of the Mediterranean in order to create the illusion of presence: "The desks are arranged in such a manner that customers can see nothing more than the out-sized poster of the Greek island: it fills the doorway entirely, so that the Mediterranean with its gleaming white hilltop village seems to lie just there, beyond the office" (38). Here, Marion intends for the poster to obscure all evidence of an "external reality." However, it is in the travel agency that the boundaries between the real and imagined world break down, and where the "arguments in the background" force themselves into the center (38). These arguments show how the history of South Africa is one of conflict rather than

consensus and demonstrate that, contrary to the ideology of separate development, “the different worlds of this country” cannot be kept apart.

Marion’s failure to reproduce the social order as represented in the pages of *Cosmopolitan* highlights the gap between the travel agency’s glossy appearance and the actual presence of competing interests and sets of values. While Marion strives for an impression of coherence, the space actually hosts what could be called a chaotic conglomeration of attitudes, beliefs, and modes of spatial existence. The “cosmopolitan” effect that Marion seeks to imitate turns out to be nothing more than a glossy poster covering up the presence of real social conflict. Wicomb’s depiction of the travel agency here can be read as an allegorical comment on the new South Africa, which similarly expressed a commitment to being “cosmopolitan.” According to Wicomb’s critique, the mere imitation or outward expression of this concept does not eliminate social inequality or the practices of segregation. Her argument, it would seem, is that it is not possible to transform space through mere utterance or visual representation. And yet, the model of democracy that emerges from the novel is based on the notion of conversation. That is, it is through dialogue that characters begin to understand one another’s differences. Thus, while Wicomb certainly suggests that the transformation of society cannot be achieved solely in the realm of discourse and representation, she maintains the importance of speech and dialogue in the creation of a new social and spatial order.

While Marion’s dreams represent her unconscious desire to “lose her place” in society and become entangled, her dreams only gain significance when she shares them aloud with her colleagues. In this way, Wicomb suggests that new social spaces can actually be spoken into being. Given Marion’s understanding that what gets talked about

becomes real, it makes sense that she prohibits the discussion of politics in the office. To talk about politics would be to admit that they were real, thus destroying the cosmopolitan illusion of transparency suggested by the glossy posters and stylistic decorations. Silence and quietness, as opposed to “arguments,” are “good for business” because they promise customers an escape from their everyday reality of “tedious nonsense” (38-39).

In other words, the architecture of the novel resembles that of the travel agency, which is decorated according to a motif of “transparency,” but that ultimately fails to contain the eruption of “another layer of meaning” (38, 40). Through her representation of the travel agency, Wicomb illustrates the gap between the appearance of coherence and consensus in society and the actual presence of argument, difference, and violence. Rather than emphasizing a binary distinction between these two models of social behavior, however, Wicomb insists upon their entanglement. In the “new” South Africa represented in the novel, chaos and the seeming descent into disorder actually become the preconditions for democracy (what Driver refers to as a “conversational community.”)

Wicomb draws a startling parallel between democracy and apartheid by depicting both as forms of social performance. For a queer theorist like Butler, performance does not cover up anything; there is no essence behind the performance. To draw on Butler’s understanding, apartheid is a performance just like all social systems. The difference is that the particular performances of apartheid are designed to be unjust, whereas the performances of democracy are predicated on equality. For Wicomb, the performances of racial identity can end up reinforcing apartheid ideology even when they are intended to shore up the appearances of democracy. Wicomb’s overall point is that apartheid,

democracy, and categories of racial identity are socially constructed rather than based on any kind of essence. This is important because it works against the assumption that democracy is somehow better or more natural than what it is designed to replace. In *Playing in the Light*, characters perform their identity in ways that both conform to and exceed social expectations. Because apartheid laws allocated more privileges to whites, these laws actually encouraged what the novel calls “play whites” to keep their true identities secret. At the same time, *Playing in the Light* focuses on the cracks that appear in apartheid’s architectural edifice, suggesting that no performance can cover up these seams. While apartheid society and “play whites” such as John and Helen seek to marginalize coloured identity by describing it as shameful and keeping it a secret, the secret eventually comes out of the closet. *Playing in the Light* can be read alongside Brenna Munro’s notion of the post-apartheid “coming-out narrative as a mode of national allegory” (399). According to Munro, South African novels talk about “coming-out” as a way to “talk about the possibilities and failures of the national transition” (399). In *Playing in the Light*, the coming-out story points out the “failures” of post-apartheid society to confront the racial demons of the past while gesturing towards the “possibilities” embodied by embracing the coloured identity: a category that inherently undermines binary oppositions.

IV. The Terror of Racial Secrecy

Marion's response to the photograph of Patricia Williams highlights the paradoxical nature of national transition and points out some of the consequences of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act that established the Commission sought to further the aims of the 1993 constitution, which "provides a historic bridge between the past of a deeply divided society characterized by strife, conflict, untold suffering and injustice, and a future founded on the recognition of human rights, democracy and peaceful co-existence for all South Africans" (2). The metaphor of the bridge suggests that the future will differ markedly from the past, distant as this future will be from the atrocities aired by the commission and made illegal by the constitution. What Wicomb's novel points out, however, is that the stories and memories that "bridge" South Africa's past with its future can never be completely submerged by the rhetoric of "democracy and peaceful co-existence." For Marion the photograph functions like a private TRC hearing that seems to hold her responsible: "The eyes of the stranger hold hers accusingly, calling her to account: for what, for the callous fold across the face? But no; it hisses a command to remember, remember, remember..." (54). This passage explicitly contrasts the indifferent way Marion folds the photograph with the commitment it would require to remember or discover her precise entanglement with Williams. Marion's disavowal of entanglement resonates with the term's negative denotations as noted in the Oxford English Dictionary: a "compromising relationship," "a snare," or a physical "obstacle" ("Entanglement"). Immediately after looking at the photograph, "Marion feels the room shrink around her. She is trapped in endless folds of muslin; the bed grows into the room, fills it, grows

large as a ship in which she, bound in metres of muslin, flounders” (54). In this passage, the command “to remember” has denied Marion the ability to move freely: she is bound tightly like a mummy and “flounders” helplessly on the bed. In a sense, Marion has been caught in the snare of shared history which links her to those she deems most unlike herself. The fact that she is “trapped” on a bed-cum-ship suggests that the very situation which seems to impede her movement may also carry her somewhere else. The image of her motionless body on a ship can be compared to the Oxford English Dictionary definition of translation as “onward motion” (“Translation”). In other words, while entanglement may appear to Marion as an insurmountable obstacle, it also propels her forward into an undefinable future.

Marion’s encounter with the photograph can be read as a queer situation that brings together Marion’s pathological fears of difference and the potential for communication. When Marion feels the room “shrink,” she expresses her fear not just of confined spaces but of the implied loss of agency associated with confinement. Once she hears the command “to remember,” Marion is no longer the master of her own destiny; instead she is borne away by a power greater than her individual body and will. When Marion emerges from this vision, she leaves behind her treasured oppositions between inside / outside and self / other: she “manages to escape to the balcony, with the crumpled paper clutched to her chest” (54). Here, the balcony provides the architectural equivalent to the unexpected meeting between Marion and Patricia Williams. Whatever Marion’s future will be, she can no longer rely on the fiction of individualism or the illusion of whiteness; instead, she must accept the messy and confused situation of entanglement.

The photograph of Patricia Williams initiates a chain of events that begins to dismantle the claustrophobic architecture of secrecy created by Marion's parents. Marion can sense that her father is hiding something from her when she asks about their maid: "She hears that he is dissembling, that he is panicking, prattling" (58). As one of the definitions of irony, the word "dissembling" points towards the gap between appearances and reality. John and Helen have constructed an elaborate surface image of family life to deflect attention from the fact that there is no such thing as a pure racial origin. Their behavior mimics that of apartheid ideology itself, which consists of a set of restrictions and laws meant to cover up the inevitability of miscegenation. Helen's death and the fall of apartheid suggest that edifices such as the family and the nation operate by excluding certain kinds of knowledge as forbidden and policing the boundaries between inside and outside. By calling attention to the secret at the heart of Marion's family and apartheid society in general, the novel suggests that it is possible to capitalize on the ironic gap between surface and reality. As Marion observes, "Helen is dead and there is something secret, something ugly, monstrous, at the heart of their paltry little family. The trouble and strife of an ill-matched couple – that was what she had, throughout her life, attributed the strangeness to, but now Marion knows that there is something else. A secret" (58). This passage creates what Munro calls a "queer temporality" by distinguishing between what Marion used to believe and what she "now...knows." While Marion does not yet know the content of the secret, its exact definition matters less than the fact that it is not a lie. The secret has forced its way through her family's strained semblance of normalcy and ensured that the future will proceed differently.

Given the novel's focus on claustrophobia, Marion's recurring panic attacks can be interpreted as a form of paralysis in the face of dual impulses to isolate herself from others and communicate with them. The word claustrophobia comes from the word cloister, which denotes an enclosed space that nevertheless facilitates communication. In a monastery, a cloister is "A covered walk or arcade connected with a monastery, college, or large church, serving as a way of communication between different parts of the group of buildings, and sometimes as a place of exercise or study; often running round the open court of a quadrangle, with a plain wall on the one side, and a series of windows or an open colonnade on the other. (Often in *pl.*)" ("Cloister"). According to this definition, a cloister brings together the seemingly unlike states of solitude and communion. In addition, it employs apparently contradictory architectural elements that make it both closed and open. For example, while a cloister might seem to isolate those inside from those outside, the repetition of the word "open" and the reference to windows pushes against that traditional binary. In a similar way, Marion's experiences of claustrophobia call attention to the ways in which her family and apartheid society have always been traversed by difference. Like the architects of apartheid, Helen hopes to maintain the illusion of racial purity by invoking the law of genre: "It is best to keep oneself to oneself" (61). Helen's "maxims," like apartheid's laws, have the paradoxical effect of producing more "secrets" than they suppress: "But in that barren world, secrets engendered secrets with abandon, wantonly reproductive" (61). Here, the novel compares Helen's "maxims" to the apartheid laws designed to prevent miscegenation. While both Helen and apartheid ideology depend on the assumption that the self can be kept separate from that which is different, this very assumption reveals the essential presence of

difference as part of the definition of self. Thus, the very secrets that Helen pushes to the margins push themselves back to the center in her absence. Helen's household, in turn, mimics the structure of apartheid, which attempts to cover up the "monstrous" secret of racial mixture that defied its policies of separate development.

While Marion expects the journey to Clanwilliam to bring her closer to the truth of her familial roots, the trip leads to unexpected moments of intimacy that redefine the familiar and the strange. For example, when she and Brenda return, Brenda stays the night at Marion's house and comforts her when she begins to weep. Then, "Like lovers, they wake together. Still entwined, they are disturbed at dawn by the crashing noise of the garbage truck" (100). Earlier in the novel, Marion dreams of a loft occupied by a woman with whom she seems unable to communicate; here, she has strayed into the embrace of another, as it were, by accident. The trope of the peach, also used in the earlier dream passage, recurs here to symbolize the entanglement between Brenda and Marion. On waking, Brenda leaves the bedroom, unsettled by the fact that she has "lain close to this stranger without feeling a trace of revulsion she feels for her mother's body:"

In the kitchen there is a bowl of peaches, which she prods for weakness. Dare I eat a peach? Brenda calls theatrically, but doesn't listen to the muffled reply from the bedroom. I never understood it, she says, the idea of being challenged by a peach, but its simple, isn't it? Refined people struggle with the possibility because of the juice that will dribble down their chins. So the answer to Prufrock is to eat the fruit before it's ripe, or to tackle it with a knife and fork. (100)

In this passage, the challenge posed by the peach can be read as a metaphor for the challenge posed by intimate relations across boundaries of race, gender, and class.

According to Brenda, “Refined people” hesitate to eat peaches because of the messy residue that will betray the satisfaction of their desires. Thus, they try to find ways of still eating the peach without letting its juice spill onto their bodies. Prufrock’s dilemma about the peach can be compared to Marion’s conflicted attitude towards her own past and that of the country. Early in the novel, she claims to have “no interest” in the “so-called misdemeanors of history” (48). Like the fastidious Prufrock, she tries to hold history at an arm’s length and attempts to stay clear of its residue. According to Marion, the line “Dare I eat a peach?” refers to the possibility of avoiding the dreaded messiness and contamination associated with intimacy: “Marion hobbles to the kitchen. Nonsense, she says, it’s about eating fruit when it looks perfect, before it’s over the hill – firm, perfect shape, perfect colour” (100). By implication, Marion suggests that the poem is also about rejecting fruit that does not look “perfect” – that is not the right “shape” or “colour.” Marion’s reading resonates with Helen’s “maxims” and apartheid’s laws, which regulate and restrict interactions between those of different colors. And yet, while Marion seems committed to stick to her own kind, the novel suggests that she cannot keep the “peach” of history and her racial identity at a safe distance.

Instead, her discoveries challenge her understanding of the boundaries between self and other and force her to confront the shame and uncleanness she associates with coloured identity. As Brenda points out, Prufrock’s fear of the peach stems from his overall aversion to any outward appearance of uncleanness, decline, and old age. The potential threat to decorum posed by the peach resonates with the discourse of shame specifically associated with coloured identity. According to Brenda, however, the fall of apartheid has made it possible, and even fashionable, to embrace the idea of racial

mixture: “Haven’t you heard how many white people, or rather Afrikaners of the more-indigenous-than-thou brigade, are claiming mixed blood these days? It’s not such a tragedy being black, you know, at least you’re authentic. And just think of the other benefits: you need no longer speak in hushed tones – you’re free to be noisy, free to eat a peach, a juicy ripe one, and free of the burdens of nation and tradition” (102). Brenda’s use of the word tragedy suggests that blackness, here used as a synonym for coloured identity, belongs to a different genre in the postapartheid moment. Under apartheid, blackness designated an undesirable and stigmatized type or category. Now, the category of blackness affords its bearer the seemingly incompatible “benefits” of being both “authentic” and “free from the burdens of nation and tradition.” In Brenda’s language, the telltale juice of the peach represents the increasing visibility of “mixed blood,” brought center stage by the increasing marginalization of apartheid’s ideology of racial purity.

In these passages, the peach signifies Marion’s identification of herself as the other she has attempted to hold at a safe distance. Just like the peach that has been boiled in water, Marion has been stripped of her skin and her ability to “pass” as white. This loss actually makes it possible for her to share a space not unlike the loft of her dreams with a woman from whom her previous prejudices and assumptions would have kept her apart.

She stares at her peach; she cannot bring herself to eat it. Naked, slippery – that’s me, that’s who I am, she thinks. Hurlled into the world fully grown, without a skin. But she cannot say this to a virtual stranger, a woman in pink Mickey Mouse pajamas who sits at her kitchen table eyeing her coolly, who waits for her to eat a peach. How much longer can they go on talking about peaches? Or the skin of peaches? What is she meant to say? (101)

Caught up in her own anxieties, Marion overlooks the fact that Brenda is not a “stranger” at all, but more like a “lover” who has comforted her in a moment of vulnerability. However, while Marion submits herself to intimacy in the throes of her nightmare, on waking she is quick to re-establish her personal boundaries. Brenda has no problem biting into the peach and letting the juice spill onto her chin; Marion, on the other hand, cannot bring herself to be “Naked” before a stranger.

Marion’s efforts to preserve the distance between herself and the other persist until the end of the novel, when Brenda waits in vain for Marion to invite her on an outing. Brenda finally takes the initiative to invite Marion out under the assumption that “friends spend time together.” However, Brenda concludes that “I can’t be your friend because I’m too dependent on you” (216). Here, Brenda suggests that so long as one person assumes the dominant role, the relationship cannot be considered equal. While Brenda drove Marion’s car and comforted her when she was injured, this role reversal was temporary. Even though Marion has discovered her own mixed heritage, this does not automatically lead to a more equal fellowship with Brenda. The novel thus problematizes the utopian discourses of non-racialism and reconciliation made popular by the African National Congress and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. After an argument with Brenda, Marion slams the car door after her, seemingly sealing off the possibility of connection. However, even though Brenda and Marion’s alliance may not survive, the novel suggests that their encounter has contributed to the future of the New South Africa. Despite Marion’s objections, Brenda will continue to write Marion’s father’s story, which will not conform to the generic expectations set forth in the old South Africa. Therefore, even though the queer situations in the novel may not ultimately

lead to reconciliation, they have produced unexpected if fleeting forms of intimacy that contribute to the construction of a new nation based on new forms of narrative and identity.

V. At the Juncture of Performance and Apartheid Violence

Playing in the Light suggests that the ironic gaps in apartheid discourse itself have created potential spaces for imagining and living in this new nation. When conducting research at the National Library, Marion comes across the Population Registration Act of 1950, which defines a “ ‘white person’ as “One who in appearance obviously is, or who is generally accepted as a white person, but does not include a person who, although in appearance obviously a white person, is generally accepted as a coloured person” (121). The words “appearance” and “obvious” seem to define race as an easily perceived biological phenomenon. The second sentence, however, emphasizes that race cannot be an essential fact because it is socially constructed. Even a person who “is” white can be excluded from the category for being “accepted” as non-white. The Amendment, which was added to the act in 1962, includes self-presentation as an integral aspect of racial performance. According to the amendment, the category of “white person” “does not include any person who for the purposes of classification under this Act, freely and voluntarily admits that he is by descent a native or a coloured person unless it is proved that the admission is not based on fact” (121). As Marion observes: “the amendment, unlike the original, defines whiteness in terms of what it is not” (121). The irony is that the act must *include* the definition of a “coloured person” in its definition of a “white

person.” In this way, the act reveals the way in which its racial categories have always been entangled with one another despite the ideology of separation.

To invoke Fanon’s well-known formulation, the Population Registration Act and its amendment suggest that both the “white person” and the “coloured person” have been overdetermined from without – defined according to outward characteristics. Wicomb contrasts the seemingly closed epistemological system of race to the spatial practices of the characters, whose travels carry them across boundaries of race and gender. According to Brenda, the goal of a “journey” is “to leave ourselves behind” (81). While the word journey normally applies to “land-travel,” Brenda correlates the physical act of moving across the land with the metaphysical act of self-discovery (“Journey”). According to this logic, Marion’s stated “refusal to buy into the transformative value of travel” can be seen as a refusal to leave herself behind. As she explains to Geoff, losing her identity as white means opening herself up to a queer temporality: “Perhaps it’s a question of time, the arrival of a moment when you cross a boundary and say: Once I was white, now I am coloured” (106). Whereas apartheid legislation takes a synchronic approach to race, seeing it as static and clearly visible, *Playing in the Light* takes a diachronic approach, seeing it as entangled with the particular history, temporality, and spatiality of South Africa.

Marion’s use of the term “play white” suggests that she understands whiteness is largely a performance even though apartheid predicates itself on the fact that whiteness is both detectable and real. As she tells Geoff, “My parents were the play-whites; *they* crossed over” (106-107). By declaring themselves white, Marion’s parents crossed the lines established by apartheid laws so that they could occupy a place in society reserved

for whites. Marion's dilemma stems from the fact that in the post-apartheid moment "there can be no question of returning to a place where my parents once were. Perhaps I can now keep crossing to and fro, to different places, perhaps that is what the new era is all about – an era of unremitting crossings" (107). While Marion seems optimistic about the endless possibilities for travel, she also recognizes that the "crossing" facilitated by racial identity cannot necessarily be attributed to a progressive politics. When she finds that the category of "play white" cannot be found in the National Library, she wonders whether her parents adopted this identity as a conscious form of protest: "Did they think of themselves as dissidents, daring to play in the light? Or as people who could mess up the system, who could not be looked up in libraries, who had escaped the documentation of identity? She thinks not. They thought only of their own advancement" (122).

According to Derrida's understanding, the dangerous supplement works its way from the margins to the center in order to disrupt hierarchical binary oppositions. By Marion's account, however, the dangerous supplement can also uphold existing hierarchical relations. Her parents had no desire to disrupt apartheid's racial binaries because they wanted to benefit from the privileges afforded to whites. The word "play" in the term "play white" would seem to open an ironic gap between the public performance of race and the private reality. However, the novel suggests that the immense effort required to maintain the identity of "play white" collapses the distinction between public and private, such that private life cannot be distinguished from public performance: "With a child to raise, a public-private distinction was a luxury they could not contemplate; the public selves required all their energies. Playing – as others would have it – in the light left no space, no time for interiority, for reflecting on what they had done" (123). While John

and Helen hope to make the surface appearance of whiteness into a reality through mimicry and performance, the novel suggests that their performance ends up calling attention to the very thing – coloured identity – they seek to hide.

Marion's solution to the paradox of crossing over is to stay put, avoid travel, and stick to her own kind. The novel contrasts Marion, who sees her identity as distinct from others, with Outa Blinkoog, who sees identity as a network of intersecting paths. By depicting Outa Blinkoog, a kind of harlequin figure, as transgressing the boundaries of both genre and gender, Wicomb queers the concepts of narrative, place, and identity. First, Outa's physical appearance challenges the boundaries between man and animal, human and divine, young and old: "He is a peacock man, a brightly coloured creature from mythology, a messenger from the gods; his teeth are as brilliant white as a young man's" (87). Second, the way that the novel feminizes Outa's body and his mode of storytelling undermines the hierarchy between male and female: "It is as if the man has waited all his life to tell his story: a flood of words bursts unsolicited from his girlish lips. He is unstoppable, barely comprehensible, as he launches into a narrative that has no end, each fragment leading to another" (88). This passage draws a parallel between the way that Outa's "girlish lips" deviate from masculine norms and the way that his story ignores the realist conventions of narrative coherence and progression. Furthermore, the passage draws an analogy between Outa's queer storytelling practice and his life of endless travel. He composes stories the same way he adds to his treasures: by collecting fragments, or what Outa calls "found things that others throw away" (89). For Outa, travelling creates a queer situation that brings seemingly unlike objects and stories together. Outa does not seem to place much value on stable notions of history or cultural roots, saying that "He

doesn't like being in the same place all the time, has always kept on the move" (89). At the same time, the novel uses the tropes of feet and shoes to demonstrate his connection with the land. When Marion and Brenda tell him of their plans to visit Wuppertal, he comments: "there is no room for him in a place devoted to the making of shoes. He supposes there is a time and a place for a good pair of veldskoen, especially on the tar roads, but he prefers to know one's terrain through the soles of one's own feet" (91). Here, Outa implies that knowing one's place involves surrendering one's skin, or the boundaries one maintains between self and other, inside and outside. The novel then draws a parallel between walking without shoes and Outa's particular model of storytelling, which disregards concepts of authorship, ownership and copyright in favor of a notion of a shared gift.

VI. A Different Kind of Story / A Story of Difference

Through the character of Outa, Wicomb offers a queer postcolonial perspective on the concept of the storyteller as theorized by Walter Benjamin. According to Benjamin, the storyteller brings together the perspectives of "someone who has come from afar" and someone "who has stayed at home, making an honest living, and who knows the local tales and traditions. If one wants to picture these two groups through their archaic representatives, one is embodied in the resident tiller of the soil, and the other in the trading seaman" (84-85). Here, Benjamin suggests that the local knowledge of the storyteller is always already traversed by the global. His definition of storytelling breaks down the boundaries between roots / rootlessness and home / away: "The resident master craftsman and the traveling journeyman worked together in the same rooms; and every

master had been a traveling journeyman before he settled down in his home town or somewhere else” (85). In other words, being at “home” actually requires being somewhere else first. Read alongside Benjamin, Outa can be read as a “traveling journeyman” who never settles, but who continues to craft stories from the objects and experiences he collects as he travels. While his stories have many obvious features of the oral tradition, they can also be analyzed as written forms. When Outa begins to tell his story to Brenda and Marion, he illustrates his points by drawing in the sand; because sand is a type of earth that is particularly unstable, Outa’s drawings represent the intimate connection between storytelling and the land as well as the impermanence of human experience. Outa also suggests that some form of inscription is required in order to make his memories more permanent: “such a shower of blue can’t be told, can’t be drawn in the sand, and can’t be made into tin treasures. That is why he would rather have his stories embroidered on white cloth” (88).

Outa’s model of storytelling blends oral and written forms and undermines traditional, male-centered notions of individual authorship: “Look, he shows them, my sewing is coming along nicely. There’s a lo-ovely woman – he tilts his head and winks – who comes to see me, she knows where to find me in the veld, and teaches me to sew; her body is as soft as a featherbed. The chapters on cloth, they must be embroidered in different colors for the different little stories that grow inside the big story, but that can only be done by a woman with small hands” (90). Here, Outa draws a comparison between the reproduction of stories and sexual reproduction, in which both male and female play fundamental roles. Furthermore, he describes storytelling as a craft designed to preserve the oral tradition. Finally, he emphasizes the fact that “different little stories”

come in “different colours.” Here, he implies that difference – between genders and between different colours – is actually fundamental to the practice of storytelling. If Outa indeed views storytelling as a mode of reproduction, it is one that values mixture as productive rather than perverse.

Despite many similarities, Outa differs from Benjamin’s journeyman in two important ways. First, although Outa claims to choose travel as his *modus operandi*, he has actually been forced to travel. The question of exile is one that Benjamin does not address explicitly in his discussion of the traveling journeyman. Second, while Benjamin describes the storyteller as one with roots in the community, Outa seems connected to no particular place. Both of these departures from Benjamin’s model can be summarized by Outa’s repetition of the command he received as a boy: “Come on, get a move on Joe, move on” (88). Outa hears this for the first time from his schoolmaster as punishment for being unable to read from the “English storybook.” He hears the command to move on a second time from people who “complain about him and his cart;” these people force him into an increasingly marginal position by asking him to keep off the roads. “Eventually,” Outa says, “they will find the courage to drive him off the road for good” (89). In this passage, the phrase “Move on Joe” positions the storyteller as a marginal figure that has been purged from the community for his deviance from the accepted standards and norms. By calling Outa “Joe,” both the schoolmaster and the community treat Outa as a symbolic victim rather than an individual. Instead of being embraced as a storyteller, Outa is punished as an outcast who cannot or does not conform to the standards of colonial education as represented by the “English storybook.” In addition, he is rejected as a “hazard” because his travels take him outside the orbit of the economy. Outa’s

compulsion to “keep moving” places him alongside literary characters such as the protagonist of Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*. In Ellison’s novel, the phrase “Keep this Nigger Boy Running” refers to all the factors that prevent the unnamed protagonist from finding a place within a racially stratified society. The novel characterizes the protagonist’s choice to live underground as both a condition of forced exile and as potentially subversive; he siphons electricity without paying and embraces his social invisibility. Likewise, Outa defines his adopted profession as a choice, claiming that he “doesn’t like being in the same place all the time” (89). He explains the fact that he does not fit in by saying that “people are dazzled by the Beautiful Things, struck dumb and given headaches, so he can’t altogether blame them” (89). Here, Outa characterizes his marginality as evidence that the community does not appreciate the value of his Beautiful Things. Like *Invisible Man*, however, *Playing in the Light* draws attention to the fact that this character has been sacrificed to preserve a social order based on racial codes.

When Outa, Brenda, and Marion part ways, he gives them a lantern made of coloured glass that he intends for them to share: “Brenda keeps the lantern on her lap, hold it up to the light so that red and green flicker on the dashboard. The lantern that is for both of them, that neither one nor the other will own” (92). Here, the novel offers an alternative to playing in the blinding light of white identity. Made from coloured glass, this lamp will offer a perspective apart from the traditional accounts of white-black relations. By giving the lamp to both Brenda and Marion, Outa also undermines traditional models of ownership and authorship. In the spirit of Outa’s collection of treasures, which have been collected over time and given new contexts, the lamp symbolizes a mode of storytelling less interested in origins than in border crossings and

connections. The symbolic nature of the lantern re-emerges near the end of the novel, when Brenda reveals how the light of this lantern enables her to write. The lamp provides a middle ground between darkness and light. While the multicolored glass will not make anything clear, its brightness leaves “no place for sadness” (91). Ultimately, the lamp brings new meaning to the phrase “playing in the light,” because it makes it unnecessary to choose between the secrecy and sadness of the dark past and the brilliance of the future. Like the proverbial rose-colored glasses, the multicolored lamp shows the world in a different light, privileging neither black nor white.

Wicomb uses images of feet and shoes to describe how each character makes literal contact with the ground and symbolic contact with their histories, genealogies, and spatial environments. As previously discussed, Outa Blinkoog scoffs at the very idea of shoes, preferring to navigate the South African soil barefoot. As the adverb “barefoot” implies, Blinkoog’s feet make direct contact with the ground since he wears no protective material. Outa’s unabashed nakedness contrasts sharply with Marion’s own prudishness, which she conveys in a later conversation with Brenda over a bowl of peaches: “She stares at her peach; she cannot bring herself to eat it. Naked, slippery – that’s me, that’s who I am, she thinks. Hurlled into the world fully grown, without a skin” (101). To eat the peach would be to accept the “naked, slippery” truth of her own origins; a truth that involves stripping away the “skin” of her racial performance and laying bare the scandalous and promiscuous mixing of blood that “hurled” her into the world. Unlike Blinkoog, Marion seems unable to walk barefoot – in fact, as soon as she seems to make contact with the land and people of her family’s past, her feet swell in seeming protest of any form ambulatory navigation: “Marion’s foot is swollen, taut as dough risen in the

confines of its pan...She rises to test it and shrieks with pain, Jesus Christ, I can't walk" (96). Marion's immediate concern is that she will be "stuck in this pious Moravian house, unable to drive herself home" (96). Having strayed into unfamiliar territory, Marion panics at the thought of having to stay there. While Marion would prefer to remain indifferent and stick to her own kind, her swollen feet bring her unexpectedly into the company of the committed. Whereas Marion acts and thinks primarily according to the principles of self-interest, Mrs. Murray and Brenda direct their sympathies and care towards the other. For example, Mrs. Murray "takes pity" on Marion, methodically treating the swollen foot (96). This ritual brings the true nature of Marion's entanglement to light in several ways. First, Mrs. Murray uses a basin given to her by Mrs. Karelse who, unknown to Mrs. Murray, is also known by Marion as Tokkie. Therefore, Marion's lead has not been false at all, and she actually has made contact with her past. Second, the care and attention Mrs. Murray pays to Marion's feet echoes the intimacies shared between Tokkie and Flip and between Helen and John Campbell. Finally, the footwashing also recalls a scene in J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* in which the magistrate cleans the barbarian woman's feet. This intertextual reference emphasizes Wicomb's point that despite the apparent differences reinforced by the apartheid regime, human relations in South Africa have always been predicated on intimacy.

In these relationships, the men massage and clean their wives' feet as a way of showing love. The recurring motif of foot washing ritual resonates with the symbolic function of foot washing in Christian demonstrations of devotion. Marion literally evokes this Christian tradition by uttering "Jesus Christ" as an expletive upon seeing her swollen foot. Marion proceeds to play the role of the martyr, viewing herself as a victim while

submitting herself to Brenda's and Mrs. Murray's attentions. Since Marion literally cannot walk on her own, Brenda must drive her home and stay the night. Whereas Marion is "panic-stricken" at the thought of being trapped in the home of another person, Brenda acts according to a perceived duty to respond to and engage with the needs of the other. Of her decision to drive, she asks herself "What choice does she have?" In addition, she feels compelled to confront the discoveries Marion made during the journey: "It's not Brenda's fault that she's been drawn into this situation, but now that she has, now that knowledge, however unwelcome, has been foisted on her, does she not have an obligation to engage with it, with Marion?" (98). Finally, when Brenda arrives at Marion's house, she frames the decision to stay as inevitable: "There is nothing to be done. Neither of them relishes the thought, but it is late and Brenda will have to stay the night" (99). In these passages, Brenda understands entanglement as an obligation to respond to the other. Thus, even though Marion thinks she has followed a "false lead" to Wuppertall, her swollen foot brings her into closer contact with those from whom she might otherwise have kept at a safe distance. Furthermore, she is placed into a position of dependence, causing her to rely on the aid of others. It is because of her swollen feet that Brenda drives the car home and stays the night with Marion.

In light of Marion and Brenda's encounter with Outa Blinkoog, the novel suggests that "play whites" do not have their feet planted firmly on the ground. When John and Helen construct their home as a stage for their performance of whiteness, they actually lose a vital means of connecting with the space they inhabit. The novel points out the irony of John and Helen's commitment to white identity, which is not static or natural but must be "cultivated" because it is too slippery to be defined:

No, there is no question of letting up. Just look how the world around them is being ordered, shaped according to colour, restricted: coloureds on a new voters' roll, job reservation, Group Areas Act – legislation upon legislation that proves how right they were.

Whiteness is without restrictions. It has the fluidity of milk; its glow far-reaching. It's up to them to make it work.

Which means that they sweep and scrub and brush, maintain a home of unforgiving hygiene, with floors that you can eat off, and a garden with soil freshly dug over, raked smooth in readiness for planting, for the labour of cultivation. (151)

According to this passage, “whiteness” is like “milk” because both have been appropriated, turned into commodities, and manipulated to signify far beyond any original meaning or context they may have had. What the passage does not point out so explicitly is that both whiteness and milk seem self-evident and essential, yet both actually require “work.” John and Helen commit themselves to domestic “hygiene” hoping that the process of ridding their home of dirt and disorder might also purge their lives of racial mixture. They control their environment so successfully that their efforts begin to resemble the way “the world around them is being ordered, shaped according to colour, restricted.” In other words, John and Helen’s dedication to domestic order reinforces the basic assumption made by apartheid logic that spatial arrangements can (and should) reflect racial identities. Throughout the novel, for example, Wicomb reminds readers of the common perception of coloured homes as cramped and unclean. Thus, by keeping their house clean, John and Helen hope to avoid being recognized as

coloured. Ironically, their obsessive cultivation of the ground actually prevents them from making full contact with the land. John reflects: “Vigilance is everything; to achieve whiteness is to keep on your toes” (152).

Marion’s expressed distaste for intimacy and uncleanness suggests that she has internalized apartheid’s prejudices against coloured identity. Marion scoffs at Brenda’s notions of friendship:

Some people, she retorts, grow out of their childish attachments. Marion supposes that it is because people live so closely together in the townships, bodies packed into cramped rooms – Like sardines? Brenda interjects mockingly – that they get so involved with the lives of others. It’s a defense mechanism, Marion says, presented as virtue. Material comfort would relieve people from such forced intimacy, such unhealthy attachments. (162)

In this passage, Brenda’s interjection highlights the similarity between Marion’s views on intimacy and the pervasive, racist correlation between overcrowding and licentiousness. The irony, of course, is that apartheid legislation imposes the very “cramped” conditions it later uses as evidence of racial and cultural inferiority. While Marion refers to “intimacy” degradingly as a “defense mechanism” and a product of material conditions, she fails to see her own rejection of intimacy as a defense mechanism against commitment. By living alone, she prevents – or so she thinks – getting “involved in the lives of others.” While the novel supports Marion’s view that spatial arrangements in South Africa have led to situations of entanglement, the novel also points out that entanglement can be destructive and productive. For example, even though Marion does not literally share a “cramped room” with Brenda, their lives and personal histories

become entwined. Their shared experiences do not necessarily result in friendship, but they do contribute to the production of stories.

Marion outwardly rejects the notion of a “queer situation” that would force her into an “unnatural” or “unhealthy” intimacy. While she may not share a “cramped room” with anyone, she cannot avoid the entanglements of shared “personal histories.” Intimacy is not a defense mechanism, but a natural and inevitable outcome of spatial practices in South Africa. The apartheid regime itself created a queer situation by bringing people together and driving them apart in often unexpected ways.

It is only by leaving home that Marion can begin to recognize herself in the other. It is during her trip to London that Marion becomes entangled with the words and language of her own country. While the mimetic language of travel brochures has no power over her, Gordimer’s words “take root” in her. Thus, while leaving home seems to embody a form of indifference, it actually enables a form of commitment. Marion’s travels create a queer situation that actually brings her into contact with home and enables her to recognize the other as one of the many versions of herself. The idea of self-reflection in *Playing in the Light* resonates with the image of the elevator in *The House Gun*. Like the elevator, Marion’s room in London is a claustrophobic space stripped of geographic specificity. Because Marion’s room lacks the parameters of a specific time or place, it places few demands on her representation of self. In South Africa, characters try to cover up the actual multiplicity of identities by claiming to be a single race and gender. When Marion leaves South Africa, she imagines herself plural rather than singular. In the South Africa that Marion leaves behind, the performance of identity requires the suspension of disbelief and the assumption that appearance equals reality. For example,

Wicomb refers to the act which states that a white person is a person who appears white (44). The act however also admits the possibility that the appearance of whiteness may conflict with the truth of identity. The racial codes and spatial patterns of South Africa prevent Marion from recognizing herself.

The passages about the “Betrayal of Annie Boshoff” can be compared to Gordimer’s observations about the “upholders of the colour bar” (“Great Problems” 133). Like Gordimer, Wicomb suggests that spaces in South Africa have been engineered to keep people apart. In “Great Problems in the Street,” Gordimer describes the “pretty suburban garden” as a “security measure” upheld by those who wish to stick to their “own kind” (133, 132). In *Playing in the Light*, Wicomb also focuses on the theme of security by calling attention to architectural barriers that re-enforce the physical and conceptual boundaries between self and other. Her representation of security in the domestic setting resonates with the rhetoric of security as mobilized by the South African Police in close collaboration with the National Party government.

The “Betrayal of Annie Boshoff” depicts the social consequences of intimacies that cross racial lines. When Mr. Boshoff admits that he is “coloured, a play-white,” he demonstrates the fragility of a system of classification based solely on appearances (194). Despite apartheid’s attempt to codify whiteness as a legal identity, Mr. Boshoff’s defection proves that whiteness already includes within itself that which it strives to purge and deny. Helen’s reaction in particular can be described as a form of abjection, in the sense that she must reject Mr. Boshoff’s behavior as shameful in order to construct and maintain her own identity as white: “And poor Mrs. Boshoff, Helen wondered aloud, betrayed by that rat – or had she known all along, herself guilty of immorality? In which

case, the family deserved the scandal, the just deserts of unlawful behavior. They had all been betrayed by the Boshoffs, the whole community, and Helen was sorry to say there was no question of Marion ever seeing Annie again” (194). While Helen uses the words “immorality” and “unlawful” as terms that can distinguish between right and wrong, the passage actually reveals these concepts to be relative. For example, Mr. Boshoff can only be “charged under the Immorality Act” if he continues to claim a white identity; his behavior is no longer illegal when he admits to being coloured (194). The white community consolidates itself by purging members who threaten its self-definition or who might expose the actual heterogeneity of whiteness.

Marion sat with her fingers plugged into her ears. She and Annie loved each other; they were more than sisters. They owned a joint scrapbook with their favorite pictures of ballet dancers and film stars and things. Helen said to forget it – that the family would never live down the scandal, the shame of it all. The Campbells could have nothing to do with them. (194)

In this passage, the young girls have yet to associate intimacy with strict binaries between self / other. Instead, they assume a collective identity based on a shared past. The “joint scrapbook” can be compared to the concept of the “seam,” which is another word for a coming together and a falling apart. In her review of Leon de Kock’s work, Sarah Nuttall refers to the seam as “the place where difference and sameness are hitched together – where they are brought to self-awareness, denied, or displaced into third terms” (5). In *Playing in the Light*, the scrapbook documents a form of entanglement based on sameness; the girls define themselves as closer than a same-gender familial bond. And

yet, the scrapbook also figures prominently in the process of differentiation, when Marion comes up against the “security” measures of race:

It was early on a Sunday morning. Marion knew, seconds before the quiet knock, that it was Annie; she jack-knifed out of bed and tiptoed past her parents’ room to open the front door. The children stood facing each other through the security gate. They wore identical pink nighties from Woolworths with chains of white daisies embroidered on the yokes...They did not speak; their eyes met briefly. Annie held out the scrapbook, passed it through the bars of the security gate, and turned to leave. Marion shut the door. Before returning to her bed, she dropped the scrapbook into the dustbin in the backyard. Marion was eight years old when she betrayed Annie Boshoff. (195)

Here, the security gate acts as an arbitrary boundary enforcing difference over sameness. Annie’s act of passing the scrapbook through the gate can be read as a gesture of hope that the relationship itself can cross over the prohibition imposed by Helen. While the bars of the security gate at least allow the girls to look at and recognize one another, their meeting is cut short when Annie turns away and Marion closes the door. These acts of indifference suggest that Marion and Annie cannot sustain a relationship based on notions of collectivity and a shared past. Marion essentially throws this shared past away when she puts the scrapbook in the trash. Relationships such as Marion and Annie’s, based on the mutual recognition of sameness, seem to have no place in a society based on distinguishing the self from the other. The irony, of course, is that Marion and her family members are *not* different from the Boshoffs; all of them are actually coloured. Helen

must *create* difference and reject the Boshoffs as immoral, shameful, and on the wrong side of the law in order to preserve her integrity as “play-white.”

Marion’s experience in England can be read as a revision of the popular genre of postcolonial fiction in which the migrant seeks to identify the new, foreign landscape as home. In “Imaginary Homelands,” Rushdie writes that

It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge – which gives rise to profound uncertainties – that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind. (428)

While Marion is not a writer, Rushdie’s account of the exile can shed light on Marion’s encounter with South African fiction. Like Rushdie, Marion looks at her homeland through the lens of “loss,” imagining as she reads Gordimer’s *The Conservationist* that “The hole in her chest seems to fill up with words” (190). Here, Marion attempts to replace the void created by her “physical alienation” from the land of South Africa with words that represent South Africa, thus acting out her “urge to reclaim” the “thing that was lost.” However, to use Rushdie’s terminology, Marion is “not capable of reclaiming” South Africa; instead, she participates in creating South Africa as a fictional, imaginary homeland. First, the South Africa that Marion encounters has already been mediated by the literary marketplace in the colonial metropolis. Marion does not read just any South

African novels, but rather those that the “handsome woman at Clarke’s bookshop chose for her” (189). Furthermore, the woman recommends *The Conservationist* because it meets English standards of literary taste: “the British gave it the Booker” (190). Thus, the version of South Africa that Marion encounters is one that has been deemed acceptable and marketable abroad. Despite the woman’s advice to read “a couple of novels from each decade, saying that that would give an overview, an idea of the country’s history,” Marion only reads novels by Nadine Gordimer and J.M. Coetzee (190). These canonical authors present Marion with only a narrow perspective on South Africa, as their works overshadow those by lesser known or non-white writers. Marion thinks that reading “the stories of her country” will help her understand her own identity and “get to know those dark decades” of her family’s and her country’s past. What Marion actually finds in England, however, is not herself or her country but the opportunity to reimagine herself in relation to the idea of home. It is actually by inhabiting the conditions of loss – rather than denying them – that Marion begins to reinvent herself:

Some would say that she might as well be in Cape Town, reading novels indoors, but there is something about being cocooned in a single room, about the bleakness of the days, that must be endured, like sitting an examination. It is a place in which to cry. Wantonly – for Helen, the mother, and for representations of herself, which are of course not herself and therefore permissible. In this room, with a rug across her knees like an old woman, the world imprints itself on her afresh; her days are rinsed in rain. (190)

This passage describes the single room as both a negative space and a nurturing womb. The word “cocooned” suggests that the room will enable Marion’s transformation into

something new. At the same time, the room is a melancholy place – one in which Marion abandons herself to darkness, sadness, and loss. According to the passage, Marion’s unrestrained mourning has a symbiotic relationship with her rebirth; in a room drenched in tears, “the world imprints itself on her afresh.” Like the “zero point” to which Gordimer refers in *The House Gun*, Marion’s single room offers a space to confront and contemplate the sufferings of the past while serving as the starting point for a different future. The word “endured” suggests that this future will move forward even as it bears the traces of that which has been lost. Thus, while Wicomb traffics in the trope of the migrant, depicting Marion as understanding her home by being elsewhere, Wicomb also points out the “imaginary” quality of this home.

Marion reads in order to bring her concept of self into conversation with her family history: “to get to know the dark decades when the Campbells were playing in the light” (191). However, neither *The Conservationist* nor *In the Heart of the Country* offer a straightforwardly realist narrative; they both use a stream of consciousness technique that emphasizes interiority. In these novels, Gordimer and Coetzee do not strive to reproduce a unit of South African space and time, but rather to dramatize how their characters perceive that space and time through the filters of their senses, emotions, and memories. Both *The Conservationist* and *In the Heart of the Country* do emphasize the importance of land and take up issues of ownership and inheritance. Reading these novels empowers Marion to take ownership of what she now sees as “her” country: “Marion looks forward to starting the next novel, *In the Heart of the Country*. She finds the title inspiring; she chooses to read it as her country having a real, live, throbbing heart. In this alien world, it pleases her to think of South Africa as her country. She is a colonial at

heart: it is with pride that she takes the book out of her bag (she has already read the first page), examines the back cover with its accolades and the photograph of a kindly author smiling encouragingly at the timid reader” (197). By changing Coetzee’s “the” into the possessive “her” Marion claims ownership of South Africa (or, rather, her *idea* of South Africa) and of the novel itself. While Marion’s newfound commitment to South Africa may seem to undermine her earlier indifference, she does not necessarily abandon the narcissism of colonial and apartheid ideology when she turns towards South Africa. For example, Marion takes “pride” not in the novel’s depth or artistry, but in its surfaces: the “first page,” the “back cover,” and the “photograph.” Here, it seems that Marion’s travels have provided the geographic and aesthetic distance necessary for her to appreciate South Africa as beautiful and as belonging to her. However, the version of South Africa that she consumes has been sold to her in London by a woman concerned with literary conventions of style and taste. Marion’s travels and reading practices literally take her further away from what Gordimer would refer to as the “grubby realities” of everyday life in South Africa. Nevertheless, the South Africa Marion reads about can still be read as a “real” place insofar as Marion sees “versions of herself” in the situations, settings, and characters (190). When she enters the fictional worlds of Gordimer and Coetzee, she enters a place not unlike Gordimer’s figural “desert,” which cannot be found “on the map of human relations” even though it contains the “trails connecting human destiny.”

Marion’s grammar of possession indicates that she identifies with characters that embody both the possessor and the possessed. For example, she sees herself both as “Mehring’s girl” and as a “colonial” (190, 197). However, Marion’s identification with Magda only occurs at the level of image. The main difference between her entanglement

with “Mehring’s girl” and Magda is that Gordimer’s words “take root” in her while she has been “lured” into identifying with Magda. (56/108/196).

Marion’s car accident brings her into contact with the other in a way that recalls the opening scene of Gordimer’s *The Pickup*. Marion hits a BMW that is unoccupied at the time, which allows her to justify leaving the scene of the accident before the owner returns: “Then Marion drives into the city centre herself to deliver tickets, and on the way back scrapes the side of a brand-new BMW. It is badly parked, but the accident is undoubtedly her fault. Oh, it is the last thing she needs; she cannot face an irate owner, and so hurriedly leaves her card with a scribbled Sorry before rushing back to her own car” (57). This passage raises the issue of complicity in the context of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings. The novel compares her avoidance of the BMW’s owner to her denial that whatever happened to Patricia Williams does not involve her. Thus, when she leaves the scene of the accident, she seeks to avoid entanglement not just with the individual who owns the BMW but with the broader South African community that has been victimized by apartheid. By calling attention to Marion’s “scribbled Sorry,” the novel critiques empty rhetorical gestures of apology and foreshadows the fact that Marion will ultimately have to “face” the owner of the BMW. Marion’s encounter with “Mr. Mkhize” can be read as a queer situation that undermines the hierarchical gender binary manifest in Marion’s relationship with Geoff. Whereas Geoff rushes to “protect” Marion from the “stranger,” Marion does not feel threatened by Mr. Mkhize and even invited him to lunch. When Marion “gives him her card,” she reaches across the boundaries of race and class in a way that she could not when she gazed at Annie Boshoff through the security gate of her childhood home.

By using symbols such as the security gate, Wicomb highlights the way that a novel's setting can function as a form of intertextuality. In "Setting, Intertextuality and the Resurrection of the Postcolonial Author," Wicomb points out that "more than supplementing character description, setting is the representation of physical surroundings that is crucially bound up with a culture and its dominant ideologies, providing ready-made, recognizable meanings. In other words, setting functions much like intertextuality (145-146). Here, Wicomb complicates a straightforwardly realist account of setting as a representation of place and suggests instead that setting conveys ideas of place while also working like a language. Wicomb also describes setting as a form of entanglement that brings together the ideas, stories, and languages of different times and places. For Wicomb, intertextuality and setting have a particular resonance for postcolonial writers:

To recap Roland Barthes: intertextuality, a condition of all writing, strikes a death blow to the author and so liberates the reader from author-centered, theological meanings...But for the postcolonial writer it is the transformative effect of intertextuality that is of significance. Frequently our settings in disjunction with citations from colonial texts produce postcolonial irony, and if we are doomed to echolalia it is also the case that repetition re-presents, reverses or revises, or simply asks the reader to reflect on indeterminate meanings produced by citations, meanings that destabilize received views. (146)

What Wicomb means is that the setting can represent real places and also question the dominant meanings and values associated with those places. Wicomb's observations about postcolonial irony provide a productive way to read *Playing in the Light* and

David's Story, which can too easily be read as emphasizing the failures of representation. To use Wicomb's phrase, the settings of both novels asks the reader to "reflect on indeterminate meanings...that destabilize received views" (146). The ending of *David's Story* in particular offers a critical perspective on both apartheid's policies of separate development and the post-apartheid ideology of non-racialism. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, the ANC rally brings together groups previously kept separate by apartheid legislation even as it brings the residue of segregation to light.

South African fiction in general, and that of Gordimer and Wicomb in particular, self-consciously reflects on the particular responsibilities of writers and readers in a society that has historically restricted freedom of expression and that is in the process of transitioning to democracy. The way that the ANC rally brings the politics of representation together with the ideas of democracy and commitment can be compared to Sartre's observations of the obligations facing the writer. Both Wicomb's novel and Sartre's essay suggest that writing itself embodies a form of commitment, especially under conditions that threaten freedom. In "What is Literature," Sartre argues that

One does not write for slaves. The art of prose is bound up with the only regime in which prose has meaning, democracy. When one is threatened, the other is too. And it is not enough to defend them with the pen. A day comes when the pen is forced to stop, and the writer must then take up arms. Thus, however you might have come to it, whatever opinions you might have professed, literature throws you into battle. Writing is a certain way of wanting freedom; once you have begun, you are committed, willy-nilly. (69)

Sartre's insistence on democracy as a necessary precondition for prose has a particular relevance in the South African context, as Gordimer points out in her 1963 essay "Censored, Banned, Gagged." Here, she writes that "no one can be well-read or well-informed or fitted to contribute to the culture and development of his own society in the democratic sense while he does not have absolutely free access to the ideas of his time as well as to the accumulated thought of the past, nor while, in particular, there are areas of experience in the life of his own society and country which, through censorship, are left out of his reading" (130-131). Like Sartre, Gordimer believes that when apartheid threatens freedom of expression, it also threatens the principles of democracy. In addition, Gordimer shares Sartre's notion that the writer must ultimately "take up arms" to defend these principles (Sartre 69). In their fiction, both Wicomb and Gordimer take up Sartre's fundamental questions about what the writer's commitment looks like and what implications it has in times of political struggle.

While Sartre notes that engaged or committed writer "may be impassioned," he also suggests that this writer "withdraws somewhat from his feelings, in short, that he has transformed his emotions into free emotions" (61). What Sartre describes is a certain aesthetic distance that must be achieved in order for the writer to convey his or her passions. In other words, the committed writer actually uses strategies of indifference. In *David's Story*, "Ouma, overcome by the beauty of it all, feels, first in her heart, the transformation, turning her inside out, turning her into a princess – yes, nothing short of a princess, waving her fist like a magic wand in this fairyland" (209). On the one hand, contemplating the "beauty of it all" transports Sarie away from the immediacy of her environment to a distant and unreal "fairyland." This state of transformation amounts to a

form of disengagement with the physical environment and seems to make Sarie indifferent to her surroundings. However, Sarie's transformation occurs simultaneously with her engagement in the political actions of the crowd: "Ouma zealously holds her left fist up, stamps her feet, oblivious of the beer being smuggled under her very nose" (209). Just as Sartre's reader becomes responsible for the book as soon as he or she opens it, Sarie becomes committed to the rally as soon as she arrives. Even as she performs her commitment with her body, her "heart" experiences a form of aesthetic withdrawal that removes her from the immediacy of time and space into a distant and seemingly unreal "fairyland." The passage gives this "fairyland" a more concrete form by immediately following the word "fairyland" with the words of the South African national anthem. At the ANC rally, Sarie experiences the new South Africa both from a state of active political engagement and a state of passive aesthetic withdrawal. From this dual perspective, the new South Africa embodies a physical landscape in the midst of turmoil and transition as well as an abstract concept of beauty. Here, Wicomb has used irony to point out the gaps between democratic ideals and political realities, but also to undercut the supposed chasm between political engagement and aesthetic contemplation. For Wicomb, the chasm is a space of ambiguity that can be appropriated simultaneously by those seeking to preserve old patterns and by those seeking a new social order.

VII. The Other Side of the Story

Like *David's Story*, *Playing in the Light* depicts forms of togetherness that work against binaries and forms of storytelling that revise notions of ownership, authorship, authenticity, and genealogy. Marion clings to the notion of genealogical history, announcing to Brenda: "I know my father's fucking story" (218). Here, Marion expresses the rather essentialist view that a story is like an heirloom and can be passed unaltered from one generation to the next. In addition, she privileges the biological family as a form of intimacy that automatically gives her access to her father's story. Brenda's response rejects the idea of stories as inheritance and widens the scope of intimate relations that can participate in the transmission of stories: "Actually, Brenda says, I suspect you don't." Brenda insists on a mode of narration that focuses on the other rather than on the self and that recognizes the impossibility of producing narrative truth. According to Brenda, "the story that should be written" is not her own, which is "the story of everyone else," but rather the story of Marion's father: "Now your father, there's a story – with his pale skin as capital, ripe for investment..." The words "capital" and "investment" suggest that writing Marion's father's story has something to offer the future. By contrast, Brenda sees her own story as "tedious." Brenda's position on storytelling challenges Marion's quest for self-knowledge and suggests that the future of narration lies in turning outward towards the other rather than inward towards the self.

Although Marion's expletive seems arbitrary, the noticeable repetition of the word "fucking" signals her anxiety about inappropriate forms of intimacy both past and present: the shameful act of miscegenation itself as well as the relationship between her father and Brenda. "Why don't you write your own fucking story," she asks Brenda,

implying that writers should not cross boundaries such as self / other or outside / inside. Brenda's scandalous claim is not only that she can, but that she should, write John's "inside" story from the "outside." Wicomb stages the writing process as an exchange of gifts; Brenda brings Marion's father a bottle of Brandy and keeps him company in exchange for his story. This model seems in keeping with the one inspired by Outa's lamp, which was intended to be shared and which offers a multicolored perspective.

While the ending does project a potential future direction for storytelling, it does not present a utopian vision of entanglement. Even as Brenda writes the story she feels should be told, her friendship with Marion seems to come to an end. After arguing with Brenda, Marion shuts the car door; this resonates with the earlier scene in which she closes the door between herself and Annie Boshoff. Wicomb's emphasis on closed doors can be compared to the scene in *The House Gun* in which Claudia and Herald marvel at the terrible beauty of South Africa from the hermetic isolation of their car. Like Claudia and Harald, Marion has been on a journey that has changed her perspective on her identity and her relationship to place. And yet, her failure to surrender her concept of self and orient herself towards the other leaves her playing in the dark.

Wicomb's fiction actually demonstrates a more complicated relationship between concepts such as the author, narrator, character, and reader than her non-fiction seems to imply. In a recent article on the importance of setting, Wicomb appears to conclude that constructing a "house of fiction in a foreign world...is a construction that promises to be none other than a folly." Here, Wicomb seems to re-enforce a binary understanding of concepts such as home and away, familiar and strange. In response to Wicomb, one might suggest that constructing a house of fiction in a familiar world might prove equally

impossible. Indeed, Wicomb's own fiction challenges the assumption that authors, narrators and / or characters have privileged access to and / or authority over the people and places in their immediate environment.

According to Brenda, it is neither possible nor desirable to follow the standard creative writing maxim to "write what you know." "Writing my own story, I know, is what someone like me is supposed to do, what we all do, they say, whether we know it or not, but Christ, what story do I have to tell?" Here, Brenda denies that the most powerful or effective forms of writing emerge from a desire to locate or replicate the self. To use Mieke Ball's terminology, Brenda's writing self occupies a concrete place; for Brenda, however, this place offers no narrative possibilities: "why would anyone want to write about them, invent something around such tedious lives? So that tedium can be converted into something improving? That, I say, is the business of God." (218). The problem, for Brenda, is that her place is too familiar. The job of the writer is not to turn inward, looking for significance in the "tedium" of the self and its surroundings, but to turn outward towards the other.

This ending can be read as a supplement to the notion of apparent authorial failure staged at the end of *David's Story*. The narrator seems to reject her project as impossible when she declares: I no longer acknowledge this scrambled thing as mine. In *Playing in the Light*, however, Brenda argues that the "story that should be written" is not "her own" at all. By writing Marion's father's story, Brenda highlights the folly of any attempt to represent a character fully or trace a family line. According to Brenda, the "lines" connecting father to daughter afford no more privilege than the "lines" connecting Brenda to Bonteheuwel. Instead of following the standard generic approach, Brenda

follows John's advice, given at Marion's welcome-home party: "Man, in this New South Africa we can play at anything, mix 'n match, talk and sing any way we like. Because of freedom, he explains" (213). The word "play" here suggests that in the New South Africa writers have the freedom to depart from standards such as autobiographical or protest writing and to mix genres. Freedom, in this passage, means freedom from notions of essence and freedom from fixed genres of speaking, knowing, writing, and thinking. For Wicomb, this kind of freedom is not incompatible with the concept of intersubjectivity, which means that Marion's father's story is also the story of Marion, Brenda, and South Africa.

John's comments about "mix 'n match" and Brenda's commitment to storytelling suggest that the concept of entanglement can work as a metaphor for both local and global narrative practices. First, Brenda rejects models of filiation, genealogy, and genre in favor of models of affiliation and intertextuality. She feels no obligation to write what she knows, and chooses instead to tell John's story. This model of storytelling has the added benefit of displacing the primarily masculine model of protest fiction made almost canonical during the resistance years. Second, Brenda establishes a new relationship of intimacy between the writer and the subject based on notions of hospitality. In *Playing in the Light*, Wicomb advocates for a form of give-and-take rather than notions of ownership.

Despite its apparent focus on storytelling, *Playing in the Light* does not privilege textuality at the expense of history and politics. When Brenda mentions that she can only write by the light of the Harlequin's lamp, she indicates that storytelling in South Africa is intimately connected to the land. When Outa gives Marion and Brenda the lamp, he

also bestows the wisdom that the story of South Africa is actually made up of many stories and journeys of its multi-coloured people. Narrative entanglement, then, is actually an aspect of historical entanglement; Brenda writes in light of, not despite or outside of, history. Wicomb's point is that South Africa's literary tradition has emerged from local literatures and histories even as it is connected to international traditions and global processes like colonialism.

This claim resonates with the overall topics of entanglement and the "queer situation" because it suggests that writing itself has the potential to exceed the false binaries of text / history and aesthetics / politics. Because history and politics shed light on the text, and the text offers a perspective on history and politics, it is not necessary to see them as polar opposites. Wicomb depicts the relationship between the text and history through the proxies of characters like David and Dulcie; the story of one is also the story of the other because they are drawn to one another and rely on one another even though they sometimes antagonize one another. Wicomb also succeeds in eroding the distinction between commitment and indifference by engaging with aspects of South African life and culture without necessarily endorsing a particular political position. By writing intimately about South Africa while critiquing the ideologies on either side of apartheid, Wicomb adopts what Derek Attridge calls a "critical distance" (158). As Attridge rightly points out, Wicomb's vested interest in the local does not prevent her from analyzing the major contradictions at the heart of racism and the liberation movement alike. In "Zoë Wicomb's Home Truths," Attridge writes that *David's Story* "conveys the texture of South African life – and in particular, the life of the coloured community, or rather communities – and keeps a critical distance from some of the most powerful myths about

the liberation struggle at work in the post-apartheid imaginary” (158). According to Attridge, Wicomb draws on the tradition of realism to depict coloured identity while also employing deconstruction to analyze the languages and discourses of power. By using the word “texture,” Attridge seems to imply that Wicomb has successfully translated the three-dimensional quality of “South African life” into the written form. However, Attridge is careful to point out that Wicomb’s project is not straightforwardly realist, and that her fiction remains critical of concepts such as nationalism, genealogy, and origins (158-159). Attridge’s comments here support the texturealist approach I advocated for in the Introduction to this dissertation, because reading Wicomb requires noting the importance of the land and history as well as the discourses through which those categories have been produced. Attridge’s observations also offer a productive way to read *Playing in the Light* as a novel that adopts a “critical distance” towards protest fiction. In place of this prior narrative model, Wicomb offers a form of storytelling based on familiarity with the land and compassion for its people. Brenda in particular rejects a genealogical approach to storytelling in favor of a model based on sympathy and friendship. It is telling that Brenda uses words like “capital” and “investment” to describe her project, because these are terms that require action. Brenda does not assume that she has a right to tell a certain kind of story simply because she lives in a certain place or was born a certain color. Instead, she sees her writing project as a series of conscious decisions that, like an investment, have little bearing on the present but will hopefully become more valuable in the future. Brenda’s act of investment can be compared to Gordimer’s understanding of commitment in the sense that Brenda orients herself to the future without necessarily knowing what that future will look like.

Brenda's storytelling suggests that entanglement can take on new meanings in the New South Africa. Under apartheid, the term entanglement could be used to describe the inevitable mixings between different races, cultures, and genders despite apartheid's preoccupation with separate development. Entanglement in that context often carried negative connotations because of the potential repercussions for violating apartheid's laws. In the New South Africa, Brenda has the freedom to choose entanglement by involving herself in the life of a man whose story takes her outside the boundaries of her own "race" and "place." In this context, entanglement has productive consequences for the future of the nation; to use Brenda's terms, it is an "investment" in the New South Africa.

Comparing the final scenes of both novels suggests that entanglement can also signify the relationships between author, narrator, character, and reader. Wicomb defines these roles in ways that allow her to explore issues of narrative and ownership: who will write (and own) the stories of the New South Africa? What (and who) will be their subjects? Ultimately, Wicomb suggests that standard generic forms, such as autobiography and protest writing, will not be able to accommodate the shifting identities of the new landscape. And yet, as her focus on the concepts of ownership and investment imply, the role of the author cannot be completely eliminated. Instead, Wicomb advocates for a more symbiotic relationship between author, narrator, character, subject, and text – one that recognizes the social value of storytelling even in (or because of) the absence of truth. This is not to say that Wicomb does not see the value of concepts like truth, fact, origins and history, but rather to suggest that she adopts a certain amount of indifference towards them in order to commit to a future in which they can be redefined

CHAPTER 3

Beyond the Black/White Binary

In the introduction and first chapter of my dissertation I sought to undo the binary opposition between Nadine Gordimer and J.M. Coetzee, two of the most canonical figures in South African writing. In the second chapter, I then shifted my focus to Zoë Wicomb, who can be considered as both a protégé and critic of this earlier generation. Each of the concept-metaphors I used in these chapters has its own critical genealogy; and, while terms such as the queer situation and entanglement can be traced back to particular authors and contexts, they also have implications beyond the “original” time and place of their articulation. In my first two chapters, I drew on Nadine Gordimer’s notion of the queer situation to analyze her approach to violence and racial difference. When I speak of the queer situation and the queering of apartheid, I am not necessarily using the word queer in the same sense as theorists such as Judith Butler have in mind. Instead, I read the queer situation as the literary analogue for socio-political situations of entanglement that bring differences together in unexpected and unpredictable ways.

Although critics commonly associate the term entanglement with Glissant’s arguments against essentialism in the Caribbean context, the term lends itself well to other times and geographies where ideologies of racial purity crack under the pressure of race as a lived experience. “Uprooting” concepts such as the queer situation and entanglement from their original sources makes sense for reading fiction by Gordimer and Wicomb, whose work argues against notions of literary and racial purity. I translate the queer situation and entanglement into literary metaphors not just for the mixed identities depicted *in* the texts but for the mixed identities *of* the texts, which draw from

various international genres and traditions. While I read the queer situation and entanglement as analogous, I concede that they cannot necessarily be read as synonyms. For Gordimer, the queer situation provides an opportunity for ethical engagement in a South African Society that encourages disengagement. Gordimer articulates her sense of ethics in literary terms, asking how readers and writers should and can be responsible to one another and to their historical situation. Nuttall, by contrast, is less interested in the ethical dimensions of difference than in the sociological impact of art and literature that engages with South Africa's political, social, and historical landscape. Despite these apparent differences, the ideas of the queer situation and entanglement can perform similar work as metaphors for how binary oppositions break down. Here, in my third chapter, my aim is to explore further the economies of difference that are particular to South Africa and the system of apartheid, and yet link South Africa to a global system of inequality based on race, gender, and class.

This final chapter will focus on the cultural milieu of Islam and the ethnic designation of Chinese as categories that are not fully accommodated by apartheid discourse. In the first case, Islam was racialized according to an Afrikaner nationalist ideology that was fundamentally Christian. In the second case, the designation of Chinese placed pressure on the already ambiguous category of "coloured" and stressed the tenuous nature of apartheid's racial definitions. I will begin with a reading of Darryl Accone's *All Under Heaven* (2004), which depicts Accone's family history through a series of travel narratives set in China, South Africa, and the sea in between. I will end with an analysis of Rayda Jacobs' *Eyes of the Sky* (1996) and *Confessions of a Gambler* (2007), which focus on the notion of banishment in both rural and urban South African

spaces. The literature of these under-represented authors underscores the fact that South Africa was multiracial and multicultural at its founding moment, and that apartheid functioned at best as a discursive fiction aimed at keeping groups apart. By engaging with tropes of space and mobility, both Accone and Jacobs show that the strictures of apartheid belied the flow of ideas, commodities and people across geographic, cultural, religious, and linguistic boundaries. For example, Accone's *All Under Heaven* underscores the paradoxical logic of forced removals; while apartheid legislation controlled the movement of populations within different areas, it often specified grace periods before strict enforcement. Accone points out that apartheid's system of forced mobility necessarily operates according to the exceptions: the grace periods, the buffer zones, and the loopholes. According to Accone, apartheid's disciplinary measures of constraint produce spaces that are heavily policed as well as those that remain relatively un-articulated; it is from the latter that Accone can think about ethnicity outside of apartheid.

I do not suggest that Accone and Jacobs depict ethnic or religious identities that *entirely* escape apartheid discourse, since Foucault has taught us that it is not possible to stand outside of power relations. Instead, I will argue that the very structure of apartheid allowed, rather than prevented, the imagining of in-between spaces. While apartheid is of course a specifically South African power dynamic, I suggest that the logic of forced mobility permits a comparison with the literature of other global postcolonial contexts, such as that of Australia or the United States. While I will not neglect how each literary work engages with elements of South African culture, history, and geography, my readings will provide productive ways to re-read the more canonical South African

literary tradition and situate all South African literature in a broader context. In addition, my readings will participate in the conversation already begun in the vast archive of scholarship on Chinese and Muslim migratory practices and identity. It is not possible here to give a detailed account of this body of work, but it is important to point out the ways in which my own work intersects with that of others. For example, in *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living Between Asia and the West*, Ien Ang writes from what she calls a “hybrid point of view” that looks “beyond identity and difference towards a more dynamic concern for togetherness-indifference – a crucial issue for cultural politics in the twenty-first century” (viii). This concept of “togetherness-indifference” can be compared to the way I discussed commitment and indifference in my chapters on Gordimer and Wicomb. As I noted there, indifference signifies a moral economy of “setting apart” that is more than a mere precursor to commitment because it suspends the fundamental act of differentiation so essential to regimes like apartheid. While of course the scholarship on Chinese and Muslim migration and identity focuses on a broad range of issues, it tends to share Ang’s emphasis on the value of indifference as a moral economy and the crucial position of being “in” difference or inhabiting a “hybrid point of view” (vii). Ang understands the negative connotations of hybridity that have accrued over time, but maintains that “hybridity, here, should not be dismissed pejoratively as the mere contingent and ephemeral, equated with lack of commitment and political resoluteness, but should be valued, in James Clifford’s (ibid.: 366) words, as a ‘pragmatic response, making the best of (often bad) situations...in limited historical conjunctures’” (3). The concept of “togetherness-indifference” and “hybridity” runs throughout my readings of Jacobs and Accone, who inhabit an in-between space that allows them to highlight the

contradictions in the dominant discourses of their own, so-called “native” cultures” and the regime of apartheid.

Because this in-between space has both cultural and material dimensions, it can be compared to what Foucault has called “heterotopias” (“Of Other Spaces” 24). Foucault defines heterotopias as “counter-sites” that bring together seemingly opposed elements of culture (24). He provides the example of the stage, an apparently confined space which nonetheless represents many other times and spaces (24). Of the six principles of heterotopias Foucault outlines, the one most relevant to my analysis is the fourth: “The heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time” (26). Foucault refers to cemeteries, which emerge from the “absolute break” that is death. In my view, the heterotopia might also be said to begin with a radical temporal break such as regime change. As I discussed in relation to Gordimer and Wicomb, the transition from apartheid created a zero-point which juxtaposed the views and practices of the old generation with the new. If we understand this zero-point as a heterotopia in Foucault’s sense, we are reminded that periods of transition are not necessarily voids into which various values, people, and things can simply be placed. Instead, periods of transition create spaces where elements of apartheid coexist with elements of democracy and where groups of people previously kept apart come together in unexpected ways. And, since these groups of people have always been heterogeneous, post-apartheid spaces can be considered doubly heterotopic: in-between spaces where hybrid identities come together *in difference*.

The texts I have chosen by Darryl Accone and Rayda Jacobs invite readings that emphasize problems of form, style, and genre. For example, I read Darryl Accone’s *All*

Under Heaven as fiction even though it employs the formal strategies of a non-fictional memoir or family history. Rayda Jacobs' novel *Eyes of the Sky*, in turn, both revisits and critiques the South African farm novel. Finally, in Jacobs' *Confessions of a Gambler*, confession and autobiography offer formal avenues for confronting and challenging categories of space and identity. A narrow formal analysis of Accone and Jacobs might point out how their texts either conform to or deviate from generic expectations. This line of interpretation would read *All Under Heaven* as drawing on the language of genealogy, history, and identity in order to trace origins and outline a linear trajectory. *Eyes of the Sky*, in turn, would be seen as mobilizing familiar pastoral tropes in order to stage the emergence of native life into the colonial myth of land possession. Finally, *Confessions of a Gambler* would be read as using the conventions of confession to perform the 'truth' of female Muslim identity. In this chapter, however, I suggest that Accone and Jacobs see categories such as race and literary genre as always invaded, interrupted, and deconstructed by what Derrida would call the "dangerous supplement" (*Grammatology* 141). In his essay on Rousseau, Derrida defines the "dangerous supplement" as a category that undermines "conceptual oppositions" such as presence / absence, inside / outside, and writing / speech (145). However, the dangerous supplement does more than just challenge binary oppositions. Derrida's point is really about the ambivalence of the gesture/move of adding something to an existing structure: once an addition is made, it changes everything, including the structure itself; hence what seems "superfluous" at first becomes "necessary." Accone and Jacobs point out a similar paradox within the apartheid economy of difference, which forced non-whites to the margins of society. At the same time, apartheid required the presence of non-whites to supply the labor force

and to serve as a benchmark for defining white identity. It is this paradoxical state – being both integral to a social system and denied the basic rights of living in that system – that invites comparison with Derrida’s dangerous supplement. In addition, Accone and Jacobs share Derrida’s interest in the potential for upsetting the system altogether. Even as apartheid acts upon the characters by defining their identities and spatial practices, they act upon apartheid, changing it from the inside out.

In the first section, I discuss Accone’s presentation of coloured identity as a dangerous supplement to the classificatory intentions of apartheid legislation. Because Accone traces the local roots of Chinese identity while also focusing on migration and the diaspora, his memoir can be brought into a productive dialogue with Foucault’s understanding of genealogy. According to Foucault, the “search for descent is not the erecting of foundations: on the contrary, it disturbs what was previously considered immobile; it fragments what was thought unified; it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself” (“Nietzsche” 147). To invoke Foucault’s language, Accone “fragments” and “shows the heterogeneity” of what he calls the “Chinese Self” in South Africa. It is only by fragmenting this “Self” that Accone is able to get around the seeming contradiction between concepts like entanglement and more essentialist accounts of identity. While the “Chinese Self” might appear to outsiders as universal and unified, Accone explains that those who identify (or are identified) as Chinese have very different historical trajectories, different social practices, and speak different languages and dialects. The reason it is possible for Accone to speak of a “Chinese Self” at all is because discourses such as apartheid are predicated on construing identity as internally coherent.

Like Accone, Jacobs highlights the historical entanglements like migration and slavery upon which South Africa was founded in order to argue that it is not possible to talk about separate, self-contained identities. In addition, she suggests that apartheid has not been the *only* divisive force in identity formation, because groups like Muslim South Africans were cosmopolitan before even arriving on the continent. Here, Jacobs would agree with an observation made by Robert C. H. Shell in a chapter on the history of Islam in Southern Africa. Writing about the Muslim community in South Africa, Shell argues that “one of South Africa’s oldest, and indeed most independent of communities, has been internally divided for most of its distinguished and sometimes glorious history” (343). This is not to downplay the significant impact of apartheid on Muslim identity, but rather to push against the tendency to interpret the identities of marginalized groups only in relation to those in power. Hall’s point, like Jacobs’, is that Muslim communities have rich histories and traditions that should be considered in their own right, not just through the lens of apartheid. For example, *Eyes of the Sky* focuses on the native presence on the land and miscegenation as tropes that undermine white narratives of racial purity and challenge the self-containment of the farm. Whereas earlier authors such as Olive Schreiner arguably depict the veld as empty of native inhabitants and abandoned by God, Jacobs renders visible the trails that connect seemingly separate destinies and unearths the specters of racial violence that continue to haunt the land. Finally, I argue that *Confessions of a Gambler* articulates female Muslim identity, homosexuality, AIDS, and addiction in ways that suggest the discontinuity of identity.

By invoking terms such as the dangerous supplement, archaeology, and genealogy, I do not mean to conclude that these novels merely celebrate difference and

heterogeneity or that they completely resist the master tropes of history and genre. Nor do I suggest that the novels construct the supplement as always already silenced or repressed by regimes of power. Instead, I highlight Derrida's insistence that the supplement, as the undecidable, puts the very binary of freedom and repression under erasure. The way that the supplement frustrates binary modes of thinking provides a productive way to push against readings of South African literature according to strict materialist or discursive agendas. In my readings, I suggest that focusing on space and identity can bridge the gap between these two seemingly incommensurable approaches to literature. By drawing on notions of archaeology and architecture, I highlight the importance of land and the built environment in South Africa. By turning my attention to form, I recognize the ways in which contestations over space and land are entangled in the politics of representation. My archaeology of architecture, in other words, seeks to tease out the ways that literary forms dramatize their engagement with spaces and places that can only be made available to us as readers in textual form.

Derrida, who uses deconstruction to demonstrate the ruptures and inconsistencies already present in concepts such as the dangerous supplement. In the introduction to her translation of Derrida's *Dissemination*, Barbara Johnson explains that

In French, the word *supplément* has two meanings: it means both 'an addition' and 'a substitute.' Rousseau uses this word to describe both writing and masturbation. Thus, writing and masturbation may *add to* something that is already present, in which case they are *superfluous*, and/or they may *replace* something that is *not* present, in which case they are *necessary*. Superfluous and

necessary, dangerous and redemptive, the supplement moves through Rousseau's text according to a very strange logic. (xiii)

In Derrida's essay on Rousseau, the dangerous supplement refers specifically to masturbation, a form of sexuality relegated to the margins of normative behavior. In general, however, the dangerous supplement works as a synonym for other undecidable terms such as the *pharmakon* and *différance*. Using metaphors of architecture, Derrida describes systems of discourse as structures haunted by the ghostly presence of the supplement; he also describes the supplement as a virus internal to an externally healthy and coherent body. If Le Corbusier's architect can be read as the director of troops in a war of forms, then Derrida's dangerous supplement can be read as an internal insurrection that frustrates the driving intention of the director's plan and prevents any unity of morale.

While the philosophical, architectural, and linguistic perspectives of Foucault, Le Corbusier and Derrida are admittedly quite different, they share an interest in the connections between power and aspects of culture such as archeology, architecture, and language. Their views can be productively compared to the way writers like Accone and Jacobs view social and literary spaces as shaped by the discourse and practice of apartheid. And, while Foucault, Le Corbusier and Derrida may seem more relevant to the Western European context than South Africa, all three thinkers have contributed productively to postcolonial studies in general and South African studies in particular. For example, Foucault's theories have been consistently invoked by postcolonial scholars interested in the intersections of knowledge and power. For his part, Le Corbusier had a lasting impact on the way that South African cities were designed. In a recent article for

the design website *The Design Observer Group*, Lisa Findley and Liz Ogbu argue that “Le Corbusier’s concept of temporary workforce housing, presented in the 1922 utopian proposal *Ville Contemporaine*, inspired the white South African vision of the positive yet controlled movement of a black population as temporary labor” (Findley and Ogbu). Derrida, in turn, has explicitly addressed the implications of deconstructive practices within the realm of South African politics. In a heated exchange with Anne McClintock and Rob Nixon in the 1986 volume of *Critical Inquiry*, Derrida argues that “the word” apartheid should not be separated from its “history” as a racist regime (159). Despite McClintock and Nixon’s claim that Derrida’s reading of the word apartheid has little “strategic value,” postcolonial scholars continue to draw from Derrida’s work (140). These brief examples reinforce Said’s overall message that intellectual ideas are always already global, even when they seem to apply to particular places and times.

Gaurav Desai’s use of Derrida in *Subject to Colonialism: African Self-Fashioning and the Colonial Library* demonstrates the value of deconstruction for postcolonial projects that seek to undo the binary logic at the heart of discourses on race, gender, and class. In his introduction, Desai delineates the relevance of the dangerous supplement in particular:

As Derrida elaborates, the dangerous supplement is that part of a given binary structure that is at first relegated to the outside, to the margin, to the position of inferiority, but works its way to the very center of the dichotomy, putting under erasure the earlier political hierarchy of the binary. Thus, for instance, in his various readings, Derrida shows how Woman, the supposedly subjugated figure of the male/female binary, begins to emerge in Nietzsche’s thinking as the carrier

of truth and power; or again, writing, often thought of as a debased form of speech in Western logocentric thought, often appears in the texts of Ferdinand de Saussure and Claude Lévi-Strauss as always already structurally implicit in oral societies. (10)

For Desai, postcolonial texts operate as dangerous supplements to the “hierarchy” between the “margin” and the “center.”

In this chapter, the concept of the dangerous supplement is useful for my focus on less canonical, less well-known authors. The dangerous supplement, as Derrida defines it, both adds to and replaces that which is considered dominant in a given binary opposition. For example, Darryl Accone and Rayda Jacobs can be seen as “adding” to or supplementing the black/white binary with their perspectives on coloured (specifically Chinese and Muslim) identity. In addition, Accone and Jacobs can be seen as “replacing” the black/white binary.

Coetzee and Gordimer represent the most canonical figures in South African literature, Wicomb, Jacobs and Accone represent an increasingly popular though still less well-known generation of writers. Wicomb can partly be viewed as a protégé of Coetzee in the sense that she shares his linguistic preoccupations. At the same time, Wicomb also places herself explicitly in dialogue with Gordimer in particular with her predecessor’s representations of women. As I have been arguing throughout this dissertation, the textualist/materialist divide is not particularly helpful for reading the nuances of South African writing. In addition, the South African example is not only particular, but is also always already connected to the global. Both Gordimer and Wicomb speak to questions of Globalism in their biographies as well as their literary works. While Gordimer herself

was born and has remained in South Africa, she has repeatedly referred to her family as one of immigrants. As a white South African who opposed apartheid but could not find full acceptance in the black community, Gordimer felt herself exiled, a “minority within a minority” (“Living in the Interregnum” 384). While Gordimer intends for her position of exile to be read metaphorically, she sympathized with those for whom exile was not a choice. In addition, she spoke publicly against others like Coetzee who chose to leave South Africa during its most violent period.

Accone and Jacobs can be compared to other South African writers like Ivan Vladislavic, whose work does not fit neatly into categories of realism/non-realism or fiction/non-fiction. In addition to his work as a journalist, Vladislavic has produced short stories, novels, and inter-disciplinary texts mainly set in Johannesburg. Darryl Accone also began his career as a journalist, eventually writing the memoir I read closely in this chapter. Accone and Vladislavic in particular challenge apartheid’s white/black binary. Just as the category of white cannot accommodate Vladislavic’s Croatian background, the category of coloured cannot accommodate the complexity of Chinese identity in South Africa. As Accone points out, apartheid defined Asian identity in conflicting and confusing ways that changed over time, such that his great grandmother was able to reclassify her family from coloured to white merely by filling out some paperwork.

Rayda Jacobs was born in Cape Town just one year before Wicomb. Like Wicomb, Jacobs left South Africa at the height of the resistance to apartheid, emigrating to Toronto. While her first collection of short stories was published there in 1994, she returned to South Africa in 1995 and published her first novel *Eyes of the Sky*. She has remained in South Africa since then, publishing six more novels in addition to directing

and starring in a film version of her novel *Confessions of a Gambler*. Like Gordimer, Wicomb, Coetzee and Vladislavic Jacobs cultivates a public persona that makes it difficult to classify her work as either fiction or non-fiction. In her blogs, Jacobs voices her views on literature, feminism, Cape Muslim culture and South African life in general. A review of her film notes that it is not clear whether Jacobs has intended to produce an “honest” account of Cape Muslim culture. While this review comes from the public rather than the academic realm it still points towards the very real difficulty of classifying Jacobs’ work. Though *Confessions of a Gambler* is obviously marketed as a novel, it contains elements of a non-fiction confessional much like those written by writers during the apartheid era who sought to document their experiences of that regime. Thus while Jacobs can be read alongside her contemporaries like Wicomb, she can also be placed in a broader tradition of documentary-style writing by authors as diverse as Breyten Breytenbach, Bloke Modisane, and even J.M. Coetzee. *Confessions of a Gambler* is at once a novel, a documentary, a memoir, and an adventure tale.

Through their own travels and in the content of their work, both Accone and Jacobs are already in dialogue with the international scene. Accone’s memoir actually takes the reader on board the ships that travel between China to South Africa, using the ship as a metaphor for the multiple crossings his family encounters even on dry land. For her part, Jacobs draws equally from local, specific literary traditions like the *plaasroman* and more global genres like the confessional and adventure tale. Together, Accone and Jacobs focus on the worldly aspects of South African spaces, identities, and modes of writing.

For both Accone and Jacobs, the regional or national is not incompatible with the global. In a sense, Accone and Jacobs accomplish in their writing what other writers such as Achille Mbembe have done through theirs, which is to attack notions of essentialism that still adhere to accounts of African identity. In addition, Accone and Jacobs demonstrate that signifiers such as “apartheid” can bear resonance with international contexts, and that racism and discrimination do not end with apartheid. As I mentioned in the introduction, theorists such as Derrida and Laclau make it possible to argue that apartheid be retained as the signifier for what must constantly be repudiated. In other words, writers such as Accone and Jacobs keep the term alive as a signifier of everything we should work against. At the same time, these authors draw our attention to issues that an exclusive focus on apartheid may have eclipsed, such as issues of religion, gender inequality and AIDS. The tragic death of Beeda’s son serves as a constant reminder that South African identity has not always been nor will it always be exclusively defined by apartheid.

It would be easy to read *All Under Heaven* sociologically, as offering a “window” to the experiences of Chinese South Africans during apartheid. The text seems to invite such a reading by presenting itself as a memoir, a genre typically associated with the conventions of realism. By prefacing the text with a family tree Accone also foregrounds the concept of familial genealogy and suggests that the forthcoming narrative will follow the linear lines of blood and plot.

Despite being categorized as non-fiction, *All Under Heaven* can actually be compared to Wicomb’s novel *David’s Story*, which was published only a few years earlier and which also foregrounds the concepts of genre and genealogy. Both *All Under*

Heaven and *David's Story* offer examples of how South African writing uses strategies of both realism and non-realism to point out how life in South Africa cannot be represented in any straightforward, unmediated way. At the same time, these texts fight the notion that there is nothing beyond or outside of representation by calling attention to the measurable impact of apartheid and by focusing on actual people, places, and events. Wicomb acknowledges South Africa's history of racial entanglement and its effects on the nation's social and geographical landscape while also deconstructing essentialist ideas about race and gender. Likewise, Accone offers a historical account of Asian migration to South Africa that also challenges the primacy of the historical. Accone's characters actively question their place within a seemingly static society and reject the rigid labels and spatial boundaries imposed upon them by apartheid. For Accone, even though race seems to be a social fact in South Africa because it has dominated social relations, it is actually a social fiction dramatized by performance. In a way that resonates with *David's Story*, *All Under Heaven* supplements the narrowly-focused discourses of apartheid and nationalism with a plurality of narrative voices spanning multiple generations. Accone's story directly contests the ideology of separate development by suggesting that the national has always been international and that South Africa has accrued meaning as a place in part through its relationships with other places. While Accone's mode of storytelling can be seen as particular to South Africa, the way he casts South Africa as both exceptional and part of the diaspora places him in conversation with discourses such as post-nationalism, cosmopolitanism and globalization.

I. Darryl Accone and the Dispersal of the Chinese Self in South Africa

In terms of subject-position, Accone brings a number of specificities as South African-born Chinese (classified “coloured” under apartheid) and as a writer who came of age after apartheid’s demise. He strategically marks the diasporic connection by privileging concepts of ethnic identity, translation, travel and assimilation. What this means is that even though Accone represents a particular tradition of lesser-known “coloured” South African writers, his concerns range beyond the national. Like Gordimer and Wicomb, Accone points out the limitations of thinking of identity in binary terms as either black or white. For Accone, as for Gordimer and Wicomb, there can be no such thing as a pure racial identity, particularly in a nation like South Africa that has been multicultural from its founding moment and that has a rich, long history of immigration and international migration. While Accone's account of Chinese identity in South Africa can be read alongside literary traditions that are specific to South Africa, his writing also offers a perspective on well-known concepts such as “routes” and “roots” that are part of a more global diasporic vocabulary (Gilroy 133). In addition, through his emphasis on the performative dimensions of identity, Accone shares key theoretical concerns with disciplines such as gender and postcolonial studies. Finally, Accone takes part in larger debates about literary genres and the nature of ethnic identity. *All Under Heaven* combines the formal strategies of fiction and non-fiction to emphasize the socially constructed nature of ethnic identity and call attention to the practices of “affiliation” that accompany those of “filiation” (Said 23). Accone’s point is that neither writing nor identity are static categories inherited by the past; instead, they are dynamic processes that engage with the past and participate in making the future.

Accone's varied career places him in league with a diverse group of South African writers whose background and training in language has influenced not only the way they write, but also the way they are read and received. It is hard to read Coetzee without considering his education in linguistics, or to read Gordimer without taking her relatively isolated childhood into account. Vladislavic brings his experience as a journalist to life in his essays, short stories, and novels, which feature characters and plots driven by the ambiguity of words. Phaswane Mpe's fiction focuses on the particular demands facing South African writers while referring to canonical literary works such as *Jude the Obscure*. Like Vladislavic, Accone worked as a journalist, and his editorial career coincided with South Africa's most turbulent years prior to the transition to democracy. It therefore comes as no surprise that Accone is interested in the role language plays in constructing identity. In his article " 'Ghost People': Localising the Chinese Self in an African Context," Accone contests the perception of the Chinese identity in South Africa as "homogenous" (267). The way Accone theorizes the "Chinese Self" brings to mind Foucault's account of genealogy as that which "disturbs what was previously considered immobile; it fragments what was thought unified; it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself" ("Nietzsche" 147). Accone writes: "Given the vast heterogeneity of China – race, ethnicity, language and culture being areas of ceaseless contestation – it is extremely difficult to define the Chinese self. When that Self is dispersed and diffused by emigration, acculturation and globalization, definitions become even more intractable" (257). What Accone means is that the Chinese self cannot be traced to an origin because what appears to be the origin is actually a site of "ceaseless contestation." Here, Accone gestures towards the inevitable failure of his

own stated project, that of “Localising the Chinese Self,” due to the fact that the self always already participates in globalization. Like Foucault’s concept of genealogy, which “opposes itself to the search for origins,” Accone’s account offers a history of identity as “difficult to define,” “dispersed,” and “diffused” (Foucault 140, Accone 257). Accone uses the language of migration to emphasize the fact that identity never stays in one place; instead, it *moves*, crossing definitional, national, and cultural boundaries. In the section “Migration Trajectory,” Accone outlines the diverse spatial practices, cultural backgrounds, and primary languages that invalidate the concept of a unitary Chinese identity.

Accone does not suggest that this internal inconsistency is unique to the Chinese Self; instead, he demonstrates that both China and South Africa have always been multicultural and multilingual. In this article as well as in his memoir *All Under Heaven*, Accone works against the common perception of apartheid ideology as a repressive, unified geo-political practice. Instead, Accone depicts apartheid as a self-contradictory set of rhetorical and spatial strategies that actually *produces* differences. Even though Accone’s memoir focuses on a historically marginalized group, it does not fall into the trap of classifying its characters into binaries such as oppressor/oppressed. As in his article on “Localising the Chinese Self,” Accone focuses on the “Migratory Trajectory” of his characters, using spatial dispersal as a metaphor for the undecideability of identity in general. Accone does not lose sight of the fact that space has a very real impact on the formation of identity, especially in South Africa. Even though he depicts identity as a socially constructed performance, he also recognizes that categories of identity form the

basis of discriminatory practices that deprive whole populations of basic rights and resources.

Accone's memoir obviously speaks to issues of national importance to China and South Africa and can be read productively alongside either nation's established literary traditions. For example, the text can be compared to South African texts that privilege place and its role in forming "coloured" identity. In *A History of South African Literature*, Christopher Heywood outlines the careers of many such writers, often based out of Sophiatown, Johannesburg, whose work focused on the "idea of South African identity" (139). For example, in their work as journalists and fiction writers, authors such as Can Themba and Peter Abrahams stressed how coming of age in South Africa also involved coming to terms with apartheid's rules. Because Accone's memoir critiques binary accounts of identity, it resonates with the Sophiatown tradition but also with the more international strategies and vocabulary of deconstruction, and in particular with Derrida's concept of the dangerous supplement. According to Derrida, the supplement is dangerous because it adds to the dominant discourse and also claims to take its place; writing, for example, is "added" to speech and becomes "dangerous from the moment that representation there claims to be presence and the sign of the thing itself" (144). In other words, writing starts off by standing for the absence of speech and ends up presenting itself as an object in and of itself that replaces speech. The way that Derrida talks about presence and absence in language can easily be adapted to talk about the apparent differences between dominant and marginalized social groups. For example, the Chinese Self adds to South Africa's already complex racial hierarchy and also threatens to replace the black / white binary altogether. The Chinese Self also makes itself present

in situations where apartheid would prefer its absence: in so-called “white” settlement areas or mixed marriages. The Chinese Self captures the paradox Derrida describes as the dangerous supplement because the Chinese Self is both marginalized by apartheid and crucial to its architecture. As Yoon Jung Park points out, the South African state has historically relied on the Chinese presence to supplement and mediate white-black labor relations (202). At the same time, the South African state discriminated against the Chinese and treated them similarly to other non-white populations (202). According to Park, under apartheid the Chinese were treated as surplus labor needed for the mines and as a surplus population that must be contained, controlled, and denied rights. Instead of reading *All Under Heaven* as a reflection of the reality that Jung Park’s essay describes, it is more productive to read both the essay and the memoir as different approaches to the entanglement between the Chinese population and the South African state.

Because Accone begins by positing “three distinct senses of Chineseness in South Africa,” one might assume that a specialized schema and vocabulary is necessary for understanding Chinese South African identity. However, it is also productive to think about the “three Chinese communities” Accone discusses in terms of what Lindsay Bremner calls “surplus people,” meaning those who have been marginalized by apartheid. Brenmer’s term resonates with the Marxist theory of “surplus value,” which stipulates that the dominant regime exploits the “product of labor in excess of the labor cost of producing labor” (Mills, *Struggle for Existence* 325). In the South African context, this means that apartheid exploits the surplus value of non-white labor even though it also classifies them as outsiders and relegates them to the social and spatial margins. While Brenmer’s focus is primarily materialist, his analysis of South Africa’s

“surplus people” can be considered both a temporal, linguistic mode of theorizing and a form of spatial thinking. In particular, Brenner points out how apartheid logic works in and through language as well as in and through bodies and geographies.

In “Reframing Township Space: The Kliptown Project,” Lindsay Bremner writes about the township called Kliptown where the Freedom Charter was signed in 1955. She argues that “The singularity of this place called Kliptown lies in this seeming invisibility, in this unlocatedness or, rather, in this condition of being located in many places simultaneously. Kliptown is not singular but rather multiple: a locale of teeming, undisciplined practices and trajectories of people whom, for all intents and purposes, have been excluded from or by the regulatory discourses of spatial planning and social administration. Kliptown is a community of surplus people living in a leftover space. Kliptown’s history is indistinguishable from this condition of being unincorporated, leftover, or outside of” (522). Here, Brenner is saying that apartheid actually created surplus people and places by excluding them from official discourses. As Bremner goes on to say, Kliptown does not even appear on a map of Johannesburg. This non-fiction account of a so-called invisible space is similar to the opening of Phaswane Mpe’s *Welcome to our Hillbrow*, which opens with a description of the neighborhood that the narrator claims is different than one that could be found on a map. As these two examples show, there has always been a discrepancy between official and unofficial space in South Africa, which does not necessarily make South Africa unique but rather indicates its similarity to postcolonial societies in general. While it is not possible here to provide a detailed account of mapping and colonial/postcolonial discourse, it is important to note that colonial discourse tends to employ the dual logic of inclusion and exclusion and to

label people and territories as either inside or outside. Framed as “surplus people,” the Chinese communities described by Accone share the experiences not just of other non-white populations in South Africa but also with populations worldwide that have been marginalized by a ruling regime. Accone’s analysis in “Localising the Chinese Self” and his story in *All Under Heaven* resonate well beyond their immediate place to comment more broadly on the meaning of identity in racially and culturally stratified societies.

It would be tempting to read “Localising the Chinese Self” and *All Under Heaven* as offering an ethnographic perspective on Chinese identity in South Africa. Accone’s work, however, should be taken on its own terms as having its own set of material concerns, precedents, strategies, and techniques. For example, Accone does not merely document the cultural practices of Chinese South Africans or provide a window to their world. Instead, he uses strategies like deconstruction to show the limitations of concepts like culture and to illustrate the interconnectedness between supposedly separate people and places. For example, Accone portrays the sharing of food as a genealogical practice in the sense that it communicates cultural values from father to son. At the same time, Accone notes that the sharing of food takes place across national boundaries, in transitory spaces like hotels and boats, and between different cultures. For Accone, the sharing of food offers his characters a mode of self-identification and a way to orient themselves towards others. Accone also refers to the common experience of oppression as one that could prevent different minorities from unifying but that ends up facilitating connections among and between the oppressed. Accone focuses on cultural practices that speak across differences and break down false distinctions such as oppressor/oppressed, self/other and East/West. Accone points out that apartheid brought people together as much as it

claimed to keep them apart, and that practices of exclusion often resulted in a sense of inclusion among those labeled outsiders. According to Accone, “Discrimination against the Chinese, and the coming of so-called Grand Apartheid under the National Party ministers...unified what other common denominators previously had not” (262). In this sentence, Accone appropriates a racialized vocabulary to point out the ironic failure of “Grand Apartheid” to enforce division among oppressed groups. The phrase “so-called,” normally used as a prefix to the ill-defined racial category coloured, here casts “Grand Apartheid” as an unfulfilled promise. Just like the more commonly used phrase “so-called coloured” deconstructs essentialist notions of identity, the phrase “so-called Grand Apartheid” works against the notion of apartheid as monolithic. Apartheid itself, according to Accone, is inconsistent, self-contradictory, and even incoherent.

In his memoir *All Under Heaven*, Accone invokes tropes like travel and transportation, hospitality, the sharing of food, and inter-racial relationships in order to critique standard definitions of cultural difference. As in “Localising the Chinese Self” Accone combines strategies of ethnography, sociology and fiction to portray his characters as both singular and multiple. Like the residents of Kliptown that Brenner writes about, Accone’s characters are “surplus people living in a leftover space,” whether they are in China or South Africa (Brenner 512). Accone’s point is to show how these characters can take ownership of and transform spaces that have been written off, marginalized, or rendered invisible. By inhabiting space differently, his characters also learn to see themselves differently, often recognizing and calling attention to the performative aspects of identity. While presenting itself as a memoir, *All Under Heaven* can be compared to African novels such as *Mhudi* that use melodrama to make

commentary on South African social, political, and historical issues. Like Wicomb, Accone calls attention to oral and written forms of storytelling as ways to bring those who have been marginalized into the center. No literary form can render the other completely present or make the other speak; however, archeological and genealogical practices of reading and writing can at least deconstruct the binary logic behind such tropes as speech/silence, visibility/invisibility and freedom/oppression. Such a project permits the re-conceptualization of space and identity as unevenly determined and contingent and yet still subject to the forces of geography and history.

While “Localising the Chinese Self in an African Context” appears to conform to the formal rules of empirical analysis, its generic discontinuities actually perform the fragmentation of the supposedly unified Chinese Self. In keeping with the language of social science, Accone begins his article with an empirical claim: “This paper posits three distinct senses of Chineseness in South Africa” (257). Instead of rejecting all notions of collectivity or totality, however, Accone re-defines the common ground shared by Chinese South Africans. Rather than emerging from some homogenous experience of culture or language, unity has been imposed on the Chinese community by discrimination. According to Accone, “One element unites these ‘Three Chinas’: legal discrimination and official marginalization in South Africa past and present” (257). Here, Accone places pressure on the assumed *internal* nature of cultural identity, positing instead that cultural identity cannot be thought apart from *external* relations of power. Even “legal discrimination and official marginalisation,” however, cannot delimit the boundaries of Chinese identity in South Africa. Accone denies the notion of a uniform experience of oppression, describing the ambiguous position of the Chinese Self as a

“limbo status”: “Discriminated against before 1994 by being declared ‘non-White’, Chinese now are denied Historically Disadvantaged Status by the ANC government” (257). Citing one of his own unpublished studies of Chinese South Africans, Accone writes: “The [Chinese] community argues that under apartheid they were not ‘white enough’, and now, under the post 1994 dispensation, they are ‘not black enough,’ and therefore they are ‘just as marginalized as they were under apartheid’ ” (270). Whether circumscribed by apartheid laws or targeted by democratic measures, the Chinese community occupies a hazily defined buffer zone between white/nonwhite and privilege/discrimination. As such, the Chinese Self represents the dangerous supplement to the discourses of apartheid as well as democracy. In terms of apartheid, the Chinese Self works against attempts to define categories of identity as well as restrict and control bodies. In terms of democracy, the Chinese Self undermines the ANC’s narrative of political justice and economic redistribution.

As outlined above, Accone draws on three distinct narrative strategies: ethnography, travel narrative, and autobiography. Rather than claiming identity as an object to be determined by discourse, Accone marks out identity as a terrain traversed by overlapping genres, which themselves do not always operate according to their stated rules. For example, Accone problematizes the empirical aims of ethnography by admitting the eruption of uncertainty. Like an ethnographer, Accone articulates his argument in the third person and relies on factual data. For example, the essay begins with a series of third person claims such as “This paper posits” and “The paper locates.” Accone supports these claims by tracing the ancient “prehistory” of a story that “begins” with the forced migration of the Chinese to South Africa (258). Here, Accone seems to

perform the work of the traditional historian who, according to Foucault, attempts “to ‘memorize’ the *monuments* of the past, transform them into *documents*, and lend speech to those traces which, in themselves, are often not verbal, or which say in silence something other than what they actually say” (*Archaeology* 7-8). In other words, Accone studies Chinese identity as an object with traceable origins and a history that can be unearthed and made to speak. This project, however, must face the inevitable ambiguity of the archive. Recounting the voyages of a 15th century Chinese explorer, Accone asserts that one of the landing places “*might have been* what is South Africa today” (258 emphasis added). Accone uses many other phrases of conjecture in his account of Chinese-South African relations, including “may,” “it is possible,” “suggestions,” and “highly debatable” (258-259). These terms erode the passive ethnographic aspirations to observe and describe, and introduce instead the genealogical and archeological practice of “rewriting” the historical document (Foucault *Archaeology* 156). To use Foucault’s words, Accone “operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times” (“Nietzsche” 139). What begins as a story of origins thus evolves into a re-writing of the very concepts of migration, exploration, and even apartheid as overlapping systems that produce heterogeneous identities. For example, Accone first describes apartheid legislation through its efforts to impose restrictions on a homogenous group: “Discrimination against the Chinese, and the coming of so-called Grand Apartheid under the National Party prime ministers Malan, Strijdom and Verwoerd, unified what other common denominators previously had not” (262). According to Accone, the totalizing aims of Grand Apartheid operated through discursive acts and biopolitical directives. He writes that Chinese “immigrants were

subject to a comprehensive and wide-ranging set of laws that restricted where and how they could do business and lead their lives” (262). Emphasizing the role played by power in the formation of identity, Accone continues that “It was the coming to power of the National Party in 1948, however, that saw the most oppressive laws introduced” (262). These laws, which included the Group Areas Act and the Mixed Marriages Act, erected linguistic and spatial boundaries in order to keep races categorically and geographically separate. For Accone, the Group Areas Act epitomizes the apartheid regime’s will to power:

An awful pincer, the Group Areas Act was intended to squeeze the wherewithal out of so-called Non-European communities, making it impossible for them to earn a decent living and relocating them in residential ghettos outside the cities. In introducing the Group Areas Bill to parliament, Prime Minister D. F. Malan described this gargantuan piece of social engineering as the essence of apartheid policy. (262)

The language of this passage constructs the Group Areas Act as a form of physical oppression and ideological repression. Terms such as “pincer” and “squeeze” describe the act as a biopolitical force that imposes claustrophobic restraints on bodies. The relocation of Non-Europeans, in turn, describes both spatial and discursive practices of marginalization. By attempting to maintain clear boundaries between the “outside” and the “inside,” the act expresses a will to push non-white bodies and identities to the very edge of the visible, representable, and sayable. Furthermore, the act seeks to contain these bodies and identities in the physical ghettos of the townships and the linguistic ghettos

of racial classification. If the Group Areas Act is read as a model of repression, then it articulates a spatial syntax of prescribed paths and regulated movement.

Here, Accone describes the Group Areas Act as emblematic of the “comprehensive and wide-ranging” architecture of apartheid legislation in general (262). The totalizing aims of this legislation can be read alongside Le Corbusier’s definition of the architectural plan that directs what I have previously referred to as a war of forms. As discussed earlier Le Corbusier writes that

the plan is the generator, ‘the plan determines everything; it is an austere abstraction, an algebrization dry to the eye.’ It is a plan of battle. The battle ensues, and that is the great moment. The battle consists of the clash of volumes in space and the morale of the troops is the bundle of preexisting ideas and the driving intention. Without a good plan nothing exists, everything is fragile and does not last, everything is poor under even a clutter of opulence. (215)

The Group Areas Act, in this sense, can be read as a “plan” that seeks to determine the boundaries of race and direct the movement of bodies in space. The “battle” which ensues takes place on both metaphorical and literal grounds, as apartheid seeks to monopolize both the formal and spatial arrangement of racial categories. However, even if the architecture of apartheid operates according to what Le Corbusier calls the “driving intention” and a will towards closure, Accone recognizes the ways in which race cannot be defined. For example, Accone writes that the Population Registration Act became a “complex maze in classifying so-called Non-Whites, with sub-division into seven groups,” including one called “other Coloured,” which “referred to persons ‘whose race cannot be defined under the other six non-European groups and who are not white or

African” (263). The Population Registration Act is like a maze in the sense that it seems to be a closed system, imposing complex and confusing rules that control peoples’ movements and confine them to certain spaces. However, Accone makes it clear that it is only a matter of time until those apparently trapped in the “maze” of apartheid realize that there is an “outside” to the system because the boundaries are arbitrary. Despite apartheid’s efforts to define different racial groups and keep them separate, it must come to terms with the fact that race “cannot be defined” (263). Accone’s account of the Population Registration Act can be read as a critique of the repressive hypothesis, which Foucault defines as the assumption that “prohibition, censorship, and denial truly are the forms through which power is exercised in a general way” (*History of Sexuality* 10).

According to Foucault,

the central issue (at least in the first instance), is not to determine whether one says yes or no to sex, whether one formulates prohibitions or permissions, whether one asserts its importance or denies its effects, or whether one refines the words one uses to designate it; but to account for the fact that it is spoken about, to discover who does the speaking, the positions and viewpoints from which they speak, the institutions which prompt people to speak about it and which store and distribute the things that are said. (11)

Indeed, for Accone the “central issue” is not to merely document apartheid as a system of “prohibitions” and “permissions.” Instead, he seeks to identify the ways that race is “spoken about” from both inside and outside the Chinese community. Read in this way, apartheid can be viewed not as a closed system, but as a fantasy of totalization that actually participates in the proliferation of discourses on race. A genealogical reading of

Accone's text brings out the ways in which apartheid's "will to knowledge" cannot anticipate the complex strategies of the Chinese community's self-identification (*History of Sexuality* 12).

All Under Heaven can also be read alongside Foucault's notions of archaeology and genealogy; I argue that Accone's memoir produces Chinese-South African identity as a construction site defined by apertures and exchanges rather than boundaries and origins. In the prologue, Ah Nung's family visits the grave of Chow Kwai For, a Chinese immigrant ostracized by the Chinese community in South Africa. According to Ah Nung's mother, Chow Kwai For arrived in Johannesburg in the late nineteenth century, hoping to work in the mines. Instead, he found himself at odds with the very Chinese community with which he hoped to settle and fit in. As Ah Nung's mother relates, Chow Kwai For's immigration corresponded to a period of protest against the "Pass Books:" "As you know, Ah Nung, in South Africa black people are made to carry Pass Books wherever they go, books with their names and pictures and the places they are allowed to be in. We are more fortunate, we have only to carry ordinary identity books" (2). In this passage, Ah Nung's mother depicts apartheid as a system of what Foucault would call "prohibitions" and "permissions" (*History of Sexuality* 11). In other words, apartheid mobilizes the pass book as a formal device for prescribing categories of identity and acceptable spatial practices. The Chinese community's protests against the imposition of the Pass Book seem to conform to a binary model of institutional repression versus popular resistance. When "the government said that the Chinese, too, would have to carry Pass Books" the Chinese community "refused," "spoke out against the Pass Book," and "stood fast against the government" (2). Here, *All Under Heaven* underscores a point

made by Yoon Jung Park in “Sojourners to Settlers: Early Constructions of Chinese Identity in South Africa.” According to Park, protest against discrimination became an important point of identification for Chinese identity in South Africa: “For the Chinese community, protesting racist treatment became a way of reclaiming honour lost, fighting the shame of their second-class status, and attempting to make life easier for themselves and their children” (215). In Accone’s fictional account of this dynamic, Chow Kwai For’s acquiescence to the pass laws represents a threat to cohesive group identity.

As Accone goes on to demonstrate, however, the binary model of power versus resistance cannot account for the internal divisions within the Chinese community. As the story of Chow Kwai For suggests, power operates from within the Chinese community as well as without, rendering impossible any notions of group identity as homogenous. Read alongside Foucault’s concept of the “will to power” and Derrida’s notion of the “dangerous supplement,” the prologue can be read as a critique of binary models of power. Recalling Guarav Desai’s summary of the dangerous supplement, the characters in *All Under Heaven* can be read as occupying the “margins” because they have been “relegated to the outside” (Desai 10). However, to use Desai’s terms, both the Chinese community and Chow Kwai For perform the deconstructive work of the dangerous supplement by “putting under erasure the earlier political hierarchy of the binary” (Desai 10).

According to Accone, the Chinese community contests the externally imposed binary between empowered whites and disempowered minorities of color by defining itself in opposition to black people. Chow Kwai For, in turn, moves from what Desai calls “the position of inferiority” to occupy “the very center” (Desai 10). Once exiled as

an outsider, he is later recognized as an insider who “wanted just to fit in” (Accone 4). By characterizing the Chinese community as a system that grants and denies permission to belong, Accone seems to align it with apartheid itself, which also operates primarily through its boundary enforcing activities. And by denying Chow Kwai For a “place,” the Chinese community acts in an analogous way to the pass laws, which seek grant or deny “place” based on race. Accone, however, complicates the totalizing claims of apartheid legislation and community identity formation by emphasizing the unsustainability of binary thinking.

According to the prologue, Chow Kwai For’s exile results from conflicting definitions of what it means to fit in or find a place. By denying freedom of movement, the Pass Book threatens the Chinese community’s sense of “place” in South Africa’s geography, economy, and racial hierarchy. Chow Kwai For, by contrast, views the Pass Book precisely as a means of obtaining a “place.” While those that protest the Pass Book want to exist outside of the law and maintain the exceptional status of the Chinese community, Chow Kwai For “did not want to cause trouble. He believed that one should obey the law” (2). As Ah Nung’s mother suggests, these two conflicting interpretations of “fitting in” resulted in a contest over access to the physical spaces in Chinatown:

They thought he had valued fitting in...above remaining faithful to his community...So angry were the Chinese that they would not have anything to do with the unfortunate young man. No one would speak to him. They refused to sell him goods, food, clothing, herbal medicines. There was no place in Chinatown that would accept him as a lodger. (3)

In this passage, Chow Kwai For's banishment takes the form of exile from social spaces. Having "no place" means being denied access to the "goods," services, and hospitality of the community. In their application of the ban, the Chinese community actually mobilizes some of the same techniques used by the government in its enforcement of the Pass Book. Like the formal apartheid document, the Chinese community's informal ban defines "the places" that Chow Kwai For "is allowed to be in" (2). Both the Pass Book and the rules of Chinatown produce outcasts in order to define geographical boundaries and regulate access to resources. By telling this story, Ah Nung's mother suggests that "fitting in" (a process Darryl Accone also approaches in his non-fictional article on "Localising the Chinese Self") is not a simple matter of either following or protesting the law. Instead, characters negotiate a complex network formed by the apartheid legal structure, community expectations, and the community's appropriation and adaptation of apartheid strategies of spatial regulation.

The final passages of *All Under Heaven* revisit the notion of the dangerous supplement by positioning the characters Julie and Giddy both inside and outside apartheid's discursive and geographic boundaries. The text cautions against an uncritical view of apartheid as a binary system of power by emphasizing the overlaps between freedom and constraint. As Foucault argues, many people "rely on a common representation of power which, depending on the use made of it and the position it is accorded with respect to desire, leads to two contradictory results: either to the promise of a 'liberation,' if power is seen as having only an external hold on desire, or, if it is constitutive of desire itself, to the affirmation: you are always-already trapped" (*History of Sexuality* 83). Foucault describes such binary modes of thinking as overly schematic,

in that they ascribe a “uniform and comprehensive” quality to power (84). In line with Foucault’s analysis, *All Under Heaven* presents apartheid as a contradictory system where freedom and constraint never stand in strict opposition to one another. For example, the text appears to present Julie and Giddy’s spatial practices as circumnavigating the constraints of apartheid. At the same time, however, the text denies the existence of a spatial utopia outside of apartheid rule. In this way, *All Under Heaven* suggests that spatial identities constitute re-writings of the apartheid text that remain haunted by apartheid’s textual and architectural remains.

Near the end of *All Under Heaven*, the “head of what is called Non-European Housing Affairs” issues Julie and Giddy an “Open Permit” allowing them to “live anywhere in the city” (278). As Julie and Giddy point out, the government official employs the language of permission but only offers the illusion of choice: “Essentially, the gesture was empty since there was no prospect of their being allowed to live where they chose, but it was enough that the permit gave them some means to continue looking for a house” (278). Despite the government official’s assurances, Julie and Giddy do not celebrate receiving their “Open Pass” or view it as what Foucault calls “the promise of a ‘liberation’” (*History of Sexuality* 83). Instead, Julie and Giddy recognize “choice” as just another version of the dispossession through which apartheid operates. As Julie points out: “You know, Gid, that they are moving people out of Claremont and Lady Selborne, Coloured and black homeowners. In all likelihood we will be getting one of their houses” (278). In this passage, Julie and Giddy’s relative privilege remains haunted – but not completely erased -- by the sense of being what Foucault calls “always-already trapped” by power (*History of Sexuality* 83). According to Accone’s text, the architecture of

apartheid does not necessarily separate the “trapped” from the “free;” in the space of Julie and Giddy’s home, freedom and constraint actually occupy the same space, in that Julie and Giddy’s mobility writes itself over the text of the former residents’ poverty. Despite representing a space of opportunity, Claremont appears to be determined by a spatial syntax of marginality, extreme deprivation, and geographical isolation:

When they [Julie and Giddy] went out to Claremont, they found all the proffered houses in terrible condition. None had electricity, running water, and toilets. Candles, Primus stoves, a backyard tap and a long-drop lavatory outside were how people had lived, not out of choice. Best of the four houses was a solitary, square house, with a huge old poplar tree that shaded its whole southern side. At the very edge of Claremont, surrounded by veld on three sides, it had a curiously appealing insularity. (278)

On the surface, it seems as though the houses in Claremont have been composed as texts of poverty, and are inscribed with signifiers for the lack of basic resources. When Julie and Giddy move to one of these houses, however, they do not merely accommodate themselves to these pre-given signifiers. Instead, their move constitutes what Foucault would call a “rewriting: that is, in the preserved form of exteriority, a regulated transformation of what has already been written” (*Archaeology of Knowledge* 156). In Julie and Giddy’s case, the laws that discriminate against people of color and restrict their movement have “already been written;” however, the home improvements that they make can be read as a “re-writing” of apartheid’s constraints. According to the narrator of *All Under Heaven*, “Giddy spent weekends and most nights after work painting and repairing, and installing ceiling boards...As he worked assiduously on their home, Giddy

felt increasingly comfortable” (279). This passage suggests that Giddy finds a place and sense of spatial identity by physically transforming the pre-existing structures made available through the apartheid pass system. While the initial description of the house as “solitary” seems to emphasize apartheid’s spatial practices of segregation, the “insularity” of the house actually provides a space of respite. The passage locates the house “At the very edge of Claremont, surrounded by veld on three sides,” describing it as marginal and geographically circumscribed. Yet, the narrator also describes the house as a “haven in the midst of Nationalist territory” (278, 280). As emblems of power, the “veld” and the “Nationalist territory” do not exert a uniform oppressive force over Julie and Giddy’s spatial identity. Instead, Julie and Giddy counteract the effects of constraint by re-writing their domestic space as natural, expansive, and ancient:

Summer eased into its last days as the Accones settled in. The mornings were clear and there was a curious absence of red dust. Out of the kitchen they could see, not the neighboring semi’s wall, but the sun rise. On the south side of the house, protecting it, was the poplar, its trunk many rings thick. Looking north, the family saw mountains that seemed like a gigantic sea frozen in motion, cliff faces cresting steep south slopes, which swept downwards in an ever more gentle wave to the broad valley floor and their home. It had been a long journey to this patch of paradise that seemed to reach, with the purity of fire, from the earth to the sky. Here, Julie and Giddy thought, it was as if they were living *All Under Heaven*.
(280)

While Julie and Giddy follow the law and live according to the rules of their Open Pass, they also imagine their home in terms that expose the limits of apartheid’s spatial

categories. By noting the “curious absence of red dust,” the passage disassociates this common signifier for township life from Julie and Giddy’s version of Claremont, thus making the space available for re-writing. In this passage, the “sun rise” and other cyclical natural processes eclipse the earlier narrative descriptions of Claremont as crowded and deprived of resources. Trees in particular stand for the capacity to articulate a spatial identity in spite of physical constraints. According to the narrator, Giddy sees “the remarkable wild fig tree that was centuries old and, with its many subsidiary growths and branches, spread out over almost an acre. We have our own wonder tree here, thought Giddy, as he sipped a Coke in the cool of the poplar, during a break from tiling the bathroom” (280). This passage undoes the opposition between the wild and the cultivated by suggesting that the fig tree, the Accone family, and the poplar all spread their roots wide, despite the limitations imposed by roads, laws, and Pass Books (280). By emphasizing the “cool” shade provided by the poplar, the passage suggests that such defiance of boundaries can actually mitigate the effects of power. It would be hasty, however, to conclude that the passage celebrates Julie and Giddy’s “patch of paradise” as a fully liberated space; as we have seen, Julie and Giddy’s house occupies land laden with the memories of forced removals. Thus, the final lines (and title) of *All Under Heaven* can be read as a critique of the repressive hypothesis, according to which the dispossessed resist a uniform avatar of power. On the title page to the first section of *All Under Heaven*, the text indicates that the phrase “*All Under Heaven*” served as a “popular synonym for China” during a particular historical period. In light of this historical reference, the invocation of the phrase “*All Under Heaven*” suggests that Julie and Giddy re-imagine their South African house as being situated elsewhere, in an

imaginary, hypothetical space that reminds them of China. Through its use of simile (“seemed like,” “seemed to reach,” “as if they were”) the passage highlights the practical limits to Julie and Giddy’s spatial practices of transformation. While Julie and Giddy may “seem” to occupy a utopian space, they actually cannot move very far from the streets, territories, and laws of South Africa; their slice of “Heaven” has its sacrificial underside in the forced, physical removal of other bodies from the very space that gives flight to their imagination. Thus, *All Under Heaven* suggests that even where the state of exception appears to provide a respite from apartheid regulations of space, these regulations re-emerge as residue in the new space.

II. The Archaeology of Architecture in Rayda Jacobs’ *Eyes of the Sky*

On April 4, 2010, the infamous white supremacist Eugene Terreblanche was killed on his farm in Ventersdorp, South Africa. Although the manner of his death was newsworthy – according to most sources, he was beaten by two of his farm workers – it was not necessarily unprecedented. In the Spring 2000 issue of *Modern Fiction Studies*, Jennifer Wenzel writes that “Since the historic 1994 elections, more than 500 white farmers have been murdered in South Africa” (90). According to a recent BBC News article, this number has now reached the thousands.⁹ Terreblanche, of course, was more than just a “white farmer;” he was also a highly visible figurehead for the controversial Afrikaner Resistance Movement, which used terrorist tactics to attempt to undermine the country’s transition to a non-racial democracy. Even though many news sources describe Terreblanche’s murder as a crime committed by isolated individuals, it also symbolizes the way that contests over land in South Africa are entangled with the politics of race and

⁹ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/8602347.stm>

class. Occurring two decades after Nelson Mandela's release from prison, the repeal of apartheid legislation, and the adoption of a new constitution, Terreblanche's death places pressure on the narrative of the "New," non-racial South Africa and stresses the continuing primacy of struggles for, over, and on behalf of the land.

According to Edward Said, "human history is rooted in the earth," including the "struggle over geography;" this struggle, in turn, "is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings" (*Culture and Imperialism* 7). Here, Said describes the "earth" as both the metaphorical and literal grounds for "human history," a category which includes artistic forms of expression (7). Said acknowledges that the earth may be 'real,' but that discourses such as fiction participate in imagining and producing that reality. Though Jennifer Wenzel does not directly cite Said, she writes about the "profound – and volatile – significance of land in the postapartheid era" and analyzes what Said would call the "forms," "images and imaginings" that take up the issue of land (Wenzel 91, Said 7). Wenzel writes: "at an April 1997 press conference for the release of his department's policy blueprint, the White Paper on Land Policy," the Minister of Agriculture and Land Affairs "proclaimed that 'the history of land dispossession is the history of this country [...]. It is the root of much of the conflict' (91). By referring to the White Paper as a "blueprint" that "seeks to ameliorate the history of land dispossession," Wenzel suggests that both apartheid and postapartheid discourses can be read in terms of their spatial and linguistic architecture. For Wenzel, the White Paper represents a formal ideology of land reform that responds (or fails to respond) to the conflicts dramatized by what Michel de

Certeau would call the “spatial practices” and “everyday tactics” of South African social life.

Following both Said and Wenzel, Terreblanche’s murder provides an occasion for re-reading the geographical and formal architecture of South African fiction. I refer to this re-reading as an “archaeology” not because it aspires to the strict terms of Foucaultian description, but because it studies literary and social forms as constructions haunted by the “old structures and buried relics of the remote past” (“Archaeology”). The archaeology of architecture thus insists on the status of land, especially in South Africa, as a surface inscribed by the spatial practices of the post-apartheid present as well as the supposedly subterranean apartheid past. Regarding the Terreblanche case, the London-based Guardian reported that South African “Police erected a barbed wire barricade” between the black and white demonstrators that gathered outside the courthouse where the accused were being held (“Eugene Terreblanche killed in South Africa”). According to the Guardian, the racially divided crowd represented “a throwback to the days of segregation before the release and election of Mandela.” For the spectator abroad, the razor wire recuperates both the physical apparatus and the intangible racial sentiments of apartheid, an “old relic” supposedly buried by the narrative of a non-racial South Africa.

Terreblanche’s death suggests that the sociopolitical and metaphorical valences of land, race, and class remain central to what de Certeau would call the “narrative structures” of South African storytelling. Writing about the murder of white farmers in the 1990’s, Wenzel argues that the “web of meaning that entangles the farm murders with land reform emphasizes the importance, even and especially in a postapartheid era, of South African cultural and political understandings of land” (92). For Wenzel, the turn-

of-the century genre of the *plaasroman* (South African farm novel) provides one of the richest avenues for exploring these issues. Wenzel writes that “The features of the *plaasroman* that I have outlined here - its prominence in a time of historical change, its pastoral response to new modes of agriculture and land ownership, its difficulty with the representation of black labor, and its narrative reliance on the threat of losing the farm as an epiphanic moment of ‘lineal consciousness’ – also suggest that primary concerns of the genre are relevant to the current transitional period in South Africa” (95).

Terreblanche’s murder makes it clear that the “transitional period” Wenzel refers to in the year 2000 has by no means ended, nor has the literary attention to land abated.

In this section, I argue that Rayda Jacobs’ 1996 novel *Eyes of the Sky* draws on the “features of the *plaasroman*” in order to problematize colonial South African spatial relations. Though published in 1996, the novel takes place in the 18th century arid landscape of the Karoo. While the choices of setting and genre may seem idiosyncratic, especially given the prominence of realist protest fiction in South Africa, I argue that the formal apparatus of the farm novel foregrounds the contested status of land during periods of political and economic crisis. I suggest that *Eyes of the Sky* juxtaposes the architecture of South African spaces – as in fences, corrals, and other manufactured modes of enclosure – to the archaeology of the same spaces – as in the persistent traces of displaced peoples and their histories. Recalling the thematic concerns of South African farm novels like Olive Schreiner’s *Story of an African Farm* (1883), *Eyes of the Sky* depicts characters preoccupied with building and policing the physical and social boundaries between the ‘domestic’ self and the ‘wild’ other. In a significant departure from Schreiner’s model, however, *Eyes of the Sky* also registers the impossibility of

keeping out or repressing the indigenous living beings and their histories. By revising the South African farm novel, Jacobs posits the relevancy of that genre's historical critique of colonialism to the contemporary concerns of the "New" South Africa. In particular, *Eyes of the Sky* presents a challenge to the generally accepted account that South African spaces and literary genres are governed primarily or solely by practices of containment. While I do not argue that *Eyes of the Sky* advocates formlessness or the total eradication of physical and cultural boundaries, I do suggest that *Eyes of the Sky* registers the deep conflicts involved in creating new architectural forms from residual genres and social structures, particularly at the moment of South Africa's transition to democracy.

In her study of postapartheid writing, Sue Kossew argues that the work of South African authors in the 1990s conveyed "the sense that old structures needed to be replaced by a literature of transition" (97). Drawing on South African author Ingrid de Kok, Kossew observes that "this transitional literature was janus-faced, 'vigilant of the past, watchful of the future'" (97). Jacobs' re-writing of the traditional farm novel serves as an excellent example of both Kossew and de Kok's observations. Like other postapartheid writers dissatisfied with the protest tradition, Jacobs eschews an urban, contemporary focus in order to highlight rural colonial land relations. In this sense, she remains 'vigilant of the past.' The formal apparatus of the novel, however, underscores the forward-looking nature of this backward glance. For Jacobs, the seemingly 'old' genre of the farm novel provides a means through which to critique the politics of race and space. And, although her critique remains focused on the past, Jacobs remains 'watchful of the future' as well, especially insofar as present and future land relations appear to exhume the inequalities of the past.

I want to demonstrate these broad claims by examining the initial and closing scenes of *Eyes of the Sky*. The novel begins with a narrative description of the Karoo that borrows much of its grammar and imagery from Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm*. In Schreiner's novel, an omniscient narrator details the features of an arid landscape, noticeably absent of human beings: "The full African moon poured down its light from the blue sky into the wide, lonely plain" (1). The passage goes on to describe the "dry, sandy earth" and the "monotony of the plain," and concludes by focusing on the "homestead" upon which the moonlight "glinted with a quite peculiar brightness" (1). According to J.M. Coetzee, the "topography" and "chronography" of this passage construct the farm as both "undomesticated" and as a "place of human habitation." "In fact, so human is it in its bigotry, hypocrisy and idleness that all that redeems it from being an African town in miniature is its proximity to nature. The farm thus has a twofold being: as land it is in essence nature; as habitation it is in essence town" (1-2). Like Coetzee, I read the linguistic architecture of Schreiner's novel as one that highlights the claustrophobic nature of the farm and the closed mindedness of its inhabitants.

Like *The Story of an African Farm*, *Eyes of the Sky* opens with an omniscient narrator's depiction of the land: "It was an intensely still night, the radiance of the moon spilling into the back of the lonely little house on the rise. Inside the house were four beds, and in one of them, a boy stirred in his sleep. Some noise had scratched into his dreams. He opened his eyes and listened. Had the servant entered the house? Sanna was practically his mother the way she fussed over him, part of the family" (1). Despite the way that this passage echoes the sublime presence of the moon and the lonely expanse of the Karoo, it significantly revises the vision of land relations presented in *The Story of an*

African Farm. In *Eyes of the Sky*, the emphasis upon domestic architecture dramatizes the human attempt to bring discipline to the unruly, expansive land. Furthermore, Jacobs' novel almost immediately registers the relations of power that enable these domestic structures. By naming Sanna as both the "servant" and "part of the family," *Eyes of the Sky* defines the family as both hierarchical and inclusive (1). It is this very paradox – between inclusion and exclusion, enclosure and permeability – that structures the novel's approach to land in general.

In contrast to Schreiner, who "could not represent black labor without jeopardizing the larger aims of the narrative," Jacobs struggles to represent the indigenous presence on the land, on the white farm, and within the white family (Wenzel 94). In the final pages of the novel, the main character Roeloff returns with his new wife to the land of his father. He has discovered evidence of racial mixture in some family documents, and reads these documents to his wife. In addition, he promises to tell her about a sexual encounter in his past that would undermine the farmer's imperative to "husband" rather than "rape" (Coetzee 3). His wife, however, refuses narrative practices that threaten to pollute the pastoral mythology: "That's over, Roff. We'll have enough to do raising children and sheep to bother with scratching about in the past" (226). According to the features of the *plaasroman* identified by Wenzel, this passage draws on the trope of "lineal consciousness, where the farmer recognizes himself as a mediator between past and future generations, as a transitory steward of permanent land, where 'the manifestation of the lineage in historical time is the farm, an area of nature inscribed with signs of the lineage: with evidences of labor and with bones in the earth'" (Wenzel). The refusal to go "scratching about in the past" can be read as a desire to protect the

purity of “the lineage” against the pollution of miscegenation and rape. Presumably, the novel could end here, thereby staging Roeloff’s return to his father’s land as a boundary enforcing process aimed at protecting and policing space. Instead, however, *Eyes of the Sky* ends with an unexpected image of “bones in the earth.” Rather than reinforcing the historical and geographical autonomy of the white farm, these bones expose “lineal consciousness” itself as a myth predicated on the exclusion and denial of indigenous labor and miscegenation.

The scene of Zokho’s remains can be read as both a literary and geographical “construction site.” In the first case, the hunters produce narrative accounts of Zokho’s death from the archeological and spatial “syntax” of her remains (de Certeau 115). In the second case, the scene insists that the architecture of South African farms rests uneasily on the bones of those forced from the land. In other words, the South African farm deconstructs and disavows the native presence on the land in order to build homes, sheep kraals, and fences. However, just as the “construction site” of Zokho’s death remains open to interpretation by storytellers, the “construction site” of the farm remains open to penetration from the outside and loss from the inside. For example, the constant inability to protect the farm from the loss of sheep demonstrates the ultimately imaginary nature of the boundaries surrounding land. Rather than serving a purely physical function, these boundaries instead attempt to define the nature of the community based on what lies “inside” or “outside” of the fence.

Although written in 1996, this final scene of *Eyes of the Sky* anticipates the historical process later undertaken by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In 2005, the Commission began exhuming bodies in an effort to identify those who went missing

in the apartheid years. Like the fictional emergence of Zokho's body, these exhumations raise several questions. Even if the body can be identified, what recourse does that body have to the violence that caused his or her death? Furthermore, since the exhumations were performed under the banner of the commission, the perpetrators will presumably receive amnesty. Who, then, bears responsibility for violence? Along with the emergence of bodies, then, comes the curious consequence of silence. The past may return, but may shed no light on how to proceed into the future.

If we think of archaeology as "the scientific study of the remains and monuments" of the past, then one way to read the end of *Eyes of the Sky* is in terms of a rejection of history ("Archaeology"). Roeloff's wife refuses to allow certain narrative forms to disturb her own version of history and vision of the future, and the hunters cannot disturb or exhume Zokho's bones in order to learn her identity. And yet, another way to read the end of the novel posits literary form itself as performing the historically-oriented work of archaeology. As previously mentioned, the scene of Zokho's death provides the occasion for storytelling. Likewise, the genre of the farm novel allows Jacobs to study the 'remains' and 'monuments' of the colonial past. Thus, while the novel remains suspicious of efforts to simply unearth the bones of the past, it also recognizes the productive role literature plays in grappling with the conflicting ideologies of a given cultural context. To return to the words of Ingrid de Kok, *Eyes of the Sky* is a novel that is both "vigilant of the past" and "watchful of the future."

III. The Advent(ure) of Truth in *Confessions of a Gambler*

While *Eyes of the Sky* only hints at and anticipates the kinds of social and spatial restrictions that would be engendered by apartheid, *Confessions of a Gambler* takes place after these restrictions have been supposedly lifted. The temporal gap between these two texts begs the question of what has happened in the interregnum, and whether Jacobs views post-apartheid urban society as significantly different from the rural setting she describes in *Eyes of the Sky*. In addition, the contrast between the two texts prompts the question of whether Jacobs, like Gordimer, Wicomb, and Accone, consistently combines genres and approaches throughout the span of her career. In my view, both novels can be read through the metaphor of a construction site; in other words, they pay homage to and rely on structures such as the farm novel and confessional while remaining open to new ways of writing. Unlike a finished edifice, a construction site has no clear boundaries between inside and outside. Furthermore, a construction site carries with it a sense of danger and risk. The very openness that allows for multiple entry and exit points also prevents security and protection. As is well known, for Derrida, writing becomes dangerous when it claims to represent the “thing itself” (*Grammatology* 144). In an analogous way, the construction site becomes dangerous when it is mis-recognized as a finished product, a closed system, or an available structure of meaning. Instead, the construction site should be viewed as providing the occasion for the process of building. Read in this way, the closing scene of Jacobs’ novel *Eyes of the Sky* can be interpreted as doing more than making Zokho’s bones visible and present in the text; instead, the scene produces presence as a literary form that simultaneously indicates Zokho’s absence.

To read south African literature in this way – privileging construction sites over edifices – is to read against the tendency to classify South African fiction as either realist and mimetic or non-realist and experimental. For example, many critics read *Confessions of a Gambler* as a realistic representation; reviews praising the novel claim that “Jacobs realistically portrays the psychology of an addict” and that the novel, “Set in Cape Town, South Africa” provides “insight into Muslim and South African societies.”¹⁰ Here, the reviewers measure the fictional psychology, landscape, and treatment of religion against a generalized notion of what constitutes ‘the real.’ As a result, the reviewers privilege the content of Jacobs’ text (who and what the novel portrays, and to what degree of accuracy) over the form (how the novel draws on literary conventions). What these reviewers assume is a certain immediacy between the language of the novel and the reality it seeks to represent. Inspired by Derrida’s work in *Of Grammatology*, I read *Confessions of a Gambler* not as a text that refers to the “thing itself” (the gambler, Cape Town, Muslim and South African Society) but as a set of formal strategies and techniques of representation. These strategies and techniques, like those of archaeology and genealogy, do not seek to locate the roots of identity or describe the concrete boundaries of space and culture; instead, these formal strategies seek to dissipate these boundaries and excavate categorical discontinuities.

On the surface, *Confessions of a Gambler* seems to present a relatively straightforward first-person narrative of a Muslim woman’s gambling habits. By explicitly opening with a confession, however, the novel opens a dialogue with the generic implications of the confessional form, particularly in South Africa. As Coetzee has written, “confessional fictions have come to constitute a subgenre of the novel in

¹⁰ Reviews are from the back cover of the hard cover edition of the novel.

which problems of truth-telling and self-recognition, deception and self-deception, come to the forefront” (“Confession” 194). Here, Coetzee characterizes the confession as a form that deploys tropes of truth and identity. According to this definition, the confessional form seems to function as an archaeology in the historical sense of an excavation or bringing to light of the truth. In addition, the confession can be read in light of Le Corbusier’s notion of the *ordonnance* or “plan” as an arrangement of representational details that is driven by a particular intention (86). In the case of the confession, the intention to expiate guilt or perform the truth for an audience determines what will be said and revealed. As Foucault points out, the performance of a confession operates within discourse but also in relation to power:

The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile; a ritual in which the truth is corroborated by the obstacles and resistances it has had to surmount in order to be formulated; and finally, a ritual in which the expression alone, independently of its external consequences, produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it: it exonerates, redeems, and purifies him; it unburdens him of his wrongs and liberates him, and promises him salvation. (*History of Sexuality* 62)

Despite Foucault’s focus on Western Europe and the Christian religion, the above analysis of confession provides a productive way to understand the confession in a South

African literary and cultural context. As the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission have demonstrated, confession operates within a matrix of power defined by the apartheid state as well as the new democratic dispensation. Even before these hearings, however, the confession was popularized as a mode of writing associated with political dissidence. For example, Breyten Bretenbach's *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* (1984) documents the author's experiences in prison. Given the historical relationship between public or written confessions and resistance to oppression, *Confessions of a Gambler* can be read as staging a confession of an identity that "unfolds in a power relationship" and assumes the presence of a particular audience (Foucault 61). As a public articulation of a supposedly private and covert identity, *Confessions of a Gambler* focuses less on truth as an object or event and more on the adven(ture) of truth as a product of storytelling.

An archaeological reading of the confessional form in general suggests that truth and identity never emerge as concrete presences in the narrative. Indeed, *Confessions of a Gambler* takes its shape not from the surface revelation of truth, but through a series of subterranean detours and ruptures that seem to distract from the narrative thrust. In Jacobs' novel, these narrative detours work as dangerous supplements, in that they both add to and threaten to replace the main plot of confession. On the first page, the protagonist Beeda declares: "The first thing I have to confess is that I am a Muslim woman" (7). With the phrase "I am," Beeda identifies the "Muslim woman" as a predetermined category of identity (7). By stressing her need to "confess" to this identity, Beeda also suggests that the "Muslim woman" is never a static object, but rather the undetermined outcome of a continuous performance. Through her organization or

“ordonnance” of this performance, Beeda constructs a narrative architecture composed of detours. Rather than excavating the truth of Beeda’s identity or revealing the origins of her gambling addiction, these detours highlight the nature of identity as ruptured and discontinuous. What the novel suggests, then, is that the confession operates as a form of architecture – a spatial and narrative practice that organizes the elements of narrative. The hermetic quality of this narrative, however, is haunted by the boundary-crossing impulses of the dangerous supplement. By immediately privileging the notion of risk, the novel highlights spatial practices that test conceptual and geographical limits.

As Derrida reminds us, the supplement is dangerous because it challenges notions of presence; accordingly, it would be a mistake to read the opening lines of *Confessions of a Gambler* in terms of the presence of Beeda’s identity as a Muslim woman. Instead, the novel introduces Beeda’s love of “risk” as a discontinuity or break in the supposed coherence of her identity. As a supplement to her first confession, Beeda adds: “The second thing I have to confess is that I like risk” (7). Risk, positioned here as a sin worthy of confession, threatens to undermine the coherence of the “Muslim woman” and poses a danger to the systems of friendship, marriage, and religion. Beeda’s love of risk, however, cannot be sublimated by the imperative to be feminine or to follow the rules of Islam; like Derrida’s supplement, Beeda’s addiction surfaces again and again as a detour or distraction from her responsibilities as a Muslim woman and mother. In this way, Beeda’s addiction can be likened to a narrative strategy and spatial practice that draws attention to itself as a fantasy, as an image, and as a turning away. Within this narrative, Beeda herself functions as a dangerous supplement: a character who challenges the inner workings of structures such as the home, family, marriage, and religion.

Ultimately, the novel produces a story of identity that is self-aware of its status *as a story*; its narrative practice, in turn, can be read as a spatial practice that produces the categories of space and identity as construction sites rather than edifices. Language, in the novel, does not so much describe the “thing itself” as direct attention to the production of an image or representation. The trope of visibility, for example, suggests that to be seen is to be captured and cast as a character in a dramatic performance. For example, the storytelling practice of “fitnah” or gossip works by subjecting its victims to visible and verbal exposure. In the novel, the trope of visibility (who sees who where and for what reason) generates the narrative content for gossip. Here, a character’s spatial position (being in a certain time and place) determines his or her narrative position (being the topic of praise or scandal). As formal devices, gossip and confession seem to situate the “Muslim woman” within binary oppositions such as loyalty / betrayal, faith / blasphemy and modesty / immodesty. Beeda’s narrative, however, suggests that the “Muslim woman” performs the limits of such hierarchical thinking. At the beginning of the novel Beeda notes: “When you pass me on the street, you won’t even glance my way. I’m one of those robed women who appear to be going nowhere” (7). Here, Beeda seems to suggest that her spatial practices are circumscribed by her invisibility; when one is not seen, one goes nowhere. However, Beeda goes on to re-write the spatial terms of her invisibility; while she may “appear” to be going nowhere, her covert gambling practices re-write the discursive and spatial trajectory of the “Muslim woman.”

In the novel, Beeda’s gambling episodes function as strategies of substitution and replacement that prevent a linear or teleological narrative trajectory. While Beeda’s confession takes place in the present, she often recalls painful episodes from the past that

interrupt the narrative. As the narrative moves back and forth between the past and the present, it depicts Beeda's impulse to gamble as a turning away from traumatic situations. Each time Beeda makes a spatial detour to the casino, she turns away from confrontations with loss and death. By following Beeda on her gambling adventures, the novel makes an analogous formal detour from the conventions of confession. Just as Beeda claims she drives to the casino against her best intentions, the novel proceeds at odds with its own generic conventions.

In contrast to Beeda, who is both seen and spoken about through gossip, Beeda's son Reza is exiled into a position of invisibility and silence. Reza's sexuality undermines the familiarity of the space of the home and upsets the formal distinction between inside and outside. Rather than reinforcing the category of identity, the visibility of Reza's sexuality poses a danger to the boundaries of space and identity. Beeda recalls:

I'd come to the gate and discovered I'd left the house that morning without the keys. When that happened, the last person to leave had to put the keys under a stone in the yard. I walked along the side of the house, past two windows. Before I came to the second one, I heard laughing. I thought the twins had come home early. But the laughter was different, and I stopped. I don't know if it happened in my head first, or my heart, but something told me to stand very still. I didn't recognize the voice, but I recognized what was happening. I peeped through the window. On the bed was my boy with another boy, naked as the day he was born.

I moved back from the window. I suddenly needed to pee. But I didn't go into the yard, or into the house. I stood there, looking about as if I was in a strange place. Then silently went back the way I had come, out of the gate, and down the

road. Until today I don't remember where I went. But I came home at six-thirty, like I'd been at work the whole day. (21)

In this passage, Beeda seems to discover the fact of her son's homosexuality, which becomes visible through the lens of the window. By drawing attention to Beeda's forgotten keys, the passage positions Beeda as an outside observer to the drama unfolding inside her domestic space. The "laughter," together with the sight of two naked bodies, functions as evidence for an identity that can be "recognized" and categorized. The passage, however, troubles an easy reading of Beeda's act of discovery as a "making visible" or of Reza's sexuality as a presence denoted by visual and auditory evidence. According to the temporal logic of the passage, Beeda "recognized what was happening" *before* she "peeped through the window." In other words, Beeda already has an account of what she is about to see; she bases her recognition not on external visual cues, but on an internal "voice" that tells her to "stand very still." The visual performance thus confirms the conclusion she has already reached in her "head" or "heart." This passage, then, does not construct Reza's sexuality as an entirely external category whose limits can be visually determined and defined. Instead, the recognition of homosexuality operates in the buffer zone between internal structures (such as the domestic home and Beeda's mind) and external discourses that define how to interpret the naked bodies on the bed. What this means is that the visible does not correspond to an unmediated factual identity.

What Beeda encounters is not the fact of her son's homosexuality, but a performance that exposes the limitations of binary oppositions such as inside/outside, public/private, and stange/familiar. Crucially, the novel suggests that Reza's disease and

his identity are mutually interchangeable – as though homosexuality and AIDS amount to the same thing. Here, the novel stages a troubling analogy between a disease that attacks the immune system of the body and a category of identity that disrupts the system of heterosexuality. As Derrida points out, the dangerous supplement is like a virus.

Because many characters in the novel seem to reduce Reza's sexuality to the category of the "known" homosexual with AIDS, they view his identity as incompatible with the confined structures of the home and family. When Beeda wants to bring her ill son back home, her ex-husband protests: "I agree with them, Beeda. You can't have him in the house. You can't create fitnah. Whether or not we care what people say, you musn't give them something to talk about. You can't hide Aids, but you don't want people to say that you've encouraged his lifestyle" (47). AIDS, in the novel, forces Reza to the margins in a form of exile. As a dangerous supplement, however, AIDS cannot remain invisible; as Beeda's ex-husband says, "You can't hide Aids." In a later passage, the novel suggests that AIDS erupts into visibility much like the subconscious enters the conscious mind. In a conversation with a friend, Beeda confesses:

The words came out on their own. 'Reza's dying,' I said.

'Oh no.' She came and put her arms around me. 'Oh, my sister.'

'He's gay, Zulpha. I've never said it out loud. My son's gay.'

'I know,' she said.

'He has AIDS.' (55)

The parallel structure of the short declarative sentences in this passage implies that "dying," "gay," and "AIDS" are synonyms: Beeda's son is dying; Beeda's son is gay; Beeda's son has AIDS. Each of these identities resides on the border between the known /

unknown and speakeable / unspeakable. The terms of Beeda's declaration "came out on their own," as though the categories for understanding her son's condition pre-exist within language itself. Furthermore, Beeda's friend Zulpha somehow knows that Reza is gay (and perhaps that he is dying) even though Beeda has never spoken about it "out loud." In this passage, then, Reza is a kind of open secret about which everyone knows but does not speak. When he is spoken about, it is through a series of synonyms that work as supplements: dying as opposed the living, gay instead of straight, diseased instead of healthy.

As a dangerous supplement, Reza's diseased body brings the threat of death into Beeda's home. First, his failing health interrupts the teleology of life: "when a child dies it's much worse. It's not in the order of things for a child to go before the parents" (55). Furthermore, Reza's "chest infection" functions as the outward, speakeable sign for that other, notoriously internal, unmentionable disease: AIDS. It is the chest infection that brings Beeda face to face with the full implications of her son's disease (99). AIDS, in the novel, represents a form of living death. "I stood looking at him for a few moments – the full lips, the sunken cheekbones, the bony shoulders poking through the pyjamas. A thought came to me cold and calm, without panic. My son was going to die. His life was going to end as quietly as it had begun. He was going to leave me" (99). AIDS not only transforms the vital body into a living corpse, but it also inverts the natural order according to which parents die before their children. Beeda's serenity in the face of this disruption suggests her willingness to recognize seemingly closed systems such as death as open and porous. Likewise, her desire to incorporate Reza back into her home signals an acceptance of the living death. When Beeda brings her dying son home, she brings

home both a body and a virus; a supplement that is both dead and alive, child and adult. The construction of Reza as a replacement for the loss of her husband makes the threat of death all the more compelling; the replacement itself is not a presence, but an imminent loss.

At the end of the novel, risk functions as a generic category that undermines the confession. Despite the fact that Beeda is happily married to her second husband and “cured” of gambling, she announces: “I feel like a James Bond adventure” (239). Rhoda interprets Beeda’s declaration as a desire to be deviant. Rhoda replies, “This sounds like you want to do something bad” (239). The way that Beeda’s adventure plays out, however, does not conform to the unspoken rules established by the mention of James Bond. James Bond would, of course, “get away with” whatever transgression he undertook. Beeda, however, gets caught; the cashier who takes Beeda’s ID card captures her identity, and the security guard recognizes and hails Beeda by name. Beeda, however, is not surprised by her capture: “I turned to my friends. ‘In the James Bond movies it never happens like this.’ I turned to the guy. ‘Are you coming to tell me I shouldn’t be here?’ He smiled. He had a nice smile. I noticed his white teeth. ‘Mrs Ariefdien...you’ve been a naughty girl’” (240). Here, Beeda’s adventure disrupts the narrative codes of the James Bond adventure, in which the hero notoriously avoids consequences, punishment, and discipline. In Beeda’s adventure, she is both the hero and the villain: a “very naughty girl.” Furthermore, Beeda solicits the very discipline and capture that a James Bond character would seek to avoid. She seems neither surprised nor disappointed to be confronted by the cashier and security guard. Instead, when she says she “feels like” an adventure, she actively solicits the consequences of violating her self-imposed ban; in a

way, she also expresses a desire for the surveillance and discipline involved in being caught.

The conclusion of the novel refers back to the opening lines, in which Beeda confesses: “I like risk.” As the final passage makes clear, to “like risk” is to invite consequences and punishment; to like risk is to like discipline. By referring to the James Bond genre, however, the novel suggests that Beeda, like James Bond, operates outside of the law. As a “007” agent, James Bond can operate at his own discretion, and can even kill without suffering consequences. While Beeda’s gambling may not seem akin to the dealings of a secret agent, she does seem to take pleasure in an illicit activity that is not strictly illegal. Furthermore, she initiates a disciplinary process in order to embrace a deviant identity. Because she cannot actually be arrested, she occupies a buffer zone between acceptable and unacceptable behavior. This ambiguous position is important because it suggests that discipline does not always impose itself on the body from the outside, but rather operates in conspiracy with the individual’s spatial and narrative practices. Furthermore, the passage redefines capture not as the site of discipline but as the site of desire.

By recognizing space and identity as crucial categories in postapartheid South African fiction, I do not suggest that these categories correspond exactly or neatly with ‘real’ bodies and landscapes. Following Derrida’s methodology, I read these texts “as writing, not as a mere window on some other, more ‘real’ reality” (*Acts of Literature* 77). Reading less canonical authors such as Accone and Jacobs sets a precedent for re-encountering more established writers like Nadine Gordimer. In *The House Gun*, for example, the tension between what is said and what can never be said produces an aporia

at the center of which the novel positions Duncan himself; as an absent presence. Caught by the mechanisms of social control and the law, and confined within the spatial architecture of the prison, Duncan nevertheless evades capture by the language of the novel. Duncan's mother in particular agonizes over what she will never know and what will never be said. Duncan's opacity undermines the logic of the courtroom, which operates under the assumption that the truth will emerge. As with the actual Truth and Reconciliation Commission, however, neither the practice of confession nor the emergence of truth can lead straightforwardly to reconciliation and peace. For Gordimer, as for Wicomb, Accone, and Jacobs, the path to the future of South Africa has proved much more difficult than merely walking across the bridge from a painful past. That painful past has remained, whether in the form of memories, stories, photographs, or residual violence, to haunt the living. And, while the spectre of apartheid may seem particularly local, these authors are at pains to point out that their stories form part of a global fabric. To invoke the language of the National Unity and Reconciliation Act, South Africa has a history of "untold suffering" (2). For Gordimer, Wicomb, Accone and Jacobs, the desire to speak and write about, beyond, and in spite of this suffering is not specifically South African but is instead profoundly *human*.

CONCLUSION

What I have been arguing for throughout this dissertation is the need for a new cognitive, conceptual, and literary map of South African writing. As I wrote in the introduction, this map could be called texturealist in the sense that it follows the contours of lived space while accounting for the ways space is understood and communicated through language. In the project as a whole, I have called attention to the ways in which South African writing anticipates, but does not determine, a future beyond apartheid. Despite many apparent differences, Gordimer, Wicomb, Jacobs and Accone share an interest in committing to and mapping this uncertain future. And, while drawing paradigmatic conclusions would go against the deconstructive aims of my project, it is worth pointing out some of the similarities in the literary and spatial terrain I have covered.

Gordimer, Wicomb, Accone, and Jacobs invite readers to reconsider the meaning of the word genre as it refers to both content and form. In terms of form, these authors use established literary techniques in surprising ways to challenge our expectations; Gordimer re-works the detective novel, Wicomb draws from the historical novel and plaasroman, Accone re-invents the memoir, and Jacobs invokes the plaasroman, confessional, and thriller. Using literary conventions in unconventional ways makes sense for their literary aims, which are to undo the standard ways of writing about and representing South African literary and social spaces. In a sense, Gordimer, Wicomb, Accone and Jacobs are cartographers seeking to map the underappreciated, unseen, and misunderstood. The spaces they create do not necessarily have the same boundaries and rules as conventional modern spaces. In *Confessions of a Gambler*, for example, Beeda

loses all track of time once she enters the casino. The desert in Gordimer's *The Pickup* marks the boundary between the domesticated, known world and the wild unknown. If, as Wicomb argues, the setting in a novel is as important as a character, it bears asking what type of character Gordimer, Wicomb, Accone and Jacobs imagine South Africa to be. At the risk of drawing too broad a generalization, my readings have suggested that these authors see South Africa as a space of great potential not in spite of, but because of, a traumatized past. For Gordimer, Wicomb, Jacobs, and Accone, the story of South Africa is one of entanglement. And, while this entanglement has contributed to some of the more well-known atrocities committed under apartheid, it also makes it possible to imagine a future beyond stark binary oppositions like black and white. In *The House Gun*, Gordimer uses the conditional tense to express the tentativeness of this future. In *David's Story*, Wicomb closes the doors of the Standard Bank on the openness of the democratic rally. And yet, in the face of this tentativeness and closure, Gordimer, Wicomb, Accone and Jacobs do articulate their hopes for new ways of writing, being, and relating to others. Gordimer expresses this hope in the form of a gesture; an outstretched hand in *The Pickup*. Wicomb, in turn, concludes with the possibility of new modes of storytelling. By the light of the Harlequin's lamp, Brenda writes against the patrilineal, autobiographical South African literary traditions.

I conclude by suggesting that the "paradise" to which Julie and Giddy retire at the end of *All Under Heaven* is not unlike the literary-spatial paradise sought by Gordimer, Wicomb, and Jacobs. For these authors, paradise is not necessarily a utopia free from the traces of the traumatic past. Instead, paradise is a place from which one can gain perspective on the past and orient oneself towards the future. In addition, it is a space that

recognizes the importance of history without letting that history become overwhelming. Paradise, in other words, is what South African literary and social spaces might look like outside of binary frames like black/white, commitment/indifference, fiction/nonfiction, and literary/political. For Gordimer, Wicomb, Jacobs and Accone, South Africa's history of entanglement makes it possible to tell more interesting and complex stories about experiences that have always been lived outside of the artificial rules, categories, and boundaries imposed by apartheid.

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