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John C. Hawley

Santa Clara University, jhawley@scu.edu

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“Archaic Ambivalence:” The Case of South Africa

John C. Hawley
Santa Clara University, U.S.A.

I. THE REAL WORK OF THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION

What happened at the Truth Commission may not be generalizable to all other situations. But what the work of the TRC suggests is that cycles of political violence can indeed be broken and that there are alternatives to revenge and retributive justice.

—Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela,
A Human Being Died That Night (2003, 126)

Arif Dirlik, Aihwa Ong, Simon Gikandi, and other theorists of globalization have criticized postcolonial theory for what they consider to be its exclusive interest in cultural matters at a time when political and economic interests have taken center stage.¹ Recent fiction coming from South Africa, for all its urgent focus on individuals in personal crisis, may nonetheless be an instance of the intersection of cultural and political or “material” matters that such critics hope to see. While acknowledging the criticisms brought by Aijaz Ahmad and others against Fredric Jameson’s notion of all “Third-World” fiction serving as allegories of the collectivity and of nation formation, readings such as Jameson’s should not be tossed overboard as meaningless—nor as meaningful only in the eye of a “First World” reader. The case of South Africa, for example, while arguably a country closer to the classically defined First World nation than any other in Africa, in a post-apartheid era is surely preoccupied in its fiction with questions of national identity and the possible forms of agency available for that (new) nation’s various classes and ethnic/racial groups. So long ostracized by the rest of the world, South Africa is surely not coming to these questions

because of the demands of those outside its borders. In fact, the tentative answers that many of its citizens are proposing are flying in the face of the calls for retributive justice that are heard from its heretofore liberal former advocates in the West. What the controversial Truth and Reconciliation Commission may have to do with the interchange between globalization and postcoloniality, therefore, is the broad subject of this essay.

A recent anthologist like Isabel Balseiro will readily admit that "it is impossible to speak of *a* [single] new South African literature" (Balseiro 2000, xv), recognizing that voices are being heard from new quarters and the process is very much a work-in-progress. Nonetheless, Balseiro and others (see, for example, Denis Hirson and Emmanuel Ngara) describe a "new consciousness of being" that is "shaped by the past but recogniz[es] itself uneasily in the everyday world of the institutions emerging from the negotiated settlement, in urban crime, in raised and battered expectations of change" (2000, xvii). Following Mbulelo V. Mzamane's lead, Balseiro urges an examination of this transitional process. As part of this process, which Susan VanZanten Gallagher calls "unmaking the void," there has been a "recovery of lost works" that began in the 1980s and that involves the reissuance by South African publishers of confessional works that had been banned or were written in exile (Gallagher 2002, 140). While noting that such confessions (and those recorded by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission) are "characterized by many failures: of audience, language, self-posturing, and closure" (2002, 180), Gallagher suggests that they offer a challenge to the West because this "construction of self . . . does not . . . resort to a clear dichotomy of self and Other, but situates the self in community, acknowledging errors as well as anguish" (Gallagher 2002, 180). Such a strategy remains controversial, and its success is not portrayed in current South African literature as inevitable. The fiction written since the official end of apartheid often shares this confessional impulse, and generally underscores the complex interplay between objective truth, memory, and personal trauma.²

The role of the arts in this national self-examination and cultural crisis remains contentious. Central to recent writing by Annie Coombes, David Koloane, Rasheed Araeen, Jyoti Mistry, and others are questions regarding the definition of "transitional art" and the requisite qualities of "the authentic African artist," questions centered around how the nation is to represent itself and the past while moving forward, and questions of resistance to being "othered" by the West and being made to "play" the South African role. The cultural theorist Theodor Adorno once said that "after Auschwitz it is barbaric to write poetry." But later he moderated this by saying "perennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream; hence, it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems." John Noyes, professor of German language and literature at the University of Cape Town, elaborated on this issue in a recent lecture at this University. "The question Adorno felt so urgently in the aftermath of the holocaust," he said, "presents itself in South Africa today as the question of what happens to stories and narratives of

violence, trauma, pain and injustice when they find their way into the arenas commanded by those who are versed in words.³ This challenge addresses those disciplines in the academy that interrogate the way language apprehends, sustains and disavows trauma, and the way this process feeds into the constitution of politically stable identities." Clearly, some are concerned lest art be used by the new state to bring artificial closure to questions of cultural guilt, silencing the aggrieved in its own desire for self-definition and preservation.

The role of memory and history as they impinge on the present vexes individuals and governments alike, of course, and not just in such traumatic historical situations as South Africa's recovery from years of apartheid. Referring to the broader question of how the past remains a part of the postmodern world, Arif Dirlik writes that "The question is how the world has changed: whether what we witness in the present is a rupture with the past or a reconfiguration of the relationships of power that have facilitated the globalization of earlier forms of power, while eliminating earlier forms of resistance to it. . . . Clearly, the present represents not a rupture with the past but its reconfiguration" (Dirlik 2000, 79, 81). Yet, for all the involvement of confession in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the narration that that involves, a key factor of these stories is, in fact, an enduring rupture, a displacement in the individual's situation in the nation's history and definition. How can a meaningful "reconfiguration" be achieved without smearing the personal portraits that are colorfully, memorably, framed by the Commission and its Report?

Rosemary Jolly offers a vigorous defense⁴ of the philosophy behind the TRC, suggesting that "South Africa and other postcolonial locales may well continue to appear to cloak their resistant practices in modes that the West has a structural inability to apprehend" (Jolly 2001, 709). In a determinedly Marxist reading, Jolly describes the West's construction of a supposedly typical South African as a consumer with access to the retributive justice system that a country like the United States presupposes—but she counters that this is a false understanding of the current (and historic) situation for much of the population of South Africa.⁵ In what she describes as the "ritual" of the TRC, she suggests that South Africa is creating a new (and perhaps exemplary) means of dealing with a national history of injustice:

It is important to note that conceiving of the survivors and perpetrators who bear witness as storytellers certainly suspends judgment; yet it does so to avoid freezing perpetrators and victims in those roles. The perpetrator is no longer an autonomous actor; his crimes reveal the systematic way in which apartheid constructed a society of racist, macho aggression and proceeded to sanction that which was illegitimate in its own interest, creating it as a feature of the normal, the ordinary. The victim is no longer trapped in the time of his or her victimization, since the very act of relation establishes difference, both temporally and subjectively. The victim is "me, now" as opposed to "me, then," and the secrecy of the violation that disabled its recognition by the victim through its acknowledgement by the community then is now no longer in effect. (Jolly 2001, 710)⁶

Thus, the TRC is a type of ritual, in some sense a reenactment and revisiting of the scene of trauma that may lead to a fuller sense of health. This is not the typical sort of national ritual, but one that "is seen not as that which maintains or enforces a community's (static) traditions, but that which negotiates between a series of contradictions in the community, including those between tradition and modernization. Its power, its authority, lies in its ability to create diverse meanings in a world of conflicts, not exclusively in its reification of tradition as a defensive move" (Jolly 2001, 711).

Ashis Nandy points the direction that appears to have been taken by much of South Africa. "Despite all the indignity and oppression they have faced," he writes, "many defeated cultures refuse to draw a clear line between the victor and the defeated, the oppressor and the oppressed, the rulers and the ruled. . . . They try to protect the faith . . . that the borderlines of evil can never be clearly defined, that there is always a continuity between the aggressor and his victim, and that liberation from oppressive structures outside has at the same time to mean freedom from an oppressive part of one's own self." Susan VanZanten Gallagher (2002, 179-80) and others might suggest that this has something to do with Christian ethics being put into play in the national consciousness. Rosemary Jolly observes, for example, that "[there is a] global shift toward ignorance of nonmaterialist cultures" and suggests that the TRC can help reverse this trend (Jolly 2001, 714).⁷ Someone like Frantz Fanon, however negatively we may assume he might have responded to the TRC, could alternatively be imagined as finding in its strategy a form of self-liberation from the past and its traumas. "In no way," he suggests, "should I derive my basic purpose from the past of peoples of color. In no way should I dedicate myself to the revival of an unjustly unrecognized Negro civilization. I will not make myself the man of any past. I do not want to exalt the past at the expense of my present and my future" (Fanon 1968, 226). If we may pass over Fanon's reference here to questions of race, relevant though they are in a broader sense, what is more pertinent to our argument is his insistence that the past—even a past of suffering—need not be given the power to deform the future. One is instead called upon to "reconfigure" it.

As Homi Bhabha suggests, how to configure the past is a question faced by all postcolonial countries. "How do we plot the narrative of the nation," he asks, "that must mediate between the teleology of progress tipping over into the timeless discourse of irrationality? . . . To write the story of the nation demands that we articulate that archaic ambivalence that informs the time of modernity" (Bhabha 1994, 142). But as the example of Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela demonstrates, the situation in South Africa is especially acute in the negotiation of a relationship between "progress" and "irrationality." Gobodo-Madikizela, a psychologist who worked with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, famously conducted a series of interviews with one of the masters of the apartheid regime, Eugene de Kock, during which she recorded what appeared to her to be his awakening remorse. She concluded as follows, in words that many in the West find difficult to swallow:

Although forgiveness is often regarded as an expression of weakness, the decision to forgive can paradoxically elevate a victim to a position of strength as the one who holds the key to the perpetrator's wish . . . readmission into the human community (Gobodo-Madikizela 2003, 117). . . . The perpetrator cannot restore what he has irrevocably damaged, but his words can go beneath the scar tissue left by the trauma, put its elements back into play, and thus help the victim master the memory of it. But even forgiveness does not necessarily bring finality because it does not erase the past. (2003, 132)

Crucially, as noted by Kader Asmal and others who have sought to explain the rationale behind the TRC, if there is nation-building in play then it is pointedly nonessentializing and sophisticated in its embrace of social complexity. "We will need to build a new, shared and ceaselessly debated memory of that past" writes Asmal, "with its various strands intertwined in constructive friction [*sic*]. . . . It is not the creation of a post-apartheid folk or a stifling homogeneous nationhood" (9) [cited in Jolly 2001, 701]. If one looks beyond the TRC itself and reads the fiction that has been coming out of post-apartheid South Africa, one surely notices that what had for decades been an understandable literary preoccupation with the injustices of apartheid has now settled in to an exploration of this "debated memory" of the past—whether that past is the immediacy of racial and sexual aggression in recent years, or imaginative investigations of pre-apartheid South Africa. In the best of these cases, there is little attempt at a false sense of finality or closure. Rosemary Jolly observes that "there is, as holocaust survivor testimony has taught us, the imperative to bear witness and the impossibility of doing so. . . . There can be no conclusion to these tensions without denial of the humanity of the storytellers" (Jolly 2001, 711; see, also, Grunebaum-Ralph 1996, on this topic).

II. POST-APARTHEID LITERATURE

Your days are over, Casanova.

—J. M. Coetzee, *Disgrace* (1999, 43)

South African literature has always been laced through with the essential irony of its placement in a society divided against itself, with consequent divisions within its citizens of whatever racial mix. As long ago as 1963, in *The Ochre People: Scenes from a South African Life*, Noni Jabavu has one black character advising another that other blacks, even the urban ones, should be respected as human beings. "I tell you, Ntando," the character pleads, "you would get used to it. There are *people* living here [in the Hillbrow section of Johannesburg, South Africa] among thieves and gangsters, *people* like back home in your beloved Colony" (Jabavu 1963). (Noni [Nontando] Jabavu was born in Cape Province, South Africa, in 1921, and was educated in England.) Forty years after Jabavu's book, with novels like Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome*

to *Our Hillbrow* and K. Sello Duiker's *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*, the same fears of Hillbrow, mixed with something like a pride of ownership, are informing books about the same troubled section of the city. One might ask how much has really changed for the common man and woman. And as recently as 1989, with apartheid on the run, we hear the enthusiasm building in writing such as Dulcie September's: "And in the distance we can hear sounds of steadily running feet, steadfast feet, steady feet. And we know that these sounds that we hear are the sounds of those who are going to eradicate all this ugliness. These sounds that we hear are drawing nearer and nearer. They are getting very close, drawing closer and closer. And the sun creeps over the horizon, adding long silhouettes to the sounds of the steady running feet" (September 1989). The sad irony here is Dulcie September's own life. Born in 1953 in Western Cape, when she protested against Bantu Education Act practices she was arrested and imprisoned in 1974, and was banned. She later became the African National Congress's representative in France—where she was killed in 1988 by a bomb placed in her office. The central image of this brief passage is picked up by Jeremy Cronin and used to ironic effect to end his poem, "Running Toward Us:"

The victory of life over death? Of the innocent small person caught in the middle?
But what is the middle?

Are you sure, in the thick of all this slaughter, he could be innocent?

Whom did he just betray? Whom will he still betray now as he runs away from
the executioners?

Away from the spectators. Away from the police and army with fresh killings
on their hands. A corpse covered in petrol, each stumbling pace one step
more away from a death it has already died.

He is running towards us. Into our exile. Into the return of exiles. Running
towards the negotiated settlement. Towards the democratic elections. He is
running, sore, into the new South Africa. Into our rainbow nation, in
desperation, one shoe on, one shoe off. Into our midst. Running. (Balseiro
2000, 5)

The anguish of self-recrimination evident in this poem, of multiple complications in the national tragedy, seems to haunt much of the black and coloured writing of post-apartheid South Africa, as it always has shaped the writings of white writers like Nadine Gordimer (see her interview with Katie Bolick) and J. M. Coetzee. Much like the TRC itself, this fiction boldly incorporates the sophisticated move beyond a literal black-and-white bifurcation of innocence and guilt, implicitly acknowledging that apartheid has scarred all ethnic and racial communities within the nation—and that it has tragic consequences in the young men and women who are, they are told, now much freer than their older brothers and sisters once were. One of the most poignant examples of such consequences is Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother*, a novel in which the author imagines what the mother of one of Amy

Biehl's killers might say to the mother of Ms. Biehl, were they to meet. Amy Biehl was the Fulbright scholar who had been working in the township of Gugulêtu in an attempt to organize free elections, and who was surrounded by a mob and stabbed to death.⁸ Magona's conflicted protagonist seeks to explain how her son might have reached this irrational point in his life, and sees in him a victim of forces that not only took years to come to fruition, but that still persist in the broader post-apartheid South African society:

And my son? What had he to live for? . . . He had already seen his tomorrows; in the defeated stoop of his father's shoulders. In the tired eyes of that father's friends. In the huddled, ragged men who daily wait for chance at some job whose whereabouts they do not know . . . wait at the corners of roads leading nowhere. . . . The men from the dry, dusty, wind-flattened, withering shacks they call home. Would always call home. No escape (Magona 1998, 203). . . . Oh, that her goodness had not blinded her to the animosity of some of those for whom she bore such compassion! That her naiveté had not tricked her into believing in blanket, uniform guiltlessness of those whom she came to help (1998, 209). . . . My son was only an agent, executing the long-simmering dark desires of his race. Burning hatred for the oppressor possessed his being. It saw through his eyes; walked with his feet and wielded the knife that tore mercilessly into her flesh. The resentment of three hundred years plugged his ears; deaf to her pitiful entreaties. My son, the blind but sharpened arrow of the wrath of his race. (1998, 210)

Such pleading suggests that the "post" in post-apartheid is as tenuous as the "post" in postcoloniality. In both cases, the residual effects (and, some might argue, even the structures) of the oppressive system have a life of their own, ramifying in the lives of its victims and, consequently, in their ways of relating to the contemporary situation.

Shane Graham is one critic of the TRC who suggests that such fiction, in fact, is providing a crucial righting of the balance in the equation of who is allowed to dominate the ongoing conversation. He recognizes, first, that "rather than issuing blanket indemnity to the agents of state terror, as in Chile, amnesty in South Africa was granted on an individual basis to those who have 'full disclosure' of politically motivated crimes. Thus amnesty was used as a tool for excavating the truth about the past" (Shane Graham 2003, 11). And he goes on to acknowledge that, "in his foreword to the *Final Report* . . . former Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Chairperson of the Commission, refers to the past as a 'jigsaw puzzle' of which the TRC is only a piece, and alludes to a search 'for the clues that lead, endlessly, to a truth that will, in the very nature of things, never be fully revealed'" (2003, 11). He feels, however, that the perpetrators have been given the lion's share of attention,⁹ and he suggests that fiction can counter this (perhaps media driven) focus in two ways: first, by the questions it asks ("Antjie Krog's memoir *Country of My Skull* [asks] . . . why do many white South Africans—and international audiences—seem so much more interested in the stories of killers and torturers

than in their victims' tales of loss and sorrow?" [Shane Graham 2003, 21]; and secondly, by the contracted suspension of closure that contemporary authors make with their readers ("stories about trauma are prone to fragmentation, displacement, and distortion" [2003, 13]). He draws support here from novelist André Brink, who writes that "Memory alone cannot be the answer. Hence my argument in favor of an imagined rewriting of history or, more precisely, of the role of the imagination in the dialectic between past and present, individual and society" (Shane Graham 2003, 13; Brink 1998, 37). But Graham wishes to underscore that only a certain type of fiction can provide what he is looking for, and this is writing that can be unsettling in its lack of resolution and, for some readers, ultimately unsatisfying. In Graham's view, "the psychological truth of the event cannot be captured by the conventions of narrative, which reduce the traumatic events to language and present them in a linear sequence" (Shane Graham 2003, 16). To "capture" such events would be to suggest that they have been digested, and one can move on, possibly strengthened. This, Graham seems to suggest, would be a disservice to the events of apartheid. Thus, an open-ended fiction best embodies an ongoing trauma and its aftermath. In the fiction of Phaswane Mpe, K. Sello Duiker, Zakes Mda, Zoë Wicomb, and J. M. Coetzee, there is little attempt to bring readers easy closure to events that haunt the "new" nation.

Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* is, at 124 pages, a slim volume. But within its covers the behavior of its characters seems hopelessly self-destructive: the plot centers around the betrayal of lovers; one of its characters is run over by gangsters, one goes crazy, one accuses another of being a witch (who is consequently "necklaced" with a tire that is set afire), one contracts AIDS, and another commits suicide. Mpe, who lives in Hillbrow, teaches African Literature and Publishing Studies at the University of Witwatersrand, and his brief novel seems almost a *roman à clef*, with in-jokes about the publishing process and the prejudices built in to the system. Thus, for example:

She did not know that writing in an African language in South Africa could be such a curse. She had not anticipated that the publishers' reviewers would brand her novel vulgar. Calling shit and genitalia by their correct names in Sepedi was apparently regarded as vulgar by these reviewers. . . . Now, for nearly fifty years, the system of Apartheid had been confusing writers in this way. Trying to make them believe that euphemism equals good morals. (Mpe 2001, 56-57)

And euphemism of any sort is regularly discarded in most of these angry new books, which treat topics that they insist must be confronted by their readers: "Euphemism. Xenophobia. Prejudice. AIDS" (Mpe 2001, 60). Mpe argues in the novel that, behind the crime of black against black within Hillbrow, the real power (for evil) remains with whites, who not only work as prostitutes in Hillbrow and sell drugs, as, of course, blacks also do, but who also own the bottle stores that facilitate the widespread alcoholism (2001, 103). Mpe's persistent focus, however, is beyond the anger that these inequities produce. He

and many of the other writers apparently wish not only to record ongoing prejudices against the black and coloured communities, but more insistently to wake their black readers to a sense of crisis and personal responsibility.

Western readers may be struck, for example, by Mpe's preoccupation with the "othering" that South African blacks carry out against Nigerians in their midst. These foreign guestworkers are called *Makwerekwere* and *Mapolantane*, and are consistently portrayed by black South Africans as universally lawless and a drag on their society. When Mpe sends one of his protagonists on a trip to London, however, he puts the shoe on the other foot: "Our Heathrow," he ironically writes, "strongly reminded Refilwe of our Hillbrow and the xenophobia it engendered. She learnt there, at our Heathrow, that there was another word for *Makwerekwere* or *Mapolantane*. Except that it was a much more widely used term: *Africans*" (Mpe 2001, 102). This is startling enough, but when she finds that she has contracted AIDS, she recognizes that it is now not only the whites who "other" her: "Now she was, by association, one of the hated *Makwerekwere*. Convenient scapegoat for everything that goes wrong in peoples' lives. She had learnt a lot in Oxford, more than the degree in her bag implied. The Refilwe who returned was a very different person from the one who had left" (Mpe 2001, 118).

One certainly finds in post-apartheid writers a complex desire for self-examination, confession, mutual acceptance, and meaningful steps toward a better future that is not neurotically enthralled by the past. Perhaps such writing suggests that black readers have the responsibility to take the reins and shape their broader society more justly than their white masters had done. As K. Sello Duiker has one black character tell another in *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*, "I refused to blame history. It was too convenient to blame it on apartheid" (Duiker 2001, 63). This is the attitude at the heart of the TRC, which seeks, in Rosemary Jolly's words, "a form of accountability that does not depend on the familiar rhetoric of prosecution, defense, and judgment, to risk trying an alternate process in order to participate in a profoundly different future" (Jolly 2001, 697).

Like the characters in Mpe's novel, Duiker's protagonist ultimately lives in Hillbrow. At novel's end Tshepo is working and living in a children's home, helping children from broken homes who come from absolute poverty. "I believe in our children," he writes. "I believe in people, in humankind, in personhood" (Duiker 2001, 454). Thus, Duiker's novel meshes nicely with Mpe's, taking up very much where Mpe's leaves off:

In Hillbrow I live with foreigners, illegal and legal immigrants, what black South Africans call makwere-kwere with derogatory and defiant arrogance. I feel at home with them because they are trying to find a home in our country. They are so fragile, so cultured and beautiful, our foreign guests. In their eyes I feel at home, I see Africa. I feel like I live in Africa when I walk out in the street and hear dark-skinned beauties rapping in Lingala or Congo or a French patois that I don't understand . . . perhaps Africa is a late bloomer. (Duiker 2001, 454)

Rosemary Jolly remarks that “the role the West would like South Africa to play in southern Africa . . . is to be proof of the benefits of modernization in Africa” (Jolly 2001, 708), and yet the role that Duiker’s character envisions has really very little to do with capitalism—though, paradoxically, much to do with globalization:

There are better ways, they keep telling me, capitalism is not the only way. We haven’t nearly exhausted all the possibilities. . . . Perhaps the future of mankind lies in each other, not in separate continents with separate people. We are still evolving as a species, our differences are merging. When I look at the children I work with, mostly black, with some colored and white faces, I sense that God can’t be one story. He is a series of narratives. (Duiker 2001, 455–56)

As with Mpe’s novel, which mystically ends in heaven, the reader may be surprised to see this broadly optimistic conclusion that Duiker’s Tshepo reaches—since Duiker has first brought him through many levels of hell, including a long course of male prostitution.¹⁰

These two novelists share with some others, like Zakes Mda, an interest in breaking through the givens of their post-apartheid worlds, exploring myths from the past, opening doors through trauma into unexpected vistas. In *Ways of Dying*, Mda’s Toloki moves from being, quite literally, a professional mourner, to an artist who chooses a lifelong friend as his muse, a woman with whom he can somehow craft a personal (and, by extension, national) future not dependent upon death. “Funerals acquire a life of their own,” he writes, “and give birth to other funerals” (Mda 1995, 160). As with Duiker, children play a crucial role. In Mda’s case, it is children that Toloki chooses as the subjects for his paintings, and these in turn bring hope to the community. Passers-by “say that the work has profound meaning. As usual, they cannot say what the meaning is. It is not even necessary to say, or even to know, what the meaning is. It is enough only to know that there is a meaning, and it is a profound one” (Mda 1995, 200). Again, like Duiker, the protagonist becomes a teacher: “the children are busy with Toloki’s crayons. They are trying to copy the images he has created, and are competing as to whose are better. To escape any further discussion on the merits of dreams, Toloki turns to the children and shows them various techniques of drawing better images” (Mda 1995, 201). *Ways of Dying* ends with a series of reconciliations, and finally turns to one of the most grotesque images of the attacks of blacks against blacks and attempts to transform even this into something cleansed of its horrid memories: “Tires are still burning. Tires can burn for a very long time. The smell of burning rubber fills the air. But this time it is not mingled with the sickly stench of roasting human flesh. Just pure wholesome rubber” (Mda 1995, 212).¹¹

If these black-authored novels seem intent on celebrating a healing of the nation and an embrace of their central role in building the nation by first accepting one another, recent novels by colored and white authors are more ambigu-

ous, somehow adrift in a sea with a receding shoreline. Typical are Zoë Wicomb and J. M. Coetzee. Wicomb's *David's Story* has attracted a great deal of critical interest, principally for its fascinating use of layers of narration that serve as a palimpsest, imitating the limits of memory and decidedly veering away from any sense of closure—except, perhaps, that of David, who commits suicide at the book's conclusion. His possible complicity in the death of Dulcie, a member like himself of the ANC, haunts his search for her and his spasmodic reconstruction of her life amidst his search for his own roots ("All is in shadow play, in mime, in a comic strip where speech bubbles taper into think dots that just miss their mouths" [2001, 184]). Note the distinctly uncomfortable threat that memory poses in this book, contrasted to its treatment in Mda, Mpe, or Duiker:

David is troubled by the idea of false memory . . . he is suspicious of the ways in which the tilt of a hat, the rustle of a palm leaf, or the bunching of curtain fabric will hold its meaning sealed, until one day, for no discernible reason, it will burst forth to speak of another time, an original moment that in turn will prove to be not the original after all, as promiscuous memory, spiraling into the past, mates with new disclosures to produce further moments of terrible surprise. Is one to believe that terror lies dormant in all the shapes and sounds and smells of our everyday encounters, that memories lie cravenly hidden one within another? Surely memory is not to be trusted. (Wicomb 2001, 194-95)

Memory, for David, is like Henry James's "Beast in the Jungle," an epiphany to be avoided at all costs. The editor remarks that David constantly changes the subject, "skirting about Dulcie, a protean subject that slithers hither and thither, out of reach, repeating, replacing, transforming itself" (Wicomb 2001, 35).¹²

Wicomb sees to it that David's story ramifies on multiple levels of the country's story, spending as much time on the Griqua nation, the "Hottentot Venus," Krotos Eva, and ANC intrigues as on David's meandering tale. Wicomb further complicates the narrative by having David die by his own hand, and then framing the tale by putting it in the hands of an imagined editor, who admits that he/she corrected various aspects of the original. "[David's] fragments," writes this purported editor, "betray the desire to distance himself from his own story; the many beginnings, invariably flights into history, although he is no historian, show uncertainty about whether to begin at all. He has made some basic errors with dates [which ones?], miscalculating more than a hundred years[!]. . . . If there is such a thing as truth, he said, it has to be left to its own devices, find its own way . . . my prattling, as he called it, about meaning in the margin, or absence as an aspect of writing, had nothing to do with his project" (Wicomb 2001, 1-2). According to David, writes this editor, "there is no need to fret about writing, about our choice of words in the New South Africa; rather, we will have to make do with mixtures of meaning, will have to rely on typographic devices like the slash for many more years" (Wicomb 2001, 3).

Part of the uncomfortably compromised history that David wishes to keep in suspension is the ANC's patriarchy and its own cruelty and killings in its own detention camps. Like the racial mixing that is part of Griqua history,¹³ the ethical mixing that flits in and out of the shadows of this novel haunts its protagonist, and finally hounds him to his own death.

As painful, however, as David's missed encounters with the truth undoubtedly are, it is Dulcie who is tortured and killed—another woman in a long line of victims in South African history. It is her disappearance from history and her blurring in memory that undergirds the central criticism implied in Wicomb's complex defamiliarization of her readers' notions of history and a full and truthful record. If David provides the hub for the narration, the novel is really made up of a series of spokes that extend out from the center, and these partial memories and truncated narrative lines are principally about women who are far more important players in the history of South Africa than is David Dirkse, sometime guerilla. Wicomb's novel is very much about the ambivalence that also informs Jeremy Cronin's poem about the corpse that has come back to life and is "running towards us."

In a strange way, the same might be said of the plotting of J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*, which purports to be the story of 52-year-old David Lurie, but which ultimately turns the tables on his recurring objectification of women by removing all the struts that have supported his sense of self. In the process, the very women whom he has used and shunted off to the sidelines take on bolder outlines, fuller shading, more dramatic characterization. As with Wicomb's novel, which used its white male protagonist's insistent indirection to embody "history's" devalorization of women, Coetzee ironizes her male protagonist's centrality in the story (and in history) and, in the process, allows the story's female characters to step into more prominent roles.

Both novels, as well, demand a more complex reading of the TRC—Wicomb by leveling an implied criticism against the internal workings of the ANC (a move analogous to Ngugi wa Thiong'o's critique of Kenyan revolutionary movements in *Petals of Blood*), and Coetzee by comparing the process to an academic exercise with its own internal politics. On one level, Coetzee's novel appears to offer two metaphors that some critics of the TRC may find compatible with their way of thinking. The first is a play in which the student David Lurie seduces has a minor role:

Sunset at the Globe Salon is the name of the play they are rehearsing: a comedy of the new South Africa set in a hairdressing salon in Hillbrow, Johannesburg. On stage a hairdresser, flamboyantly gay, attends to two clients, one black, one white. Patter passes among the three of them: jokes, insults. Catharsis seems to be the presiding principle: all the coarse old prejudices brought into the light of day and washed away in gales of laughter. (Coetzee 1999, 23)

The second metaphor for the TRC is the hearing that considers the charges of sexual harassment against Professor Lurie. The panel chairperson in-

forms him that "this is not a trial but an inquiry. Our rules of procedure are not those of a law court" (Coetzee 1999, 48). In his heart, Lurie has already dismissed such claims to objectivity ("The gossip-mill, he thinks, turning day and night, grinding reputations. The community of the righteous, holding their sessions in corners, over the telephone, behind closed doors. Glee-ful whispers. *Schadenfreude*. First the sentence, then the trial" [1999, 42]). Later, when Lurie pleads guilty to the charges and is told that there is a difference between pleading guilty and admitting one is wrong, he replies, "I won't do it. I appeared before an officially constituted tribunal, before a branch of the law. Before that secular tribunal I pleaded guilty, a secular plea. That plea should suffice. Repentance is neither here nor there. Repentance belongs to another world, to another universe of discourse" (Coetzee 1999, 58). Such a "secular plea" seems to echo those of several prominent apartheid agents who maintained they had operated in the best interests of the nation, and that there was nothing for which they should, therefore, be sorry.

But on a second level the broader metaphor is one of enlightenment, of acknowledgment of one's complicity in evil that (as with Wicomb's interrogation of "history") extends beyond straightforward questions of legality. The novel can be read as an allegory for what the TRC has meant in post-apartheid South Africa, but can also be read as a particularly South African rendering of the fall from paradise, and of the story of Adam and Eve. In a word, Lurie comes to acknowledge his own misuse of women ("not rape, not quite that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core" [Coetzee 1999, 25]), and the reader undoubtedly recognizes the suggestion that Lurie, writ large, embodies the white race's "rape" of South Africa, with consequences in subsequent generations that cannot be nicely encompassed by traditional legal assignments of guilt and innocence.¹⁴ As one anonymous student informs the professor, this Casanova's days are over—and whether we read this as the story of one professor, of whites in South Africa, or of males in general, Coetzee gives the reader plenty of "historical" evidence to make such a narrative interpretation "truthful."

Coetzee, perhaps like many of those who worked with the TRC, seems finally less interested in the "trial" itself and more focused on the many personal trials that it will allow to subsequently take place in private. After all, Lurie's board of inquiry is over with three-fourths of the novel still ahead. In his consequent removal from a familiar world of prestige to one of anonymous volunteer work with abandoned dogs in some out-of-the-way backwater, Lurie faces an uncertain future that will be built, first, on a day-to-day engagement with the present. The lesbian daughter with whom he now lives, and whom he could not protect from a brutal rape, becomes *his* teacher. After her own "disgrace" following her rape, she decides not to leave but to continue to engage with the complex and messy world in which she finds herself. "No, I'm not leaving," she informs him.

There is a pause between them.

"How humiliating," he says finally. "Such high hopes, and to end like this."

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

"Like a dog."

"Yes, like a dog." (Coetzee 1999, 205)

It is a stark truth that she proposes, but one that her father finally embraces. "One gets used to things getting harder," he concludes; "one ceases to be surprised that what used to be as hard as hard can be grows harder yet" (Coetzee 1999, 219). As bare as this may appear to be when read out of context, it is the context, after all, that provides all the meaning and substance in any life. In David Lurie's—and perhaps in South Africa's—this is the base from which any future structure must arise. As Rosemary Jolly remarks, "The TRC . . . has exposed . . . the coping strategy . . . of a society pathologically involved in deceiving itself" (2001, 700). South Africa sees itself as setting an example for the rest of the continent in its engagement with issues of globalization, but the literature it has produced since the end of apartheid and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission gives evidence that the cultural issues postcolonial theorists typically engage will fester beneath the skin of economic advances until they are honestly addressed. Recent fiction suggests that South Africa's writers have taken their cue and wish to cure the pathology by facing the complex present in which they find themselves.

This essay was written during a residency at the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Study and Conference Center, and I wish to express my gratitude for their hospitality and support of my work.

NOTES

1. Dirlik writes: "Since postcolonial criticism has focused on the postcolonial subject to the exclusion of an account of the world outside the subject, the global condition implied by postcoloniality appears at best as a projection onto the world of postcolonial subjectivity and epistemology—a discursive constitution of the world, in other words, in accordance with the constitution of the postcolonial subject, much as it had been constituted earlier by the epistemologies that are the object of postcolonial criticism" (Dirlik 1994, 336). Similarly, in Ong's words, "Only by weaving the analysis of cultural politics and political economy into a single framework can we hope to provide a nuanced delineation of the complex relations between transnational phenomena, national regimes, and cultural practices in late modernity" (16). And Gikandi: "Once social scientists had defined the new global culture as one built around images, the imagined, and the imaginary, they had in effect invited the rule

of the literary. . . . At the bare bottom, postcolonial theory is the assertion of the centrality of the literary in the diagnosis and representation of the social terrain that we have been discussing under the sign of globalization" (646-47). On the other hand, Paul Sharra notes that "there have been networks of decolonizing cultural formations that are both part of and different from the forces of globalization before and after those decades in which the 'winds of change' blew away Britain's Empire" (727).

2. See, for example, *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa*, eds. Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee.

3. See Brendon Nicholls's "Post-Apartheid Violence and the Institutions of Literature."

4. "The provision for the TRC, which includes the opportunity to appeal for amnesty in cases of politically motivated crimes against humanity, was made as a consequence of South Africa's negotiated settlement, and that fact is frequently ignored or overlooked by those seeking to undermine the commission and its work. The amnesty provision, as one line of argument goes, spares the worst of the offenders, undermining the credibility of the TRC as a key player in the process of establishing the postapartheid state. It is difficult, says Wilhelm Verwoerd. . . , for liberals not to feel that the TRC offers victims a place in which to 'just talk,' without ensuring that 'justice will be done.' From the other side of the political spectrum, he points out, come the complaints that it is an 'ANC witch hunt'" (695-96).

5. John K. Noyes offers a like-minded, though somewhat more Eurocentric, warning to his countrymen and women, lest they attempt to duplicate the West, lock, stock, and barrel. "The concept of universal human experience that drove the European renaissance," he writes, "is also central to the African renaissance. But central to both is also the idea of a universal market based on the globalization of value. If the African renaissance thinks it can build upon the tradition of universal humanity coupled to globalization, powerful world financial institutions, and a universal market, without adopting the tradition of critical thought that grew out of and aligned itself against this situation, it is headed for trouble. A neo-liberal balancing act that pays lip service to the socialist humanist project on the one side while bowing to the force of global capital on the other will soon find that it is doing nothing but reinventing a name for a culture of consumption for the select few on the African continent and calling it African renaissance."

6. "The TRC can be seen as the locus of a ritual of reconciliation that does not depend on closure, one that can invoke the past in the name of the future. The very excess of this ritual—that is, its surplus of meaning beyond the mechanics of secular and legal concepts of violation, testimony, proof, confession, judgment, punishment, financial compensation, even the truths the commission itself seeks to verify—serves its mandate of contributing substantially to the creation of South Africa's new democracy" (Jolly 710).

7. "Global capitalism's construction of states as equal before the law—in this case, the law of supply and demand—mirrors that of the liberal subject. I suggest, then, that the commodification of human rights, undertaken in the name of ethics, but in actuality in service to business, speaks to the ways in which 'democratic' and corporate citizenship have become aligned. . . . The TRC hold value as an institution that resists such commodification" (Jolly 694-95).

8. Peter and Linda Biehl, Amy's parents, subsequently established the Amy Biehl Foundation in Cape Town to help rehabilitate young men like their daughter's killers. Two of the identified killers, Ntobeko Peni and Easy Nofemla, were trained by the Foundation as mechanics.

9. "When the commissioners decide that an applicant has made full disclosure and is therefore eligible for amnesty, they accept the perpetrator's version of events, even when it directly contradicts the evidence given by his victims. . . . Thus, for all of the TRC's rhetoric of reconciliation and restoration, its processes inevitably throw the victims' accounts of the past into conflict with the accounts given by the perpetrators themselves. The political need for amnesty and the humanitarian need for reform and restoration appear to be contradictory, perhaps even mutually exclusive, and the Commission has therefore given birth to a crisis of public memory and collective agency. That is, to the extent that the victim hearings have failed to balance the perpetrator-oriented amnesty process, the Commission's work has not only failed to restore the 'human and civil dignity' of the victims of apartheid-era violence, but it actually threatens to reproduce the symbolic erasure of the impoverished black and coloured masses" (12).

10. For an informed discussion of the interchange between apartheid and homosexuality, see William L. Leap's "'Strangers on a Train': Sexual Citizenship and the Politics of Public Transportation in Apartheid Cape Town." On AIDS, see Julie Torrant's "Global AIDS and the Imperialist State."

11. If *Ways of Dying* can be read as a national allegory, J. U. Jacobs, in "Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness*: The Novel as *Umgqokolo*," argues that in this more recent novel Mda "has responded to [Njabulo S.] Ndebele's challenge [to rediscover the ordinary and restore the human dimension to black South African storytelling] by addressing the present history of South Africa in regional terms rather than those of national allegory, and in a narrative that draws on distinctive cultural practice and a particular even from the South African past to structure its concern with contemporary realities" (224).

12. The book becomes, in fact, a stereotypical self-consuming artifact, as the editor records a strange experience at the end of the writing: "I take a break from writing this impossible story with a turn in my unseasonable garden, slipping a backup disk into my pocket as I always do. Especially since, on my return from the funeral, I found several days' work gone, replaced by a queer message in bold: *this text deletes itself*" (212).

13. For an interesting reading of the recent return from France of the body of Saartje Baartman's for reburial in South Africa, see Kai Easton's "Travelling Through History."

14. Meg Samuelson, in "The Rainbow Womb: Rape and Race in South African Fiction of the Transition," notes that post-apartheid novels frequently focus on interracial rape as a metaphor of the future of the nation (noting that this even plays itself out in male-on-male rape in Duiker's novel), but disputes the emphasis, noting that this "fails to ring true in reality, where rape is overwhelmingly intraracial and the rate of conception comparatively low" (88). See, also, Gillian Gane's "Unspeakable Injuries in *Disgrace* and *David's Story*."

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