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The movement of transition: trends in the post-apartheid South African novels of English expression

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Abstract

The period of South Africa's political transition in the late 1980s and 1990s also saw a number of interesting developments in the field of cultural production, especially within the province of literature. A number of literary scholars, critics of all realms, writers, some enthusiasts and adventurers all showed interest in the direction of literature after the repressive years of apartheid. The dominant academic question at the time centred on the possible transition in the thematic and formalistic dimension of the literature of the new South Africa. Scholars and cultural commentators that include Es'kia Mphahlele, Njabulo Ndebele, Albie Sachs, Guy Butler, Elleke Boehmer, Michael Chapman, Mbulelo Mzamane, Andries Walter Oliphant, amongst others, all contributed immensely in the debates that attempted to define the possible direction of the literature after apartheid. This research is concerned with the developments in the Post-Apartheid South African Novels of English expression. Its focus is on how temporal mobility has impacted on cultural production especially as witnessed in the many transformations in the field of literature, particularly the novel as a genre. Using the tropes of memory, violence, and otherness, it examines the novels of writers as varying as André Brink, J.M. Coetzee, Zakes Mda, Zoë Wicomb, and Jo-Anne Richards. At the level of form, the fantastical and the confessional modes of narration are discussed as significant manifestations of the post-apartheid narratives using the novels of André Brink and Jo-Anne Richards respectively. It suggests that, among other things, the post-apartheid novels of English expression are marked by some interesting thematic blocs that include the fascination with land, the artistic display of remorse through the confessional mode, the rekindling of memory and its representation in narrative, the peculiar interest in violence and alterity, the continuing reportage of the urban space and the implications of urbanity on the ordinary citizenry, the recourse to gangsterism, miscegenation and the dilemma of a humankind confined to the psychological spaces of the interstices. Efforts were made in this research to avoid the 'intellectual apartheid' often associated with the hermeneutic engagements of the literati previously devoted to South Africa's literary scholarship. It is for this reason that a more elaborate introductory chapter highlights aspects of the contributions of novelists and scholars that include Nadine Gordimer, Mongane Wally Serote, Lewis Nkosi, Njabulo Ndebele, and the 'emergent' ones such as Phaswane Mpe, K. Sello Duiker, Pamela Jooste, among others. An important

dimension to this study is that it situates the Post-Apartheid narratives not only within relevant historical contexts, but also develops its argument by drawing immensely from the intellectual culture dominant in South Africa *before*, *during*, and *after* the notorious era of racial separatism. It concludes on the suggestive note that South African writers and literary scholars should attempt to demonstrate a more rigorous interest in locating the creative points of convergence between the aesthetic and social ideals.

KEY WORDS: Post-Apartheid Narratives, Postcolonial African Literature, English Studies, Memory, Violence, Otherness/Alterity, Magic Realism, Confessional Fiction.