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# " To see another person's face... to touch another person's hand": bodies and intimate relations in the fiction of Marlene Van Niekerk

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# “TO SEE ANOTHER PERSON’S FACE … TO TOUCH ANOTHER PERSON’S HAND”: BODIES AND INTIMATE RELATIONS IN THE FICTION OF MARLENE VAN NIEKERK.

Lara Buxbaum

# “TO SEE ANOTHER PERSON’S FACE … TO TOUCH ANOTHER PERSON’S HAND”: BODIES AND INTIMATE RELATIONS IN THE FICTION OF MARLENE VAN NIEKERK.

Lara Buxbaum

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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**Abstract**

Marlene van Niekerk is an original and virtuouso writer who has been lauded both locally and internationally. Although Van Niekerk's works have aroused considerable critical attention, analysis has thus far focused mainly on the individual novels. Furthermore, the importance of bodies in her writing has been neglected. In this thesis I attempt to correct that critical occlusion by analysing bodies and intimate relations in Van Niekerk's three novels, *Triomf* (1994/1999), *Agaat* (2004/2006) and *Memorandum* (2006). Corporeality is emphasized in the interactions between characters; in fact it seems that any kind of understanding is mediated, facilitated or impeded through the body. I adopt Elizabeth Grosz's explanation of embodied subjectivity which avoids what she might term the Cartesian, monist or essentialist fallacy of embodiment (1994). The first chapter presents an overview of the existing literature on Van Niekerk and theories of bodies. In Chapter Two I propose that any consideration of spatiality in the novel must also take into account corporeality. With reference to apartheid spatial discourse and the recurring cartographic motifs, I argue that all of the protagonists articulate the desire for a nurturing environment. Chapter Three explores the relationship between narrative and body fragments in order to determine whether remembering (or re-membering) can prove salutary. I consider how intimate relationships are implicated in working through the embodied experience of trauma and whether recognition might provide an alternative narrative of healing to the confessional mode. I inquire whether, in the absence of a coherent narrative and healed body, there might prove something liberating in celebrating the potential of the fragment. Relations of looking are the focus of Chapter Four where I investigate whether reciprocity is possible. Chapter Five objects to allegorical readings of the incest and sexual relations which forecloses more nuanced readings. Furthermore I maintain that some of these encounters be read as rape. *Triomf* and *Agaat* subvert "the rape script" thus raising difficult questions about the nature of complicity, intimacy and power. The final chapter illustrates the manner in which intimacy is affected by the imminence of death. I consider the extent to which the bodywork entailed in caring for a dying person alters relationships and explore the changes in metaphors of embodiment employed by the dying person. In this manner I hope to illuminate hitherto unexplored similarities in these three novels which make for a richer appreciation of Van Niekerk's oeuvre as well as encourage new ways of reading embodiment and intimacy .

**Key Words:**

Marlene van Niekerk, Bodies, Intimacy, *Triomf*, *Agaat*, *Memorandum*, Embodied Subjectivity, Spatiality, Rape, Dying, Voyeurism, Fragments, Trauma.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

Lara Buxbaum

30th day of May, 2014.

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Please note that during the course of writing this thesis I published three articles on Van Niekerk based on my PhD research (Buxbaum 2011a, 2012a and 2013). I will refer to these throughout, and certain aspects of the argument as published are repeated here. I have also delivered papers at conferences, which have not been published, the contents of which are referred to in the body of this research.

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**Introduction**

Marlene Van Niekerk is a revolutionary writer whose innovative treatment of bodies and intimacy warrants in-depth analysis. Van Niekerk has received numerous critical accolades and her work has given rise to much lively discussion within the South African, and of late the global, literary community. However, there has been no critical analysis of her oeuvre as a whole. While scholarship on Van Niekerk has continued to rise to rise over the twenty years since her first novel was published, analysis of bodies in her work remains virtually non-existent, as do comparative studies of her novels.[1] The aim of my research is to show that Marlene Van Niekerk's three novels: *Triomf* (1994 [English translation 1999]), *Agaat* (2004 [English translation 2006]) and *Memorandum* (2006 [English translation 2006]) share a common interest in the [im]possibility of creating and maintaining intimate relationships between embodied subjects. To follow Emma Bedford then,[2] I wish to question "what constitutes intimate relationships and how those relations between people, places and objects are structured" (Bedford 2007: 33). That is to say, I intend to explore the ways in which Van Niekerk's protagonists attempt to connect with and understand each other and their environment.

Although Van Niekerk's work has aroused considerable critical attention, analysis has thus far focused on individual novels in isolation. I am aware that these three novels differ dramatically and can certainly not be viewed as a trilogy.[3] However, I believe the argument can be made for an overlap of themes and critical concerns within their pages. By tracing the development of Van Niekerk's thought in *Triomf*, *Agaat* and *Memorandum* I hope to illuminate hitherto unexplored similarities which make for a richer appreciation of Van Niekerk's oeuvre.

Van Niekerk's books are peopled with characters who are geographically isolated and culturally marginalised. The incestuous Benades of *Triomf* are neighbourhood pariahs (242); in *Agaat*, "everyone was always starved for company" (91), while the "loner" Wiid wonders if he had

[1]The exceptions to this are Burger (2009a and 2009b), Van Niekerk (2008b) and Buxbaum (2011a and 2013).

[2] Bedford's article is based on a discussion of the Marlene Dumas Exhibition entitled "Intimate Relations". I have appropriated this phrase for the title of my dissertation as it succinctly summarizes the issues with which I am concerned. Furthermore, since Marlene Dumas and Marlene Van Niekerk enjoy a relationship of mutual artistic respect and share many common concerns, it seems appropriate to adopt this title. Van Niekerk wrote the introduction, "Seven *M*-blems for Marlene Dumas", to *Marlene Dumas: Selected Works* (2005). She also contributed "Mass for the Painter", after Dumas' "The Painter", to the catalogue of *Marlene Dumas: Intimate Relations* (2007). The poem "credo uit die 'skildersmis'" from her latest collection of Afrikaans poetry *Kaar* (2013: 196-201) appears to be adapted from "Mass for the Painter" and is inspired by the same Dumas painting.

[3] Although the novels do suggest a kind of temporal linearity: *Triomf* is set on the eve of the first democratic elections, *Agaat* is set a couple of years into the new democratic dispensation while *Memorandum* relates to the first decade of the 21st century.

"always been nothing but [his] brother's still life" (*Memorandum*, 67). Yet despite their isolation from the larger community, the protagonists are forced to share intimate spaces with each other, to cross the silence, division and hatred in order to rely on each other to survive. They also long for connection with others, for community, empathy, understanding and someone to "abide with them" (*Memorandum*, 124). Van Niekerk herself has discussed the primacy of "intimate relationships" in *Agaat* (L'Ange 2007, Pienaar 2005 and De Kock 2009). It is this element of her protagonists' lives that I wish to explicate – their complex interpersonal relationships.

Critics have agreed that Van Niekerk's characters share an inability to communicate, but generally do not interrogate this statement further. Van Niekerk's visceral, almost obsessive descriptions of bodies, body parts, body fluids, childbirth and disease leave no doubt as to the corporeal existence of her characters. In her fiction the body is not merely a sign or symbol. The characters experience the world as bodies; they are embodied, (although at times they express shock at the very grotesque, creaturely nature of these bodies). This fixation with bodies has received no notable attention from literary scholars. It seems then, that there is a gap in Van Niekerk scholarship that can be filled by exploring the body and intimate relations in her fiction.

Corporeality is emphasized in the interactions between characters; in fact, it seems that any kind of understanding is mediated, facilitated or impeded through bodies. Characters struggle to engage in honest conversation and to connect through language and yet for brief moments, they succeed in expressing themselves and communicating through and with their bodies. It is for this reason that a discussion of intimate relationships must consider the embodied subjectivity of the protagonists and the extent to which their experience as inescapably embodied beings affects their relationships. It is not the contention of this thesis, then, that the bodies of the characters act as signs or are to be 'read' separately from their intentions in a kind of dualistic analysis. Rather, the characters are 'inseparable' from their bodies, their bodies 'speak' and it is only when bodies speak that any kind of empathy or understanding exists in their intimate relationships.

Marlene Van Niekerk is an original voice in the South African literary landscape who challenges many preconceptions that might have been held about the future of specifically white, Afrikaans writing in this country. She transgresses the boundaries and limits of the South African literary canon and the new creative possibilities she charts for fiction in general deserve to be elucidated. The questions she raises concerning the representations of embodiment warrant further discussion.

My thesis is based on the English translations of the novels. As Van Niekerk becomes recognised

worldwide, most readers will, perhaps ironically, encounter her work in a language other than Afrikaans, a fact of which the author herself is not unaware (cf De Kock 2003: 347). Van Niekerk's novels are read around the world; more copies have been sold of *Agaat* in Swedish or Dutch translation than in the original (Stehle 2013:10).[4] Thus far, her novels have been translated into English, Swedish, Dutch and Norwegian. Both Leon de Kock (translator of *Triomf*) and Michiel Heyns (translator of *Agaat* and *Memorandum*), whose translations have been critically lauded, have written about the processes of translating Van Niekerk's work (see De Kock 2003, 2009a, 2012 and Heyns 2009). Devarenne (2006), Swart (2007) and England (2013) have also commented on the changes made in the translated versions. While there is certainly more work to be done in this regard, and in consideration of the manner in which South African literature travels globally (cf Van Niekerk *Fellow Traveller*), this project is not a translation studies one. A great many classic texts – from the Bible to Dante's *Inferno*, *Don Quixote*, *War and Peace* (to name but a tiny sample) – are only accessible to the English reader in translations. Thus, I approach this project fully aware of the issues raised by these particular translations, of what Heyns refers to as the "irreparable loss and exorbitant gain" of translations (2009) but also confident that analysing the English translations is a valid and not necessarily controversial approach.

This thesis will concern itself with three broad areas of investigation. Firstly, I will explore the importance of bodies and the manner in which they are described in Van Niekerk's fiction. Secondly, I will draw conclusions as to how the protagonists' relationship to their own bodies affects their subjectivity. Finally, I will discuss the impact of their embodied subjectivity on their intimate relationships.

The first chapter of this thesis provides an overview of the existing literature on Van Niekerk's novels and theories of bodies which has influenced my research.

Chapter Two introduces Grosz's explanation of "lived spatiality" (2001) and the embodiment of space. I explore the relationship that Van Niekerk sets up between characters and their environment and discuss the extent to which their surroundings curtail their freedom and impact on their sense of self. A discussion of apartheid spatial discourse and cartographic motifs will allow me to explore the divisions of space and changing conceptions of land ownership and possession. I propose that all of the protagonists articulate a desire for a 'nurturing environment'.

[4] As of November 2013, 30 000 copies of the Swedish translation had been sold and 40 000 of the Dutch. In comparison, only 14 000 copies of the original Afrikaans were bought in South Africa (Stehle 2013:10). I am unsure of the global sales figures for the English translations.

Chapter Three takes Elleke Boehmer's (1993) theory of transfiguration as its starting point. I explore the significance of the relationship between the depiction of fragmented bodies and fragmented narratives of self. The revelation of a traumatic past is reflected in the fragmented, wounded or disproportionate bodies of Van Niekerk's characters. Against this backdrop I explore the potential consolations of remembering.

At various points in the three novels, characters express their frustration that they cannot see the world through the eyes of others, as this perspective might provide the insight and understanding they seek. In Chapter Four, I explore the role of voyeurism and spying and question whether a reciprocal looking relation is ever achieved.

Chapter Five focuses on violent intimate relationships. The tendency has been to ignore the specifics of these relations in favour of an allegorical reading of the texts. However, such a reading diminished the horror of the brutality and forestalls a categorisation of many of the sexual encounters as rape. I examine the manner in which the *Triomf* and *Agaat* debunk rape myths and also complicate conventional notions of complicity and victimhood.

All three texts are concerned with the themes of sickness and a dying protagonist's slow progression towards death. The search for the origins of illness preoccupies the characters and it seems that disease can be attributed as much to medical causes as to socio-political and personal history. Of particular interest are the metaphors of embodiment that Van Niekerk employs to describe the experience of dying. In the light of Elaine Scarry's (1985) contention regarding the inexpressibility of physical pain and Maurice Blanchot's thoughts about the "unsharability" of dying (1995), in Chapter Six, I consider the ways in which being present for the dying of another uniquely affects intimacy.

In summing up my argument I propose answers to the three questions which prompted my research. I suggest that Van Niekerk's novels make a positive contribution to the existing critical literature on bodies and insist that the somatic dimensions of relationships cannot be ignored. In closing I will propose what might be termed a *Marlene van Niekerkian* theory of embodied subjectivity and intimacy. Finally I will recommend potential new avenues of research

## Chapter One
## Literature on Van Niekerk and Bodies

Following an introduction to her individual novels, I will elaborate on the theorists and literary critics whose work relates to issues of the body and relationships between the self and other which have proved relevant for this research.

### *Triomf*

Marlene van Niekerk's *Triomf* was published and set in 1994, at the time of the democratic transition in South Africa. It has garnered a considerable amount of critical attention and achieved a kind of cult-status in Afrikaans literature (Van Coller 2009). The English translation, by Leon de Kock, on which my thesis is based appeared in 1999 to great critical acclaim. Twenty years after its initial publication, this darkly comic novel continues to reward and provoke readers. Most early reviewers focused on the various ways in which Van Niekerk deconstructs the mythology and ideology that served to sustain Afrikaner nationalism and apartheid (see Brophy 2006 and Shear 2006). In this regard, the novel has primarily been read allegorically (see also Rossman 2012a for a religio-spiritual allegorical reading). The Benades are thus seen as the horrifying result of the insularity of apartheid doctrine taken to its incestuous yet logical extreme. These myths and ideologies might be included in what Treppie, in *Triomf*, describes as "wallpaper": a theme which has been explored by Burger (2000 and 2002), Van Der Merwe (1999) and Van Coller (2009). Burger likens Treppie to the "Dionisiese monster of Zarathustra" (2000: 4) who eschews all attempts to narrate history, to euphemize reality with language.

The role of the dogs in the novel has also received critical attention by Woodward (2001), Jackson (2011) and Dayan (2013). Woodward argues that Van Niekerk challenges the "foundational dualism of self and other in [her] representation of the relationships between dogs and humans" (2001:95). She suggests that animals play a key role in the intimate relationships of the protagonists in that they act as "intermediaries" and that furthermore the Benades tend to exhibit the characteristics of an animal nature (2001: 99 & 101).

*Triomf* 'writes back' to, and positions itself at a critical distance from, the Afrikaans literary canon (Oliphant 2006, Viljoen 1996). Van Der Merwe refers to it as "'n moderne variant van die Ampie-geskiedenis; die uitbeelding van die arm Afrikaners" (2004).[5] However, *Triomf* is not simply a

[5] "A modern version of the 'Ampie history'; the depiction of the poor Afrikaners" (Own translation). This is a reference to Jochem van Bruggen's *Ampie* trilogy (1924, 1928, 1942) which relates the travails of 'poor whites' (see Olivier

'modern Ampie-tale' (cf *Triomf* 215 and see Irlam 2004: 705-706). It parodies and satirizes the conventions of the romanticized 'plaasroman' and the 'voorstadsroman' (Van Coller 2009). Van Niekerk's inventive use of the Afrikaans language, her intermingling of formal ideologically-loaded phrases, religious expression with everyday slang and expletives also mark this novel as a departure from Afrikaans tradition as well as her own previous writing (see Van Niekerk 2008: 104, Devarenne 2006 and De Kock 2003 and 2009a).[6]

***Agaat***

*Agaat* has been described as "die laaste plaasroman" or "the last farm novel" (Coetzee 2007: 353) and the appropriateness of this epithet as well as its implications for the fate of the Afrikaner in South Africa has generated much fiery debate.[7] However, the denouncements of *Agaat* as promoting the 'metaphorical suicide' and cultural assimilation of the Afrikaner tend to lack depth or validity and are not worth rehashing.[8] For the most part these objections can be summarily dismissed as it is not the purpose of this project to engage with them.[9] That is not to say that there is not room for a nuanced engagement with the questions Van Niekerk raises in this allusive text about Afrikaner identity and the new avenues for Afrikaans and South African fiction it *opens.*

Van Der Merwe (2004), Wessels (2006), De Villiers (2007) and Prinsloo and Visagie (2007) explore the ways in which *Agaat* confronts the gender conventions of the 'plaasroman' in Van Niekerk's depiction of the matriarchal order governing the farm, thus allowing for a critique of traditional gender roles. Visagie argues that *Agaat* challenges readers to reconsider so-called traditional Afrikaans 'cultural goods', stripped of the mythical status they were accorded by the ideology of Afrikaner nationalism, and possibly to attempt to reintegrate them into contemporary *and future* Afrikaans culture (2005). He concludes that the novel should be considered a "lewende monument vir Afrikaans" (*ibid.*).[10] In a response to critics, Anton van Niekerk incisively states that "Daar gebeur egter veel meer tussen Milla en Agaat as 'n mikroweergawe van die ontvouing van

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2012:316).

[6] Van Niekerk has admitted that her decision to write in this hybrid style was a direct reaction to critics who accused her of adopting an overly-philosophical and elevated style in her previous texts : "And so I decided to write about the most complex things in the most crass language imaginable, and I wrote *Triomf"* (L'Ange 2007).There is a similarity between Van Niekerk's stated intention here and characteristics of other Southern African writers as discussed by Veit-Wild: "[Dambudzo] Marechera and [Lesego] Rampolokeng make use of a violent, scathingly obscene or parodic language to smash the façade of a corroded and sick society" (107).

[7] See Visagie (2005), Anton Van Niekerk (2004) and Burger's (2005) response to Johann Rossouw's political interpretation of the novel.

[8] Burger (2005) has bemoaned the fact that many critics have used the novel as a starting point for a political discussion that in fact has very little to do with the novel itself.

[9] Van Niekerk's witty retort to these kinds of critics is worth quoting: "Someone accused me of promoting the self-abrogation of the Afrikaner. To which I reply, oh please man, make me a cabbage stew!" (L'Ange 2007).

[10] "A living monument to Afrikaans" (own translation).

Afrikanernasionalisme sedert 1948" (2004).[11] It is this assertion that is particularly prescient for my research. Van Niekerk's novel is certainly not oblivious to the political context. However, Anton van Niekerk is correct in that the intimate relationship between Milla and Agaat cannot simply be explained away as an inevitable outcome and microcosm of the South African socio-political context. I am interested in exploring the other ways of analyzing and understanding their relationship.

Marlene van Niekerk has insisted that her "main thrust and main obsession [in *Agaat*] was the workings of power in intimate relationships" (quoted in De Kock 2009: 141). Several critics have explored the nature of the relationships in the novel and agree that it is the personal rather than the political that dominate (for different readings of these relationships see Van Der Merwe 2004, Burger 2005, Wessels 2006, De Villiers, 2007, Prinsloo and Visagie 2007, Stobie 2009, Olivier 2011 and Rossman and Stobie 2012). Commentators have elaborated on the various ways in which Milla attempts to mould Agaat's identity. Nevertheless, Van Der Merwe (2004) and Wessels (2006:40) agree that Agaat is more than merely Milla's reflection; Wessels insists that she remains incomprehensible, "die 'ander', die onpeilbare, die veragte en gevreesde, die vergetalting van die blanke Afrikaner se angs en onmag teenoor die bedreiging van 'n kultuur-vreemde meerderheid" (2006:40).[12] Van Der Merwe, drawing on the philosophy of Martin Buber suggests: "Die wêreld wat uitgebeeld word [in *Agaat*], word fundamenteel deur verhoudings bepaal, deur mense wat mekaar vorm en mekaar reflekteer, wat die wêreld na hul eie sin beskou en herskep" (2004).[13] Jacobs maintains that "[t]he relationship between Agaat and Milla provides perhaps the most comprehensive representation of colonial/apartheid mimicry, mockery and menace in contemporary South African fiction (Jacobs 2012: 85). Several writers have explored whether Agaat, as subaltern, is given a chance to speak and have focused on her embroidery as a form of expression (Burger 2006, Prinsloo and Visagie 2007, Carvalho and Van Vuuren 2009).[14] Eva Hunter draws on the research by Shireen Ally into domestic workers to propose that "Ally's term, 'the ambiguities of intimacy', takes us to the heart of the Agaat-Milla relationship, and, in the South African 'post colony', such ambiguities persist, giving Van Niekerk's fiction a contemporary relevance" (2012). Gerrit Olivier considers the mother-daughter relationship between Milla and Agaat, which

[11] "Much more happens between Milla and Agaat than merely a microcosm of the unfolding of Afrikaner nationalism from 1948 onwards" (own translation).

[12] "The 'other', the unfathomable, the scorned and dreaded, the accumulation of the white Afrikaner's angst and powerlessness against the threat of a culturally-alien majority" (own translation).

[13] "The world that is depicted [in *Agaat*], is fundamentally determined by relationships, by people who form and reflect each other, and who view and recreate the world according to their own perspective" (own translation).

[14] It is not my intention to repeat these detailed arguments, especially since their emphasis falls beyond the scope of this thesis. Suffice to say that I agree that her embroidery provides her with a means of self-expression and self-articulation.

complicates their intimacy further (2011). I believe there is more to be to be said regarding how the embodied subjectivity of characters is formed and affected by these ambiguous intimate relationships, beyond the binaries invoked by postcolonial theories.

A recurring motif in Van Niekerk's writing is the mirror. Willie Burger (2006) and Johan van der Walt (2009) have explored the significance of mirrors in *Agaat* with reference to Jacques Lacan's 'mirror stage'. Burger examines the possibilities set out by the novel of "finding the other as other" (2006:178). He argues that Milla's physical inability, on her death-bed, to speak to Agaat and Agaat's inability to respond to Milla in anything other than mimicry of Milla's own language suggests that communication between the two of them can never actually occur; the imaginary order cannot be overcome. Nevertheless, Burger does suggest that there is a possibility to know the other through an intimate knowledge of the other's body (2006: 179 & 192). He suggests there is more to be said on this topic, but does not pursue it further. It seems, then, that there is a rationale for extending Van Niekerk scholarship by exploring the possibility that communication can be achieved via bodies or the creation of an embodied language.

***Memorandum***

Very little critical literature is available on *Memorandum*, which is subtitled "A Story with Paintings" and Van Niekerk's text appears alongside the late Adriaan van Zyl's paintings. *Memorandum* eludes easy categorization into any one genre and the interplay between text and painting has been the focus of discussion. Mark Sanders (2007) has published an article on the role of mimesis and memory in *Memorandum* in which he explores the dialogue between Van Niekerk's writing and Van Zyl's painting. Joan Hambidge (2007) discusses the form of this work as a kind of mosaic and Madri Victor suggests that *Memorandum* draws the reader's attention to "die wisselwerking tussen die drie groot bene van die kuns: die beeldende kunste, die uitvoerende kunste en die letterkunde" (2006).[15]

A key theme of this philosophical work is the treatment of the ill and dying as well as their relationship to their surroundings. Du Preez summarises the changing understandings of 'hospitality' charted in *Memorandum*: "die gasvryheid wat siekes eens in hulle eie tuistes beleef het, word dus nou vervang met 'n geïnstrumenteerde benadering" (2007: 266).[16] The tension between these two approaches to medicine is also illustrated in *Agaat*. Victor concludes that *Memorandum*, like *Agaat*,

[15] "The interaction between the three main pillars of art: the fine arts, the performing arts and literature" (own translation).

[16] "The hospitality that the sick once experienced in their own home is now replaced with a more instrumentalist approach" (own translation).

is primarily concerned with loss: "die verlies van o.a. eeue oue tradisies en waardes, en 'n verlies aan die waardering van ruimte en plek betrek" (2006).[17]

## THEORIES OF BODIES

### Mind-body Dualism

Since my focus falls on bodies and embodiment it is also necessary to investigate the work of key theorists of the body. René Descartes' ontological meditations on the relationship between mind and body should be mentioned as most theorists in one way or another challenge or respond to the foundational ideas of what has come to be termed Cartesian dualism. Descartes is perhaps best remembered for authoring the aphorism *Cogito Ergo Sum* ("I am thinking therefore I exist" [Cottingham 1996: xxix] or in some translations simply, "I think therefore I am"). The "I" for Descartes is the soul (9, cf footnote 3 p54). In his "Sixth Meditation: the existence of material things, and the real distinction between mind and body" (50), Descartes makes several observations regarding the nature of his own "essence" (51), or that which is essential to identity. He concludes that a body is that which is possessed by a mind; mind and body are "different [and distinct] substances" (9). Although they are interconnected and "make up a kind of unit" (11), Descartes concludes that identity is in fact coterminous with and synonymous with the mind:

> I can infer correctly that my essence consists solely in the fact that I am a thinking thing. It is true that I may have … a body that is very closely joined to me. But nevertheless, on the one hand I have a clear and distinct idea of myself, in so far as I am simply a thinking, non-extended thing; and on the other hand I have a distinct idea of body, in so far as this is simply an extended, non-thinking thing. And accordingly, it is certain that I am really distinct from my body, and can exist without it. (54)

Theorists have criticized Descartes' formulation of mind-body dualism, what Gilbert Ryle (commenting on his earlier publications) called "the Cartesian doctrine of the 'ghost in the machine'" (quoted in Cottingham 1996: xxx). Cottingham points to a clear flaw in the Cartesian formulation which contends that amputating any body part does not "take away" from the mind (Descartes 59): "the *brain*, being a purely bodily organ, must, for Descartes, be as inessential to the mind's continued functioning as a foot or arm" (Cottingham 1996: xxxi).

[17] "It encompasses the loss of inter alia, century-old traditions and values and a loss of the appreciation of space and place" (own translation).

**Embodied Subjectivity**

The corporeal body has been historically sidelined, or maligned as a topic worthy of philosophical and literary investigation, although the body-as-self has featured prominently in the philosophy of phenomenologists and existentialists. There has been a veritable explosion of academic interest in the body since the mid-1980s. It is beyond the scope of this project to provide an exhaustive history of the changing importance of bodies in theory and in feminist theory in particular. Feminist theory and theories of bodies are vast, multi-vocal and schismatic. Given this overwhelmingly large theoretic field, I have chosen to elucidate the positions of those theorists who, as Elizabeth Grosz phrases it, do not "de-corporealize" bodies and whose work can be adopted in order to illuminate the extent to which embodiment impacts on intimate relationships.

Grosz outlines the reasons why, historically, feminists have preferred to discuss the *representation* of bodies or subjects *affecting* women's bodies rather than to explore the very corporeality of the body itself. Those who risked conceptualizing the "female body as playing a major role in women's oppression" have opened themselves to charges of "biologism, essentialism, ahistoricism and naturalism" (1995:31). The reasons for this "de-corporealization" and "discursivization" of the body can be related to the legacy of Cartesian dualism (*ibid*.) Binary pairs tend to dominate Western knowledge systems and the terms in these pairs are accorded hierarchical values. Thus, following Descartes, 'mind' is equated with rationality and knowledge and is valued over 'body' which is equated with the physical and by implication irrationality. Furthermore, the mind is traditionally associated with the masculine and the body with the feminine. Thus Grosz shows that feminists have been reluctant to embrace the corporeal body as a subject worthy of philosophical investigation or to challenge the dominant knowledge paradigm. She concludes that in order to be accepted into and taken seriously in male-dominated disciplines of scientific and philosophical enquiry, female scholars have tended to adopt the discursive mode of analysis. Feminists have also been wary of exploring the physical, sexed body for fear of being aligned with those chauvinists who make pronouncements on men and women's different capabilities based on their different physical make-up (the above discussion is based on Grosz: 1995: 31-2).

Elizabeth Grosz's groundbreaking texts *Volatile Bodies* (1994) and *Space, Perversion and Time* (1995) provide an analysis of the various existing ways in which bodies have been theorized and articulates the need for a new kind of "nondichotomous understanding" of bodies (1994: 21). She insists that bodies are not neutral, transparent or universal and that one should therefore speak of bodies rather than 'the body' (1995: 3). Grosz is particularly interested in the implications of the sexual (as well as class, race and ethnic) differences of bodies. She is cognizant of the

contentiousness of this approach and the fine intellectual line that must be walked to avoid essentialism. Nevertheless, there is definite merit in her project and it creates many more possibilities for intellectual research and attempts to understand the experiences of others in various power regimes and socio-cultural contexts. As Grosz explains: "Sexual difference entails the existence of a sexual ethics, an ethics of the ongoing negotiations between beings whose differences, whose alterities, are left intact but with whom some kind of exchange is nonetheless possible (1994 : 192). The aim of her research is to suggest the potential of engaging in intimate relations with others; these relations with others must, to some extent, be based in the knowledge of their corporeal difference. Van Niekerk's novels do emphasize the differently sexed and racially identified bodies of her protagonists and this is another element which impacts on power relations.[18]

Grosz (1994) does not propose a definite theory of embodiment so much as provide a survey of contemporary and historical philosophers and literary critics who have theorized the body. She divides these scholars into those who explore from the "outside in" and those who explore from the "inside out" – i.e. those for whom inscriptive powers and social constructions are key in the production of the self and the body and those for whom the psychic processes of the subject are more fundamental. In doing so, it is her stated aim to expose what she considers to be the implicit phallogocentric discourse underpinning existing and historical accounts of 'the body'. Subsequent to this, Grosz outlines the work of feminist theorists who have attempted to provide an account of sexual difference and 'sexed bodies' while simultaneously avoiding, what she might term, the Cartesian, monist or essentialist fallacy of embodiment. [19] As noted above, for Grosz, any coherent analysis of embodied subjectivity must account for *and* take into account the creative, constitutive power of both these inscriptive and psychic processes.

Stemming from her disdain for binary pairs, Grosz suggests the use of an alternate framework for theorizing embodiment:

> A framework which acknowledges both the psychical or interior dimensions of subjectivity and the surface corporeal exposures of the subject to social inscription and training; a model which resists, as much as possible, both dualism and monism; a model which insists on (at least) two surfaces which cannot be collapsed into one and which do not always harmoniously blend with and support each other; a model where the join, the interaction of the two surfaces,

[18] Frantz Fanon's discussion of the "fact of blackness" and the traumatic way in which the black man is forced to adjust his idea of himself and his body in relation to the world when he encounters the gaze of the white man is relevant in this regard (Fanon 1952: 78).

[19] Grosz refers specifically to Julia Kristeva, Iris Marion Young and Luce Irigary.

> is always a question of power; a model that *may* be represented by the geometrical form of the Mobius strip's two-dimensional torsion in three dimensional space – will nevertheless be of some use if feminists wish to avoid the impasses of traditional theorizing about the body. ... [A Mobius strip analogy] enables subjectivity to be understood as fully material and for materiality to be extended and to include and explain the operations of language, desire and significance (1994: 188-9 & 210, emphasis in original).

This analogy proves particularly valuable: it allows for a critical discussion of the machinations of power which serve to contain or oppress bodies and are inscribed on the surface of the body but on the proviso that there is a simultaneous recognition of the impact of these processes on the psyche. Furthermore, her insistence that there exists a tension between these forces allows for the possibility that at times certain contributing factors will exert a greater impact than others on embodied subjectivity. The subject is thus not merely fleshy body or psyche or discourse but a complex interplay of these.

Grosz's suggestions are reflected in the logic of so-called 'New Materialist' theories, which emphasise the need to consider "the place of embodied humans within a material world" and the political dimensions of the context (Coole and Frost 2010: 3, 25).

**The Domain of Abjection**

It would be remiss to exclude Judith Butler's critical studies of sex and gender in a review of the literature on bodies. Butler's (1990) formulation of "performativity" as a central and potentially subversive component in identity creation and gender construction has become a kind of point of departure for many discussions on gender or feminist or queer analyses. While my focus is not strictly on gender, I will, in the course of my investigation of relationships necessarily refer to the way in which the gendered body impacts on intimacy. It is thus important to be cognizant of Butler's contribution to this field of research.

Butler has been accused by critics of ignoring and thus denying the import of the material body. However, she has refuted these criticisms and argued that she has never denied the corporeal, but merely problematised it: she proposes that "feminists ought to be interested, not in taking materiality as an irreducible, but in conducting a critical genealogy of its formulation" (1993: 32). For Butler, it is precisely the processes by which the material body is formulated or 'constructed' that cannot be denied:

> At stake in such a reformulation of the materiality of bodies will be . . . the recasting of the matter of bodies as the effect of a dynamic of power, such that the matter of bodies will be indissoluble from the regulatory norms that govern their materialization and the signification of those material effects (1993: 2).

Thus the corporeal can never be taken for granted or as a given. The constitutive power of these Foucauldian "regulatory norms" is especially important in terms of their political and ethical consequences. Butler insists that heterosexual norms dictate 'which bodies matter' or are "viable" and thus necessarily malign others. As a result "a domain of abjected bodies, a field of deformation" is created which exists in a constant tension with the norm, threatening to destabilize it (1993: 16).

In order to determine whether in fact Van Niekerk does expose such a domain, and the implications thereof, it is necessary to define the abject. As a component of a psychoanalytic theory, the abject is inextricably linked to the escape from maternal authority and the entry into the domain of language (1982). Julia Kristeva introduces the notion of the abject as follows:

> When I am beset by abjection, the twisted braids of affects and thoughts I call by such a name does not have, properly speaking, a definable *object*. The abject is not an ob-ject facing me, which I name or imagine. Nor is it an ob-jest, an otherness ceaselessly fleeing in a systematic quest of desire. … The abject has only one quality of the object – that of being opposed to *I*. ... what is abject … the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses. (1982:1-2)

The abject is neither an object nor is it a subject. The abject threatens the structure of the *I*'s body and world and yet the *I* is drawn to the abject; the abject challenges the law of language and threatens a reversion to the maternal order: "the place where meaning collapses". Kristeva continues,

> It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. … [The] logic of exclusion causes the abject to exist. (1982: 4, 66)

Although Kristeva's work emphasises the obsession with cleanliness and purification, the abject is not necessarily only that which is unclean or impure. The abject refers to that which is inherently transgressive and which is brought into being by social codes which exclude or frown on it. The abject encompasses "*corporeal waste*, menstrual blood and excrement, or everything that is assimilated to them, from nail parings to decay [which] represent – like a metaphor that would have

become incarnate – the objective frailty of symbolic order" (1997:70, emphasis in original). The abject is unsettling as it exposes meanings and laws as constructs.

The justifications Elizabeth Grosz provides for her interest in Kristeva's work are relevant to this project and bear repeating:

> What interests me about Kristeva's work is the way in which this notion of abjection links the lived experience of the body, the social and culturally specific meanings of the body, the cultural investment in selectively marking the body, the privileging of some parts and functions while resolutely minimizing or leaving un- or underrepresented other parts and functions. It is the consequence of a culture effectively intervening into the constitution of the value of the body. (1994: 192)

Kristeva's research explores the ways in which socio-political mechanisms determine which bodies, which bodily features and fluids (and by implication which groups of *people*) are appropriate and which are not. Those bodies deemed inappropriate – or 'abject' – are often responded to with a combination of horror and fascination.

Butler's "domain of abjected bodies" troubles the norm (1993: 16). Similarly the bodily fluids which blur the boundaries between inside and outside, which threaten to disrupt received notions of acceptability and of the body as a discreet entity, are abject and ascribed the culturally laden appellations of horrific or disgusting (*ibid*.: 201). Thus one's own body and biological effects – in other words, fragments of the body – *as well as* the bodies of others can be a source of horror, a source of simultaneous attraction and repulsion. The "abject simultaneously beseeches and pulverises the subject" (Kristeva 1982:5). Several of Van Niekerk's protagonists experience a desire to distance themselves from their own 'embarrassing' or 'foreign' or 'alienating' bodies and bodily fluids and the impacts of this abjection will be investigated.

Kristeva's historical exploration of the meaning of 'foreigners' and 'strangers' in *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991) allows for the insertion of the abject into the ethical realm of relations with others.[20] In other words, Kristeva makes explicit the ethical consequences of the designation of certain groups as other, as strangers; to use Butler's phrase, she discusses the ethical imperative of deconstructing the "domain of abjected bodies". Kristeva, tracing the trajectory of Freud's

[20] Although Kristeva herself does not use the term 'abject' in the course of this work, it seems that there is an argument to be made for the appropriation of this term in the context of relations with others and specifically with the bodies of others.

formulation of the uncanny, argues that only by accepting "that we are foreigners to ourselves ... can we attempt to live with others" (170). She elaborates that,

> The foreigner is within us. And when we flee from or struggle against the foreigner, we are fighting our unconscious … Analytically, Freud does not speak of foreigners: he teaches us how to detect foreignness in ourselves. That is perhaps the only way not to hound it outside of us. … but rather to welcome [foreigners] to that uncanny strangeness, which is as much theirs as it is ours. (191-2)

Although Kristeva is referring specifically to the foreignness of our own 'unconscious', I will propose that it is also possible to apply the same logic to the experience of our own bodies as foreign, or abject. The negative argument can also be formulated and is perhaps more appropriate to Van Niekerk's work: that is, if one's own strangeness is continually denied or repressed, this strangeness is projected onto the other, thus prohibiting an ethical or even empathetic relationship with both the self and the other.

**The Grotesque Body and the Body in Fragments**

The grotesque body is associated with the carnivalesque. The carnival celebrates the body and the coexistence of the sacred and the profane: "sacred speech is macaronized by the vernacular" and "all partial claims to transcendent authority [are called into question] in a spirit of 'joyous relativity', which degrades and desacralizes without being nihilistic" (Monas: 1990: 62–63). This description of the carnival could easily be a description of the style and content of *Triomf*. Monas suggests that the 'circus' can be viewed as a contemporary parody or commercialization of the carnival, which is devoid of its ceremonial import (*ibid.*: 65).

Peter Stallybrass and Allon White argue that although Bakhtin can be criticized for his "self-consciously utopian and lyrical" depiction of the carnival and grotesque realism, his analysis of the carnivalesque holds special insights for an understanding of transgression (1986: 9). Bakhtin claims that the grotesque also has positive connotations. He insists that the grotesque body be differentiated from the classical body and also from middle class assumptions concerning the private individual body:

> The material bodily principle is contained not in the biological individual, not in the bourgeois ego, but in the people, a people who are continually growing and renewed. This is why all that is body becomes grandiose, exaggerated, immeasurable. (quoted in Stallybrass & White: 1986: 9-10)

In this sense, the grotesque body seems to represent the 'body of the people', of the working classes and not the bourgeoisie. In the course of the carnival celebrations, all bodies – heaving, dancing, revelling – seem to merge into one. Thus, another way of thinking about a fragment might be to consider an individual, grotesque body that has been 'broken off' from the body mass, the body-politic; individuals that have been alienated and prevented from joining the community, or nation.

Stallybrass and White claim that the defining "principle" of the carnival, in Bakhtin's eyes, "resides in the spirit of carnivalesque laughter" (*Ibid.*: 8):

> Fundamental to the corporeal, collective nature of carnival laughter is what Bakhtin terms "grotesque realism". Grotesque Realism uses the material body – flesh conceptualized as corpulent excess – to represent cosmic, social, topographical and linguistic elements of the world. Thus already in Bakhtin there is the germinal notion of *transcoding* and *displacements* effected between the high/low image of the physical body and other social domains. (*Ibid.*, 8-9, emphasis in original).

Thus, the grotesque is never simply concerned with the material body for its own sake; "corpulent excess" is representative of excess in other socio-political or linguistic fields. The idea of *transcoding* is central to Stallybrass and White's thesis and it is this aspect of the carnivalesque which they consider to be most critically useful. In order to clarify this, they contend that "the human body, psychic forms, geographical space and the social formation are all constructed within interrelating and dependent hierarchies of high and low" (1986: 2). They wish to explore, specifically, "both the formation of these hierarchies and the processes through which the low troubles the high" (1986: 3). Stallybrass and White insist that there is an interdependence between these four domains (body, psyche, space and the social) and that a transgression of the hierarchical order, in any one domain, could affect and upset the order in another – it is this notion which is termed transcoding (*ibid.*). More importantly, they claim that the grotesque body is a privileged site of transcoding: "the grotesque body may become a primary, highly charged *intersection* and *mediation* of social and political forces, a sort of *intensifier* and *displacer* in the making of identity" (1986: 25, own emphasis). This suggestion accords with the argument I make throughout this thesis regarding the role of the body in mediating and facilitating intimate relationships and determining and influencing identity. It is as a result of this broader interest that Stallybrass and White maintain that the "widespread adoption of the idea of the carnival as an *analytic* category can only be fruitful if it is displaced into the broader concept of symbolic inversion and transgression" (1986: 18). They adopt anthropologist Barbara Babcock's discussion of "symbolic inversion" and her assertion that

"what is socially peripheral is symbolically central" (quoted in Stallybrass and White 1986:20). In this case, the body and specifically the lower body strata become of central symbolic import. In Van Niekerk's work, the socially and politically maligned 'poor whites' of *Triomf* and the marginalised women of the Tradouw region in *Agaat* are accorded a pivotal role. Accordingly, I aim to point out instances of the grotesque not merely for their own sake, but to explore the linkages between the grotesque and other socio-political hierarchies as well as to explore how the grotesque body implies that such a holistic analysis of transgression is necessary.

There is an intimate link between the theorising of the grotesque and the abject. Both theories rely on a corporeal premise and on the permeability of the corporeal, especially as it relates to others: **"**relations between bodies are precisely where the grotesque is located, rather than within a single body; just as in Julia Kristeva's model, the presence of the abject signals the delayed memory of the subject's body having once been part of another" (Vice 1997:169).

**The Mirror Stage**

It is worth noting here the emphasis on the 'fragmented body' or 'the body in parts' in the grotesque and the abject. This has certain parallels with aspects of Jacques Lacan's mirror stage.[21] Lacan contends that the *I* is formed in the 'mirror stage' and describes this stage as follows:

> The mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation – and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of totality that I shall call orthopaedic – and lastly, to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development. (Lacan 1966: 4)

The mirror stage usually occurs in early childhood development and thus describes a temporal process which charts the infant's growing self-awareness and identification with a body-image

[21] In the context of a discussion of the grotesque, Vice alludes to an argument by Ann Jefferson which seems to support the viability of this proposition:

> Jefferson … sees revolutionary potential in Bakhtin's concentration on the parts and limits of the body without insisting on their individual ownership. If the space of the carnival in which the grotesque exists can be likened to the pre-Oedipal (a rather big "if"), then the fragmented body with its detachable parts may sound like the body-in-fragments identified by Lacan as the precursor to the misrecognised but coherent "classical" body of the mirror stage. To see the relation of grotesque to classical in this way, as a temporal one, suggests that one must inevitably be succeeded by the other. There is no getting out of the symbolic realm of law and language. This is closer to Kristeva's position; the symbolic is won at the expense of the suppressed maternal, which constantly threatens to resurface in abject form. (Vice 1997:168)

which at first appears alien and but is subsequently assumed. The catalyst for this process is the infant's encounter with his or her own reflection in a mirror. The mirror reflects a totality, a body-image, which at first bears no resemblance to the infant's own limited, partial and fragmentary sense of self. However, the infant comes to identify with the reflection in the mirror, to understand the reflection as representing the '*I*'. This is what I understand Lacan to mean when he describes the mirror stage as a move from "insufficiency to anticipation … to the assumption of an alienating identity".[22]

Leonard J. Davis's (1995) Lacanian analysis of the able-bodied person's response to encounters with disabled bodies provides a means by which the importance of the fragmented body-image can be extended. Davis argues that the disabled body, "far from being the body of some small group of 'victims', is an entity from the earliest of childhood instincts, a body that is common to all humans, as Lacan would have it" (2411). For this reason, the encounter with a disabled body is experienced as uncanny:

> The disabled body is a direct *imago* of the repressed fragmented body. The disabled body causes a kind of hallucination of the mirror phase gone wrong. The subject looks at the disabled body and has a moment of cognitive dissonance, or should we say a moment of cognitive resonance with the earlier state of fragmentation. Rather than seeing the whole body in the mirror, the subject sees the repressed fragmented body ... In Lacanian terms, the *moi* is threatened with a breaking-up, literally of its structure, is threatened with a reminder of its incompleteness. (1995: 2410)

Thus the appearance of the disabled body poses a direct threat to the ostensibly coherent identity of an able-bodied subject and exposes that coherence as a construct; it exposes wholeness as a "hallucination". This is a valuable argument as it suggests a framework for the analysis of encounters between characters in Van Niekerk's fiction – especially between those who are designated as 'normal' and those whose bodies are described as fragmented. The impact of this "cognitive resonance" will be especially interesting to pursue as it is experienced by protagonists who are in some way disabled and who are themselves faced with other 'fragmented bodies'. Davis further contends that "missing senses, blindness, deafness, aphasia … will [also] point to missing bodily parts or function" (2411). This broadening of the definition of fragmentation is useful in that

[22] The mirror stage is an Imaginary, or pre-symbolic, and thus pre-lingual, stage (cf Willie Burger 2006 and Van der Walt 2009:705). The transition from the Imaginary to the Symbolic order is also summarised in these articles, although a detailed discussion falls beyond the scope of this literature review.

it justifies the inclusion of the silenced Milla in *Agaat* and the blind Mr Y in *Memorandum* in the category of fragmented bodies. It might also be a useful framework to consider various readers' responses to the characters of the novel in this light.

Davis's scholarship focuses on the depiction of disabled bodies in popular culture and the erroneous conflation of disability with the grotesque and the extent to which these terms disempower the object of observation. The body is seen through a set of cultural default settings arrived at by the wholesale adoption of ableist cultural values (2418-9).

It seems apparent that the disabled and fragmented body functions in a similar way to the grotesque body: it forces a kind of reckoning with the repressed elements of individual or socio-political consciousness. Thus the abject, the grotesque, the disabled body and the body-in-parts all serve to 'trouble' (to use Butler's phrase) assumptions of 'normal bodies' and the status quo – and perhaps even expose the regulatory norms and narratives which construct and govern such bodies.

**Colonised Bodies**

Elleke Boehmer argues that in the colonial context, "the body of the other can represent only its own physicality, its strangeness" (1993: 270). In this case, the body is contrasted with mind (which was represented by the colonialist) and is the lesser valued of the binary pair, as Elizabeth Grosz (1994) has argued. Several critics have also commented on this unequal binarism. Katy Davis observes that

> (s)ubordinate groups are defined by their bodies and according to norms which diminish or degrade them. By imprisoning the other in her/his body, privileged groups are able to take on a god's eye view as disembodied subjects. (1997:10)

Achille Mbembe argues that this reduction of the colonised to a body, an "embodiment", served to dehumanise the colonised:

> In the eyes of the settler, the native has no limits but his or her body. It is this body… that makes up the sum total of the native's "being". … In the colonial principle of rationality, however, there is a clear difference between being and existing. … From the standpoint of colonialism, the colonised does not truly exist, as a person or as a subject. (2001: 187)

Thus, to be embodied in this sense not only indicates lesser value or even a denial of mind, but quite

simply the denial of personhood. Also of relevance for this analysis is Sarah Nuttall's reference to Alexander Buchart's work, *The Anatomy of Power: European Constructions of the African Body* which maps the changing way African bodies have been viewed. In the seventeenth century their bodies were merely 'a surface', while in the nineteenth this had changed to a conceptualization of a body with an anatomical interior. This latter shift allowed for the "[fabrication of] the interior of the African body as a 'pathological anatomy' to be studied by missionary medicine" (discussion above based on Nuttall 2004: 46-47). When the mind of the other was deemed worthy of intellectual inquiry, it was as linked to his or her "pathological anatomy" (Nuttall 2004: 47). As Veit-Wild states, "in the view of the colonialists, the perceived bodily anomalies of the Africans around them went hand in hand with an abnormal psyche" (2006:13). Louise Bethlehem (2006) concurs that early ethnographers were obsessed with the bodies of the 'others' they encountered and yet, as Malvern van Wyk Smith notes of early descriptions of the Khoi people, they "say almost nothing about the face" (quoted in Bethlehem 2006: 57). Bethlehem reads this evasion through a Levinasian lens, as a denial of an ethical obligation owed to the other (*ibid*.). Rather than the face as the site of contact, the focus in these ethnographic accounts has been the genitals:

> From the renaissance onwards, European discourse has often routed its first encounters with indigenous cultures through tropes of the body, with the "genitals as the crucial site/sight in the 'bodyscape'". (Pratt quoted in Bethlehem 2006:57)

Most famously, this can be seen in the case of Sara Baartman. The other, reduced to a 'mere' body is then reduced even further to a fragment of a body; a fetishised body-part.

**Bodies and Society**

The suggestion that the body is representative of society is one that is familiar, reaching back to Plato's *The Republic*. Canonical anthropologists Victor Turner (1967) and Mary Douglas (1966) have argued for the validity of the supposition that "the human body is the prototype of society" (quoted in Veit-Wild 2006: 3). Flora Veit-Wild summarises Turner and Douglas's conclusion that "the social order is represented by the symbols of the body: a malfunctioning of the body or of parts of the body points at disorder in society" (in Veit-Wild: 2006: 3).

However, a simple representational relation of the ostensibly gender-neutral body and "the social order" is the kind that Elizabeth Grosz (1998) critiques. Such a view, in Grosz's reckoning,

> proposes a kind of parallelism or isomorphism between the body and the city. The two are

> understood as analogues, congruent counterparts, in which the features, organisation, and characteristics of one are reflected in the other. This notion of the parallelism between the body and the social order… finds its clearest formulations in the seventeenth century, when liberal political philosophers justified their various allegiances … through the metaphor of the body politic. The state parallels body; artifice mirrors nature. The correspondence between the king and the body-politic is more or less exact and codified. (1998:45-46)

Grosz challenges this representational relation on the basis that the apparently neutral body in question is in fact assumed to be the male body. She is also concerned that such an analogy "serves [a political function as] it serves to provide a justification for various forms of 'ideal' government and social organisation through a process of 'naturalisation'" (46). Finally, she claims that "the body-politic is an artificial construct which replaces the primacy of the human body" (46). Grosz's aim in this extract is to discuss the relation between body and city but there is also a semantic slippage in her own discussion, as body-politic/nation/social order are not all akin and cannot all be equated, nor are they – in the earlier discussions – synonyms for city. Thus Grosz's own objections are problematic. Nevertheless, it is worth drawing attention to the problems arising from a straightforward representational connection between body and nation, or in any discussion of the body-politic, and to reaffirm that in my own discussion of this analogy I aim to avoid the pitfalls associated with this view. One way out of this dilemma, which could help ensure that a stronger version of Grosz's criticism is taken into account, might be to refer to a "bodies-politic" – as in the title of Michiel Heyn's (2008) novel.

**Bodies in Pain**

Although fluidity and pliability are vital to Grosz's discussion of bodies, it has been doubted whether this analytical framework can indeed account for *all* bodies. Michael Dorn, echoing Susan Bordo, argues that Grosz and other poststructuralist researchers' reverence for "metaphors of nomadism" and aversion of any kind of fixity reveals an "[underlying] ableist assumption" in their work (1998: 183). Dorn argues that Grosz's formulation of embodied subjectivity cannot account for (and in fact dismisses) the experiences of "crippled" or disabled people; he refers specifically to the occlusion of the "creative spatial dissidence of disability" (*ibid.*: 189).[23] His objection on the

[23] To illustrate his argument Dorn refers to Grosz's discussion of "freaks". In this article, he argues that

> Grosz explicitly rules out the possibility of considering the lives of the *banal* disabled … these exclusions are rationalized by the fact that the banal disabled do not elicit the same response of simultaneous horror and fascination as found with "real" freaks. For Grosz, the *real* disabled are "unusually disadvantaged" and more likely to engender a response of *simple pity.* (Dorn 1998:187)

While it is inescapable that Grosz's quote is deeply concerning and seems to implicate her as an "ableist", I am not entirely convinced that on the evidence of this that we can dismiss Grosz's intentions. Her theoretical interest might be focused on so-called 'freaks' but that should not belie her stated concern with the necessity of creating an ethical

basis of disability might be extended to include disease, illness or any physical disfigurement or 'abnormality'. It becomes apparent, then, that the so-called "infinite pliability" of the body, which Grosz refers to, is not only mitigated by the physical or architectural environment, but also – and indeed more so – by physical health. Embodied subjectivity is necessarily affected by illness, disease or disability. In fact, the subjective experience of illness is often described by reverting to the Cartesian metaphors of entrapment which Grosz (1994) rejects in her discussion of embodiment. There is thus a need to consult scholars whose interest lies specifically in theorizing bodies which have been rendered 'disabled' in some way in order to extend the analytical limits of Grosz's theories. For example, Nancy Mairs (1997) argues that the experience of living with Multiple-Sclerosis has convinced her of the inappropriateness of the binary configuration of the self-body.

Elaine Scarry's groundbreaking text *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (1985) provides an alternate view on understanding the meaning and implications of physical pain for embodied subjectivity. Scarry's focus is the ambiguous nature of pain and the impact of this for interactions with others. She observes that pain is unique in that is devoid of "referential content" and for this reason resists objectification or translation into language (4). Thus pain is at once a cause of both ineluctable certainty and incurable doubt. For the sufferer of pain the reality of her pain is absolute and inescapable; another person may witness the effects of this pain, but the reality of that pain will always be open to doubt since it remains incommunicable (*ibid*.). Pain could thus prove to be an almost insurmountable obstacle to intimacy and empathy. However, Scarry argues that attempts must be made to communicate pain as there is a direct relationship between "expressing pain and eliminating it" (11). Scarry adumbrates the means by which medical discourses, civil society groups such as Amnesty International, law courts and artists attempt to cross this communication chasm and ultimately presents an argument for the importance of the imagination in expressing pain and sentience through the creation of mental and material artifacts (279–326).

In her deconstruction of the "structure of torture", Scarry illustrates the way in which pain is

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basis for all interactions. It is in fact her concern with revealing the masculine basis of many philosophies and the way in which difference is subsumed under the cloak of universality that motivated her research in the first place. In this regard, she expresses

> [her] concern with the ways in which a corporeal "universal" has in fact functioned as a veiled representation and projection of a masculine which takes itself as the unquestioned norm, the ideal representation without any idea of the violence that this representational positioning does to its others – women, the "disabled," cultural and racial minorities, different classes, homosexuals – who are reduced to the role of modifications or variations of the (implicitly white, male, youthful, heterosexual, middle-class) human body. (1993: 188)

intricately connected to power. Torture is conceived as consisting of three endlessly repeatable steps: pain is inflicted, objectified and finally "denied as pain and read as power" (28). Scarry argues that

> What the process of torture does is to split the human being in two, to make emphatic the ever present but, except in the extremity of sickness and death, only latent distinction between a self and a body, between a "me" and "my body". (48-49)

While I disagree with Scarry's contention regarding the distinction between body and self, the parallel between the impact of torture and illness on the experience of embodied subjectivity is interesting. The resultant division of self cannot be accounted for by Grosz's mobius strip analogy. In these 'extreme' cases, the voice is considered the last vestige of selfhood. Scarry concludes that, "the goal of the torturer is to make ... the body, emphatically and crushingly *present* by destroying it, and to make ... the voice, *absent* by destroying it" (48-49). Furthermore, Scarry proposes that in torture, as in illness, the prisoner or patient can experience his or her own body as an enemy as the body succumbs to pain or the body itself is seen as the cause of pain (47). There is a dual estrangement that occurs when a person is in pain: the person in pain feels betrayed or alienated by his or her own body and also alienated from others with whom this pain cannot be shared or communicated.

In *Agaat*, these workings of power are made explicit when Agaat attends to Milla on her deathbed and Milla's body becomes the medium through which and on which power is exerted. The fact that Milla is rendered silent on her deathbed and Agaat in effect 'controls her voice' has obvious implications for the expression of pain and the balance of power. This is an explicit analogy with the structure of torture. Scarry suggests that

> In torture, it is in part the obsessive display of agency that permits one person's body to be translated into another person's voice that allows real human pain to be converted into a regime's fiction of power (18).

*Triomf* and *Memorandum* are also concerned with the exercise of power and its inscription on the body – be it through violent incest, beatings, medical treatment or even the materialization of emotional torture. Scarry's analysis of torture thus provides a prism through which the relationship between power, bodies and *physical pain* within intimate relationships can be interpreted.[24]

[24] Although the context of 'torture' within a pre-established relationship is obviously dramatically different from political torture, there are similarities in their structure which I believe can be usefully employed in different contexts without conflating the two.

**Hospitality, Dying and Relations with Others**

I have already mentioned scholars who theorise the relations with others in reference to the corporeal realm. It is necessary to briefly show awareness of two other scholars who theorise relations with others on an ethical as opposed to necessarily corporeal level.

Although I am not pursuing a Levinasian analysis, I wish to acknowledge Emmanuel Levinas's discussion of the relationship between the same and the other. In *Totality and Infinity* (1991) Levinas is concerned with explicating the structure of an ethical relationship. The ethical relationship is grounded in the recognition of and the respect for the difference of the other, a difference which cannot be assimilated into the 'order of the same'. The ethical event occurs when the *I* takes on responsibility for the other and exists in the mode of 'for-the-other'.[25] While it is useful to bear in mind the possibility of being-for-the-other, Van Niekerk's protagonists never seem to achieve or realize this 'elect' state. More relevant for the purposes of my research is Levinas's definition of subjectivity as "welcoming the Other, as hospitality" (1991: 27).[26] Hospitality – and the related term hospice – are key tropes in Van Niekerk's fiction. Mention must thus be made of Jacques Derrida's seminal lectures *Of Hospitality* (2000) which seem to invoke Levinas's earlier claim in their discussion of the ethics of hospitality.[27]

Derrida's first seminar, "Foreigner Question," can be aligned with Kristeva's analysis in *Strangers to Ourselves* in its consideration of the potentially disruptive meaning of the 'foreigner': the foreigner is "the one who, putting the first question, puts me in question" (2000:3). Derrida suggests that the "question of hospitality" begins with understanding the "question of the foreigner" to whom hospitality is or is not offered (17). Derrida defines two types of hospitality, namely absolute and conditional hospitality, which are inextricably connected and which would appear to cancel each other out and yet *must* coexist. In this sense hospitality is, to use Derrida's phrase an "aporia" (65 and 79). Derrida explains:

> It is as though hospitality were the impossible … as if it were only possible to transgress it, as though *the* law of absolute, unconditional ... hospitality … commanded that we transgress all

[25] Levinas defines the ethical event as follows:

> It is this shattering of indifference … this possibility of one-for-the-other, that constitutes the ethical event. When … the fellow human being's existential adventure matters more to the I than its own, posing from the start the I as responsible for the being of the other; responsible, that is, unique and elect, as an I who is no longer just any individual member of the human race. (2006: viii)

[26] In this context, it is worth noting that Levinas makes mention of the way in which medical practitioners exert power on the other. They deny the 'for-itself' and reduce the other to a 'thing' (2006:26).

[27] Titlestad and Kissack's (2008) paper is an illuminating example of the application of this Derridean theory of hospitality to a reading of Karel Schoeman's *Promised Land* and Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull*.

> the laws (in the plural) of hospitality, namely, the conditions, the norms, the rights and duties that are imposed . . . on the men or women who give a welcome as well as [those] who receive it. And vice versa … In other words there would be an antimony, an insoluble antimony, a non-dialectizable antimony between, on the one hand, *The* law of unlimited hospitality ... and on the other hand, the laws, … those rights and duties that are always conditioned and conditional (75–77, emphasis in the original).

It is thus the transgression of hospitality which is more easily identifiable than hospitality itself; hospitality has the structure of the "economy of a circle" (135). Of added importance in this exposition of hospitality is the easy slippage that occurs between the terms host, hostage, guest and 'parasite'. In effect, "these substitutions make everyone into everyone else's hostage" (125). The power dynamics at play here and the implicit violence which Derrida hints at in this relationship are worth bearing in mind.

It would be remiss not to mention Derrida's writing on the aporia of death. Derrida refers to dying as "awaiting death" (1993:72) and with reference to Heidegger's *Being and Time* to dying as that which is most proper to *Dasein.* Derrida also quotes Blanchot, for whom

> Dying means: you are dead already, in an immemorial past, of a death which was not yours, which you have thus neither known nor lived, but under the threat of which you believe you are called upon to live; you await it henceforth in the future constructing a future to make it possible at last – possible as something that will take and will belong to the realm of experience. (Blanchot 1995:65 and quoted in Derrida 1993:87)

Only the knowledge that death is unavoidable, that it is a given fact of one's existence, is sufficient for one to live a life worth dying.

Yet, as Derrida deduces, 'I' cannot have access to my own death; "man, or man as *Dasein*, never has a relation to death as such, but only to perishing, to demising, and to the death of the other, who is not the other. The death of the other thus becomes again 'first', always first. …The death of the other, this death of the other in 'me', is fundamentally the only death that is named in the syntagm 'my death'" (76). However, the death of the other and the death of the self are not, cannot be, simultaneous, and so we "await each other", never arriving at the same time (65).

For Blanchot, as for Heidegger, death is central to identity: "man knows death only because he is man, and he is man only because he is death in the process of becoming" (1995: 337). For

Heidegger, my response towards the fact of my death enables me to "assume my own existence in a specific sense" (Iyer 2001: 66). In *Being and Time* Heidegger writes, "I myself am in that I will die" (quoted in Iyer 2001:66.). Derrida, after Heidegger, suggests only *Dasein* can "properly die", can "experience death as such" (1993: 31, 35).[28] Death is aporetic because it is the "unique occurrence of this possibility of the impossible" (Derrida 1993: 72). For Blanchot, death exists in the context of community, or relationships: "To be before the Other as that Other dies is to be affected by that death in such a way that my own self-relation is transgressed" (Iyer 2001:66-67).

**Conclusion**

I have outlined an array of theorists whose work can be employed in order to illuminate issues in Van Niekerk's fiction which have been neglected thus far. I am not viewing her fiction through a singular expository lens, as I have not found one particular theorist or theory that can satisfactorily be employed to address my topic. I therefore have chosen key theorists on embodiment and the relations between the same and other. I believe their work is complementary and the use of multiple theorists can thus prove enriching rather than confusing or contradictory.

The majority of academic critics analyze Van Niekerk's fiction within the framework of postcolonialism. While I am not disputing that these three novels can be considered as postcolonial texts, I do think that to label them thus diminishes their innovative thrust. As a point of departure, I have referred to the work of Elizabeth Grosz (1994, 1995 & 2001) as she espouses the need for a new model of embodiment which challenges the premises of Cartesian dualism. Grosz maintains that any discussion of subjectivity must take into account socio-political inscriptive or constructive processes, the workings of the psyche as well as the anatomical body itself. I have thus referred to various theorists who allow for the coexistence of these three formative spheres, although their area of interest might be limited to only one.

I refer to the theories outlined above to strengthen my understanding of Van Niekerk's narrative method; this will allow me to contextualize her thought within existing academic literature. However, it is not my intention to try to 'fit' the novel into one theoretical mould. Rather, I will suggest ways in which Van Niekerk's writing tends to depart from conventional theory and even adds to our existing knowledge of embodiment and intimacy.

[28] "*Dasein* or the mortal is not man, the human subject, but is that in terms of which the humanity of man must be rethought. And man remains the only example of *Dasein*" (Derrida 1993:35).

## Chapter Two

## "Embodying Space": The Search for a Nurturing Environment[29]

The visceral descriptions of bodies and embodiment in Marlene van Niekerk's fiction challenge conventional understandings of the relationship between corporeality and spatiality. The existing critical literature on Van Niekerk has not devoted sufficient attention to the radical way in which she reconceptualizes this relationship. Critics have instead emphasised the ways in which Van Niekerk writes back to and challenges the conventions of the Afrikaans canon, particularly the genre of the *plaasroman.*[30] However, the importance that Van Niekerk accords the body in this act of writing back has not been elucidated. This chapter is an attempt to correct this critical occlusion. I propose that Van Niekerk's fiction charts a new vision of the relationship between characters and their environment and also of the way in which their surroundings impact on their sense of self. This needs to be examined within the wider context of philosophical and literary studies, and would be diminished by merely examining it from the narrow perspective of 'writing back' to the *plaasroman*. In order to illuminate features of this relationship I will refer to Elizabeth Grosz's (2001) explanation of "lived spatiality" and the embodiment of space. Graham Huggan's discussion of the "map topos" in postcolonial fiction provides a useful framework for an analysis of the recurring cartographic motif in these novels and will allow me to explore apartheid spatial discourse and changing conceptions of land ownership (1989: 407). Reference must also be made to Van Niekerk's employment of features of the grotesque, particularly in her description of her protagonists' bodies as well as the extent to which these bodies merge with or protrude into their environs. This chapter firstly describes the features of the *plaasroman* and introduces Elizabeth Grosz's (2001) explanation of the embodiment of space. Subsequently, I provide a chronological analysis of Van Niekerk's novels illuminating their innovative treatment of the relationship between corporeality and spatiality. I argue that personal and political history is inscribed on the land as it is on the bodies of citizens. Finally, I propose that *Memorandum* can be read as a kind of synthesis of the themes of displacement as expressed in the first two novels and articulates the desire of all the protagonists for a "nurturing environment" and suggests the possibility of "landscapes of inclusion" as opposed to exclusion. In conclusion, I will sketch a tentative theory of what I consider to be common to Van Niekerk's treatment of space in these works.

[29] A shorter version of the arguments in this chapter has been published with the same title in Buxbaum (2011a). The idea of "landscapes of inclusion" as illustrated in *Memorandum* was developed for a paper presented at The International Academic Forum conference in Osaka (Buxbaum 2011b) and is available online. Aspects of the discussion of Agaat's response to Milla's farm maps have been published in Buxbaum (2013).

[30] See for example Van Coller (2003), Van Der Merwe (2004), Wessels (2006), Coetzee (2007), De Villiers (2007), Prinsloo and Visagie (2009) and Devarenne (2009).

**Beyond the *plaasroman***

While it is indeed true that Van Niekerk "deconstructs all those things that are sacred to the *plaasroman* [in *Agaat*]" (Michiel Heyns quoted in De Kock 2009: 138), there is more to be said regarding the means by which her visceral descriptions of bodies and embodiment achieve this and challenge the relationship between corporeality and spatiality exemplified in the *plaasroman*. It is necessary to first outline the key features of this genre so that the extent to which she subverts and deconstructs it is clear.

The inheritance of the family farm was traditionally considered the birthright of every Afrikaans son. However, in the historical context of South Africa in the 1930s, this was no longer guaranteed. Many farms had been sub-divided so many times that the resulting farms were often too small to be successful, and this situation was compounded by "poor rainfall, low wool prices, and general economic depression" (Coetzee 1988: 82). In his seminal study *White Writing*, J.M Coetzee suggests that the *plaasroman* arose in direct response to these changes by depicting a romanticized and idealised vision of the farm and equating the loss of the family farm – a birthright – with a tragedy (1988: 79, 83). Coetzee argues that the "ultimate purpose of the *plaasroman* is to provide transcendental justification for the ownership of land" (*ibid*.: 106). That is to say that in the *plaasroman*, the farmer is recognised as "the transitory embodiment of a lineage" (87) and furthermore, that "the continuity of the marriage between farm and lineage requires that the farmer have not only parents but children" (95). The identity of the farmer, and by implication the Afrikaner, is shown to be rooted in ownership of a farm which is passed on from generation to generation (110). Aligned with this, the *plaasroman* has always had an ideological slant which implicitly affirmed and justified the right of the farmer to own the land and keep it safe for his family in perpetuity.

Graphic or explicit descriptions of the bodies of the farmers are absent from the pages of the conventional *plaasroman*; although the continuation of the farming lineage depends on procreation, sex itself is absent from the pages of these earlier novels. If any descriptions of bodies are provided, they are reserved for details of farm labourers. There is a parallel here with colonial fiction in general where descriptions of the materiality of the body were reserved for the bodies of 'the other'; only colonial subjects were seen as embodied (see Grosz 1995 and Davis 1997:10).

Marlene van Niekerk's writing exposes these conventions of the *plaasroman* and implicitly criticizes them.[31] In order to elucidate how she achieves this, and understand the pivotal role she

[31] Van Niekerk is not the only South African writer to 'write back' to the *plaasroman*, and Prinsloo and Visagie (2009),

accords to the body, it is necessary to outline Elizabeth Grosz's (1994) explanation of embodiment, which I have adopted. Grosz's central thesis is that Cartesian dualism is not a useful model for understanding embodied subjectivity and proposes instead that "subjectivity [be] understood as fully material and for materiality to be extended and to include and explain the operations of language, desire and significance" (1994: 210). Grosz's formulation allows for a critical discussion of the machinations of power which are inscribed on the surface of the body and a simultaneous recognition of the impact of these processes on the psyche as well as an awareness of the material or anatomical features of the body. The subject is thus a complex interplay of fleshy body, interior psychic drives and external inscriptive or prescriptive forces.

Elizabeth Grosz has also written extensively on the relationship between bodies and city space and conceives of ways to rethink the connection between architecture and bodies (1998 and 2001). Her interest lies specifically in the ways in which space can be embodied and argues that both space and time should be considered as "*corporeal* categories" (2001:32, emphasis in original). Grosz maintains that "the relations between corporeality and the metropolis [are constitutive and mutually defining]" (1998: 43). Her thesis concerning "lived spatiality" is a useful starting point for my analysis:

> The limits of possible spaces are the limits of possible modes of corporeality: the body's infinite pliability is a measure of the infinite plasticity of the spatiotemporal universe in which it is housed and through which bodies become real, are lived, and have effects. (2001: 33)

Thus, the phrase "lived spatiality" or alternately "the embodiment of space", refers to the ways in which the corporeal body inserts itself into its physical environment and simultaneously the ways in which that space accommodates, constrains or "creates" the body and by extension, subjectivity. The features of this relationship between body and space are of central concern for my reading of Van Niekerk's novels.

It might be said *Triomf* with its grotesque protagonists, irreverent laughter, darkly-comic plot and concrete reference to the historical context in which it is set, is written with "Rabelaisian realism"

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Devarenne (2009) and Olivier (2012) provide a useful review of the ways in which South African writers have responded to the *plaasroman*. As I have acknowledged, many critics have already commented on this feature of Van Niekerk's writing. However, none of these authors have seen this tendency within the larger framework of Van Niekerk's treatment of corporeality, nor have they included a comparative discussion of spatial relationships in *Memorandum.* It is not my intention to repeat earlier arguments detailing the ways in which Van Niekerk subverts the *plaasroman*. While I will point out a few of these features which have not been discussed in previous analyses it is my aim to argue that cognizance must be taken of the role of the body in any discussion of spatiality.

(Bakhtin 1984: 436).[32] *Triomf* is set on the eve of the first democratic elections in South Africa and chronicles the history of a family of indigent and incestuous Afrikaners, the Benades, who live in a ramshackle house in the 'whites-only' suburb of Triomf, which was created in the early 1960s by the apartheid government on the ruins of the razed multiracial suburb Sophiatown. Their story thus tells the marginalized history of the impoverished Afrikaners, with a grotesque twist.[33] The Benades consist of Mol, her brothers Pop and Treppie and their monstrous son Lambert – Mol is Lambert's mother, but it remains mysterious whether Pop or Treppie is his father. All three men have sex with Mol. A story has been devised by Treppie to explain to Lambert that Pop is a distant family relation and is his father. Lambert discovers the truth of his origins at the novel's conclusion, with disastrous consequences.

Triomf means "triumph" in English, just as the erection of this suburb was supposed to imply the triumph of the apartheid government and the ideal of Afrikaner nationalism. As Don Mattera caustically words it in his memoir of Sophiatown:

> The new place that would rise out of the ashes would be called "the place of triumph" – Triomf – which embodied all that the Boers stood for and would ostensibly gain when the last black person was removed from Sophiatown. The triumph was etched on the weapons of those who represented and defended the regime. The triumph was manifested in the division the white government and its allies had sown among the inhabitants of Sophiatown … The triumph also echoes from Verwoerd's vow that he would destroy Sophiatown and erase it from the memory of its people. (1987: 19)

Van Niekerk's novel reveals the irony in the name of this new suburb and the title exists as a kind of rhetorical question.

*Triomf* is a city novel,[34] in particular a Johannesburg city novel. It is therefore interesting to apply Grosz's contention that the relationship between cities and bodies are "constitutive and mutually defining" (1998: 43) to a reading of *Triomf*. Van Niekerk employs mechanistic metaphors to describe both the bodies of the Benades and the cityscape. For instance, Treppie tells Mol to listen

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[32] Bakhtin defines this realism as exhibiting the features of Rabelais's work, especially *Gargantua and Pantagruel*:

> [E]xceptional concreteness and fullness; it looks for detail, exactness, actuality, the sense of reality in the presentation of historical facts. Each of these images combines an extreme breadth and a cosmic character with an exceptionally concrete feeling of life with individuality and journalistic response to the events of the day. (1984: 436)

[33] The incestuous Benades are simultaneously hilarious and horrifying. This irreconcilable ambiguity is one of the characteristics of the grotesque (Thompson 1972: 21).

[34] See Van Coller (2003) for a discussion of *Triomf* in relation to the *voorstadroman* tradition.

for "[t]he loose screws in your head, sister, a whole assortment of nuts and bolts, all of them odd pairs" (120). He continues, "Nice and scrambled … It's hereditary!", and concludes: "we're twisted into each other like the innards of a fridge" (120-121). The effects of Mol's psychological and physical trauma (at the hands of her brothers and son) are rendered here in terms of a machine that is irreparably broken. The incestuous family unit is itself like a fridge with the "wrong voltage" (121). Mechanistic metaphors are also used to describe the natural environment: "the sky above Triomf is blow torch blue" (121). In the city, any remnant of nature has been all but subsumed by industry.

Johannesburg itself is often rendered in an apocalyptic light and is fraught with dangers. The city evokes a visceral response in Mol: "When the noise is loudest, the sun comes up. Then it feels like her whole body starts droning softly, along with the city. That's her sign to get up, otherwise she begins to feel sick in her stomach" (120). The city itself is like a mechanical monster, whose vocal eruptions seem to dictate the time of the sunrise; they are also felt physically by Mol, suggesting a kind of empathic relationship between her body and the city. The city provides no comfort or succour; it is unstable, unreliable and permeable. The history of exploitative mining and extracting gold from the earth's core has resulted in a city that is "hollow on the inside" and prone to sink holes (194). Mol is especially concerned that "There just isn't enough solid ground left for graves. And … most of the corpses fall through after a while" (194). Furthermore, it appears as if living in the city exacts an exhausting physical toll: "Getting buried in Jo'burg is a waste of time and money, says Treppie. After you've lived in this place there's not much left of you in any case" (195). Jo'burg's inhabitants seem to waste away, imploding, just as the ground beneath their feet caves in on itself. This appears to be a clear example of a mutually constitutive relationship.

This relationship between self and world exhibits features of the grotesque. Mikhail Bakhtin traces the history and changing meaning of the term grotesque and the imagery of the grotesque, from medieval and Renaissance grotesque to Romantic grotesque, in his "Introduction" to *Rabelais and his World* (see 1984: 29-53).[35] Grotesque realism developed as a literary genre in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As Bakhtin explains, this form celebrates the hybrid and functions "to consecrate inventive freedom" and to "liberate ... from conventions and established truths, from clichés, from all that is humdrum and universally accepted. This carnival spirit offers the chance to have a new outlook on the world" (34). Central to this genre's rebelliousness is laughter and the presentation of the "ever unfinished" grotesque body as opposed to the classical body (1984: 29).

[35] These differences fall beyond the scope of this chapter, although *Triomf* bears more in common with Renaissance than Romantic grotesque (see Bakhtin 1984:39)

The grotesque body "is looking for that which protrudes from the body, all that seeks to go out beyond the body's confines. Special attention is given to the shoots and branches, to all that prolongs the body and links it to other bodies or to the world outside" (2005:93). Bakhtin explains that the boundary between the grotesque body and the world is one that is easily penetrated: "the body swallows the world and is itself swallowed by the world" (*Ibid.*). Thus, one could read Mol's fear of being consumed by the abyss beneath Jo'burg as grotesque. The "essential role" in the grotesque body belongs to the "bowels and phallus" *(Ibid.*). In this vein, it is also worth noting the considerable descriptive energy Van Niekerk devotes to Lambert's disproportionately large phallus, Treppie's constipated bowels and Pop's pants which fail to conceal his underwear, as well as Mol's lack of underwear.

It is opportune to mention the mining metaphor used to describe Treppie's emotional tormenting of Mol:

> When he, Treppie, tells Mol things, it's not to see if she can still think, but to see if she can still feel ... he has to dig deeper nowadays to find Mol's feelings. First you get blood and shit and gore. Then only feelings. But it's Lambert's job [to dig] and when the arteries are nice and wide open, then he, Treppie can go do some inspection, to see if there's any gold-dust left in the mines. (116)

Firstly, Treppies's description of Mol has notable parallels with Grosz's theory of embodiment: flesh, feelings and the impact of power are coterminous here. Secondly, there is again an implicit parallel between body and city: Mol's feelings are likened to the remnants of gold-dust that might still be hidden in an exhausted mine. This could be interpreted in one of two ways: either the "gold" serves to redeem Mol and similarly the city *or* the discovery of the "gold" ensures that both Mol and the city can be exploited further for personal gain. Knowing Treppie, the latter interpretation seems more likely. Thirdly, the "relief" of Mol's body, of tunnels and mineshafts, aligns her with the grotesque: "[m]ountains and abysses, such is the relief of the grotesque body" (Bakhtin 2005:93).

The grotesque does not merely serve to shock and amuse, it also has a socio-political consequence. As Peter Stallybrass and Allon White argue, "the grotesque returns as the repressed of the political unconscious, as those hidden culture contents which by their abjection had consolidated the cultural identity of the bourgeoisie" (quoted in Russo 1994:9). The Benades represent a repressed element of Afrikaner history and a counter-narrative to the apartheid ideology of racial hierarchy. Their abjection from the body-politic consolidates the identity of the *volk*. By emphasizing their

grotesqueness, by forcing the reader to 'look' at their bodies and experience simultaneous horror and hilarity, Van Niekerk debunks Afrikaner nationalist mythology which both sees the Afrikaner *volk* as God's elect and insists on the sanctity of racial separation.[36] *Triomf* forces a reckoning with this repressed human element of the national consciousness; the grotesque Benades dirty the sanitised history that apartheid crafted and furthermore, the tragedy of Sophiatown refuses to remain buried.

Triomf was built on the remains of the multiracial Sophiatown as a 'haven' for poor whites. The reader is alerted to the archaeological layers of the suburb from the opening page of the novel, as Lambert digs in the earth and finds "just rubble wherever you dig" (*Triomf* 1). Mattera notes that after the demolition of Sophiatown, the neighbourhood as well as the "hopes and dreams" it represented was submerged in "rubble" (1987: 151). The apartheid government attempted to inscribe their narrative onto the landscape itself, thus affirming its right to control the space. However, the government merely succeeded in transforming the landscape into a palimpsest. Jennifer Beningfield argues that "the visual landscape is a veneer, a thin edge drawn over the piled debris of the past that still thwarts attempts to coax the land into fertility and growth" (2006: 223). There is a parallel to be drawn between her reading of the landscape and my reading of the Benades's bodies. According to the ideological narrative of apartheid, the Benades's white skin symbolizes their incontrovertible place at the top of South Africa's racial hierarchy. Van Niekerk exposes the absurdity of this myth of racial supremacy. The Benades's skin is a thinly veiled veneer which fails to completely hide their physical *and* psychological trauma or "the debris of the past". Treppie's description of himself supports this argument: "All that's left of me is a drop of blood, a wet spot with some skin around it struggling for breath. A lump of scar tissue with a heart in the middle" (*Triomf* 380). The Benades's frail, grotesque bodies exist in sharp contrast to the ideal of the virile healthy bodies of farmers and their "ancestors … of heroic strength [and] fortitude" who "carved [their farms] out of the wild" as depicted in *plaasromans* (Coetzee 1988: 83).

Evidence of Sophiatown surfaces throughout the text, haunting the city and the Benades.[37] These relics serve as a constant reminder that the inhabitants of Triomf do not possess the land on which

[36] See Saul Dubow (1992) for a chronological account of the changing nature of Afrikaner Nationalism in the 20th century. Van Niekerk quotes T. Dunbar Moodie's description of "traditional Afrikaner faith" as a "civil religion", since the Christian tradition allowed for [Afrikaner history from 1886 to 1914] to be interpreted as righteous suffering, proof of God's favour and, moreover, as an imitation of Christ's innocent suffering" (1992:11).

[37] In the early pages of the novel, Mol informs the reader that

> Treppie says the ghosts of those dogs are all over Triomf. Sometimes he wakes up at night from all their barking. .. It sounds like the end of all time. Then she waits for the earth to open up and the skeletons' bones to grow back together again, so they can be covered with flesh and rise up under the trumpets. That's why she says to Lambert he must rather leave those bones there where he finds them. (*Triomf* 4-5)

they live – they have no historical claim to it. This, once again, parodies the *plaasroman*. As Coetzee explains, the farm is "an area of nature inscribed with signs of the [family] lineage: with evidence of labor and with bones in the earth" (109). In the context of the *plaasroman*, the bones of earlier generations of Afrikaans farmers are interred in the earth; in *Triomf*, only the bones of the dead dogs of the citizens of Sophiatown litter the ground. The material artefacts of this 'buried' city of Sophiatown await more thoughtful archaeologists than Lambert and Mol, but also act as obstacles for any transcendental merging of the new white land owners and the land which resists their ownership. Similarly, while in the *plaasroman*, the ancestors might haunt the farmer, to remind him of his duty to perpetuate his lineage (Coetzee 1988: 105), the fact that the Benades are haunted by ghosts of the dogs of the black residents forced off their land places them in a very different political situation. This haunting is a reminder of injustice. Lambert will produce no progeny and the Benades are thus the end of a lineage. The Benades do however exist in the continuum of a broader South African history and not outside of it, as in the *plaasroman*. Coetzee's discussion is worth quoting here to illustrate my argument. He contends that,

> [The white pastoral] marks off and defends a territory "outside" history where the disturbing realities of land and labour can be bracketed off and questions of justice and power translated into questions of legal succession and personal relations between master and servant. (1988:11)

In Van Niekerk's fiction, nothing is "bracketed off" and "questions of justice and power" are made explicit and are inserted into personal relationships "between master and servant". At the conclusion of the novel, the Benades' dog Gerty and Pop's ashes are buried in their backyard. Thus they attempt to stake their claim – however tenuous – to the land and also to the post-apartheid country, to insert their narrative into the official national one.

**Home and Belonging**

The theme of home and the need to construct a safe haven in which to live or a space from which to withstand the pressures of, or fortify oneself against, the rest of the world recurs throughout *Triomf*. In this regard it is worth quoting from Achmat Dangor's *Kafka's Curse*: "It struck me that our history is contained in the homes we live in, that we are shaped by the ability of these simple structures to resist being defiled" (Dangor 35 quoted in Jeppie 1998: G10). As Jeppie words it, "homes are lived spaces made and remade by the people who dwell in them, shaped by their histories, dispositions and notions of domesticity" (*Ibid.*). Treppie pityingly comments of Mol, "Jirre, poor Mol, all she can worry about is whether they'll still have a roof over their heads" *(Triomf* 442). The ability of their walls to protect them is vital for their survival, perhaps to

compensate for the fact that their bodies have proved too fragile and weak to "resist being defiled" (Dangor quoted in Jeppie 1998, see also *Triomf* 225). As Treppie says, "as if you're not exposed enough, with your soft human skin" (315). For this reason perhaps, the Benades are obsessed with repairing the house – a futile but recurring exercise. If the houses of Sophiatown were "extraordinary symbols of a way of life in Sophiatown" (Mattera 1987:9) and thus had to be bulldozed, then the Benades's house is symbolic of the leaky edifice of apartheid.

In an article discussing race and space in Elleke Boehmer's *Nile Baby*, Mike Marais (2010) refers to the creation of a home and the need for belonging. In reflecting on the reader's response to Boehmer's novel, he argues that it disrupts her own "sense of being at-home" (2010). The reader is thus implicated in and unsettled by the knowledge that the creation of a home, of a sense of belonging always involves the converse – the exclusion of others. Marais points out that the "right to belong" is always an "epiphenomenon of an exclusionary gesture through which her community has come into being, the differential process through which it has defined itself against what it is not" (2010: 50). In *Triomf*, there is no ignoring the fact that the house at 127 Martha Street literally performs this exclusionary gesture, since it was built on the site of a neighbourhood which idealistically, and in ways which have entered the realm of mythology, represented "the antithesis of separation and racial prejudice" (Mattera 1987: 16-7).

On Guy Fawkes night, Mol looks outside at the festivities in the street from which her family is excluded and back at the cracked walls of their house and concludes:

> The house is just a shell. But she knows the stuff inside that shell is thick. Thick and quiet from all the things that have happened … Tonight, I … will shoot off a [fire]cracker. For my heart and for my breath, so they can run smoothly, and for the little thing buzzing inside my head, so it can settle down, and for the house, and the walls, so they can get some strength, and for the quiet, thick insides, to give them a little light. And for us, to pep us up a little. (255)

The Benades's fate is intimately and inextricably connected to their house – to their sense of belonging, their shelter, their home. This moment of real joy and rebellion from Mol is born out of sheer desperation and misery after Lambert's cataclysmic destruction of the house after a particularly violent fit. The "stuff inside which is thick" refers simultaneously to the inhabitants, their feelings and emotions – which are here rendered palpable – and the heavy weight of their history. There is also a metaphoric slippage between Mol and the house, between her viscera and that of the house; they draw strength from each other and the spark of the firecracker symbolizes the

life of the house and her heart, the regeneration of both. The house might be considered as a kind of exoskeleton of the bodies of those live inside it. Thus, while the house symbolises exlusion, there is no doubt that it also enacts the sense of "being at-home". The reader needs to engage critically with this productive and troubling tension.

The house is "whitewashed" on election day, "painted white, pure white, without a trace of their comings and goings" (*Triomf* 453, 323). On the topic of the house painting, Burger comments: "Die werklikheid word deur die verf bedek, maar eintlik verander dit niks aan hulle situasie nie" (2001:11).[38] However, they have failed to read the small print – in fact they will be paying for "Operation Whitewash" for the rest of their lives (453). When the debt collector arrived, "He still said something about people like them thinking the New South Africa meant they didn't have to pay their debts to the old South Africa" (465). And so the Benades pay off the cost of the painting: "Treppie says this is now what you call Triomf debt – by the time they finish paying it off, their matt-white will have cost them ninety thousand rand" (465). In this sense, the idiomatic definition of a whitewash as a crushing defeat seems apt. Pop's death might also be counted among the costs of the whitewash (see Chapter Three and Chapter Six for an extended discussion of this). Their house becomes a kind of palimpsest as the markings below the whitewash have not altogether disappeared. In this regard, Burger suggests that "Om die huis af te wit, is dus dieselfde as om 'n nuwe dorp op Sophiatown se 'rubble' te bou en dit dan Triomf te noem. Dit is 'n leuen" (2001:12).[39] The history of the "Old South Africa" cannot be whitewashed, and failure to reckon with the "secrets" of the past can prove disastrous. At the close of the novel, after the first democratic elections, the exclusionary logic of Triomf has been eroded, as "Black people are living across the road now" (472), even though it remains unlikely that they are invited into the Benade home or vice versa.

Thus, in reading about the Benades's desire to stake a claim to the land, to find a home, especially in the fraught and political loaded terrain of Triomf, the reader too queries the machinations of power and exclusion at work in such a desire and the debt that must be repaid in order to realise this desire, especially in the context of post-transitional South Africa. Furthermore, since a direct parallel is drawn between the state of the Benades's bodies and the state of their home, there is a question about the exclusionary signification of their white skin. The question is how and whether one can find ways to embody one's subjectivity, to live in one's skin – with the full weight of its

[38] "The reality is covered by paint, but that actually changes nothing about their situation" (own translation).
[39] "To paint the house white is thus the same as building a new town on Sophiatown's rubble and calling it Triomf. It is a lie" (own translation).

political significance – pre- and post-apartheid South Africa and in one's home, without premising one's sense of belonging on an exclusionary act.

**Subversive Cartography**

*Agaat*, Van Niekerk's monumental second novel, is set on the farm *Grootmoedersdrift* in the Western Cape. As the name of the farm suggests, ownership has been passed down the female line of the family, immediately contradicting the *plaasroman's* masculine lineage.[40] Kamilla de Wet, the tyrannical matriarch of this farm, is dying. Since her husband is deceased and her son, Jakkie, has emigrated to Canada, the farm is to be inherited by her maid, the eponymous Agaat. Thus, as in *Triomf*, the family lineage is ended. On her deathbed Milla is cared for by Agaat Lourier, the coloured woman she "adopted" 43 years ago and then relegated to the servant's quarters when Milla fell pregnant. While Agaat's biological mother was pregnant, she was beaten and as a child, Agaat was abused by her biological father. As a result, her body is physically scarred – her arm and leg are disfigured. These scars remain hidden beneath the maid's uniform she wears with military precision. Given the limited scope of this chapter, I will focus on explicating Milla's cartographic obsession and Agaat's fennel plantations in order to illuminate previously unexamined aspects of the relationship between corporeality and spatiality.

The prologue and epilogue of the novel are told from Jakkie's perspective, while the remainder of the novel is told from the perspective of the now mute Milla. As she succumbs to the ravages of Motor Neuron Disease, she reflects back on her life and tries to extract meaning from it. There are four narrative styles: present tense first person, second person past tense, diary extracts and Milla's stream of consciousness. Agaat reads Milla's diaries to her, although it is never clear to what extent Agaat has edited these, expunging certain details and adding others.

Milla describes her final project as follows:

> Let me try myself, a self-portrait, an autobiography, life and times of Milla de Wet, her place of origin, her purlieu, on Grootmoedersdrift, her hereditary home. An honest likeness. From the mirror, over my feet, along the length of my paralysed body, all the way into my head. Between my temples, above my nose, behind the frontal bone, thére. (21)[41]

[40] See Devarenne (2009: 640-642) and Prinsloo and Visagie (2009) for a more detailed analysis of this matriarchal lineage.

[41] The final sentence suggests an interesting parallel to Antjie Krog's claim, in an introduction to David Goldblatt's *Some Afrikaners Revisited*, that [she] "can see he's an Afrikaner … it's something here. Between the nose and the mouth. Perhaps more towards the eyes" (29). Krog's statement raises the possibility that identity is both physical and psychological and this has particular relevance to my discussion of Milla's embodied subjectivity.

Notice how she conflates a self-portrait, a visual genre, with an autobiography, which is a literary genre. It is impossible for Milla to tell her life's story without including reference to her physical body; her history is inscribed on her flesh. She searches for her story's beginning deep within her body. In addition, her story is inextricably linked to its locale. Thus, body, history and land exist on a kind of continuum – which raises intriguing possibilities for the discussion of "lived spatiality".

Our first glimpse of Milla in the novel is from a recent photograph that Jakkie describes: "In the last photo Gaat sent, she was tiny amongst the panache plants in the front garden, eyes deep in their sockets" (3). One can imagine such a photograph taken by David Goldblatt and appearing in the pages of *Some Afrikaners Revisited*. In this portrait, the only one we are given from an external viewpoint, Milla is dwarfed by the vegetation; she is a fragile speck on the landscape.

This contrasts drastically with Milla's deluded self-image. In her youth, Milla envisioned herself as a larger-than-life creator of the world around her: "a regent of the whole Tradouw ... everything [my] domain" (30-31). Milla's egoism ensures that she views the land as her *possession*; she does not consider herself "the transitory embodiment of a lineage" (Coetzee 1988: 87). However, in her present circumstance, paralysed and helpless, her realm has dwindled: "Shrinking domain. I'm locked up in my own body" (21). At the height of her power, Milla felt, to paraphrase Grosz (2001: 33), that the space available to her was unlimited, and thus too were the modes of corporeality. Her illness has restricted not only her lived environment – her domain – but also her corporeal existence. Illness has foisted on her a Cartesian understanding of subjectivity, where the mind, the I, is distinct from the body (this will be elaborated on in Chapter Six). This context is necessary to understand Milla's desire to view the maps of her farm one last time before death. Her motivation stems from her desperate need to transcend her current condition and thereby escape the reckoning of her past crimes, as orchestrated by Agaat. She believes the maps will provide "[p]laces to clamp myself to, a space outside these chambered systems of retribution" (40).

Graham Huggan's (1989) explanation of cartographic discourse is relevant here, especially for its parallels with apartheid spatial discourse. Huggan proposes that the "cartographic connection" might "provide the provisional link which joins the contestatory theories of post-structuralism and post-colonialism in the pursuit of social and cultural change" (128). He argues that, "in the demonstration of colonial discursive practices," cartography has an "exemplary role" (115) He provides a deconstructive reading of the map in order to reveal what he refers to as its "contradictory coherence" and the implicit desire to affirm ownership of space which informs its

production (120). The map is thus never neutral or disinterested. Cartographic discourse, Huggan explains, "is characterized by the discrepancy between its authoritative status and its approximate function, a discrepancy which marks out the 'recognizable totality' of the map as a manifestation of control rather than as an authenticating seal of coherence" (117). These "'blind spots' reveal flaws in the overall presentation of the map" and thus suggests the possibility of alternate readings (118). Huggan concludes that

> the "contradictory coherence" implied by the map's systematic inscription on a supposedly "uninscribed" earth reveals it, moreover, as a palimpsest covering over alternative spatial configurations which, once brought to light, indicate both the plurality of possible perspectives on, and the inadequacy of any single model of, the world. (120)

By deconstructing or "decolonizing" the map, Huggan challenges its "authoritative status" and reveals the function it served for colonialists (121). This reading of cartography illuminates how the motif of a map can operate in post-colonial narratives in order to simultaneously reveal multiple perspectives and counter the master narrative of colonial control. He also suggests the map as a useful hinge between post-colonialism and post-structuralism.

In the light of Huggan's analysis, Milla's obsession with the maps of her farm can be seen as a last attempt to exert her power, to experience the "regency" of her domain once more. Burger suggests the maps affirm Milla's success, and are a reminder of her farming prowess (2006 :181). The maps themselves act as a reminder and a "manifestation of her control" over her farm and her household (Huggan 1989:117). This is again evidenced in Milla's silent address to Agaat: "You may have dominion over my hours ... but there is also space, cartographed, stippled, inalienable ... laid down in place names for a century or two or three" (*Agaat* 64). Van Niekerk's treatment of her protagonist's thoughts is parodic here. Cartographic space is precisely the opposite of inalienable; it is constructed, unnatural and thus open to interpretation. The place names Milla refers to in the final sentence are those that were "laid down" by the European settlers on a map that was believed to be blank; the names themselves function as a palimpsest.[42]

[42] Jakkie's thoughts on the etymology of names illustrates this:

> This stream, the first which a European would deign to give the name of river, according to Di Capelli. Afterwards Rio de Nazareth. Le Fleuve Large. Hottentot names, certainly, but what remains of those and who still cares? The Sijnna River, possibly derived from the Nama, Sunnu-!a, Quarrel River?... Quarrel country. Cacophony. (*Agaat* 4-5)

Once again there is an echo of the implicit ideological intent of the *plaasroman*, which is here exposed, deconstructed and finally subverted. Naming is explicitly aligned with ownership, and as many trekboers settled throughout the country, they (re)named rivers, mountains and farms to commemorate aspects of their journey or struggles. According to Jakkie's reading, all that remains is a cacophony of competing claims of ownership, of

The farm maps could be regarded as another version of the diaries Milla has kept of her life on *Grootmoedersdrift*. Both function to impose her master narrative on events. However, both the diaries and the maps contain "blind spots" which serve to contradict their coherence. In both cases, it is telling that the occlusions refer to Agaat, whose presence threatens to destabilize Milla's version of accounts.

Huggan declares Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's discussion of maps as rhizomes a useful model which allows maps to be conceived of as "the expression of shifting ground between alternative metaphors rather than the approximate representation of a 'literal truth'" (1987: 125). Maps have more in common with figurative than literal language; depending on which metaphor is used, and who utters it, the subject that is being described will 'shift'. Delueze and Guattari propose a rhizome system as a metaphor to describe their book, and also the world (1987: 6). The rhizome model is intended as an alternative to the traditional, governing 'tree model' which is used to describe a hierarchy of ideas. A rhizome is characterized by the potential for "[ceaseless] connection and heterogeneity" (7), "multiplicity" as opposed to unity (8), possibilities of "rupture" and concomitant processes of de- and re-territorialization (9) and is an "acentred, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system" (21). The rhizome system is characterized by circulation and flows rather than self-contained units or totalities. Delueze and Guattari's contention that the map is rhizomatic represents a distinct challenge to the authoritative status of the map:

> [The map] is itself a part of the rhizome. The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group or social formation. It can be drawn on a wall, conceived as a work of art, constructed as a political action or as a meditation. Perhaps one of the most important characteristics of the rhizome is that it always has multiple entryways. … The map has to do with performance. (1987: 12–13)

These Deleuzian characteristics of a map stand in stark contrast to the characteristics associated with the map in colonial discourse. In the latter, the map was revered as evidence of conquest and discovery. Deleuze and Guattari, however, describe a map which is open to multiple readings and is thus never complete. This rhizomatic map has clear echoes in the recurring cartographic motifs in Van Niekerk's fiction. In addition, this reading of a map suggests rich connections with my reading

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competing narratives which co-exist – and yet any of which can be made invisible by the stroke of the cartographer's pen.

of bodies: "part of the rhizome", "open and connectable", "susceptible to constant modification", "multiple entryways" and "to do with performance". A connection Milla suggests when she refers to herself as "Map butterfly" (*Agaat* 274). The way bodies are read also depends on the social or political structures which influence that reading.

I shall examine two contrasting consecutive descriptions of what Milla wishes to do with the maps in order to extend my argument. Initially, before Milla has successfully communicated to Agaat her desire to see the maps, her intentions for the maps are expressed in romanticized tones.[43] She longs to see the representation of her farm on the map and simultaneously the farm itself. Milla believes the map to be a mimetic representation of the farm. Huggan's discussion of cartographic discourse exposes this "mimetic fallacy" (1987: 117). Milla describes the idyllic beauty of the farm she wishes to see, "until [she is] satiated with what [she has] occupied here" (105). However, the following paragraph jolts the reader from this pastoral reverie:

> And then they must roll [the map] up in a tube and put on my neckbrace again like the mouth of a quiver. And I will close my eyes and prepare myself so that they can unscrew my head and allow the map to slip into my lacunae. So that I can be filled and braced from the inside and fortified for the voyage. Because without my world inside me I will contract and congeal, more even than I am now, without speech and without actions and without any purchase on time. (105)

Van Niekerk subverts the *plaasroman's* discourse on land ownership by deconstructing the map. In order to comprehend the full scope of her subversion of conventional tropes of land ownership and spatiality, the subversive role of the corporeal must be taken into account. Milla's use of the word "satiated" in the initial quote may at first glance appear rather innocuous. However, the second quote elaborates on the definition in visceral, grotesque detail. Milla wishes to consume the external world and thus merge spatiality and corporeality. She envisions the map, the image of her farm, as being capable of filling the emptiness inside her. The map thus fulfils the dual purpose of providing psychological succour and physical support. Her identity is rooted in the farm to such an extent that despite the fact that she is dying, imprisoned in her body, incapable of movement or speech, she recognizes herself in the farm; it mirrors and affirms a sense of self that she has lost. Milla wishes not only to inscribe herself on the land as part of its historical narrative but also to inscribe the land on her body, to absorb it and in this metaphorical way take it with her when she dies.

[43]See Chapter Three for more on this "language of the eyes" that Milla and Agaat use to communicate.

The image of a figurative merging with the landscape is not foreign to the *plaasroman*. However, in the latter, such a fusion occurs as the result of a romantic epiphany of communion and transcendence rather than a desire to "consume". Coetzee explains:

> The final test that the bond between [farmer, lineage and farm] is supramaterial will be passed when a mystic communion of interpenetration takes place between them, when the farmer becomes *vergroeid* (intergrown, fused) with the farm. (1988:68)

He quotes from C.M. Van Den Heever's novel *Groei* (*Growth*) for illustration: "Never before had he felt such a bond with the earth. It was now as if the life within it were streaming up into his body ... as if he and the earth were living in silent understanding" (Coetzee 1988:68). Milla desires not only to feel the "life of the farm", but rather to suck it out of the farm.[44] Her desperation for the maps is fuelled by self-interest and the maps themselves are but a flawed simulacrum of the farm itself. There is no spontaneous mystical communion here, but merely an imagined, carefully orchestrated imitation of one – which ultimately fails.

When Milla eventually does see the maps, her response is dramatically different. Agaat unravels the maps at the exact moment that the powerful laxative she has given Milla begins to take effect.[45] As opposed to the earlier image in which Milla still exerted a modicum of control, in this instance she has been rendered utterly helpless, humiliated and powerless against the physical urges of her body and the whims of Agaat to punish her. Her only imaginable recourse is the desire to empty her bowels all over the maps. Her desire to be "satiated" by the maps has been perversely inverted. This climactic image could be considered the apex of grotesqueness; it is simultaneously comic and deeply troubling. Milla's thoughts unfold thus: "[a]m I Atlas? The myth is the wrong way around. The earth like heaven is not abóve us, but inside us. For us to retain in our cavities and to surrender through our orifices" (339). Later, the imagery recurs when she imagines instructing Agaat:

> Unroll [the map] under me, keep the edges together and watch me make a sewerage farm out of them … What does it matter in any case? Fold the water map into a little boat, set the contour map for a sail. Caulk the holds with pulp from Grootmoedersdrift. Then I sail away on

[44] The vampiric connotation here is intentional. In an interview with Leon de Kock, Van Niekerk has casually suggested that "[Milla's] a vampire. She doesn't have a life of her own; she sucks the blood off that poor child ... and there're a lot of vampire motifs right through the entire thing" (De Kock, 142).

[45] It is also possible that Van Niekerk is making a tongue-in-cheek Deleuzian joke here. Deleuze and Guattari claim that "[t]he map does not reproduce an unconscious closed in upon itself; it constructs the unconscious. It fosters connections between fields, the removal of blockages on bodies without organs, the maximum opening of bodies with organs onto a plane of consistency" (1987:13). Here the map certainly encourages openings and removal of blockages.

> my last voyage in it. Up to my chin in shit. Once and forever put in my place. Would that satisfy you? (401)

In this case, the symbolism of the map has changed dramatically, as a direct result of Milla's change in emotional and physical state as occasioned by Agaat's intervention. Whereas previously the map represented the concretization of her power and provided her with strength, in this case, that power has been breached and the coherence of her narrative challenged. The map itself is merely a representation (and a flawed one at that) and as such has no real value; it might as well be folded up into a paper boat, where at least it would fulfil a purpose. In a dramatic inversion, Milla has been "put in her place" by Agaat. As figurative retribution for her tyrannical treatment of Agaat, Milla imagines all that she has laboured over turn to excrement. Whereas the maps of her imagination metaphorically "satiated" her, here she is pre-emptively emptied out, as a result of the laxatives, in order perhaps to digest Agaat's alternative map. In her rereading of the Atlas myth, if Milla's world is surrendered, it will be replaced with Agaat's – or rather a world of both of their making.

Agaat "suspects" the reason Milla wishes to view the maps is to rediscover "a weak spot or a soft spot that [Milla] wants to visit again" (403). For the purposes of pointing out what is effectively a "blind spot", Agaat has recruited the services of a feather duster named "Japie" – the very same Japie which Milla employed to spank Agaat as a child. What follows is a perverse parody of a geography lesson.[46] For the first time in the novel, Agaat appears to lose her self-control as well as any embarrassment about her little arm as evidence of her suppressed anger finally surfaces explicitly: "It's the first time Agaat has ever pushed up her right sleeve [to reveal her deformed arm] for me like that. It's the first time that she's sworn in front of me, with her mouth at any rate, and at mé" (403). Agaat's exasperation at Milla's continued silence finds expression via the medium of the map. The displaying of the map is thus the catalyst for Agaat's revelation of her disfigured arm as well as a sherry-fuelled chastisement of Milla. Milla's farm map morphs into Agaat's bodymap.

Agaat begins to chant the names of places, some of which appear on the map and some of which do not (403).[47] Previously, Milla had referred to "space ... laid down in place names for a century or two or three" (64). Once again, Milla's view that cartography is stable and permanent is parodied. As Agaat invents alternate place names, she reveals the random nature of the inscription of names on a map, and simultaneously also lays claim to an alternative cartographic narrative. The smell of

[46] Aspects of this argument which relate to Agaat's geography lesson have been published in Buxbaum (2013).
[47] Devarenne points out a similar occurrence in *Triomf* , when Treppie "dubs his neighbourhood 'Soek-vir-kak-fontein ... or 'Rondom-stront-stasie' ... names that ironically recall the practice of giving farms romantic or idyllic names" (2009: 640).

Milla's excrement adds to her sense of disempowerment: "My own stink is in my nostrils. Acrid, grassy. Green manuring" (403). Furthermore, Milla appears oblivious to Agaat's implicit message, hearing only "a topographical and zoological gibberish" (404). All that concerns her is her state of extreme physical discomfort and embarrassment. Her egoism asserts itself once more. The smell is also perhaps a reminder to Milla that she too will soon be manure, buried in a land whose names and narratives are no longer certain.

Milla, silent, tortured, listens to Agaat recounting their history:

> It's released from her like a flood, the names of the towns. We stayed over here (she on sacks with the smelly servant in the hovel), visited there (tea and cake for her in the shade of a great old bluegum what more could one wish for). … Here was a sheep on the spit (for her the shinbone that I kept in a white napkin), there a circus (peeped through a chink). (404–406)

What sounds like gibberish to Milla is in fact Agaat imposing her own version of events onto the provincial map. She is attempting to fill in the "blind spots" and suggest "alternative spatial configurations" (Huggan 1994: 118, 120). Her performance here emphasizes Delueze and Guattari's notion that maps themselves are a kind of performance (1987:13). Agaat's body is bracketed off from the official 'body-politic' and the official narrative; it has been excised from apartheid cartographic representations. The places that Milla recognizes represent at once inclusion and exclusion: whether one was welcomed into these places depended solely on the colour of one's skin. The re-reading of the map then indeed becomes a re-enactment and revisiting of a battle, "[a]ll along the old battle positions" (405) as Milla realizes. It is her and Agaat's personal battle, but the map also positions this battle within the broader context of South Africa's historical geo-political battles. Space becomes a battlefield – Milla and Agaat's power struggles are fought over the control of Milla's body and her physical urges as well as over the control of the cartographic narrative. In this reading, Agaat's re-naming of places constitutes a revolutionary act, an act of resistance and an attempt by her to embody space more completely.

Agaat relates "Everything that you forgot and never noted in your little books" (405). Milla realizes, "My bowels may be empty but now it's Agaat's turn to flush her system" (405-406).[48] Milla's sense of relief after emptying her bowels prompts Agaat to seek similar relief, although of a psychological

[48]The suggestion that Milla and Agaat's relationship is one of sympathetic embodiment, of interconnected bodies, will be developed in the following chapter.

kind. Excrement and bowel movements are also linked to creativity, as will be shown in Chapter Three, and thus Agaat's "flushing" narrative is perhaps a kind of symbolic equivalent to Milla's physical release. Lastly, it could be suggested that when Agaat "flushes her system" she is in turn ensuring that Milla's newly emptied body will now be filled with alternative material, with disconcerting and troubling historical knowledge that must be embodied.

Agaat's finger follows an idiosyncratic route across the maps: "[m]umbling she follows her own routes, index finger on the lines. Helter-skelter amongst the various maps" (406). Maintaining physical contact with the map, she creates new rhizomatic connections, de- and re-territorialising the map. Liz Gunner's discussion of naming in the context of South African oral poetry has further implications for my analysis of Agaat's actions: "In the aesthetics of naming ... the land frequently becomes the person, and becomes part of the body's text; the social and the historical self is perceived through the land" (1996: 120). Agaat reveals her historical self via the medium of the map; her history too is rooted in this land and the land is part of her 'body text'. Importantly, the moment Agaat challenges Milla's understanding of the maps – and by implication, her recollection of their shared past and the spatial dynamics of apartheid and power relations – is also the moment when Agaat sheds her shame and embarrassment and ceases to conceal her scarred, disfigured arm in the sleeve of her uniform.

This pivotal narrative section concludes with the only time we are made aware of Agaat's feelings of displacement. Here, Agaat employs the plan of the farmhouse as an aid in relating the most intimate details of her personal geography. Adopting the stance and mannerisms of a soldier, preparing for battle (406), Agaat accuses Milla of all the acts of injustice committed against her, as if in a military tribunal. The unfurled map acts as a substitute for Milla's body: "here comes a finger pointing, at me, at the plan" (406). All that she cannot say to Milla is expressed in the force of her finger painfully bent against the map; her finger speaks of her anger, her frustration, her desperation. Looking from the plan to Milla it is suggested she wishes to "press press press" (*ibid.*) her finger not only against the map but against Milla too. This time Milla is not oblivious to Agaat's intentions as she feels herself to be "in the line of fire" (406). Agaat releases a volley of place names as if they were machine gun fire. The litany of names is announced to a military rhythm, a parody of her childhood nursery rhymes, and the names mimic and mock the formation of names inscribed on early maps by the Dutch and the trekboers. Agaat is rewriting the geography of the house, re-inscribing it with her memories of dispossession and maltreatment. Agaat thus ensures that Milla cannot escape "these chambered systems of retribution" (40) by looking at her map, which previously represented an escape for her. The supposed political neutrality and mimetic function of

the map has thus been exposed and disproved; spatial narratives can either conceal or reveal injustice.[49]

Agaat concludes her verbal assault on Milla with a description of her forced relocation to the outside room (407). Her body, still, exists as an absence and has been reduced to a few fragmentary symbols. Nevertheless, these symbols of Agaat's existence have been imaginatively inscribed onto the maps, and into Milla's memories, revealing an alternative cartographic discourse.[50] The map as well as her body can be read as a locus of meaning and a site of conflict; both are inscribed by a traumatic history.

If Agaat challenges cartographic history through her own embodied narrative, her body itself also challenges both the National Party and Milla's conception of her "place". 'Petty' apartheid for example, forbade 'non-whites' from swimming on certain beaches and even sitting on certain benches. Their "bodies" were, quite simply, deemed to be "out of place" (Robins 1998a: J12). Furthermore, Achille Mbembe explains,

> The apartheid state attempted to establish a relationship between spatial patterns and the moral order. The physical distances that separated the races were largely understood to consecrate moral ones. (2008: 47)

These racist "spatial control methods" (Elder 1998: 158) were thus not only inscribed on the landscape and implemented through the actions of urban planners, but also inscribed in the psychology of South Africans; space was ascribed moral value.

Throughout the novel we are alerted to the spaces which are rendered off-limits to Agaat. Milla's diary entry from Witsand in 1966 gives an example of the attempts made to bracket off her body (as in her geographical re-naming above) from view: "Perhaps [Agaat] wants to swim. Please just at a time and place where she won't offend because the beach is for whites only. Not that I needed to say it. She knows hr place (sic)" (314). Milla's choice of the word "offend" emphasizes the pervasiveness of racial ideology, to the extent that it is conceptualized as a visceral response to the other's body. It is Agaat's body itself that is considered the source of offence. Milla's concluding

[49] Huggan observes that this is a trend in post-colonial fictional narratives, where the "map is often identified, then parodied and/or ironized, as a spurious definitional construct, thereby permitting the writer to engage in a more wide-ranging deconstruction of Western signifying systems" (1989:126). See Shane Graham (2008) for an analysis of the map motif in Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story*.

[50] A more extensive analysis of the meaning of the 'fragmentation' of Agaat's body and narrative will be provided in the following chapter.

sentence implies that Agaat has internalized this ideology. As Glen Elder's discussion of apartheid spatial discourse argues

> Intricate links [existed] between the bodily encoding of apartheid's subjects and geography. … policy focusing on the city and the body are [thus] part of a … continuum of spatial control methods (1998:158). [51]

By knowing her place, Agaat is thus simultaneously aware of the geographical barriers governing her movement and of her body as a racialised place which, as a result of her skin colour, dictates her identity, her place.

Agaat's fennel seeds exist as a means of challenging apartheid cartographic discourse. Milla gave Agaat fennel seeds as a child, prior to her eviction from the house and forced transformation from adopted child to servant. Agaat planted these seeds all over the farm and the presence of fennel is referred to on several separate occasions throughout the novel. Agaat refused to obey Milla's instructions to tear up the plants, claiming that they belong to her (629); she later refers to them as her trademark (312). In the present tense narrative we are told that Agaat has read Charles van Onselen's *The Seed is Mine*: "That shut her up. I know what was in her head. Fennel seed" (14). While in Van Onselen's landmark oral history of Kas Maine, the seeds are all that Maine owns, Agaat can claim the seeds and ultimately the land. This narrative of dispossession is thus challenged and written back to by Agaat.

Agaat's fennel would not be depicted on any official maps of *Grootmoedersdrift*, and yet the continuing encroachment of these flowering herbs, considered by some as a weed – rhizome-like in their seemingly chaotic uncontrollable growth – serves as a constant reminder of the destabilizing and disruptive presence of Agaat herself. The fennel then metonymically represents her body which exists as a "blind spot" on the landscape, in Milla's narrative, in apartheid cartography and indeed, in the *plaasroman.*[52] As Van Niekerk summarizes, "die strooi van vinkelsaad oral waar sy stap, 'n ondoelmatige saaiery om die saai ontwil, 'n soort bevrugting van die omgewing en 'n merk van haar invloedsfeer wat ongebreideld voortwoeker en magies proebaar is in die melk van die koeie uit die omgewing" (Van Niekerk 2008:113).[53] Fennel also aids digestion, is consumed by the cows

[51] A.J. Christopher's *Atlas of Apartheid* is a useful reference in illustrating the National Party's cartographic discourse. Christopher employs maps to "[demonstrate] the spatial patterns of the planning and enforcement of ... 'grand apartheid' ... 'urban apartheid' and 'petty apartheid'" (1994:7).

[52] Coetzee observes that in the *plaasroman* there is "[by and large] silence about the place of black labour" (1988: 71).

[53] "The scattering of fennel seed where ever she walks, an irregular sowing pattern for the sake of the sowing process itself, a sort of fertilizing or even impregnating of the land, and a mark of her sphere of influence which spreads or

whose milk is consumed by the De Wets and is thus a component of the endless bodily cycle of consuming and excreting. Agaat leaves in her wake traces of fennel seeds, which will grow unhindered, eventually taking over so that her movements are no longer discernible, because they are everywhere. This is in direct conflict with Milla's desire to be omnipresent and remembered, even in the soil of her farm. Agaat is infertile, but the fennel's fertility acts as a kind of botanical substitute. In this way, Agaat asserts herself and inscribes her own narrative into the earth, thus laying claim to a farm she will one day inherit, to a world that is, as Jakkie delighted in discovering, "pure fennel!" (3).

Van Niekerk comments that she was inspired to consider the connections between Agaat and Lambert, as "agterkamerkinders" ("backroom children") and "pseudo-sjamane" (pseudo-shamans") (2008:116) by readers' observations, particularly one who asked about the recurrence and the symbolism of fire in *Triomf* and *Agaat* (104).[54] While the fire motif will be returned to in the final chapter, it's worth noting that fennel, according to Greek mythology, is the vessel in which Prometheus stole the secret of fire from Zeus: "I hunted out and stored in fennel stalk the stolen source of fire that has proved a teacher to mortals in every art and a means to mighty ends" (*Apollodurs, The Library* ([trans] J.G. Frazier) 1921: 7).[55] Creatively re-appropriating this myth to a reading of *Agaat*, one might suggest that Agaat has stolen the power of fire from the god-like Milla, however, unlike Prometheus, it is Milla who will suffer a cruel physical fate as a result; Agaat's punishment is that she is eternally tied to Milla.

This multiplicity (in the Deleuzian sense) of meanings associated with the map is also alluded to in *Triomf*. I contend that there is a parallel to be drawn between Lambert's "never-ending painting" (*Triomf* 163) and Agaat's map.

One of the characteristics of Delueze and Guattari's rhizome, as mentioned above, is multiplicity:

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festers unchecked and is tasted, as if magically, in the milk of the cows of the area" (own translation). The term "voortwoeker" which denotes "eat into (like cancer into the flesh), spread, fester" (*Groot Woordeboek*) has rich symbolism in terms of the centrality of disease in the novel.

[54] Van Niekerk was asked, "wat beteken die vuur in your boeke? Agaat en Lambert is dan albei piromane!" (2008:104). The question can be translated as "what is the meaning of the fire in your books? Agaat and Lambert are both pyromaniacs!" (own translation).

[55] See also *Apollodurs, The Library* ([trans] J.G. Frazier) 1921: 7). As punishment for his theft, Prometheus was "riveted in fetters beneath the open sky" (*Aeschylus*) or in another version, his body was "nail[ed] … to Mount Caucasus … and kept bound for many years. Every day an eagle swooped on him and devoured the lobes of his liver, which grew by night" (*Apollodorus*). This cruel fate is similar to the one Treppie threatens Lambert with and which Lambert imagines for Treppie in his painting; it also prefigures Wiid's illness which is cancer of the liver. The fennel is thus a key motif, in that, via Greek mythology, and Deleuzian ideas of "multiplicity", it links the bodies of Treppie and Lambert with Milla and Agaat (who both consume fennel-flavoured milk) as well as with Wiid.

> All multiplicities are flat, in the sense that they fill or occupy all of their dimensions: we will therefore speak of a *plane of consistency* of multiplicities, even though the dimensions of this "plane" increase with the number of connections that are made on it. Multiplicities are defined by the outside: by the abstract line, the line of flight or deterritorialization according to which they change in nature and connect with other multiplicities. … the possibility and necessity of flattening all of the multiplicities on a single plane of consistency or exteriority, regardless of their number of dimensions. The ideal for a book would be to lay everything out on a plane of exteriority of this kind, on a single page, the same sheet: lived events, historical determinations, concepts, individuals, groups, social formations. (9)

I have shown how Agaat "defines" and "transforms" the multiplicity of the map and creates new "lines of flight" (406). The map is the single "plane of consistency" on which all the multiplicities occur. Similarly, Lambert's mural could be considered as a realization of Delueze and Guattari's description of the ideal book; it is a palimpsest and yet all the previous layers are simultaneously visible and in concert with each other result in new connections and new meanings which they did not possess singularly. This kind of pictorial representation might be symbolic of an imagined world that is non-hierarchical, where different time periods occur concurrently and where freedom of movement is possible unhindered by borders or political ideology, even by past or present; where all power is flattened out.

Lambert's painting on the wall of his den began as a response to his boredom upon leaving school: "Then one day he began to draw South Africa with koki pens on the wall, copying from his history book. The outer lines are green. They're almost completely faded out now" (163). The accuracy of his representation of geographical history is already compromised as the map is copied from an old apartheid-era school textbook probably printed in the late 1960s. Such maps existed to inscribe a very biased understanding of migrations and power onto the land. Furthermore, the school book map of the country is on the verge of undergoing a geo-political shift as the democratic government will usher in new geographical divisions and place names. The impermanent nature of maps is further suggested by the fading koki lines.

Since he has exhausted his wall space but not his artistic desire, he decides "to paint the house. On top of everything. And across the whole of South Africa" (164). The house and the nation thus come to occupy the same space in Lambert's revisionist map. Treppie comments that the yellow and black arrows indicating the movements of the Voortrekkers and black people respectively "looked more like piss-pipes and shit-pipes under the ground. ... Then Treppie said same difference. Where you

get people you get shit and crap going down the pipes" (194) Treppie dismisses all propaganda, ideology and grand historical narratives in favour of the only undeniable reality: the material, physical reality, particularly excrement. He seems to be suggesting that a map of the sewer systems would be a more accurate representation of life than a geo-political map: regardless of who fought whom and where, and even as memory of those details fade, all that is certain is that they left a trail of "shit and crap" across the country. Treppie's suggestion that the map need only to represent the "shit and crap going through the pipes" (164) is perhaps realized in Milla's vision of emptying her bowels all over the maps. It is possible that for a *brief* moment, Milla is in accordance with Treppie – she realizes that the physical imperatives of the body ultimately take precedence over and dominate all other ideological explanations or desires. This scatological theme will be developed in the following chapter.

Lambert's graphic portraits of his family show remarkable insight as they seem to capture the essential characteristics of his family members, or of his relationship to them. Treppie is depicted as eviscerated: "His insides are hanging out. ... a huge, naked kaffir ... [is] eating Treppie's liver. 'PATYDEFWAGRAS,' the kaffir says (166).[56] In a vengeful inversion, the fantastic stories of cannibals that Treppie terrified Lambert with (see 154-155) are brought to life and the cannibals are feasting on Treppie. Lambert is incapable of defending himself verbally against Treppie's incessant teasing, and so his anger finds expression in his painting. Nevertheless, there is also a degree of truth in Lambert's gory portrait: the historical and economic realities of life in Africa have destroyed Treppie, and so it is fitting that Treppie lies "cut open across the shoulder of Africa" (166). Lambert's vision of Treppie also aligns with Treppie's own tortured self-image, which I have alluded to earlier: "All that's left of me is a drop of blood … A lump of scar tissue with a heart in the middle" (380).

Pop, who is dying of old age, is barely visible in the painting, depicted "rising up to heaven" (166). Mol's body is absent from the map,[57] but is symbolized by her ever-present housecoat:

> His mother's housecoat hangs from the horn of Africa ... It looks more like a piece of slaughtered human skin. That's why he wrote HOUSE COAT there. Then, in brackets, he

[56] This is Lambert's phonetic spelling of *paté de fois gras*, which is duck or goose liver paté, but here represents a paté of Treppie's liver. The words written in capital letters appear as labels which Lambert has written on his map to accompany his illustrations and are intended to clarify what the drawings represent.

[57] However, another portrait of Mol exists, hidden behind an old fridge. In this portrait, Lambert represents – with glee rather than any regret – the time in 1970 when he locked his mother in the fridge as punishment for losing his spanners. Once again, the suggestion of a violent death accompanies his drawing: "She looks like she's been slaughtered" (*Triomf* 211).

added (MOLE SKIN) (165).

Throughout the novel, Mol is teased as a result of her homophonic name. In this portrait, she is dehumanized by Lambert and exists as a mere shadow, an empty skin devoid of any depth. Lambert's violent treatment of his mother and his disregard for her humanity is expressed unequivocally in his map. As a result of the abuse she has suffered, Mol herself feels exhausted and hollow, as mentioned above in the discussion of Jo'burg's porous earth. Lambert's body is not described in any detail and only his face is visible in the painting: "He, LAMBERT sits in the VOLKSWAGEN ... He's smiling out the window" (166). This is a purposeful omission as Lambert feels nothing but revulsion for his own body (167 and 463). In his painting, he thus projects an idealistic self-image. Lambert is painted with a smile, his grotesque body is invisible and he is accorded abilities that in reality he lacks – he is pictured behind the wheel of the car he is not allowed to drive. His 'girl' is on the roof of the car and they are driving north to escape South Africa after the election.

In Lambert's map, the effects of the Benades's emotional and psychological trauma are rendered in grotesque detail. "Lived events, historical determinations, concepts, individuals, groups, social formations" coexist on a plane (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 9); anatomical bodies are acted upon by geo-political and historical forces and also experience the impact of familial interactions and emotional exchanges. In this map, Grosz's (1994) suggestion that a coherent analysis of the importance of bodies would need to take into account the triangular relationship between "the anatomical and material body", the external socio-political forces which are inscribed on and constrain the body as well as the processes of the psyche, is illustrated. The Benades are confined by their geographical location, and the traumatic history of the land, whose boundaries are marked by fading green koki pens, is inscribed on their bodies.

Both *Agaat* and *Triomf*, in different ways, explore the relationship between characters and their environment and the extent to which their surroundings curtail their freedom and impact on their sense of self. In both these novels, maps are used as the very tactile, malleable medium through which these issues are interrogated and exposed. The map as well as the body can be read as a locus of meaning and a site of conflict; both are marked by history. In this way, the representations of the corporeal and spatial merge and occur on the same plane. For both Agaat and Lambert, maps provide the possibility of creatively re-imagining their lives and their historical narratives and

asserting themselves and changing, however temporarily the dominant power dynamics.[58]

**Landscapes of Inclusion**

In this final section of the chapter I argue that the challenge of transforming the dominant spatial logic from one of exclusion to that of inclusion in post-apartheid cities is explored in *Memorandum* (2006), through the changing ideas of the protagonist: a retired city planner with terminal liver cancer.[59] This section falls into two main parts. In the first I introduce the concept of 'landscapes of exclusion' and refer to the arguments in the anthology *Blank_ Architecture, Apartheid and After* (1998) to contextualize my analysis. Secondly, I analyse *Memorandum* with an emphasis on illustrating transformations of self and space. I argue that the novel presents an innovative and poetic vision of what might be termed 'landscapes of inclusion'.

The collection of essays, *Blank_ Architecture, Apartheid and After* (Judin and Vladislavić 1998)[60] examines how architecture and urban planning in South Africa exist as legacies of, and sometimes recreate, "landscapes of exclusion" (Robins 1998a: J12).[61] Some context regarding urbanization is needed. Initially, the apartheid government tried to limit the migration of black people from rural to urban areas and to keep the cities 'white'. However, this changed with the '1986 White Paper on Urbanization'.[62] This, in effect, ensured that 'black' townships could only be established as "satellites" around the "white" city centre and ensured that cities remained segregated, residentially and economically, by allowing migration to occur only on the outskirts of the city centre (Mabin 1998, E6). This is a legacy that continues to mark spatial relations and affects the experience of "city-ness" in South Africa (Nuttall and Mbembe 2008: 15). Mark Gevisser (2010), Jonny Steinberg

[58] Van Niekerk (2008) has explored the similarities between Agaat and Lambert further, arguing that both exhibit shamanic characteristics. She also draws attention to the ambiguous and politically loaded nature of land ownership in a post-apartheid South Africa in a short story "Labour". In 2008, Van Niekerk delivered an inaugural lecture at Stellenbosch University which develops the aforementioned means of embodying space further, and which is included as "Die Swanefluisteraar" in her most recent collections of stories, *Die Sneeuslaper* (2010).

[59] When I use the phrase 'landscapes of inclusion', I am not referring to it as part of the binary pair of inclusion and exclusion. Rather, I suggest that an authentic landscape of inclusion is not created by dint of the act of exclusion. I propose that an inclusive landscape is inclusive to all, and not defined by virtue of what it excludes; perhaps there is an element of utopianism in that it does not exclude at all.

[60] The anthology was originally compiled as a catalogue for an architectural exhibition in Rotterdam. The contents of the anthology are organized not by page number, but akin to what Judin and Vladislavić term a "conceptual map" (1998). Thus each article is given an alphabetical and numerical co-ordinate on a map which refers to where their contribution can be found in the anthology, but there are no page numbers to reference articles. This volume provides context to the problem of the lack of shared public space which continues to bedevil South Africa. Although published in the Netherlands 13 years ago, it is a groundbreaking work – both for the variety of voices gathered between its pages and as one of the earliest post-apartheid attempts to examine the relationship between architecture, the urban environment and politics (Feireiss 1998: "Foreword").

[61] See Steven Robins (1998a: J12) for a discussion of the resilience of segregationist polices in Cape Town and the Cape Flats after 1994. Robins concludes that "In some parts of the city, for some people, black bodies are still out of place" (Robins 1998a: J12).

[62] See Alan Mabin (1998: E6) for a more detailed discussion of these processes.

(2010) and Sarah Calburn (2010) all bewail the lack of public spaces or possibilities for what Calburn terms, "points of contact" in contemporary South African cities (2010: 66).

From the outset, urban planners were required in order to implement the National Party's apartheid policy.[63] The impact of their work is still evident today and impinges on the manner in which cities can be transformed or even recreated. In a discussion of the creative and reconstructive constraints facing architects in post-apartheid South Africa, Daniel Herwitz observes that "the city is not a blank canvas" (1998: H3). He maintains that the lack of public space and the struggle to create it today is a relic of apartheid planning and as a result, the "potential for public conversation" remains limited (*Ibid*.). Many of the essays in *Blank* centre on the need for an imaginative reconstruction of place.[64] As Ingrid De Kok suggests, "segregation has become the spatial imprint of our cities and the deep structure of our imaginations and memories" (quoted in Minkley 1998: D11). Transformation is thus as much a matter of changing our imaginations, as it is of changing our city spaces. AbdouMaliq Simone concurs and argues for the need to cultivate a "creative urbanity":

> It is these cultural resources and creative enterprises which transform city spaces as much as – or perhaps even more than – political struggle and institutional reform. The imagination, then, is a crucial part of (re)making city spaces. (quoted in Robinson 1998: D7)

*Memorandum* could be considered as just such a "cultural resource" as it imagines how "spatial relations" could be remade and how those relations presented in *Triomf* and *Agaat* might be altered (see Robinson 1998: D7).

In her own contribution to *Blank*, Marlene Van Niekerk presents a reading of the exclusive urban gym in which she suggests that gym-goers search for something akin to the "grace of community" (1998: F4). In the gym, "encounters are a nuisance or a delay. We cannot escape being beside each other, but we try hard not to be *with* each other" (*Ibid*.). Yet, despite this seeming disinterest in connecting with others, she maintains that there is something "slightly hopeful" about the gym; that in the early years of post-apartheid South Africa, even being *beside* each other is potentially revelatory. The space of the gym

> sanctions the tentative, experimental glance between black and white … In this sense the South African gym might even be conceived of as a kind of "nursery" for the tenuous insights

[63] Although several architects and planners did protest against and reject these policies in the 1980s as outlined by Mabin (1998: E6).
[64] For example, see the contributions of Robinson, Simone and Herwitz to *Blank* (1998).

> that arise from a literally exposed, shared creatureliness. (*Ibid.*)

It is precisely this "grace of community", and this realization of commonalities, "of shared creatureliness" which is denied by landscapes of exclusion. Here, Van Niekerk emphasizes the importance of sharing space in order to see other bodies as akin to one's own, regardless of race.

*Memorandum* is subtitled "A Story with Paintings" and Van Niekerk's text appears alongside the late Adriaan van Zyl's paintings. The plot revolves around a conversation overheard in the hospital by Johannes Frederikus Wiid, a retired city planner whose dire cancer diagnosis offers no possibility of recovery.

The reclusive, bureaucratic Wiid writes a memorandum to the reader in which he attempts to recreate and understand the meanings of this night-time conversation between two dying patients. Unsure of their real names, Wiid names the ornithology enthusiast and double leg amputee Mr X, while the architectural aficionado whose eyes have been 'gouged out' by doctors is named Mr. Y:

> X, the fanatical poet without feet, who chattered about birds and birds' nests, Y, the blind mocker, who delivered one speech after another on antique building methods, the foundation of cities and on hospitals. (2006: 23)

In the context of the conversation, X quotes liberally from Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* while Y's responses allude to Joseph Rykwert's *The Idea of a Town*. Despite their different focuses, both Bachelard and Rykwert (and by implication X and Y) insist on the importance of a poetic and spiritual interaction with one's surroundings. Rykwert, in his preface, insists that architects bear in mind that "a city had to enshrine the hopes and fears of its citizens" (1988). Bachelard's project "seeks to determine human value of the sorts of space that may be grasped, that may be defended against adverse forces, the space we love" (1964: xxxv). The idea that space should be loved, that space should encourage the potential for love and human connections and simultaneously that space should embrace its inhabitants and nurture them is a central theme in *Memorandum*. I argue that a nurturing environment is characterized by precisely this kind of intimate poetic engagement and interaction between corporeality and spatiality, such that the subject exists "in space with integrity" and is no longer "blind to the earth" (*Memorandum* 78, 40). All of Van Niekerk's characters articulate the desire for a nurturing environment; whether it is possible to create one without such an exclusionary gesture is the question.

Prior to his retirement, Wiid was a "director [of] parks & playgrounds, sanitation and maintenance" (6). However, X and Y's conversation challenges the foundations of his beliefs. He describes feeling "disorientation" (8); X and Y's ideas have caused him to regard his surroundings in a new light, to embody them differently and thus ultimately transform his conception of himself. Sanders suggests that X and Y's theories challenge Wiid's identity in that they transform him into a writer: "Unaccustomed to writing anything other than official minutes and memoranda, Wiid must reinvent himself in order to write" (2009: 107). Sanders proposes that, in the course of writing his memoranda to the reader, Wiid realizes that "[thought cannot be] dissociate[d] from the inner workings of the body" (108). It is as an embodied subject, who is also embodied in a city that Wiid must write.

Wiid's memorandum begins with a description of the lingering impact of that night of eavesdropping, and it is framed in poetic imagery which would have been unthinkable to him prior to that evening:

> Just as elevated music in a suburban street can transform the pavement into a secret footpath, the frequently looming recollection of that night made me feel as if I were a beloved person to whom precious memories had been entrusted. Not that I could till quite recently have claimed such music or such enchanted pavements amongst my experiences, even less that I felt myself on that night the focus of anybody's loving attention (25).

The recollection of X and Y's conversation has made Wiid aware of the transformative potential of art – of poetry or music – on concrete everyday reality. While the town planner would eschew all enchanting "secret footpaths" in favour of concrete pavements for ease of movement, Wiid has been made aware of alternative modes of embodying space. The metaphor he employs to describe this revelatory experience establishes a definite connection between the transformation of a place and the transformation of his identity. The catalyst for this transformation appears to be the reception of love.

Prior to Wiid's retirement, his "last headache ... was the decline of the inner city" (74). The arrival of informal traders had transformed the city centre into what Wiid, the city planner, disapprovingly described as "a whole carnival by day in our once-orderly shopping streets" (*ibid*.). Wiid recalls his earlier assessment of the situation:

> Rampant informal trading on pavements in the central business district, transforming neat

> street corners into market places; chickens in coops, sniffing dogs, dubious substances, body odours, uncouth languages. Even on foot one could later not move there with a purposeful tread. Muti, sheep's heads, chicken legs, a bickering that cannot be tolerated in a civilized city. … the mess also elicited all sorts of elements from the white working classes – apparently they were irretrievably infected with these indigenous notions of commerce ... (74)

He expresses disgust for the vibrant interactions which occur on street corners, which baffle and evade easy categorization. His assessment is clearly value-laden and expresses a racist perspective of the changes in the inner city since the end of apartheid. Examined from a different perspective, there is also something celebratory and empowering about the manner in which people have re-invented the city centre, transforming it in ways akin to what Mbembe positively terms "afropolitan forms of urbanity" (1998) or what AbdouMaliq Simone refers to when he describes "people as infrastructure" (2008: 68).

Wiid's initial thoughts about these changes is telling and eerily foreshadows the logic and actions of the City of Johannesburg's "Operation Clean Sweep" response to inner city traders at the close of 2012 (see for example Nicolson and Nicolson & Lekgawa 2013):

> I told my meeting we would have to wake up and root out this nest of iniquity with all means and powers at our disposal. The free flow of labour, capital and information is what we have to secure. Extensive civic sanitation projects were the last things I instituted, rezonings intended to facilitate vehicular and pedestrian traffic in the business areas and to relocate to peripheral areas the markets, termini, crèches and old age homes. The centre was earmarked for the upwardly mobile businessmen, brokers, estate agents and consumers, the rest had to be rationalised out of the city centre. (*Memorandum* 74–76)

As a result of the conversation he overhears between X and Y, and his subsequent research into alternative theories of space and habitation, Wiid's understanding of the purpose of the city centre alters dramatically in ways which suggest he might agree with Mbembe (1998) and Simone (2008:68), or at least be capable of understanding their perspective. Wiid concludes:

> Everything must be mediated, the great by the small, by participation and by mirroring and by translation. In the city by the centre, in the body by the liver. But a conduit was my model for everything, a conveying emptiness of which one must keep the interior as open and

smooth as possible. (96–97)[65]

The similar mediating function of the liver and the city centre further implies that the centre may be the ideal place for the congregation of a wide variety of people; a heterogenous carnivalesque community which might, in fact, be celebrated rather than "rationalised out" (76). The city could thus be made habitable for and hospitable to all; it could exist as a 'landscape of inclusion'. In this manner, community and communication can be fostered in ways that, as Daniel Herwitz notes, the apartheid government was determined to prevent (1998: H3). Indeed, in hindsight, Wiid even refers to his professional commitment to preventing "the leak of disorder" as "stingy" (*Memorandum* 74). There is an etymological connection between Wiid's name and "weed", as exemplified by Agaat's fennel.[66] Perhaps "Wiid" and "weed" are slightly discordant homophones. Whereas Wiid used to be obsessed with 'weeding', he comes to embrace the erratic, chaotic growth pattern of weeds as a positive metaphor for the way in which the inner city could develop and come alive. However, there is also a residual ambiguity in the name, as both his cancer and the fennel seeds "fester" and grow unimpeded.

As evidence of his new understanding of spatiality, Wiid decides to die at home rather than subject himself to the sterility of the hospital building. Y's critique of the spatial configurations of the hospital room is illuminating in understanding Wiid's motivation:

> Here we have all the prepositions ... that connect things to one another, ABOVE one another, ON TOP OF one another, BESIDE one another, while the human being's own measure and status is denied, and people in wards like this feel NEXT TO one another instead of WITH one another. … [X replied:] I'm WITH you! I stay BY you! (*Memodrandum* 43)

The only preposition which suggests the possibility of an intimate connection with another being – "with" – is absent from the hospital's vocabulary. The contiguity of the gym is insufficient here (see Van Niekerk 1998: F4). Y's outburst implies that in order for space to have any meaning, for it to be hospitable, it should facilitate empathy and intimate relationships. As a result of his eavesdropping, Wiid becomes convinced that the way "space … is filled is a *barometer … of love*" (94) echoing both Rykwert (1988) and Bachelard (1964: xxxv) as mentioned above. This idea is initially

[65] Wiid's quote about the liver continues, "So that things can go smoothly, unimpeded like a message in ordinary human language. Perhaps that was a mistake. Apparently the art lies in impediment" (97). Sanders (2007) has used this quote as the basis for his essay on the role of mimesis and memory in *Memorandum*. He considers the implications of "mediation" and "impediment" in the representational arts of writing and painting.

[66] The Afrikaans verb "wied", derived from Medieval Dutch "wieden", has the same meaning as "to weed" in English (S.P.E. Boshoff & G.S. Nienaber, *Afrikaanse etimologieë*. Pretoria: Die Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns, 1976: 720). There is likely to be a common Indo-Germanic root.

expressed when Buytendagh, the librarian, sardonically adumbrates the flaws of apartheid-era architecture. Wiid recalls, "when I first mooted the subject of so-called 'unnurturing' architecture in the library, Buytendagh out of the blue let rip about what he called 'a profound blindness to the earth' that apparently causes 'us Afrikaners' to be such loveless people" (*Memorandum* 40).

X and Y's dialogue bemoans the "unnurturing" environment of the hospital and both propose examples of what an alternative might be, drawn from their particular areas of expertise. X insists that,

> Without thinking of nests I cannot dream of habitation ... space is in a tree, amongst reeds, in the grass, like honey in a comb. That is the thing above all with which poets and dreamers refresh themselves (38).

A nurturing space should enclose and embrace its inhabitants, in the same way that the honeycomb surrounds and contains the honey and the honey's shape conforms to that of the comb. This perhaps utopian model of embodiment would appear to exist beyond power relations. X proposes that there should be a sympathetic alignment between the dimensions of the body and the dimensions of its environment. However, X insists that this kind of embodiment of space also inspires artistic expression. This is an illustration from nature of Grosz's conclusion concerning "lived spatiality" (2001: 33).

Wiid experiences a similar realization during his time at the library, researching obscure references made by X and Y in their conversation. He felt a "peculiar feeling of belonging that [he] was the only person in the library who could address the boss [Buytendagh] in passing from amongst the shelves [by his nickname] Joop" (52). Wiid is a friendless bureaucrat who used to insist on formality at all times. However, the development of a friendship has altered his relationship to his surroundings. Joop's congeniality allows Wiid to feel as if there is someone "with" him. He is no longer appalled by the "unprofessional appearance of the Parow Public Library" (138), and instead feels at home there.

To conclude all that Wiid has learned from X and Y, mention must be made of the corporeal. X and Y differ on the role of the human body in their spatial schema.[67] X, the materialist, holds that any

[67] Both X and Y present various different arguments and examples throughout the novel in defence of their respective positions on the body. However, despite their different premises, as mentioned earlier, they both agree on the conclusion that one should be nurtured by one's surroundings. Wiid too, comes to realize this:

> The more I write, the better I understand that X and Y, in spite of their wrangling, did not differ than

kind of shelter must of necessity accommodate and cohere with the physical reality of the body: "we've forgotten the whole lowly thing, namely our paltry body" (81). On the other hand, Y, the post-structuralist, insists that the body is merely another kind of discourse: "for the human his body, like everything, also serves as a sign and symbol, a first plan and map for all further constructs" (82). A synthesis of these two views on the body – one which takes into account embodied subjectivity as Grosz (1994) does – is needed in order to create and embody a nurturing environment. Wiid's poetic wine-inspired passacaglia, with which he ends his memorandum, strives to achieve just that:

> Every day that remains … I'll slowly walk my city's streets ... note all that lives ... And I shall say, Brethren mine, were it given to me to do it all again, I'd find you someone else as architect, o pardon me. … The sacred round I shall ambulate, erstwhile beautifier of parks and playground, and in my heart unmake what seems inhospitable and out of place. I'll re-enchant, contemplate, consider … It will not have been for nought, if with my last lees of life I can bring it all about. (123-4)

Although Wiid is a white Afrikaner, his desire to befriend people, to invite someone into his home, "to my nest already prepared for him as bequest" (124), is oblivious of any considerations of race. Mark Sanders emphasizes the "political dimension" of the novel and argues that Wiid's newly inherited knowledge of architecture enables him to "undertake reparation of his disenchantment with the metamorphoses of urban spaces that have followed apartheid" (2009: 120). Earlier Wiid had questioned "How did I get sick? ... Is my house to blame? My city?" (*Memorandum* 96). In answer to these rhetorical questions, Sanders proposes that

> If it is perhaps the fault of his city that he is sick, or has erred in thought, X and Y suggest to him a remedy, in which he, the [… city] beautifier … and cleanser will, at least in his heart, undo all that he has had a role in building. (2009: 120)

When Sanders refers to all that Wiid "has had a role in building", it seems that he is referring to both the physical structures of the city as well as the political system of apartheid which relied on policies of urban segregation designed and enacted by city planners, other civil servants as well as ordinary citizens.

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much from each other. The one who differed was I. … I was the one who thought space was empty. That night I heard for the first time that space is a thing with qualities, a living, yes, even a holy medium, and how it is filled, according to Mr X, a *barometer*, yes believe it or not, *of love*. (94)

Wiid determines not to surrender himself to the alienating environment of the hospital. In this decision, he articulates the desire of all of Van Niekerk's protagonists for a nurturing environment in which to live, and in which to die. He chooses instead to spend the time remaining to him wandering the streets of his city, seeing poetry and art for the first time in the world around him. He envisions alternative modes of embodying space such that the space becomes a home. Furthermore, in contrast to his earlier eschewal of all human contact, Wiid now longs for companionship, for someone he can nurture and be *with* to the end. Specifically, he idealistically – and drunkenly – is even willing to befriend "a lonely tramp", someone who falls into the category of all those in the inner city that Wiid previously felt disdain and disgust for (this is elaborated on in the final chapter).[68]

This poignant realization comes all but too late for Wiid, stricken as he is with an incurable disease, yet the realization itself is also only made possible by his cancer. Since it is contained in a memorandum for a reader, perhaps Wiid's epiphany will alter the reader's relationship to space. In this way, the reader inherits Wiid's ideas and is inspired to rethink his or her own relationship to space and to those with whom that space is shared, to foster the creation of landscapes of inclusion and nurturing environments.[69] Despite his childlessness, Wiid leaves a 'lineage' in the form of the reader of his memorandum. In this way, Van Niekerk once again radically subverts the centrality of the family lineage in the *plaasroman*. In fact, the claustrophobia of the family unit in *Triomf* and *Agaat* has been dispensed with and opened up. A new kind of lineage – of readers, poets, artists – is thus proposed.[70] This lineage is not based on biology or *ownership* of space, but rather on a certain kind of poetic, nurturing and intimate embodiment of space and in turn a similar kind of engagement with the other people who inhabit that space. However, this conclusion should not be seen as naïve or easy; as the discussion of her previous novels have shown: relationships to space are fraught with power struggles, history, economics and politics. Nevertheless, this kind of engagement is one which it is suggested is worth striving for. Perhaps in this way, Buytendagh's indictment of those who exhibit "profound blindness to the earth" (40) can be challenged and overturned.

In an interview with Achille Mbembe, Calburn, a South African architect, argues for the replacement of urban planning with urban design and suggests we

[68]There are echoes of Coetzee's *Age of Iron* in this regard as well as similarities to be drawn with Kasper in "Die swanefluisteraar" (Van Niekerk 2010).
[69] Wiid has 'inherited' these ideas from X and Y, who in turn have 'inherited' them from various authors.
[70] This idea has also been initiated with Jakkie who becomes an ethnomusicologist. For different readings on Jakkie as a writer see Van Niekerk (2008b) and Olivier (2011).

> should be directed to the optimistic creation of urban space that can both frame and nurture a vibrant, diverse society in lively, meaningful and mutually respectful conversation both internally and in the world. Crucially, 'design' demands the adoption of altered points of view, of new ways of seeing and reading ourselves and our realities. It is only through these 'recognitions' that we can start to imaginatively extrapolate ourselves, to build creatively on our own particular qualities and quantities. Urban design, thus, demands a re-imagination of who we are and who we might become. (2010: 65)

The emphasis on the imagination and the need to awaken ourselves to the reality of different perspectives is central to her argument. Infrastructure and architecture alone cannot foster this transformation; they can merely provide the space for it to occur.

Calburn suggests that in South African cities, people move from "guarded interior" to "guarded interior" (66) or what the criminologist Clifford Shearing terms "bubbles of security" (quoted in Steinberg 2010, cf Van Niekerk 1998). In these cities in which much of life is enacted in the private sphere, and the interior exists as kind of fortress against the public sphere, Calburn makes a plea for rethinking the idea of the interior: "I conceive of interiors as landscapes. What stops us from changing our thinking to conceive of the public spaces of our city as large interiors in which we are all welcome?" (2010: 66). This idea echoes Wiid's dying desire, in *Memorandum*, "to remake what seems inhospitable and out of place" and ensure that the way that space is filled is a measure of love. In this sense, Wiid's desire to invite a stranger into his home stems from a sense that all space – public and private – can be transformed into a kind of home if it fosters intimacy. Thus, home need not signify an "exclusionary gesture", as Marais suggests (2010:50). Wiid's wine-fuelled wish is thus not so different in substance from the sober and academic expressions of cultural critics (see also Calburn 2010, Steinberg 2010 and Gevisser 2010).

For the social commentators I have discussed in this section, as well as for Marlene van Niekerk, the street and the public sphere present a potentially revolutionary site of contact (see Chapter Four). In my analysis of *Memorandum* I have argued that the novel illustrates a creative realization of the problem of sharing public space with others. Van Niekerk's fictional response to the desire for a hospitable and inclusive environment has clear relevance to the contemporary debates about public space in South Africa. For now the realization of this hoped for landscape of inclusion remains in the realm of fiction, of dream and fantasy and imagination. Similarly, Wiid's need to find someone to 'be with' is not fulfilled. Nevertheless, this should not be cause for despair. I have maintained

throughout this chapter that the imagination has a potentially transformative power. To recall Simone's statement: "The imagination is a crucial part of (re)making city spaces" (quoted in Robinson 1998: D7). It is possible then, that in the same way as Wiid finds comfort, some solace can be found, in the building which acts as a repository for the imagination – the library. In the absence of, or while still anticipating, the creation of landscapes of inclusion in which we can 'be *with* each other', I propose that we have the opportunity to know each other a little better in the virtual public space that exists between the pages of books.

**Conclusion**

In this opening chapter I have argued that a comparative study of Van Niekerk's oeuvre will yield rewarding results and reveal the common theme of an interest in radically reconsidering the relationship between corporeality and spatiality. When considering the inscription of history on bodies or place, a common trend in postcolonial studies, I argue that it proves rewarding to consider inscription along with an understanding of embodied subjectivity, as theorized by Grosz. It is suggested that this relationship between corporeality and spatiality is never static and several different modes of embodying space are explored. In *Triomf*, the traumatized, grotesque bodies of the Benades mirror the landscape. The city exerts a tyrannical hold over its inhabitants and affirms the fragility of their existence within its boundaries. Similarly, their intimate relationships are characterized by brutality, tragedy and thwarted attempts at empathy. The Benades live atop the runs of a failed dream of an inclusive neighbourhood, but *Triomf* itself reveals the apartheid-dream of political control over space to be a fiction. In *Agaat*, space becomes a battleground. Milla attempts to exercise complete control over her environment and the people with whom she shares this space. However, the coherence of her power is disrupted by Agaat's refusal to remain 'in her place'. In both *Triomf* and *Agaat* the *plaasroman's* ideology of land ownership has been subverted; the land, and so, too, Agaat resists attempts to posses it. Furthermore, the protagonists' freedom of movement and the mode of their "lived spatiality" is dictated by a complex interplay of power, ideology, corporeality, intimacy and geography. I argue that Van Niekerk uses the category of the corporeal to parody the *plaasroman* genre and subvert the nationalist master narrative of land ownership and Afrikaner identity. The corporeal is *also* the means by which issues of identity are inserted into a new kind of narrative genre. *Memorandum* proposes an alternative relationship to spatiality and expresses a synthesis of the themes of alienation and displacement illustrated in *Triomf* and *Agaat*. It articulates the desire of all of Van Niekerk's protagonists for a 'nurturing environment'. Such an environment is created as the result of an artistic embodiment of space as well as the creation of intimate relationships. These novels confirm the validity of the insertion of both corporeality and intimacy into any discussion of spatial discourse. Only by considering these

components of the relationship to space, can one begin to understand what it might mean to “live in space with integrity”.

## Chapter Three

## "Joined by nothing more than the power of mercy": Bodies in Fragments[71]

The protagonists of Marlene van Niekerk's fiction long to inhabit a nurturing environment. However, as I have illustrated, this desire is merely aspirational and somewhat utopian. In this chapter I consider the meaning of the protagonists' fragmented embodied subjectivities. Their bodies are depicted as neither whole nor complete; their narratives are not coherent. The dictionary defines a fragment as a fraction, or a portion of something, or a part severed from a whole (*CED*). For the sake of my argument, I have also classified traumatised, wounded, scarred, broken or disfigured subjects as fragmented (given that I have adopted Elizabeth Grosz's definition of embodied subjectivity outlined in the Chapter One and Chapter Two). This chapter will explore the implications of fragmentation in *Triomf*, *Agaat* and *Memorandum*. I will employ Elleke Boehmer's reading of transfiguration in postcolonial narratives as a starting point for this analysis in order to determine the extent to which Van Niekerk's descriptions of fragmented bodies can be read as a metaphor for a fragmented national narrative. I am interested in the extent to which references to bodily scars, wounds and fragments belie the so-called classical body and "wallpapered" versions of the past and by implication challenge any kind of ideological or narrative closure. In the course of this analysis I will also explore attempts at embodied self-articulation. This investigation will be extended with reference to other theorists, such as Bakhtin, who are concerned with representations of 'bodies in parts'. My reason for exploring the correlation between corporeal and narrative fragmentation in Van Niekerk's novels is to determine whether remembering (or re-membering) can prove salutary or heal trauma. In this regard I refer to Toni Morrison's concept of 'rememory' in *Beloved* as well as considering the anatomical implications of re-membering the body. I consider whether the fragmentary has any liberating potential in the absence of a coherent narrative of the healed body and the extent to which unity and completion may be illusory or even undesirable.

### Transfiguration

Elleke Boehmer's contribution to the discussion of bodies in postcolonial narratives is the starting point for this chapter. Boehmer charts the ways in which bodies were conceptualized in colonial narratives and surveys several of the options she considers to be available to postcolonial writers in terms of (re)presenting the body in their narratives. Boehmer explains: "In colonial representation, exclusion or suppression can often literally be seen as 'embodied'" (1993: 269). She continues: "The seductive and/or repulsive qualities of the wild or Other, and the punishment of the same, are

[71] An article examining fragmented bodies and fragmented narratives in *Triomf* and *Agaat* with reference to trauma theory has been published as Buxbaum (2013). Aspects of that article are repeated in this chapter.

figured on the body, and as body" (269). Boehmer explores the approaches adopted by postcolonial writers (Bessie Head, J.M. Coetzee, Nuruddin Farah and Michelle Cliff) as they interrogate these colonial assumptions and explore whether the body of the colonised can "figure" rather than be figured or be reduced to a mere figure in another's narrative (269). She explains: "In the process of postcolonial rewriting the trope of the dumb, oppressed body undergoes significant translations. … or transfigurations" (1993: 268). Boehmer argues that the task of the postcolonial writer is consequently one of transfiguration: "Transfiguration, in effect becomes the recuperation of the body by way of narrative" (*ibid.*: 273). It is these means of transfiguration that occupy Boehmer's (and my own) interest.

Subsequent to the achievement of independence from colonialism, the hope was that a coherent, unified nation would be created and by implication that bodies could be represented as whole: "The tendency is first and foremost to find absolute self-identity, located on the site of the whole, healed body – whether the physical body or the national body, the body of the land" (Boehmer 1993: 273). The physical body, the national body-politic and the body of the land are considered as metaphorically, and politically, coterminous. However, as Boehmer notes, after the initial optimism of independence, cynicism and wariness set in:

> As national narrative begins to fragment, so too does the iconography of the body. … When national histories are revealed as stochastic, divided, painful, where origins are obscure, the body, too, is exposed as fissured, reduced. (Boehmer 1996: 274)

If we accept Boehmer's argument that the body, nation and land enjoy such a metaphoric relationship in postcolonial literary fiction, then her conclusion regarding the meaning of representations of the fragmented body is quite compelling.[72] It suggests that one might deduce the fragmentation of a national narrative from the appearance of fragmented bodies in fictional narratives and vice versa. One might also be able to read the effects of disfiguring national narratives on bodies.

Boehmer suggests that despite the depiction of corporeal fragmentation, language – the writer's or

[72] It should be clarified that in my reading of Boehmer I understand that she posits the relationship between body and nation or national narrative to be merely metaphorical. That is, she is suggesting an argument concerning artists' aesthetic intentions and considerations in the depictions of bodies in ways that might echo a political imperative. This imperative aims at, firstly, transfiguring the body and thus allowing for self-articulation and, secondly, critiquing the national narrative by implying a connection between it and the body. Her intention is also to explore the figuring of bodies which have been excluded from both colonial and hegemonic or sanitised postcolonial narratives.

the poet's – becomes a way of creating wholeness, by "gathering together the self in language … by way of narrative" (1993:275). Thus, a fragmentation of the body can be 'over-written', so-to-speak, by a unified narrative in which this body figures, and in which it figures itself, to use Boehmer's terms.

**Trauma and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission**

This process of creating wholeness by means of narrative is also the approach espoused for the healing of trauma.[73] For the purposes of this chapter, I have adopted Eva Hoffman's gloss of trauma: "Perhaps metaphorically, 'trauma' is suffering in excess of what the psyche can absorb, a suffering that twists the soul until it can no longer straighten itself out, and so piercingly sharp that it fragments the wholeness of the self" (Hoffman 2005: 54). I follow Hoffman in considering that trauma, as her metaphors imply, is experienced both psychologically and physically as shattering.[74] I am interested in analyzing the impact and representation of trauma on the embodied self in the form of anatomical inscription, specifically scarring. I maintain that anatomical and psychological experiences of trauma are neither mutually exclusive nor binary pairs (See Grosz 1994: 210).

Writing about South African literature and trauma, one is always writing in the shadow of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and its causal narrative of testimony and healing. Indeed, one of the aims of the TRC can be read as "find[ing] absolute self-identity, located on the site of the whole, healed body" (Boehmer 1993: 73). This was to be achieved via the process of sharing narratives of witness. This understanding of testimony and narrative emplotment is evident in the processes and structure of the TRC and its twin "juridical and therapeutic functions" which are "uneasily combined" (Klopper 2001: 462). Dirk Klopper concludes that

> By virtue of its linear teleology, the TRC narrative seeks to bring about a transcendence of the fragmented body of the South African body politic and, as a logical consequence, the attainment of a unified humanity, conceived of as both the individual made whole and the nation reconciled in unity. (2001: 470)

[73] The influence of the Freudian interpretation of trauma (see Caruth 1996) and its advocacy of a 'talking cure' is visible in the TRC's reliance on witness testimony. Paul Ricoeur's theories of narrative are also regularly cited in relation to attempts to overcome trauma and rewrite one's life story. On Ricoeur's concept of "configuration" as it relates to *Beloved*, see Henderson (1999: 90) and with reference to the TRC see Van Der Merwe & Gobodo-Madikizela (2008:1–3).

[74] The problem of definition is a recurring issue in trauma studies, evident even in the work of foundational theorists, notably Cathy Caruth (1995 and 1996) and Dominick LaCapra (1999: 724). There seems to be no consensus regarding the limits of the term itself. This is part of the attraction of trauma (theory) as an explanatory force and also one of its drawbacks. In this regard, one of the dangers is that trauma can too easily become "trivialized" (Hoffman 2005: 171) or "allegorised" (2006: 85), as Louise Bethlehem argues in a chapter on the TRC and its attempt to promote healing from the "trauma of apartheid" (2006: 8).

Healing the individual and healing the nation are inextricably connected in this formulation (see Klopper 2001: 464 and Bethlehem 2006: 78).

In Archbishop Desmond Tutu's opening address at the TRC, he made implicit reference to the founding logic of the Commission, which considered "the nation as a physical body" (Bethlehem 2006: 78). Bethlehem continues, "This healing is, to paraphrase Tutu, a matter of opening and cleansing wounds in order that they might not fester" (78). The language reverted to in attempting to explain trauma, is an embodied one. However, Bethlehem argues that in the course of the Commission's work, and in terms of its legacy, ironically, by attempting to anchor the "trauma of apartheid" in the wounded body, and have that body function as a metonym for the nation, individual traumas were converted to collective traumas, and concrete traumas became abstract (8, 77–91). The trauma of the individual and the specifically embodied experience of trauma were thus elided as the metaphor of the body replaces the matter of the body (cf Butler 1990). Klopper agrees, quoting Steven Robins when he contends that "the rewriting of personal memory as national narrative 'reconfigures and erases the fragmented character and silences embodied experiences of violence'" (quoted in Klopper 2001: 463).

As an alternative way out of trauma, Eva Hoffman emphasises 'recognition' and argues that narrative "isn't always salvational…. Making a 'story' out of extremity – or wanting such a story – sometimes offers false and facile consolations" (2004: 173).[75] Bethlehem argues that of greater solace to those who testified, was the physical support and contact provided by those who acted as 'comforters':

> A contingent reparation, a contagious restitution. Not to be overstated, surely. But not to be ignored. *Closer to hand* than the interpreter, it is the comforter who transmits the somatic justice of the TRC as the *errance* which is only true when it is *besides itself*. (91, emphasis in the original)

It is possible, thus, that the victim of torture,[76] as tortured and traumatised embodied subject, can be healed by the touch of another, rather than by (or in addition to) sharing a narrative.[77] This

[75] See also Shane Graham (2008) for a critique of the TRC's logic of reconciliation. He argues that: "the rhetoric of postliberation reconciliation and nation-building must be joined with a sustained program of material, economic, and spatial compensation and physical rebuilding" (2008:180).
[76] I use victim in LaCapra's sense: "'Victim' is not a psychological category. It is, in variable ways, a social, political and ethical category" (1999: 737).
[77] See also Jessica Murray (2010) for a discussion of the healing potential of touch in the case of trauma.

relationship context is central for Hoffman, as well, who speaks of the important role played by "recognition" in the recovery from trauma: "to acknowledge, turn, bend towards the victims rather than away from them. There can be no other recompense, no other closure" (2005: 233). Adopting Hoffman's concept of recognition and Bethlehem's "somatic justice", I read Van Niekerk's novels as proposing alternative means of healing to the confessional mode (a suggestion continued in Chapter Five). I consider whether wounds can be mended by assuring the protagonists that, to paraphrase Judith Butler, their "bodies matter" (1993: xxiv).

**Fragmented Bodies, Fragmented Narratives**

Several critics have adumbrated in detail the means by which Van Niekerk deconstructs the mythology and ideology that served to sustain Afrikaner nationalism and apartheid (Shear 2006, Brophy 2006 and Du Plessis 2008). It is not my intention here to repeat these insights. Rather, I wish to focus on the special way in which the fragmented bodies, in particular, function to re-write or challenge official or normative narratives. *This* aspect of Van Niekerk's subversion of Afrikaner nationalism has not been accorded sufficient attention.[78]

Van Niekerk celebrates the corporeal in all its visceral minutiae. In the context of a discussion of fragments of the body, the fact that Van Niekerk insistently reminds the reader that her characters are embodied, and furthermore, that their *bodies are in parts*, deserves further mention. At times, these body parts are focused on in the context of the complete body of the subject, and as representative of the subject, whereas at other times, the subject seems reduced to these parts. These body parts, bodily organs, are thus also fragments of a whole – they function as both metonymy and synecdoche.

Sarah Nuttall coins the term "bodiographies" to describe

> narratives of the self centred on the lived body in which the body is figured less as an object inscribed with the social and the political than as a subject actively contributing to the production of meaning. (2004: 39)

[78] Shear (1996) does comment briefly on the transgressive import of the grotesque in the trope of the colonial Gothic and states that

> *Triomf* ... redeploys the ominous presence of a monster as a force that destabilises the binary of racial privilege and racial inferiority. The product of the Benades' inbreeding is Lambert, the novel's locus of monstrosity. Though the other members of the family possess grotesque features that project ideas of the fragmented body … Lambert far exceeds the sum of their malformed parts. (84)

The kind of narrative of the self that can be told will be determined by the experience of the lived body. Boehmer implies that the subject is inscribed in the socio-political sphere, yet she also insists on the need for self-articulation within that sphere. I argue that this kind of self-articulation can take the form of a bodiography in which the subject actively contributes to the production of meaning through bodily expression. Bodiographies cannot be told in a vacuum or in the absence of socio-political context, but the subject, the author of her bodiography, is a socio-political actor in her own right.

The grotesque body is a hyperbole, or intensification, of the "lived flesh in its fully anatomical dimensions" (Nuttall 2004: 37). The relevance of the grotesque body was explored with reference to bodies in fragments in the Chapter One and to embodiment of space in Chapter Two. I return to the concept of the grotesque in order to further emphasise its transgressive potential, specifically as a counterpoint to official or hegemonic narrative discourse.

As I have alluded to earlier, fragmentation is not simply a matter of anatomy. In order to underwrite this position again, I refer to Linda Nochlin who, in an analysis of nineteenth century art, *The Body in Pieces*, asks:

> what of the larger implications of the topic, what of the sense of social, psychological, even metaphysical fragmentation that so seems to mark modern experience – a loss of wholeness, a shattering of connection, a destruction or disintegration of permanent value that is so universally felt in the nineteenth century as to be often identified with modernity itself? (1994: 24–25)

Although the context for Nochlin's study is a dramatically different historical era from Van Niekerk's, her method and her insistence on exploring the larger implications of visual or sculptural depictions of fragmentation are equally valid for this study of literary depictions of fragmentation. In both cases, one can extend the discussion in such a way that physical fragmentation implies psychological fragmentation and also impinges on identity, relationships and values. Thus, given these multiple ways of conceiving of fragmented subjectivity, the foundation has been laid for a discussion of these concepts within the context of Van Niekerk's fiction.

In her discussion of the relationship between "general ideology and ideology in literary works" (Van Niekerk 1992:153) in order to comprehend the enduring myth of the *volksmoeder* (which will be discussed in Chapter Five), Marlene Van Niekerk insists that:

> [w]e must "remember" old or redundant definitions and institutions of Afrikaans and Afrikaans culture in order to consider possibilities for new definitions and new constitutions. Conversely, emergent new definitions, burgeoning new perspectives are preconditions for remembering or interpreting the past. The past is always read in the light of the present. (Van Niekerk: 1992:141)

This act of remembering is thus potentially revolutionary as it creates fertile ground for imagining alternative narratives of cultural identity. Similarly, these new narratives necessitate the revisiting of the past. The past is obsessively revisited in both *Triomf* and *Agaat*. Thus I argue that in Van Niekerk's novels, bodily fragmentation and gaps in the historiographic archive (both personal and national) are inextricably – lexically – linked.

In Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), the protagonist, Sethe, considers "rememories" as "pictures" which seem to exist simultaneously in both the past and the present (see Morrison 1987: 35-6).[79] Sethe's challenge, then, is to reorder these "pictures" and to claim authorship of the narrative of her life. Mae Henderson explains, "Sethe uses the memory of personal experience and what Collingwood calls the 'constructive imagination' as a means of re-membering a dis-membered past, dis-membered family, and community" (1999: 90). That supposition can be extended with reference to the structure of the word "remember", which encourages a play on words: it implies a 're-membering' of the body.[80] Remembering and re-membering the embodied narrative of self can potentially heal.

**Grotesque Bodies and Transcoding**

*Triomf* (1999) can be seen as Van Niekerk's contribution to the protection of what she calls "creative closure" and her insistence on the necessary endurance of a "trickster spirit" in literature (1990: 3).[81] In *Triomf* there are no "holy cows" left untouched *(Ibid.*).

[79]Morrison championed the release of *Agaat* in the United States and her encomium adorns the front cover of the American edition of the novel. There is more to be said regarding the parallel themes and tropes in *Beloved* and *Agaat.* Intriguingly, perhaps as an intertextual nod to *Beloved*, in terms of traumatic inscription, both Agaat and the woman who cares for Sethe in her childhood have disfigured or slightly deformed arms.

[80]It is perhaps an idiosyncratic connection to make, but for this insight I am indebted to Russell Hoban for his play on the meaning of remembering. This is a key theme in his quirky 1974 novel, *Kleinzeit*, in which the myth of "Orpheus and Eurydice" is the main intertext. In the novel, the eponymous Orpheus-like hero is constantly exhorted to 'remember'. The character Hospital insists that Orpheus's severed head has been eclipsed from our collective 'memory' of the myth. Hospital argues that the Orphic head continuously attempts to return to its origin, to its body, to "the place of his dismemberment" by the Thracian women (Hoban 1974:143). Once Orpheus returns, Kleinzeit realizes: "He's found his members ... He's remembered himself." To which Hospital responds, "What is harmony … but a fitting together?" (144).

[81] Van Niekerk used this phrase in the context of a paper entitled, "Writing in Times of Transformation", delivered at the IDASA/Afrikaner Skrywersgilde conference in 1990. This phrase appears to be an oxymoron – and this is, arguably,

The opening image of *Triomf* presents Mol, surveying her backyard in the late afternoon sunlight. She is literally bisected by the rays of the sun: "As the sun drops, it reaches between the houses and draws a line across the middle button of her housecoat. Her bottom half is in shadow. Her top half feels warm" (1999:1). Our very first encounter with the Benades is thus (tellingly) with a body-in-parts. I am interested in the somatic metaphor at work here. Mol's body will fragment into even more parts as the narrative progresses. The high/low binarism suggested by this division will be destabilized, blurred and inverted (see Stallybrass and White 1986:2-3). Mol's lower body, cloaked in shadow here, will soon be revealed as a central motif in the novel.

In their discussion of the grotesque body Stallybrass and White (1986) emphasise the symbolic importance attached to the lower bodily strata. As I have mentioned in my discussion of the grotesque in Chapter One, a symbolic inversion in the realm of the corporeal affects a *transcoding* in other hierarchical realms (1986: 8-9). The image of Mol will soon be inverted, and what appears *peripheral*, namely her darkened lower half, will soon be illuminated and shown to be of central *symbolic importance* (to use Stallybrass and White's terms). Her 'upper half' – which in this high/low binary symbolizes rationality – will be revealed to be a mere empty shell. As Lambert mockingly states, "There's just a hole where Mol's head is supposed to be anyway (*Triomf* 116). Mol's body-image is metaphorically linked to her emblematic "headless cat" figurine, which remains decapitated, despite attempts to fix it or replace it (*Triomf* 209). These symbolic inversions in the anatomical realm will be shown to affect other hierarchies in the novel.

In an attempt to connect the ideas of "transcoding" (Stallybrass and White) and the grotesque to Boehmer's thesis, it would seem logical that a transgression in the realm of the body could impact on our understanding of social formations.[82] In terms of literary representation, I contend that

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the main thrust of Van Niekerk's paper. The "closure" Van Niekerk rejects is anything that limits or foreshortens creative and poetic possibilities; if indeed such a limit is needed, then the only kind of limit she can accept is one which in fact is not a limit – which proposes that there be no limits:

> Of course we need closures in order to live. Words are closures. But abstract, generalising concepts are "worse" closures, and when they are wielded by the powerful or those ascending to power, they are the worst. What I want is to protect the notion of a "creative closure", a "fertile boundary". To protect this is to demand that 'Puck' must always be welcome to hover in the wings of political organizations as theatres of power (1990: 3).

[82] In terms of their 'definition' of the body, Stallybrass and White argue that

> the body cannot be thought separately from the social formation, symbolic topography and the constitution of the subject. The body is neither a purely natural given nor is it merely a textual metaphor, it is a privileged operator for the transcoding of these other areas. Thinking the body is thinking social topography and vice versa. The dissociation of the two is a distinctive ideological manouevre (1986: 192).

Their understanding of the body appears to align with the one I have adopted throughout this study: the body cannot be examined in isolation, it should always be considered in the context of the social and subject-formations. The

*transfiguring* the body, representing the body as fragmented (which indeed is a characteristic of the grotesque) has relevance for our perception of other symbolic domains, specifically, but not limited to, narratives of the nation and the self. The importance of fragmentation should be understood within the context of a wider socio-political, critical nexus.

When Mol reflects on her youth, she recalls a conversation between her parents, Old Mol and Old Pop, shortly after their discovery of their children's incestuous sexual experimentation. Bewailing her fate and blaming their living situation, Old Mol states, "people go rotten from living in a heap like this" (*Triomf* 153). This is very far from Bakhtin's celebratory invocation of the carnival in which individual bodies disappear into a writhing, ecstatic mass and merge as if into one: "a people who are continually growing and renewed. This is why all that is body becomes grandiose, exaggerated, immeasurable" (quoted in Stallybrass and White 1986: 9-10). The reality of poverty suggests that grotesque bodies merge with other bodies only to figuratively form a rotten, decaying rubbish heap. Old Mol's statement concurs with and prefigures Mol's sentiment at the close of the novel:

> The Benades were crocks from the moment they first saw the light of day. Pieced together and panelbeaten, not to mention screwed together, from scrap. Throw away pieces, left over rags, waste wool, old wives' tales, hearsay, a passing likeness from the front and a glimpse from behind. That's how they found themselves here on earth. Things that get thrown away. Good for nothing. Write-offs. (467)

The metaphor of the rubbish heap recurs in this instance in a slightly different format. The blame in the latter extract is placed not on their socio-economic position and living space, but rather their current impasse is a seemingly inevitable result of their history, of (possible) inter-marriage but also of disfiguring ideological myths or gossip. Metaphorically, their bodies and their histories are intermingled and interconnected; they are also fragmented and resist reincorporation and coherence (this is a suggestion I will return to in my discussion of Agaat and Milla's relationship). The Benades have been abandoned by the white nationalist party which claimed to uplift them. The metaphor describing the Benades, as "things that get thrown away" (467) could also refer to the elision of their stories, their narratives and their grotesque bodies from the official Afrikaner nationalist narrative and indeed from the unifying 'rainbow nation' narrative and 'body-politic' of the transition and after. To use Kristeva's (1982) formulation of the logic of cleanliness and pollution, which defines the boundaries of the body, the Benades have been cleansed out of a

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subject is always embodied, and the body cannot be read as mere sign or as a given.

society that they are thought to defile (by their very existence). The Benades threaten society's "own and clean self" and the socio-political "logic of exclusion" determines their designation as abject (Kristeva 1982: 65). The Benades are thus figuratively excreted by the "body-politic" – they are its abject and exist in a "domain of abjection" in Butler's terms (1993: 16). However, abjection also refers to self-awareness: each member of the Benade family is disgusted by his or her own body; their inheritance is one of visceral horror at their state.

Nevertheless, this inextricable, grotesque connection between the Benades also provides security and comfort, as with the oft-repeated refrain "at least we still have each other" (*Triomf* 264). Old Pop's response to his wife is illuminating in this context: "what makes people go rotten is loneliness" (*Triomf* 153). Despite the toxicity of their incestuous relationship, the Benades are intimately bound together, such that loneliness – being separated from 'the heap', to continue the metaphor – would be even worse. Thus, when I speak of fragments, I also refer to an individual body separated and alienated from the familial and societal 'body'.

**Stuck in the Mirror with You**

A recurring motif in Van Niekerk's writing is the broken mirror.[83] The body-image of the protagonists of *Triomf* remains fragmented, despite their desire to project a coherent identity. Lacan contends that the *I* is formed in the 'mirror stage' (1996:4): the *I* comes to accept a unified and complete body-image which replaces any intimations of being a body-in-parts. I propose that the protagonists of Triomf are 'stuck' in the initial phases of the mirror stage.[84] The mirror fails to provide them with the desired "orthopaedic totality" (Lacan 1966:4). The mirror which the National Party held up to its supporters in order to reflect the myth of Afrikaner nationalism and racial superiority has been quite literally shattered in the pages of this novel (cf *Triomf* 312-313). To paraphrase Lacan, the "succession of phantasies" (Lacan 1966: 4) which the National Party set in motion in order to invent an alternate, totalizing image are exposed and stalled; the reality is thus

[83] Willie Burger (2006: 186) and Johan van der Walt (2009) have explored the significance of mirrors in Van Niekerk's second novel *Agaat*.

[84] It is worth stressing that I am not making an argument about the evolutionary development or immaturity of Van Niekerk's characters. That is to say, I am not arguing they are akin to infants who have not progressed beyond the mirror stage. I am merely exploring the metaphoric possibilities of being 'stuck in the mirror stage', and linking this position to the characters' body-image and subjectivity. Leon de Kock (2001) makes a related argument to justify the use of the mirror stage analogy beyond the limits of early childhood. De Kock applies the logic of the mirror stage to an analysis of the experience of colonisation in South Africa and the formation of the "civil imaginary" in the colonial mirror (2001:405). He argues for the appropriateness of this schematic analogy, as, although missionary converts lives are steeped in linguistically governed codes and thus exist in the symbolic phase (and not the "pre-symbolic phase of the infant"), the analogy remains legitimate since by converting to Christianity, the convert is 'reborn' and re-imagines their identity. The Benades too stand at the threshold of a potential new identity, of emerging as 'new' South Africans – a term interrogated by the novel. In this sense, one can talk of the protagonists being 'stuck in the mirror stage' without infantilizing them. It could be further argued that the Benades are torn between two mirrors, neither of which matches their reality: the Afrikaner nationalist mirror and the 'new' South African mirror.

shorn of myths and revealed in all its ordinariness and its trauma.[85]

When Mol peers into the mirror, instead of a totality, it merely reflects an anatomical fragment: "[a]ll she sees is her mouth, it looks like someone else's mouth" (*Triomf* 149). This suggests that rather than a part representing or signifying the whole (which would imply that from the part of the body that is visible, Mol, and the reader, could deduce a totality that exists beyond the limited frame of the broken mirror) the part in fact *replaces* the whole. Mol has been reduced to a mouth and this fragment belies any image of a stable, coherent identity she might harbour. Significantly, the "grotesque face is actually reduced to the gaping mouth; the other features are only a frame encasing this wide-open bodily abyss" (Bakhtin 1984: 92). Mol is thus reduced to a gaping mouth, an abyss.[86] Ironically, she exists as a silent or powerless gaping mouth, metaphorically speaking, as no one in the family listens to her.

Mol is not the only family member who desires the mirror to be replaced. In his preparation for his 40th birthday party which coincides with the election, Lambert makes a list of improvements to be made to the house on Martha Street as well as to its inhabitants. One of the items on this list is the purchase of a new mirror (214). The reason for this burst of activity on Lambert's part and his obsession with home improvement is explained by Treppie: "[Lambert] said to hell with bad times, he was only going to be forty once and he wanted to face the New South Africa like a decent man, with a good woman on his arm" (244). Lambert here expresses the desire for his personal narrative to correspond with the national narrative – or simply for the inauguration of a new national narrative to signal the inception of a new personal narrative: a new beginning and redemption.[87] Lambert attempts to transform his body and by implication, his identity, such that he can find "absolute self-identity, located on the site of [his] whole, healed body" (Boehmer: 1993 273).

However, when Lambert does consider the appearance of his body, he is horrified:

> There's so much about himself that he'd like to fix up: his hair, his fat belly, his backside. He

[85] The ideological narrative of Afrikaner election is challenged in a similar corporeal manner. Towards the novel's conclusion, Mol remarks of her own body: "Just look what God's Providence had wrought over time, creasing the wattles on her throat, weighing down her old gut and cracking the soles of her old feet – being one of the chosen had worn her out good and proper!" (*Triomf* 457). It seems the pervasive myth of Afrikaner nationalism has a causal role in the trauma and decrepitude wrought on Mol's body. Thus the myth of election is exposed and debunked in an embodied form – or expressed differently, the physical evidence disproves the myth.

[86] This serves to re-iterate my discussion of her body in Chapter Two, in which I argued that the "relief" of Mol's body, of tunnels and mineshafts, aligns her with the grotesque.

[87] Treppie's comment is nevertheless not without irony, as Lambert, as a result of Treppie's taunting, is actually terrified of what will happen in the country after the elections. He has been hoarding containers to store petrol and planning the family's great escape to the North.

> needs some clothes, and some underpants so his dick won't hang out of his shorts all the time. … If only things would work. Cars, fridges, the lawnmower. If everything was nice and tidy; if all the rubbish got cleared up; then, he schemes, maybe his girl will want to come back again. (207)

Lambert wishes to conceal the features which mark his body as grotesque. He wishes to heal his wounded body, to make it "work" and re-member his body in order to be considered "a decent man" by "his girl". Thus her approval would ensure that his transformation is complete and would assure him the kind of "new beginning" that the arrival of democracy does not necessarily imply.

A new mirror is one again purchased in order to console Lambert after his over-zealous cleaning efforts have resulted in disaster. Lambert suffered a fit and ordered Mol and Treppie to throw everything in sight into a fire he had started in their backyard. The house itself is virtually disemboweled as a result. Pop awakens from a dream to this nightmarish vision and as he rushes outside – the lower half of his body exposed as he cannot find his pants – he glimpses himself in the "cracked" mirror of the dressing table,

> All he sees are dark holes where his eyes should be, and the white point of his nose. His mouth and chin and cheeks are blotted out in the semi-dark of the room. He rubs his hand over the bottom half of his face. The stubble makes a scraping noise. So, at least his face is still there. (235)

Pop's reaction to his grotesque reflection is reminiscent of Mol's. However, his action of rubbing his face is done in order to confirm that he is still alive, that his face still exists, rather than to merely challenge the veracity of the reflection. Touch is more reliable than vision. In a tragic distortion of his dream of a dog's heaven, in his waking hours Pop is reduced to crawling on all fours, witnessing the fiery destruction of his belongings in a scene more suited to one of the circles of hell than heaven. From this inverted vantage point, Pop's field of vision is limited to the lower strata of his family's bodies. The lower half of Mol's body, initially hidden in shade and mystery, is now revealed to the reader in all its exhaustion:

> Now he sees Mol's legs. She's full of bruises and grazes and her brown socks have sagged down to her ankles. Pop looks up Mol's legs. The hollows of her knees are full of knobbly, purple veins. Above the hollows, the skin puffs up in bulges, and further up it hangs in folds. Pop's looking up into Mol's depths. He lets his head drop again. (238).

Pop turns his head away in shame and embarrassment. The incontrovertible evidence of the trauma wrought by years of hardship, poverty and sexual abuse is inscribed on Mol's body. Her bruised body reveals what she is incapable of articulating. It appears that for the first time, as a result of witnessing her body from this invasive angle, Pop is forced to acknowledge the extent of Mol's private suffering and to reckon with the full horror of their family history. The fragility of his existence and of the family's relationship is thus exposed.

After his fit, Lambert is unconscious and his burnt body is described from Pop's perspective as a collection of monstrous body parts. This view of the entirety of Lambert's body is from an external perspective, and despite the extent of his wounds and the fact that he has lost bowel control, it evokes sympathy in both the Benades and this reader. Pop, Mol and Treppie act together, as a family unit, in order to try to preserve a modicum of dignity (both their own, and Lambert's) as Pop covers Lambert's lower half with his own shirt and Treppie tries to save him from swallowing his tongue in his epileptic fit. They are all rendered speechless, even Treppie ("Fuck… Jirre, no, fuck it" [241] is all he can manage), who is reduced to tears for only the second time in the novel (the first being at their dog Gerty's burial). The complete revelation of Lambert's naked body causes a similar reaction to Pop's sight of Mol's body. It results in their surrender to and undeniable awareness of the unforgivable results of their incestuousness and the harsh, irredeemable reality of their situation.[88] It is subsequent to this shock that Pop buys a new mirror, in order to assuage their guilt and pain and attempt to create a new familial coherence, if only figuratively, as well as to provide Lambert with the opportunity of envisioning a new body-image that accords with his transformational desire: to reconfigure the fragments of his body and of their lives into a unified whole. However, the new mirror is "a hair's breadth too big. … So Pop put the little mirror down in the bath. He'd in any case forgotten to buy glue" (249). Even a new mirror will only be capable of reflecting the reality of Lambert's grotesque body, and not his fantasy of himself. Perhaps this is why he shatters the remaining pieces of the newer bathroom mirror after his attempt to force it into available frame fails (312-313). For this reason, I propose that the sight of and physical proximity to the bodies of others accords the protagonists of *Triomf* the kind of coherent image that their own

[88] Shear states that

> Lambert is never described in total or as a unified whole. The images Van Niekerk uses to describe Lambert present the monstrous bits and pieces of his body as singular objects of horror, as if the full picture would be too terrible for words. (2006:85)

In this instance and the one following (when Lambert discovers the family secret), I maintain that Lambert *is almost* described in his entirety. In this case, despite the absence of *complete* anatomical detail – and it is unlikely that more details would be possible, bar a microscopic limb-by-limb or piece-by-piece analysis – the reader is made aware that the other Benades *see* Lambert in his entirety for the first time as an adult. It remains undeniable that the fact that Mol, Pop and Treppie himself see Lambert's complete, grotesque body, affects their relationship to him and their understanding of their familial narrative.

reflection in the mirror denies.

During their subsequent recovery from this catastrophic scene on Guy Fawkes day, Mol observes Pop's sleeping body in its entirety:

> He's still wearing the same socks he had on this morning . . . It's his only pair. Worn right through at the heels. All his toes stick out in front. The toes look like fingers. Black from soot. Shame, poor Pop.
>
> As he sits there, she stares at *all the bits of his body*. He looks like his joints are too thin, like all the places where his hands and feet and head should be fixed to his body are *joined by nothing more than the power of mercy.* Mercy. Suddenly she feels she dare not look away, 'cause if she does, the mercy won't hold any longer. And then Pop will break apart, right here next to her, all along his joints. And she would've been the only one who could've kept him together, just by looking. So she looks and looks. Her eyes get heavy. She must just not fall asleep now. Everything depends on her. The joints in Pop's body. *And what would she amount to, without him?*
>
> Suddenly the front gate creaks. It's Treppie. Thank God, he's back … Now there'll be some life in the place. She fingers her bun at the back and pins the loose pieces back into place (250, my emphasis).

There is much insight to be gleaned from this extended quote. Firstly, although Pop's protruding toes are grotesque, the reason for their *visible* protrusion (and similarly for the emphasis on his broken zips, Mol's lack of underwear and her housecoat which fails to adequately conceal her body) is socio-economic: proper clothes might conceal these grotesque body parts from onlookers and might provide the grotesque body with a *veneer* of closure and completion. Secondly, Pop's body is perceived as a body-in-parts, a fragmented body. For the first time, Mol is made aware of the fragility of Pop's body and by extension, the fragility of her relationship to him and thus her own identity. This realization causes Mol to believe that the "power of mercy" is responsible for anatomical cohesion, rather than frail muscles or tendons or ligaments. She presumes that the act of looking – rather than possessing the power to segment or control the body of another – will ensure that the body is not dismembered. Furthermore, the act of looking is accompanied by a rush of tenderness and sympathy, as was the case when the family looked at Lambert's comatose body. This is a different kind of specular economy, in which the body is neither divided nor fragmented by the gaze of the other, but rather unified (see Chapter Four for a discussion of relations based on sight).[89]

[89] As I have mentioned already, Boehmer argues that "[i]n colonial representation, exclusion or suppression can often literally be seen as 'embodied'" (Boehmer 1993:269). In addition, Flora Veit-Wild illustrates in her discussion of

Thus, looking at others with compassion might reflect a totality the mirror is incapable of showing. Thirdly, Mol's motivation stems not only from a selfless affection for Pop but also a fear that without him, she would be lost; that is, she 'keeps' him whole, but needs her relationship with him to feel complete. Finally, Treppie's reappearance, which would normally evoke fear or anger in Mol, reassures her and reminds her of the continuity of life. Mercy and Treppie's laughter keep the Benades together as a complete *family unit*. Mol subconsciously 'puts herself back together' upon Treppie's arrival: the loose pieces of hair which have escaped her bun are put back in their place. The implication is that an intimate connection with another human being can prevent one's embodied subjectivity from fracturing – intimacy can potentially overcome the tenuousness of anatomy and psychological insecurity; it can overwrite the mirrored reflection.

**Saving Perspectives**

The suggestion that the power of mercy can have healing physical effects is parallelled in Treppie's "saving perspective" which, as an alternate 'myth of origins', has psychical healing effects for the Benades and binds them together as co-conspirators. This alternative family history, "[t]hat Pop was a distant Benade from the Cape", acts as a veneer which disguises the shocking truth about the acts of incest which resulted in Lambert's birth (174). Such a perspective, although false, allows them all to live with the repercussions of their past actions; it "kep[t them] alive" and it ensures the cohesion of the family unit (175). This perspective, which provides the Benades with the opportunity to remember their histories in a more romantic and joyous light, prevents the family members from dispersing; it prevents the dismemberment of the family unit and the dismemberment of the self.

Developing this line of argument, it is significant that the solitary instance in which Treppie vocalises his own pain as a result of his traumatic past is when he reveals his hitherto hidden abdominal scars. The disclosure of both Treppie and Lambert's bodies accompanies the destruction of a "saving perspective". Thus self-articulation is possible when the "saving perspective" is dashed, when the lie of wholeness is ruptured.

I will first discuss the context in which Treppie reveals his traumatised body and subsequent to that, I will draw conclusions about Lamberts discovery of the 'family secret'. Mol, Pop and Treppie abandon the house on the eve of Lambert's birthday in order to leave him alone with the prostitute they have hired for him. They spend most of the night in the car on the Brixton koppie. It is here

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"Sarah (Saartjie) Baartman" that there is a history of "the violent segmentation of the black female body by the colonial gaze and hand" (2006:13). Here, it would appear that mercy is embodied; Mol's love and insecurities are figured on Pop's body.

that a confrontation about the appropriate apportioning of blame for their situation occurs between Mol's brothers. Treppie takes umbrage at Pop's suggestion that there are certain moral dictums – such as honouring one's parents – to which adherence is obligatory: "*Honour*, for what should I *honour* [Old Pop], all that's left of me is a drop of blood, a wet spot with some skin around it struggling for breath. A lump of scar-tissue with a heart in the middle" (381). As if to illustrate his point, Treppie reveals his scarred abdomen; "[h]e plucked his shirt up and pushed his pants down over his hips so they could see his scar-tissue" (381). These scars are the result of the beating he received from Old Pop, when the latter discovered the sexual activities of his children. Mol's reaction to Treppie's wounds is one of shock. She is confused by the discovery that his punishment has been inscribed on his body and exists, not as a mere memory, but as a permanent physical reminder of the torture he suffered at his father's hands:

> Then [Mol] saw how terribly those blows had set into Treppie's skin. She hadn't known. She thought people outgrew things like that. Treppie's stomach and hips were covered with nicks and grooves, as if he'd been tied up with ropes and beaten over and over again. … 'Marked for life!' he said, prodding his finger into the nicks and scars on his skin. (382)

As Louise Bethlehem insists: "The scar is the *amanuensis* of violence … Moreover it casts itself as the truthful amanuensis of violence, since the truth of its writing is validated by the ontology of the body" (2006: 83). However, in retracing the nicks and scars with his own finger, Treppie succeeds in "uttering [his] wounds" and thus "negates" the silencing which his father attempted to impose on him (Boehmer 1993: 272). In Boehmer's discussion of strategies of transfiguration, she invokes a bodily permutation of the 'talking cure': "Ideally speaking this is a process not of reclamation only, but importantly of self-articulation, healing through speaking one's condition, as with the hysteric" (1993: 272). Treppie is incapable of retelling the story of his abuse to his siblings, his trauma resists 'narrative recuperation' but he does achieves a degree of "self-articulation" previously impossible (Boehmer 1993: 272). Treppie's subjectivity has been reduced to a body fragment; he exists as a barely beating heart.[90] Nonetheless, his revelation prompts expressions of concern, solace and comfort from his family; his scars exist as incontrovertible proof of his continued physical and emotional suffering and yet, by presenting them to his siblings, he initiates a healing process. Mol and Pop attempt to soothe his pain by emphasising his place in the family – "As it was, they were little more than skin and bone, but without Treppie they wouldn't even have cast a shadow" (387).

[90] A different way of existing as a fragment, as a heart, is suggested by Baby Suggs in *Beloved* : "Who decided that, because slave life had 'busted her legs, back, head, eyes, hands, kidneys, womb, and tongue', she had nothing left to make a living with but her heart – which she put to work at once" (Morrison 1987: 87). Treppie's heart barely beats; it is suffocated by his emotional and physical scarring. He does not possess Baby Suggs's fortitude or power to transcend his bodily trauma; his "process of reclamation" and "self-articulation" remains incomplete.

They try to repair Treppie's fractured subjectivity; to act as a salve for his wounds or glue for his body-in-parts. Pop attempts to console Treppie by assuring him his 'body matters' (cf Butler 1993: xxiv).

Willie Burger concludes of this moment: "Dit is die realiteit geanker in die persoonlike ervaring. Geen verhaal kan dit beter maak, anders laat lyk, of wegneem nie. Dit sal 'n ontkenning van die pyn en werklikheid van die lewe wees" (2000:13).[91] His fragmented, wounded body belies any (ideological) narrative which would gloss over such trauma; narratives dissemble, but bodies cannot. In this moment, Treppie is at his most vulnerable and exposed. However, he is also empowered. His trauma has been told, shorn of any 'wallpaper' or 'saving perspective' and in this way he protests against unjustified or undeserved honour and other abstract moral mores – other kinds of wallpaper. In Van Niekerk's writing, as with other postcolonial writers and as evinced by the example of Treppie's scored flesh and Pop's description of Mol's lower half, the "borderlines of the body are the metonymical marks of power relations in a colonial and postcolonial society" (Veit-Wild:2006 107). These power relations are dictated by socio-economic circumstances, as well as violent historical and political forces. The power relations are written on the body.

Finally, I wish to make a few closing remarks concerning Lambert, who symbolically discovers the "key to his existence" (454) on the day of the election, 27 April 1994. While the house is being repainted, the painters hand Lambert the key to a drawer in the sideboard where his parents hide all their important papers. In that drawer he discovers Mol, Treppie and Pop's identity documents as well as the only existing family photograph. The photograph depicts the whole family on the day of the centenary of the Great Trek, "the culmination of Afrikaner nationalist sentiment" (Van Niekerk: 1992: 148).

It is on reading Old Pop's inscription on the back of the photo, and recognising a young Pop in the family photo that Lambert realises the truth of the circumstances surrounding his birth:

> [Pop's] no fucken distant Benade. He's fucken poep-close! They're all the fucken same, the whole lot of them! … It feels like he can't get enough air. … He feels like something that's already dead. … He feels like he's fucking out from the inside. Things that have been said, pieces of stories, falling inwards from his head. … he feels like he wants to burst out of his seams as the truth plunges down into him. (461–462)

[91] "It is the reality anchored in the personal experience. No story can make it better, look different or take it away. That would be a denial of the pain and reality of life" (own translation).

The impact of this shameful history is experienced as a physical implosion and explosion. The truth, which shatters the story of his origins, is embodied and acts as a centrifugal force. Reading Old Pop's suicide letter confirms his worst fears: "*Only a monster will be born from this sort of thing*" (463, italics in original). The various fragments of stories he has heard over the years suddenly fall into place, "falling inwards from his head". In the very instant that the gaps in his autobiography are filled he is made aware of the monstrosity of his body for the very first time:

> He looks at his hands. Skew, full of knobs. He looks down at his legs and his feet. … Now he sees his large knees, his hollow shins, his knobbly, swollen, monster-ankles, his skew, monster-feet, and his monster-toes. Ten of them! All different shapes and sizes. Dog-toenails! He feels his face. A monster. A devil-monster. No wonder! No fucken wonder he's such a fuck-up! (463)

Lambert's response to his body appears to be the ultimate act of "abjection of self" (Kristeva 1982:5).

At this point, and considering the historical significance of the date of Lambert's discovery, it is worth returning to Boehmer's contention that "where a national narrative begins to fragment, so too does the iconography of the body" (1996: 274). At a time when the political focus is on the creation of a new unified national narrative, *Triomf* prominently displays the simultaneous splintering of foundational narratives and of the iconography of the body. The painful truth of Lambert's history has finally been exposed, and in the light of this new knowledge he sees his body not as a complete, classical, unified body, but rather he is made aware that the *whole* of his body is composed of monstrous, ill-fitting parts. His anger is expressed in the diabolic act of breaking a drawer over Pop's head, which may or may not have caused his death (see Chapter Six). Although, for the sake of a new 'saving perspective', Pop's death is ruled an accident and the family exists in an uneasy peace. [92]

The remaining Benades are all scarred from their violent election day confrontation. Lambert is wheelchair-bound, his one leg has been amputated and Treppie's fingers are broken. Their wounds and disfigurement are no longer hidden and remain visible to all. Nonetheless, the Benades too, have, in their own way, embraced the new era in South African history: "The most important thing was that they should never again say the word 'kaffir'. …What was past was past, [Treppie] said,

[92]For a discussion of the end of *Triomf*, see also Buxbaum (2012a).

and it applied to them too" (*Triomf* 472). The fantasy of an escape has also been crushed: "North no more" (474). The Benades have been shorn of any myths or wallpaper, the only reality is that which is experienced through their broken bodies in the changing socio-political context. I also propose that, by the novel's end, Treppie and Lambert are no longer grotesque, but rather disabled.[93] As a result of this transformation and the revelations of trauma which have led up to it, we do feel sympathy for the Benades. The novel's conclusion re-situates the context of the Benades – we have moved from the mythical to the everyday; the Benades are no longer grotesque symbols, but merely a family of broken, wounded individuals, bumbling along as best they can.[94] And while the final scene evokes pathos, there is no room for sentimentalising the Benades: Treppie "looks even more like the devil" with his broken, "crooked" fingers" (*Triomf* 473).

**Bodies Politic and Re-reading Fragments**

I propose appropriating the title of Michiel Heyns's (2008) novel, *Bodies Politic*, instead of the conventional singular (and thus exclusive) 'body politic' which might ensure that these individuals, whose bodies are deemed 'not to matter', are not ignored in the politically expedient need for the "transcendence of the fragmented South African body-politic" (Klopper 470). Furthermore I posit that fragmentation might not necessarily need to be transcended. The plural term, "bodies-politic", exposes the impossibility, and perhaps even undesirability, of a unitary body-politic whose fractures and fissures have been rendered invisible. Following this logic, there can be no one 'body' that comes to represent the whole, so that indeed there is no unified whole.[95] In this sense, the attempt to 'recuperate' the Benades' bodies in narrative (to use Boehmer's phrase [1993*:* 273]) and to represent their trauma can be read as an attempt at (a different kind of) 'transfiguration' by Van Niekerk. By inserting them into the South African post-apartheid "bodies politic", she disrupts and troubles any anodyne national narrative which attempts to gloss over the past as well as political fissures in the present.

In this context, Maurice Blanchot's reading of the fragment is illuminating in that he celebrates the

[93]This is an ethical move by Van Niekerk which can be understood with reference to Leonard Davis's analysis of disability summarised in Chapter One. Despite Bakhtin's lyricism, the grotesque does have negative connotations and instills horror and comedy. Disability, on the other hand, refers to mere bodily brokenness, devoid of extra connotations of the carnival, or excess, or monstrosity. This alteration in how the reader responds to the Benades will be developed in the remaining chapters.

[94] There is a correlation here with Boehmer's description of the process of 'self-articulation':

> Symbol is expanded into plot, or plots, history in the epic sense of the tale of a nation becomes biography, autobiography ... in other words, becomes individual or communal narrative, less lofty than national epic, certainly not as coherent, not as authoritative. Character (as in symbol, cipher) is transfigured into character (as in the subject of the story). (1993: 275)

[95]The fallacy of a simple representational relation of the ostensibly gender-neutral body and society is outlined by Elizabeth Grosz (1998: 45–46).

fragmentary (1992 and 1993), suggesting in a reading of René Char's poem: "We must try to recognize in this '*shattering*' or '*dislocation*' a value that is not one of negation" (1993: 308, emphasis in original). As opposed to the dictionary definition, Blanchot maintains that the fragment need not be read in relation to any previous or future desired unity (1993: 308 and 1992:40). Lycette Nelson contends that Blanchot's reading of the fragment should be considered in relation to his desire "to find a language that is truly multiple and that does not attempt to achieve closure" (1992: v). It seems Van Niekerk's texts could be read as illustrative of a similar desire for such a language, as the novels engender multiple readings and evade definitive closure. The reader's challenge then is to "animat[e] the multiplicity of crossing routes" rather than attempt to "reconstitut[e] a new totality" (Blanchot 1992:50). This challenge to the reader is apparent in *Agaat* and in trying to understand Agaat, Jakkie and Milla's attempts at remembering.

**Remembering the Self**

My aim in the discussion of *Agaat* is to draw some comparisons between descriptions of fragmentation in these two novels. I continue to explore the metaphorical kinship between narrative and anatomical fragments. It is worth highlighting the fact that the four narrative sections act to fragment the plot of the novel, and the 'beginning' of Milla's relationship with Agaat is only revealed at the end of the novel. As with *Triomf*, I will also explore the implications of references to completion in the text.

Jakkie's (Milla's son) stream of consciousness bookends the novel as both prologue and epilogue. The novel opens as Jakkie begins the journey to the Canadian airport to fly home to his dying mother. His thought process is telegrammatic and fragmented:

> Matt-white winter. Stop-start traffic. Storm warning. And I. In two places at once, as always. Snow on my shoulder, but with the light of the Overberg haunting me, the wet black apparitions of winter, the mirages of summer. (*Agaat* 1)

These few lines of this mammoth novel refer to two key motifs which have repercussions for my discussion of the fragmented body. First, there is a resemblance to the opening scene of *Triomf* where Mol's body is bisected by sun and shade. Jakkie's subjectivity is 'split' – "as always" – between the pastoral landscape of his youth and his adulthood in urban North American exile (1). His experience of a psychic division is expressed in the metaphor of seasonal changes, as experienced by the body – the contrasting feel of freezing snow and warm sun; dark and light. This sense of disconnection and alienation is reinforced by the intertext of Ezra Pound's "In a Station of

the Metro".[96] Secondly, the reception of the telegram from Agaat informing him of his mother's impending death is likened to "an aperture in the skull", a hole bored into his brain from which "memories are a stream, unquenchable" (1). There is a correlation with Lambert's experience of reading the inscription on the back of the family photograph: unexpected knowledge is received as a physical trauma and memories are embodied. Jakkie subsequently reminisces about searching for the "purple emperor" butterfly with Agaat and recalls his emotional state: "blood shaking my heart. Leaking heart" (2). The use of somatic metaphors to describe emotions and the reduction of subjectivity to porous or fragile anatomical fragments is in evidence in the very first pages of the novel.

According to those narrative strands of *Agaat* which unfold mostly in relation to chronological time – the second person narration and the extracts of Milla's diaries – our first awareness of Agaat is of a shadowy absence.[97] Milla recalls that on the eve of the discovery of her pregnancy:"[y]ou felt eyes on you, eyes that interrogated you, a face that was unsure of this new mood of yours" (107). In this recollection, the inconvenient spectre of the child Agaat has been all but erased, as Milla asks "Who laid a hand against your arm as if your temperature would warm her? Who touched the hem of your dress? … Was there somebody who could guess something and wanted to share in your excitement?" (107). Milla is determined to alter her memory. She answers her own questions in the negative: "No, you were alone. You wanted to be alone. You became a different person. Everything altered in interest and scale" (107). One clear possible reading of this is that if Milla allowed herself to place Agaat in that memory, in her physical totality, then Milla would be forced to confront her own ignominious behaviour; she would have to reckon with the inhumanity of her banishing Agaat to the outside room and transforming her from foster-child into servant. Thus only fragments of Agaat's body remain as a ghostly reminder: her eyes, face and hand. Nevertheless, from these mere fragments, the reader can deduce the intimacy that used to exist between Milla and the person represented by these body parts. Agaat, at that young age, was capable of reading Milla's every mood and her childlike innocence is signified by her curious touching of Milla's cosmetics (107). This is the great unforgivable crime, the travesty of Milla's behaviour towards Agaat. She adopted Agaat and in spite of Milla's continued tyrannical behaviour, she did succeed in healing – to a degree – Agaat's brokenness and allowing her to recover from her childhood trauma. Although in the process, she remodelled Agaat into her own image, as her own mother attempted to do to her

[96]"The apparition of these faces in the crowd; / Petals on a wet, black bough" (Pound 1926: 251).

[97] It needs to be borne in mind, however, that both these narrative strands obscure the origins of Agaat's birth and arrival at *Grootmoedersdrift* and the diaries pertaining to the early years of her childhood are only read *after* the later diaries. I merely wish to contrast the earlier images of Agaat in these narratives, with those of the adult Agaat as she cares for the dying Milla.

(*Agaat* 93, see also Van Niekerk [2008: 106-107]) and as Jak believes Milla has done to him and Agaat (513). When Agaat is banished to the outside room, she is traumatised once again and it is as if her fragile subjectivity can only withstand this betrayal by denying her former self – "Good, you are dead" (689) – and creating a new narrative by which to live. She performs the role of servant and adopts the uniform of that role *as if* it were her only identity. [98]

Agaat's trauma remains unspoken, but the reader is made aware of Milla's struggle to come to terms with her and Agaat's relationship: with the trauma she has inflicted on Agaat as well as the loss of Agaat as her daughter. Milla is simultaneously aware that "[i]t would be fatal not to seek reconciliation" (*Agaat* 552) and is incapable of doing so. Hoffman argues that a future direction for trauma studies should foster greater understanding of "the perpetrator mentality" (2005: 271 and see Van den Berg 2011). There is certainly more to be said regarding the extent to which Milla, as a perpetrator of trauma, also suffers from trauma, as a result of her past actions and her present debilitating illness, and of her attempts and failure to 'remember' her narrative coherently (*Agaat* 163 and see Burger 2009: 9).[99]

The description of Agaat as "Frankenstein's monster", a charge Jakkie lays against Milla and Jak, echoes the descriptions of Lambert as monstrous (*Agaat* 609, see also Prinsloo and Visagie 2007: 57-58). In elucidating Lambert and Agaat's similarities as "agterkamerkinders" (2008: 104), Van Niekerk discusses the extent to which both are rendered powerless and simultaneously given the illusion of power by their "masters". The methods of these masters are listed as "fragmentering, indoktrinering, hersamestelling" (2008:106). These three steps – fragmenting, indoctrination and 'recomposition' or remoulding – seem applicable to the stages of Agaat's biography I have outlined above. Or in Jakkie's metaphor: "She's part of the place from the beginning. Calloused, salted,

[98] Van Niekerk (2008) and Carvalho & Van Vuuren (2009) explore the subversive potential of Agaat's night-time dancing, alone in the veld on the farm. Carvalho and Van Vuuren, commenting on Milla's description of these dances – "separating the divisions of the night. Or dividing something within herself" (*Agaat* 151) – suggest that by having a new identity imposed on her, Agaat effectually creates a double identity, in which her subjectivity is split between her autonomous identity and that imposed on her by Milla (2009: 49). In this sense, Agaat presents the illusion of a coherent identity by virtue of her adaptation of the uniform, mannerisms and behaviour of a servant. Carvalho & Van Vuuren (2009) also discuss the symbolism of Agaat's cap and the role of mimicry in further detail.

[99] In fact, Jakkie compares what must have taken place in his mother's bed chamber to a "kangaroo court" (680). Indeed, it seems Milla is on trial in this novel for her actions. Jakkie's statement should also be understood in the historical context of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings, which began in 1996, the year that the present tense sections of the novel is set. Milla is bearing witness to her life and potentially applying for amnesty for her actions. Many of the novel's concerns with memory, forgiveness, trauma, witnessing, reconciliation, constructing an historical narrative and guilt are characteristic of South African novels influenced by the TRC and published from the mid 1990s to early 2000s (for examples of the impact of the TRC on South African literature, see Graham 2009 and Bethlehem 2004). Van den Berg alludes to the trauma and guilt suffered by perpetrators of apatheid-era human rights violations, as well as the possible collective trauma experienced by Afrikaners (2011). Although there is more to be said in this regard, it falls beyond the focus of this chapter.

brayed, the lessons of the masters engraved in her life like the law on the tablets of stone" (*Agaat* 682). As Van Niekerk concludes, both Lambert and Agaat experience the impact of these power relations in an embodied manner. The corporeal experience of this power is fragmented, just as the power wielded by both Treppie and Milla (in the context of Van Niekerk's essay) is incomplete.

I also read fragments as emblems in order to determine what they are emblematic of. A key emblem in *Agaat* (see Van Niekerk 2005 for an essay on emblems in Dumas) is Agaat's cap (see *Agaat* 55). The symbols of Agaat's subjugation are simultaneously the symbols of her protest.[100] The cap functions in a metonymic relation to Agaat. Patrizia Calefato's explanation of clothing is appropriate here: "The garment as a vessel of otherness, a place where the identity of one's body is confused, an indistinct zone between covering and image. The clothed body, the body-as-covering, and its imagery burst into social territory" (Calefato: 2004:60). The maid's outift and particularly its accompanying head piece enable Agaat to become 'other' to herself, and yet this identity created by the garment is not stable, which suggests slippages are possible, between the identity adopted and the fragmented subjectivity it covers.

Agaat's cap is kept in pristine condition and she forbids anyone else to even touch it. The scene is which it is crushed for the first and only time in the novel, is thus significant. In the present tense narrative, under extreme physical and emotional strain, Agaat falls asleep at the foot of Milla's bed, with Milla's feet pressed to her chest. Milla awakens first and has her only opportunity to study the surreal designs on Agaat's cap. She also provides the reader with a description of Agaat's exhausted, fragile, aging body-in-parts. When Agaat does awaken, "she's angry. With herself. Angry that I saw her like that … I can feel her distrust. Beneath the distrust something else. Can it be true?" (*Agaat*, 372). It remains unclear what other emotion Milla intuits beneath the distrust – it could be any range of exhaustion, submission, desperation, defeat or even compassion and tenderness. Agaat walks to

[100] Patrizia Calefato refers to bell hooks's analysis of style in American history, which supports my assertion :

> According to bell hooks (1990) there is a close relation between style, as expressed by clothes, and subversion, that is, the way in which throughout American history both 'master' and 'servant' have used style to express respectively either conformity to or resistance against the dominant social order. (2004: 61)

The *style* in which Agaat wears the garments of the 'servant' indicates a resistance to the *meaning* of the garments themselves and by implication the hierarchy of power relations on *Grootmoedersdrift*. When Milla first shows Agaat her uniform, it represents a horrific concretisation of her displacement from the home. The pedantic instructions Milla gives her regarding the appropriate style of her new attire illustrate this callousness and also reveal a glimpse of Agaat's youthful identity:

> The caps were the most difficult. I said I know you don't like things on your head but you'll just have to like it or lump it. Asked her nicely she must put on a clean one every day & pin it up nicely. … I thought I'd show her how to put on the cap & I said I don't want to see a strand of hair. (*Agaat* 125)

These instructions are interpreted and followed with a parodic excessiveness, as are Milla's other lessons to Agaat. See Burger (2006) and Carvalho & van Vuuren (2009) for analyses of the role of mimicry in Agaat and Milla's relationship.

the door, but returns to Milla's bed:

> I hear her letting herself down on the chair. Her arms come around my feet, she presses them against her breast, tight, still tighter, she bends her neck, she presses her forehead against the arches of my feet, hard. … the whole merciless music [embroidered on her cap] she crumples up with one stroke against my ankles (373).

There is a potential tenderness in Agaat's touch. Her forehead fits neatly into the arches of Milla's feet, producing a seamless connection between their bodies. This is Milla's interpretation; she reads it as an embrace. However, the harshness and intensity of the touch also suggests suppressed anger, or hopelessness. This image is a literalisation, albeit on a horizontal plane, of Milla's treatment of Agaat and of the ultimate balance of power in their relationship: she has crushed Agaat underfoot. The "untouchable" cap (395), which represents Agaat's subversive rebellion, her artistry and metonymically her entire being, is crushed. The first time Agaat cradled Milla's feet, she was asleep and vulnerable and it was an unconscious or natural act of intimacy. The second, conscious re-enactment is more nuanced. These complex wordless exchanges can be read as a vignette of their entire relationship, as a convoluted tangle of limbs and power.

Metaphorically, the suggestion of a fragmented corporeal connection between Milla and Agaat is raised at several points in the text. On her sickbed, silent and supine, Milla wishes to communicate this to Agaat: "I want to say, a piece, *you are a piece of me*, how am I to quit you? (193, my emphasis). Milla's word choice is ambiguous as it suggests that Agaat is a partial miniature of Milla – or a fragment of Milla that has broken off – and also that Agaat has become a part of Milla, as if Milla has consumed her and erased any independent existence she might have had. Earlier Milla remarks that "Life flows through me as if through a transfusion rigged up between her and me" (129). If there is a physical connection, it is always to Milla's advantage; it is not as a carnivalesque revelrous body that the two merge into a whole. Milla has drained the life out of Agaat.[101] The implication of anatomical connection and commingling is unmistakable – although it is certainly of a different form to the incestuous Benades. Nevertheless, there is a parallel idea that intimacy, emotion and interpersonal relationships can [only] be expressed through anatomical metaphors and that relationships 'bind' bodies together.

Contemplating her own life and impending death, Milla reflects on her attempts to craft "the fragments I am trying to shore" into a palatable narrative. She employs the metaphor of arranging

[101] The vampiric suggestion recurs again, as I have noted in Chapter Two (cf Van Niekerk 2008:115).

stones in a river in order to create a bridge to the other side. This might be an allusion to the river of life and/or the river Styx, across which souls of the dead are ferried to the underworld, according to Greek mythology:

> I step on them, step, as on stones in a stream. Agaat and I and Jak and Jakkie. Four stepping stones, every time four and their combinations of two, of three, their powers to infinity and their square roots. Their sequences in time, their causes and effects. How to join and how to fit, how to step and to say: Thát is how I crossed the river, thére I walked, that was the way to here. (163)

Burger, following Paul Ricoeur, comments that this extract acts as a metaphor for the writing process itself and the imposition of a plot and narrative structure onto the events of a life (2009a: 9). The end Milla must come to, in her dying days, is her inevitable death, but it also the beginning of her and Agaat's story, which has eluded her and has been eclipsed from her journals.[102] The fragments Milla refers to shoring are her memories, in addition to the written and cartographic records of her life, which are revealed in parts in the course of the novel. However, the stones are also metaphors for the characters in her life story and in the novel *Agaat*: "Agaat and I and Jak and Jakkie. Four stepping stones" (*Agaat* 163). As in *Triomf*, the implication is that of elements of narrative and bodies metaphorically commingling in such a way that the connection between these elements is inextricable and yet always tenuous and subject to rearranging. These fragments are envisioned as the stepping stones across a stream which need to be re-arranged, disassembled and re-assembled – "how to join and how to fit" (163) – in order to create a narrative, a path to the end of the journey. Intra-familial relations need to be made sense of so that their relations fit together into an acceptable coherent narrative. However, the complexity of this family and their shared history prevents a seamless connection: "always there are more contents to be ordered into coherence" (103). A consoling story eludes Milla.

There are key events in Agaat's life which can be identified as traumatic: the abuse she experienced prior to her (forced) relocation to *Grootmoedersdrift* and the subsequent traumatic change in household position: from daughter-figure to servant. However, the "event-model" of trauma cannot sufficiently account for Agaat's suffering (cf Rothberg 2008: 229 and Craps & Buelens 2008). It would be more appropriate to consider Agaat's life under Milla's tyrannical rein as a continued

[102]The desire to return to the beginning is made explicit in the English translation with Heyns's inclusion of quotations from T.S. Eliot's "The Four Quartets". He quotes particularly from the fifth section of "Little Gidding", an extract of which is used as an epigraph to the novel, as well from East Coker: "In my beginning is my end" and "In my end is my beginning" (Eliot1963:184, 191). See Heyns (2009) and England (2013) for different perspectives on the addition of Eliot.

trauma. Agaat's childhood abuse remains the unspeakable original trauma: her biological mother was beaten while pregnant, and as a child Agaat was subject to physical and probably sexual abuse from her father and brothers (*Agaat* 656–666). The reader is made aware only of the physical impacts of this abuse: she cannot have children (166), and her arm and leg are severely disfigured. The novel reveals three different versions of "the beginning" (653): Jakkie's recollection of the bedtime story Agaat told him as a child (684-691), Milla's final second-person narrative, which could be considered a kind of confession (653–672) and Agaat's fragmentary rapprochement of Milla when she displays the maps (402–407). Yet all three narratives remain incomplete and refer only to the trauma of displacement from Milla, whom she called "my Même ... my only mother" (633) and her transformation from child to servant.

The bedtime story, which is recollected by Jakkie and reproduced in the epilogue, is clearly a narrative of Agaat's displacement in the genre of a fairytale. However, Jakkie failed to interpret it as Agaat's autobiography. Admitting his ignorance on his 21st birthday, he comments: "Perhaps she'll be able to tell me at last ... where she came from and how she ended up here on Grootmoedersdrift" (608). This story also fails to provide Agaat with closure or healing, most importantly because Milla never hears this version of their life together and because it includes neither the details of Agaat's life with her biological family or her life after Jakkie grows up.

Another alternative narrative of Agaat's life is presented when she challenges Milla's reading of the maps (see Chapter Two). Agaat concludes her verbal assault on Milla with a description of her forced relocation to the outside room. Her body has been reduced to a few fragmentary symbols: a missing suitcase, a cap and a broken heart (407). Agaat's recitation of place names and events is fragmented, but it is recited nonetheless; her body is wounded and fragmented, but it is revealed nonetheless. The veneer of the 'classic body' is shattered as is the exclusionary spatial narrative Milla has clung to. Milla cannot deny the reality of the abuse which caused Agaat's physical disfigurement nor can she deny the mental anguish her own treatment of Agaat has caused. Their impact on Agaat's subjectivity can be understood only by reading her body.

This pivotal scene does allow Agaat a moment of self-articulation. However, its healing effect should not be over-emphasised. In this instance Agaat can be usefully contrasted with Toni Morrison's Sethe in *Beloved*. As Henderson words it, Sethe's challenge is "to learn to read herself – that is to configure the history of her body's text" (87). Agaat's authorial power remains severely constrained and her body is only ever read through the eyes of others. There is no indication that she comes to terms with trauma of her own body, or finds a way to re-member it, apart from the fact

that she is briefly liberated to 'display' her disfigurement.

There are also the embroidered stories Agaat creates.[103] There are two contrasting visions of unity in the novel. In the first of these, in the present tense narrative, Agaat unveils her embroidery of a rainbow for Milla. It stemmed from Agaat's feelings of despair and loss when Jakkie started school: "she anaesthetized herself with the work" (218). Nevertheless, the emptiness which prompted the embroidery appears to be reflected implicitly in the finished product: "It's an embroidery of nothing and nowhere ... Everything that slipped out of her grasp, Jakkie's whole childhood, replaced with this embroidered emptiness" (218). This rainbow provides Milla with no succour, precisely the opposite in fact:

> A *complete* colour chart. The origin, the *fullness*, the foundation of all. What am I supposed to do with it all? It's the wrong medicine. *Completeness*. The death of the song, of the small dusty tale. … *Perfection, purity, order*. Adversaries are they all, the devils own little helpers …. How my heart burns to tell her this! Now that I can see it. Now that it's too late. (219, my emphasis)

Completeness is exposed as a mere construct: the rainbow is an artistic expression of Agaat's attempts to numb her loss when Jakkie went to school; according to Milla it can signify nothing other than its origin in emptiness. Milla has realised that this actualisation of narrative unity is false and premature; it foreshortens: it causes "the death of the song… the tale". The song and the tale represent the story she is attempting to tell of her relationship with Agaat, but its complexity, tragedy and fragmentation cannot be captured within the geometric borders of Agaat's rainbow or, by implication, the generic structure of a bedtime fairytale. This rainbow is merely another kind of 'wallpaper' (cf *Triomf*).

A second glimpse of unity occurs towards the end of the novel, when Milla's diary from 1954 is read. This entry was made shortly after she adopted the child Agaat:

> Still I have the feeling of satiety. … Can it be that you feed someone else and feel replete yourself with it?
> Perhaps it's the mere fact that [Agaat] could go to sleep with me so close to her that makes me feel like this.
> It's the first time in my life that I understand it like this, the impersonal unity of all living

[103] See also Burger (2006: 181-182) for a comparison of embroidery and storytelling and Milla's response to Agaat's embroidery on her burial cloth.

things. It doesn't matter who is who. … It's óne energy. We are one, Agaat and I. (521)

This epiphany is momentary and all too brief. Nonetheless it contains an important truth which Milla seems to spend her whole life struggling to re-learn. For the first time, in this moment with Agaat, Milla feels "replete"; she is completely content as a result of the physical and emotional intimacy achieved with Agaat (this initial innocent experience of "satiety" can be contrasted with that occasioned by the maps, as illustrated in Chapter Two). This burst of unadulterated tenderness and compassion, dare one say love, is oblivious to oppressive political or societal forces based on segregation and hierarchies. In this instant, Milla believes in an "impersonal unity of all living things" – a unity of narratives and bodies and emotions and nature. This knowledge "stirs in [her] navel" (521); it is an embodied epiphany, prompted by the vulnerability of physical intimacy between a mother and child. It is a story of completion truer than Agaat's rainbow or indeed Milla's own attempt at autobiography can ever be – yet this story of completion is also, always, compromised because it is coloured by Milla's narrative voice and her perspective. This image prefigures Agaat, as nurse, falling asleep at the feet of the dying Milla, although by that stage, this kind of poignant, honest connection is impossible, and irrecoverable.

The penultimate second person narrative section details Milla's first meeting with Agaat and the day she took Agaat home with her (see also Chapter Six). When Milla first lays eyes on Agaat as she hid in the hearth, her body is described in its entirety, in all the minutiae of her scarring and deformity (657). The fact that our first complete physical description of Agaat is of her as a silent young child heightens the pathos and tragedy of the novel. The impact of trauma on her subjectivity can only be understood by reading her body.

This analysis of the significance of fragments in *Agaat* began with Jakkie's perspective in the prologue, and it seems fitting that it concludes with his comment in the epilogue. After his mother's funeral, Jakkie navigates his way through Milla's death chamber, gawking at the remnants of her and Agaat's existence together. All the emblems of their life are now rendered meaningless: "The murky realm of mothers ... Monstruous specimens everywhere. Samples of some weird mnemonic" (679). The objects in the room are fragments, designed to aid in the retelling of an untellable tale, in the remembering of a life. Reflecting on all that has gone before: his childhood, his life in South Africa, Milla and Agaat and the contemporary politics of the country, Jakkie declares: "I just want to cauterise it all neatly now. A dry white scar" (683). He determines that all that remains is to try

to forget and to "mourn" (683).[104] The novel which began with "an aperture in the skull" and "a leaky heart" ends with a cauterisation (1, 2) – an attempt to put an end to the bleeding; a closing of orifices, and a reversion from the grotesque body to the classical. The story of Agaat and Milla is reduced to a scar, a wound which has been sutured over, but cannot be hidden. The scar remains, as an emblem of this story, an anatomical reminder – a wounded body as metonym for a fragmented familial narrative.

In both *Triomf* and *Agaat*, the revelation of a tortured past is mirrored by the exposure of the victim's fragmented bodies. It is only when characters are faced with the irrefutable evidence of trauma as wreaked on each others' bodies that they are forced to reckon with and recognize the truth of their familial and national narratives and perhaps initiate healing. These moments of "recognition" (Hoffman 2004: 233) are always mediated by bodies. The two novels do not trivialize or reduce to abstraction the individual traumas of the protagonists, nor the national narrative of the trauma of apartheid to which they relate. Van Niekerk's novels do not present any easy solutions to the experience of trauma or false senses of closure. Nevertheless, they insist that trauma must be confronted and this confrontation is only possible via the medium of the body and by disrupting any "saving perspectives".

In exploring the potential for healing from trauma in *Triomf* and *Agaat* I have argued that the emphasis on the creation of a unified body-politic that stems from the TRC narrative is misplaced. In a different context, Leon de Kock suggests that "Symbollically ... perhaps one of the most central gestures of the 'South African' condition [is] the attempt ... to bring a certain order of composure, of settlement, to a place of profound difference" (2004: 22). Following Blanchot, in my readings of these novels I propose that healing might result from the recognition that coherence cannot be achieved, or should not be desired, that "It's the wrong medicine. Completeness" (*Agaat* 219). Van Niekerk's protagonists do not achieve closure; their futures are uncertain and yet in their attempts at remembering they experience moments of compassion and solace and encourage a reconsideration of the meaning of the fragmentary.

**Bodies and Writing**

The structure and content of *Memorandum* is a radical departure from these first two novels (as *Agaat* is a departure from *Triomf*). Joan Hambidge describes *Memorandum* as,

[104]See Buxbaum (2013) for an elaboration of Jakkie's mourning process and Olivier (2011) for a different analysis of Agaat's mourning.

> ’n teks wat met voetnote, skilderye, fabrikasies, drome en versugtinge ’n memorandum aan die leser voorhou. En ’n memorandum intimeer alreeds iets wat na iets anders verwys; ’n teks wat ’n kort opsomming wil wees vir ’n uitvoering van ’n plig. (Hambidge: 2007)[105]

Various components are arranged to form a kind of hybrid work which is not easily classifiable. In an interview with Willie Burger, Van Niekerk expressed her desire to frustrate the reader’s expectations of stories and linear chronologies and has compared *Memorandum* to a labyrinth, which the reader enters and from which she never quite escapes (2009b: 4).

Van Niekerk thus desires to write novels which stand as counterpoints to the classical, ‘well-made’ plot, in the same way that the grotesque body challenges the classical body. The grotesque body challenges false closure and fixed boundaries as do Van Niekerk’s texts. The aim of ensuring “creative closure” is fulfilled on both the structural level of the form of the novel as well as on the level of description and characterisation of embodied subjectivity (see Van Niekerk 1990:3).

Wiid’s description of researching his list of mysterious words has similarities with the labyrinthine process Van Niekerk hopes the reader of *Memorandum* will experience:

> The original list brought forth new lists with every library visit and every new book, whole notebooks full, like a roof leaking in an elusive spot. Our Lady’s apse, the wisdom locked in a glance shared with a cat, fragments, cultures, structures, a list without end. (73)

Wiid understands that the words he has overheard in the hospital (and spelled out phonetically) merely lead him to new references – to new sources of knowledge. There are merely fragments of a “list without end”; completion is impossible and undesired (73). This research process is never-ending, as Wiid is made aware of the limitlessness of knowledge and the impossibility of closure of/in knowledge. Despite his earlier, professional interest in fixing leaks (74), he welcomes the fact that Buytendagh, the librarian who assists him, “was now enlarging the hole talked into my universe by two dying people, with no prospect of healing” (73). The metaphor of the “hole in his universe” could refer to a rupture in his embodied subjectivity which threatens the coherence of his identity and cannot be healed, cannot be sutured over. Wiid’s reaction to this newfound knowledge can be aligned with Jakkie’s physical response to the telegram he receives and Lambert’s response to the family secret. The difference is that Wiid is elated by this rupture.

[105] “A text that with footnotes, paintings, fabrications, dreams and sighs, presents a memorandum to the reader. And a memorandum already suggests something that refers to something else; a text that desires to be a short summary for the performance of a duty” (own translation).

I have already suggested that the bodies of Mr X and Mr Y could be classified as disabled, with reference to the work of Leonard J. Davis (see Chapter One). Davis's theorizing of disability and its connection to fragmentation bears revisiting at this juncture. Wiid's first encounter with X and Y in the hospital ward is disconcerting. He is relieved when they are taken away to the operating theatre: "the two of them had upset me with their babbling and I needed peace and quiet to prepare myself for my ablation" (*Memorandum*, 15). Upon their return, Wiid is even more distressed by their changed appearance (X is now an amputee and Y is blind) and the fact that X's body obstructs his view through the window. Their fragile health and obvious pain does little to calm Wiid, and he tries to "[pull him]self together" (*ibid*.). This expression, though idiomatic, also suggests he attempts to reassert his completeness when faced with such bodily fragmentation. To reiterate Davis's Lacanian explanation of the encounter with a disabled other, Wiid is "threatened with a breaking-up, literally of [his] structure, is threatened with a reminder of [his] incompleteness" (Davis 2410: 1995). Furthermore, the friendship shared between X and Y emphasizes Wiid's own alienation from others. Thus, although their bodies are fragmented, they still are "with" one another. Wiid has no one to be with him, is distanced from any bodies-politic. When Wiid "risked a direct glance" at X and Y he is even more aware that "they were in a bad way. … Like writing on the wall they looked to me" (19). X and Y thus represent a possible foretaste of Wiid's own deteriorating health and physical disintegration. Following Davis's line of reasoning, they are also "uncanny" as their bodies remind Wiid of his repressed, fragmented body-image. Wiid's choice of simile to describe their bodies, "like writing on a wall", is revealing. Beyond the ominous idiomatic meaning, it equates bodies and writing – an argument I have been developing throughout this chapter.

The two tables in Addendum 1 describe in detached, scientific detail the possible outcomes of Wiid's colon operation. These rigorous tables echo Milla's "table of … sickness" and will be referred to again in the final chapter (*Agaat* 10). In both Wiid and Milla's tables, the medical language becomes a way of separating and distancing the sufferer from his or her pain – and thus of disembodying him or her (cf Illich 1976 and 1994). Pain is reduced to words on page; the "bodiography" (cf Nuttall 2004) is shorn of its body. In fact, as opposed to the detailed description of the protagonists' bodies in the previous novels, we know almost nothing of Wiid's physical appearance. At the novel's end, Wiid has decided to abandon the narrative foretold in the strictly ordered information on his table, which allows for no spontaneity and renders him powerless. He embraces instead the unknown, as an embodied subject. He attempts to "re-member" himself.

The liver is an important emblem in *Memorandum*. In Chapter Two I analysed the parallel between

the liver, as the centre of the body, and the city centre. I now explore the significance of this bodily organ in a Nordic myth and its connection to narratives.[106] One of the first words that Wiid remembers from X and Y's conversation is "Yggdrasil" (15). Later, he questions, "What were they to each to other that they could talk like that to each other? A secret language filled with nonsensical references which they bandied to and fro? Lif and Lifthrasil, they called each other at one stage" (23). Wiid, X and Y are thus compared to characters in a Norse myth – with Wiid as Odin. The hospital room is re-imagined as the "rootless world tree" in which Wiid/Odin eavesdrops on X and Y or Lif and Lifthrasil, hoping to understand their secret alphabet (132).[107] Upon trying to type his memorandum to the reader and recollect the events of that fateful night, Wiid reinforces this identification when he states:

> I have a feeling that I find myself in a tangle that is nothing to do with library classification systems or unfathomable references. It is a jungle of sentences and paragraphs in which I have strung myself upside down (26).

Odin impaled himself on his spear and stared into the abyss (132); Wiid spends a sleepless night, drinking red wine (perilous for his health) and trying to recapture and type a dialogue he overhead. He has hung himself up with a string of convoluted and fragmented sentences as he searches for the origin of and explanation to his cancer of the liver and the meaning of his life. Wiid peers into the abyss of the hospital and decides instead to immerse himself in the outside world, to embody space as best he can in the days left to him.[108]

Wiid questions his election as inheritor of such a wealth of knowledge, and he likens the content of X and Y's conversation to an epiphany "that a fairytale, once heard by a child, will continue to grow, until it lies nestled behind the short rib like an extra liver, where thenceforth it will filter everything that's read" (95-96). Narrative, in this metaphor, is embodied such that it develops into another bodily organ, another part of the anatomy. According to that figurative logic, whereas the liver filters everything that is physically consumed, the "fairytale extra liver" filters everything that is

[106] See also the interpretation of Agaat's fennel above with reference to the myth of Prometheus.

[107] Willie Burger has written one of the only comparative studies of Van Niekerk's three texts in which he argues that Van Niekerk "wys die rigting aan in die verkenning van ons menswees en van ons wêreld, deur op 'n ander manier met taal om te gaan" (2009a:14). This could be translated as "Van Niekerk shows the direction for the reconnoitring of our humanity and our world, through a different usage of language or a different kind of language" (own translation). The private, poetic language spoken by X and Y is one possible means of circumventing the inability of language to facilitate conversation and understanding.

[108] There is a similarity between Wiid as Odin and the manner in which Jak dies: "Jak was hanging over the water a bit further along. A broken wattle branch had penetrated his chest in front and emerged from his back" (*Agaat*, 620). In this case, one could argue that Jak has discovered the secret rune – Jakkie's letter – which remains covered in blood in his pocket. He has been effectively impaled by his own anger, his realisation that his son and Agaat shared a truly intimate relationship in which he had no part, and Jakkie's betrayal of his political ideology.

read (mentally consumed) and these two processes are parallel and coterminous. Narratives are embodied and absorbed into the very structure of the body; they are transformative and affect our response to future narratives and the world in general.[109] Embodied subjectivity is thus neither fixed nor complete, but continuously in the process of being remade (or undone) as a result of both mental and physical processes and influences.

**Excrement / Text**

Not only is reading described as a physical experience but so too is writing. Just as reading is akin to the consumption of food (and thus as necessary as food for survival), writing is compared to the act of excretion. When Wiid struggles to overcome his writer's block he is reminded of his father's advice to overcome constipation. Writer's block is akin to constipation, as if words were a bodily excrescence: "A sentence will flow effortlessly and then again not at all. If it won't come you just have to have faith and wait patiently for a while. Quietly on your commo e, as my father used to say" (82). The comparison of the writing process with a bowel movement is quite striking. It is reminiscent of one of the earliest scenes in which the reader encounters Leopold Bloom in *Ulysses*.[110] The scatological theme occurs in Van Niekerk's previous two novels: in Treppie's obsession with easing his constipation and the description of the impact of Milla's laxatives (which in addition to a bowel movement, produce a loquacious internal monologue).[111] It is also present in

[109] There is an early biblical reference to the consumption of narratives and words in the "The Book of Ezekiel". This Old Testament story describes Ezekiel's vision of God riding a fiery chariot. As Karen Armstrong relates this encounter: "A hand stretched towards Ezekiel holding a scroll, which was inscribed with 'lamentations, wailing, and moanings'. 'Eat this scroll,' a divine voice commanded him, 'feed and be satisfied by the scroll I am giving you.' When he forced it down, accepting the pain and misery of his exile, Ezekiel found that 'it tasted sweet as honey'" (2007:10). Armstrong explains that from this moment, "the Israelites would make contact with their God in sacred writings, rather than a shrine". While the religious analogue does not apply in *Memorandum*, the equation of reading with an embodied experience of "absorbing" a text, "making it part of [one's] inmost being"(2007:11) clearly has a long history and is an illuminating reference point for Wiid's secular metaphor of reading in *Memorandum.*

[110] In Joyce's *Ulysses*, Bloom too finds reading a conducive activity while "asquat on the cuckstool" (1922:83): "he allowed his bowels to ease themselves quietly as he read" (84). He in turn imagines writing his own short story: "might manage a sketch. … Invent a story for some proverb which? Time I used to try jotting down on my cuff what she said dressing" (1922: 84).

[111] In *Triomf* , the chapter entitled "Peace on Earth", begins "To shit is a fine skill, that's for fucken sure. And if anything, a turd is a work of art" (311). Then follows a paragraph of hilarious description of different kinds of such art works, from the connoisseur of shit himself. Treppie passes the time reading newspapers and concludes that the "whole world is just names and nothing is what it is and everything's what it's not, it's all in the mind! And the mind's a bottomless pit" (327). At the moment that "he feels his guts moving" he "tears the newspapers into small pieces. He's making confetti" (328). He feels "Emptied and unburdened. Everything well. Peace on earth" (328). Treppie makes confetti, but Bloom merely tears the newspaper to use as toilet paper (85). Burger suggests that for Treppie the only reality that can be relied on is the material reality that is experienced through the body (2000:12). He argues that for Treppie it is only "kak" that transcends description, that is inescapably 'what it is' (2000: 12). Interestingly, as Burger shows, this is made explicit in the original Afrikaans when Treppie uses word play to show how things change depending on one's perspective: "die maan is 'n naam, lag is gal, our lord is 'n drol, net kak is all side same side" (quoted in Burger 2000:12). In the English translation, such reverse readings don't work and the "what's in a name?" sequence becomes: "The moon is a sickle, a coin or a pickle, teaching is cheating, God is a dog, just Eve is all side same side" (*Triomf* 289). The replacement palindrome reveals more about Treppie's attitude to women than materiality and access to a world beyond dissembling language.

*Die Sneeuslaper.*[112] Throughout this chapter, I have illustrated that language is embodied and narratives are imbibed (in addition to inscribed on the body). It therefore seems that the logical conclusion to this process is for narratives to be excreted or, for narratives and excretion to be produced concurrently. The emphasis on excrement is grotesque, as it affirms that the border between body and world is permeable – bodies both consume and excrete the wor(l)d.

Kristeva has insisted on the importance of excrement for the abject:

> Contrary to what enters the mouth and nourishes, what goes out of the body, out of its pores and openings, points to the infinitude of the body proper and gives rise to abjection. Fecal matter signifies, as it were, what never ceases to separate from a body in a state of permanent loss in order to become *autonomous, distinct* from the mixtures, alterations, and decay that run through it. That is the price the body must pay if it is to become *clean and proper* (1982: 108).

Fecal matter emphasises the openness of the body and signifies something which both is and is not part of the subject. It acts as a permanent reminder of the futility of the body's struggle to achieve a state of permanent cleanliness and completion. In a discussion of the TRC's "reliance on a philosophy of catharsis", Louise Bethlehem adopts Adam Sitze's term, "scatological historiography":

> It is not only the case that "the past is configured as a waste product to be expunged from the system" as Sitze (2003:15) claims – but the figuration of the body-politic-as-system devolves back onto the privileged trope of the system-as-body, and back onto the body as the body of the victim. (Bethlehem 2006: 78)

The idea of a scatological historiography could prove quite useful. In order for her protagonists to come to terms with their pasts, these experiences must be literally flushed out of their systems (as Agaat attempts above when the maps are unravelled). These social pariahs – the Benades, Milla, Agaat and Wiid – have been "expunged" from the "body-politic-as-system".

A further suggestion for understanding the embodiment of text and the connection between the

[112] See Buxbaum (2012b). In the title story, "Die Sneeuslaper", a "swerwer" relates a story of his successful bowel movements on the train from Amsterdam to Sloterdijk. Each morning he sings his morning prayer, like a trickster casting a dark spell:

> En wat jy weet is wat jy nie weet nie.
> En wat jy besit is wat jy nie het nie.
> En waar jy is, is nie waar jy is nie. (120)

These words echo Treppie's in the footnote above.

abject and the grotesque is provided by Sue Vice who (re)considers the relationship between the grotesque and the abject – and by implication the debt owed by Julia Kristeva to Mikhail Bakhtin (1997:161). While I do not wish to become caught up in a comparative analysis of Bakhtin and Kristeva's philosophy, I do wish to focus on Vice's analysis of their treatment of the text, "the area in which Bakhtin and Kristeva come closest to each other" (1997:164), in particular and since both the abject and the grotesque have been discussed in this chapter, it is worth making their connections more explicit. Vice maintains that,

> In the end, what is grotesque or abject is the text itself, whether or not it is concerned with images from either realm.[113] The body which can best be described as operating along its margins, its protuberances and convexities, or administering the shock of abjection through an unexpected plunge into different and disorientating subject positions, is that of the text. The process of dialogism and intertextualiy both act like a lower bodily stratum, to undermine the idea of a sleek classical text, ruled by an upper stratum of a single author whose word is truth. …
>
> Just as Bakhtin claims the carnival reaches its fullest realization in literary form, Kristeva suggests that writing itself is a kind of defilement rite, which allows expression to the abject in a contained manner. … the abject within a text might be signaled by a slipping subject position; the disorder and boundary-infringement of unorthodox grammar; representing objects as subjects; aligning unusual adjectives with certain nouns" (1997:164 &170-1).

The novels in Van Niekerk's oeuvre do indeed operate along their margins and astonish and disorientate the reader with their 'openness' and their refusal to pander to the narrative conventions of closure or authorial omniscience. Vice's intervention into the analysis of the work of Bakhtin and Kristeva is vital as she extracts and illuminates similarities in their work and allows them to be read as existing along the same critical continuum. Furthermore, her insistence that it is in their treatment of the text that these two critics are in strongest accord allows me to draw together the strands of my discussions on the grotesque body, abjection and the relationship between narrative and body fragments. Vice's gloss on Bakhtin and Kristeva's understanding of the text seems to have definite applicability to Van Niekerk's oeuvre and its effects on the reader, but also on the various texts within the novels and their impact on Van Niekerk's protagonists – which has been the focus of my argument. If the text is considered the abject or grotesque body par excellence, then it follows that to talk of "the moment of 'interchange', as Bakhtin calls it, where the body transgresses its own

[113] Kristeva insists that, "because it occupies its place, because it hence decks itself out in the sacred power of horror, literature may also involve not an ultimate resistance to but an unveiling of the abject: an elaboration, a discharge, and a hollowing out of abjection through the Crisis of the Word" (1982:208).

limits" (Vice: 1997: 165) is to talk of the relationship between bodies and text as well as between bodies themselves. Both of these relationships have been illustrated at length in the course of this comparative analysis.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, I return to the questions raised by Boehmer's thesis with which this chapter began. Firstly, in both *Triomf* and *Agaat*, the revelation of a tortured past is mirrored by the exposure of the protagonists' fragmented bodies. Although Lambert's entire body is revealed at the emotional climax of *Triomf*, it is still revealed as a body-in-fragments; the whole is grotesque and he experiences self-abjection. Thus, when the 'wallpaper' has been torn down and 'saving perspectives' debunked, embodied subjectivity can similarly no longer be considered as coherent or seamless. Secondly, in these texts there are several attempts at projecting a unified subjectivity or creating completion. However, as Milla comes to realise, narrative completion is a (impossible) construct which tends to foreshorten alternate readings and enforce closure in a way that is limiting and suffocating. The only sincere attainment of healing suggested in the texts is fleeting and spontaneous. It occurs when bodies connect in an intimate relationship and are exposed as vulnerable and trusting – as with the young Agaat. Relationships with others can encourage a sense of belonging to a family unit or the bodies-politic. This intimacy fosters a sense of personal security and fulfillment – as Mol experiences. Mercy and compassion, for oneself and for others, can potentially overcome the tenuousness of anatomical structure and the fragility of identity. The suggestion appears to be that completion is impossible in the absence of intimacy. Thirdly, I have shown that there is a continuous metaphorical kinship between anatomical fragments and narrative fragments which impact on characters' subjectivity. Narratives are embodied and the connection between text and body is permeable and porous. Agaat, Milla, Treppie, Mol, Lambert and Wiid all attempt self-articulation via the medium of the body; they attempt to transfigure their bodies into their own personal narrative, although this attempt is not always successful. The protagonists of these novels prove incapable of telling their stories, and the narratives they do have recourse to, remain fragmentary. In this regard, I attempted to draw attention to an alternative understanding of healing from trauma that is not necessarily predicated on attaining narrative coherence. Nevertheless, in the process of revealing the narrative of their bodies, their scars and physical trauma, these characters achieve a greater degree of honesty and understanding than would be possible through speech. In Boehmer's phraseology, bodies do indeed *figure* and self-articulation is always embodied.

Boehmer's comparison between the body and narrative is based on a reading of postcolonial

national narratives. It should be stated that Van Niekerk is not explicitly criticising the post-apartheid nationalist narrative, rather, she is criticising an ideological reading of the past. The narratives in her fictions are thus primarily retrospective. She does expose fault lines in the Afrikaner nationalist narrative, but she also exposes and challenges normative familial and cultural narrative histories. Nevertheless, the adoption of Boehmer's framework has, I believe, been invaluable in that it has enabled me to explore the meaning of fragmentation in its various guises: a literal anatomical fragmentation, metaphorical bodily fragmentation, the fragmentation of the mirrored body-image, traumatic fragmentation, the fragmentary impact of oppressive power regimes, narrative fragmentation and lastly, the grotesque and abject fragment. Boehmer's reading allows these to be read in the context of self-articulation and the transfiguration of the body. Her thesis further encourages these fragments to be read in relation to each other such that one can infer a narrative fragmentation from physical fragmentation and so forth. The borderlines of the body and the fragmentation of the same have been proved to be marks of oppression and power relations (as argued by Veit-Wild and Boehmer). The emphasis on anatomical fragments, especially those in the lower body strata, affects a "symbolic inversion" (to use Babcock's phrase, quoted in Stallybrass and White 1986:20) which troubles other socio-political hierarchies. This explicitly challenges the hierarchy of theory and the abstract, arguing instead for an awareness of the physical, the emotional, and the irreducible excrement. Boehmer's framework allows me to combine an analysis of the challenges to hegemonic narrative and to the classical, closed body. Those critics who have explored the former in Van Niekerk's texts have largely ignored the latter. Those who have commented on the grotesque and explicit physical imagery (especially in *Triomf*) tend to have read this in isolation from the rest of the text and Van Niekerk's broader intentions. This oversight detracts from an understanding of the symbolic importance of visceral anatomical descriptions and by implication diminishes the impact of her fiction.

The protagonists of Van Niekerk's fiction all exhibit a degree of fragmentation – they are bound together tenuously, their bodies and their relationships exist by the "power of mercy".

## Chapter Four

## Of Binoculars and Peepholes: [Collapsing] the Distance between Self and Other[114]

The trope of 'looking' is central to Van Niekerk's fiction. In Chapter Three I focused on a narcissistic kind of looking-relation, in which protagonists examine their fragmented reflections in mirrors, or stare in horror at their own bodies. I also suggested that the act of looking with compassion at the bodies of others can potentially foster healing if not cohesion. In this chapter I am interested in the different kinds of intersubjective looking-relations featured in these three texts. I consider whether looking can result in empathy or understanding, or whether it remains an act of voyeurism or objectification. In this regard, it is worth noting the numerous references to binoculars and peepholes in all three novels. In the analysis to follow, I focus on these motifs in an attempt to understand the meaning of different versions of what Milla terms the "eye game" (*Agaat* 483). In the context of relations based on sight, I explore how the seeing subject comes to understand the embodied subjectivity of others.

### Relations of Looking and the Apartheid Scopic Regime

In *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger proposes that with the experience of sight comes the realization "that we can also be seen" (1972: 9). Thus sight always exists in the context of relationships: "The reciprocal nature of vision is more fundamental than that of spoken dialogue. And often dialogue is an attempt to verbalise this" (*Ibid.*). Berger seems to take the reciprocity of visual encounters for granted, without sufficiently considering the political dimensions of sight. This elision detracts from his comments as looking-relations are often, if not always, governed by an implicit or explicit hierarchy or power relation. Furthermore, it is the case that certain sectors of society are often, deliberately or obliviously, rendered "invisible" (see for example Budesta Batanda et al 2013). Invisibility can be a form of oppression or exclusion as well as a tactical choice (*Ibid.*: 6-7).[115] Thus merely because we are capable of sight it does not necessarily follow that we will see others or indeed that those who see, can or will be seen. Sight is thus not necessarily conducive to intimacy or reciprocity but it is, I argue, necessarily embedded in the context of relationships. As Grosz explains:

> Of all the senses, vision remains the one which most readily confirms the separation of subject from object. Vision performs a distancing function, leaving the looker

[114] Aspects of the discussion on *Triomf* has been published in Buxbaum (2012a).

[115] In their introduction to the collection *Writing Invisibility*, Budesta Batanda, Wanjiku Kihato and Wilhelm-Solomon explain that in their usage of the term, invisibility "is not the same as marginality, poverty or vulnerability, though it overlaps with them. ... it can also be a form of power for marginalised groups. It can be a strategy to evade detection … Invisibility may also refer to the occult or spiritual elements in city life" (2013: 6-7).

> unimplicated in or uncontaminated by its object. With all of the other senses, there is a contiguity between subject and object, if not an internalization and incorporation of the object by the subject. … As Sartre (1974) recognized, the look is the domain of domination and mastery; it provides access to its object without necessarily being in contact with it. Moreover the visual is the most amenable of the senses to spatialization. (1994: 38)

Part of the aim of this chapter is to differentiate between these different "ways of seeing" (to quote and write back to Berger) in Van Niekerk's three novels and to determine whether in fact reciprocal looking-relations occur between any of Van Niekerk's characters and whether these relations of looking can be theorised in a different manner.

In search of an alternative manner in which to consider relations of looking, I follow Jennifer Schmidt's approach in an article on "scopophilic desires" (2010). Schmidt refers to the feminist film critic E. Ann Kaplan, who formulates the problem thus:

> The question is how to move beyond the literal fact of subject-object looking, with its necessarily objectifying implications. How can people move to an understanding of subjectivity and mutuality on the level of approaching an Other? (quoted in Schmidt 2010: 93)

Kaplan's question is, I maintain, one which occupies and underpins Van Niekerk's work. The question is whether mutuality can ever be achieved in the sphere of the visual; whether looking can ever be reciprocal, or can only exist in the realm of objectification. Schmidt responds to this dilemma by exploring whether, rather than "[t]he surreptitious use of the gaze", a visual relationship based on mutuality, "an intersubjective looking-relation that is grounded in mutuality rather than asymmetrical displays of power", can be found (97). This is a useful distinction in attempting to resolve the difference between (potentially) reciprocal visual encounters and a gaze which implies a hierarchical power relation and one to which I will return in my discussion of voyeurism and spying in *Triomf* and *Agaat*.

The "distancing function" (Grosz 1994:38) of vision is apparent and perhaps emblematic in the Foucauldian "technologies of power" of the apartheid regime. During apartheid, relationships were governed by racist laws, stereotypes, and *perceptions* (rather than intimate conversations or reciprocal interactions). Van Niekerk explores this dominance of the visual in encounters with others and in the process exposes the "ensemble of practices" which made up the apartheid "scopic regime" – that is, "an ensemble of visual practices that produces a socially sanctioned form of

facticity" (Feldman quoted in Bethlehem 2006: 82). In other words, these ways of seeing others justify and produce a certain way of being or mode of existence (cf Fanon 1967). In this context, Bethlehem is referring to Allen Feldman's definition of a "scopic regime":

> By scopic regime I mean the agendas and techniques of political visualisation: the regimens that prescribe modes of seeing and object visibility and that proscribe or render untenable other modes and objects of perception. A scopic regime is an ensemble of practices and discourses that establish the truth claims, typicality, and credibility of visual acts and objects and politically correct modes of seeing. (quoted in Bethlehem 2006: 107)

The apartheid scopic regime can be considered as a form of state-sanctioned myopia; it attempted to limit visual practices such that what was seen, who was seen, where they were seen and the manner in which they were seen accorded strictly with apartheid racial ideology and its explicit hierarchy. With reference to this "hierarchy of perception", in "Living in the Interregnum" Nadine Gordimer wrote: "The weird ordering of the collective life, in South Africa, has slipped its special contact lens into the eyes of whites; we actually *see* blacks differently, which includes *not seeing*, not noticing their unnatural absence, since there are so many perfectly ordinary avenues of daily life … where blacks have never been allowed in, and so one has forgotten that they could be, might be, encountered there" (1982: 265). Or, as Mbembe writes of colonial power regimes, "The removal of the native from the historically existing occurs when the colonizer chooses – and has the means to – not to look at, see, or hear him/her – not, that is, to acknowledge any human attribute in him/her. From this instant, the native *is* only in so far as he/she is a *thing denied*, *is* only as *something deniable*" (2001: 187). Sight, indeed, was the sense which the apartheid government relied on to ensure the success of its discriminatory policies. Re-appropriating Susan Sontag's pithy aphorism about photographic subjects, one could say of South Africa under apartheid, that "the other, even when not an enemy, is regarded as someone only to be seen, not someone (like us) who also sees" (2003: 65). According to apartheid logic whiteness, then, was the norm, such that the white body itself is rendered invisible, and the political implications of blackness are inextricably connected with the black body; 'non-whites' (in the horrific negating terminology of the regime) are bound to their bodies – to be exploited as bodies. Thus, to be embodied in this sense not only indicates lesser value or even a denial of mind, but quite simply, as Achille Mbembe (2001: 187) suggests, the denial of personhood. As Frantz Fanon words it, "in the white world", the "racial epidermal schema" dominates (1967:78-79). Fanon hauntingly describes being the recipient of such a cripping white gaze: "My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recoloured, clad in mourning in that winter day" (80). He feels as if "dissected under white eyes, the only real eyes. I

am *fixed*" (86). It is within this dominant historical and ideological framework that one must consider the looking-relations of Van Niekerk's fictional characters. In *Triomf*, the apartheid scopic regime is subverted with the insistence that the bodies of the white protagonists be *seen*; their fragile, failing grotesque bodies take centre stage. However, the Benades also encounter black residents of the city who have previously been "invisible" to them. In *Agaat*, although the narrative is never revealed from Agaat's perspective, only Milla's retelling of it, we are nonetheless conscious of Agaat as a seeing subject, not merely one who is seen by Milla.

**Bodies on Display**

The sense of being constantly under observation and subject to state surveillance is emphasized in *Triomf* as a police helicopter is often remarked upon, circling the sky above. In response to this ever-present helicopter, Lambert Benade encourages his family to gather outside the house, "So the neighbours and the people in the helicopter could see the Benades had nothing to hide" (*Triomf* 271). His actions would imply that being seen is equated with a kind of innocence and assertion of one's right to be seen.

Marlene Dumas's exhibition staged in Rotterdam in February 1993, sardonically entitled, 'Give the People What They Want', provides a productive starting point for this discussion of the way in which bodies are displayed. The title painting depicts a young girl, holding open a cloth or towel to reveal her nudity (1992). In this exhibition, the figure of the naked girl is repeated in different poses: blindfolded with arms raised high, suggesting innocence or surrender ('Justice', 1993) and staring off to the side, possibly smirking ('Liberty', 1993). In her artist's statement for the exhibition, Dumas wrote:

> 1994 will see the first-ever introduction of the democratic vote for all peoples in South Africa. I wouldn't mount this show with this title there now. And as Spike Lee would say: if you don't understand why not, you're probably white. (2007: 93)

Dumas's statement provides a useful framework in which to consider *Triomf* and its historical context. In a sense, *Triomf* is the literary equivalent of the show that Dumas was reluctant to mount in South Africa in 1994. Van Niekerk "gives the people what they want" by exposing the simultaneously hilarious and shocking lives of the neighbourhood pariahs, the Benades. To quote Dumas again, "It was a compliment when someone once described my work as Cheap Thrills. It wasn't meant as a compliment" (93). The same ambiguity exists, to a degree, in the reception of Van

Niekerk's novel.[116] I argue that by displaying these bodies, Van Niekerk is not merely depicting abjection or indulging the reader's voyeuristic urges, rather she is enquiring whether empathy and intimate relations can be fostered through an engagement with the body of others and thus whether a form of visual communication can be conceived of beyond the myths on which apartheid was based.

The Benades are neighbourhood pariahs, ostracized by the whole street, based primarily on their behaviour, their grotesque bodies and the poverty explicit in their appearance. Lambert reports on a neighbour's complaints about the family:

> … about Pop's zips that always hung open, and his mother [Mol] who walked around with no panties all day long. And that they must watch out before he mobilised the whole neighbourhood against them, 'cause they were sticking out like a sore finger. (*Triomf*, 276)

The novel's narrative structure plays with the idea of surfaces and depth, of the experience of embodied subjectivity as opposed to body image. Although a detailed analysis of the formal structural elements of this novel falls beyond the scope of this chapter, it is useful to briefly refer to the work of Gérard Genette (1980). Waugh claims that in revising the existing "theories of narrative point of view", Genette's "most innovative contribution is the distinction between mode and voice, that is, the theoretical separation between the question *who sees?* (the focalizer) and *who tells?* (the narrative instance)" (2006: 276).[117] Each chapter of *Triomf* is told in the third person narrative style, but Mol, Pop, Treppie and Lambert alternate as the focaliser of each chapter and sometimes focalisers change within chapters. Using Genette's terms, this could be classified as "internal focalization" with "variable focalization" or even "multiple focalization" (1980: 189).[118] Thus the reader is encouraged to feel empathy for the focaliser and simultaneously recall the other family members' at times less than sympathetic perspective of that character. Furthermore, the focaliser's perspective on events is often challenged or exposed by other focalisers' contrasting point of view. The third person narrative voice also exposes the limited perspective of the focaliser. The Benades are thus simultaneously seen as both objects and subjects, as surface and depth. It is for this reason that the Benades are not merely abject, or rather are not abject merely for the sake of provoking

[116] See Shaun de Waal (1999), Màri-Anne Swartz (1994) and Frederik De Jager (1999) for details of *Triomf's* reception. De Jager, the book's editor, recalls the praise the novel was accorded, but also receiving hate mail when it was first published in 1994 (1999).

[117] Although Genette wished to discourage the "too specifically visual connotations" of the existing terms "*vision, field* and *point of view*" and for that reason adopted "the slightly more abstract term *focalization*" (1980:189).

[118] Variable focalization means the focalising alternates between characters in the novel. Multiple focalization is similar, with the added meaning that several characters' perspectives may be given on the same event.

shock or horror.

**The Message of Binoculars and Peepholes**

Binoculars function as a leitmotif in this novel (and indeed recur frequently in Van Niekerk's oeuvre: in "Die vrou wat haar verkyker vergeet het" and *Die Sneeuslaper*). I will first briefly discuss the general symbolism of binoculars prior to discussing a few incidents involving binoculars in these novels to illustrate my arguments.

If the "medium is the message", as Marshall Mcluhan and Quentin Fiore famously insisted, and "all media are extensions of some human faculty – psychic or physical" (1967: 26) – it follows to ask what the message of the binoculars is**.** Binoculars could be understood as a proxy, even a hyperbole, for the sense of sight. The binoculars are an extension of the eye. They function in order to make that which is far, close – and in this sense they ostensibly act to collapse the distance separating the audience and the spectacle being viewed. There is thus an *illusion* of closeness, but the spectator remains (safely) separated from that which he or she is *watching*. The spectator might for an instant believe that the spectacle being viewed is close enough to touch (that in fact is the binoculars illusory claim to fame, their purpose), but the only sense which can truly be heightened is that of sight. Binoculars may thus thwart a desire to be a part of an event; but can also foster spying, in which case there is a desire to remain separate or hidden, to be an invisible observer. Peepholes, on the other hand, require much greater physical proximity to the object being observed; their purpose is exclusively spying or voyeurism. Neither binoculars nor peepholes foster reciprocity and furthermore, binoculars enable the observer to claim a "god's eye view" (Davis 1997: 10).[119] In times of violent confrontations, or war, one might also imagine binoculars put to service in scanning the landscape on the lookout for 'enemy troops'. In such a situation, the telescopic sights might be placed atop firearms, perhaps in the form of sniper rifles – their magnifying power far from neutral in this case. A similar collocation might be found in hunting expeditions: a manly pursuit no doubt prevalent on the *plaas*, where hunting prowess is equated with masculinity. Binoculars alone encourage the disinterested observer; binoculars paired with weaponry encourage violent action, from a safe distance.

In *Triomf*, Lambert attains a pair of binoculars and a gun in exchange for his meal vouchers from Spur (which the Benades won and he subsequently stole). Lambert walks to the rubbish dump in

[119] In fact, one of the most resonant images of the archetypal colonial explorer is of a man in khaki, pith helmet and binoculars hanging around his neck. The binoculars assist in bringing the "exotic" landscape and its peoples into focus.

order to collect empty wine bags in which he can store petrol for the envisioned trek north after the election. At the dump he encounters Sonnyboy, and in order to appreciate the impact of that meeting, a few comments are necessary on the interactions Lambert has in the street on his way there. In Triomf itself, Lambert feels empowered and sure of himself. His anxiety about his appearance doesn't extend to how he is perceived by his neighbours in this poor white suburb. However, once he ventures beyond the confines of Triomf, his confidence is shaken and his identity questioned. He ponders his route: he "wanted to go to the dumps in Bosmont, but that's too far in this heat. And the fucken hotnots always stare at him, like he's a fucken kaffir or something" (215). Lambert has clearly internalized the racial classification system (and range of pejorative names) on which apartheid is built. There is also the suggestion that his white skin refuses to signify in the way he desires; his body is read differently by those he has no hesitation in reading as less than him. On another occasion in Bosmont, an area designated 'coloured', Lambert is aroused by the sight of "young Coloured girls": "Some of them were lekker white … but they're still Coloured, you can see it. You can see it by their hair and those missing front teeth" (215). Lambert believes their race is encoded in their appearance, that he can correctly read the signs of their bodies echoing the influential pseudo-sciences of physiognomy and phrenology. However, choosing to avoid another experience of being mocked, Lambert decides on the Martindale dump which is accessed via the Triomf streets. On his way, he is called over by two gun-carrying recruiters for the right-wing Afrikaner Weerstandbeweging (AWB). He decides to "go and have a look"; however, "he sees quickly it's not him who's doing the looking. It's them" (217). In both these encounters then, Lambert's identity as a seeing subject and his fluency in the "agendas and techniques of political visualisation" (Feldman, quoted in Bethlehem 2006:107) of the apartheid regime are challenged. As a result of his appearance, his declared allegiance to the National Party and his strange style of expressing himself, he is mocked and harassed by the recruiters: "'Leave the rubbish alone, man,' says Du Pisanie. 'We're wasting our time with him, he's just a piece of rubbish, man'" (*Triomf* 220). Lambert is ultimately determined as having insufficient utility for the AWB; he is rendered invisible by them. This accumulation of uncertainty and indeterminacy is an important context for what happens next. The instability of racialised identity categories will be exploded by the time he reaches the dump.

Lambert is rescued from an epileptic fit at the dump by Sonnyboy whose appearance baffles him. At first Lambert is certain "he sees a kaffir" (223), but "he looks rough, like he's a rough, loose kaffir or something. But Lambert's not sure" (224). He wears a beaded anklet: "Red and green and yellow. Almost ANC, he thinks. Almost Inkatha. But not quite. He wonders what this yellow kaffir's case is. He's a different kind, this one" (224). Lambert's interpretation strategies fail in the face of a man

who refuses classification. The irony and failure of the apartheid system of taxonomy is here rendered explicit. De Kock's nuanced analysis of this pivotal exchange is based on the visual interaction between Lambert and Sonnyboy and the fact that, although he can see Sonnyboy, Lambert remains incapable of 'reading' him, or of interpreting what it is he sees since Sonnyboy eludes all the apartheid racial categories and stereotypes (De Kock 2010: 24–28). Sonnyboy's hybrid language also fails to locate him or settle him. When Sonnyboy declares, "Hear, hear! ... Hierie whitey kannie my classify nie!" (227), De Kock insists that, "[t]he extent to which this crowning moment of symbolic mastery turns the tables on whiteness, or the orthodox version of Apartheid whiteness for which Lambert is a proxy, cannot be overstated" (2010: 27).

Lambert fails to reduce Sonnyboy's identity to his skin colour, to the visual clues of his body. His English is not as fluent as Sonnyboy's hybrid, code-switching one. He does however successfully learn the syntax of Sonnyboy's handshake. In addition to the gun and binoculars he receives in their bartering exchange, Sonnyboy gives Lamber the gift of a "mbira" which he promises to practice (232). Not quite in concert with the gun and binoculars, this traditional musical instrument perhaps suggests another kind of engagement with others, a third way, through artistic media, through innovation and creativity, which might rupture staid ideological doctrines.

I wish to extend this argument by tracing the fate of these binoculars and their implications for "intersubjective looking-relations" (Schmidt 2010: 97). Firstly, however, it is worth discussing what Lambert sees the first time he uses the binoculars. Sonnyboy draws his attention to the graffiti on the rubbish containers at the dump:

> "One settler, one bullet," Lambert reads. The letters have been scratched with a nail onto the rusted side of the container.
> "…. Daai kak is all over the city geskrywe, man. Kill this, kill that, one this, one that, viva this, viva that, long live this, that and the other. I love the NP, I love Dingaan, I love Tokyo, I love Phama, I love Amy. So much love in this place it sounds like fucken paradise! I love all that stuff! Ek kan nie worry oor daai kak nie, my man. I just want to show you. This thing here [the binoculars] works." (231–232)

It is significant that the binoculars are initially used to illustrate the cacophony of competing claims of political allegiance in the city, the irony of these expressions of love and hate and the simultaneous negation of any threat of violence or real affection behind them. These slogans are merely a backdrop to prove that the binoculars work, as well as a contextual backdrop to the politics

of this fictional representation of South Africa in transition. They reveal the 'wallpaper' decorating the city, as Treppie would phrase it. Neither Lambert nor Sonnyboy are interested in the actual slogans. Lambert remains unconvinced that he should accept the binoculars:

> "What can I do with it, the binoculars now? I'm not a spy!"
> "Well," says Sonnyboy, "you can show your girl the city. From high places." (232)

Sonnyboy's answer implies that the binoculars will enable Lambert to assert himself as a subject in the city, to look on others (rather than be gawked at, as he has just been by the AWB recruiters) and to impress a girl. That this "thing here" works, implies that Lambert is potentially empowered – not as a spy, but as an inhabitant of the city, who can claim his space in it, who can stake a claim to high places, to a disembodied viewpoint which allows him a means of escaping his grotesque body.

Despite declaring to Sonnyboy that he is not a spy, Lambert has previously spied on his neighbour's party and the women across the road. He is a voyeur who is obsessed with scenes of intimacy, scenes which are foreign and unimaginable to him. Thus he peeps at the neighbours drunkenly caressing each other in their skimpy swim suits (106) and the lesbians across the road engaged in sexual acts involving fruit salad (188-193). Both scenes, as described from Lambert's perspective, are excessive and humorous. Yet Lambert also desires them; he experiences these acts voyeuristically, since spying on others engaged in acts of sexual intimacy is the only way he can begin to comprehend them. As Chris van der Merwe argues, Lambert's spying is a sign of his longing for a life that he cannot have (1999). Nevertheless his actions, his 'surreptitious gaze', simultaneously affirm his separateness, his sense of isolation from social interaction and his otherness. The affronted neighbour's response is grounded in the logic of the apartheid scopic regime and taxonomy: "Come here, you waste of white skin who peeps at us when we braai!"(110).[120]

In an article on the depiction of lesbian desire in *Triomf* and Yvette Christiansë's *Unconfessed*, Jessica Murray analyses Lambert's peeping at the lesbians across the road. Murray provides a nuanced discussion of the concluding image of the chapter in which "the reader is ... left with a layered gaze as Mol watches Lambert watching the lesbian couple's home in the 'pitch dark' night" (93). Quoting Kathleen Schroeder's explication of the dynamics of voyeurism, in which the voyeur

[120]The horror and disgust which the Benades's appearance arouses in their neighbours and the local National Party politicians is in stark opposition to the paternalistic approach historically adopted by the National Party to 'uplift' the so-called poor whites. In a discussion of the origins of the welfare state in South Africa, Jeremy Seekings, concludes that the policies initiated by the government in the late 1920s to alleviate poverty among whites were motivated by a desire to "re-establish the clear racial hierarchy" (2007: 393).

"seeks to establish himself as the 'mastering presence'" (93) by virtue of being concealed from the objects of his fascination, Murray suggests that

> Lambert is certainly trying to appropriate this controlling presence by watching the lesbian couple without their knowledge. The reader's gaze, however, spans more than that of Lambert, and we see his victim, Mol, exerting a gaze on him without his awareness. While the author subtly undercuts the power of Lambert's gaze by subjecting him to Mol's gaze, Mol's ability to exert power through the gaze must remain questionable. (93–94)

However, "[e]ven if [Mol] cannot claim much power through her gaze, she questions Lambert's ability to be an "active controlling" presence through his "curious gaze" (Mulvey quoted in Murray 94). Although the reader is never allowed to 'witness' the looks exchanged between the neighbours themselves, Murray suggests that in these secret glances, an alternative, loving, reciprocal looking-relation is implied, but never revealed. This alternative possibility exists in the margins of the text.

After acquiring the binoculars, Lambert becomes a kind of "Urban angel" (271), patrolling the streets at night with his binoculars and gun: "It's just him, Lambert, who knows where to look. Only he sees everything there is to be seen. 'Cause he's a patrolman" (280). As a patrolman, Lambert exists as a parody of the apartheid police and their surveillance activities. The binoculars provide Lambert with a false sense of power and an inflated sense of his own perceptive skills. As De Kock has argued, Lambert is precisely incapable of seeing "everything there is to be seen" and of understanding or deciphering anything that he does see (2010). Treppie subsequently recruits Lambert to use the binoculars to spy on the inhabitants of the police flats – thus inverting the conventional subject-object relation. The binoculars enable them to construct their own narrative, to be both spectators and directors: "Now the flats look like lots of little square movies, all running at the same time on a big screen" (286). However, none of the "movies" are entertaining. Treppie is drunk and at his most morose, and Lambert, stricken, attempts to cheer him up. Treppie remains inconsolable and after reciting a series of incoherent mythical narratives and folk tales describing the moon as seen through the lens, he concludes: "Maybe it's rubbish, Lambert, but who's going to open your eyes for you? Fuck those binoculars of yours, man, fuck them! It's all in the mind" (289). "Opening your eyes" in this case has nothing to do with the visual, with the hyperbolic vision supposedly allowed by binoculars.

There is a clear distinction in the novel between simply looking at and understanding what one sees. The binoculars fail to provide Lambert and Treppie access to another artistic realm or to escape

from their tawdry existence. The imaginative freedom they promised fails to materialise. And yet, Treppie is the erstwhile trickster figure who recognizes the importance of occasionally obscuring the harsh facts of reality: "What the eye doesn't see, the heart can't grieve for" (454). Although he himself cannot find an imaginative escape in the puerile television soap operas and adverts (as Mol and Pop can) he recognizes the need to tell stories in order to 'give the people what they want': "And then Treppie would say he couldn't help it, that's what the people, meaning them [the Benades], wanted from him. A story for every occasion" (466). In concocting stories and in writing poetry, Treppie is able to re-interpret the world around him, to artistically reflect on life and indulge his creative impulses. Lambert achieves something similar with his painting. The imagination allows for a more palatable view on life than the binoculars – it offers the possibility of transcendence.

**Moments of Empathy and Encounters with Others**

I have alluded to Lambert's 'peeping' through walls and fences, voyeuristically and longingly. At other points in the narrative, several of the protagonists spy on each other (cf Swartz 1994), or hide things, fearing discovery, fearing being watched. Treppie says, "what is the world if not one huge sitcom" (458). I now wish to extend the analysis of the metaphor of the peephole to determine whether there is a sense in which it may foster empathy, or rather express the desire for empathy, even though 'peeping' remains "surreptitious", to use Schmidt's (2010) phrase. For example, when Pop peeps "into Mol's depths", her body reveals the pain she is incapable of articulating.[121]

At several points in the novel, the protagonists express the desire to see the world through another's perspective or from another's point of view. Mol believes that "Treppie can see right into her head" (434), but Treppie's foresight stems from a desire to mock and torment, rather than to empathise. Conversely, Mol longs to "peep through a hole in Pop's head so she can watch with him" (195). This is an expressed wish for empathy, attained through an embodied experience, through literally seeing what the other sees, and thus hopefully feeling what the other feels. Although impossible for Mol, the reader is granted this position in the chapters in which Pop is the focaliser, and in turn the reader is able to see the world from all the Benades's perspectives. The Benades are thus never simply grotesque bodies on display, or surfaces without depth. The reader's intimate encounter with their interiority over the course of the novel challenges stereotypes and encourages empathy. The visual distance between the reader and characters is in this sense collapsed.

[121] An incident which has already been discussed in some detail in Chapter Three.

Thus far I have examined two kinds of visual encounters, using the motif of binoculars and peepholes. In the remainder of the chapter I examine whether intimate encounters with the bodies of others, beyond the claustrophobic realm of the family, have the potential to accord the protagonists a kind of comfort and understanding. I explore whether these moments of looking at others could potentially constitute visual interactions based on mutuality.

The Benades are an insular family and very rarely stray from their house at 127 Martha Street or engage with other members of the public. Treppie does have a part-time job at a Chinese-owned shop, although very little information is shared about his activities there. When the Benades do go out as a family unit, it is usually to shop or borrow library books. On the one occasion they eat in a restaurant Pop has to admit, that "[t]hey don't look so good under the Spur's stairway lights. … Ag, what the hell. They are what they are" (85). Their relations with their neighbours are strained and yet, subsequent to the drama on Guy Fawkes, Mol's initial response is to seek comfort in other people. Mol longs to escape the brutality and futility expressed by Treppie by fulfilling a need for a temporary community (253-4):

> But Mol wants a cigarette, one of those the man's offering over the wall. She wants to see another person's face. She wants to touch another person's hand. If someone wants to give her a cigarette, who's she to say no? Some people still care when you're suffering. That's what Mol's thinking. Pop knows. Shame. Poor Mol. (242)

The neighbour's offer is not prompted by compassion, but rather mockery ("Anyone for a smoke? After action, satisfaction?" (241) he says, quoting a cigarette advert). Pop knows this, but in her desperation for some kind of solace and intimacy, Mol takes up her neighbour's offer. She desires to "see another person's face… to touch another person's hand". As a member of a family of neighbourhood pariahs, Mol wishes to briefly feel as if she is part of a larger community. Mol's need to connect with someone outside her family is mediated by the body; for her, the existence of enduring tenderness and compassion will be proved via sensual connection – seeing and touching (not talking).

The other neighbours' responses, however, remain steeped in voyeurism and disdain:

> [Pop] sees how the Fort Knox women look over the wall at Mol from both sides of the Fort Knox man. They're looking at how she lights her cigarette, but they're also looking her up and down. Her body and her legs. Their faces look like they want to say: Sies. But they're also

> curious. Like the faces of people looking at an old tortoise or reptile or something eating its food in the zoo. Eating food or shitting. Or shitting off. 'Cause now the Benades have taken another big blow and everyone's staring at them, as if they're the only people who have setbacks like this. (242)

Their stares of horror and curiosity are explicit and overt, yet Mol is oblivious of their meaning, in her desperation for some form of neighbourly contact. Pop, watching from the sidelines, witnesses and understands the meaning of their looks. The simile used implies that the Benades are considered akin to animals, incapable of thought or emotion. Perhaps the reader's thoughts might initially mimic those of the Fort Knox women. Yet the final sentence in the quote above affirms the reality of the Benades emotional and affective lives; it encourages sympathy if not empathy. Treppie confines himself to the classifieds section of the newspapers to feel a sense of kinship with others and echoes Pop's thought: "all those odd little fuck-ups in the lives of the underdogs. If it proves one thing, it's that the Benades aren't alone in the world. They're not the only ones who turned out funny" (316).

That evening, Mol is in the bath with Pop, cradling his head in her arms, in a brief moment of real intimacy. Divorced from cheap thrills, or the incestuous acts which began in the bath tubs of their youth, it is a moment grounded in mutuality and understanding as a result of their shared naked vulnerability. Nonetheless, a "reciprocal looking-relation" is once again denied: "She wants to look into his face so he can see her smile. When she smiles, he always smiles back at her. But Pop's neck is stiff. She can't turn it. All she can see is the one side of his face, from an angle above him" (266). Mol is confronted by the insufficiency of her metaphorical language – although Pop's wrinkled and exhausted skin suggests similarities with an old pachyderm, it is "not elephant tears. Human tears!" which he cries (266). While their neighbours still consider them akin to animals, Mol is able to see beyond that dehumanizing gesture. She is incapable of seeing what Pop sees, her attempts at empathy have been thwarted, and since there is "nothing to be done, she'll maar cry with him a little" (267), thus sharing his pain and providing them both with a brief feeling of solace and comfort.[122]

Despite his seeming cynicism and world-weariness in the scene with the "Fort Knox" neighbours

[122] The possibility of crying with someone is also alluded to after a particularly violent confrontation between Pop and Treppie. Pop, enraged by Treppie's ranting, punches him and knocks him out. Immediately contrite and exhausted, Pop drags Treppie to his room:

> … when Pop took hold of Treppie under the arms and dragged him away to his room, Pop was folded over double from crying. His tears were dripping onto Treppie's face, so it looked like Treppie was also crying as he lay there, lights-out. (*Triomf*, 458)

However, in this instance, Treppie's tears are illusory, rather than actual tears of empathy.

above, Pop has also expressed the longing to be viewed as an equal, embraced as a friend. On a particularly hopeful day, he drives into Braamfontein and parks his car in order to stroll through the city streets: "He doesn't know what he's looking for. He's not looking for anything. He just wants to feel the rush of people around his shoulders; he wants to look at their faces" (70). His interactions are all positive – he exchanges good wishes with a beggar and enjoys being part of the camaraderie of the black men standing in the Ithuba scratch card line. The woman behind the counter explains the process to him and he subsequently wins 75 rand: "The black woman first has to explain to him where to scratch. She smiles a big smile at him. Never in Triomf has he seen a black woman smile at him like this" (72). In a situation devoid of hierarchy or political interference, Pop for the first time exchanges pleasantries across the racial boundary. He is considered an equal to the other men in the queue, all hoping for a change in fortune.

There is one other similar moment of reciprocal interaction in the novel. In one of their few ventures as a family beyond the confines of Triomf, the Benades head to Braamfontein for a furniture sale. However, they are caught up in a peace march, and humorously believe they have been mistaken for ardent supporters of the Mass Democratic Movement, as their Volkswagen's number plate begins with the letters MDM. The Benades are quick to feel terror, and to judge the crowd as threatening, on the basis of its demographic make-up of mostly black people, referred to in derogatory terms by the Benades. Lambert shouts "Stay together!" (300), but they are soon dispersed in the crowd. Mol's experience in the crowd is worth presenting in its entirety:

> Then a young meid with a Chicken-Licken cap on her head came over and said: 'Peace be with you, Ma,' and she smiled at Mol and pinned a light-blue ribbon onto her housecoat, with two doves on a bright blue pin, one white and the other light-blue. Then only did she see what was going on – everyone was wearing ribbons and doves and holding hands – so that was the story! And all this time the young meid kept squeezing her hand and smiling at her with shining eyes. She smelt like Chicken Licken and her hand was a bit greasy. But then she squeezed the hand back, *even though she'd never touched a black hand before, clean or dirty*. On the other side of her was an outa with only one leg, leaning on crutches. He stuck one of his crutches under his arm and then he shook her hand. That hand was cold and the skin was loose. And the bones felt like they had come apart.
>
> She saw the outa had no blue on, so she worked her hands loose to give him her own ribbon. … And then she smiled at him, and she saw the young meid smile as well, and then all three of them were smiling much better, and they all took each other's hands again.
>
> Suddenly everything went so quiet you could hear a pin drop. All around her people began to cry. …Next to her, the young meid was sniffing. The next thing, that meid picked up her hand,

> with Mol's hand still in it, and she used it to wipe her nose. Mol thought, ja, it's hard to believe, but if that young meid had rubbed her snot off on the back of Mol's own hand, she would wragtag not have minded. There was such a nice feeling in the air that she almost started crying herself. (300–301, my emphasis)

The peace parade affords another example of a different kind of intersubjective 'looking experience'. It is the only moment in the novel when the Benades appear to be wholeheartedly accepted into and embraced by a crowd of people. It could be argued that the depiction of the march is somewhat romanticised or contrived, but considering the grotesque depictions of the rest of the novel, in comparison, it does not seem out of place – in fact it is a necessary balance. Furthermore, the marchers themselves are not described sentimentally at all – they have greasy hands, snotty noses and are emaciated – and yet there is an intimacy implied in this closeness. The Benades too have dripping noses, sweaty, unwashed and unhealthy bodies. Furthermore, the march seems to encourage a mutual, reciprocal relation of looking. Importantly, Mol has never been in such close physical proximity to a black person, despite living on the ruins on Sophiatown and so close to the central business district and "non-white townships". Her perceptions of black people were based on stereotypes, narratives of racial inequality and political dogma. The terms she uses to describe the man and woman, "outa" and "meid", situate them into a pre-existing racial network of relations.[123] "Meid" suggests both servant and young black girl; while "outa" refers to an old black man. Both terms are explicitly racialised and demeaning, yet also suggest a complicit kind of familiarity. Neither term is as pejorative as those slurs Lambert employs. Yet the limits of these terms to account for the world around them are exposed. The experience of holding hands with others, of mirroring the smile of another and having her smile mirrored back at her affords Mol a sense of shared purpose and understanding that mere voyeurism would not provide. The encounter with the body of the other enables her to feel empathy, to feel, for the first time in her life, a sense of community – the kind she has longed for and that has thus far been denied her. Her empathy and desire to cry in response to and with the young woman whose hand she is holding, recalls her instinctive response to Pop's tears in the bath tub. However, the fact remains that Mol is oblivious of the conditions under which the "meid" and "outa" live and the rationale behind the march itself remains somewhat mysterious to her.

[123] As Heyns explains, in his article on translating *Agaat*:

> At one stage I considered appending a short essay on the word meid to my translation to explain its shifting register. Originally a neutral Dutch term for a young woman (compare maid in English) it came to mean, in South Africa, female servant (again like maid in English). From here the process of what semioticians call pejoration degraded the word further, as it came to constitute a disrespectful reference to a black or coloured woman, and in schoolboy slang, to a cowardly person. One of the realities reflected in *Agaat* is the whole range of registers still surviving in a single word. (2009:129)

This parade marks a kind of turning point in the domestic relations of the Benades. Treppie is intially speechless and once he recovers, suggests a family picnic. During the picnic he writes a poem entitled "This is not wallpaper" which ends with the phrase "at last there is peace" (303). Participating in the unpredictable mass gathering inspires and transforms Treppie in a way that "making movies" of life at the police flats never could. The euphoria of the march clings to the family, and Treppie subsequently refrains from sexually harassing Mol again. Seeing others smile and cry, holding hands and collapsing the distance between two people, has facilitated a real understanding – ephemeral, and dissolved at the march's conclusion – but nonetheless groundbreaking. This "peace" unlike the "peace on earth" Treppie envisages after a successful bowel movement, is not subject to sarcasm or irony (328).

In his epistolary novel, *Be My Knife*, David Grossman's protagonist Yair ponders the meaning of empathy and intimacy:

> I thought we would look into each other's eyes, and slowly bring our eyes closer, closer and closer, and even closer, until my eyes touched hers – not the lashes, really touched – the eyelids, the eye itself, the pupils and moistures would touch. Tears will immediately come, of course, that's how the body works. But we will not give up or surrender to the rules of reflex, to the body's bureaucracy; until we rise, out of the tears and pain into the fragments of the vaguest, most ancient pictures of our two souls and float into our bodies. We will see the broken forms in each other. This is what I want, right now. That we will see the darkness in each other. Why not? Why compromise, Miriam? Why not, for once in our lives, ask to cry with the other's tears? (Grossman 2001: 132)

Yair's idea of eyes touching eyes is an extreme form of 'looking at the other' and yet at the heart of his desire remains a very real emotional longing for empathy – in its most authentic form. This kind of looking relation segues into touch and would thus collapse the space between the self and other, subject and object, that is maintained by peepholes and binoculars. The protagonists of *Triomf* experience all too brief moments in which looking at one other's bodies facilitates empathy. In two different incidents, Mol expresses the desire to cry with another's tears and experiences intimacy as a result of familiarity with the bodies of others. Perhaps, in the absence of a mutual looking relation, touch can suffice to engender empathy and intimacy.

**The Language of the Eyes**

One of the dominant moods in *Agaat* is claustrophobia: all the characters are continuously under

each others' surveillance; there is no space for privacy and everyone seems to be warily watching everyone else, always concerned about the impressions their actions encourage. Milla and Agaat's relationship is defined by relations of looking – by spying, staring, gazing, watching, by communicating via the language of the eyes. Below I consider whether any of these different ways of looking manage to circumvent existing racially encoded ways of being and of being seen or whether ultimately, they remain restricted to it. I enquire whether the language of the eyes developed by Milla and Agaat can also potentially lead to empathy and reciprocity or whether it merely enacts what Michel Foucault termed "the disciplinary power to observe" (1984: 213).

Chapter one of the novel begins with Milla attempting to communicate with Agaat: "It'll be the end of me yet, getting communication going" (9). Willie Burger suggests this opening line contains a key theme of *Agaat*, in fact a key theme of Van Niekerk's oeuvre, which is the exploration of communication between people (2009a:1). He suggests that all the novels investigate the role of language as the 'space' in which people can meet each other (2009a:1, own translation).

In an earlier article Burger had suggested that "Die 'riet-en ruigtetaal' is dan 'n taal waarin die self opgeneem kan word om die ander te vind" (2006: 192 see *Agaat* 547 in the Afrikaans version, 555 in the English version)[124] but also hinted at the possibility of an embodied language, which might develop as a result of an intimate knowledge of the other's body, of being entrusted with caring for the other's body (192). Carvalho and Van Vuuren (2009) also raise the possibility of an embodied language.[125] In my analysis, I explore whether the 'language of the eyes' in *Agaat* might indeed raise possibilities for knowing the other, beyond the domain of verbal language.

The only part of her body that Milla continues to exert control over is her eyes, and she uses these to blink at Agaat, to speak to her.[126] Her aim, from the start of the novel, is for Agaat to display the maps of the farm to her, the significance of which has been discussed in the third chapter of this thesis. The mirrored structure of the novel is implied in the second sentence of the first chapter: "That's how it's been from the beginning with her" (9). The attempt to communicate using sight is

[124] "The 'language of reed and rushes' is then a language in which the self can be assimilated in order to find the other" (own translation).

[125] The very anatomical nature of an embodied language warrants further analysis. In a discussion of whether Agaat is accorded a speaking turn, Carvalho and Van Vuuren (2009) contend that "an absence of linguistic representation results from the reality that Agaat's subjectivity is created chiefly through non-verbal means; her actions are seldom if ever accompanied by words" (53). This is not strictly true, as Agaat does speak, even though her words are reported by Milla.

[126] In this regard, Milla's attempts at communication echo those of Jean-Dominique Bauby in *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (1997). Bauby dictated his memoir by means of blinking his eyelids while his amanuensis pointed at an alphabet chart and thus communicated which letter of the alphabet he was referring to.

thus central to the evolution of Milla and Agaat's fraught relationship.

Although this is only revealed at the conclusion of the novel, I intend to open this discussion with the means by which Milla and Agaat first learn to communicate with each other, when their relationship has more in common with a mother-daughter than a master-servant one (and this lost first relationship continues to haunt and trouble the latter one; see Olivier 2011). Her husband, Jak, is horrified that a coloured child has been brought to live under their roof; he insists Milla has transgressed the dominant scopic regime. However, Milla is simply enacting a different version of it: she wants to be able to display Agaat to the Afrikaans community, to show her off, and reveal her healed body for their approving gaze. If she 'civilizes' Agaat, this will serve to affirm her own humanity rather than Agaat's. As she expresses it: "so that I can show the world: See, I tóld you! You didn't want to believe me did you?" (576).

Upon her arrival at *Grootmoedersdrift* for the first time, Agaat is kept under lock and key in a back room in the house, and Milla spies on her through the slit of a letter box she has affixed to the door. Milla has always been desperate to "be able to see what [Agaat] does when she's alone" (473). This suggests her controlling impulse, her need to monitor and also influence Agaat's every action. The desire to see the world through another's eyes is echoed in *Triomf* (see also *Agaat* 56, 76, 172, 204, 211, 554, 556, 573, 601 and 602 for further instances of this).

Van Niekerk has suggested that in this novel she is concerned with power as it is enacted in the intimate sphere (quoted in De Kock, 2009). Relevant for this context is Foucault's explanation of everyday panopticism and discipline:

> The minute disciplines, the panopticisms of the everyday, may well be below the level of emergence of the great apparatuses and the great political struggles. But, in the genealogy of modern society, they have been, with the class domination that traverses it, the political counterpart of the juridical norms according to which power was redistributed. (1984: 212)

Furthermore,

> the prison with all the corrective technology at its disposal is to be resituated at the point where the codified power to punish turns into a disciplinary power to observe; … What generalises power to punish, then, is not the universal consciousness of the law in each juridical subject; it is the regular extension, the infinitely minute web of panoptic techniques ... (1984: 213)

The "panopticisms of the everyday" dominate this novel and the "disciplinary power to observe" enacted by Milla directly informs the hierarchy in the domestic sphere; this disciplinary power extends the juridical power assigned by the apartheid state and formalised in racist laws. Furthermore, Foucault suggests that the pantopicon in prisons functions to imbue prisoners with a sense of constantly being under surveillance to the extent that it no longer matters if there is a guard in the erstwhile watchtower or not – the prisoners continue to act *as if* there is,. They monitor themselves, internalize the disciplinary power and modify their behaviour accordingly. Agaat, too, is under constant surveillance from the moment Milla brings her to *Grootmoerdersdrift*. However, Agaat does not internalize the panopticism. Rather, she functions subversively and rebelliously in this disciplinary system, employing and inverting the modes of surveillance adopted by Milla.

Shortly after 'adopting' Agaat, and reaching a point of frustration and despair, doubting her actions, Milla has nightmares about Agaat:

> Dream I pull out her tongue like an aerial … there's no end to it, she laughs from the back of her throat … her tongue shudders in my hands, like a fishing rod, there's something heavy biting and tugging at the line, pulling me off my feet drawing me in, into her mouth, then I wake up screaming. (482)

Several key themes in this dream demand explication in light of the intimate politics in Milla and Agaat's relationship. The symbolism of Milla's dream suggests her powerlessness, but also her attempts to silence Agaat and give her a new voice. However, throughout the dream Agaat laughs, from the back of her throat, taunting Milla, suggesting it is Agaat who will triumph in this struggle. Indeed, the conclusion of the dream suggests both that Agaat refuses to be silenced by Milla (it suggests that she swallows Milla as implied by the metaphor of a fisherman swallowed by the fish he is attempting to catch), but also that she will speak with Milla's voice ("drawing me in, into her mouth"). The act of severing a tongue in order to silence and subjectify reminds one of the fate of Friday in Coetzee's (1986) *Foe* and could be a reference to Spivak's landmark essay "Can the subaltern speak?" (1985).[127] The Afrikaans which Milla teaches Agaat remains the oppressor's tongue and thus, Burger argues, fails to produce communicative equality (see Burger 2009a:2). As in the nightmare Milla has, when Agaat speaks, it can only ever be with Milla's voice. Agaat answers Milla with a "double barrelled mimicry" (*Agaat* 189); she responds to questions with remembered fragments from the *FAK-Volksangbundel*, *Borduur só* or *Hulpboek vir Boere in Suid-Afrika*: "she will recite all her texts to me rather than talk to me openly" (431). However, the

[127] The novel ends with the echoing, haunting and empty 'O' howled by Friday.

subversive way in which Agaat re-purposes these texts cannot be dismissed by Milla and in fact often stymies Milla's intentions or disempowers Milla.

The nightmare prefigures the failure of language and the subsequent attempt to communicate non-verbally. Milla's diary entry directly after this nightmare details how she and Agaat develop their own idiosyncratic form of communication which will last their lifetimes. And so Milla teaches Agaat, "if you can't say it with your mouth, you say it with your eyes" (514). Interestingly, although this interaction forms the basis of Milla and Agaat's intimate and exclusionary language, or their "telepathy" (36, 80), it is a vision of Jak which prompts the discovery of a new code (423). Her diary entry reads:

> 16 January
> Breakthrough! … her gaze perks up.... She looks past my shoulder, looks at something behind me. Then she looks straight into my eyes for the very first time, and then back again over my shoulder, as if she wants to say: Look behind you! Look! Beware! Look! I play back with my eyes, raise my eyebrows: What do you see? Behind you! She signals with her eye. What can it be? I make my eyes ask to and fro. She looks more and more urgently, she holds my gaze, she directs my eyes, I'm almost overcome with feeling her own will stirring, the very first time!!! (482-3)

By confirming herself as a seeing subject, as someone who sees, and who can "direct another's eyes", Agaat affirms her own subjectivity and insists that she cannot be merely considered a broken body. The diary continues: "I use Jak's code now.… She understands quite well how it works, the eye game. … Now there definitely is communication" (483). It is also worth pointing out that at this moment, there appears to be a reciprocal looking relation between Milla and Agaat.

In the aforementioned vignette of a mother-daughter interaction, there seems to be a sincere attempt by both Milla and Agaat to approach the other. Perhaps it is stating the obvious, but when Milla and Agaat stare into each other's eyes, they become oblivious of each other's bodies. Their looking relation is equal in this instance precisely because the objectification of the other and confinement of the other to a body cannot occur.

Milla's diary continues:

> She's in thrall to my eyes now. ... I could never have dreamed you can achieve so much with your eyes.… I must take care that she doesn't react to reward exclusively. There

> won't always be a reward. She múst simply learn to speak now. You can't live by looking alone. I take out the duster. She's going to get Japie, I say, on her backside, if she won't talk. (483)

It is the threat of punishment, and Milla's ability to invoke that threat, which ultimately ensures that their communication enters the verbal realm. Despite the fact that Agaat does eventually begin to speak to Milla, it is the so-called eye game which remains their private language. Furthermore, ironically, at the end of her life, Milla must, "live by looking alone". This is suggested in the present tense narrative, in an inversion of roles from the earlier fishing nightmare:

> Like one standing in bright sunshine at the mouth of the cave, she peers into me.
> I blink my eyes slowly, regularly as encouragement.
> Find it Agaat, find the word in my mouth, find the impulse from which it must sprout, fish it out as intention, as yearning. ...Peering into each other's throats is the name of the game, two throats in search of a word. (43)

The final sentence suggests a shared search for language, perhaps one in which both Milla and Agaat are agents, and the language is a shared one, stemming from both of them together. However, taking turns "peering" into the body of the other prevents reciprocal looking. I propose that there remains the possibility that lines of sight can cut across hierarchies and reveal a different language beyond spoken or written language.

This is symbolized by the Emperor butterfly, the search for which is a recurring motif in the novel. Milla never glimpses it, but Agaat and Jakkie do. The butterfly has what appear to be two eyes on its wings, and its scientific name is "Apatura iris. The eye that guards the secret of the soul. Only good people get to see it. ... a butterfly is like the soul of a person, it dries out in captivity" (571). This suggestion that "the eye guards the secret of the soul" and the butterfly represents the soul is meant to be considered seriously, rather than mere cliché.[128] There is an echo of the relationship in J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* when the magistrate looks at his torturer: "I look into Mandel's face, at the clear eyes, windows of his soul, at the mouth from which his spirit utters itself" (1980: 125).[129] However, Milla and Agaat never find the butterfly together; Agaat shows it to Jakkie but Milla is not aware of their discovery (*Agaat* 2).

[128]The butterfly exists as a *leitmotif* in the novel. References to butterflies are linked to images of captivity, fragility, beauty, the soul as well as secrecy in *Agaat*. (See for example pages 441, 586, 626–627 and 646)

[129]The torture scenes in *Waiting for the Barbarians* are arguably illustrative of the Foucauldian characterisation of incarceration and punishment as a means to reveal, access and thus control the soul.

It is not merely the development of language which is heavy with the threat of punishment. The 'eye game', at times seemingly an expression of sincerity and trust, is also laced with and has been compromised by Milla's "disciplinary power", her inability to allow herself to bond with Agaat as well as Agaat's refusal to be domesticated or rendered docile under Milla's law. Milla writes, "I can't help it, sometimes she nauseates me (yes, I'm ashamed of myself, but it's trúé!). The long jaw, the bulbous eyes that glare so coercively, the untameable woolly mop, the little crank-handle of an arm, the sly manner at times, the cruelty that sometimes breaks through. How does one make a good heart in a creature that's so damaged?" (576).

During these early years, Milla also takes Agaat exploring on the farm, and instructs her on the names and characteristics of the small insects, animals and birds that inhabit the area. Milla and Agaat sit side by side watching through their "binocular fists", sharing the same perspective (526). In a moment of honesty and openness rare in their adult relationship, months after the discovery of this eye game, Milla writes: "Then she puts hr arms around my neck & says: Close you eyes open your eyes my Même you're my only mother. Now I'm crying too much to carry on writing here (633, sic)." Tragically, Agaat acts this way oblivious of her fate, of the violent displacement that is soon to occur from the woman she calls même, mother. At this point, Milla too is unprepared for her pregnancy which transforms their relationship – she had given up on having a biological child – and appears equally sincere. The foundation for what might have been a loving relationship did exist.

When Milla discovers she is pregnant, she evicts Agaat from the house, and transplants her in the outside maid's room. Agaat is relegated to the role of servant and the ensuing destruction of this initial child-like trust is clear in the interaction when Milla foists a maid's cap on Agaat's head, as indicative of her new station:

> I wanted her to look in the mirror but the mirror was too high … so I said look into my eyes how do you look to yourself? – like a smart Dutch house but she looked right through me and didn't look for her reflection. (125)

Milla as mother-figure possessed the ability to reflect Agaat-as-daughter in her eyes, and Agaat longed to see herself reflected thus in Milla's eyes; however, here, in this grotesque transformation, she does not need to look into Milla's eyes to comprehend how Milla conceives of her, how she is viewed from Milla's perspective. As Willie Burger (2006) explains, in the novel the mirror acts as a plane of confrontation and in this instance equal confrontation is unavailable: these two characters

would need an intermediary, a mirror, to reflect both of their glances simultaneously as equals. Thus Agaat refuses to submit to Milla's image of her. Although Agaat has been denied the power to see herself in the mirror, by avoiding Milla's gaze she also denies Milla the observing power, and denies any possibility of a fluid transition from daughter to servant. Agaat thus forces Milla to acknowledge the erasure this transformation implies. From this moment, the language of the eyes is compromised (see Chapter Six for a potential final reclamation of this language). The "binocular fists" of Agaat's childhood have been replaced by Jak's binoculars which Milla uses to spy on Agaat as she 'dances' on the mountaintop for the first time of many, in her new uniform (526, 150-1)

And so Agaat is turned into a maid, who raises Milla's only son, Jakkie, proves indispensable in the day-to-day running of the farm, and continues her tortured relationship with Milla. Throughout, they continue to "signal... with [their] eyes" (322). In fact, Agaat is even called on to spy on Jak on Milla's behalf (231) and yet Milla remains emotionally abusive of Agaat. Their lives are inextricably intertwined, as Milla words it: "Witness was what you two wanted to do, witness, and be each other's witnesses" (142). Agaat bears witness to Milla's crimes and serves as a constant reminder of them.

**Agaat and Jakkie: A Betrayal of Mutuality**

Before examining the necessity of communicating via the eyes for a dying Milla, I wish to examine a different kind of relationship, dominated by affection rather than recriminations – that of the young Jakkie and Agaat.

Agaat in effect raises Jakkie and the transformation his arrival sparks in her is noteworthy: "Often watch her when she doesn't know I'm looking so tender & her mouth so soft & her body even though she's no more than a child herself … Feel myself in her shade her inferior by far in terms of patience and ingenuity" (203, sic). Milla is excluded from their intimate bond: "his little face clouds over immediately when he notices me" (203), and she is reduced to voyeur in her son's life, jealous of his easy affection for 'Gaat, as he calls her. She continues to spy on the two of them, eavesdropping on private conversations or peeping at them when they escape to secluded parts of the farm. Milla even peers through Agaat's tiny window at her breastfeeding Jakkie:

> There is A. with her back to me … Hr one shoulder bare the crooked bones of the deformed side wide open to view & I look & I see … with my forehead pressed against the window sill & I listen to the little sounds it sucks & sighs it's a whole language out there in the outside room I can almost not bring myself to write about it. (206)

This is the first description of Agaat's body since her effective demotion to servant, although Agaat is only voluntarily revealing her wounded body to Jakkie, not Milla from whom her deformed arm has remained closely guarded. Milla is not privy to the codes of this exclusive, intimate sensory conversation between Agaat and Jakkie. The "language out there" is one she cannot communicate in; she has been in a sense ex-communicated by both of her children. Agaat and Jakkie's relationship flourishes and the childlike intimacy with which Jakkie responds to Agaat is reminiscent of Agaat's early responses to Milla. Milla can only watch acts of love and intimacy; she can neither participate, nor initiate them and in fact would prefer to expunge them from memory – to not include them in her diary, these sights which damn her as they remind her of her betrayal of Agaat's love. The language of the eyes she has developed with Agaat cannot compare with the silent and wordless affection exchanged between Jakkie and Agaat.

In a final comment on Jakkie and Agaat's relationship, I will refer to the moment Jakkie takes Agaat for a trip in the aeroplane he is piloting for guests on his 21st birthday, the night before he flees the farm and the army and ultimately goes into exile in Canada. At the big celebration, the community's curiosity and observing power is emphasized: "You felt the eyes of the guests scrutinising him, scrutinising the commissions and omissions of all of you" (585). Just prior to the party, Milla spies on Jakkie and eavesdrops on his revelations to Agaat that he is "no longer scared of [Jak], Gaat, for that I've almost seen my arse too many times in the service of his pathetic National Party" (589). He continues, "I puke of it, of this pathetic lot who tell themselves they've been placed here on the southernmost tip with a purpose and they represent something grandiose in the procession of nations" (590). Subsequent to this conversation Milla seems to experience brief moments of lucidity. She locks her diaries away, as if aware of how her own thoughts implicate her in the system Jakkie condemns, render her "pathetic" (590). The veneer has been stripped away:

> Was it the abominations of your own family that opened your eyes to the power or impotence branded on the faces, the whitewashed disgrace of the guests … Was it the lack of sleep? The pills you hadn't taken? So that you, for the first time in how many years, were soberly and austerely aware of what was happening around you? … You saw everything so clearly through Jakkie's eyes (602).

Throughout the novel there are references to the protagonists being characters in a play, or performing certain roles (at Milla's behest, or orchestrated by her). Jakkie's party is the one moment when everyone seems to cease pretending, when the costumes appear a little worn and

contrived to Milla herself.

Jakkie is drunk and in front of the gathered guests, presents Agaat with a red "shiny raw silk headscarf", the wrapping of which Agaat struggles to open, "embarrassed with the little hand that didn't want to grip properly in front of an audience" (607). Milla reprimands him by saying, "you want to make a spectacle of her", but Jakkie insists that

> she'll feel how it feels to be free as a bird. Because that's what she's scared of. That's what you're all scared of.... So I'm not permitted to say what I want to say. Agaat's orders … Then she has to pay for it. I'm not the one making a spectacle of her, she's making a spectacle of herself. It was on hér behalf amongst other's that I wanted to speak. So if I máy not do it, and she cán not do it, better then that we go up into the air together. (608)

Jakkie's drunken intention is presumably to allow Agaat a moment of exhilaration and the giddy freedom and god-like perspective accorded by flight.[130] He desires to symbolically liberate her from her role as maid – "You are not your apron and your cap, Agaat"; in Sartrean terms, one could say he wishes her to experience that state of "being-for-itself" as opposed to "being-in-itself". However, such an experience cannot be foisted on or demanded of another: Agaat responds by saying "I am [my apron and cap]" and even Milla was "ashamed that he could say one thing and do the opposite and not notice" (609). Shorn of her uniform, Agaat appears vulnerable, and as she boards the plane, and again when she returns, she is open to ridicule and racist jeering comments ("Hee, nów you're going to see a flying goffel! God, but she'll shit herself the creature! [610]). Jakkie wished to 'liberate' Agaat, in a sense to disembody her and yet all he succeeds in doing is displaying her body to others, thus ensuring she is the recipient of stares and that these stares remind her of her station in the apartheid scopic regime. Agaat is further humiliated on her return to the house, when she is forced to add the racialised honorific "baas" to her responses to a white foreman, the first time this has occurred in the novel (612). Never is the reader so aware of the scopic regime than at Jakkie's birthday party. In this moment Jakkie has betrayed the complex but hidden intimacies which exist on the farm and has ironically only succeeded in robbing Agaat of her power to transcend the narrow racial identity forced on her.

**The Confusion of Subject and Object**

At this point, I will revert to the present tense narrative situation to focus on the manner in which

[130] Years later, when Milla is already ill, she takes Agaat along on day excursions, to show her the sights. Yet Agaat's response seems similar to her response to the flight: "to see her face as she gazed at the great world passing her by … On the way home she didn't say a word" (467).

Agaat, "the eye-reader" (540) must care for the mute, immobile Milla. And so they continue "the fencing with the eyes" (372). Milla's mood is variable and fluctuates often during her confinement to her bed: moments when compassion and affection are directed toward Agaat are contrasted by scenes of recriminations and fury. I will discuss a few moments which are illustrative of the changes in the function of the language of the eyes and the implications for Milla and Agaat's relationship and the search for empathy and understanding.

However, it must be said that their language of the eyes differs signigicantly from the doctor's. The distinction between the intimate, historical relationship which dictates Agaat's treatment of Milla and the objective disinterested gaze of the family doctor is made apparent when he attends to her bedside, after a choking scare. Milla berates Doctor Le Roux for his bedside manner: "Stupid is his grip, stupid and bereft of messages, such hands, enough to make you feel you're dead already" (210). Milla's criticism of her doctor foreshadows Mr X and Mr Y's opinions in *Memorandum* about the treatment they receive in the hospital. Michel Foucault traces how the sense of sight came to dominate in diagnosing illness, and how this "suzerainty of the gaze" (1973: 4) is a product of changes in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century medicine. He identifies the genesis of a new clinical medical language in the hospitals, "a language without words, possessing an entirely new syntax to be formed: a language that did not owe its truth to speech but to the gaze alone" (Foucault 1973: 68-9). Intimacy, it would appear, alters the syntax.

Milla's description of Agaat's treatment of her during a haircut is indicative of their new situation. In a foul and vindictive mood, Milla imagines her body as akin to the main circus tent (328): "She's standing outside the tent again peeping through the chinks to steal a glimpse" (329)[131]. She continues:

> she pretends to restrict her gaze to my surface ... that everything about me is purely a matter of layout and systematic attack. But actually she's looking for a peephole … a truer more intimate version of my reaction. As if I could contain any secrets that she doesn't know. (331)

The peephole is a tool for spying, but here Agaat is trying to find, to recognize perhaps, in Eva Hoffman's (2005) terms, a memory of Milla as mother; trying to identify with an earlier image of her, or to understand the workings of their relationship, to interpret the layers of meaning that have been inscribed on Milla's body. Or to use Judith Butler's term, Agaat wonders if it is possible to

[131]This reverie is prompted by a recollection of the time Milla took Agaat to visit the circus, as a treat, but she was not allowed entry to the main tent because of her skin colour. Agaat is neither allowed to see the circus, nor to be seen inside the circus tent.

visually pierce through and peel back the layers of *sedimentation* that have accrued over time in the *materialization* of Milla to discover some "truer" version (1993: 334). Agaat does not wish to objectify Milla, but to approach her, in a moment of reciprocity for which it is all too late.

This theme continues in Milla's internal monologue when her shin is cut while her legs are shaved by Agaat. Piercing Milla's skin or finding a new peephole will not reveal anything of Milla's thoughts or emotions, "No ready-made pictures to make your skin crawl, nor a tent full of entertainment, that thing on my shin is no peep-hole of a kaleidoscope" it will merely confirm a biological truth: "it's only blood that's inside me" (342).

Without recourse to language, Milla encapsulates their current impasse:

> Our positions in this studio, who is in the chair of the drawing-master, who the model on the podium. Both beginners . . . with a stick of charcoal in the hand, dumbfounded before each other's nakedness, without anybody to instruct us in the fashion of a faithful representation. (393)

The implication is that, possibly, if they could draw, they could convey their thoughts in a way language precludes (cf Burger 2009a:10, 14). However, in this situation, the vision of the other causes them to be dumbfounded; the canvas remains blank in response to the bodily image.

Milla's vision of their positions in the studio does not indicate a reciprocal looking-relation, but neither is it hierarchical, as Milla and Agaat are both simultaneously subject and object. The metaphor employed here suggests that Milla and Agaat are equally exposed, vulnerable and incapable of decoding the meaning of or even representing the bodily image they are faced with.[132] The problem remains the post-colonial one of representation and it carries with it all the attendant meanings historically ascribed to raced, sexed bodies. As Leon de Kock argues, in a different context, in the South African situation "identity has always been contingent upon representation" (2004:20). However, Milla's acknowledgment that there is no one to "instruct [them] in the fashion of a faithful representation" could also suggest there is a unique opportunity to attempt to look at each other afresh, to transcend existing power relations. If they embrace their shared vulnerability it could be productive. Both Agaat and Milla desire to discover each other beyond a surface veneer, beyond their ready-made identities and the structure of objectification in order to see each other differently. But too much seems to stand in the way: power and resentment and guilt prevent them

[132] The thought of being "dumbfounded before each other's nakedness" recalls Milla's actual response when she bursts into Agaat's room, and discovers her without her cap on: "You started talking before you'd seen her. Your words dried up when you looked in her eyes.... you felt as if you'd caught her naked" (461).

from ever seeing each other again as Agaat innocently did that first time – "close your eyes, open your eyes, you're my mother".

It is for this reason that Milla longs for a "*permeable world world without end*" (674, italics in original) and her thoughts in her dying breath return to the whirligigs, the small insects seen by her and Agaat on their very first day together, "*the smallest circling water-creature zealously writing everything reflects so with open eyes into the white light so whispering my soul to go*" (*ibid.*) The whirligigs, in their manner of whirling and thus writing on the water, seem to face their own reflection, with nothing appearing to separate the original from the reflection. Milla wishes for such an understanding with and of another: to be able to see eye to eye with Agaat, free of the weight of her body. As Burger explains, the whirligigs's eyes are so positioned that they can see from under the water and above the water that they are writing on at the same time (2006: 192).[133] If in some ways Agaat is considered as Milla's reflection, her "hall of mirrors" (*Agaat* 554), then perhaps this echoes her desire to see Agaat, read her eyes, and simultaneously see as if through Agaat's eyes, to see what she is thinking. With the confusion of subject and object as in the studio above, the same would apply to Agaat, to the way in which the two of them are inextricably connected, and yet fail to experience the much-desired empathy.

**Kaleidoscopic Vision**

In drawing this chapter to a close I will briefly discuss sight as a trope in *Memorandum.* Arguably the most important thing that Wiid learns during his night of eavesdropping on Mr X and Mr Y is to listen and to see differently (as has already been mentioned in Chapter One). Although lacking the exuberance of e. e. cummings, and despite the religious exaltation in his poem "i thank you god for most this amazing", one could say that Wiid shares cummings's closing insight: "now the ears of my ears awake/ now the eyes of my eyes are opened". Wiid prided himself on being a "neutral observer" (20), and now "the weight of [X and Y's] feeling had been transferred to [him]". (23) He used to be oblivious of his natural surroundings, and after that night, he delights in looking for flowers (30). Wiid realises the value of sight primarily from listening to Mr Y, the architecture enthusiast, bemoan its absence: "I imagine that he thought of the fact that he would never again see the sunrise" (44). Y's eyes have been removed during surgery, he can only rely on his memory of sight.

Near the end of their conversation, X and Y for the first time ponder the fate of the third man in

[133]See Burger (2006, 191–192) for a detailed and nuanced discussion of the importance of the whirligigs in the novel.

their room, Wiid himself:

> *What happened to old whatsisname, have they carted him away?* Y asked. ...
> *Wouldn't surprise me,* X mumbled, *the colour of a buttercup the poor bugger. His eyes despairing, even though he tried to sound like a welcoming committee.*
> *Yes, just imagine,* Y said, *he was the last stranger whose glance I caught. Perhaps I should have made more of it, taken off my dark glasses, but that would have been inconsiderate.*
> *We were very far from polite,* X murmured, *we were selfishly furious with each other.* (110, italics in original)

For the first time, a description of Wiid is provided, and this serves only to highlight how pathetic and ill he appeared. However, inspired by X and Y, Wiid is transformed; he remains incurably ill but his eyes no longer reflect that initial despair. Y also considers the significance of the fact that Wiid was the last person whose eyes he met and by implication, perhaps, the meaning of a shared look with a stranger and the gallery of strangers in the past to whom he did not give a second glance. Y continues:

> *Do you think, my dear illuminator* ... Y then asked with his customary tendency towards fantasy, *that when somebody has looked at you it leaves a residue on your skin, so that at the end of your life you are covered from head to toe in a patina of love, hate and desire with which your neighbour regarded you?* to which X replied: *If you're right, Jonathan ... we can probably start scraping you with a trowel.* (110)

As the sighted of the two interlocutors, X must be relied on to illuminate Y's newly darkened world. X even offers, "Let me be your eyes" (39). In this reversal of the voyeuristic desire Milla nurtures, X is willing to see *for* the other; he invites Y to see the world through his eyes. Y's "fantasy" is another version of the palimpsest metaphor that has been used to describe bodies and landscapes in this thesis. However, this is not a fantasy of inscription, but rather one in which being seen, an experience which has no real physical aspect (there is no sense in which being seen *feels* like something in the same way that, being touched or even being cold, for example, does), leaves a physical "residue" on the skin. The effect of having been seen, an ephemeral experience, then is palpably rendered on one's body and reading the body would reveal a record, an archive, of all the emotions with which one has been "regarded". Alluding again to Butler's concept of sedimentation (1993), X's humorous response can be understood to suggest that this "patina" is in fact a thick layer which could be scraped off the body, that emotions too have a material dimension – and that Y has been the recipient of many gazes. Y's notion recalls Milla's question in *Agaat* whether "a mirror

sometimes preserve everything that has been reflected in it?" (*Agaat* 163).

In a more politicised consideration of this "fantasy", in the context of a discussion on Dumas's work, Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe ask: "What happens to intimate relations when politics has moved to the body, leaving its traces all over the face of the other, of my neighbour, of the stranger?" (2007: 128). The traces of apartheid, they suggest, were inscribed and visible on the bodies of Others, and thus, I argue, intimate relations might stem from an attempt to rethink the meaning of bodies.

During his reveries, Y related his chance discovery of the restoration-in-progress of the mosaic floor of the Cologne Cathedral: "The cathedral offered no vantage point from which the whole of the floor design could be surveyed. You had to make sense as you walked. Every visitor was an executor of the work, etcetera" (98). In this situation, if I can refer to the motif of binoculars and peepholes once more, there is no distance between the object of art viewed and the viewer. No aspect of the artwork is veiled from Y; his sight of it is not limited as would be the case if he were peeping.

Later, when Wiid is conducting his research into the mosaic on the floor of the Cologne Cathedral at the Parow Public Library, the librarian, Joop challenges the primacy of sight in engaging with art works. First, Joop presents him with a "reproduction from the Dionysus mosaic, excavated in the cathedral, itself built on top of ancient villas" (100-1): another palimpsest. Joop also insists on playing "Keith Jarret, The Cologne Concert" (98) while Wiid does his research, and this provides an alternative soundscape for the Cathedral's art. Joop expounds:

> "constipated" was Joop's word for the German mosaics. If you really want to be so anal, he laughed, his bellowing laugh, as to paint on floors with tiny square pebbles, for God's sake at least choose designs that will make people's feet itch. Nobody would feel a sudden urge to dance on Old August von Sauerwein's floor. (101)

The mosaic which astonished Y fails to excite the unorthodox, at times contrary, librarian (as evidenced in his mocking reworking of the artist's surname). Joop's counterpoint suggests that merely engaging with art, with life, visually results in a one dimensional experience. Sound and physical sensation should accompany sight; art should inspire all five senses.

In reflecting on what X and Y's conversation has ultimately taught him, Wiid indulges in the kind of

poetic language Burger alludes to (2009a) and for the first time, binoculars which have occurred as functional objects in *Triomf* and *Agaat*, are used here as the vehicle of a metaphor, to convey the tenor of the content of their conversation:

> Did I deserve to inherit so much rich material without any exertion? A lucky bag full of sayings …A pair of binoculars through which I could see that the universe is a peacock constantly displaying, that one glowing point on those wondrous plumes is a winking fractal of our earth, with inside it the crystals, the clouds, the drops, the snowflakes and the pinecone, the stipple on the guineafowl and the quills of the porcupine repeating the big pattern on a smaller scale all the way to the miniscule. (94-5)

The words he overheard, and their implications, allowed Wiid to *see* differently. Wiid's binoculars, to a degree, could stand in for the "kaleidoscope" Milla believes Agaat is looking for (*Agaat* 342). X and Y's poetic ramblings and Joop's radical musings have succeeded in tearing a proverbial peephole in Wiid's otherwise stultifying, dull and solitary universe; they've provided him with a new perspective from which to view the world beyond his own preconceptions (73).

Prior to his night in Tygerberg hospital, Wiid had expressed no real curiosity about other people. He would not have been likely to use binoculars to watch others. He was even afraid to venture onto his balcony at home for fear that his neighbour might attempt a friendly greeting or conversation (83). And yet, the metaphorical pair of binoculars he inherits inspires him to collapse the distance between himself and others. He abandons his balcony perch to wander the streets in the hope of meeting people (124). Perhaps he hopes for an encounter of the kind the Benades had at the peace march. The revolution in Wiid's understanding of sight compels him to seek an experience of touch, someone to embrace. His sensory universe has been expanded; sight alone remains insufficient in the search for a more intimate engagement with others, with one's surroundings, with art.

**Conclusion**

*Memorandum* seems to mark a new direction in Van Niekerk's work, not only in terms of subject and style but also in its shift in focus from the domestic sphere to the world of solitaries and their interactions with strangers. Her latest collection of short stories, *Die Sneeuslaper* (2011), continues this development. Although this is not one of the three texts under examination in this thesis, it seems pertinent to point out that the binoculars leitmotif and the trope of looking are present once again in these four stories.[134] *Die Sneeuslaper* marks Van Niekerk's first return to the short story

[134]See Buxbaum (2012) for a review of *Die Sneeuslaper* for the Stellenbosch Literary Project (Slipnet).

form since *Die vrou wat haar verkyker vergeet het (*1992) and should be considered with reference to it (see Buxbaum 2012b).

In the title story of that early collection, the protagonist embarks on a writer's retreat, hoping to experience some kind of mystical epiphany, a transcendental moment whose meaning cannot, and yet must, be conveyed in words. She longs to find meaning beyond that suggested by her Protestant theology and the dominant literary paradigms of the time: "dít was wat sy verlang het: die geheime toegang tot daardie kleinste, pittigste, kraalogige detail van die werklikheid" (38).[135]

The catalyst for her particular transformation is that she forgets to pack her binoculars. Unable to enjoy bird watching from afar, the distance that would be virtually collapsed by the magnifying properties of the binoculars must be crossed physically. Bewitched and transfixed by the clouds of birds around a tree outside her house, the writer embarks on an obsessive and ultimately self-destructive experiment to discover "die intiemste, mees godverbode kennis van voëls" (50).[136] The story concludes as the convalescent writer, rescued from her temporary abode in the tree, begins to write a story she entitles "Die vrou wat haar verkyker vergeet het". That story might act as a prelude to the four interlinked stories in this latest collection in which voyeurism and the process of becoming other to oneself in order to write recur as themes. The focus in these short story collections is interactions with strangers, rather than the domestic realm, which has been the focus of *Triomf* and *Agaat*.

Wiid of *Memorandum* is also searching for "die geheime toegang". However, the protagonists of *Triomf* and *Agaat* primarily desire access to each other. They spy, through peepholes and binoculars, and stare and gaze and occasionally their glances are reciprocated. The protagonists of *Triomf* and *Agaat* long to escape the "body's bureaucracy" and experience moments in which looking into each other's eyes allows them to see "the broken forms in each other" (Grossman 2001: 132). As I have demonstrated above, relations of looking provide all too brief moments of empathy and recognition, but for the most part these interactions are voyeuristic. It seems that intimacy requires the engagement of all the senses, as Joop suggests in *Memorandum*.

Referring to the opening scene of Ivan Vladislavić's *The Restless Supermarket*, Louise Bethlehem states, "The tawdriness of this scene is entirely congruent with the sensationalism of much post-apartheid fiction where the body stalks in exhibitionist display" and then refers to *Triomf* as

[135] "That is what she longed for; the secret entry to that smallest, pithiest, beady-eyed detail of reality" (own translation).
[136] "The most intimate, most forbidden knowledge of birds" (own translation).

illustrative of this, with its narrative that "foreground[s] … rape and incest" (80). In this chapter I have attempted to show that Van Niekerk's novel cannot be categorised as merely exhibitionist or sensationalist in its admittedly often grotesque depictions of the body. I have suggested that Van Niekerk enquires whether looking at the other could potentially facilitate empathy and understanding or whether this remains merely an act of voyeurism. The reader, too, acts as a literary voyeur, yet in this manner begins to care for and empathise with the Benades. *Triomf* explores various looking relations, and ultimately asks the reader to be capable of seeing the Benades without condemning them (cf Van Niekerk in Swartz 1994). Misquoting Treppie, perhaps the reader is encouraged to wonder 'what if the world is not one huge sitcom' (see *Triomf* 458) and furthermore, what it would mean to attempt to collapse the distance between the self and others.

If the reader is moved to feel some degree of empathy for these, often extremely unsympathetic, protagonists and to perhaps even shed a tear with them (tears of pain in addition to tears of laughter) then it seems there is a foundation for contemplating mutual remorse (Cf Heyns quoted as epigraph in Van Niekerk 2001) and for understanding one another on the basis of something other than a bodily image encoded in apartheid logic.

## Chapter Five

## "Without tenderness we are in hell": Brutal Domesticities[137]

In the previous chapter I considered the ways in which the protagonists of the three novels under discussion perceive each other: warily, and from a distance; and the extent to which their interactions hinge on misconceptions and (failed) attempts to see the world from one another's eyes. As Mol maintains: "Other people are a mystery" (*Triomf* 44) and it would appear that they remain so for all the characters in these novels. I have hinted that there are ephemeral moments in which physical touch enables a kind of understanding impossible in verbal interchanges or in those encounters which occur in the visual realm, for example, in Mol and Pop's encounter after their bath.

In this chapter I offer a closer reading of physical interactions between characters and enquire whether Van Niekerk suggests possibilities for compassionate touch, or whether touch, especially in the form of sexual relations, is ultimately violent, devoid of desire or satisfaction and non-reciprocal. There has not been a sustained examination of the intra-familial sexual violence in *Triomf* and *Agaat* in the existing criticism. Central to this chapter will be a consideration of the depiction of sex in the first two novels. I grapple with Van Niekerk's engagement with what Sorcha Gunne and Zoë Brigley Thompson call "the rape script" (2010). The rape script perpetuates "the mould of victim/perpetrator binary that dominates patriarchal discourse and much of the subsequent feminist debates" (2010: 3). In novels in which the minutiae of bodily processes are described, the manner in which sex is depicted, experienced or elided in the first and second person narrative sections will prove relevant to a consideration of the meaning of embodied subjectivity and the obsessive engagement with embodiment in the three texts under discussion. This chapter is also the place then for an extended examination of gender relations in these novels, and the manner in which representations of gender identity challenge, counter or trouble mythical as well as normative narratives of gender roles. The focus for this chapter will fall on three inter-related themes: the manner in which the novels trouble both the "rape script" and feminist responses to rape myths; the representation of sexual violence; and finally whether avenues for the expression of tenderness exist in the texts.

Several of the sexual encounters, I will argue, should be considered as rape or sexual abuse. Given Frances Ferguson's convincing argument that "Rape ... dramatizes a problematic about the relationship between the body and the mind" (1992: 99) reading rape promises to reveal more about

[137] The title is taken from a phrase in Adrienne Rich's "21 Love Poems" (Rich 2002: 148).

embodied subjectivity. Theorizing rape and sexual violence is filled with potential pitfalls, and the critic should tread carefully in order not to make light of, or trivialise or reduce to theoretical abstraction, a distressingly real and violent component of contemporary South African life. Such trivialisation or abstraction is far from my intention in this analysis of sexual interactions in Van Niekerk's work.

In her foreword to Gunne and Brigley Thompson's edited volume on rape narratives, Moniza Alvi cites Fiona McCann's examination of the work of Yvonne Vera, where she argues that "a poetics of violence is inextricably linked to the beauty of the prose through which it is expressed, thus creating disconcerting associations" (McCann 85, quoted by Alvi 2010: n.p.). In a similar investigation into the meaning of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Aminatta Forna's sensual, explicit and violent descriptions of embodiment in a time of war (in *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *The Memory of Love* respectively), and to determine why the "sexually explicit is vital to both novels, counteracting some critics' assertions that it forms an unnecessary aside" (2012: 36), Zoe Norridge suggests that "[t]hey focus on the particularity of the personal (in the face of homogenizing civil war) and emphasize the importance of sensual interpersonal connection in the face of, and indeed in response to non-sensical loss and violence" (2012: 35).

Van Niekerk's novels, while focusing on the "particularity of the personal," offer neither Vera's disconcerting poeticism nor the reassuring resilience of the sensual. Yet the realm of physical experiences *might* offer an alternative to, or ephemeral escape from, the reality of debilitating poverty and desperation (in *Triomf*) or crippling expectations of gender roles (in *Agaat*). The explicit references to rape, incest and abuse warrant closer attention; they are neither "unnecessary asides" nor akin to pornography (see Norrdige 2012: 36).

**Incest and Allegorical Readings**

This analysis will begin with considering ways of reading the sex in *Triomf* before proceeding to analyse *Agaat* and then very briefly, *Memorandum*. All the sexual acts which are described in *Triomf* can be termed incestuous.[138] This raises several questions: firstly, there is the issue of a suitable definition of incest; secondly, the means by which the majority of critics have responded to the incest; and thirdly, the definition-continuum between incest and rape. My reading, hopefully, develops the latter in ways which have not yet received attention and achieves this in part by enquiring how to read the violence depicted and arguing for the categorisation of some of the incestuous acts as rape and for limiting the allegorical reading of the incest.

[138] Apart from, of course, the sex Lambert witnesses between the "dilly dykes" *(Triomf* 472) across the road.

In terms of South African criminal law, and according to the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007, incest is defined as follows:

> Persons who may not lawfully marry each other on account of consanguinity, affinity or an adoptive relationship and who unlawfully and intentionally engage in an act of sexual penetration with each other, are, despite their mutual consent to engage in such act, guilty of the offence of incest. (http://www.justice.gov.za/legislation/acts/2007-032.pdf: 13)

Thus, one can presume that, depending on the power relations and the degree of affinity, and other aggravating circumstances, incest *might sometimes* be consensual. On the other hand, rape is defined by the absence of consent:[139]

> Any Person ("A") who unlawfully and intentionally commits an act of sexual penetration with a complainant ("B") without the consent of B, is guilty of the offence of rape.
> (http://www.justice.gov.za/legislation/acts/2007-032.pdf :11)

The legal definition of incest notably only refers to sexual penetration, although many researchers on sexual abuse expand the definition to include "sexual acts, which may or may not include intercourse" (Becker quoted in MJ Van Niekerk 2005:11). Shelton concurs that "Legal definitions of incest tend to emphasize marriage or intercourse as the marker of transgression, but much sexual abuse, particularly of young children, stops short of intercourse while still generating secrets and shame" (2002:227). In my arguments, as will become clear, I employ these broader definitions of incest which do not necessarily always include penetration, but do refer to sexual acts or experiences.

In an edited collection entitled *Incest and the Literary Imagination*, Elizabeth Barnes claims that the theme of incest suggests the confluence of many socio-political, personal and kinship factors. She is preoccupied with "a view of how the narrativizing of incest reveals the ways in which discourses of sex, gender, class, race, desire, intimacy, family, domination, love, and violence, inform, and have informed, understandings of personal, political, and cultural experience" (3). It is in this context that

[139] This is also true according to West's *Encyclopedia of American Law*, in which consent is the key difference:
> Rape and incest are separate offenses and are distinguished by the fact that mutual consent is required for incest but not for rape. When the female is below the age of consent recognized by law, however, the same act can be both rape and incest. (2008)

I position my own analysis of incest.[140] I adopt insights from this incest literature without ignoring the specifically local context and content of *Triomf*. The depiction of incest in this novel clearly relates to and must be considered in the context of both personal and national identity formation and the awful weight of historical narratives in a South Africa on the cusp of a new and, at the time, unknown and unpredictable dispensation.

The localised context of South African historical narratives has indeed been the overly narrow lens through which the incest in *Triomf* has been considered. That is to say, critics have, for the most part, considered the incest as a logical component or development of the novel's theme of satirising Afrikaner nationalism and its concomitant myths of racial superiority and thus the incest is considered as having primarily allegorical import. This idea is deliberately alluded to in the novel itself, when Treppie refers to "[DF] Malan's story" at the time of the centenary celebrations of the Great Trek, and his assurance that the poor "rural Afrikaners" who trekked to the cities would be taken care of: "About how his party, the 'Purged' National Party was depending on everyone to bring the Great trek to its logical 'conclusion'. Pure, undiluted shit!" (*Triomf* 324). The logical conclusion Malan envisaged (or for the sake of his rhetoric claimed to envisage) was the creation of an Afrikaans urban working and middle class; yet the logical conclusion illustrated by the Benades's lives is poverty, incest and a "genetic cul-de-sac" (*Triomf 65*). As Michiel Heyns suggests, "The whole novel is a mordant recognition of the flimsiness of the fabric of Afrikaner nationalism, the weak base on which it is built" (Heyns 2000:62). The family's incestuous relations thus function to expose Malan's "story". However, as Burger argues, "part of the triumph of *Triomf*" is that the novel reveals the Benades as unique individuals and not merely typical of a certain "type" of people, or as poor whites (Burger 2000: 18, own translation). Viewing the incest as primarily allegorical would deny this reading. *Triomf* should be praised because it achieves these two seemingly contradictory ends, as explained by Heyns and Burger. The manner in which this is realised, I believe, can by understood with reference to the sexual violation in the text.

The context of the readers of the novel should also be considered. Elizabeth Barnes notes that "charges of incest have historically been aimed at marginal or underprivileged groups as a way of demonizing them" (2002:3-4).[141] Indeed, this could affect the reception of *Triomf* in other countries, where the Benades might fit into, or rather be absorbed into, the mould of those derogatorily

[140]It must be noted that the majority of the available literature on incest in fiction exhibits an Anglo-American bias in focus, as does Barnes's collection. There is also, for example, a plethora of articles and books on incest in the Renaissance period or in the novels of Jane Austen, William Faulkner and Toni Morrison, to name but a few.

[141]Historically incest has also, perhaps ironically, been the privilege of the upper class and royalty in an attempt to keep the bloodline pure (Barnes 2002).

referred to as "white trash" in a dehistoricized context.[142] However, historically, while the Afrikaners and white people in general are a demographic minority in South Africa, this population group was accorded political power by apartheid, and the so-called poor whites were the marginalised group within that group. The Benades's childhood neighbours, the Beyleveldts (as well as their current neighbours in Triomf), imply this in their recriminatory mutterings: "A very weak kind of Afrikaner" or "worse than kaffirs" (*Triomf* 153). However, only a lazy reading of *Triomf* could accuse Van Niekerk of merely perpetuating stereotypes. Something is lost, some explanatory power and pathos if the incest is considered a simply logical extension of the Benades's poverty or their marginality.

The majority of reviews or academic articles on *Triomf* refer to the Benades as incestuous and the incest as having allegorical import.[143] There is a history of what might be termed the incest trope in South African, specifically Afrikaans literature, and Van Niekerk is not the only writer whose characters are incestuous, and in ways that might be read symbolically. The insularity on which apartheid depended seems to beg fictional exploration, and is illustrated in, among others, Andre Brink's (1998) *Duiwelskloof* (translated into English as *Devil's Valley*), Etienne van Heerden's *Toorberg* (1986) (translated in 1989 as *Ancestral Voices*) and the late Reza de Wet's plays (see Irlam [2005: 705], Burger [2001: 87-88] and Krueger [2010: 53]).

In sum, the incest trope in Afrikaans literature is a response to an insular and endogamous brand of Afrikaner nationalism, with its particular fear of cultural dilution. Yoshikawa also outlines the changing meaning of the incest over time, charting how it has come to be seen in terms linked to "racial purity" (2002: 363). She quotes Sander Gilman's work on the etymology of the term, specifically the original German "Blutschande", which, in the "nineteenth century … moves from signifying incestuous behaviour to meaning the violation of the purity of the race" (quoted in Yoshikawa 2002: 363). The incest trope in this literature then hinges on concerns about racial purity and the state of the family, extended into "die volk".

However, the incest in *Triomf*, while nominally a "fear of contamination" (Whigham quoted in

[142]See Jackson (2012) with regard to the North American reception of South African literature, and *Triomf* in particular. The incest in *Triomf*, while related to the logic of Afrikaner nationalism, is explicitly connected to myths surrounding American "white trash" – the equivalent (yet symbolically divergent) slang nomenclature for "poor white" North Americans.

[143]For references to the allegorical or symbolic meanings of incest in the novel, see *Contemporary World Fiction (*2011:14), AJ van der Walt (2010: 13, footnote 29), Jacobs (2006), Irlam (2004), Viljoen (1996 & 2012), Shear (2006), Brophy (2006), Barnard (2012), Burger (2001), Ampie Coetzee (2007: 153), Rossman (2012: 159) and Fuhler (2006).

Barnes 2002: 4) if considered as occurring within the context of apartheid's insistence on insularity and enforced separation, is also simply a response to the absence of any other possible sexual partners. As Mol is aware, in this regard and more generally, the Benades are "too few, even for themselves" *(Triomf* 8). The incest in *Triomf* is certainly suggestive of both national allegorical readings and the experiences of a particular, fictional family. As Louise Viljoen summarises:

> On the one hand, the incestuous and inbred Benade family becomes symbolic of the extremes to which the apartheid philosophy of ethnic and racial exclusivity led; on the other hand, the novel is almost naturalistic in the way in which it depicts the detail of their everyday lives and reveals the specifics of the historical condition that led to their situation. (2012: 465–466)

Allegorical readings, while understandable, tend to diminish the horror of the incest and abuse, and allow it to be rationalised as symbolic of the internal logic of Afrikaner nationalism.[144] Therefore, I consider alternative ways of reading the abuse. I am primarily concerned with the actual acts of incest, which in the world of the novel are depicted realistically and have literal, rather than merely symbolic meaning. This is not to say I wish to foreclose the obvious – some might say too obvious – allegory, but there is more to be said and the allegorical reading should be limited.[145]

To what extent, then, does Van Niekerk depict the Benades's incestuous relations as an expected, or unavoidable, conclusion to either Afrikaner nationalism's endogamy or their economic desperation and cultural isolation? In other words, does the reader presume that "they are so fucked up, of course they're also incestuous?" Is the incest presented as merely another familial characteristic akin to their penchant for polony and Klipdrift and racism? I argue that we should resist such a knee jerk response – and concurrent dismissal – of the meaning of the incest (as indeed Barnes [2002] argues against in her introduction).

[144]For example, Brophy argues, "At the heart of this allegory, Van Niekerk places the incestuous Benades, collectively emblematic of Afrikaner consciousness and individually representative of Jungian archetypes" (2006: 97). In contrast to Viljoen's more nuanced analysis, in Brophy's reading, the novel is allegorical on both the national and the individual level. I am not convinced by this psychoanalytical reading, primarily because it reduces violence and the explicitly physical act of intercourse to the abstract level of allegory. Mol's suffering is thus, according to Borphy's logic, more powerful as metonym. She is illustrative of a Jungian archetype rather than an individual subject to abuse.

[145]There is of course more to be said regarding allegory in South African literature in general and the resilience of allegorical readings. Chris Thurman discusses the "sub-tradition" of allegorical writing, and of allegorical readings in South African literature, with reference to "'pre-transitional' allegory" and "'post-transitional' allegory" (despite his resistance to this terminology) (2010: 92). He also engages with Frederic Jameson's oft-quoted claim that "third world" texts can be read as "national allegories" (Jameson 1986: 69, quoted in Thurman 2010:92, see 92–95). While Thurman elegantly points out the problems with such a generic claim, he also presents an astute reading of both Jameson and the (limited) usefulness of this "first world" and "third world" binary as it might apply to South African literary history.

Shaun de Waal reports on an interview with Van Niekerk for the *Mail and Guardian*:

> But, in the end, says Van Niekerk, the book tries to resist both the determinism of personal pathology ("those mad alcoholic inbreeds!") and the determinism of ideology ("those poor victims of history!"). "In the end," she says, "I think it's more allegorical, an allegory of certain types of human solutions to human problems, of possibilities of being within the human condition. (quoted in De Waal 1999)

Van Niekerk importantly argues for a reading which does not fuse determinism and allegory. The kind of allegory which she posits is a more existential one. However, my argument is that even if the incest functions quite powerfully as allegory, the violence of these incestuous acts, indeed the brutal, repeated rape to which Mol is subject cannot be merely read as allegory. Viljoen's comments on the naturalistic style of *Triomf* are worth more serious consideration. Furthermore it is important not to forget that the novel is a dark comedy, which is extremely funny in a way that doesn't always come across in the analysis, but which is also troubling and distressing. And so while the *idea* of the in-bred Benades might be comic, the depiction of acts of incest, and their results – especially as they are inscribed on the Benades's bodies – are not humorous. For this reason a more nuanced account of the sexual violence inherent in the incestuous acts is needed. It would be disservice to a complex text, to reduce it to *only* an allegory – *Triomf* demands to be read on its own terms. Brophy, in his reading of the novel as "psychological allegory (2006: 96) and Shear (2006) in particular, err in this regard. Even Rossman's (2012) religio-spiritualist reading of sexual violence, unique in that she focuses on Mol, runs into potential problems in this regard.

I will demonstrate how *Triomf* exhibits an awareness of the incest trope and its allegorical implications, primarily through Treppie's satirical responses to political speeches, before examining the nature of the sexual relations. The obvious political symbolism and allegorical relevance of the incest stems from the metonymyic use of the "family" as representative of "the big National family" (*Triomf* 127). A clear connection between the insularity of the Benades and the apartheid government is suggested when the Republic Day celebrations of 1960 are recalled (a day which ultimately ends disastrously for the Benades). Pop recalls HF Verwoerd's speech on Republic Day in which he justifies the withdrawal from the Commonwealth:

> Then Treppie comes in with a fat grin on his face. Now *that* sounds just right, he says. That sounds like good business. No one must come here and mess with them. Not with the volk and not with their brothers in the volk either. (51)

Treppie's response is of course sardonic, mockingly echoing Verwoerd but also emphasising the desire of the Benades for privacy, their right to escape anyone "meddling in their affairs" (see also *Triomf* 40). This is rendered explicit in Treppie's narrating of the history of their family's political allegiances: "His father always used to say: 'That which belongs together, must remain together'. That's why he voted for Malan's National Party in the 1948 election. Out of family instinct more than anything else" (127). Mol's continued loyalty to the National Party (NP) is evidence of familial inheritance, a loyalty to "Old Mol and Old Pop's words", rather than belief in the NP's political policies. Treppie, however, fails to be convinced by the NP's invocation of the language of kinship: "he doesn't feel at all looked after by the NP …[they] use him like they've always used people" (127). Treppie's words reveal the inappropriateness of the metonym, or rather that it is mere rhetoric: their family of 'poor whites' are not equal members of the Afrikaner Nationalist family or rather volk. This seems to trouble both the myths of Afrikaner nationalism – as has been mentioned earlier in this thesis – but also the straightforward application of the allegory of an endogomous cultural group onto the Benades, who have been abjected from the singular body-politic of the Afrikaners. It seems to me we cannot have it both ways: the Benades cannot represent the logical result of extreme Afrikaner nationalism and *at the same time* be considered pariahs or abhorrent by proponents of that very nationalism ("a weak kind of Afrikaner"). This is as much a critique of the supposed inclusivity of Afrikaner nationalism and its apparent concern for "poor whites" as it is a justification for considering the non-allegorical meaning of the incest and the violence in the novel.

There are several ways to respond to allegorical readings of the text. As Burger argues, Van Niekerk's virtuouso achievement allows for an empathetic response to a particular set of fictional protagonists (2000:3). Although she does allow the critical valency of a (limited) allegorical reading, Jackson argues that "Van Niekerk's canine characters complicate the allegorical import that *Triomf* announces" (Jackson 2011:350). In his review, Rob Nixon (2004) suggests that "*Triomf* reverberates with a complex, comically inflected anger directed at sexual violation as a kind of family heritage that travels, in shame and secrecy, down the generations, flaring into random rages that fuel wider, public cruelties." This is an interesting acknowledgement of both the historicity and intimacy of sexual violation, which Nixon reads beyond the allegorical – in fact, his review is one of the rare instances which makes no explicit mention of the allegorical import of incest. Also of value in Nixon's verdict is the suggestion that it is the sexual violence which "fuels wider, public cruelties", by which I take him to mean the social interactions and ideas about others that the Benades hold. This reverses the logic of those critics who suggest that "public cruelties" are symbolically expressed by, and result in, the domestic sexual violation.

In terms of alternative readings of the incest and Mol's character in particular, Viljoen (1996), Rossman (2012) and Fuhler (2006) are the only writers to adopt a specifically gendered reading of the novel.[146] In contrast, bizarrely and unsympathetically, Ampie Coetzee refers to Mol as "[c]ertainly physically the ugliest character in Afrikaans literature, from *Bywoners* to *Triomf*" (2001: 156). Considering the other members of the Benade family, this is quite an astonishing claim. In addition, such a glib reading of Mol's physicality negates any consideration of the socio-political or familial reasons for her battered and stricken appearance. There is no relevance to mentioning Mol's appearance outside of this context and the claim has no interpretative value.

**Reading Rape**

I will discuss the revelation of the incest, focusing on the sexual relationship between Mol and Lambert before finally presenting a reading of the Benades's incestuous childhood. The fact of the Benades incest is hinted at, very early on in the novel, in the form of jokes about buying a car, and its extent is only gradually revealed. First we realise that Lambert is the product of incest, and thereafter that Lambert himself rapes his mother. We also discover that Mol, Pop and Treppie's incest began in early childhood, although the nature of their sexual relations has changed over time, becoming more violent.

In the second chapter, entitled "The Witnesses", Lambert is the focaliser. His characterisation of his mother reveals his ignorance of the familial dynamics (mirroring the reader's initial naïveté), as well as unwittingly foreshadows their revelation. When the family go to a mechanic to buy a car, Treppie suggests it should be named after Mol, who "wouldn't mind of course, 'cause all three of them rode her in any case" (*Triomf* 27). Lambert's response is revealing as he reports on, but does not quite understand, Treppie's tasteless joke:

> Well, he can't see how Treppie knows about him and his mother's business … And Pop sleeps day in and day out, so he knows nothing … and in any case, that just makes two, that is, if Pop still can, which he doubts … for the rest, Treppie and his mother are brother and sister, so they can't. (27, ellipsis in original)

Lambert's selective morality is interesting here, as it allows for the injunction against sibling incest,

[146] Both Rossman (2012) and Fuhler (2006) were only discovered in the final stages of writing this chapter. Any similarities with Fuhler's approach are thus purely coincidental. Fuhler also presents an argument against a narrowly allegorical reading of three South African novels, on the basis of their representation of rape and sexual abuse. She asserts the original approach to rape represented in Van Niekerk's novel, with regard to the focalisation of Mol as the rape victim. However, in an attempt to convey the originality of the novel, she tends to overemphasise Mol's "resilience" and ultimate liberation (2006: i–ii).

but shows no awareness of any taboo against parental or mother-son incest. Furthermore, the actual act of sexual intercourse is the object of elision.[147] The verb "can" is used to refer both to the ability to have sex, to maintain an erection, as well as the religio-ethical-moral legality or acceptability of doing so. However, Lambert, as of yet, is oblivious of the fact that Pop is also Mol's brother. As the novel progresses, the reader will be made privvy to both the meaning of "business" and Treppie's jokes and she must then grapple with the ethics of being a member of this "community of guilt" (Barnes 2002:9).

In the same chapter, while listening to and feeling aroused by one of the Jehovah's Witnesses reading from her bible, Lambert concludes,

> These two Witnesses are fucking each other.... [He] sticks it in. Lekker deep until she screams like a pig. That's the way they scream. On the videos as well. His mother too, but she screams too hard, and then he has to close her mouth with his hand. (*Triomf* 34)

Lambert's understanding of sex stems from pornographic films and intercourse with his mother (the only woman he has ever had sex with). From these he draws general conclusions regarding the normative roles and responses of women to sex: women are passive (or unwilling) participants; their pain and pleasure are indistinguishable and of little relevance.

It seems clear that the incest that occurs between his mother and Lambert is in keeping with the legal definition of incest and includes penetration. Yet, Mol's "screaming like a pig" complicates the incest-theme and renders the consensual nature of the sex dubious at best.[148] It is evidence of, or highly suggestive of someone whose body is being violated and who is in pain. It is also, I argue, in keeping with the legal definition of rape.Yet, in the critical literature, rape is a term which has not been favoured.[149] In fact, as I have discussed above, incest is the descriptive term most oft adopted, or, in the Afrikaans, the far more expressive term "bloedskandige seks" is used by Burger

[147]The use of omission and euphemisms in narratives of incest is explored by both Jen Shelton and Elizabeth Allen (2002). Barnes explains that "For Shelton, like Allen, euphemism increases 'the hearer's responsibility for decoding information'. It creates 'a community of guilt' shared between speaker and listener – the guilt of knowing what should be kept secret. [Euphemism] conveys a message and reflects society's attitude to that message" (2002:9).

[148]This particular phrase recurs in the novel. In the English translation of *Triomf*, the phrase might also be an intertextual reference to Damon Galgut's novel *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* (1991). In that novel the screaming prefaces the slaughter of the pigs, and so read with that echo in mind, the sound is all the more ominous. See Heyns for a discussion of Galgut's novel (2000: 51).

[149] Murray includes *Triomf* in a list of recent South African novels which depict rape but does not discuss it (2011:37). Rossman agrees that Lambert rapes Mol (2012: 164), although her approach is still a primarily symbolic one. Jackson mentions the existence of "incest and rape" in the novel, but does not elaborate (2011: 355). If rape is mentioned at all in the reviews, it is sans any analysis. The exception is an unpublished Masters thesis by Fuhler (2006).

(2001:10).[150] Perhaps because the sexual intercourse and acts of physical intimacy do not fit easily into existing descriptive models, or disrupt or subvert them, or because by its very nature it is so difficult to find the correct nomenclature for it, incest seems to be the umbrella term favoured in the existing scholarship.

In a paper about rape in the work of Rozeena Maart, Jessica Murray argues for the use of rape as opposed to incest in instances of familial abuse, which is often encased in silence (2011: 41). I argue that there can be no doubt that the repeated violence to which Mol is subject to at the hands of Treppie and Lambert is rape or "incestuous rape" (Jones 2002: viii).[151] It is problematised by the fact that this violation occurs within the familial structure, by the fact that it has been repeated so often so as to become habitual, but not banal, and Mol acquiesces in her own subjection – to the extent that she is capable of either acquiescence or resistance in a situation from which there is no feasible escape.

The problem of consent is central to determining whether a sexual act is rape, as Louise Du Toit shows:

> the whole notion of consent … becomes a hollow notion if we concede to the ways in which sexual identities are structured under patriarchy. The idea of a woman's consent (submission) as the female version of male initiative or demand, is flawed in the sense that it assumes that women are free to make their own choices, and that the men who initiate and the women who respond are equally powerful in that situation. (2005: 262)

In the patriarchal domestic, and also the political, sphere, Mol is not "free to make [her] own sexual choice" Du Toit (2005: 262) and so the idea of consent, predicated on the freedom to concur or decline, with both of those being equally feasible options, is rendered null and void. Mol's manner might thus be termed resigned rather than actively resistant. Despite her apparent (and this will be considered below) submission – itself a problematic term, as Rossman (2012) allows – to her son's violence, there is no doubt that she would prefer not to: she has no desire to have sexual intercourse with her brothers or son. And yet, remarkably, and contrary to the narrative of the 'rape script',

[150] Interestingly, as Barnes notes (2002), incest is, for the most part, a culturally constructed taboo. However, the Afrikaans term, suggests it is, literally, 'a scandal, or crime, against the blood'. This invokes a much more biologically-centred taboo, an injunction based in biology rather than merely culture. If blood is also suggestive of family (as in the bloodline), it might carry the larger meaning of a crime against the family, and by extension, the volk. The Afrikaans term is related to the original German "Blutschande", as mentioned above.

[151] The legal definition notwithstanding, given this lack of clarity on the acts which can be termed incestuous, I will have occasion to adopt Jones's use of the term "incestuous rape" (2002: viii) to refer to acts of non-consensual sexual penetration and to differentiate these from non-penetrative acts, which are still incestuous.

neither the act nor Mol's voice is silenced – as nothing in *Triomf* is silenced.

When rape has been theorised or written about in South African literature – and indeed historiography – it has traditionally been in the context of inter-racial rape and the persistence of the so-called 'black peril narrative' (see Bethlehem 2004 and Graham 2012 for an analysis of this).[152] The South African novel which figures most often in literary discussions of rape in South African literature, is of course JM Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999).[153] However, the spectre of inter-racial rape does not feature in either *Agaat* or *Triomf*.

After hearing Treppie's jokes and Lambert's puzzlement, the extent of the brutality Mol suffers from the men in her family is revealed from her perspective. This chapter, entitled "Knitting", is perhaps one of the prime reasons for Viljoen's possibly hyperbolic assertion that

> [a]lthough this novel is not exclusively occupied with gender issues, it demonstrates more eloquently than could any feminist treatise the position of women in such conditions. The objectification of Mol … reaches atrocious depths. (1996)

The extended commentary by Mol in this chapter, in which she reflects quite profoundly on the origins of and inescapable nature of her current impasse, runs over the course of two or three pages. The polemic Mol presents is in a voice quite different from the echoes she normally converses in and seems to challenge the assertion that she has "lost her bearings" (160). Mol's brothers and son, and perhaps even the reader might presume her incapable of these coherent insights. In fact Treppie accuses Mol of "refus[ing] to understand [suffering]" (385) and Mol concurs, "suffering existed. That was all there was to it. Why should you also tire yourself out by understanding it" (384-385). Yet her thoughts below suggest she in fact understands a great deal about her own suffering. There is thus an unresolved tension in the novel as regards Mol's level of awareness of her fate.

The origin of her relationship with her son is revealed as rooted, ironically perhaps, in a kind of compassionate self-sacrifice and a nurturing response to his inconsolable moods; a maternal desire to keep the family together as well as a misguided desire to assuage her guilt about his incestuous

[152]Notably, there is no reference to Van Niekerk's work in Lucy Graham's (2012) *State of Peril: Race and Rape in South African Literature* – the first monograph to examine rape narratives in South African fiction – primarily it would seem because the content of the novel does not refer to interracial rape and concomitant narratives of 'black or white peril', which is Graham's focus (although she claims too, that these peril narratives are not based in reality, as most rapes are intraracial, and so part of her argument is to debunk these myths).

[153]See Graham (2003) and Boehmer (2002) for discussions of Lucy and Melanie in terms of the gender implications of rape in the novel. There is rich material for a comparative analysis of Mol and Lucy's (in *Disgrace*) responses to rape. I will briefly comment on this below.

origin: “She and Pop just try to stay on his good side. They do what they can. She does even more than she can. She feels she owes it to him” (*Triomf* 40).

Mol presents a thoughtful explanation of how the abuse began and also how its nature has changed as Lambert grew older:

> There’s only one thing that helps. She found this out when he was still very small. Just three years old. One day in the old house in Vrededorp when he was squealing like a pig, she rubbed his little thingy for him. Then he suddenly became all meek and mild, smiling at her with his big blue eyes.
>
> In later years, when Lambert began to swear and get wild, breaking all their stuff so that Treppie would drag Pop out from behind the bathroom door where he was hiding and say to him come, let’s pack our stuff so we can get out of this bladdy madhouse for once and for all, then she would say to Lambert he must come and lie down with her in the back room so he could find some peace for his soul.
>
> She would rub his thing until he was finished and then everything would be fine again. But after a while that was also not good enough anymore. He wanted to put it in. He wanted to do it himself. What could she do? She lay down for him. She went and lay herself down. Housecoat and all.
>
> That was the way she’d kept them all together, Pop and Treppie and Lambert and herself.
>
> ’Cause they can’t do without each other. What would happen if something made them split up and they lost each other? They’d fall to pieces, the whole lot of them, like kaffirdogs on rubbish heaps.
>
> So she’d lain herself down for them. For Pop, but he was good to her. He was gentle. Always has been.
>
> And for Treppie, the devil, who’s been stuffing her all his life. From the front, and later, God help her, from the back too. He says it’s ’cause she’s stretched beyond repair.
>
> It’s a little more than a month since he last wanted it. That business of Peace Day must be working on his conscience. If he has such a thing. She just hopes it lasts. He can write his little verses, anything. But he must just cut her out....
>
> And then there’s Lambert. Lambert, who’ll still be the end of her. The bloody end.
>
> Lambert doesn’t know when to stop. No, nowadays he wants stories too. (41-2)

The inversion of roles is worth noting. Mol’s desire to comfort Lambert, to prevent him “squealing like a pig”, ultimately leads to her own “screaming like a pig”. In Chapter Three, I provided a close reading of Mol’s desire to keep Pop’s body together “just by looking”. This compassion is present

here too, and so is the theme of an ultimately failed attempt to ensure the coherence of bodily and familial fragments. If incest is often figured as a sign of pathology or the logical and grotesque extension of apartheid's endogamy, there is an alternative narrative that has been gestured at throughout this thesis – that the incest also is an attempt to avert loneliness, arising from a need to preserve family cohesion and peace at all costs, "'cause they can't do without each other. … they'd fall to pieces" (41). While Mol may have initiated the sexual contact with Lambert to provide him with some "peace for his soul", the transition from sexual touch to penetration and thus incestuous rape was neither anticipated nor desired by Mol – there is no mutual consent – and yet she has no other feasible option if she wishes her family to remain together, to dissuade Treppie and Pop from fleeing and prevent or ease Lambert's devastating and destructive fits. For Mol, sex has always been transactional, and perhaps the current exchange is familial cohesion, rather than the sweets she received or the companionship and a sense of inclusion she experienced as a young girl.

Sex between Mol and Pop is never described in the novel, although Mol mentions that he is "gentle". It also appears that as they grew older, Mol retained a degree of agency in her relations with Pop. In their previous home in Vrededorp:

> it was always her who said let's go bath. That's what she did when she wanted to go somewhere with Pop and Treppie, or if she wanted sweets or something. Bathing with Pop was the price she had to pay. But it was okay. Pop was soft with her. Most of the time she just rubbed him, or sucked him. And it didn't take long. (262)

Sex, or sexual acts, is transactional here and both Pop and Mol are aware of the terms. However, the terms of sex with Treppie, which also used to be "for sweets" (151) when they were young, have changed irrevocably. Any mutuality disappeared once Treppie was beaten for committing incest by their father, and Treppie enacts his revenge on Mol by raping her (cf 45). Mol wishes to be finally "cut out", to escape the brutal encounters with Treppie who "has been stuffing her all his life", and yet in this relationship, as with her son and unlike with Pop, she has neither power nor choice (42).

Perhaps as some way of distinguishing the relationship she has with her brothers and her son, to Lambert's dismay, Mol never removes her housecoat when he "stuffs her" (32, 39). The incest with her siblings is a product and extension of their early sexual experiences. However, perhaps Mol's refusal to remove her coat for Lambert can be considered as another small yet meaningful act of resistance. She refuses to eroticize the encounter; it is akin to a household chore she has been forced to perform. Mol also refuses to remove her housecoat any more for the National Party canvassers

after she overhears them referring to the Benades as "scum" (135, 139). The removal of her housecoat seems to suggest a desire to present a different version of herself and to mark the occasion as something out-of-the-ordinary. However, keeping her housecoat on underlines her refusal to pretend, or to submit to someone else's or even her own fantasy of her life.

As for her political allegiances, it is here that Mol's radical-proto-feminist monologue enters into full swing:

> … But she couldn't really be bothered. The National Party had never been able to stop three men from getting the better of her in one morning. If they really want to help, the National Party must provide some prostitutes. Well-paid, plump fancy broads to save women like her from their lot in life. If they have enough money to pay state murders, as Treppie says, then why can't they also pay state whores? At least it won't kill anyone. It will just stop women like her from getting stabbed with knives and shut up in fridges with Peking Ducks.[154] Maybe if she's had enough Klipdrift to drink one day, she'll say it to those two chickens from the NP who come here to do their canvassing. ...
>
> Maybe they [Treppie and Lambert] need to see her in action for a change. Maybe then they'll get some respect for her. (42-3)

Mol's insight is feminist in that it shows awareness of the inequality of women, and a desire to protest her objectification. However, her consciousness is a class-based one, distinguishing "women like her" from educated, elite women. Her views on prostitution are also quite radical, influenced more by Treppie's world view than the National Party's paternalism and patriarchy. However, she also doesn't question the responsibility of men, or whether they should change their behaviour – their sexual needs are considered a given, and Mol does not spare a thought for the lot in life of the imagined "plump fancy broads". Any feminist ideas are thus compromised and complicated by the fact that Mol is not concerned with the collective well-being of women, but rather with her own position in the family, which she nonetheless recognises to be a direct result of her gender. There's no doubt though that she longs for an intervention to prevent "three men getting the better of her". Furthermore, Mol believes that an ability to vocalise these thoughts, rather than her meaningless echoes, and to confront the NP with them, will ultimately garner her respect in the family. She desires to be an intellectual equal to Treppie, to participate in debate and to be respected for her mind, rather than violated because of her body. However, the continued brutality, especially the

[154]Here Mol is referring to a particularly traumatic event, which also occurred on Guy Fawkes Day, when Lambert locked her in the fridge with fireworks. This seems to have been a trauma, in a series of traumas, from which Mol has never fully recovered (see *Triomf* 160–161).

'Peking Duck' incident, has rendered Mol incapable of coherent conversation. Donning her house coat and minus underwear, Mol is finally empowered to talk back to the NPs, as she imagines doing above. However, what she says to them is not a feminist protest, but a defence of the integrity of their family: "'Befucked,' she says, 'but not brain-dead. We can still read and write and all'" (137). Pop is shocked, but both Treppie and Lambert are impressed by her dashing of their expectations.

One could say this idea of the self-sacrificing mother is a parody of the volksmoeder, based, as Elsie Cloete argues, on the historical figure (myth) of the "frontierswoman" of the South African war: "an historically contingent invention utilised for reinforcing the Afrikaner nationalist metanarrative" (1994: 5).[155] When considering the depiction of women in Van Niekerk's work, and indeed a gendered reading, there is always the lurking shadow cast by the volksmoeder, that archetypal mythical figure, who is, and always has been, more a figure of fantasy than reality, or one which skewers reality, a created image, invented for political exigencies, as Cloete argues, and appropriated (and sometimes re-appropriated) in the service of Afrikaner nationalism (see Cloete 1994). "It is therefore possible to explain how the notions of frontierswoman / volksmoeder / Boerwoman, as historically variable constructs became largely defunct as nationalism's rallying call as the political circumstances of the Afrikaner changed," Cloete writes (1994: 21). The idea of the volksmoeder thus exists primarily as "'n beeld van 'n vrou" and "'n plek van herinnering" (Brink 2008: 7, 14)

In a Foucauldian analysis, Cloete argues that "[a]ppeals to Afrikaner women to become volksmoeders employ, via the biological essentialist argument, a political technology of the body. The material body is 'trained' and 'marked' to nurture the nation – but in such a way that nurture involves an extension of familial duty to include patriotic duty" (1994:18). Mol's body is indeed "'trained' and 'marked' to nurture"; her body is the medium via which she expresses her "duty". Although it is dubious whether her envisioning of her familial duty extends to any patriotic duty, as the patriarchal nationalist narrative would have it. In fact, for Mol, any concept of the nation is somewhat obtuse and incoherent – her family is all that she has and all she can rely on (as also evidenced by her lack of interest in the fate of other women); her experiences have assured her that, despite any residual loyalty to the National Party, the government is not interested in her fate.

[155] Jean Rossman positions Mol "as a composite Christ/Mary-figure, a sacrificial and abject mother who, through her (perverse) compassion, offers her body to her brothers and son" (2012:159). She also suggests Mol is a synthesis of Mary and Martha (161). However, Treppie contradicts this suggestion: "And if one considers that her real name is Martha, one could dub her Martha Street's presently serving Martha. But that's an altogether different kind of service and a different kind of Martha from the story in the Bible that the Jehovahs always want to read" (*Triomf* 327).

The idea of a mother-figure, a volksmoeder who would sacrifice her life for the nationalist cause, a figure who is chaste and generous, is here exploded in the unchaste, yet physically generous actions of Mol. However, Mol has *no other option* but to continue to "lay herself down": "Bitter, bitter, is her lot in this house" (42). She has no false consciousness about her oppression: it is against her will; she consents to sex, but the sex is by no means consensual, and the violence with which it is enacted assures it is rape. Power is not a "floating signifier" (cf Hall quoted in Mardorossian 2002:746) in Mol's world: "Try as she might in this house, no one listens to her. She's a woman alone here, that's for sure. She'll just have to accept it" (135). Mol displays insightful awareness of the dynamics of power which have accumulated to shape her sense of powerlessness as a result of her sexual identity in a patriarchal society.

What Gunne and Brigley Thompson (2010) refer to as the "rape script", which has been subverted by many feminist writers, is also challenged by the depiction of incestuous rape in this novel. They draw on the work of Carine M. Mardorossian who criticises the "psychologizing and victim-blaming terms that have domininated hegemonic approaches to gendered violence" (2002: 747). Mardorossian's concern is that the approach of some "postmodern feminists" who place an "emphasis on interiority and self-reflexivity is … itself a technology of domination that pathologizes women and displaces male agency" (2002: 758). Frances Ferguson's (1992) article, although criticising this trend, goes some way to explain why interiority has been the centre of legal and feminist discourse about rape. Ferguson convincingly shows how the onus of proof has remained on the women's testimony, as "rape has progressively been defined as a crime that is constituted as one by the victim's nonconsent" (91). Ferguson explains that legally, since sex itself is not punishable by law, "evidence of penetration is necessary but not sufficient to establish criminal intent. The crime, that is, only becomes a crime on the level of mental states" (99).[156] Du Toit (2005) also highlights the flaws of a decontextualised focus on consent.

Gunne and Brigley Thompson argue that their, and future, scholarship on rape should "break the mould of the victim/perpetrator binary that dominates patriarchal discourse and much of the subsequent feminist debates" (2010: 3). They furthermore wish to avoid the "gauntlet of scepticism that turns the focus from the acts of violence to the rape victim and the truth or fiction of their story" (7). Their approach draws on Bourke's argument for the deconstruction of pre-existing "myths

[156]For this reason, the mental states are of more judicial import than the action, and more difficult to prove. Ferguson does acknowledge, but also criticises the feminist interventions of Andrea Dworkin and Susan Brownmiller, arguing they merely represent a converse of a problematic legal definition, which flounders when individual cases do not cohere with general forms: "the legal system has been most successful – for good and for ill – when rape approaches most nearly to the formal definition" (94). This relates to one of the key challenges in reading bodily violation in *Triomf* and *Agaat* as these acts do not fit into any pre-existing narrative or "formal definition".

about rape victims" which determine the reception of rape narratives, and by implication, rape testimonies (8).

Van Niekerk's protagonists reference these myths, evoke and simultaneously quash caricatures and trouble any "scripts of power" (Bourke 2010:8). I will highlight the manner in which neither experience nor interiority (Mol's, Lambert's or Treppie's) is privileged in Van Niekerk's description of incestuous rape, although unusually both perspectives are represented. Mol's subjectivity is asserted, although interiority is not privileged above a consideration of the politics of violence. Bucking the trend of focusing only on the truth-status of the victim's narrative, Van Niekerk reveals Lambert's perspective too. Referring to Ferguson's consideration of mental states, there is no denying Lambert's intention to have sex with his mother and his awareness – based on previous experiences – that she experiences sex with him as a kind of torture from which she has no escape. In fact, she obeys his demand out of a fear of a worse fate. The physical pain Mol experiences is emphasised and the effects of the rape are rendered in both starkly physical *and* psychological terms: Mol's body is irreparably damaged and her ability to take part in conversations with her tormentors (especially Treppie and Lambert) is often reduced to echoes. This is one of the advantages of Van Niekerk's narrative style, in which different characters function as focalisers for each chapter. Of interest in reading Van Niekerk's work is neither finding blame nor establishing individual guilt but questioning the usefulness of these terms in situations of intimacy and historical trauma.

Lambert's perspective on sex with his mother is revealed after Treppie relates the truth of the events that befell the family on Republic Day (65). A furious Lambert instructs his mother to "Go get yourself ready, Ma, I want to see you in the back room as soon as I'm finished here" (66). He continues past Pop, who "mos always goes and hides in the bathroom" (66) and events unfold as if according to an existing script, suggesting a regular occurrence:

> And his mother had better keep her mouth shut. Nowadays she screams like someone's slitting her throat or something. Well she'd better watch out or he'll squash her fucken voice-box to a pulp. They mustn't come here and treat him like he's a fucken idiot. (*Triomf* 66-7)

Lambert's explicit intention to engage in intercourse with Mol regardless of her consent is conveyed. There can be no doubt here of the reality of the threat of violence posed by Lambert and of Mol's powerlessness to resist him and the concomitant powerlessness or inability of her brothers to aid her in any way. Mol "knows her place" and she knows that if she doesn't submit, quietly, to her violation, she could be beaten or tormented further. That this is not an empty threat is assured by the

fact that Lambert once locked her in a fridge with fireworks and stabbed her (160-1, 262).[157] This possibility puts paid to any attempt at resistance, or belief in its success. The fact that Mol's power to consent, to choose, has been rescinded, should be considered in the same light as her non-consent.

Despite critics' continued references to Mol's submission to rape and abuse, her response is not one of total submission or quiet resignation or acceptance. Her rape is not occluded. If she is mentally resigned (or reconciled) to her "bitter lot" in the house, her physical reaction contradicts this psychological acceptance. This expression of bodily pain is the only means Mol has to respond to Lambert, she cannot say 'stop' or 'no', yet she cannot suppress her cry.

Lambert is also not oblivious of this, as he recalls of their most recent encounter: "That was bad. He could feel things breaking inside her" (93). However, Lambert is also incapable of understanding why his mother chooses to ignore him afterwards: "If she looks for trouble, she'll get it. But now he's looking for company. … His mother shifts away slightly. That means he must just not start fucking around again. Tonight it's peace and quiet. … It's more than just fucking around he's got in his body "(93-94). It would seem that it is only when Lambert is on the verge of a fit, or furious beyond any words, that Mol has no option but to submit. When she realizes he will not rape her, she is safe to ignore him. It is also as if some aspect of their initial understanding has been broken, as the sex became increasingly violent. Indeed, what Mol used to get in exchange – peace – has diminished and is no longer worth her trauma.

In a discussion of Lucy's rape in *Disgrace*, Elleke Boehmer posits:

> As part of its meditation on coming to terms, the novel thus sets up the difficult Levinasian ethic of being for the (abjected) other, or, in Lucy's case, of living as other: a process that is at once deeply personal and yet impersonalizing. (Boehmer 2002: 343)

In a sense one might call Mol's response to Lambert related to the 'ethic of being for the abjected other', however Mol's scream (as well as her thoughts on the subject as mentioned earlier) contrasts with Lucy's continued silence in response to her rape. This is not to discard the important difference regarding the contexts of Lucy and Mol's rape. For Lucy, the other is a racialised other, in a history of racial inequality and oppression (see Graham 2003: 437). For Mol, the other is her grotesque son. Boehmer argues that Coetzee "proposes the far more painful process of enduring rather than transcending the degraded past. … Both Lurie and his raped daughter Lucy eventually seek to

[157]This fear of Lambert's brutality is stated throughout *Triomf* (331, see also 67).

accommodate a history of violation through a traditionally feminine physical abjection to, and new responsibility for, that history" (2002:343). It is this apparent submissive approach that Boehmer objects to: "In both halves of the narrative, therefore, a highly conventional patriarchal and colonial prerogative of possession over the 'silent body of the woman' is exercised" (344). Graham adds that, in *Disgrace*, "Lucy's refusal to speak about her experience certainly does not empower her and means that her story belongs to her rapist" (2003:442, see also 433). *Triomf* challenges that "patriarchal prerogative" with Mol's refusal to be silenced; she claims ownership of her story. Disagreeing with Mike Marais's redemptive reading of Lucy's silence, Boehmer questions what possible reconciliation, forgiveness, redemption and future there can be, if Lucy remains the "silent wom[a]n-in-pain" (344). Mol's screams, her monologue explaining her actions and her loquaciousness at the novel's end, which continues irrespective of the interest of Treppie and Lambert, suggests that perhaps, in speaking her pain, Mol ensures she is not reduced to mere body, mere woman-in-pain. Her subjectivity is assured, although the novel's conclusion is not quite as celebratory or transcendent of her circumstances as Fuhler (2006) and Rossman (2012) suggest.[158]

Mol's experience in the back room with Lambert and the act of rape itself is in this instance occluded. However, Mol's screams, her body language as she limps out of the room and her inability to speak clearly suggest the events that occurred and her trauma (67). This speaks to the problematics of representation,[159] as Jyotike Virdi explains:

> [T]he erasure of rape from the narrative bears the marks of a patriarchal discourse of honour and chastity; yet showing rape, some argue, eroticizes it for the male gaze and purveys the victim myth. How do we refuse to erase the palpability of rape and negotiate the splintering of the private/public trauma associated with it? (quoted in Gunne & Brigley 2010:3).

The "palpability of rape" is conveyed by the trauma visible on Mol's body. Treppie claims she is "stretched beyond repair" (41), and Pop witnessed her scars in horror (238, 265).[160] Yet in a novel in which all bodily functions are described in their minutae – eating, defecating, drinking, arousal – it

[158]Rossman argues, problematically and in language that seems, perhaps unintentionally, to concur with a reading of Lucy's behaviour after her rape in *Disgrace*, that "Mol's cosmology, based on the virtues of humility and compassion, presents an alternative morality for white South Africans in post-apartheid South Africa" (2012: 165).

[159] The representation of rape and violence remains a complex issues. As Jones asks "How does one express the inexpressible? Hoe does one portray the horrors of incestuous rape without prurience or the inhuman violence and the futility of war without resort to journalistic sensationalism?"(2002: viii).

[160]This visibility of the brutalised body can also be contrasted with *Disgrace*, as Graham explains: "This stifling of rape narrative is a feature of the entire novel. The central incidents in both narrative settings of *Disgrace* are acts of sexual violation, but notably, in each case, the experience of the violated body is absent, hidden from the reader" (2003: 433, see also 440).

is interesting that Van Niekerk never resorts to erotic spectacles but relies on euphemisms or vulgarity for scenes of rape: "they're stuffing the shit out of each other" (39) and "he [Treppie] fucked her" (45). Further details are not provided. For a novel in which many sentences are devoted to describing Lambert's penis (39, 417 ), as well as Pop's (151, 385), this evasion is noteworthy. Rather than a sign of prudishness, this appears to be part of a desire not to occlude the act of rape from the narrative, but also not to eroticize it or reduce it to a scene of grotesque humour. This suggests that while there are no 'holy cows' in this exuberantly crass novel, nor patience for political correctness, there is an ethical concern not to trivialise rape and also to challenge the rape script and raise difficult questions about the nature of blame, intimacy and power.

I have discussed in Chapter Four the brief intimacy experienced by Mol and Pop when they are both naked after their bath. In terms of sex, the only "nice" encounter occurs between the lesbians across the road, as reported by Lambert to his incredulous family (See also Chapter Four).[161] Mol's response contains an element of pathos:

> "Well, it sounds nice and soft to me". The words come out before she can stop herself. She wants to make her point here tonight. She doesn't always get the chance.
> "No, I was just thinking", she says. "I wouldn't mind if it was only strawberries that got stuck into me ..." (192)

Mol's desire here is echoed by Treppie, although his sentiment is designed primarily to infuriate Lambert. In a sarcastic moment, he sings "'If only we had love'" (366). Love has been withheld from the Benades, ever since they were children, and to a degree, is the reason they sought comfort from each other.

When the siblings return to Martha Street on the eve of Lambert's birthday, they return to a scene of destruction with Lambert seemingly paralytic, in the centre of the chaos and vomit. The night has ended in disaster for him, and in an echo of the compassion his mother extended him as a child, his final action before passing out is to touch himself, not in the hope of climaxing but as comfort. It is the only way for Lambert to cope with his confusion and his thwarted dreams: "He rubs his dick. For what, anyway? For fuck-all. It feels like it's getting smaller and smaller. But he rubs, anyway, harder and harder. It's all he can think of doing" (413).

[161]The anodyne adjective "nice" is repeated when Mol describes the books she enjoys borrowing from the library. Mol's choices reveal the simplicity and limitations of her expectations and desires and relate to a sentimental fictional world which has no correlation in reality – especially not her reality (183).

The phrase "all he can think of doing" might function as a refrain in this narrative, as the incest between the Benades siblings began in this way: it was all Pop could think of doing to distract them from their hunger (127).

Treppie and Mol reveal the history of the family's incestous relationships and the trajectory from childhood experimentation to incestuous rape. Treppie refers to the incest first, subsequently it is considered in Mol's childhood reverie, then it forms part of Treppie and Pop's confrontation regarding responsibility and blame that occurs in the shadow of the Brixton tower (as analysed in Chapter Three, see also Buxbaum 2013), and finally it is mentioned by Treppie in a somewhat coded manner to Lambert, who is still recovering from his fit, and so incapable of digesting its meaning.

It is perhaps unexpected that the incest narrative stems first from Treppie's memory. Yet as a child he was the most sensitive, almost romantic member of the family (he "cried for the poultry" [122] which was killed before his family left the farm), very different from the cynical and violent man he grew into. The brutal treatment he received from Old Pop, coupled with the betrayal felt at his brother's inability or disinclination to intervene is revealed as responsible for the change.

Upon arrival in Johannesburg, or "Gomorrah" (122) as his father referred to it, they lived in poverty, sharing a single room, and his father worked on the railways, in the jobs created for poor whites (125). Treppie recalls the manner in which the logic of the insular "volk" had entered into their domestic discourse, where its flaws were all too apparent:

> [Old Pop said] "All we have in the world is each other. Us Benades must stand together".
>
> Old Mol was starting to lose her marbles. She knew "each other" was too little to live from, but what else could they do? Everything was starting to fuck out, even then.
>
> And so that's how they learned to look after "each other". How he and Little Mol and Little Pop learned to take care of "each other". ...
>
> A "well looked-after" person was someone who stayed the way he was, a person who kept to himself, to his own kind. (126-7)

Old Mol, realises the paucity of options available as well as the insufficiency of only having 'each other' to turn to: "She clung to that belief, even though she knew there was something wrong with it" (126). When Treppie refers to 'his own kind', he means blood-relatives. They had only each other to turn to for the fulfilment of all their needs. What follows then, is a betrayal of what is denoted by

"looked after". Thus, rather than the hollow echo of Old Pop's words, it is Old Mol's exhortation that they must "look after" each other, rather than merely "stand together" which haunts the Benades and is the source of their undoing.

Treppie's reveries continue, explaining the origin of the incest:

> School was shit … so they rather stayed in bed. Little Pop's dick could already stand up nicely by then. He showed Treppie and Mol how to rub it. They killed time on those mornings by rubbing Little Pop's dick. It took away the hunger. They were allowed to have their morning bread only once Pop had come three times; otherwise they'd get hungry for their afternoon bread too soon. And if that got eaten, they stayed hungry all day, until their mother came home from the factory at night.
>
> Hungry time, time that you feel in your stomach, is a terrible thing. But what's worse is how time feels when you see the same things happening over and over again. Like things that get broken and then fixed again. Over and over again, fucken broken and fixed again. And nothing ever gets fixed properly. (127)

In its early incarnation, the incest was consensual, child-like experimentation. While Pop might have been well-versed in the meaning and significance of their actions, Mol and Treppie considered it initially only as game that Pop had devised to stave off their hunger. It was an expression of tenderness of a sort, a way of finding creaturely comfort in each other.

With hindsight, for Treppie worse than the physical pangs of hunger, is the knowledge that the Benades are caught in cycle of abuse and poverty from which there is no escape. The central motif of "Running Repairs", as one chapter is entitled, also encompasses the failure to repair or transcend their socio-economic position, to transform their lives, and the way in which they 'look after' each other. The trauma they have caused each other can never be 'fixed properly'. Incest then has always been a form of escape from this impasse, with at least the promise of physical pleasure – for Pop and Treppie. Neither sibling seems to give a thought to Mol's experience of these encounters, although Treppie does seem to realise his treatment of Mol does not promote "peace", as he leaves her alone after the day of the march.

These incestuous acts were the only means they had to briefly distract themselves from their dire material circumstances, and as they aged, a way to distract themselves from thinking too deeply about their lives. As an act of self-preservation, Treppie knows, "He mustn't think about these things. It makes him shaky. It causes accidents" (128) and so he continually tries to suppress these

earliest memories, preferring to attend only to physical needs. As he explains to Mol, "He says he loses his bearings when he thinks too much with his head. So he rather keeps it under the belt. Those kinds of thoughts are 'easily digestible'. Everyone can understand them, it's the 'basics'. Everything else is 'fancy footwork'". (182). While nothing else in their lives may 'work', the intra-familial sex is at least an assurance that their bodies – often compared to machines – work. For Treppie at least. For Mol, the continued sex assures neither her body nor her mind work, leaves her in a similar state to her mother, whose head would also jerk uncontrollably (126) and who was a "broken woman": "Something inside her head cracked that day, like when eggs break and the stuff runs out" (158).

Treppie distrusts all normative or prescriptive ideologies. The trauma of his youth and the Benades's current existence is overwhelming, but he is at least assured of his humanity, because "everyone can understand" these basic needs. Sex (like other physical needs) is the great equaliser – beyond considerations of race, class. In a perverse logic, it humanises the Benades.

As opposed to Treppie, Mol never blames Pop for initiating the incest, perhaps because her intentions to soothe Lambert followed the same logic as Pop's attempts to console and distract his hungry siblings. Pop, however, seems in no doubt of the inappropriateness of his actions: "Pop says he's dried up now, thank God. Thank God? she asks. Then Pop says he gives thanks to God that he can't cause any more trouble" (150). Pop's was hardly a selfless ways of killing time, and unlike Mol, he experienced pleasure from the incest. However, the incest is never revealed from his perspective. He also never admits or accepts any blame when Treppie confronts him. In this case, only the victims – Treppie and Mol – describe these early acts, but without any reference to consent.

In Treppie's version of events, he focuses only on the abuse he was subject to by Old Pop *and* Pop. He does not consider his own culpability with Mol. Under the Brixton tower, Treppie lambasts Pop:

> That dick of Pop's was the place where all the trouble started, he said. He mos had to suck Pop's dick like it was a lollipop, remember? And he hadn't understood anything, he was still too young, but when the lashes were dealt out he was always the only one who got them. (385)

Treppie revisits these memories of childhood incest, in a more jocular manner, when he asks the still-groggy Lambert, after his encounter with the prostitute:

> Did they do it on top of the mirror, inside the bath, under the water? Hey that takes my mind very far back, he says. Can she, Mol, still remember those naughty days? ...
>
> "Well," Treppie says to Lambert, "maybe I'm the only one, but I remember well, your mother was still very young, and she used to take her older brother in hand too, in the bath. Those days her little brother was still very small, smaller than her, but when his little sister got tired, then her kid brother had to maar take over. And you wouldn't say it today about your mother's older brother, would you, but in his young days he couldn't get enough. There was no satisfying him!" (435)

This is as clear a statement as any about the Benades's early history, and the kinship relations that have been hidden from Lambert, but he is too mentally exhausted to take it in. It is not until he discovers Old Pop's suicide note that he finally realises what Treppie has been saying. In both of Treppie's recollections of their youth, Pop is positioned as the victimiser, a role that the reader might find difficult to reconcile with his current role as gentle peace-keeper. Nonetheless, it seems apparent that even in their childish search for comfort, power relations and exploitation were present. Reciprocity was never considered.

In her own recollections of those days Mol explains:

> she'd allowed it long after it stopped being a game. But if she hadn't, she'd never have seen a sweet in her life again and they'd never have taken her anywhere with them. Like the circus or the bioscope in the afternoons after school or the horse races where you could stand around the stables till someone asked you for something and then you said yes, but that will cost two bob, nè. (151)

For Mol, sex has always been underwritten by the logic of (unequal) exchange. She seems to understand that their actions continued long after they could be dismissed as an innocent experimentation, yet she (purposefully or sincerely oblivious) misunderstands Pop's reference to the "trouble" he caused (150). It's also made apparent that Mol charged strangers at the racetrack for sexual favours.

When Treppie is beaten by his father as punishment, the nature of "the game" changes irrevocably. After his 'punishment', "Treppie started running her into the ground (see also 45). She tried to complain to Old Mol, but by then Old Mol was a broken woman" (154). In the only instance in which Mol reports the incestuous rape, her mother excuses Treppie's actions and chastises Mol for complaining. And so Mol is left with no option, no escape. Her body has been 'trained' from an

early age to be a receptacle for her brother's emotions and anger. Rape should thus be understood as "an enforcement of a set of patriarchal and misogynist values" (Cahil 2001:58).

I have written about the confrontation between Pop and Treppie, which hinges on blame and responsibility, in Chapter Three. Mol does not take part in the conversation, primarily because of Treppie's use of the word 'fault' – she "can't handle that word" (380). It evokes memories of Old Pop:

> Old Pop always used to say everything was *her* fault, and then Old Mol would jump in front of her when she saw a punch coming her way. Or she, Mol, would jump behind Old Mol. Then she felt it was all her fault, twice over, 'cause Old Mol was always looking black and blue from taking the blows meant for her. (380)

In terms of the language of the rape script, Old Pop, with his unquestioning patriarchal views, blames the victim. Mol's enduring loyalty to her parents has perversely also ensured that she has absorbed her father's belief that she is to blame for her brothers' (and son's) raping her and that nothing is to be gained from complaining.

Treppie, on the other hand, desires retribution for his pain, and he has nowhere to turn for it outside of the family (cf p. 127). Whereas Treppie avoids "understanding his suffering" by transforming his emotions into physical expression which provides some relief, for Mol there is no comfort in retreating to physicality. Suffering is already embodied, "deep in our bones" (385). And notions of blame and fault have no place in her vocabulary, especially since their invocation fails to produce any positive changes in her life. Nonetheless, she has no doubts about the undesirability of pain and the experience of continued brutality.

Given the existence of Lambert's gun, and the elaborate bargaining process he goes through with Sonnyboy to acquire it, the fact that he only shoots at his mural, in anger, rather than his family, is perhaps an unexpected realisation of Anton Chekhov's adage about guns as props.[162] *Triomf*, although exploiting and drawing on many South African myths and literary tropes, is too complex a novel to resort to such a cliched end. As Treppie pontificates:

> The bastard should fuckenwell have shot himself in the head, and the rest of them too, one after

[162] As illustration of his view that every element of the play should have a purpose, Chekhov stated, "If in Act I you have a pistol hanging on the wall, then it must fire in the last act" (quoted in Rayfield 1997: 203).

> the other. Then all of their problems would've been solved for good. And then this whole blasted story could have ended in blood and guts and a smoking barrel. The perfect South African family murder. Then everyone would've been happy – common rubbish living their common lives, making the rest of the fucken scum feel good about themselves.... Well, no one's going to get rid of them quite so easily. (441)

Extrapolating from this statement about the fate of the Benades in the world of the book, it is possible to construe a meta-comment on the fate of *Triomf* in the world of its readers. Van Niekerk repeatedly dashes the reader's expectations and the novel refuses an interpretation which reduces it to the determinism of a comic tale about "common rubbish living their common lives, making the rest of the fucken scum feel good about themselves". *Triomf* does not fit neatly into any pre-existing models of explanation and similarly troubles the 'rape script', although not in a straightforward feminist manner and for these reasons, it continues to haunt and challenge the reader. The reader is included in the 'community of guilt'. The Benades cannot be abjected from the South African bodies politic; they can't be forgotten so easily. *Triomf* is not so much concerned with "fault" or apportioning blame, as it is with the possibility of physical encounters which express remorse instead of violence.

Towards the novel's end, Treppie exhibits a rare moment of compassion, perhaps indicative of his change in temperament after 'Peace Day' and to appease Mol, compares their house to a ship: "sailing to the shore where love did last eternally, and would that make her feel better?" (451). The Benades never do reach those "eternal shores" (452) – another kind of wallpaper – and none of them experience love, in its sentimental mythical version perpetuated by the library romance novel (451-2). Lambert assumes he has inherited the mantle of "man of the house", but his power has been defused: "He's boss of the house now, he thinks. But that's okay. He can't corner her anymore like he used to. Now she's faster than him" (470).

However, Mol's freedom and independence is prefigured when Pop teaches her to drive, a final act of compassion, and a scene in which Mol, Pop and Treppie cry (446). Treppie, watching Mol and Pop felt "It was so bad he felt like his heart wanted to combust. … His gills contracted with tears" (446). Treppie remains watching Mol "light a cigarette and smoke it from beginning to end, there in her victory chariot" (448). Mol may not experience love and sex remains a violation, but in this moment, even more than at the end of the novel, she achieves a semblance of peace, and there is tenderness in Treppie's vision of her: a recognition of their tragedy and survival.

**Domestic Violence and Power Struggles**

Meg Samuelson writes that "*Agaat* bristles with undercurrents of violence – physical and psychic – between men and women, and women and women, as well as charges of love" (2012: 773). In scholarly articles on *Agaat*, the focus has understandably fallen on the relationship between "women and women", between Milla and Agaat. However, in this chapter, I propose primarily a consideration of Milla's relationship with her husband, "PrettyJak" (*Agaat* 49), and the manner in which this relationship troubles conservative notions of gender roles and depictions of domestic violence.

Women's bodies and reproduction are at the centre of debates about the construction of women's identity and role in society. In the *plaasroman* the lineage must continue for the farm to be viable, to exist in posterity and to avert the tragedy of a change in ownership, or the end of a family dynasty. In this sense too, the *plaasroman* and Afrikaner nationalism's priorities and intentions merge, are inscribed on the body of the farmer's wife and are dependent on her capacity to become a mother. On this topic, Elsie Cloete explains that "[n]ationalism's propensities to use women as tools in evoking nationalistic sentiments are based on the presupposition that the category of women as mothers is a pre-given and seamless phenomenon" (Cloete 1994:1). Furthermore, a necessary component of the historical definition of motherhood "is that of the 'nobleness' of the phenomenon" (1994: 10). In a different reading, Dorothy Driver has suggested that, despite tendencies to idealise motherhood, it has revolutionary potential to rewrite dominant patriarchal narratives and to suggest the possibilities of a different future (1992). As Driver contends, the theme of motherhood is an especially fruitful metaphor for a country at the point of rebirth, or dramatic change.

In *Agaat* ownership of the farm can be traced back along a matriarchal lineage; Milla is a pale reincarnation of her great-great-great-grandmother, who haunts the tale. Her farming prowess is legendary and has entered the family mythology, as she continued to farm alone after her husband's death. Yet in order to inherit the farm, Milla (unlike Agaat after her) must marry. In the world of the novel, Milla merely needs Jak to secure her inheritance and to become pregnant. For this reason, Prinsloo and Visagie describe the novel as feminist, as enacting a feminist inversion of the plaasroman (2007:77). While *Agaat*, like *Triomf*, is a highly allusive text, I argue that it is the literal fact of Milla's desire to have a child that fuels the action of the novel, and which is not of primarily allegorical import.[163] Milla has no delusions about Jak's farming ability, but is convinced that she

[163]Rosemarie Buikema (2009) elucidates that "[i]n the Netherlands, the academic reception of this recently translated novel has not been documented yet, but the journalistic reception of *Agaat* explicitly states that the lengthy novel's true meaning is allegorical" (311).

can teach him and instruct him to manage a successful farm. For Milla, any talk of farming is mediated through her body, as her sexuality is exploited to seduce Jak into being a farmer (cf Prinsloo & Visagie 2009: 78). She attempts to extract from him a desire for both her body and the land; the desire for the latter is expressed and manipulated through the former. Love remains a kind of afterthought: "Was there love? Enough for a start, you thought" (24). The absence of love, and the willingness to settle for something approximating an idea of it, is a familiar theme – witness *Triomf*. If the whole novel is about being 'good enough', the initial requirements for Jak are remarkably slim: he simply needs to be good enough to impregnate his wife. As Milla is reduced to her reproductive organs, Jak's utility and identity is reduced to his penis: "You wanted a child. And for that he was good enough. Because that was something you didn't have" (107).

This consideration of Milla and Jak's relationship will draw from the second person narrative sections, as that is where their encounters are related in depth. Whereas the diary sections are read aloud to Milla by Agaat, and possibly embroidered on by their reader (cf Van Niekerk quoted in De Kock 2009:149), the second person sections are Milla's alone, addressed to herself and unmediated by another consciousness or affected by the encroachment of her disease.[164] As will become evident in the examples discussed below, the adoption of the second person is, however, not necessarily a form of illuminated self-recrimination; Milla expresses greater understanding of her own failings in the present tense and diary sections, thus if this is her 'testimony', it is ultimately flawed and marred by gaps. The self-doubt present in the diary is not to be found in the often confident, self-justifying second person sections.

Milla's mother has always been critical of her, an attitude which changes little over the course of the novel. However, Milla believes that fulfilling the roles traditionally ascribed to women – wife and mother – will ensure her worth. As Milla reflects: "you who hitherto could never find favour in [your mother's] eyes, would at last be complete. Somebody's wife. In the normal course of events, somebody's mother" (*Agaat* 23). In Milla's mind, her engagement will thus be the catalyst to her eventual apotheosis as 'Afrikaner woman'.

From the start of Milla and Jak's engagement, farming and intercourse are metaphorically and literally interconnected. Milla's mother lectures Jak on farming and recites the ancestral

[164]Van Niekerk describes these narrative sections as a "a court of conscience" (De Kock 2009: 143) and De Kock suggests the use of the unusual second person form facilitates "reflecting upon yourself, but in fact addressing yourself, it creates a lot of interesting gaps of self-ironising" (143). Heyns suggests the second person "has an almost confessional, even accusatory inflection. … Accusatory is too strong, but it's a sense of … a recording of what she has done as if she is pointing a finger at herself" (quoted in Felman 2007).

hagiography, the 'creation myth' of the farm. When the all-important farm maps are revealed for the first time, in an almost ritualistic passing on of the inheritance, Milla's body is pressed against her fiancé. As the farm is revealed to its new owners, so is her body to her future husband. Shirking literary precedent, it is Milla rather than Jak, who purposefully eroticizes the land and who willingly indulges the phallocentric cliché (cf Prinsloo and Visagie [2009:78]). She believes herself to be in control of this gendered narrative, thinks she "played him" (25). However she is in the perilous situation of asserting her agency while cynically invoking a patriarchal narrative in which she, as a woman, has no agency and exists to be objectified, as an object of 'conquest'.

This seduction scene in the car, as they cross the Tradouw Pass together is redolent with Freudian metaphors, double entendres and comic timing but also contains hints of the darker strains of violence which will enter their marriage. It is notably the only scene in which both Milla and Jak are equally aroused by their encounter, in which bodies are voluptuous sources of pleasure, rather than depleted and exhausted – this regardless of the intimations of violence, of the fact that each of them are using sex as a bargaining chip and the unsatisfactory end of the drive (for Milla). It is the only scene in either of the novels in which arousal (specifically the erect penis, certainly not a common sight in the *plaasroman*, and in some sense still a taboo of film, if less so in literature) is not described as grotesque (compare the descriptions of Lambert's penis in particular). For once, in a sensual description, it a source of sexual pleasure for Milla who relishes the hitherto unknown texture of penile skin (30). Her actions here, although exactly mirroring her mother's later miming of how women gain control over men (144-145), evoke the frivolity and joy at the discovery of another's body, rather than the controlling manipulation implied in her mother's actions. Thus, while Milla is clearly manipulating Jak, her actions are not yet purely selfish. Jak's childlike delight at being "immersed" in Milla's breasts and his "desperate and trembling [mouth], endeared him to Milla" (32). She relishes being in control, reducing Jak to the equivalent of a powerless child (which she performs more cruelly as the novel progresses), yet she also delights in him, and her own excitement.[165]

Oblivious of the dramatic irony, Jak reminds Milla how her mother "hád finished off [her] father" (28). It is also clear there is a bargain struck here: "So, and what are you going to give mé in exchange?" (29, see also 25) Jak asked. In this instance a receptive body is offered in exchange for a farm (and a virile farmer). In a thinly veiled threat, Jak says, "And you'd better show me

[165] There are many similarities concerning the sexual power relations in *Agaat* with Wilma Stockenström's *Uitdraai* (1976) and there is certainly potential for a paper comparing the two novel's depiction of sex and reversion of conventional gender roles.

everything. I want to séé where I'll be farming. I can't wait. Seeing that I've allowed myself to be set up in a golden frame here" (33). Jak has explicitly equated her body with the farm and demanded full access to it. Jak intimates that Milla had better fulfil her role as wife and submit to him or there will be consequences. It is the threat of violence which Jak believes he has the right to wield. He is aware of the bargain he has struck – though perhaps not of the extent to which he will be made to suffer for it, nor the crippling effect his own idea of himself in this "golden frame" will have.

This drive to *Grootmoedersdrift* concludes with their first sexual encounter at the farm, and shortly thereafter Jak assaults Milla on the day before her wedding (44-47). All that is related is the unexpected brevity and brutality of the sex. Yet the first time she is battered by Jak, Milla's injuries are itemised (47). Noticeably, in the chronology of the second person narrative, the sex is hinted at, but only narrated *after* the *first* abuse. The narrative order (as opposed to the chronological order) ensures that when the sex is described, it is tainted by the prior assault and is thus already part of a narrative of violence.

On the wedding day itself, the perceptions of others is what matters most – more than the betrayal by Jak. Milla adapts her dress to hide her bruised arms, and her mother's response to the dress material (her mother does not necessarily know about the violence, and even if she did, it's unclear that her words would be in any way altered) is telling: "Perhaps, she said, you're not too taken with the idea of getting married in a bedspread, but as far as that's concerned, you'll just have to get rid of your finickiness, because from now on you're the bed". (47). Jak parodically echoes her mother's views, when he dismisses Milla's concerns about "the quantity of blood" after intercourse: "Now you're well broken-in. A little crash course. Don't be so namby-pamby. What did your mother say? An Afrikaner woman makes her way in silence and forbearance" (48). Milla's mother's view on the role of women in marriage echoes Old Mol's: both accept the status of women in society as if destined; neither are capable of considering these conditions as socially constructed, or if they are, they still remain powerless against the knowledge, in fact they collude in its dissemination. In their perspective, then, once the marriage is official, consent becomes a non-issue. As Ann Cahil argues, the ever-present threat of rape is "a constitutive and sustained moment in the production of the feminine body" (2001:56). The dominant patriarchal power discourse ensures this production, and for Cahil the question of resistance is particularly pertinent. Milla's mother cautions her to passively accept the manner in which her body has been encoded into the logic of patriarchy: her bodily comportment should be passive, and horizontal (cf Cahil 2001:58).

Milla's description of sex, "[Jak] had his way with you" (48), places Jak as the subject and ensures her non-participation in the act and potentially her non-consent. She simply steels herself against the inevitable: "gathered yourself into yourself. From inside you protected yourself while he drove home his will" (48). [166] Milla is a woman reduced to a role of sexual submission. Her womb and genitalia become synecdoches for her identity. Milla remains "colonised" by the "phallocentric model" of sexuality (See Bartky 322); she remains incapable of considering her body in any other terms than the way her her mother – and Jak – sees it.[167] However, one might argue that she embraces the phallocentric model for her own ends. Her sexual liberation is thus a fraught and compromised one.

In her brief characterisation of Milla and Jak's marriage, Stobie allows that "[t]he marriage is not a happy one, and plays out sadomasochistic tensions" (2009: 61), but there is much more to be said. Van Niekerk and Heyns differ in terms of whose conniving is more successful, more deliberate and abhorrent (see De Kock 2009 & Felman 2007), and the reality is probably somewhere in between.[168] Both the conventional masculine and feminine roles on the farm are challenged and deconstructed. Milla, despite her radical treatise on farming, is not easily described as feminist, despite Hein Viljoen's claim, nor do I think she is an "earth mother" (Stobie and Rossman 2012).[169] Jak is not an archetypal patriarch. He is neither a heroic farmer, nor merely a brute; his body is sculpted in response to vanity, rather than through hours of manly labouring in the sun.

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[166] Milla's response of "gathering yourself into yourself" can be compared with Luce Irigary's description of the "female lover", as opposed to merely the "beloved": "Given back to her own movements, to the demonstration of her charms, the female lover also revives herself in the flame and does not simply receive it from the other. Waiting without becoming rigid, she does not close herself off or enclose herself in some sepulchre of images or some project that denies her dynamism. She tends toward her own fulfillment, already unfolds herself to gather in more" (126). Milla's attempt to distance herself from the act ensures that she is neither the active lover, nor even the objectified, passive "beloved" (Cf Irigary 127).

[167] Or as Van Niekerk, quoting Cloete, suggests, on the topic of contemporary women:

> It is this possibility of defect that is watched over by an inner surveyor, a "panoptical male connoisseur" residing within the consciousness of most contemporary women. It is this modern womangrader that has to a large extent replaced the bearded Boer patriarch of the past in the psychology of the Afrikaner women. And to a large extent it is against both these wardens of womanhood that women are railing in contemporary Afrikaans literature. (1992:143)

In her fiction, the female protagonists parody, subvert but also internalise the dictates of these "wardens of womanhood". These ideas can be traced back to Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist philosophy as articulated in her groundbreaking work, *The Second Sex* (1949 [1953 trans]). As Scholz summarises, de Beauvoir argues that "women are complicit in their own oppression. In existentialist terms, women internalize the male gaze, and with it the expectations of the gender ... Women then strive to live up to this model of the 'eternal feminine'" (2008).

[168] Van Niekerk insists that "Milla weighs in on the scale of evil much heavier than Jak" (2009:141, see also Felman 2007). In an interview, Heyns elaborates: "[Van Niekerk's] not very sympathetic to Jak either. But she does see him as a victim of Milla, and that, in a way, he's reacting to his own powerlessness. And he's reacting in the only way he knows how, which is violently and very unpleasantly" (quoted in Felman 2007).

[169] Viljoen unexpectedly – and without justification – comments that one of the faults of the novel is the fact that "Daar is nie 'n sterk korrektief op Milla se feminisme nie" (178). However, while the novel might be feminist, it is not apparent that Milla is in fact feminist. Furthermore, Jak and Agaat do act "as strong correctives" to Milla's actions.

The body as soil motif occurs in various forms and several instances in the novel, too many to comment on individually. Stobie and Rossman (2012) focus on the first stream of consciousness passage in the novel, in which Milla explicitly makes this comparison. They remark that "Milla regrets not having saved [the soil and farm animals from] abuse and denigration, as she herself failed in fending off her abusive husband and manipulative mother" (2012:18). However, the substance of their reading does not revisit the abuse Milla is subject to from Jak, and limits their analysis to the 'mother-daughter' relationship between Milla and Agaat. In their reading of Milla as "menopausal Earth mother" (2012: 25), Stobie and Rossman conclude:

> Although Milla suffered under the abuse of her husband and did not "*strike back*" (*Agaat* 35), she does, even if only in phantasy, offer the greatest sacrifice for reconciliation: herself, and by extension the Afrikaner (agri)culture she comes to represent. (2012: 25)

I am not persuaded by the logic of the final line of Rossman and Stobie's argument in the quote above. Firstly, because Milla does "strike back" by rewriting the narrative of their sex life as one in which she embraced the violence, her psychological manipulation of Jak, by which she "replaces his guts with her projects" (25), could be thought of as striking back by other means. Secondly, the equation of not striking back with a fantasised sacrifice is problematic in the same way that viewing Mol's 'laying herself down' for the men in the family is considered a composite of the actions of Jesus and Mary (see Rossman and Stobie 2012 above). The suggestion that Milla's "submission" to Jak can be justified because of a future self-sacrifice for Agaat strikes me as rather odd. Furthermore, these thoughts *only* occur to Milla at the onset of the degenerative disease, which will slowly kill her. They are not justifications which arise at the time of the abuse itself. This additional element complicates the equation of abused body with exhausted soil, and does not shed light on Milla's prior sexual behaviour. In this case, as with other articles, the actual events of the narrative are subsumed into a larger theoretical and allegorical reading of the novel.

After their wedding, Milla and Jak's sex life settles into a distinctly non-reciprocal, though not entirely non-consensual routine: "Strike, you thought, strike your sword on the water, you think you possess me, but you don't know me" (69).The verbs Milla employs to describe sex connote violence, yet she also believes that she is in control; she "let him" do as he wished (69). However, Milla does not necessarily discourage or even protest at Jak's viciousness; it is somewhat glibly compared to the natural rhythms of life on Grootmoedersdrift:

> But you knew that if he got rough enough with you, you could keep him with you. Then at least

he was involved. You learnt to use his anger, the energy of it. It was less than nothing.
A smack in the face, a blow on the back
Billing and cooing on Grootmoedersdrift. (88)

In a masochistic sense, Milla strives to provoke Jak to violence, not because she receives any pleasure as a result, but merely to force him to engage with her and to prevent his complete defection. Brutality has been absorbed into the structure of their relationship. There is a perverted intimacy in the violence and pain that tie husband and wife to each other.[170] Possibly also the threat of exposure is wielded (by both Milla and Jak) to ensure their fidelity to the idea of their marriage. Milla has a utilitarian conceptualisation of violence: it is to be endured in order for her to fall pregnant.

Jak is not oblivious of Milla's intentions: "Don't think I can't see through you, he said, you're more wily than the snake. That's the only bit of paradise that there'll ever be on this farm" (88). Her response is a non sequitor: You thought, if we can't be lovers, let us then at least be friends. Friends can learn to differ, even over paradise" (88-89). When Milla reports what Jak says, nowhere does she exhibit any capacity for compassion or empathy for his feelings. She doesn't object to his characterization of her as a snake, but fails to consider its meaning. The reader is left to draw her own conclusions about this unreliable narrator. This pattern in their dialogue is repeated often, and Milla's singular ability to ignore or divert the conversation from Jak's complaints is unfailing. There are moments where she blatantly fails to judge herself – and these all relate to her relationship with Jak. In this extract, she exhibits no understanding about the difference between lovers and friends, fails to recriminate herself for not being able to befriend Jak, nor consider the role of violence in their relationship.

On the evening of the 1st of January 1960, Milla receives word that she has finally succeeded in falling pregnant. Her pregnancy justifies "everything [she] had to endure, everything that [she'd] undertaken" (108). Her attitude to Jak undergoes an immediate transformation too, primarily because she "no longer needed him so badly" (108). Milla's rejection of Jak is more pragmatic than ideological; he has fulfilled his function. In other words, if there is a sacrifice (as Rossman and Stobie [2012] argue) it has been made by Milla in order to become a mother. The irony is that Milla has already become a mother, to Agaat, a fact that she denies and dismisses on this evening (cf Olivier 2011:177). Although Milla's pregnancy occurs in the year South Africa became a republic,

[170]Milla's tactic here has much in common with Agaat's attempts to provoke Milla in the present tense narrative, when she cares for her, to ensure she is still alive, and to battle an equal. These manipulative tendencies remain familial traits.

her impending motherhood does not carry any revolutionary potential, or usher in a new era (cf Driver and *Triomf* 51). While it does signal the start of greater independence from Jak, any possibility of a new kind of family is quashed when Agaat is banished from the house.

In Milla's logic, her endurance of Jak's violent and brutal sex has been rendered worthwhile – a logic which sits uncomfortably with any feminist rhetoric. Has Milla's "forbearance" been worthwhile? To what extent can it ever be measured as worthwhile and according to whom? Has her suffering ultimately reinforced the nobility of motherhood – achieved by any means? These troubling questions have no easy answer, but have to be confronted by a reader considering their relationship.

In an article about the phenomenology of rape, Cahil responds to and challenges Michel Foucault's categorisation of rape as akin to other kinds of violence (2001). Specifically, she objects to the elision of the sexual aspect of rape, which occurs in Foucault's redefinition. She draws interesting conclusions about feminine bodily comportment and why rape is different from other violent assaults, and proposes an intriguing suggestion regarding domestic violence, which is unfortunately only briefly mentioned at the end of her paper:

> Other assaults, including those made with fists, and especially those which occur within the context of sexual relationships, may in fact be experienced as sexual in nature precisely insofar as they confirm the assumptions about the feminine body discussed above. In some ways, these assaults may be perceived as precursors to the act of rape, the ultimate violation. If this is the case then our analysis would call for a serious reconsideration of domestic violence not merely as an act of assault, but rather as an act with an underlying set of sexual meanings as well. (2001: 61)

In this regard, Jak's abuse of Milla, while sexual, should not only be considered "sexual in nature", but also a means by which Jak attempts to reinforce patriarchal "assumptions about the feminine body" *and* simultaneously, I maintain, to reinforce and assert patriarchal assumptions about the ideal masculine body and its meanings, which he strives to maintain. Milla's resistance to Jak never challenges these assumptions but attempts – and fails – to use them against him. Jak wields the threat of rape, and Milla's resistance takes the form of a hyper-submissive parody, denying his desire to force her to have sex with him. Furthermore, by inverting this power, Milla in fact claims the power of physical abuse, whereas Jak, thus disempowered by the loss of his "disciplinary power", resorts to forms of psychological torture. The power of the phallus, to use Judith Butler's

argument (1994), rests with Milla, but, to continue in Butler's idiosyncratic style it is also "always already lost".

Milla's pregnancy, which signals her arrival as a fully-fledged Afrikaner woman in the eyes of the community is ironically also the catalyst for her adoption of a more conventionally masculine role – as farmer, but also in her relationship with Jak. Conversely, "Jak with the woman's face" (*Agaat* 49) is described and behaves in ways associated with femininity. Shortly after hearing of her pregnancy, Milla allows herself the luxury of complimenting Jak on his appearance: "You felt it coming out of your mouth. Like a noose it fell around his neck" (108). Her compliments function to entrap Jak; her words exist as implements of torture (a recurring motif) as she dusts off and adjusts what she considers this image of a man, "headpiece filled with straw" (106).

The meaning of domestic violence, and the taboo of airing it in a public forum, is explicitly raised at the New Year's dinner party held for the farming community, where, for the first time, Milla holds court. Her grandstanding is explicitly dismissed by the women as inappropriate behaviour, and received with bemused mockery by some of the men (112). The change in her behaviour is palpable and her actions are considered masculine: her body is no longer akin to the soil; in speaking out, she becomes, in the men's metaphor, "a plough" (112). Milla has always been overly concerned by the verdict of the court of public opinion, but in this moment, liberated by the news of her pregnancy, she no longer considers herself a pariah, or an object of communal derision or suspicion; she has fulfilled her duty, her body works and so she has free reign to voice her opinion on the destructive farming habits adopted in the search for profit rather than respect for nature. Once again invoking the soil motif, Milla compares the manner in which the farmer should care for his farm land, to the manner in which he should care for his wife. In this metaphor, the feminine vehicle conveys both passivity and vulnerability, suggestive of a need for protection, and this fits neatly in with the paternalist narrative and patriarchy underpinning Afrikaner nationalism, which Milla is not challenging in this case: "If a farmer clears and levels his land year after year it's as good as beating his wife every night. In a manner of speaking, you added, but the words were out and they had been spoken" (113-4). Milla invokes the metaphor not in order to draw attention to the violated land, but to reveal the concrete violence of rape erased by the metaphor – in other words, to warn Jak. She wields the power to threaten to expose his violence.

A violent argument ensues as a result when Jak and Milla return home. This confrontation is worth analysing, especially for the contrasts it reveals to their initial flirtatious conversations en-route to the farm. Importantly both encounters revolve around issues of farmer identity, the treatment of soil,

violence, and performances of masculinity and femininity. Jak initiates the argument which devolves into probably the most explicit and brutal of their sexual encounters, perhaps because it will be the final occasion in which Jak wields any power. Jak metaphorically attempts to wrest control over the land back from Milla and assert his masculinity: "If you want to be my soil, I'll do on it as I want to" (115).

Milla deflects Jak's anger and responds with seduction, unzipping her dress, distracting Jak with perhaps the kind of sexual openness she displayed first on the Tradouw Pass. She slowly undresses, in a striptease carefully orchestrated, it would seem, to debase herself and by extension Jak, whom she hopes to render powerless to his desire. She lies on the bed and wait for him:

> What does one call that? So spread open? You wanted to feel it, his powerlessness. It excited you to wait for it. You felt you had the advantage, for the first time.
>
> He was very rough. ...
>
> Jak, you should be ashamed of yourself, you said. But you heard your voice. There was a kink in the words. You were in it together, in the shame.
>
> Whore! Jak shouted, whore!
>
> You laughed, that was what you did. ...
>
> You fastened your hands around the back of your hips and pulled him deeper into you. You dictated a rhythm. For yourself. …
>
> You wanted to feel it. Dry. Sore. Good. You had him where you wanted him, you were done with him, he was good only for decoration. To know that, was the reward. (116)

Their encounter seems to blur the lines between sexual abuse, consensual rough sex and role-playing, although perhaps only Milla is consciously playing a role and has foisted one upon Jak. The scene is troubling not only because of the violence in the details with which it is related, but rather for the seeming pleasure Milla takes in her own humiliation, and which she believes will in turn humiliate Jak once he learns of her pregnancy (115-116). Their shared humiliated will enforce a kind of perverse intimacy. Milla allows herself to be debased in order to reclaim the power in their relationship. Milla can no longer be victimised by rape – not only because she is pregnant but also because she has diluted any power Jak might have had. Unlike the previous descriptions of sex, here Milla is not a passive participant. Jak's attempt to punish Milla, to be in control is subverted by her ironic compliments and her complicity. From this point, it would appear that the power shifts in their relationship. Milla reclaims ownership of her body, and to a degree, the farm. Only when he discovers he is to become a father, does Jak relent in his tormenting of Milla. This sexual violence is then sublimated into a battle for the affection of, and control over, Jakkie.

In the context of an examination of cinema and sex, Laura Mulvey explains that "scopophilia", or the pleasure of looking, is according to Freud "associated ... with taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze" (Mulvey 1975: 2184).[171] Mulvey continues: "In their traditional exhibitionist role women are looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness.* Woman displayed as sexual object is the *leitmotif* of erotic spectacle" (2186). The encounter being discussed here is relayed from Milla's perspective, which troubles the conventionally masculine specular gaze. Instead, Milla has internalised this gaze and refuses objectification in this scene. In fact, it is Jak who, despite his violence, is reduced to an object by Milla, and by implication is subject to the reader's "curious gaze". At the conclusion of this scene, Jak's body is exhausted, rendered docile and spent. Whereas Milla's body is neither fetishised nor eroticised in the encounter, Jak's body is grotesque. Any reading of this encounter as erotic spectacle is denied.

Milla waits until Jak is "done" (116), informs him of her pregnancy and is now empowered to make her own threat: "if you ever lift your hand against me again, I will sell the farm and leave you and take your child with me and you will never see him again" (116-117). The description of Jak's penis after sex echoes Treppie and Mol's metaphoric descriptions of Pop's penis – depleted and grotesque, denuded of any power: "He was too numb to answer back . … His penis dangled out. It looked like a piece of intestine. A son, he mumbled" (117).[172] Any hope Milla had of a tender response to her pregnancy has been denied, a foot in the face is the only touch she receives in response to her news (117).

What Van Niekerk does in this scene, and in writing of Milla and Jak's relationship, is precisely to challenge the way in which violence can be written – to push the boundaries and [re]consider the context of rape and the means of representation of gender violence in particular. These scenes of violent brutal sex not only challenge what Gunne and Brigley Thomson refer to as the 'rape script'

[171]Mulvey allows that there are potentially "two contradictory aspects of the pleasurable structures of looking in the conventional cinematic situation. The first, scopophilia, arises from pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight. The second, developed through narcissism and the constitution of the ego, comes from identification with the image seen" (2185). In this scene, identification and pleasure are both denied; the violence, inflicted by Jak *and* self-inflicted by Milla's submission, is not erotic – in the same way that Mol's rape never is.

[172] The final diary section ends just prior to Agaat being thrown out of the house, and the second last entry reveals an alternate reading on the conclusion of this night. It reveals Milla's conflicted feelings about the evening, her self-doubt and challenges the second-person depiction of her as impervious to Jak's anger and violence:

> Went & crawled in with A. after the scrap last night. Was ever so miserable. Perhaps B. is right perhaps one should just keep one's mouth shut about everything. Perhaps I angered that crowd of men with my talking about fertiliser & the soil. What on earth got into me? (641)

but *also* subvert narratives of gender violence proposed by some feminist scholars and gender activists. This will be elaborated on towards the end of the chapter, with reference to Jak's accusatory speeches.

As Milla embraces the role of expectant-mother and her body changes accordingly, Jak becomes a parody of the heroic farmer. His obsession with his appearance and the rigorous fitness regimes he subjects himself to have more in common with what Foucault might term "disciplinary practices" (quoted in Bartky 326), which are normally invoked by feminist critics explaining the "imposition of normative femininity upon the female body" (Bartky 326). Jak is, in a sense, in thrall to, or even held captive by, his fantasies of normative masculinity as it should be expressed by the white Afrikaner male body. He exhibits a kind of hyper-masculinity perhaps out of fear of not measuring up and in response to Milla's dilution of his sexual power.[173] Jak now embraces this objectivised view of his own body and feels the effects of the "golden frame" he "allowed himself to be set up in" (33); he internalises Milla's view of him and obsesses over being a good enough "decoration" (116). Display replaces substance, as in the case of the body regimes. Jak is frequently referred to in the imagery of T.S. Eliot's "hollow men" (see *Agaat* 25, 343, 354 and 555).[174]

In contrast to the virile "camel man" (156) image Jak projects, there are scenes of pathos, where Milla watches Jak: "as he washed his face and brushed his teeth, standing stooped over in his underclothes. Sometimes as he removed the towel from his face, it seemed to you as if he was going to cry" (135). Milla expresses no compassion here, merely disparagingly referring to him as meek (see also 195). Impending motherhood has not changed her attitude towards Jak. He has been shorn of any masculine power, reduced in effect to a child: "At night he left the stoep room and came and lay behind your back like a little boy". (135) Yet she does not reach out to him.

As the years pass, Jak's behaviour towards others, like Milla and Agaat, is variable: at times exhibiting only cruelty and hostility, at others complete disregard or disinterest, or even neediness and vulnerability. Milla claims she "tried to look more kindly on Jak, also for Jakkie's sake" (342) and develops the habit of making nightly, somewhat inebriated, conjugal visits to Jak's outpost in the stoep room (343). However, her motivation here seems to have little to do with Jakkie, and more

[173]When Milla returns all of Jak's books to the library after his death, she described how the librarians "gazed wide-eyed at the material, as if they wanted to know how I'd handled all that virile energy. As if they wondered how a mouse-face like me could have kept up with the grandiose flights of fancy of my Camel Man" (156).

[174]The Eliot epigraph, and the extracts from "Four Quartets" embedded or alluded to in the text, are Heyns's addition and were not present in Van Niekerk's original Afrikaans (cf De Kock 2009). The phrase "headpiece with straw" stems directly from the stanza of Eliot's "The Hollow Men": "We are the hollow men / We are the stuffed men / Leaning together / Headpiece filled with straw. Alas! / Our dried voices, when / We whisper together / Are quiet and meaningless / As wind in dry grass / Or rats' feet over broken glass / In our dry cellar" (2002: 79).

with the growing awareness of her own isolation: neither Agaat nor her son pays her much attention. The nature of their sex life has always been cursory and mechanical, though Jak no longer even shows his "involvement" through abuse. At this point, she seems to regret the bargain she struck with Jak over the farm: "And what good did it do you? All the struggling to get the farming going smoothly, only then to be left feeling so loveless and forlorn?" (343). Again, these feelings stem primarily from self-pity rather any real new found love for Jak; or from a desire to prove he is more than "a pretty shell", which might justify the tortured years they have spent together (343).

Milla attempts one final seduction of Jak in a scene that combines dark comedy and tragedy. In retrospect, she seems to grasp the reasons for her inability to understand and empathise with him:

> You read him wrongly, looked past what was in him, you could assess him only in your terms, couldn't imagine that anybody, even Jak shouldn't be able sometimes to yearn exactly like you – for tenderness, for excitement, for eyes mutually intoxicated. (344)

This epiphany is only achieved in hindsight and never shared with Jak. Jak's response on the night Milla attempts to initiate "melancholy sex" is telling: "What would make mé good enough all of a sudden" (345). Milla continues to view Jak in terms of her own needs – first to fall pregnant, now to provide physical comfort. The phrase "eyes mutually intoxicated" is pure fantasy in this context – no more or less than Mol's "nice stories". Both Milla and Jak fall victim to, and are seduced by, fantasies of themselves which are nurtured by contemporary expectations of men and woman as well as their inability to be "good enough", to shrug off the roles they have been performing. Milla's "problem" remains a lack of empathy and an inability to imagine both herself and Jak differently (344).

Jak's response to Milla's sexual harrassment – for there can be no other term for it – is the start of a dramatic sea change in their relationship. In a series of heated conversations, Jak finally castigates Milla. Milla's authorial hold on the narrative is thus shattered as Jak's voice acts as a corrective to her version of events. He proclaims his emotions in different speeches (see p 346, 353-60, 415-7, 460, 512, 546), always with the same general intent: to convey his sense of having been emasculated by Milla (345). Milla, for the most part, continues to misunderstand, or refuse to understand Jak's accusations and considers responding with a consoling touch, which is always brushed off or unwanted. Jak no longer resorts to physical violence, but expresses his anguish verbally whereas Milla resorts to physical responses.

Jak merely feels taken advantage of: “Leave me alone, dammit, he swore, I’m not your toolbox!” (347, see also 348). The expectation of who has the power to withhold or offer consent has been subverted as has the fetishistic reduction of a person to a body fragment:

> No! He said, no, Milla! And pushed you away ... You think I'm stupid. You think you can play with me. ... It doesn't work, you know. A bloody scrap of black lace, after all the years of breaking me down and disparaging me. (347)

While Jak’s outburst no doubt evokes sympathy, there is irony in his inability to realise his own complicity in physically “breaking down” Milla. At the time, Milla dismissed the incident as “a farce” and “banished” Jak’s words from her mind (349). The second person voice thus succeeds in alerting the reader to Milla’s failings, but continues to emphasise her inability to communicate with Jak or for either of them to repair their relationship. So Milla reverts to her old tactic of garnering Jak’s attention, aiming for “a collision if a reconciliation wasn't possible” after what she refers to as her “humiliation” (352).

And as she provokes Jak, Milla finds a level of excitement in absorbing his hostile sentences, akin to the shamed enjoyment she experienced when he penetrated her the night after the New Year's party. The language is loaded with sexual excitement and innuendo, the word-patterns and verbs mimicking exactly the earlier submission to Jak:

> You looked at his mouth, his lips distorting with exasperation the ridges on his jaws as he clenched his teeth. Something in that excited you. What was it? You could never place it. You felt it in your own mouth, extra spit, and in your gullet, a kind of widening, in your gums, an itchiness. You waited for his delivery. You closed your eyes, so strongly did you feel it coming. His voice was high and hard, his speech-rhythm emphatic. You sat back, you knew how it was going to be, how it was going to enter you, the deluge of solid, heated sentences. (352)

Words are embodied, have physical effects and are transfiguring (cf the metaphor of Milla's flattery as a noose). Jak's harsh words acts as substitute for his penis. He recovers the agency denied him in sex by insulting Milla. He accuses Milla of obdurately judging him, “decid[ing] long ago, in the very distant past, that Jak de Wet is the villain of this story and he'll remáin the villain. All written up and bound, what everybody most wants to read” (353). Dismissing Jak as the “villain” is akin to the more acceptable “murder story” Treppie imagines, if Lambert had shot his family.[175] Readers of

[175]There is an argument to be made comparing Treppie and Jak, their similar violent traits which also mask their

Van Niekerk's fiction have no recourse to predictable narratives with self-congratulatory endings; there are no exculpatory escapes, and the reader is uncomfortably implicated.

The conversation continues, with Milla's responses growing more implausible, divorced from the meaning of Jak's testimony (354). She dismisses his valid emotions and pain as "hysteria", a tactic conventionoally adopted to disempower and ignore women (353). Jak continues: "There's another story here ... Perhaps you'll understand it better in the form of a fairy tale" (355). Just as Agaat has her fairy tale, which is revealed as Jakkie's bedtime story, so Jak perfects over time (from his toast at their wedding reception) the story he has created to explain his life: "Once upon a time there was a man who looked at himself in the mirror and thought he was good enough". He questions:

> Whére then can there be lóve in this tale?
> … Oh no, no, no my Milla, no, self-love, I tell you, self-love, the malignant, the contagious kind, that unfortunately is what this tale is all about. (360)

Jak's question suggests he is capable of a greater level of self-understanding and awareness than Milla. Milla only approaches these insights with the onset of her terminal illness. This question and answer encapsulate a key theme of the novel (of the three novels) as a whole – the inability to love, to be compassionate, to transcend disfiguring political and gender discourses. Even more so the novel illustrates the tragedy implicit in the inability to transcend one's own perspective of the world and attempt to sincerely empathise with the other. A history of abuse and self-involvement cannot be undone. The idea of 'self-love' as the only enduring love in the novel accords with Van Niekerk's stated desire to "emphasise" the overwhelming "narcissism" in the novel (2009:149).

Jak demands an explanation for Milla's silent submission to his rages. He asks "[w]hy would any self-respecting woman put up with it?" (415) and presumes to answer on her behalf:

> You nééd me to mistreat you. Do you know why? That's how your móther taught you. And hér mother before her, all the way to Eve, to the tree in paradise.
>
> Jak tore off his shirt so that the buttons popped. You were shocked at his body, so lean and so hard.
>
> Don't look at me, Milla, that's what's bloody-well left of me at least I know it. A wife-batterer with self-knowledge. What about you?
>
> …Because you feel inferior. Because you want to feel inferior.

---

fragility and their sense of being abused (although in very different ways). Nonetheless, both challenge the archetype of "villains".

> … Look, here is your accomplice. I help you with it. Do you think it's possible to become like me all on one's own? And you can't tell anyone about it, can you?
>
> … Selected me by the balls, didn't you? Raised me to you hand! Bedtime story! Little woman whines for attention until she gets the kind that she most appreciates. Thud, bang, blood in the nostril, from ballroom to slapstick in two winks.
>
> Backbone of the nation, bah! Thanks to you and your kind the Afrikaner deserves an early demise. You're a pestilential species.
>
> See what you look like! You líke it. Tell me: How do you rape somebody who wants to be raped? (415-6)

Milla's response is only a desire not to be overheard, or seen. She neither contradicts, nor seems to show any understanding. Yet Milla realises later, referring to Jak's fairytale narrative of their life: "It hurt more than any shove or slap" (460).

The suggestion that some women want to be beaten, or ask to be raped has real political currency and is used in justifying the most horrific abuses. Out of context, Jak's disconcerting question: "how can you rape a woman who wants to be raped?" (415) evokes all the gender myths of the 'rape script' and lays the blame entirely with the woman (cf Du Toit 2005). However, in context, while it is apparent Milla has no desire to be raped, the above scene suggests that rape and the power relations expressed through it becomes a much more nuanced and complex event in *Agaat*. While Jak might deserve pity, and while he has been manipulated by Milla, his statements and actions illuminate his bigotry and chauvinism in addition to Milla's masochistic and misanthropic behaviour. Jak's outburst not only counter-balances Milla's version of her life, but is also a radical rewriting of the myths of Afrikaner womanhood. All the stereotypes and expectations of feminine behaviour, of the nurturing and self-sacrificing volksmoeder, "the backbone of the nation", are violently quashed by Jak, "a wife-batterer with self-knowledge".

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Jak all but admits defeat to Milla:

> I'm stúck here! You bátten on me! But I'm almost done … Then you can advance again. You've provided a reserve, after all. In the hanslam camp. Agaat Lourier. Pre-raped. Yes, don't look at me like that, it's the truth! As no man can rape a woman. She's ready for you! To the bitter end! Because that much I can tell you now, Í'm not going to make it all the way with you Milla, that I know in my bónes! (417)

Jak does not "make it all the way"; his death barely causes a ripple in the day to day running of the

farm and Agaat is indeed there till the very "bitter end". While Agaat was traumatically raped as a child, Jak's language connotes a metaphorical use of the term, suggesting that Milla's treatment of Agaat is akin to rape. This metaphor is employed to emphasise a different victim, to suggest the cycle of abuse continues irrespective of the gender of the abuser. It is certainly effective in suggesting the extent of Milla's criminal and inhumane treatment of Agaat. The phrase "as no man can rape a woman", however, simultaneously erases the reality of the incestuous rape Agaat was subject to and irreparably scarred by, as well as mitigates Jak's own violence. It dilutes Jak's own complicity in his behaviour towards Milla. However it also effectively and shockingly conveys the betrayal that Milla has committed against Agaat, the extent to which she has denied Agaat's own subjectivity and refused Agaat any power of consent in the path her life has taken. The victim-victimiser binary is destabilised in this novel, as these identities shift and change over the course of a relationship. The use of rape as a metaphor and as a violent concrete act in the novel certainly causes the reader dis-ease, challenges her preconceptions and tasks her with considering new ways of thinking about rape and domestic violence.

That evening, Milla ponders the meaning of Jak's words: "you couldn't understand what point it was that Jak was trying to make, whether he had a point" (546). Her inability to comprehend him at this point might beggar belief, or merely underline the extent of her narcissism and the enduring power of her idea of herself. Shortly thereafter Milla witnesses Jak sobbing, but she remains incapable of any conciliatory gesture or words: "You wanted to go in to him. I am part of this pain, you wanted to say to him, but you couldn't. You leant your head against the window sill and listened till the sobs died down" (546).

Milla and Jak's final years together are characterised by silence, induced by exhaustion and defeat and the continued inability to cross the chasm that has opened between them. The final image one has of the two of them is lying next to each other on a bed, silently, not touching. The exhilaration of discovering each other's bodies with which their relationship began is nowhere in evidence – an expected outcome of the passage of time but also indicative of the complete absence of tenderness. Neither is the brutality. Both the consolation of touch and kind words are denied Jak and Milla. However, if touch is never neutral for Milla, is always a product of power play or manipulation, then perhaps their rescinding of touch and conversation signals a final acceptance of their intractable situation:

> Neither of you made any overtures to the other. Each occupied a side of the bed. He slept quietly, you could hardly feel his heat and his weight. Like a husk, you thought, a dry membrane. In the

morning when you woke up, he was gone.

When Agaat wasn't present, when you were alone together, you endured each other wordlessly. (555)

**The Absence of Touch**

*Memorandum* is a radical departure from the previous two novels, both in terms of form and content. The family unit, which is at the centre of *Triomf* and *Agaat* is absent from this novel. Wiid's parents are long dead and his family exists as only a faint memory. In *Memorandum*, despite the ever presence of beds, they are hospital beds, and there is no mention of sex – violent or otherwise. This third text is notable not only for the complete absence of sex, but also touch. Apart from the nurse's contact, Wiid himself only recalls being touched twice (on the shoulder by Buytendagh and his father). Wiid's body is only an object of interest for the medical community

No one visits Wiid in hospital, and there is no mention of desire for this virtually ascetic and all-but asexual former bureaucrat. His life has been mostly devoid of joy or any sensuality (7). Wiid's childhood home appears to have been quite austere, and his parent's "well-read" but distant (*Memorandum* 10, see also 11-15 and 20). His only reference point for intimacy is the memory of witnessing a whispered conversation between his parents. (109). Wiid has no access to that intimacy, and never really experiences it. While the solace provided by the arts (painting, music and singing, embroidery) in the absence of physical comfort has been suggested in both *Triomf* and *Agaat*, it is in *Memorandum* that this theme is developed as the prime conceit.

Whereas the previous two novels are domestic dramas, the protagonist of *Memorandum* is for all intents and purposes alone. The internal energy of the novel stems from this fact, and in this way, the novel has more in common with Van Niekerk's newest collection of short stories *Die Sneeuslaper. Memorandum* thus seems to mark a new direction for her fiction. The protagonists of her latest work, *Die Sneeuslaper*,[176] are pariahs and outsiders, afflicted by loneliness and loss. The central figure in this fictional world is the stranger or the searcher, and attempts at creating connections are not confined to the domestic (claustrophic) family as in *Triomf* and *Agaat*.

**Conclusion**

The intervention this chapter makes is to insist on the unsuitability of allegorical readings to account for and interpret sex in *Triomf* and *Agaat*. Furthermore, I argued for a reading of some of

[176] A collection of four interconnected stories published in Afrikaans in 2010, and not yet translated into English. See Buxbaum 2012b for a review.

the acts of sex as rape and a consideration of how this fits into existing rape theories. In both novels the rape script and the victim/victimiser binary is blurred and myths about gender roles are troubled. A new vocabulary is needed in order to talk about the rape in these novels, when consent or the lack thereof fails to suitably encapsulate the sexual dynamics and often shared complicity.

These novels challenge the reader to rethink any pre-existing sympathies (in which one might conventionally empathise with the abused wife, or the dying woman) and by extension questions the basis for those sympathies (in the way that femininity and disease are considered worth of sympathy).

Van Niekerk's characters are denied what Luce Irigary terms "the fecundity of love whose most elementary gesture, or deed, remains the caress" (2001: 120). In her oft-cited poetic feminist (re)interpretation of and response to Emmanuel Levinas's explanation of love and definition of the feminine, Irigary insists on the need for "sensual pleasure" instead of an adult world premised on "possession" and devoid of "wonder":

> [s]ensual pleasure can reopen and reverse this conception and construction of the world. It can return to the evanescence of subject and object. To the lifting of all schemas by which the other is defined. Made graspable by this definition. *Eros* can arrive at that innocence which has never taken place with the other as other. At that non-regressive in-finity of empathy with the other. At that appetite of all the senses which is irreducible to any obligatory consumption or consummation. At that indefinable taste of an attraction to the other which will never be satiated. … this gesture may be called: the touch of the caress.
> The fecundity of a love whose most elementary gesture, or deed, remains the caress. (120)

The moment of "ultimate sympathy" without "mastery or method" (122) does not occur in these novels, despite the desire for it, and the fact that characters at times approach it. The Benades and Milla, Jak and Agaat are too constrained and defined by their "constructions" of their world; dying and inebriated, Wiid aspires for connection but finds none by the novel's end. It might perhaps also be argued that sex and sensual pleasure in the first two novels lose their autonomy; that they become tools in power transactions and negotiations. What is absent is the body that can be loved instead of the body that is used.

Even the simple expression of affection, the kiss, is absent from all three novels. Yet, in *Triomf*, as difficult as it is to accept, there is love between Pop and Mol, whose relationship resembles

husband and wife more than it does brother and sister. In *Agaat*, the emotion most closely approximating love is shared between Milla and Agaat – primarily when Agaat is first adopted. "Self-love" motivates Milla and Jak's behaviour towards each other. The time when they come closest to tenderness is when they lie silent, not touching next to each other in bed. Physical contact has been too compromised by them; it cannot be rehabilitated. The ability to mutually inflict and endure pain – physical and psychological – ties Milla and Jak together. If *Memorandum* offers a possibility of an alternative means of embodying space, it is silent on the potential for reciprocal sexual relations.

Despite her apparent cynicism, her pretence at sexual adventurousness and her university education, Milla holds some of the same clichéd fantasies about love that Mol does. She too wants a "nice" story book romance (33). As in *Triomf*, lives are transformed into narratives and attempted to fit into pre-existing genres, which will prove none too accommodating. Mol longs for a "nice story", an advert of a bed; Milla's "movie" is a *plaasroman* romance, which Jak has already undermined in his mocking re-telling of her great-grandmother's story.[177] If Mol screams like a pig, Milla is a "ravenous sow", consuming everything and everyone she encounters. Despite the fact that she has been abused, Milla never cries out in pain; her stoicism (itself a source of power) and cunning or simply her dislocation from events prevent it. Mol, perhaps surprisingly, exhibits more self-awareness and understanding of gender oppression than Milla, in a novel which has been more readily praised as a 'post-colonial feminist rewriting of the plaasroman' (cf Prinsloo and Visagie 2009). Mol and Treppie, both victims of sexual abuse, are also shown to have a greater understanding of the manner in which sex functions in the domestic realm than Milla ever does.

Motherhood is a central theme in these novels. The matrilineal heritage does not necessarily equate to a feminist one. Mol and Milla are held captive by their mother's attitudes and replicate these inherited roles. Mol's body is of interest precisely because, in Treppie's terms, it should never have been, and will not again become, a site of reproduction. On the other hand, Milla is defined by motherhood and her attitude to sex can only be understood in terms of her obsession with pregnancy – itself a means towards being accepted as an adult Afrikaner woman. While Lambert's birth in *Triomf* is considered akin to an apocalyptic disaster (see *Triomf* 117), Jakkie's birth is hailed as miraculous – his arrival eagerly anticipated by Agaat, Milla and Jak whose lives revolve around his. Motherhood is also not necessarily related to biology, as Milla stands in as mother to Agaat who in

[177] Jak's mode of resistance throughout the novel is in the genre of fairy tales or popular romance novels or plays. See Sanders (2008) on the role of fairytales in the novel.

turn mothers Jakkie and diverts his affections from Milla. Mol's son provides no hope for a new South Africa, even as his birthday coincides with its apparent dawn. Milla's son flees apartheid to live in exile, but her non-biological daughter, Agaat, inherits the farm, ushering in a new, but not necessarily liberatory rule. However, Agaat herself cannot become a mother, and so both the revolutionary potential (cf Driver 1992 ) as well as the necessity of motherhood to the identity of women is challenged in these novels.

In both *Triomf* and *Agaat*, despite the marked difference in tone and subject, sex is never depicted as a consolation for women, or rather, it is a means by which women console men. After the near-accident at the start of Agaat, Jak "sulks" and Milla distracts and comforts him by allowing him to fondle her. This seems not too far from Mol's logic in quietening her irate child; although Milla's palpable excitement is the difference. It is also clear that Milla has struck a bargain here (as once one was made in a bathtub in the railway housing in *Triomf*). Sex is always imbricated in the familial logic of exchange and bargaining. It is a way of keeping the family together and playing power games. The masculine power and the male gaze, however, are not necessarily held by the male protagonist, as in *Agaat*.

Perhaps most distressing in this consideration of sexual violation in *Triomf*, is that in all the cases of incest, the sexual touch between the Benades begins as a search for comfort and compassion absent from their existence; it is a result of social isolation and poverty but more palpably, loneliness. This is the same desire which, I believe, prompts Mol to desire to "see another person's face... to touch another person's hand". In "21 Love Poems" Adrienne Rich writes: "Without tenderness we are in hell". Van Niekerk's protagonists constantly struggle with the meaning and expression of tenderness. The Benades desire tenderness, but sex, ostensibly an expression of physical tenderness, takes the perverted form of incest and incestuous rape.

As adults, Mol and Pop share a tender moment in the bath and in the car. Treppie is incapable of expressing compassion through his body, possibly because his body has been so brutalised, but through the medium of stories he expresses his concern for the other members of his family, and his rare, reluctant tears show his sympathy for Mol, Lambert and even Pop. Mol exerts a modicum of power in relating the story, in asserting her subjectivity. Her role is ambiguous: she is not merely a victim, not entirely blameless and yet any avenue of escape or testifying to her abuse or act against her abusers has been denied her. She has been "trained" to distrust anyone outside of the family, beyond "each other". Consent has been habitually rendered superfluous to bodily violation. Treppie too, is a victim of abuse – by Pop and Old Pop – and he continues the cycle by raping Mol and

subjecting Lambert to cigarette burns as a child. Lambert in turn, is violent to his parents and uncle (whichever of the brothers that might refer to).

Van Niekerk also avoids the dilemmas associated with the representation of rape by virtue of *Triomf*'s narrative structure, which (as mentioned in Chapter Four) presents all the characters' perspectives. Mol's interiority is balanced by the descriptions of her body, of the experience of physical violence. In fact, it is via her body that her protests against rape are most clearly expressed, rather than through any attempt at post-rape testimony. Lambert's lack of mental acuity may evoke sympathy, to a degree, but it also does not excuse his actions. In *Agaat*, sex is graphically depicted but is never eroticised. These descriptions function to trouble existing theorising of rape and agency. The post-rape testimony in fact belongs to Jak and Milla subverts and parodies his intentions to rape her. Jak's exhausted body is objectified rather than Milla's; the effects of their violent relationship are rendered on his body rather than on hers.

Without denying the obvious allegorical resonance of the novels, I have presented what I hope is a compelling argument for revisiting the ways in which sexual violence is read and understood in both *Triomf* and *Agaat*. Treppie's response to the childhood incest also presents an opportunity to consider men as victims of sexual abuse. Gunne and Brigley Thomson quote Rosemary Jolly's insistence that "we need to develop ways of speaking about violence in literature which go beyond the safe, exclusive condemnation of certain representations of violence" (2010: 3). Considering whether this is possible in Van Niekerk's novels will also go some way to engaging with those few critics who object to the tone, nature, style of *Triomf*. The novels under consideration here all address the issue of representations of violence and challenge the reader to find new ways of talking about bodily violation.

**Chapter Six**

**'Does it hurt?': Disease, Dying and Intimacy**[178]

The questions relevant for this final chapter concern the experience of illness and dying – the inescapable final stage of embodied subjectivity. As Blanchot words it in *The Writing of the Disaster*, "It is the dying which, though unsharable, I have in common with all" (1986: 23). Nevertheless, when one is dying in the sight of others or dying within a family or relationship, the unsharable experience of dying – unsharable because no one can die with, or instead of, or know what it is like for the one dying – affects others who are not dying and who become entangled in the emotions of the dying person, involved in caring for his/her failing body and who witness this dying. Rather than discussing the origins of the illness or the cure, as there is none, I will focus on the palliative care, noted not for the medical, but rather the compassionate contact, the touch that is devoid of desire or sexual connotation (which was the focus of Chapter Five). This chapter concerns itself with exploring whether the awareness that one is dying or nursing someone who is dying, with full knowledge of the medical (rather than intimate and personal) futility of such processes, in some way changes both the nature of intimacy, of personal relationships and the experience of embodiment and embodied subjectivity. I consider how awareness of mortality, of the imminence (and immanence) of death (rather than the event of death itself) alters relationships in ways previously impossible. Pop's senescence and dying in *Triomf*, Milla as dying-narrator in *Agaat* and Wiid as terminal patient will be the focal points.

As Robins argues, with reference to the work of Mary Douglas (mentioned in Chapter One) there is a historical persistence of "metaphors of the body" employed to "narrate the nation and the body politic" (1998b: 123 & 132). Boyarn maintains that this is especially pertinent for "ethnic nationalist discourses [which] tend to draw on metaphors of the body. These links between the body and the nation operate at both the level of the organic metaphors of nationalist ideology, and the fact that 'nationalist ideologies really do recruit bodies'" (1994: 24 quoted in Robins 1998b:122). The metaphor of a dying or diseased protagonist in the context of a dying nationalist political system is a rich one. Ashraf Jamal's reading of Albie Sach's famous "Preparing Ourselves for Freedom" speech has relevance in this regard:

> It is this estrangement of culture, its inward and mortified gaze, which Sachs declares not as false but as ominously limiting. For Sachs it is the culture of the dead and dying, a paroxysmic culture, which cannot imagine a world beyond its own beleaguered and fearful, or

[178]Mol asks Pop this as they are descending the stairs of the Spur (*Triomf* 86).

fantastic record. (2005: 161)

In dying, Pop, Milla and Wiid are forced to reckon with the limits of their own world-view, with their figuratively imploding bodies as, inversely, the world around them opens up in ways previously unimaginable. In a sense, they are dying because they failed to "imagine a world beyond [their] own … record".

In Van Niekerk's short story, "Die vrou wat haar verkyker vergeet het" (already mentioned in Chapter Four) the onset of a mysterious illness, a kind of literal 'bird flu' hastened by a breakdown, spurred on by the need for closeness, results in the title character, a stand-in for the author, being nursed back to health by the local (Venda) women of the community. Initially alienated, her diseased body provides the means for communication and community, as well as a wordless but all the more meaningful and empathetic encounter with others. The protagonist is nursed *back* to health by the women, with whom it is assumed she has no continued relationship once her health returns. These women instead act as a kind of catalyst to her continued relationship with her friends (i.e. those similar to her) rather than a new community of others, a bridge to otherness as otherness. They enable her to escape her isolation and madness and fulfil her programme for her writing retreat, to subsequently escape this liminal space and return to the world. Illness, it would appear, prompts creativity and leads to ephemeral connections. However, perhaps ironically, if she were dying, a new community of others might have come into being.

**"What if you know you're dying?"**

In *Triomf*, life is precarious. Just being alive means submitting to a disease, as Treppie insists in references to "the germ of being human" (457); inhabitants of Triomf suffer from "a sub-economic disease" (259). In this sense, their existential condition – the result of a confluence of socio-political, historical, economic and genetic factors – is one of compromised health. Pop, the character whose dying and death the novel relates, is afflicted merely with old age. In this context, his longevity is surprising, especially since he was weak and sickly in his youth. Pop's body is undeniably grotesque and his health is failing rapidly. The novel emphasises his characteristic defeatist posture: he is perpetually pictured with his head in his hands (*Triomf* 142, 144, 148, 376) and "snot hang[ing] from his nose" (93 and see 56, 104, 444) – "the essence of life, Treppie calls it" (458).[179] His mouth often hangs open, and despite all attempts to close his zip, his pants fail to conceal anything (313); his clothes are ill fitting, his body is leaky, fragmented and fragile. Not only is the reader

[179]There is also a reference to the grotesque here, where the nose is symbolically suggestive of the phallus (Bakhtin 1984: 87). In this reading, Treppie is also mocking Pop's impotence.

continuously reminded of Pop's senescence, but his final moments are hinted at several times (23, 67, 94 and 235). Thus the novel is read with the shadow of Pop's death – natural or unnatural – hanging over it. For the Benades, Pop's imminent demise arouses fear and anxiety. I trace their reactions to, and gradual awareness of, the fact of Pop's dying, as well as Pop's response to this realisation.

Rita Barnard describes *Triomf* as a national allegory "in which domestic space [is] transformed, along with the social space of the entire nation" (Barnard 2012:654). Of more immediate concern to Mol than the national transformation are the changes which will soon occur in the domestic space. She fears what the loss of Pop, her protector, will mean for her in this house of violent men. Throughout the present tense narrative sections, Mol obsessively checks whether Pop is alive – she feels for a pulse or listens to him breathing (150, 153, 248, 330, 387) – and agonises over the fragility of his body. The inevitability of Pop's and subsequently her own passing before her son's also causes consternation: "so Gerty, what do you think, old girl, will Pop make it to Christmas? You think we'll be okay after he's gone? And when I go, one of these days, you think Treppie will look after Lambert?" (8, see also 20, 314). The future is envisioned by Mol as a series of familial deaths.

For the most part then, Mol's fear of Pop's death is a selfish one or relates to her concerns for Lambert rather than Pop's suffering. In a moment of selflessness, at the stairs of the Spur restaurant, Mol asks, "Does it hurt?" (86). Pop's energy and courage had failed as they entered and began their ascent. Mol reassures him: "'They can wait', she says, 'we're also people'" and then commiserates (85, 86). This is a key moment, of enquiring after the other, rather than presuming, of exhibiting sympathy and concern. While Mol is asking about physical pain, I propose that she is also asking a deeper, more existential question. It's not apparent what the pronoun refers to, perhaps life itself.

Mol's question could be a distorted echo of Simone Weil's pithy but poignant claim: "The love of a fellow-creature in all its fullness consists simply in the ability to say to him, 'What are you going through?'" (quoted in Rich, "Notes on 'Leaflets'": 312). I would argue that the ability to ask this question lies at the heart of the intimacy facilitated by Pop's increasing weakness. In fact, the question (or even alternative permutations of it) is asked at no other point in the novel (or in the other two novels). Unlike in *Agaat* or *Memorandum*, Pop is simply suffering from old age; his body is unmarked by the traumas of the past or the brutalities of the present in contrast with the other members of his family. No one ever asks Mol how she is, "what she is going through", but it is both a sign of her fear and deep concern for Pop that she is able to ask him.

The restaurant stairs are also the scene of a gesture of rare concern from Lambert. While descending the stairs, the sight of Pop's failing strength prompts Lambert to carry him down on his back. As their bodies become entwined, even evidence of Lambert's poor hygiene and grotesque body fail to mitigate the poignancy of the scene (*Triomf* 89-90). From this point onward, Pop is undeniably dying. Both Mol and Lambert respond to this realisation with expressions of sincere concern.

Pop himself is under no illusions about his health and for the most part, "these days he feels to himself like a place he doesn't know, a place full of strange noises coming at him through a thick mist" (69). Dying is a sensory experience, a physical and embodied awareness of a change in subjectivity. However, unlike Milla, as will be shown, Pop doesn't attempt a separation of mind and body here: "he feels to himself" – his identity is not in question; it is neither split nor divided, simply unknowable in a different way from before.

Elaine Scarry notes that "Stravinsky once described ageing as 'the ever-shrinking perimeter of pleasure'" (1985: 33). Depictions of old age are regularly marked by "this constantly diminishing world ground" and a consequent attempt at resistance which involves "self-extension" beyond these imposed and narrowing boundaries (1985:33). Pop's death is preceded by brief sensations of renewal, euphoria even, as described in the chapter "Sweet is the Day" and these are also corporeal events (71 and see Chapter Four or a discussion of the day when Pop ventures out to the streets). His final days are characterised by attempts to prolong moments of joy, to extend where he can "the perimeter of pleasure" and to ensure that Mol experiences moments of contentment (81, 320), safeguarding this for her future. His desire to make Mol smile could be read as a kind of recompense, a final act of contrition perhaps.

Critics have presumed that Pop is interesting only in passing (literally and figuratively).[180] In published articles on *Triomf* where death is concerned, the focus has been on dogs – the ghosts of

[180]Louise Viljoen, in referring to other potential symbolic readings of the incest suggests that "[t]he novel also drives the idea of the Freudian family romance to grotesque extremes, going so far as to have Lambert accidentally kill his 'father' Pop" (1996). Brophy reads Pop as representative of the Afrikaner nationalist *logos* and as representing the Jungian archetype of the *animus*. His death thus "explode[s] the myths of Afrikaner nationalism and superiority" and "liberat[es] Mol (*the anima*)" (2006: 110). See previous chapters for my criticisms of Brophy's argument. Botha's reading of *Triomf* is unique in that she engages with "the significance of the characters' avoidance of the acceptance of death" (2011: footnote 26 page 37 & 30-31) and concludes that none of the Benades are "able to achieve [a] sense of home" (30). She is not, however, concerned with the experience of dying and its effect on intimacy or embodiment as such.

the Sophiatown dogs, and Gerty (see Jackson 2011 and Woodward 2001).[181] Woodward proposes that in both *Triomf* and *Disgrace*, the dogs "motivate some humans … to ponder on the spiritual aspects of dying. Because of Gerty's death, Mol comes to think of the 'afterlife'" (2001:113). While I am not adopting an eco-critical reading of the novel, as Woodward does, I do think this suggestion proves valuable in highlighting the impact of Gerty's death. Prior to their deaths, Gerty and Pop are often collocated in Mol's thoughts: "Poor Pop. Poor Gerty" (*Triomf* 148). Her dog's demise assists Mol in coming to terms with Pop's inevitable death and she shares Pop's dream of a dog's heaven only after Gerty dies (202). Pop also begins to make more practical arrangements for his and Mol's own funerals after Gerty's (210).

Guy Fawkes Day historically has been a day of trauma for Mol, yet it is also a day she insists on associating with renewal and rebirth, similar to the ancient feasts of fire which Bakhtin discusses. And Mol wants to present her neighbours with "a gentle reminder … that we're still here" (255). She wants to insist on their survival: "To show we're still kicking and we're not planning to throw in the towel yet. Not a damn. Come hell or high water" (255). Pop is at first re-energised by Mol's determination to celebrate Guy Fawkes. As if it is contagious, he feels "like a slow dynamo starting to run" (257) but, unlike Mol, his powers of embracing the fantasy are limited. While Mol sees the fireworks as a sign of life, he sees her decrepitude lit up: "Mol's face flickers against the dark as the flame dances up and down. He sees the ruts and nicks and bags under her eyes" (257). The inescapable reality assures him they are both slowly disappearing, retreating from this life (257). Pop lacks the power of imagination required to distract him from the brute physical fact of his dying. What Mol views as a show of life, a magical display of beauty, is read differently by Pop. If the firecracker is a metaphor, it is for the transience of life, the speed at which it passes, with a spark of beauty if you're lucky. Pop declares the fate of the firecracker as akin to that of their bodies – though without the spark of colour:

> 'We're shooting out of our shells. Poof! Finished!' But Mol doesn't want to hear.
> 'A bit of powder, just one shot. A spark, and then we've had it'. Mol here next to him is pretending to be deaf. Shame. (258)

This obsession with the ephemeral nature of life continues throughout the novel, although Pop never counters it with a desire for more time, or expresses any regrets about how he has lived his

[181] For Jackson, dogs "are exceptions to the rules of human interaction" (345): "*Triomf*'s tenderness is only morally effective so long as it defies easy moralization, and this tenderness is only in evidence through the Benades' fierce enforcement of Gerty's exceptionalism and their failure to even consider the possibility of euthanasia" (353). Yet there are attempts at and moments of tenderness between the humans, as alluded to in the previous chapters. Furthermore, euthanasia is considered, but not acted on (see *Triomf* 162, 202, 230).

life. His despair is further unencumbered by any reference to the historical or wider social context. It's the statement of a resigned nihilist rather than of an enthusiastic hedonist. Mol knows what Pop means, yet pretends not to understand, as she does when he tries to tell her he's dying. Instead, she allows him to share a bath with her, in a tender moment of silent recognition that ends in tears (in a scene analysed in Chapter Four and Buxbaum 2013).

The metaphors of embodiment, and embodied illness in *Triomf* employ imagery of fridges, of electricity and fireworks, as opposed to nature or biology. Pop struggles to put words to his feelings, yet the words he settles on are euphemisms for dying, while for Mol they simply connote her exhaustion and mental confusion:

> "I feel …" Pop says. He points to his whole body with hands that open and then close again. He can't say what it is he's feeling. But she knows.
> "Overload?"
> "Overload."
> "Me too."
> "Fused," says Pop.
> "Tripped out."
> "That makes two of us," says Pop.
> "Poor us." (263)

Whereas in *Agaat*, Milla's metaphors change to indicate subjectivity trapped in a failing body, Pop (as does Mol) still considers his identity to be seamless to his body, as part of one circuit, one system. He is referring here not only to his physical well-being, but mental too. The conversation occurs in the bath, when Mol, looking at Pop's back, observes that it is "Hard and white like the trunk of an old bluegum. There's more strength in there than she thought. A mystery like death. She shivers" (264). Pop's body, his being, is mysterious, as is death. Thus, as the novel progresses, the mystery of death which, thanks to Pop's dying they must face, also prompts them to consider the converse – the mystery of life. For Mol and Treppie this takes the form of reflecting on the past (as has been shown in previous chapters). However, Pop avoids critically analysing the past.[182] His approaching death then results in a more existential line of questioning, rather than the issues of

[182]This might be understood as a result of Pop's willingness to embrace "wallpaper" and "saving perspectives". He is the only member of the Benade family who relished the pomp and ceremony of the Great Trek centennial celebrations and chastens the others when they criticise or mock the NP canvassers (138). Treppie says, "[t]he whole Transitional Executive Council had Pop by the short and curlies. He knew he had to vote for volk and vaderland" (456) – although ultimately Pop is unsure who he did vote for, as a result of his confusion and exhaustion at the voting booth.

historical trauma Mol and Treppie consider.

Mol's fear whether Pop would survive until the end of the year is finally vocalised by Pop, when he "begged them, didn't they want to try getting through just one Christmas without another big hullabaloo. Maybe this would be his last. That shut them up nicely" (306). This is the first time, Pop shares with his family the fear they've all been unwilling to address. Treppie says that "Pop's been making these heavy speeches lately" (313), about the meaning(lessness) of life. Pop lectures the rows of tinned baked beans in Shoprite, comparing the shelf life of baked beans to his own, again using a metaphor, this time of bodily digestion, to emphasise the ephemeral and material nature of life:

> ... it's all about nothing. Poof! The next thing you know, someone farts, and then someone else says sies, what's that smell, and then that's it, you're finished. Nothing! Finished, out, gone! Pffft! No one, but no one, can escape this trinity of beans, farts, and death. Amen. (313–314)

Even Treppie fails to find the humour in Pop's sermon and is taken aback by his voice which "sounded like something rattling in the wind" (314):

> This speech of Pop's was different. It wasn't a game. 'Cause the next thing Pop went and swept those beans right off the specials shelf. … It was so bad he had to drag Pop to the car kicking and screaming. (314)

Mol maintains that the cause of Pop's drunken hectoring of the beans is concern over Lambert's fate when "the rest of them kicked the bucket", although Pop's hysteria suggests he is railing against his own fate too (314). No one proves capable of comforting him, and Pop's breakdown achieves little other than Treppie retreating to the safety of the bathroom, and dismissing Lambert's escape plan for "when the shit starts flying", for its fantastical nature and unnecessarily exposing them to risks (315):

> As if you're not exposed as it is, with your soft human skin and its holes for seeing and smelling and tasting and farting – that's if you're lucky enough to still do all those things. … All the more reason for sitting quietly and waiting for the perfect shit. (315)

While farts, unintended and uncontrollable, seemingly haphazard biological processes, suggest the meaninglessness of existence to Pop, for Treppie the mysterious workings of the digestive system are a grotesque comfort – something "you're lucky enough to still do" – against the existential

anxieties of life. On this subject, Bakhtin proposes that

> In grotesque realism and in Rabelais' work ... [e]xcrement was conceived as an essential element in the life of the body and of the earth in the struggle against death. It was part of man's vivid awareness of his materiality, of his bodily nature, closely related to the life of the earth. (1984: 224)

The digestive metaphor is inherently ambiguous; it is indicative of a functioning organism but also of ultimate futility: everything turned into a fart or shit; the organism as something though which life moves. For Pop this image connotes frailty and death, and for Treppie life (this without getting into the semantics of different kinds of excretions).

In the chapter "Triomf Trials", Lambert is inducted into the secrets of refrigerator maintenance. This section is perhaps the most carnivalesque, in its mimicking and simultaneous mocking of coming-of-age rituals, complete with Treppie dressed up as clown, or the "king of fools" (Bakhtin 1984: 51). Lambert and Treppie agree that the language used in their instruction is of no consequence: "[a]ll that mattered was that a thing worked" (341).[183] It's worth bearing this in mind as Treppie introduces the "mechanic's stethoscope" into Lambert's education (353). While Lambert inherits the means and knowledge to repair machines, despite the recurring mechanistic metaphors of embodiment, the Benades must come to terms with the fact that bodies cannot be repaired, life cannot be prolonged, or even dramatically improved it would appear. Treppie suggests, "Lambert should hold the probe to Pop's chest so he could hear what music was playing there" (*Ibid.*). When Lambert hears nothing and laughs, Mol fails to see the humour. However, once the amplifier is adjusted, Lambert claims Pop's heart has a "reggae beat", which Mol hasn't heard of and Lambert and Treppie can define only as "kaffir-music" (353). This music, in their worldview, seems to suggest that Pop 'doesn't work'.

Thereafter they all take turns: "everyone listened to everyone else's heart, and they all laughed about the strange beats and the blowings and suckings of valves in each other's insides" (353). In a sense this is an attempt at real empathy. Mol doesn't know what Pop thinks, but the stethoscope allows her and the others to hear what his heart sounds like. Pop's unexpected rhythm also marks him as different, as other, an indication that something is wrong with his heart. Mol's primary worry is that Pop's heart seems to beat at a slightly different pace to theirs; that using the mechanic's tools

[183]See Devarenne (2006) for a detailed discussion about language and translation here.

on their bodies seems to confirm their mechanical rather than biological make-up: "she told them a person would swear they were a bunch of fridges standing in a circle. They shouldn't make fun of sickness" (353). She fears that it dehumanises them. Yet this is the one occasion on which they listen rapt to each other – to the body of others. This confirms their similarity and by implication their (figurative and literal) humanity; their beating hearts dictate a logic immune to the dissimulation of words. The chapter concludes with an exhausted yet relieved Pop. It would seem that "handing over the family treasure" has in a small way reassured him that Lambert will manage without him (355).

Secure in the knowledge that Lambert will have recourse to some skills for his survival and that his birthday gift has been delivered, what remains for Pop is to come to terms with his own unfinished business. Pop, Treppie and Mol spend the night under the Brixton tower, while Lambert's rendezvous with Cleopatra, his "hour of triumph", occurs (377). Treppie says Mol should "see it as a visit to the Mount of Olives" (377). In the New Testament, Jesus would deliver sermons at the Mount of Olives to his disciples, which warned of the end times. While Pop is aware of how "much depended on tonight" (377, see also 343), his sermon revolves around his own intimations of mortality,[184] rather than familial (or even national) transformation:

> "What if you know you're dying?" he said.
>
> She got such a fright she almost fainted. Pop wiped his mouth with an angry swipe and passed her his chocolate.
>
> No, gôt, she said, dè, eat your own chocolate, Pop. But he took the chocolate, ripped off the paper, and flipped it right over his shoulder for Toby at the back. A whole half of a snickers. And Pop so loves his chocolate. (378)

This section, focalised by Mol, confirms all of her fears, and yet her response is shock. Her horror is magnified by Pop's offering of his chocolate, a gesture of self-denial heretofore unimagined. Pop, who longs for sweetness, is averse to finishing his chocolate – a luxury for the Benades – and in this refusal to meet his material needs asserts the truth of his presentiment of death.

Mol's blasé response, "everyone had to go anyway", hides her own fears and is intended to console Pop, to assure him of the ordinariness of his experience (378). Her question, "what was bothering him so much anyway?" seems a betrayal of her earlier "does it hurt?" (378). Treppie's response also refers to the carnivalesque co-existence of life and death: "'I say unto you, for every one of those

[184]See also Botha (2011: 30–31).

lights, someone will either give up the ghost or give his first cry tonight'" (378). The actions and life cycle Treppie describes is that of the grotesque body, where "the beginning and end of life are closely linked and interwoven" (Bakhtin 1984: 317). Treppie reminds Pop of the Benades's place within the wider world, as members of a community of birth and death, in which there is no choice. However, his words are inflected with mockery at the language usually reserved for the pulpit. This kind of flowery language offers no consolation to the Benades, for whom death brings no new beginning. In closing he resorts to echoing Pop's drunken words at Shoprite: "It's one and the same thing. Breathe in, breathe out, eat, shit, eat, poof, gone! No one asked for it" (378).[185]

Pop is no longer concerned with fatalism, with theories of the cosmic, but rather, practicalities: what should be done? He has illustrated this by offering chocolate to Mol, by his earlier commitment to making her smile, and his final act of teaching her to drive (see page 444 and previous chapter). For Treppie however, there are no moral imperatives (see detailed analysis of this scene in Chapter Three). Mol's response to Pop's "*should*" is to change the subject, to switch on the radio and hope for distraction. Mol is wary of taking part in these conversations, of examining life and its meaning, it would appear: the brief moment of self-reflection occurred when she considered the fate of women – and not since. She distrusts any normative claims, given that they have no application to her own life.

Pop's ability to innocently ask his initial question is a result of his being unencumbered by a traumatic history. Treppie, who was brutalised by his father and taken advantage of by his brother, however realises the importance of a history in which choice matters, and free will can be exercised: "What would've been different, Treppie said was that he might've had a choice. He might've been able to choose how to die and what to do if he knew he was dying" (381). Treppie counters Pop's question with a re-interpretation of dying, suggesting a spiritual process, a trauma which metaphorically killed his innocent self – perhaps in the same way that Agaat's transformation into a servant killed hers:

> [he]said it might be that Pop had begun to die only recently, but that he, Treppie, had been dying ever since his eighth year, and it was the kind of dying you do twice over – in body and in soul. The ruination of his soul, and the blood of his limbs, he said, was on Old Pop's hands. (383)

[185]Or as Hoban's Riddley Walker expresses it "There aint that many sir prizes in life if you take noatis of every thing. Every time wil have its happenings out and every place the same. What ever eats mus shit" (Hoban 1980:15, sic) and Beckett writes, "... eat and excrete. Dish and pot, dish and pot, these are the poles" (*Malone Dies*: 185).

Pop responds again with platitudes, about honouring parents, which causes the conversation to degenerate into violence. Pop's question is never answered and the conversation finally concludes with Mol and Pop comforting Treppie. Dying itself remains impossible to address.

Within the historical context of the novel, one might consider the debate between Pop and Treppie in a wider frame: If what is dying is the old regime, an old ideology, an old hierarchy, then what should those who supported apartheid and the National Party (however indirectly) do, now that it is dying? For Treppie, the inevitability of death is the only given, but as a result of Pop's question about dying he forces a confrontation with the past, for Mol and Pop to acknowledge his trauma while insisting that "forgiveness be damned" (376). Mol too is prompted to recall the violence of her father, when Pop uses the term "fault" (381). On the other hand, Pop never confronts his past and never confesses anything. He seems incapable of imagining a different life for the Benades, a counter-factual history or of coming to terms with his own complicity (cf Jamal 2005: 161). Asking for forgiveness or confessing to his role in the incest does not seem to occur to him as one of the things he "should" do before he dies.

It is Pop though who is defeated by their conversation, and when they return to the devastation at their house, he attempts to reassure Lambert:

> He looks like he wants to say something. He looks like he wants to say Lambert mustn't worry, everything will be okay and next year they can try again. But he can't say it out loud. She takes him by the sleeve so he can come. He doesn't want to. …. Pop wants to touch Lambert's shoulder, but Lambert sees Pop's hand coming. He turns away. (439)

If one of his final acts, something he feels compelled to do before dying, is to extend a conciliatory gesture towards Lambert, some kind of fatherly embrace and parting wisdom, he finds himself incapable in this respect. In this instance he is similar to Milla, who is incapable of consoling Jak. Neither body language nor words suffices for Pop.

As the election nears, Treppie expresses relief that the new South African flag was not amongst the many decorating the ice-cream truck circling the neighbourhood:

> So he told Pop he hoped to heaven that he, Treppie, would be six feet under when the New South Africa started to see its arse, 'cause he'd been forced to watch the old South Africa go down the drain and he couldn't bear to see the new one dying on a life-support system ... Two

> nationalistic fuck-ups, he told Pop, would be too much.
> All this time Pop just stood there, looking at him like he wanted to start crying. … Pop must just understand, he said, a life-support machine was a lie against the truth of death. It didn't save you from your unavoidable end. He was fed up with this whole show just for Lambert's sake ... (444)

The political transition, the erosion of their 'saving perspective' and Pop's dying all coincide. The truth would be revealed if Lambert was allowed to "inherit the secrets of the fathers" (444) and also, if a national flag was not reduced to wallpaper – a life-support system, in this case the propaganda that maintains a system in power. Treppie doesn't extend the parallels explicitly to include Pop, but it seems that Pop's tears are a response both to the collapse of a deceptive nationalist ideology, which duped him, as well as his own dying, for which there is no available life-support. And yet, a kind of life support system is necessary, was necessary, for their family's survival up till this point.

The subsection "Wonderwall", in the final chapter, opens with Pop's sense of disorientation and acceptance of his end:

> he himself felt like his flesh was about to start falling off his bones.
> ... In the end, everything passes anyway, then it's over and it turns out to be completely meaningless. Even if it felt bad when it was happening. (448)

In this placid state, the meaninglessness of life turns out to be a comfort rather than a spur for despair or righteous monologues. As the painters throw their sheets over everything to begin their "whitewash" (as discussed in Chapter Two), Pop associates the colour with his death: "White for the crossing over" (452). As Pop prepares to die, a new aerial perspective of the city is revealed, one inflected by religious tones (453). Reminiscent of Treppie's vision of the city from the Brixton koppie, their house is revealed as one among many in the 'boundless heart' (391) of Johannesburg. It is as if Pop has already become a "man of stars" (267).[186]

Mol is liberated by Pop's death (see Rossman 2012a and Fuhler 2006), but not by that alone. Pop had been preparing her for his death, by ensuring she would have a degree of independence by

[186] Lambert's thoughts and his awareness of Pop's body suggest Pop might already be dead. His booted feet are "heavy" (457) and Mol notices that Pop "used to kick them off before he fell asleep in his chair' (467). These details, coupled with Pop's thoughts as he is covered with the sheets by the painters, suggest he may in fact have died by the time Lambert 'kills' him. Treppie demands a post-mortem, and the results confirm this 'double' death: "'Heart attack,' the doctor said. 'And multiple thrombosis.' .... 'Multiple skull fracture,' the doctor said next" (468). Pop, in a sense, dies twice – naturally and violently. Woodward also allows for the ambiguity in the construction of her sentence: "When Pop dies, or is murdered by Lambert's breaking a drawer over his head..." (2001:103). Similarly Botha notes : "... during the violent episode that follows, Pop dies, possibly due to a heart attack, or perhaps due to a skull fracture accidentally caused by Lambert" (2011: footnote 9, 35).

teaching her to drive (although her ability in this regard remains uncertain). Furthermore, it is only because his death was *also* accompanied by Lambert's injuries and those inflicted on Treppie that they no longer harass her. In fact, the immediate result of Pop's death is further violence for Mol when Lambert stabs her – he might even have killed her. Thus it is not Pop's death that made Mol's life easier, but the events subsequent to it, which were set in motion by Lambert's discovery of the family secrets. Pop's death was only one event in that chain reaction. There is no doubt that Mol continues to long for Pop: "Ever since Pop went, they've never really managed to be jolly again" (464).

The novel concludes with Mol's vision of Pop in heaven:

> "I think Pop's taking a rest up there, in Orion's belt, in a hammock that hangs from the two outside stars. …Gerty's resting between the two stars on the other side. All you can see is her tail sticking out".
> "Now you're out of the beast's belly, nè, Pop, and you're not looking from afar through a hole in his head anymore. Now you're nice and jolly, every day, nè! Not much longer, Pop, then I'll be with you. Then I'll feed you pieces of toast with honey. You and Gerty!" (473)

Despite the changes in the country, Mol has only a fantasy of an afterlife to look forward to. Nonetheless, it is significant that she no longer fears for Lambert's fate after her death. Pop's body looms so large in Mol's consciousness, that once it is gone, she turns her thoughts to his astral body, to a new myth of the afterlife. This coexistence of life and death, the idea of a cosmic continuum, is grotesque: "the grotesque body is cosmic and universal. It stresses elements common to the entire cosmos" (Bakhtin 1984: 318). Thus, "death brings nothing to an end, for it does not concern the ancestral body, which is renewed in the next generation" (322). Mol seems to concur and find comfort in this narrative. The Benades, however, have been abjected from any "historic, progressing body of mankind [which] stands at the centre of this system of images" (367). As a result, while Pop's death ensures his incorporation into a new myth, a new saving perspective for Mol, the remaining family members do not take part in the historical changes in the country, although they live in parallel to them. The Triomf 'carnival' thus parodies the liberation occasioned by the advent of democracy and concludes with a perverted freedom. There is no rebirth for the surviving Benades, simply stasis. The final image of the novel is Orion's "heels sticking out above the overflow" and the denial of any escape: "North no more" (474). In death, Pop is transmogrified into a celestial myth, yet as the sun sets, the heroic Orion is turned upside down, as if buried in the

mine overflow, the city's excresence.[187]

The novel opens with the suggestion of haunting – the dead dogs of Sophiatown haunt Triomf. However, it is unlikely Pop will similarly haunt the land. While the ghosts of history will continue to trouble any triumphant narrative, Pop,"light as air", will fade away and Treppie, the devilish clown, the "mystery devil" (Bakhtin 1984: 266)[188] will endure, his carnivalesque laughter lingering. Treppie insists history cannot be airbrushed, and that laughter will echo into the future, "too late for tears … but never too late for a laugh" (390).

The ending of *Triomf*, shortly after Nelson Mandela's inauguration as the first democratically elected president of South Africa (471-472), can be contrasted with the endings of novels written in the 1980s, or the interregnum, as Nadine Gordimer referred to this period. She wrote of this dark period as follows: "The interregnum is not only between two social orders but also between two identities, one known and discarded, the other unknown and undetermined" (1982: 269-270). She elaborates,

> Historical co-ordinates don't fit life any longer; new ones, where they exist, have couplings not to the rules, but to the ruled. It is not for nothing that I chose as an epigraph for my novel *July's People* a quotation from Gramsci: "The old is dying, and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum there arises a great diversity of morbid symptoms". (1982: 263)

This "indeterminacy" characterised the endings of (English) South African novels of the 1980s (Boehmer 1998: 51). Boehmer argues that there seemed to be a "refusal" on the part of writers "even to go so far as anticipating any ultimate end and therefore any possibility of a new beginning" (50). What she hopes for is "an open-endedness that makes room for new and various ways of thinking about the future – no longer the inevitable interregnum, arrested birth, the moment before death – in short, the foreclosure of the frozen penultimate" (56).

In this sense, it is significant that *Triomf* ends not with Pop's death, but with his surviving family recovering from its aftermath in the "new" South Africa. While there is no "new beginning" for the Benades, they are inextricably part of the narrative of a new democratic country, filled with unpredictable changes, even if the changes in their house are small (as mentioned in Chapter Two). Pop's death signals the destruction of their "saving perspective" and any myths of superiority. Pop,

[187] Rossman presents a different symbolic reading of this scene (2006:167).
[188] According to Bakhtin the mystery devil is "an ambivalent image, like the fool and the clown, representing the destroying and renewing force of the material body's lower stratum" (266–267).

as representative of "a paroxysmic culture", has died, and those who remain now have, by virtue of the political changes, no option but to "imagine a world beyond" (Jamal 2005:161), without any safety net.

**"Perfect Nurse. Perfect Patient": Bodywork and Taking on the Death of Another**

Milla describes her ordeal as a "record in long-distance dying" (*Agaat* 192). Indeed, for 692 pages (in my 2006 edition) Milla is dying.[189] Jakkie's monologue bookends the novel, but he has no interaction with the dying Milla – he only arrives home in time for his mother's funeral. While his perspective provides the only respite from Milla's narrative voice, it dwells on the aftermath of her death rather than the experience of her illness or her care.[190] Milla's dying fails to alter her relationship with her son, "the great absence" in her life (242); he has not returned to visit *Grootmoedersdrift* since his exile from South Africa "eleven, almost twelve years" earlier (3). Her terminal diagnosis is insufficient cause for him to reconcile, or even to prompt a reunion, but whether it might be sufficient to heal her relationship with Agaat is the concern of this chapter. I focus on whether the intimacy involved in Agaat's nursing of Milla, the fact that Agaat must become her "body servant" (245), enables some kind of acceptance or "recognition" (cf Hoffman 2005), if not forgiveness or reconciliation. For that reason I am particularly interested in the present tense and the italicised stream-of-consciousness narrative sections.

When Milla's dying has been discussed, it has been in terms of the temporal structure of the narrative and the manner in which Milla relates the story of her and Agaat's life together. Both David Medalie and Eva Hunter consider the way in which the past is both an irruption and eruption in the present (Medalie 2012:10 and Hunter 2012:77, 81). Jacobs's focus is on the "pseudo-autobiographical form" (72) of the novel, on the manner in which Milla narrates and reveals this past.[191] The past in *Agaat* is a fraught one, a catalogue of injustice, torment, abuse and betrayal. Both Milla and Agaat must reckon with it and force a confrontation, in their own way, with the

[189] One might also argue that Milla's dying is symbolic of, or enacts, the death of a genre, occasioned by the publication of *Agaat*. Gerrit Olivier proposes that "[o]n the metafictional level, *Agaat*, is an extended wake at the deathbed of the farm novel, raising the question whether at the end of the mourning process a new relationship to the land, to other people and to the tradition of Afrikaans literature could be found" (2012:322). Compare with Ampie Coetzee's more dire suggestion: "*Agaat* sou mens kon beskou as die laaste plaasroman, die finale, aftakeling; die einde van die plaas en van die Afrikaner-boer. (2007 ["Agaat can be considered as the last farm novel, the ultimate, final, decay; the end of the farm and of the Afrikaner-farmer" own translation]). He questions how farewells can be said, departures mourned and the mercy and forgiveness required for continuation sought (*Ibid*.). The debate that raged on *Litnet* (mentioned in Chapter One), in response to Rossouw's article about *Agaat* also engaged with these issues. In response, Sanders suggests that Rossouw misreads the extent to which the novel is a "gesture toward survival in disappearance" (2008: 28).

[190] Jean Rossman's (2012) reading of Jakkie's ironic voice in the "frame-narration" is the only published article thus far to engage with Jakkie's role in any detail.

[191] As discussed in Chapter Two and Buxbaum (2011: 35 – 36), I argue that Milla's autobiography is an embodied one.

different aspects of the past they deem relevant and most painful. As Milla thinks, "a lot of water must pass under the bridge here" (211), in "these chambered systems of retribution" (40).

There is a growing body of scholarship on confession, especially in the context of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, although in that case, the perpetrator confessing is rarely dying (cf Chapter Two). Cheryl Stobie argues that "As Milla's faculties shut down almost completely, she undergoes a process of confession" (2009:64).[192] She quotes J.M. Coetzee's assertion that "a truthful confession which transcends self-interest can only occur at the brink of (or after) death, when self-preservation is no longer a possibility" (Coetzee 1992 quoted in Stobie 2009:64 & quoted in Stobie & Rossman 2012:28). As an example, one thinks of the dying Elizabeth Curren's letter to her daughter in *Age of Iron.*[193]

In *Age of Iron*, there is a definite parallel between individual illness and societal degeneration. As Attwell writes, "Elizabeth Curren is dying of cancer in a society wracked with another kind of malignancy, a society given over entirely to the contest for power" (1993: 120). Attwell continues that the novel "stages a 'conflict of limits'" in that Elizabeth Curren is dying; her own end is irrefutably in sight, and there is the wider historical event of the State of Emergency (121). For Coetzee, he argues, the question is "What kind of discourse emerges from a narrative subject who has not made peace, exactly, with the historical Other, but for whom there is *another kind of limit* against which to speak?" (121). The dying Milla is also preoccupied with this question: "How to make peace with one eye, an unfathomable interpreter and the alphabet. If peace it can be called" (*Agaat* 488).[194]

David Attwell, writing about Coetzee's *Michael K*, posits that narrating the self, telling the story of one's life might also be a means of "postponing death" (1993: 53).[195] Elaine Scarry argues that the

[192] I disagree with the generality and optimism of Stobie's conclusion and her assurance of Milla's "penitence" (66).

[193] J.M. Coetzee's *Age of Iron* (1990) centres on the platonic relationship between a dying white woman and the homeless black man who nurses her and to whom she entrusts her final words. *Agaat* contains many thematic echoes of *Age of Iron* – not least in the fact that the homeless "derelict" Vercueil has a deformed hand, with three paralysed fingers: "Thumb and forefinger stood out; the other three fingers curled into the palm" (Coetzee 1990:11). Indeed, tracing Agaat's fictional forebears, those with traumatic brachial inscriptions, in this manner would also include the woman who cares for Sethe in Morrison's *Beloved*, who has a disfigured or slightly deformed arm. See Buxbaum (2013) for more on a comparison of Morrison and Van Niekerk, although there is further research to be done in this regard.

[194] There is of course more to be written in terms of a comparative study of Coetzee and Van Niekerk. Jacobs (2012) includes both Coetzee and Van Niekerk in his article. There is a tongue-in-cheek nod to Coetzee's titular Elizabeth Costello in Van Niekerk's lecture "The Fellow Traveller (A True Story)". In a footnote, Van Niekerk suggests that "The Fellow-Traveller" is "among other things, … a playful little homage to this South African author [Coetzee]" (2008a: footnote 4, 31).

[195] On the influence of Kafka's "The Burrow" on Coetzee's *Michael K*, Attwell writes: "It is fitting that Foucault, in his essay 'Language to Infinity', should refer to 'The Burrow' when addressing the question of speaking to avoid

old and dying experience a "constantly diminishing world ground" and in order to avert this, the protagonist speaks: "So long as one is speaking, the self extends out beyond the boundaries of the body, occupies a space much larger than the body" (1985:33). She allows that "As in dying and death, so in serious pain the claims of the body utterly nullify the claims of the world". (Scarry 1985: 33). The implication is that speaking, even confessing the errors of one's life, is not only a distraction from pain, but an attempt to deny the claims of the body, in effect to deny the unavoidable death.

These suggestions that only the imminent arrival of death enables a confession without repercussions, and that narrating life is an (always failed) attempt at postponing or even denying death, have relevance for Milla's obsessive narrating of her life, which can be read as a "doubling back" – in all four narrative sections – to "postpone death" (Atwell 1993: 53). Yet Milla never confesses, conventionally speaking, and not only because she cannot speak.

As I have argued in Chapter Three, I read Van Niekerk's two novels as proposing alternative means of healing to the confessional mode. My concern in this final chapter, then, is not with the story of a life, or even the sharing, or impossibility of sharing, that story, but rather with sharing the pain of dying – of being witness to the slow inexorable death of another, the "dying [that] can last for an eternity" (*Agaat* 648) and whether that alone, or in concert with shared remembrances, can affect a change in intimacy. As Medalie notes, Milla's narrative is "speaking what cannot be spoken, telling us what silent sorrow and voiceless suffering would sound like if only they could make themselves heard" (11).[196] Whatever conclusions Milla might come to about her life, in her "time of dying", as the old gospel song goes, she has no means of conveying these experiences to Agaat – apart from the brief and ultimately abortive alphabet chart, and the movement of her eyes. Milla feels "locked up here as if behind thick one way glass" (58), except that fails to convey that Agaat can touch and manipulate Milla's body, and that Milla's body can speak. Milla wonders whether "a lot of jabbering would have prevented us from getting to where we are now. Where that is I don't know" (393-4). Mary Gaitskill praises *Agaat* for its depiction of "the innately mixed, sometimes debased nature of human love. It is especially about how this mixed nature is expressed through the deep and complex language of the body; I don't believe I've ever read a book that so powerfully translates

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death" (53). He continues:

> The reflexive moment in narrative, Foucault goes on to say, is a kind of "wound," for the process of doubling back is really an attempt on the part of writing to postpone death, to "conceal, that is, betray the relationship that language establishes with death – with this limit to which language addresses itself and against which it is poised. (1993: 57)

[196] Milla thinks: "Now that I have only my thoughts that I may think, without ever having to express them, the last scrapings of my senses. Light, dark, heat, voices, open doors, wind. The ruin that Agaat helps me to inhabit. As squatter in my own body. Wind-blown settlement. A perilous freedom" (244).

this physical language into *printed* words" (2010).

About this embodied language. Burger suggests that knowing the other may be facilitated by intimacy with her bodily functions:

> En hiermee word ook veel meer gesê oor die moontlikheid om die ander te ken – die liggaam en al die vertroudheid met die intiemste liggaamsfunksies tussen mense bring ook op 'n ander manier as bloot die taalvlak 'n intimiteit,'n moontlikheid om te kan ken. (2006:192)[197]

In this context, it is worth referring to Jessica Murray's work on Antjie Krog and Yvonne Vera and embodied trauma. She employs and adapts Das's notion of "articulate flesh" (2005: 252 quoted in 2010: 497) from her study on touch and the experience of World War One nurses. Murray concludes that "that which cannot be articulated on a linguistic level, however, can speak through the body" (497). With reference to Irigary, Murray draws attention to "the healing touch" (497–498).

Agaat's touch is healing and also probing, comforting and torturous, forgiving and accusatory, and this ambiguity exists within the context of caring for a dying woman who, at different stages has been her mother, her friend, her companion, her taskmaster, her "baas", her torturer (291). I am interested in how Agaat and Milla's bodies communicate, in what their "flesh articulates" given these shifting roles, power dynamics and the "limit" staged by Milla's impending death (Cf Atwell 1993).

I have argued that Grosz's formulation of embodied subjectivity applies to Van Niekerk's novels, but there is a transformation in the way in which Milla comes to view her body in her illness. In the present tense narrative sections, the metaphors of embodiment suggest a Cartesian understanding of mind-body, and this is a direct result of the nature of the illness, which frustrates Milla's sense of her embodied subjectivity. Milla's invocation of Cartesian metaphors is designed to deny the coexistence of (diseased) body and self. She narrates her autobiography to remind herself that she is alive, and more than a "muscle mass with reflexes" (211). Milla believes the illness has reduced her to "a squatter in [her] own body"; she feels like "a cello in its case in this made-to-measure niche that my body has become for me" (244, 368). The first person narrative enacts a desire to separate the self from the body, to refuse to identify with what the illness has reduced her body to.[198] The

[197]"And there is also much more to say about the possibility of knowing the other – the body and all the trust and familiarity with the most intimate bodily functions between people raises another way, an intimacy, a possibility of knowing the other beyond merely on the level of language" (own translation).

[198]At this stage of her illness, Milla's Motor Neuron Disease (MRN) has much in common with the experience of

italicised sections, on the other hand, convey an idea of embodied subjectivity in which all boundaries are collapsing – boundaries of time, place, self and other, mind and body, waking life and fantasy. They relate the gradual deterioration of her body and the encroachment of the disease. Jacobs suggests these sections illustrate how Milla "unravels as a person and dissolves into death" (83). A stream-of-consciousness monologue in chapter nine of *Agaat* relays her experience of undergoing a series of medical tests and ultimately receiving the diagnosis from the doctor. It begins: "*i don't add up on any side am wrong geometry am failed electricity*" (234). This suggests that Milla's identity resides in her body and mind; the 'I' is embodied. However, when doctors "*whisper in unison*", their verdict reveals the changes in subjectivity that beckon: "*You are besieged in your head a tongueless bunker with loopholes* (234).These short interludes have more in common with *écriture féminine* than Cartesian logic.

Hélène Cixous's landmark essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" can be considered as a kind of manifesto for écriture féminine; it is an assertion and celebration of the female body. Cixous rallies women writers to "Write yourself. Your body must be heard" (2043) and later says "Women must write through their bodies" (2049), thus suggesting that the body is integral to the self, is the very site of the self.[199] The italicised sections in *Agaat* might then work to undercut Milla's attempt to separate the self from the diseased body. In the stream-of-consciousness sections the boundaries between body, thought and external world as well as past and present are collapsed. They tend to eschew full stops and Milla's words are continuous and fluid. Yet they also trouble Cixous's account, as these sections are neither celebratory nor affirmative in their depiction of the body. They chart the gradual degeneration of the body, the inability to differentiate waking from dreams, past from present. The body is not celebrated in this bodily writing; nonetheless, Milla's self cannot be written in "bodiless prose" (Mairs 305).

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'locked-in syndrome' as painfully narrated by Bauby in *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly.* Although in the case of Bauby the transition was sudden, for Milla the degeneration is more gradual, so that MRN has the most in common with locked-in syndrome only toward the end of life. Bauby describes it as follows: "Paralysed from head to foot, the patient, his mind intact, is imprisoned inside his own body, but unable to speak or move. In my case, blinking my left eyelid is my only means of communication" (2004:12).

[199]Cixous refers to Molly's monologue in *Ulysses* as an example of the kind of writing she is advocating: "The feminine (as the poets suspected) affirms: '...And yes,' says Molly, carrying *Ulysses* off beyond any book and toward the new writing; 'I said yes, I will Yes'" (2048). Joyce implicitly contrasts Molly's monologue, with its fluidity of ideas and speech, and virtually unstoppable flood of recollections free from punctuation, with Bloom's elliptical, tentative and telegrammatic internal speech pattern. Molly's monologue contains some of the most explicit sexual imagery of the novel. Furthermore, in the course of her recounting of past sexual conquests she urinates into the chamber pot and begins menstruating, and these events are seamlessly interwoven into her speech, thus providing an example of "writing through the body":

> ... when Im stretched out dead in my grave I suppose Ill have some peace I want to get up a minute if Im let wait O Jesus yes that thing has come on me yes now wouldnt that afflict you of course all the poking and rooting and ploughing he had up in me now what am I to do... (Joyce 1992: 913)

Nancy Mairs, a writer with Multiple Sclerosis (MS), presents another angle on Cixous's insistence on writing through the body. Mairs observes that in the Western traditional conception of the mind-body problem, the lexicon adopted implies that the self is still essentially an un-embodied, mental self: "I *have* a body, you are likely to say if you talk about embodiment at all; you don't say I *am* a body. A body is a separate entity possessable by the 'I'" (298). Mairs transcended this binary configuration of the self-body as a result of her experiences living with a crippling disease. Her memoir details how MS altered her embodied subjectivity: "Forced by the exigencies of physical disease to embrace my self in the flesh, I couldn't write bodiless prose. The voice is the creature of the body that produces it" (305). Thus Cixous's manifesto should not just be construed as a celebration of the female body as a sexual being, but it also provides the basis of an argument for the dissolution of Cartesian dualism in general. The inherent flaws of such a dualism are most lucidly expressed in descriptions of the sexualized, diseased and dying body (although these are the most obvious examples, dualism fails in general to account for the totality of our experience as embodied subjects).

At the start of the novel, Milla informs us that "The table of my sickness. The table of symptoms, medicines and therapies" (10) and the page bearing the "inscription in the front of the first booklet" of her diaries have been placed permanently in front of her by Agaat,

> As if the one should be a constant reminder to me of what I'm suffering from.
> As if the other is proof that everything she reads to me from the little books was
> written by myself,
> As if the two documents belong to the same order of truth. (10)

Milla is suffering from the weight of her past actions, as well as Motor Neuron (MRN) disease – and both are inescapable, debilitating. In Grosz's terms, all of these affect and determine Milla's embodied subjectivity (see Grosz 1994, 2001 and Chapter Two). The suggestion might be that when Milla refers to what she has "brought upon herself" (10) this fate includes her illness. Here Scarry's comments prove instructive: "that the very word 'pain' has its etymological home in '*poena*' or 'punishment' reminds us that even the elementary act of naming this most interior of events entails an immediate mental somersault out of the body into the external social circumstances that can be pictured as having caused the hurt" (1985: 16). While it's too simplistic to say that Milla deserves this most cruel and debilitating of illnesses, there is certainly a punitive connotation. This reinforces my introductory suggestion that Milla might be representative of "a paroxysmic culture" (Jamal 2005: 161). Allegorically, this also has particular valence in reading *Agaat* if Milla's body is to be

read as representing the diseased white social body (cf Atwell 1993), although this is not a reading I am pursuing here.

Milla is in no doubt about her prospects: "As if medicine can help. You take medicine to get better" (10). Later, Milla again refers to the absurdity of Agaat's committed nursing: "the nursing aids that promise no recovery, that are applied to the polite dismantling of my body … for the notation of my statistics of my going hence … What an ado about nothing everyday! What a farce!" (152-3). Yet, in a moment of gratitude perhaps, and tenderness, Milla also allows "  or the tremendous art that it is to treat a half-dead relic like a whole human being" (188). Milla's illness cannot be cured, her dying cannot be forestalled, but her pain can be managed, her subjectivity asserted, not by her own imagined metaphors of embodiment, but rather by Agaat's commitment to the belief that Milla's identity lies in her paralysed body. If the past as authored by Milla and her illness are "of the same order of truth", then perhaps rewriting the past in the present, or coming to terms with it through nursing the body, might be what remains. As Milla wonders: "Who's going to give in first? On the facts of the past? Or does our assignment lie here in this present?" (438). The language they develop through the use of the alphabet chart is a language used to talk about the past. Milla tries to deny the reality of her body, of the present and Agaat must face it, in the present, by attending to the needs of her body and managing her symptoms.

With regard to this "tremendous art", Ray and Street have written about the experiences of family members caring for patients with Motor Neuron disease, the demands of this "bodywork" and coping with the increasing "emotional labour" (2006: 35). Agaat's experience of nursing Milla is only conveyed through Milla's reporting and interpretation of it. However, Ray and Street provide a useful framework in their introduction of the concept of "bodywork" and contextualise the medical vocabulary, equipment and changing levels of dependency as narrated in the novel.[200] Bodywork can thus be adopted to refer to the ways in which bodies (of the dying and healthy, the patient and nurse, the paralysed and mobile) interact in the nursing process; it is an "embodied experience for both the patient and the caregiver" (see Ray and Street 2006:37).

Ray and Street outline "how the body has been constructed in nursing literature" (37), emphasising the contribution of Leder with regards to the "absent body". Leder (1984, 1990), making a similar point to Mairs, demonstrated "that when the body functions appropriately it is not consciously

[200] Ray and Street explain, "Nursing care and the way nurses manage their bodies in their interactions with patients has also been described as bodywork (Twigg 2000, Shakespeare 2003). Bodywork is a helpful concept to apply to family caregivers. However, bodywork is more than just what caregivers do with their body to provide care; it is also about how they manage the deteriorating body of their relative" (Ray & Street 2006 : 35-6).

considered; however, when the body is beset with pain or illness it becomes aware and 'dys-appears'" (2006:36). In the context of the symptoms and degeneration associated with MRN, such as drooling, loss of speech, muscular atrophy and "leaking", the body that 'dys-appears', that becomes undeniably present, would appear to be a grotesque body. They refer to both Kristeva (1982) on abjection and Grosz (1989) on the "visceral disgust" which might follow abjection (36). In this way, caring for someone with MRN is an especially intimate task. Milla describes the "visceral disgust" which her own body evokes in her: "*the filthy living body its steaming dripping folds its unreflective splashing its lack of respect for decay*" (*Agaat* 327). Agaat, on the other hand, seems fascinated rather than troubled or disgusted by Milla's body.

Milla had wondered,

> Perhaps that which has to be said has nothing to do with the truth.
> And do I myself know what it is? Is the truth beyond what happened or didn't happen, what happened hów and whére? Beyónd the facts? I'm the one who's being tested to see whether I have the words to arrive there. (434)

Ultimately Milla does not have the words to arrive there, but in Agaat's devoted, obsessive, tortured and torturous caring of Milla's body, they arrive at an alternative "there". Perhaps the truth has more to do with the relationship between bodies over the forty-three years they have lived together. Perhaps beyond the recounting of plot, beyond the admissions of guilt, beyond the medical details of her disease, Milla must find a way to say something through her body, through her and Agaat's shared bodywork. It is only through both Milla and Agaat coming to terms with the fact of Milla's dying (as expressed via her diseased body which is cared for by Agaat's healthy one), that these two documents facing Milla can be reconciled and their intimate relationship potentially transformed.

Agaat is Milla's "sole carer" and ultimately "sole means of communication with the world" (Hunter 2012: 76). Milla claims to be able to read Agaat's body language in the same way that she presumes Agaat can decipher hers. Das's notion of "articulate flesh" (quoted in Murray 2010: 497) then applies to both of them. When Agaat massages Milla's gums, as part of the elaborate teeth cleaning process, Milla responds: "I read her sign language with the membranes of my mouth, eyes closed" (63). Nonetheless, despite this fluency, the reader is occasionally encouraged to doubt Milla's ability to "read" Agaat and to interpret her moods and actions, as well as to doubt the degree of

Milla's lucidity (394). We also read of Agaat's mis-translations at times,[201] as well as uncertainty over how much of the diary she has adjusted or edited. This lends the whole narrative an air of instability which proves productive rather than fractured or flimsy. Or, as Blanchot words it: "Literature is language turning into ambiguity" *(Literature and the Right to Death:* 341), and this "double meaning" is precisely "the power of literature" (344, 340). The power of *Agaat* also resides in the ambiguity of bodies.

The physical intimacy demanded by bodywork is a marked departure from the way Agaat and Milla have shared their lives on the farm since Jakkie's birth. Between the years of Milla's initial closeness to Agaat, after she had adopted her and Milla's illness, she was never particularly physically demonstrative with Agaat – with any members of her family in fact. Although initially Milla would "press [Agaat] to [her]"[202] (624) and often sleep beside her, such closeness ended the moment Agaat was banished to the outside room. Only with Jakkie's birth, when Agaat had to deliver the baby herself, is any kind of bodily contact restored, and in this case it is a visceral and life-saving intervention. Agaat's role as midwife is the first time she calls Milla "Même" again, and as a result, when she is in hospital, it is Agaat Milla longs for, not Jakkie; Agaat, however, is only interested in Jakkie (183). The fear of Milla's death, and probably more urgently her son's, prompts a reversion to the roles of their previous pseudo-mother-daughter relationship. Once again, intimacy unmitigated – or less so – by power is only possible in an encounter with a failing body. Bodily contact continues only when necessitated by medical emergencies, yet each occasion prompts a reassessment of their relationship by Milla and an awareness of all that has been lost.[203]

The language of the eyes has been a staple of their lives (see Chapter Four), but this new-found enforced physical intimacy, as a result of MRN, has not. Agaat's treatment of Milla mirrors Milla's treatment of her as a child: "*my nurse takes me under my own law*" (263). Or as the hubristic Milla terms it: "Barely alive and I her source of life. Now it's the other way round. Me dying and she to

[201] See also for example, the bath scene: "we were thinking the same thought. Or I thought it was the same" (532) – a rare admission by Milla.

[202] Although even this was rare, and for the most part, when Milla did touch Agaat as a child, it was either to violently remonstrate with her or to viciously scrub and attend to her body.

[203] For example, when Jakkie was still a child, there was an accident with one of the workers. Both Agaat and Milla work well at comforting Julies, whose leg had been entrapped in the axle. Milla even holds "his rough hands" (292). In fact, this moment, with the two of them nursing Julies, the intimacy between his body and theirs – all unprecedented for different reasons – is the catalyst for Milla's realisation of the complications of all of their lives together :

> … your and Agaat's hands that touched each other as you passed on and received the scissors and bandages to and from each other, there everything suddenly felt too much for you.
> The ambiguity of the place, your farm … the destitution … your inability to act rightly and justly ...
> Your tears dripped on the man's face.
> Agaat wiped them. (293)

accompany me" (435). The mother-child relationship has been reversed.

Milla asks: "Where, in any case, does something like that begin? Your destiny?" (10). The question, phrased differently, is reiterated in the first stream of consciousness section:[204] "*how does a sickness begin?*" which concludes: "*who will chew me until i bind for i have done as was done unto me the sickness belongs to us two*" (35). The final clause suggests the shared experience illness imposes, with Milla as "perfect patient", Agaat as "perfect nurse" (83).[205] In the context of nursing literature, it emphasises that Milla's illness is an "embodied experience for both the patient and the caregiver" (Ray and Street 2006:37). However, it also implies that to some degree, both Milla and Agaat are ill, both suffer the effects of that dedication Milla wrote in her notebooks, as Milla realises: "Agaat translate me, I'm sick with remorse" (190). Furthermore, there is the suggestion that Milla's enforced silence might be a projection of the ideological and narrative silencing of Agaat in Milla's regime of power: "Will she ever start a sentence with 'I feel' or 'I wish' or 'I hope' Is it hér itch that is erupting on mé? Because shé can't speak?" (308).

As Milla loses the capacity for speech, the "unsharability" of pain, "ensure[d] … through its resistance to language" is concretised in Milla's inability to speak, or even attempt to vocalise her pain (Scarry 1985). Pain "achieves … this absolute split between one's sense of one's own reality and the reality of other persons" (Scarry 1985: 4). Pain then, like death, is emblematic of the impossibility of knowing the other. It is "at once that which cannot be denied and that which cannot be confirmed" (4). Language has to be devised to describe pain ("the language of agency") by those

[204] Stobie and Rossman (2012) focus on this section in an article about "cultural renewal and sacrifice". However, in their allusive reading of Milla as an "Earth Mother", they neglect the more immediate meaning of sickness; they focus on the first half of the sentence, but neglect the conclusion "the sickness belongs to us two". This is odd, as they do comment on the second last clause: "Although Milla's harsh treatment of Agaat cannot be denied, Milla, repeating the Golden Rule ("*i have done as was done unto me*") realises that she has replicated the ills done unto her by her mother" (2012: 25). I propose that the deliberate use of the number two here suggests Milla is saying something different in this final line, from the more all-inclusive, organic idea of sickness Rossman and Stobie focus on when they say: "Milla sees sickness as insidious and contagious, a defilement that infects all living organisms" (2012: 23-24). Rather, I argue the sickness is figuratively part of the mother-daughter inheritance, as Milla imagines saying to her mother: "You thought, let go of me, I'm infected already, you can't make me any sicker than I am" (145). The sickness is also, literally, MRN, "the mother of all illnesses" which affects both Milla and Agaat.
As with Rossman's (2012) reading of Mol in *Triomf*, Stobie and Rossman appear to overestimate the healing potential of Milla's death, and err on the side of optimism and perhaps even naïveté: "Consequently, the death of the white matriarch serves symbolically to reunite the divisiveness caused by the structural violence of apartheid and to allow the renewal and regeneration of the land, Afrikaans culture and, arguably, the South African nation" (19). On the contrary, all indications appear to be that Agaat, a product of that structural violence, has been trained to repeat it, or continue it. Both Agaat and Milla, in my reading then, might metaphorically suffer from the same sickness.

[205] Jacobs suggests that this adjective repetition highlights the extent of their "symbiotic relationship" and "mutuality" (236). However, I read Milla's comment here as sarcastic. Jacobs elaborates by quoting another example of mutuality in the novel: "Milla says about Agaat's reading to her from her own diaries: 'Sometimes I think it's no longer I who am the target of the reading. She does it for herself, to generate energy [...] as fuel for herself to carry on nursing me every day'" (236). What he elides of the second quote is the key suggestion of anguish, and Agaat's need to replenish her feelings of resentment. Mutuality, I think, fails to cover the very tortured, torturous and ultimately unequal, or constantly shifting power relationship between Milla and Agaat.

in pain, or by those who speak on behalf of those in pain. In setting out her argument, Scarry suggests that diseases are governed by the same logic as pain (4); the experience of having MRN cannot be conveyed.

The case of Milla's itching might best illustrate this "unsharability": "To have pain is to have *certainty*; to hear about pain is to have *doubt*" (Scarry 1985: 13). Yet what occurs despite Milla's incapacity, her inability to convince Agaat of the truth of her itching, which she knows with certainty, but Agaat can merely doubt, is that Agaat scratches, soothes, examines, eases Milla's entire body (*Agaat* 308-310).

Scarry's analysis of torture provides a prism through which the relationship between power, bodies and physical pain within intimate relationships can be interpreted. For Scarry, "the problem of pain is bound up with problem of power" (12). While not strictly part of a regime of torture, attending to Milla's body becomes a battle for power, with her body the site. The torture analogy is one that is raised often enough in *Agaat* (see for example 222, 449). Milla believes Agaat's ministrations have much in common with torture (394). Hunter explains that "'[t]errains of mutuality' (to recall Nuttall's phrase) between the women have been warped. Agaat *is* possibly tormenting Milla, as well as keeping her alive" (2012: 76). In order to generate "signs of independence", Agaat must enrage or provoke Milla only in order to have an equal adversary, Milla believes, and to deny to some small degree Milla's incapacity (394).[206] Milla's attitude to Agaat mirrors this approach (422). Scarry argues that "[i]n converting the other's pain into his own power, the torturer experiences the entire occurrence exclusively from the non-vulnerable end of the weapon" (Scarry 1985: 59). Yet Agaat is not "non-vulnerable", is not immune in this instance. Milla too needs to remind herself of her previous power, by harassing Agaat and so, aware of the futility, both women continue to torment each other.

When Agaat finally retrieves the "old alphabet chart" (434), perhaps as an attempt to find a neutral code beyond the language of pain and power, both become impatient; the language of the eyes is deemed more palatable. Chapter 16 centres on this new conversational crutch and begins, rather than as a "first joke" (281) or an attempt at reconciliation or confession, with the accusation: "W-H-O S-T-A-R-T-E-D T. F-I-R-E O-N M-O-U-N-T-A-I-N" (431), which is connected to Milla's less than charitable vision of Agaat as a "witch" (445), or even "devil" (447). In a telling metaphor,

[206]Earlier, Milla suggests that Agaat needs to remind herself of the past in order to continue with this draining task (236). See also pages 396 and 439 for different perspectives on the meaning of Milla's helplessness and Agaat's response.

Milla refers to the chart and its appendages as "A skeleton of language" (436).[207] She continues,

> If it had to be fleshed out as well … muscles, skin, hair, nerves, glands ….
> How, when, who, why, what …
> But my nerves are extinct and my muscles are moist cotton wool, my hair grey strands, my skin worn, my glands dry dumplings. My secretions trickle out of me through tubes. (436, ellipses in original)

The medium they employ needs to be "fleshed out", as it consists of letters and ready-made phrases on a page and fails to adequately express what either Milla or Agaat needs it to. It is no coincidence that the metaphorical anatomical features Milla mentions correlate not only to the adverbs in her next line of thought, but also to her literally failing anatomical features.[208] Words, explanations, corporeality are all thought to be on the same continuum. The language can only be elaborated on, completed if it is fleshed out – but Milla's flesh is insufficient to achieve this, her subjectivity too unsubstantial. This complicated alphabetical scaffold cannot ensure conversation, as Agaat doesn't ever answer Milla's questions or ask probing questions of her own and Milla refuses to believe Agaat's version of events (446).[209] Their conversation needs to take place beyond language. When the intermediary chart is removed, engaging directly with each other's bodies seems the only solution.

Milla continues: "Interprets me to the brink of Babel, to the threshold of death. But there are limits! Back! Stand Back! You're too close! My death is of mé! And my béd! There are bóúndaries!" (450). Agaat's response to Milla's invocation of boundaries is to resort to a self-comforting gesture adopted in her childhood: "She clasps her hands round her body, the knuckle of the small hand in her mouth" (451 see also 249, 446, 496). Milla has in effect denied that her death "is of" Agaat too.

Despite what Milla accuses her of, Agaat recovers and responds by reinforcing the fact that Milla's disease is of the two of them, that the boundaries have long since collapsed:

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[207] Jacobs observes of this moment: "The complexity of their partnership is most fully manifest, however, in their laborious co-creation of language … Their communication is metonymic of the co-construction of the fictional narrative" (2012:81). However, he doesn't comment on the metaphor of the body.

[208] This echoes Milla's suggestion, analysed below, regarding "the person who has to wither so that the book of her life can be filled" (239).

[209] However, Agaat does "charg[e Milla's] sentences with her own resonances. … She adds on and improvises" (437). For example when Agaat says:

> *Do something for your fellow humans? Or do something with your fellow humans or tó your fellow humans? Féllow human or in- or súper-human? Or half human? Less human than yourself?* (438)

These improvisations and riffs on Milla's statements, lead Sanders to propose that "When the prepositions shift from dative to accusative, making the recipient a direct object of the deed, the effects may be equivocal. This may be the only way that the novel actually allows Agaat to narrate" (2008:26). Yet Milla fails to answer Agaat's accusations.

> She bends over me, regards me, presses shut her eyes with the thumb and index finger of her left hand. And with the fingers of her small hand, mine. Her fingers are cold on my eyelids.
> Rest, she says, it won't be long now, we're almost there. (451)

While Milla has been obsessed with staring at her maps (as examined in depth in Chapter Two), what must still be unearthed is the suitcase which contained all the artefacts of Agaat's childhood before she was transformed into a servant, and which Agaat buried. Milla, in a surprising show of clarity of the meaning of this suitcase, refers to "the moonlit night of the burial of the heart" (496). In her fairytale, Agaat describes the contents of the suitcase as "*things of the child she'd been*" and once they were buried, she "*pointed with her snake's-head hand and said: Now, Good you are dead*" (689). This first death needs to be acknowledged, by both Milla and Agaat before Milla herself may die, and the reappearance of the suitcase enables them both to approach this trauma. [210] In this way, the death of 'Good', of Agaat's childhood, or the mother-daughter bond, which Agaat mourned privately ("*nobody noticed anything of Good's mourning because she cried without tears*" [689]), can finally be publicly mourned and belatedly acknowledged, and so it is this death rather than Milla's which is mourned.

As in *Triomf*, the bath is a climactic scene – it forces an intimacy, a disclosure, a vulnerability. By Chapter 18 of the novel, Milla can no longer bath, yet her recollections reveal a brief reconciliation, a flickering moment of recognition. Now, when Agaat cleans her with a cloth and water, "She gets to every part of me but I'm no longer invaded or besieged" (531). The war-like language has briefly ceased. "In the contracting circle of delight [Milla's bath] was a last small treat"; although she was faced with the nudity of her body, with the fact of it, she was also allowed to escape it, to experience "weightlessness" (532).

When Milla can no longer rise from her wheelchair into the bath, Agaat submits to a "piggy-back", a gesture of maternal care (535). Milla has a fantasy then, of how Agaat might escape, put a definite end to her servitude: "the moment that she feels my weight on her, jerking up her shoulder sideways and throwing me, against the wall, so that I fall down into the bath, a red veil in the water, bubbles" (536). Yet Agaat is incapable of such revenge, instead she places

> Her strong hand under my buttocks … Her clothes against my stomach and breast hard and

[210] The death of "Good" also occasions the death of Milla as Agaat's mother. Gerrit Olivier presents an astute and original reading of Agaat and Milla's relationship as mother and daughter, in which Agaat mourns Milla as "the dead mother" (2011).

coarse before I could feel the warmth of her body. ...
There was something by which I could feel the decision.
A ridge that gathered in the cloth of her dress.
And then something beyond the ridge, a boundary, a step, ríght through herself.
Then she got into the bath with me. (537)

The "piggy-back" echoes Lambert's lifting of Pop; it is an encounter with the body of the other that is a revelation – Agaat's hair is "softer than [Milla] thought" (537). This is a moment in which traditional relations are suspended, and only the logic of bodies in need is followed. And it invites a connection too, with Derrida echoing Blanchot (1973), of death as a "step/not" (Derrida 1993:6). Derrida uses this phrase to indicate that death both "has no border" and "is a border" and thus questions the meaning of thinking of death as a "crossing of a border … an overstepping or a transgression" (6). It is at once a step and not, from the double meaning of the French *pas* : "'Il y va d'un certain pas' (It involves a certain step/not; he goes along at a certain pace)" (*Ibid.*). Yet here, Agaat is not dying, but relinquishing a certain idea of her identity and of Milla's; it is as if she would take on Milla's death for herself but she cannot. As Iyer concludes in his analysis of Blanchot, "To be before the Other as that other dies is to be affected by that death in such a way that my own self-relation is transgressed" (2001:66-67). This is the boundary, which Milla had earlier invoked as insurpassable or impregnable *(Agaat* 450): Agaat cannot experience Milla's death for her. Yet in that moment prior to entering the bath with Milla, she metaphorically "stepped beyond" herself. She realised with a new clarity that Milla had degenerated beyond any hope of renewal, that Milla is definitively dying, and soon. Her soft, wordless response to Milla's outbreak earlier, becomes all the more poignant, even tragic (451). This recollection of the bath scene seems to jolt Milla too, for there is a change in the tenor of their "interactions" and of what Milla wishes to ask, to remember.

One wonders what Agaat was thinking, while Milla hugged her in the bath for an hour (Milla wasn't robbed of any of her allotted bath time). Agaat's footsteps subsequent to this watery embrace are funereal, recalling Milla's mother's funeral to her and causing her to imagine her own. In Milla's imaginary forecasting of Agaat's life after her funeral, she is present, as a spectre of sorts, to witness Agaat's loneliness and for the first time, she admits indubitably (yet not to Agaat), that she knew she had "slaughter[ed Agaat's] last hanslam" (539), an act she denied when she could have admitted it with the aid of the alphabet chart (446). This confessional mood, prompted by the recollection of their bodies together in the bath, begins a train of thought that leads directly to her death, and encourages Milla to admit to herself what she is incapable of communicating to Agaat:[211]

[211]In her reading of this section, Stobie, does not take significant notice of the context of Milla's expression of regret

> Oh, my little Agaat, my child that I pushed away from me ...
> Why can I only now be with you like this, in a fantasy of my own death?
> Why only love you now with this inexpressible regret?
> And how must I let you know this? (540)

This might be a watershed moment, when Milla states unequivocally that Agaat was her child whom she loved and betrayed. However, she is incapable of letting Agaat know this in her current state. In her fantasy of the future, after her death, she imagines soothing Agaat via a substitute for herself, the placid, maternal cow:

> See, in the twilight I lead a cow before you, a gentle jersey cow ... I place your hands on her nose your palm on her lips. You are the eye-reader. There it is, bucketfuls of mercy in those defenceless pupils. (540-541)

Milla then reverts to her current paralysis, to her desire "to console [Agaat], in anticipation, for the hereafter" (451):

> Am I in vain thinking you will miss me? That you will long to look after me, to wash me and doctor me and dress me in my bed, your last doll with whom you had to play for four years? Who is consoled by the thought that you will long for me as I was at the very end? (451)

However, the moment passes. Agaat is not in the room to translate Milla's thoughts, and her vanity jostles with her previous self-effacing, chastising or recriminatory thoughts. Milla envisions a future in which her 'dys-appearing' body (see Ray and Street), all-consuming now, will be absent and mourned precisely because the last few years of her life with Agaat revolved around nursing her body. It would appear that for Milla, reconciliation is only possible in a vision of her own death.

Milla has a similar thought when she envisions Agaat retreating into her hearth, in a gesture of disavowal. Only in this case it is Agaat who mimes her own death and dissolution into the earth. But in both instances, Milla imagines herself as a consoling presence (248). In this hallucination, she expresses what appears to be sincere empathy for Agaat's plight: "How can I blame you for wanting to vanish, Agaat? That you want to get away from me, away from the tyranny of me? More inescapable than ever" (249). Milla envisions Agaat burying herself in the earth, safe from the

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(2009: 64-65).

torment that is her life: "Until nobody searches for you any more, to draw you out, to split you into parts and stretch you over spars and to infuse you and to chafe you and to rap you till you scream, till you sing, till you dance to their tune? Till you feel time click shut behind you and everything else falls silent" (249). Milla here exhibits an unusual clarity of thought in her metaphorical rendering of Agaat's life, which accords exactly with the torture to which she subjected Agaat. It is a deeply affecting, tragic scene. As a kind of recompense, Milla then imagines comforting Agaat's corpse, "So that I can come to be there with you, with my hand on your hip bone, with my hand on your shoulder tip to wait with you in the dark. For them to be rendered white and tidy, your bones one by one" (249). Once Agaat's bones have disintegrated, Milla "shall go and lie with my head in that corner, with my ear on that place where that last trace of you lingered" (250), welcoming the moment when at least Agaat "shall be free of me, and free of yourself" (250). Milla here, unlike in her waking life, seems in no doubt about Agaat's suffering, of the trauma that her life has been. However, her gesture of maternal affection, of attending Agaat's dying, remains imaginary. It is the one inversion in the narrative of their life which can never occur; Milla will never be able to mirror Agaat's bodywork and occupy the role of deathbed nurse and mourner.

In a review of Laura E Tanner's *Lost Bodies*, Sarah Brophy situates Tanner's work within "materialist criticism" and her book draws primarily on the work of Merleau-Ponty and Grosz (Brophy 2010:103). The relevance of Tanner's book for my project is her desire "to make corporeality more central to how we theorize both experiences and representations of illness, loss, and grief" (quoted in Brophy 2010: 103). The "lost body" of the title is both "the wasting body of the terminally ill [and] the absent body of the deceased" (Mandel 2008:663). Tanner considers "the way in which the body of illness or grief is absent from critical discourse and lost to cultural view" (Tanner 2, quoted in Mandel 2008:664). Tanner highlights "the frustration of the mourner's ability to touch [which] in many ways defines the experience of grief" (Tanner 111, quoted in Brophy 2010:103). While both Brophy and Naomi Mandel have some criticisms of aspects of Tanner's work,[212] the centrality of the tactile and corporeality in discussions of illness, with reference to Grosz and materialist feminism, are a useful touchstone for my own research. The absence of Milla's body will "define Agaat's experience of grief". But both Agaat and Milla mourn the lost bodies of their youth: of mother and daughter asleep beside each other as representative of their

[212]While the details of the debates are fascinating, they are beyond the scope of this chapter. Brophy's main concern is Tanner's focus on American culture, what she perceives as Tanner's flawed criticism of the limits of "visual representation" and finally that "the materialist turn is at risk of producing a kind of over-correction: a veering away from the social, historical materiality of culture in the pursuit of the purity of embodied feeling, specifically touch" (2010:105). Mandel shares these reservations, especially regarding the visual and the American focus (2010: 664) as well as Tanner's narrow reading of loss (672, 667). However, Brophy allows for the value of engaging with a "wide range of embodied histories" (Brophy 2010:105). Throughout my argument I have been wary of a corporeal materialist reading which neglects other aspects and privileges only the body.

cruelly foreshortened relationship.

In recalling the time of her first diagnosis, hindsight and the imminent end of her life allow Milla these thoughts:

> To make of nothing an all.
> That was what Agaat made of me. … the person who has to wither so that the book of her life can be filled. As in like manner the great God had to shrink to make room for his creation. Or something to that effect. (239)[213]

While it may appear that Milla is praising Agaat, in the same breath she disingenuously and with false modesty compares herself to God, in which case both the farm and Agaat come to be seen as her "creation". The image of the inverse relationship between a person and their "book of life" is rich with symbolism. Notwithstanding the above points about speaking in order to extend one's life, one's domain of existence, Blanchot's poetic meditations on writing shed light on this idea:

> to write one's autobiography, in order to confess or to engage in self-analysis or in order to expose oneself, like a work of art, to the gaze of all is perhaps to seek to survive, but through a perpetual suicide – a death which is total inasmuch as fragmentary.
> To write (of) oneself is to cease to be, in order to confide in a guest – the other, the reader – entrusting yourself to him who will henceforth have as an obligation, and indeed as a life, nothing but your inexistence. (*Writing the Disaster*: 54)

If we consider Agaat as the agent here, then her reading of Milla's diaries functions as an ironic re-enactment of Milla's desire to "survive … through a perpetual suicide". Rather than the diaries existing as a relic of her life after death, by reading them to Milla – with her edits – Agaat performs and allows Milla to witness her waning life, while the book of her life grows in depth and complexity. However, in the present tense section (as well as in the stream-of-consciousness and second person narrative), Milla attempts another autobiography (see Chapter Two), yet this one is written through the body. In these sections Milla attempts to tell a different story, but she is impeded by Agaat, indicted by her own actions. Thus it is not just "inexistence" in the abstract that is recorded here as memory, or even in concrete form as written book, but rather as the absent or "lost" body. What Agaat is left with, what indeed the reader of *Agaat* inherits, is Milla's "inexistence" to which she is perpetually obliged, haunted by, and forced to wrestle with.

[213] The 'body as book' metaphor recurs throughout the novel (see for example *Agaat* 643)

In Chapter 19, for the first time the past and present begin to blur, and the structure of the first person narrative resembles the stream-of-consciousness sections in some aspects. Agaat is "sharpening knives over the tip of [Milla's] comatose nose" (578), and Milla's fractured thoughts drift seamlessly between the past and the present, as Agaat's actions evoke vivid memories of the time she first taught Agaat to sharpen knives: "I take her hands in mine, the small hand in my right hand" (579). The stream-of-consciousness section in that chapter affirms that Milla is near death, as she has finally accepted her embodied subjectivity. Milla transcends the Cartesian metaphors of embodiment which have characterised the latter stages of her illness, since she has been paralysed and bed-bound: "*... trapped in a lift the lift is myself no space to lift an arm sound the alarm the alarm is myself no space between me and me I fill myself fully*" (622).

Subsequent to accepting the non-binary reality of her embodied subjectivity, in the final chapter of the present tense section, Milla senses something has shifted too, in her relationship with Agaat. Agaat had spent the night in Milla's grave:[214] "Whom did I become for her overnight? Suddenly she's no longer measuring herself by me" (643). In the past, Milla has commented on measuring herself against her mother, a habit she ended after her mother's death (311). It would appear that Agaat has come to terms with Milla's death (cf Olivier 2011). Milla imagines Agaat lying in the grave viewing the celestial mural, wondering if all is "reconciled among the stars?" (644). This continues the thread of an alternate cosmic myth raised in *Triomf*. Milla wonders if she can feel in her body what Agaat felt in hers when she lay in the grave wondering what Milla would feel when she was buried. Perhaps in this circular cycle of affect the two women are closer, more synchronised than they have ever been – but it is still Milla imagining this scene and its meaning; the potential reciprocal emotions might merely be narcissistic projections.[215]

Agaat finally delivers her recovered, dug up suitcase on what appears to be the day of Milla's death. First Milla hears the suitcase locks opening, then Agaat touches her again but neither to torture nor treat her symptoms; the tactile encounter now articulates a different message:

[214]In this action we are reminded of Mol's final despairing act for Gerty in *Triomf*. Despite her fear of the instability and hollowness of the Johannesburg earth, she submits to the necessity of burying rather than cremating her dog. But she insists on first testing the ground and lowers herself into the hole they dug: "She was listening for hollow spots. She even lay down to see if the lie was right, with her cheek on those pieces of raw brick. It was an eerie feeling but she had to know" (205).

[215]Stobie, reading this scene, and of the meaning of death, is overly optimistic and allegorical:

> This entry into and rising from the grave is recounted speculatively by Milla, who imaginatively shares Agaat's experience. The boundaries between the characters' psyches is blurred in Milla's prescient dream … The mystery of death unlocks a spirit of generosity and reconciliation between Agaat and Milla, who also resonate as modern South African counterparts of Ruth and Naomi, and have spiritual associations of the Bi/Christ who disrupts heteropatriarchal hierarchies and certainties. (65)

> How light is her hand on my forehead! And now on my cheeks, how different are her palms!
> They are poised now for the final chord. For the last kneading. As good as it gets, they say. No more we can do for you. (645)

Agaat has to "risk [pulling apart Milla's eyelash] as I taught her" (645) to show her the suitcase. This is the only time that Milla desires to speak not in order to interrogate, to accuse, to chastise, or to demand (as with the alphabet chart) but simply to remember:[216] "I would want to ask her if she remembers. The butterflies we picked out of pools. ... As if dead the little creatures lay" (646). Importantly, her memory is of the time when she was still Agaat's Même, when, mirroring Milla, Agaat "herself wasn't yet speaking", but she smiled for the first time in Milla's presence. This is a treasured memory for Milla, when Agaat finally relinquished her defences and trusted Milla with a smile. This was in exchange for Milla's revealing the beauty and seeming magic of the regenerating butterflies. At this point, race, power and hidden agendas were temporarily absent from their relationship. This memory foreshadows a final attempt at recapturing that innocent intimacy. [217]

Milla, has now become the butterfly, but Agaat is done with searching for her soul (see Chapter Four):

> Now it's my turn. My upper lash is pulled up, fimgertips pull down the lower lid. …
> I see you!
> And I see yóú. (647)

It seems that here, in this delicate act, where Agaat, for the last time, opens Milla's eyes, there might be a moment of recognition, of the kind Hoffman (2005) refers to:

> She's accepted that it's beyond her, me and my dying.
> She smiles at me.
> I see my reflection in her eyes. (647)

[216] Milla thinks Agaat must remember it as "she read it out, quite recently, from my diary. February 28, 1954" (646), except that this date is not included in the diary entries in the novel, adding to the unreliability and instability of both the diaries and Milla's authorial version of events. Nonetheless, there's little doubt that Agaat has forgotten this, as she has just parted Milla's eyelashes employing the same technique.

[217] Agaat's words seem to strike a false note to me: there is something inauthentic in her expression, which is neither modulated by Milla's rhythms, nor her own, but seems to convey a sense of what is required, or proper in this case. It appears a performance, her words less sincere than her actions: "And look here, even my sack with which I arrived here on Grootmoedersdrift. Do you remember? In the beginning you hid sweets inside for me? To get me going. I was terribly timid wasn't I?" (448). There is a great deal hiding behind the phrase "terribly timid", a trauma unspoken.

Milla recalled Agaat's first smile (646), and now, this is the final smile Milla will witness, but innocence has been lost and a lifetime passed between those smiles. There appears to be a kind of acceptance of the limit of what one person can do for another. Agaat no longer wishes to penetrate Milla or to see below the surface, to poke and prod (647). She no longer desires to find a "peephole" to reveal an alternate version of Milla (see Chapter Four). Agaat smiles and they look each other in the eye. This is Agaat's final gift to Milla: an acknowledgement of their lives together. An inversion of the moment Agaat refused to look in Milla's eyes to see her reflection as a servant. Perhaps, in this final scene, Agaat allows Milla to be seen as she desires, as Agaat's mother.

Agaat doesn't trace her hands directly on Milla's body, but uses the mementoes of her own childhood, which comforted her, to comfort Milla. She tracks her childhood wheel and stick toy over Milla's skin, touches the moleskin to her cheek as an offering, perhaps of reconciliation (648), In this final inversion, Milla has reverted to a child-like state, and Agaat performs the maternal role. This is an attempt to comfort Milla, as Agaat once was comforted by these transitional objects her sister Lys had insisted be taken with her. It serves as a reminder of that which cannot be vocalised, of the mother-daughter intimacy they once shared and which Milla irrevocably banished. In this moment of acknowledging everything that the unearthed suitcase represents, Milla and Agaat finally achieve a kind of closure, which pre-empts the final stream-of-consciousness vision Milla has. However, importantly, while there might be closure, it is not apparent that there is forgiveness. As Milla recognises in the final second person narrative, "Pretty words … are not what's going to put matters straight between us" (670). This sentiment perhaps captures what has been illustrated in the course of the novel as a whole and in this scene with the suitcase: the confessional narrative on which the TRC was founded, proves insufficient. Forgiveness is not always offered or received, and there are many orders of truth, some of which cannot be confronted or vocalised. But witnessing, being present for and finally accepting the dying (of the) other can facilitate an alternative kind of "recognition" (Hoffman, 2005) and a close approximation of reconciliation.

In her prolonged reverie of those early years, Milla asks: "What have we left of all that? Of all the twirling of the stick in the hole? A fireplace, this bed, a stealthy little smoke arising" (649). As a child Agaat was always fascinated by the bellows, by the creation and mystery of fire. As a result, Milla entertained her by "twirling the stick in the hole", until it caught alight. The spark needed can only result from friction, and now, metaphorically, Milla and Agaat's bodywork, their entangled bodies, their relationship, is incendiary. The multiple meanings of fire: of destruction and life are

both alluded to here.[218]

And then the last goodbye, as Agaat ushers in the remaining farmworkers, "your people have come to say goodbye" (650). This is also Agaat's way of asserting her power, for the "new order": "three years long in this bed. She knows I'm now moving on. She shows the reins at the moment of changing hands" (650). Milla's final coherent thought is, "It's good, Agaat, it will go well, I wish you good cheer, and as much peace as possible" (651). Importantly, here she is affirming the goodness, not of the past nor of Milla's actions, but potentially of Agaat's future. The past it would appear, is beyond redemption.

As all is rendered dark, as the world recedes from Milla, and Agaat "sticks down the stare-eye" (652). Milla's final sensory experience, prior to the delirious concluding stream-of-consciousness section, is not of the forgiving or loving touch of Agaat: "firmly she starts singing. I feel her breath on my face. I feel the dogs bumping against the bed. A wet snout burrows in under my hand" (652). The dog's snout here might be a substitute for Agaat, but a telling one. If Milla imagines comforting Agaat with a gentle cow as proxy after her death, then Milla's sense of her dog's nose in her hand, at the moment of her death, or just prior to it, might be the equivalent proxy for Agaat's body. The unquestioning love which Mol praises her dogs for giving is what Milla receives, rather than the complicated caress of Agaat.

The farewell hymn Agaat chooses is "Abide with me" (652). But it would seem the religious lament is chosen more for the benefit of the workers than either Agaat or Milla. The hymn, "as Erik Routley puts it, 'looks death itself in the face' and embodies the human craving for companionship in *extremis*" (Christiansen).[219] It is based on Luke 24:29 "Abide with us for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent" (*Ibid*.). The same hymn is invoked at the close of *Memorandum*.

The remainder of the novel consists of a final second person narrative relating how Milla found Agaat – and which she never wrote down, "so that nobody need experience [her] failures and [her] mistakes at first hand"(653); a final stream-of-consciousness narrative, Jakkie's epilogue and Agaat's bedtime story.

[218]Of Agaat's fireplace, Milla said "it's her altar. For what sacrifice?" (267) Perhaps, finally, Milla is the sacrifice, and with her, the trauma of the past. In the final second person narrative, Milla reveals that she instructed Agaat to burn the diaries:

> And then your death bed became the fireplace. Crackling with ripeness the time that accrued to her. Wind-dry the material. Your eyes and ears the hearths ... with so many omissions and additions that nobody not even you, would ever be able to ascertain the true facts. (654)

[219]Interestingly, it was translated into Afrikaans on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of its composition in 1947 just prior to the establishment of the republic (*Sarasota Herald-Tribune*, 1947: 6).

The reader should take any deeper meaning into Milla's dying on the 16th of December with a pinch of salt – it is too neat, too orchestrated.[220] Milla's narrative does not end with a conciliatory moment, a lament and consoling hymn. The final scene of the second person narrative, the final image of the two of them together in the novel, is of Milla force feeding Agaat valerian to drug her:

> You felt something snapping in you over the way you were treating her. The only remedy you told yourself. You pinched shut her nose so that she had to swallow the sleeping pill as well. You rubbed her gullet hard. You could feel the little rings of cartilage under your fingers.
> Swallow, you hissed, swallow so that you can calm down, swallow, I'm not taking any more nonsense from you. (672)

This torture is then counter-poised with the stream-of-consciousness section, where Milla, in a fragment of voices and dreams and hallucinations, dreams the impossible.[221] The fissures running through Milla's body cannot be healed; it is futile, and yet she senses Agaat's body wrapped around her "reconciling my moieties" which "neither glue nor thongs or balm or coalescence of grafting or oculation or welding" (672-3) can achieve. In this vision of a "permeable world" (674), Milla imagines Agaat helping her breathe: "whose are the hands here around me belly squeezing my breath in and out?" (673). A vision perhaps of Agaat, keeping her alive, breathing for her, in a final inversion, as a mother. Here the voices, the identities, even perhaps the bodies, and pronouns blur. It becomes an attempt at unity, the kind Milla imagined when the young Agaat fell asleep next to her: "It's óne energy. We are one, Agaat and I" (521, see Chapter Three). Milla is dissipating and she fantasises of a body keeping her together. Her final thoughts are not religious, not confessional. The final clause is of a simple physical intimacy, an impossibility, a narration of the moment of death: "*in my hand the hand of the small agaat*," a fantasy of reparation.[222] In her hand, the hand of the child "she forsook" (674), an image of reconciliation, which is also undone by what follows, in the epilogue with Jakkie's less than charitable vision of his mother, and Agaat's description of her.

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[220] When Milla notices that the 16th of December has been circled on the calender, the newly renamed "Day of Reconciliation", and prior to that the "Battle of Blood River", she presumes that is the day earmarked – decreed even - for her death:

> Can anyone be so deliberate! So pathetic? So líteral! Or is it pure coincidence? Is it only I who dreamed up the causes and the effects, the reasons and the grounds? And she who arranged them? Because without that one cannot live and one cannot die. (494)

[221] Cf Stobie (2009) and Stobie and Rossman's reading of this monologue:

> In the final stream-of-consciousness passage, which relates Milla's death and passage to the afterlife, this possibility of being with rather than replacing the mother is presented. Milla's sacrifice is not an act of self-annihilation, but is rather a phantasy of transubstantiation and mending of the broken mother-daughter bond. (2012: 26)

[222] Similarly, in Karel Schoeman's *This Life*, the protagonist fantasises the impossible: "In a final gesture of tenderness and reconcilation I could reach out across all the years and touch her brow, could reach out and hold her hand while she was dying, and bid her farewell" (Schoeman 1995: 221-222).

There is no resolution, and the final symbol of the epilogue is of the bellows, an elegiac reminder of trying to extend the life of fire which once upon a time caused Agaat and Milla to dance and laugh together (688, see also 649).

The term 'witness' is specifically loaded in the context of South African literature set in or around the time of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Milla is testifying to her life, she is giving witness, but Agaat has also silently witnessed Milla's life and is now witnessing her dying and her death (cf *Agaat* 142-143 and Chapter Four). In concluding I consider the relevance of the term in the context of the death-bed-witness, beyond the connotations of confession and testimony and court room drama. Reference to Blanchot's writing on community allows for this alternative avenue of interpretation:

> what calls me most radically into question? Not my relation to myself as finite or as the consciousness of being before death or for death, but my presence in the proximity of another who by dying removes himself definitively, to take upon myself another's death as the only death that concerns me, this is what puts me beside myself, this is the only separation that can open me, in its very impossibility, to the Openness of a community" (quoted in Iyer 2001: 66)

Lars Iyer explores what "take on"[223] might mean (in the context of an article about Bataille's failed experiment at Acéphale [2001]) and contends that it also might mean to witness, to endure, to help ease the passing over into death, without hurrying it, to take on the failing body of one who is dying. This is what Agaat does for Milla. And, metaphorically, what Milla has done, although in a completely different vein and more ominously, by witnessing the 'death' of Agaat the child (her child) and in a fantasy witnessing Agaat's immersion in the ground, in a vision of her own death, wishing she could "take it on" and survive her. This impossibility is also the only possibility of community, of communion between Milla and Agaat. It is the reason why Milla and Agaat can only recognise each other when Milla is dying.

As Linda Singer contends: " 'community is not a referential sign but a call or appeal' – that

[223] Iyer explains that to "take on" the death of the other means that I am "concerning myself with it before and rather than anyone else's death, *including my own*". In this process "I am questioned most profoundly" (66). He continues:

> In my "proximity" to this dying other, I am contested in such a way that I am exposed to what Blanchot calls the "Openness" of a community. I do not voluntarily *seek* this proximity, I do not *choose* to open myself to this encounter, but am, instead, exposed to it, and, in this exposure Opened to what Blanchot calls a community. Upstream of my volition, my intentionality or my will, I am "put beside myself" through my exposure to the dying other. The death of the other overwhelms me, and, in its excessiveness, forces me to take it on, that is, to receive or assume it before my concern for my own mortality or for the mortality of those who are close to me. (66)

promotes responses and calling back in return, promoting exchanges and conversation" (quoted in Iyer 2001:61). Lars Iyer elaborates and explains that "communism, for [Blanchot], names the attempt to answer to [the] call of community … [It] names the practice that responds to the communitarian exigence in the affirmation of a relation to the other, to what is outside the '*cum'* or 'with' that is held in common" (61). In this sense, the alterity, the difference is not dispensed with, but remains, must remain. As Iyer argues, "Bataille reminds us that the other cannot be re-integrated into the same – that it is always through a desire *to be contested* that the 'I' is driven towards the other" (2001: 65).

Agaat's caring (a word I use carefully, cautiously) mirrors Milla's treatment of her as a child. It is thus an opportunity to exact revenge of a kind. There are, of course, key differences: Milla 'treated' the young Agaat in order that she might live, and be moulded into the person Milla desired; Agaat nurses Milla in order that she might die (with something akin to dignity), to prepare her for death, to ease, and trouble her dying. But also to prepare herself, to console herself for life after Milla's death. Just as no one can feel my pain, nor be certain that I am in pain, no one can share my experience of dying, no one can die *for* me, even if they can be *with* me when I die. Milla and Agaat contest each other, challenge each other in the course of their bodywork and in that contestation, they find comfort.

**Dying a Good Death**

*Memorandum* is unique in the trio of novels under discussion here, not only for its structure and inclusion of paintings (see Chapter Two), but also for its setting. Unlike *Triomf* and *Agaat*, the action, so to speak, occurs in the wards of Tygerberg hospital. The text is accompanied by the late Adriaan van Zyl's haunting "Hospital Series" paintings (2004-2006), all of which depict backdrops devoid of people.

As has been discussed in Chapter Two (and Buxbaum 2011a and 2011b), X and Y engage each other on multiple topics, including the history of medical care and the varied meanings of hospitals (*Memorandum* 53–54 & 58–60). Y's desultory sentiment that "We in these cots … are mere sockets for three-point plugs, it's only our language that their meters cannot read" (38 and see 42) captures both of their feelings about hospitals. Wiid finally seems to concur with this verdict. He realises:

> That what is fixed in a house can be wheeled away in a hospital? . . . made one feel like a loose hub instead of a person with volition? That the visibility of strange tubes and clamps in glass cases only emphasized their unknowability? That the more intensely you were cared for the

> more out of touch you got with yourself as person? As Mr Y said at one stage: *They care for you in the finest details but don't care in the least about your cares.* (44, italics in original)

Also refusing a Cartesian understanding of subjectivity, Wiid experiences the hospital environment as a dehumanising one. The "most heated part of the whole night's conversation" (60) is when Y quotes Ivan Illich's view on pain and death. Illich, who died of cancer, was highly critical of the evolution of medical care in hospitals, particularly regarding the treatment of patients who are "reduced to a mere body with pain" (*Memorandum* footnote 18, 60). He railed against the manner in which his original equivocation of suffering with "coping" had lent itself to "reductionist disembodiment", which runs entirely counter to his critique of modern medicine (Illich 1976: v). According to Wiid's précis of Illich's "Hospitality and Pain", the medical approach can be traced back to Christianity's view on pain as divine which has its roots in Greek philosophical theories of the self, which see "sensation, intellect, body" as separate – "a loose assembly of spare parts" (*Memorandum* 60.). Illich bemoaned what he termed the "iatrogenic epidemic", believed that it could be forestalled, in part, if "the layman effectively reclaim[ed] his own control over medical perception, classification and decision making" (1976:4). Decrying the dehumanising shift in medical terminology from a "person" to "life", Illich proposed a kind of manifesto in the context of unavoidable pain and illness, which concluded: "I invite all to shift their gaze, their thoughts, from worrying about health care to cultivating the art of living. And, today, with equal importance, to the art of suffering, the art of dying" (1994: 12). Illich himself adopted this approach and refused his oncologist's treatment or hospitalisation for his cancer.

In railing against their treatment in the hospital, X and Y and eventually Wiid are also asserting an understanding of subjectivity and identity which is non-dualistic.[224] Wiid believes the intimacy, compassion and empathy between X and Y is far more desirable than the care offered in the hospital, and it is this companionship that he seeks out.

X and Y are both dying. Confined to parallel beds, they are incapable of reaching out to comfort each other, but continuously attempt to keep each other's spirits up. X says to Y, who can no longer see:

[224] Y in a moment of desperation implores the nurse for better care:

> She had to understand him well now, it's a matter of human-kindness and human dignity and every other combination containing the word "human", and he's looking for a sustained morphine injection, and he's looking for one for his friend as well, because he can't listen to his *canine* keening one more time without cursing God Himself, and could they please train all staff not to address any patient of the state in the third person singular or plural. (112)

> *rather let yourself be consoled by rhythms that you can feel in your belly*. Then he recited a little poem in German, which I couldn't follow, but which sounded to me … like a spiritual lullaby. The inconsolable Mr Y then sang it back in translation at Mr X's insistence. (46)

Wiid interprets this call and response and X's unconvincing argument about "self-healing" and "rhythmical sound" as important not for its content, but its intent: "[X] had to have an excuse, in my opinion, to keep Y going, his voice sounded as if he wanted to put an arm around his neck, not that I have any experience of tones of embracement (46). X and Y enact the meaning of community in this process (see Iyer 2001). The voice here is a poor substitute for the healing touch, but it is all that they are capable of.

Wiid is haunted most by his inability to contribute to X and Y's conversation:

> ... my life and what I had done with it lay on me like lead and I wondered what the value of it was if I could find no words with which to console my neighbour. I opened my lips and traced the contours of my mouth. Thirsty, I thought, I am hungry and I am thirsty. And I opened my hand before me and it was so black and so dense that I hid it from myself under the bedclothes. Wake up, I prayed, wake up and feed me, speak your nourishing sentences to each other so that I can rejoice in you. (115)

The value of life, the meaning of life, (which Wiid, Milla and Pop wrestle with) seems here to reside in the ability to console others, perhaps even to be able to 'take on' their dying. Wiid is ignorant of the ideas X and Y share,[225] and in the absence of that knowledge of the world, he has only the experiencable fact of his embodied subjectivity – hunger, thirst – and the visible proof of the ravages of his illness. There is no comfort in that reality, in the physical material aspects of his life and so he longs for the nourishment of the words of others, which he can enjoy only as a voyeur, but be fed by nonetheless.

Wiid has been diagnosed with terminal cancer, but has no remaining family and no one to administer to his medical needs beyond the paid hospital clinicians. Van Zyl's final painting, "The Waiting Room" (127), in dark tones shows empty rows of chairs; the white light from the sole

[225]Elsewhere he explains this longing:

> I so very badly wanted to know what was written in those books that had moved them so, I should have liked to confess to them that the weight of their feeling had been transferred to me. I don't know how to describe this feeling more fully, it's close to broodiness, broody stirrings of the heart, I can feel this thing but not capture it in words. (*Memorandum* 23-4)

window fails to penetrate the room. No one is waiting for Wiid to return home. He has twice considered and dismissed the possibility of suicide (82 & 111).

Like Agaat did for Milla, Wiid has drawn up two tables, "Addendum 1, Memorandum 2, Tables A and B"[226] (*Memorandum* 28–31), with the details of his elective surgeries. However, Wiid has no body servant to administer treatment, to nurse his body. The column headings "Time", "Place", "Action", "Agent", "Outcome Positive" and "Outcome Negative" are probably the same details that the highly efficient Wiid would have included for all municipal processes. Wiid is under no doubt about the limited number of days allotted to him ("barring a miracle, I had nine months to a year to live" [27]) whether his surgeries are successful or not, the time for the final row in both tables is "May, June, July, perhaps till December". However, the differing details in each row deserve comment. In Table A, Wiid is at home, "recovers meekly, patiently, full of humility" and either has a "peaceful departure" or one "with strife" (129). Table B offers a situation where, in his final months at home, he "learns to imitate janfrederik perfectly. Crepuscular habits, morning & evening. Teeu tweetoo-tweetoo, teeu tiddlidoo. Grate cheese for him on the windowsill. Rehearse with Joop so that he knows how to do it one day"; the optimistic result is "ars moriendi"[227] and the alternative "Janfrederik removes to Plattekloof" (131).

Despite Wiid's exhaustive plotting of all possible eventualities relating to his surgery, completed with a caustic sense of humour and devoid of self-pity, he opts for cancelling the operation. In this choice he emulates Illich who "discharged himself from formal medical care … took responsibility for his own disease, as also for his death" (59). He "write[s] down what will happen if [he] stay[s]", in paragraphs filled with sensory details, self-reflection, empathy and curiosity about the lives of others and finally structural and genre concerns about his writing (121–123). He commits to creativity, to attempts at fostering intimacy and openness to community and embracing spontaneity. This is how he chooses to spend his dying days, rather than the mechanical and predictable response to medical events over which he has no control, and in which he becomes 'a body with pain', rather than an embodied human in pain. He chooses the poetry of the Passacaglia (see Chapter Two) over

[226]Table A is entitled "Resectioning of the colon & post-operative trajectory". If Wiid reacts negatively "to intake of liquids" in the preparation for the surgery the following day, or there are complications in his surgery, then Table B, "Colostomy & post-operative trajectory", should be consulted. The tables do cross-reference each other further, for example if Wiid dies, Table A states: "Intensive care, septic shock & sheet over head, to hospital morgue, Kruger & Kruger informed, testamentary stipulations re earthly remains implemented" (129). In the event of the same "Negative Outcome", Table B states: "Pneumonia confirmed, patient critical for three days and dies of complications. Cf. Table A for disposal of remains" (130).

[227]This was one of the overheard words which Wiid has to research (61). His notes state:

> Artis bene moriendi. (Lat.) Literary texts 1415-1450 with prescriptions & drawings for a good death. Humility, detachment, patience, etc. Application of these dying virtues at the right moment is called an "art". Mmm. Joop says the ending of a work of art is never doomed because of an uncertain start. (134)

the tabulated logic of science. He declines, after Y, to "prolong the suffering artificially" (61) and instead prepares for what he believes to be a "good death"[228] (see 61 and 134) and to "live in order not to be scared of life" (120). Thus, only when he is dying, is Wiid able to finally live, an illustration perhaps of Blanchot's contention that "under the threat of [dying] you believe you are called upon to live; you await it henceforth in the future constructing a future to make it possible at last" (1995:65 and quoted in Derrida 1993:87).

Despite his initial cynicism, "how pointless was the hunger for knowledge for a man who was dying" (48), Wiid's desire for knowledge remains unabated. He is also inspired by the awareness, for the first time, that his illness can be re-interpreted as a creative work: "I too have a story. I have a liver" (76). The language he uses to discuss the operation parallels the language describing the craft of the writer:

> As long as he [Dr Snyman] reads my entrails correctly tomorrow, cuts out the nonsense and edits the rest, or otherwise installs a stomach spout? (77)

> ...perhaps by that time I myself will have an idea of how I can make the thing more readable, shorten the sentences, rearrange the paragraphs, work out X and Y's conversation in more (or perhaps less?) detail, complete the footnotes, so that I can leave behind a rounded-off document. (123)

As in *Agaat*, the incendiary power of literature is also alluded to (77). The body and the text are comparable.

Finally, Wiid, the retired city planner realises that, in addition to beautifying the city and ensuring it is habitable to all (see Chapter Two), a city "must embrace the living and honour the dead" (footnote 23, 78). The inevitability of death should not be denied in cities, and the visibility of cemeteries, or memorials for the dead should serve as a reminder of the "death that awaits all ... without that one does not know one's place" (*Ibid.*) In his Passacaglia, Wiid declares "Stranger, be welcome to this place! Death has here been restored!" (124). He imagines inviting a "lonely tramp" into his home: "I shall be his friend and hospice and take him to … my nest already prepared for him as bequest, and to the end with him abide" (124).

[228]In this regard, his concerns echo both Pop's and Milla's. In refusing to return to the hospital, he is also committing, after Illich, "an act of consumer resistance" which "is possible only if one has some idea of one's other options" (121).

As Derrida writes, “the one who invites and receives truly begins by receiving hospitality from the guest to whom he thinks he is giving hospitality. It is as if in truth he were received by the one he thinks he is receiving. Wouldn’t the consequences of this be infinite?” (1993: 10). Hospitality means “to take upon oneself, in oneself, at home, with oneself, to receive, welcome, accept, and admit something other than oneself, the other than oneself” (10). Wiid would benefit, would receive and his life would be incalculably enriched if he had a guest to be hospitable to. Wiid longs for acceptance by others, and by anyone agreeing to be his guest, his companion, they would, according to this Derridean influenced argument, accept him and announce his membership of a community. However, Wiid’s intentions are not entirely selfish, or even self-centred. The phrasing of the concluding line, “to the end with him abide” (124), implies that Wiid is offering himself, rather than despairingly wishing for someone to console him in his death.

Perhaps in this sense Wiid’s hospitality is illustrative of the impossible “unconditional hospitality”, which is not dependant on the guest meeting certain criteria or answering questions posed to her (see Derrida 2002: 135). Derrida explains this “economy of the circle”:

> We will always be threatened by this dilemma between, on the one hand, unconditional hospitality that dispenses with law, duty or even politics, and, on the other, hospitality circumscribed by law and duty. One of them can always corrupt the other, and this capacity for perversion remains irreducible. It *must* remain so. ( *Ibid.*)

In the case of *Memorandum*, the dilemma remains intact because while it is possible that the fact of Wiid’s impending death means that he has nothing to lose, and so is no longer bound to “law, duty, politics”, his hospitality remains, because it must, in the realm of the imaginary. Furthermore, his connection to Joop is too tenuous for him to be Wiid’s “amicus mortice” (135), or his guest, and his lack of discernment when it comes to whom he is willing to invite into his'nest’ erases the possibility of discovering a “friend unto death”. Precisely the absence of conditions which characterise Wiid’s hospitality precludes the possibility of his receiving hospitality from a guest. He will fail to find a “friend unto death” (135), but articulating this desire itself is consoling to him. He will, however, continue to find hospitality in the library, in the books which welcome him, and the memorandum he intends to craft, which he hopes will be welcoming and hospitable, finally, to readers. Rather than in a hospital, Wiid’s life is saved, or rather his dying made bearable, in Joop’s library: “even though of late I’ve experienced something there amongst those shelves that I can describe without exaggeration as ‘total elation’” (footnote 35, 108)

**Conclusion**

While neither pain (see Scarry 1985) nor the experience of dying (see Derrida 1993) can be shared, I propose that the simple question, "Does it hurt?" (*Triomf* 86) contains within it an expression of care and concern and desire for empathy that cannot easily be dismissed. In the asking and answering of this question (whether verbally or non-verbally through touch or the language of the eyes), the key themes of bodies and intimacy come together. The question is a "call or appeal to community" (Singer). The contention considered here is whether witnessing the dying of another facilitates openness to, or the possibility of, after Blanchot, a new kind of community. Van Niekerk's third novel re-invents the kind of community depicted in her first two.

In *Triomf*, Pop's death could be read as an allegory for the end of a certain kind of political patriarchy, the end of one era and the birth of a new, as yet unpredictable one. However, the problem with such a neat resolution is that although Pop is symbolically the patriarch of the Benades, there is a real possibility that Treppie may in fact be Lambert's father (462). In this case, the father is simply disempowered and debilitated rather than dead. This might be a more fitting analogy for the fate of certain nationalist ideologies and remnants of the past at the end of apartheid and the beginning of the new democracy: they might be bruised and battered, but have not simply, conveniently disappeared. Bakhtin maintained that "Rabelais' basic goal was to destroy the official picture of events … He summoned up all the resources of sober popular imagery in order to break up official lies and the narrow seriousness dictated by the ruling classes" (439). Pop, in his dotage, was a placid, non-threatening figure, likened to an old circus elephant whose death has long been expected (*Triomf* 154); Treppie is a devil or clown (see 338).[229] Pop's death and Treppie's survival suggest a continuing challenge to any official version of events, denying a smooth transition to another nationalist project. One of Treppie's variations of the ice cream truck's tune captures this passing of time and imagines a less than edifying end for the family : "*Oh the sun comes up and sinks again / into its goddam pit / and then the bloody lot of us / dissolve like ice cream in the dirt*" (11). The carnival centres on the notions of "renewal and rebirth" (Bakhtin 1984: 249), and death is viewed as simply part of the natural progression of life, which will in turn lead to new life. However, while the novel is carnivalesque, any possibility of rebirth, of a new beginning for the Benades, is quashed in *Triomf*.

What Milla seems to wish for is the dedication she wrote to be fulfilled and the name she assigned

[229]Pop describes Treppie as the kind of "clown who laughs and cries at the same thing, so people can never make up their minds. And that's a good thing, 'cause the last thing this world needs are people who keep making up their minds about bugger-all" (338).

Agaat (Good) to prove apt – she longs to know "with certainty that it was good" (241). That of course, is unattainable,[230] despite Agaat's inscribing it on her tombstone (a suggestion made sarcastically at first, and fulfilled with a degree of sarcasm too, one would imagine). Agaat's final gift to Milla, then, is that she is allowed to believe it was good, or good enough. But Agaat lives on, with the weight of the past. Her fairytale disrupts any narrative of healing, as perhaps Milla realises it must in her encounter with Agaat's embroidered rainbow (see Chapter Four).

The dying protagonists of *Agaat* and *Triomf* are attended to by others, who 'take on' their dying, and in this way, recognition that was impossible before occurs, and a transitory and ephemeral community is created. Wiid, however, has no one to care for him, and he longs for companionship, the kind he witnesses between Mr X and Mr Y. His intention in writing his memoranda then is for the reader to 'take on' his dying and forge a community in that manner. Even his Passacaglia, in which he expresses his desire to be hospitable, is dedicated to Joop, the librarian, and this dedication ties them to each other.

In dying, nothing is forgiven, but relationships are irrevocably altered by virtue of the bodywork involved in caring for each other, and the conventional roles characters have performed in their past are transgressed; the protagonists must embrace a non-dualistic understanding of embodiment for this to occur.

[230] What might be obtainable are Pop's final thoughts of his family: "he's done the best he could. It will just have to be enough" (451).

**Conclusion**

Scholarship on Marlene van Niekerk's work is growing at a rapid pace, and will no doubt continue to do so. In the existent critical articles, while there is sometimes acknowledgement of an embodied language, the centrality of corporeality and its affect on intimacy remains under-theorised. This thesis is an attempt to contribute to conversations around embodied subjectivity and relationships in the three novels of Marlene Van Niekerk: *Triomf*, *Agaat* and *Memorandum*. In so doing, I also hope to contribute to general ideas of embodiment and intimacy.

My research fell into three overarching themes: the importance of bodies and their description in the novels; the experience of embodiment and how attitudes towards one's own body affects one's identity and subjectivity; and how embodied subjects experience and participate in relationships. Finally, I consider what a Van Niekerkian theory of bodies might entail.

Towards this end, I have illustrated how descriptions of bodies in these novels are not simply "added" in order to flesh out characterisation, but inform the reader's understanding of the protagonists as breathing beings who "eat and excrete" (*Malone Dies* 185). Bodies are not merely signs or flesh or passive objects on which power or meaning is inscribed. They actively contribute to and construct meaning and one cannot consider the subjectivity of Van Niekerk's protagonists without reference to their embodiment. The fictional characters' attitude towards the appearance of their own bodies is often disgust and abjection accompanied by the realisation that there is no escaping their body – there is a limit to how it can be repaired. The world is experienced through fragile, vulnerable bodies. As Treppie observes:

> As if you're not exposed as it is, with your soft human skin and its holes for seeing and smelling and tasting and farting – that's if you're lucky enough to still do all those things. And with your two little legs and their forward-facing feet, and your hands each with their five little twigs. Always trying to grab onto things in the void here in front of you, never knowing what's coming next. Or what's likely to trip you up. (*Triomf* 315)

Bodies are scarred and wounded, on occasion irreparably, but also the only means through which reparation is offered and received. By embracing their shared vulnerability and acknowledging each other's wounded bodies, ephemeral moments of empathy, are experienced. What Van Niekerk terms "the tenuous insights that arise from a literally exposed, shared creatureliness" (1998: F4) cannot be easily dismissed. Language dissembles and is compromised; when words fail, bodies speak.

Bodies are also, however, the media through which power is enacted and expressed. Power is exercised and inscribed on bodies, but there is something radical in the way in which power is exercised through bodies, by embodied subjects, rather than disembodied subjects. Bodies are not invisible and to be seen as a body is not to be dehumanised or objectified. The apartheid scopic regime is debunked.

These novels explore new forms of family. They disrupt narratives of gender-based violence and rape. Alternative conceptions of intimacy, divorced from sex but not devoid of touch, are presented. In order to interpret the meanings of these violent episodes, one needs to move beyond limiting allegorical readings.

In terms of a Van Niekerkian theory of bodies then, one might say these novels show the necessity of putting "bodies" back into the "body-politic". Intimacy is dependent on reading the bodies of others, but this reading extends beyond racial categorisation or surface verdicts. Stuart Hall's (1997) reading of Fanon is relevant here too: bodies tell stories beyond the fact of their appearance.[231] And in order to read these, one must look beyond the limits of one's world; one must splinter and rupture any saving perspectives. The disfiguring and also liberating potential of stories, of different narratives of the self, is emphasised. Perhaps in South Africa, with our brutal history, where language and history and relations with others still contain residual ideas of, and are contaminated by, apartheid and separation, we need to learn a new language of bodies.

Finally, ideas of the vitality and transgressive power of art and writing as articulated through bodies have been presented throughout my argument. Art which continues to fracture stultifying and politically repressive ideologies is celebrated. Narratives are produced and imbibed by embodied subjects aching for intimacy, attempting to communicate through and with their bodies.

A recurring theme in these texts is the struggle to be "with an other"; always thwarted, often futile, but worth striving for nonetheless. A transient moment, exemplary in its depiction of communion with the other and the bodywork necessary for reconciliation, exists when Agaat and Jakkie forgive

[231] At a lecture entitled "Race, The Floating Signifier", Hall said of Fanon:

> And yet … the power and importance of *Black Skin White Masks* is that Fanon understood that beneath what he called the bodily and corporeal schema is another schema. A schema composed of the stories and the anecdotes and metaphors and the images, which is really, really he says, what constructs the relationship between the body and its social and cultural space. These stories, not the fact itself. The fact itself is just exactly that trap of the surface, which allows us to rest with what is obvious. (Hall 1997: 15–16)

each other after a fight in which Jakkie bit Agaat. This scene seems to be the archetype of 'recognition', of "bending towards the other" (Hoffman 2005: 233). It represents a compassionate, unselfish means of moving beyond pain and finding forgiveness. Their exchange is mostly wordless; forgiveness is offered and accepted through the body:

> Softly they spoke … the cautious opening-up after the terrors of the day…. Jakkie pointed at her forearm. She rolled back the sleeve of her nightdress. Together they bent over the bite wound. He took a roll of plaster out of the top pocket of his pyjamas. No, it must remain open, Agaat explained. She bethought herself, took a pair of scissors out of her needlework basket, cut off a length and allowed him to stick it on her.
>
> Suddenly Jakkie pressed his head against her body. His face distorted. Agaat pressed him closer to her with both arms. For a long time they sat like that….
>
> You [Milla] couldn't look any longer. The faces in the soft light of the fire. The confidence. The ease. The forgiveness, asked, given, sealed. (*Agaat* 26)

Milla and Agaat once possessed a similar ease and trust with each other's bodies, but it was betrayed. This childlike intimacy is irrecoverable and assumes an almost utopian aspect. This loss (even if it may never have been experienced) haunts all of Van Niekerk's protagonists.

The trajectory the novels trace is interesting in that the claustrophobic atmosphere of the family ultimately gives way to the alienated loner: we move from the Benades who only have 'each other' to Wiid who has no one, but searches for a friend unto death. Any idea of endogamy and insularity is exposed as crippling – as is isolation. The character of the stranger enters the conversation with *Memorandum*, and *Die Sneeuslaper* (2010) continues this new direction for Van Niekerk (see Buxbaum 2012b). Pariahs, survivors, mourners, searchers, homeless tramps, those left undone by grief and those who commemorate lost companions are the protagonists of *Die Sneeuslaper.* In this sense, questions of familial intimacy are replaced or accompanied by questions of how to approach the unknown other. *Memorandum* and *Die Sneeuslaper* articulate the search for spaces of inclusiveness and consider the limits of empathy in the sense of becoming the other or other to oneself. This opens up several intriguing avenues for future research. One might consider a comparative study of public spaces, encounters on streets and meeting strangers in South African fiction, especially in the context of xenophobia.

The stories in *Die Sneeuslaper* also set up conversations around photography and writing, desire as opposed to technique, and the responsibilities of writers. The collection is interested in the birth of stories and whether, and under what conditions, the act of writing and reading can act as a comfort

and an escape from the mundane. One could trace the development of these differing ideas about writing and reading throughout Van Niekerk's work.

Van Niekerk's more recent work includes an explicit and brilliant play, *Die kortstondige raklewe van Anastasia W*, whose depiction of "decomposition and decay" has been commented on (see De Kock and Pieterse 2012). In terms of content and style, it would seem to revisit the world of *Triomf*. Van Niekerk's latest published work marks her return to poetry after thirty years. *Kaar* has already received a rapturous reception (see Bezuidenhout, Crous, Naudé and Snyman [all 2013]).

Van Niekerk's oeuvre thus includes a wide variety of genres and a future research project might embark on exploring all of these these texts in conversation with each other. There is also a need for more comparative studies, for example of J.M Coetzee and Van Niekerk (see Jacobs 2012 and Buikema 2009). *Triomf* might also be read in concert with other novels of the transition. For example a comparison of the two seemingly discrete, yet parallel worlds in *Triomf* and Zakes Mda *Ways of Dying* is likely to yield new insight.

Reading Van Niekerk's novels tests the limits of compassion and empathy and forces a reconsideration of the manner in which bodies and intimacy relate. It unsettles the reader, and exposes the limits of her own world.

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