

Reflective Essay

AUTHOR, SUBJECT, FORM

by

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Chapter 1 - Authorial Agency

1. *Introduction*

Anti-academicists will claim that any subject is spoiled by the rigorous analysis and study of it, along the lines of 'I loved music too much to study it at university'. There are some who claim that the intuitive enjoyment of painting and sculpture is destroyed in the critical appreciation of it, and so too with poetry and the novel. I hold the opposite view: that a critical awareness adds immeasurably to both the enjoyment and the appreciation of a work of art, be it music, the plastic arts or literature. And when it comes to producing a piece of literature, my experience has been that a meta-level consciousness of the processes of writing adds depth and balance to a text, and prevents the ingénue author from committing all sorts of blunders (like directing the reader in too loud an authorial voice).

In our course, the platform on which the theory of writing was presented, was two-fold: the fortnightly seminars in which participants' creative work was discussed, and meetings with supervisors. One of the topics which arose was all the different facets of authorial agency, e.g., the three-fold distinction of concrete, implied and explicit author. The implied author, his or her 'second self', is the voice that will inevitably come through in a work, and a great deal has been said about what is advisable with regard to it and what is not. The logical development from this is to think about the point of view explicitly taken up in a text. Is it the author's voice? If not, who is it telling the story? Here I first learned the existence of, and the difference between, the narrator and the focalizer, of 'free indirect style' or 'writing in character', letting the character's point of view predominate in a text.

Another topic was the reader. I had previously thought that a story could be told with no thought of the reader but was brought to see not only that any act of writing presupposes an audience but that the reader, like the author, could also be thought of as threefold: concrete, implied and ideal. The first is obvious; the second is that reader who is assumed to have the competence to enjoy the text and to 'buy into' the contract the writer is offering as to what the text will hold, its genre, the limits of its interpretability and meaning; the ideal reader is the one who will make the best of the text in terms of its critical appreciation.

Intentions of the author enjoyed consideration in seminars, and this topic is discussed in section 3 below. It is problematic. When a reader ascribes a particular purpose to an author, it is often shorthand for some feature(s) of the work which the reader has described, so it is more a matter of reader's interpretation than of what the author had in mind. It is possible that an author should write with no clear purpose in mind, or that he or she should be mistaken as to what purpose is in

fact being expressed, i.e., there is a gap between intention and outcome, or even that an author should lie, deliberately mislead the reader as to his or her purpose. In the simplest case however, the author will have some idea as to the end product that he or she wishes to deliver, and will have some preferences as to the means by which that end will be achieved, and these, in my case, are discussed below.

In opting for an objective, realistic style, as I have done in my text, an author may incur charges of a moral nature. When bad characters are represented in an objective, author-neutral style, with no authorial comment on the turpitude of the character, readers may well think the author is condoning or even recommending vice and evil-doing. My answer to this difficulty is set out in the third part of this chapter.

Finally, I address the question of typing and stereotyping, and discuss one way in which all fictional characters may be said to be examples of some type or other. My characters are examples of various ethnic types, which leads to the thought that the text as a whole may be said to have a certain iconicism, in contrast with texts in which the interest of the characters lies not in their type, but in their detailed explication, and which may be thought of as particularistic texts.

The aspects of authorial agency discussed here are all general considerations applying to any works of fiction and not just to my text, though I do illustrate them with reference to my work. In the other two parts of this whole essay, 'Representing Difference' and 'Underlying Structure', the discussion is focused more specifically on what I have produced.

2. *The 'Second Self', Free Indirect Style and the Ideal Reader*

There are (at least) three different senses of the term 'author'. Firstly, there is the concrete author of some work, that is, the real person who wrote it, with all his or her quirks and foibles, existing in a historical, social, economic and cultural context. Of this author, it makes sense to say that he or she suffered from tuberculosis, didn't manage financial matters well, was politically radical, etc. There is a critical standpoint to the effect that the concrete author of a text should not insert him- or herself too strongly into it. A degree of objectivity as to personal tastes, values, likes and dislikes is called for, or the work might become a polemic which would interfere with any sort of story the author is trying to tell. It would colour all the characters with the author's own hues and rob them of individuality; at worst, the text would become a moralizing tract. 'The argument in favour of neutrality is thus useful in so far as it warns the novelist that he can seldom afford to pour his untransformed biases into his work' (Booth, 1983:70), but should try to stand free of idiosyncrasies which the reader might not share.

The second sense of the term 'author', is the implied author: he or she whom a reader may deduce from the text as the person responsible for the choice and arrangement of material (plot, story, characters) and of words and sentence constructions, in a word, as the controlling intelligence of the text. He or she is an abstract construction to which the reader ascribes human qualities like 'ironic', 'humorous', 'sympathetic', and is an ineluctable presence in any work. We should not underrate the implied author's individuality, which will be different from that of any other writer. It is what Booth calls the author's 'second self' (Booth, 1983:71).

Thirdly, there may be an explicit author in a text, as when the writer addresses the reader in the second person, usually in order to direct interpretation of the text, or to introduce him- or herself for some other purpose. An example of an explicit author is the one in Fielding's two comic novels *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*. Long passages of exhortation to the readers as to what is expected of them, come from the author's mouth in a fairly truculent, straight-from-the-shoulder style. Here, there is no attempt to muffle an authorial voice; on the contrary, the reader is given a very clear idea of who is ostensibly writing the novel.

In my stories however, there is certainly no explicit author, and I have tried to be aware of, and to eliminate, undigested personal biases so that the concrete author is not overt. As far as the second self goes, the implicit author (who is probably the bearer of digested biases) will be a construction of every reader and reading of the text. It follows that I am not in a position to comment on the implicit author of my stories; all I can do is hope that she is agreeable.

If the point of view from which the text is written is not explicitly that of the author, then whose is it? The narrator is the person telling the story, and this voice may be in the first or third person (rarely the second); it may be bound to one character's point of view or different characters'; it may be an omniscient narrator knowing all about the past, present and future, and all that the characters do, think and feel, or it may be a narrator whose view is limited. Alongside the narrator is the focalizer of the story: the character over whose shoulder the events of the story are seen. In the case of my stories, the writing is focalized by usually one or sometimes two characters and the narrator tells the story mostly, but not always, from the point of view of the focalizer(s).

In 'Ash', the focalizer is a nine-year old boy and we experience his finding of a stray cat, the death of his father, the arrival of a sinister uncle and the loss of his mother's and his home to the uncle, all through his eyes. The narrator's language is in keeping with that of a child: simple constructions and words, with a certain naivete in the observation and description of events. James Findlay is the main character in 'The Hooks in Jazz', and again, the story is told as if over his shoulder, as he relives his early love of jazz, meeting an old friend in the process. That he is not the narrator is seen clearly in the last paragraph, when the narrator briefly adopts the point of view of a waiter who is observing

James, and this waiter then becomes the focalizer. In 'A Good Day for Loki', a delinquent youth is the focal point. We spend the day and evening in his company, seeing the squalor in which he lives, going with him to the local shopping centre and playpark, being present at the violent housebreaking he and his companions perpetrate that night - in short, seeing the world from his point of view. An example of a story where two people focus the story from their viewpoint equally, is 'Ukuhlalisa Umsamo', where two traditional and ageing Zulus' experience of their grandchildren's visit is similar enough for them to share centre stage.

Two of the texts are in the first-person singular voice: 'Hunger' and 'The Immaculate Character', and here the focalizer and the narrator co-incide. Where the narrator is voicing all the action himself, there is correspondingly less room for the author to intrude. The monologue that is 'Hunger' has been discussed at length in the chapter on 'Representing Difference'. There was some question about whether a white, middle-class, educated writer like myself could convincingly reproduce the voice of a black working-class youth and I hope I have done enough in Chapter 2 to show myself at least sensitive to the issue, though obviously I cannot judge the result for myself. The monologue in 'The Immaculate Character' is that of an aggressive man given to fits of anger where no anger is justified; he perceives his world in terms of its irritation-quotient so the moderate use of adjectives and adverbs, those flags of the author's presence, is natural and evident here, but they are appropriate to his voice, and thus in the first place his words rather than mine.

In both the first- and third-person point of view, the writer is concerned to minimize the authorial voice so as to achieve authenticity with regard to the action, and he achieves that by creating the narrator, speaking usually from the viewpoint of a focalizing character. Of course, the action and the characters (and even the narrator) are still the implied author's creation but at this level, it is wise to let the narrator speak for them. There are however, matters outside the narrator's scope. In my text particularly, there is the setting up of the links and gaps in the material and among the characters, which is inevitably the implied or 'abstract' author's task. 'The recognition of the links between stories lies outside the characters' scope. It is therefore not the narrators, but the implied author who selects and organises material so as to create links that should be recognized by the reader' (Supervisor's comment).

This brings us to a consideration of the reader for whom the texts were written. When I first conceived the idea of this set of sketches or stories, I had no interest beyond transmitting that conception to paper, i.e., beyond realizing the idea in my head. What became of the text after that was not an interest of mine. Disbelieving members of the seminar group who could not let go of the idea that the text must have some instrumental value, said 'Well then, you are writing it to make a submission for the MA in Creative Writing', and while this was true, it was not part of my essential

motivation. The writing of the text had an intrinsic value for me and not an instrumental one, like using it to acquire an MA or to become a published author.

But the reader or potential audience of the texts was not so easily shrugged off. The very act of writing is communicative, and communication presupposes an author and an audience. In terms of the distinction just made between the concrete, the implied and the ideal reader, even if there were never to be any concrete readers of my finished text, in itself, it suggests two sorts of reader, the reader who will 'buy into' the contract the writer is offering and enjoy the book (implied reader), and the one who has the requisite background and knowledge to make the best of what is offered (ideal reader).

Let us define the implied and the ideal reader of my text together and then say how the ideal will exceed the implied reader. They will both have to enjoy a fairly complicated text with great variety in character, style of writing, inclusion of foreign words, and diverse settings. They will be familiar with *Joburg 2010* or at least find it interesting to become familiar with it. They will not be afraid of a high degree of complexity in a book, but will be alive to the clues that link characters, things and events: realizing the implicit and explicit relationships among people (e.g., Lulu and James; Zondi, Gladys and Tossie), identifying when one event or thing is being referred to from two different points of view (Anna Purrna's disappearance, the pink Hello Kitty purse), and putting together bits of information to form a coherent whole (Loki's 'sewing machine nyuku'). In class discussions, the doubt was voiced that I was making the reader 'work too hard', but for the reader who can rise to the challenge, there is the satisfaction of working it all out. It is thus a highly participative text with the reader doing a good deal of interpretation and filling in of gaps.

There is another important assumption that I make about the reader, viz., that he or she will have some moral sensibility. More will be said on this aspect of the reader below in 3.

The ideal reader, in addition, will be familiar with some basic isiZulu, both the language and the culture, with South African Portuguese culture, will be able to recognize the types whom Mrs Levine and Anyway, Loki and Rafiloe and the whole cast of characters, represent – in short, the ideal reader will be thoroughly familiar with all the diverse aspects of contemporary Johannesburg society.

The point of view in a story, and so also the subject matter, influences the nature of the text to a high degree. This is just another way of saying that where the story's focal point is some character, the text, if it is to be successful, will be all 'in character'. Narrative seems to want to 'bend itself around' characters, in James Wood's phrase (2008:paragraphs 1-22), to take on their way of thinking and feeling and seeing. This is 'free indirect style' or 'close third person' or 'going into character' or 'close writing'. We may define 'free indirect style' as the narrator's habit of seeing things through the focalizing character's eyes; events and other characters are described in the focalizer's language.

Even good writers can sometimes get it wrong, and Wood (in the above paragraphs) cites Updike's Ahmad as an example of this. A young Muslim boy walks down a street thinking about religion but what he thinks is what Updike wants to tell the reader about Islam, and not what any such boy would plausibly be thinking to himself.

The phenomenon of free indirect style has a double effect in the collection of my texts. First, since many of the characters are simple people of little or no education, the surface texture of the writing was often plain and simple, sometimes it was even a debased English as in 'A Good Day for Loki' or 'Hunger'. But according to Wood, 'the novelist's job is to become, to impersonate what he describes, even when the subject itself is debased, vulgar, boring' (2008:para28). Characters in the collection who were from other walks of life from the simple folk, were never given to high flights of fancy, and the closest we get to a lyrical passage is when Deva's experience of the meat fridges, (he, a sensitive and cultivated young man working in a meat restaurant) is described by the narrator. This is one way in which the nature of the subject matter directed the nature of the text.

The second way in which this effect of free indirect style can be observed, is in the variety of tones that the stories evince, which is due to the great diversity of kinds of people in them. Sometimes the tone is fairly sophisticated, especially when Conan is the focal point, or Diana or James; some of the texts have a sense of elegance (especially when Deva and Mandai are the focalizers); some are old-worldly, lavender-scented (Mrs Levine and Anyway); some are warm and homely ('Uma Casa Portuguesa'), some are nostalgic ('Ukuhlalisa Umsamo', 'Sacrifice'); some are amusing ('Chief of the Monkeys', 'The Immaculate Character'), etc.

The course has shown me the art of free indirect style. At the start of writing, I was unaware of the degree to which I was going to have to muffle my own voice in the short stories I was producing. I had in fact looked forward to the writing process as a great opportunity to luxuriate in language, in adjectives and adverbs especially, and it was at first difficult to accept that usually those words are an unwelcome mark of the author's presence. Too many of them constitute an overbearing presence, an attempt to overdetermine the reading of the text, which constrains the reader in an uncomfortably tight way. After my supervisor had persuaded me of the need to use those words very sparingly, and consciously to withhold my views and opinions on characters and their actions, I believe the stories were improved.

Another way in which I benefitted from correction was in the curbing of my strong tendency to tie up a story with a neat ending, like a little bow, which summed things up and directed the reader's interpretation of the whole. It seemed to me that readers would need guidance, that there was a danger in leaving them to interpret the story for themselves. They might miss things, some choice or significant moment might have escaped them, or they might get the wrong end of the stick entirely.

The stories were greatly improved when I was brought to see that this was a form of unwarranted authorial interference. I would have to trust my readers to make the best of what was on the page.

There is some irony in my attitude to my characters and the actions they engage in but I have tried to minimize this by consciously limiting judgemental words or descriptions and restricting my narrators to reporting the characters' actions, dialogue, thoughts, etc. Nevertheless, choice and organization of material inevitably implies an author with a viewpoint (see the next section for more discussion of the author's moral viewpoint). I have been somewhat surprised to discover my second self: to find out that the author I am displays 'a kind of urbane but critical and sometimes amused sympathy' for the characters (Supervisor's comment).

3. *The Author's Intentions; Moral Issues*

The intentions of the author, as stated by him or her, may be illuminating in thinking about a creative work, though they are strictly speaking irrelevant to the business of critical enquiry. An author may for rhetorical purposes, have some stated aims which are insincere. An author may be mistaken as to what his or her own intentions were – may have set out with one clear aim and written to quite another end, i.e., may have intended one thing and achieved another. It is what is achieved that will determine the reader's ascription of intention. The describing of intentions is a function of interpretation, referring to some formal or structural feature of the work which the reader has found in the text. So to say that the author's conscious intention is any kind of measure of a work, or should be found out before critical assessment is attempted, is to commit the 'intentional fallacy'. Critics like Wimsatt and Beardsley (1967:3-18) prefer to limit their attention to what is on the page, i.e., it is the text alone and nothing extraneous like author's private allusions or intentions, which comes into the process of assessing a work.

However, the present essay is something in the nature of a biographical reflection on the production of the text rather than a critical assessment of it, and so I shall have something to say about what I wanted to achieve.

In relation to the goal of the writing, I have already indicated that I had a fairly well-realized conception of the final product in my head before the writing of it began. This is not to say that the end product matched exactly, or even pretty closely, the envisaged work. In the writing, changes of alignment and of broad vision occurred, and as the detail accumulated, the whole took on an appearance that I could not have imagined before the writing. Nevertheless, in the main I feel my intentions were realized. I wanted to produce a text which would reflect the heterogeneity, complexity and general character of contemporary Johannesburg society, which would show how

individuals' lives are affected by their social context, and give a sense of the interconnectedness of the different parts. The resulting text does do that (how well or otherwise is not for me to judge).

In my Proposal, the society to be depicted was described as 'postmodern', in contrast with the modern features of apartheid-era society. What I had in mind here was both the diversity of the whole, which points up the disjunctive, almost fractured, nature of our society, and the haphazard, dislocated nature of interaction among the various segments.

Regarding my intentions as to the means to that end, the choice of a structure has been discussed at length in the chapter on 'Underlying Structure' and I won't repeat it here. My decision as to technique and style, was to opt for a straightforward realism. In class discussions, this choice was questioned on the grounds that if I was aiming for a radically different kind of structure, then a correspondingly different style would have been appropriate. A concomitant view is that to delineate a society with postmodern characteristics, the writer must employ a style with postmodern features such as self-reference within the text, absurdities of plot and chronology, iconoclastic devices, subversion of the established conventions, etc. I simply felt that the best means to my end was realism and a straightforward style that attempted recognizable characters, plots that were easily grasped in the text or via the links, and a narration that was in character. Indeed, one might argue that given a challenging and difficult subject, the author is well-advised to opt for a style as perspicuous as possible. Had I opted for postmodern techniques in the writing of the text, my ultimate vision would probably not have been as clearly realized as with a realistic text. But it remains a moot point, to be settled when someone does write a set of postmodern stories around this subject.

I have said that the conscientious author is obliged to keep his or her own preferences and values to a minimum in a realistic text, and that moralizing by the author is not acceptable. But the intention to produce an objective or author-neutral text, to allow the characters to 'wrap the text around themselves' and tell the story from their own point of view, has implications for its moral tenor. Booth (1983:378) writes: '... impersonal narration has raised moral difficulties too often for us to dismiss moral questions as irrelevant to technique. We have seen that inside views can build sympathy even for the most vicious character'. And we can extend the observation to the political sphere since that is a dimension of the moral, morality writ large, judged perhaps in terms of justice and injustice, where individual morality is assessed in terms of good and bad.

There are several vicious characters in my text, about whom no explicit moral judgement is made. Loki is perhaps the worst: a violent, aggressive, selfish and self-pitying youth who ends up by stamping on an old woman's face and crushing her skull during a tik-fuelled house-breaking. Though Loki has no redeeming features whatsoever, there is no negative judgement voiced about him. The

story ends with Loki gazing admiringly at the bloody footprints his boots are leaving on the carpet. This is perhaps the point at which I am most vulnerable to the charge of not being clear as to my ethical values, if we are to agree with Booth's stringent comment that 'an author has an obligation to be as clear about his moral position as he possibly can be' (Booth, 1983:389). I don't think that any reader, however, could possibly admire Loki, or respond to him in any way but with revulsion, and this view is based on two things: first, on the degree to which vivid, even lurid, detail is provided in the relevant story, and second, on the assumption of the reader's moral sensibility. Nobody of normal or average moral sentiments could read of Loki's doings with anything but distress.

The second most immoral character is probably Conan with his sham lessons in personal power and power eternal, who runs his courses at a high fee and caters to the vanity of his participants. He is not a straightforward criminal like Loki, and his 'crimes' are not in the same league as Loki's, but he is a charlatan who takes money with his confidence tricks. Again, no explicit judgement is made of Conan and in fact, I have tried to present him as a plausible and persuasive speaker. I leave it up to the reader to reach some kind of judgement about him, and here I not only assume the reader's moral sensibility, I test it. I imagine those readers who value 'self-improvement' courses, and hanker after power and dominance, may be taken in by him just as Diana was, and think him to be a great teacher, and think James, who despises him, to be spiritually deficient.

What about a character like Alfrons? He is a simple construction worker who gets into trouble by losing all his money on a gambling game and ends up eating a prize Himalayan lilac-point cat. The act of killing, cooking and eating someone's beloved pet is *prima facie* a bad thing to do, but I hope I have given enough of an insider view of Alfrons, partly through use of a first-person voice, partly through provision of detail regarding his history and lifestyle, that the reader will view his horrific act sympathetically and not shrink from him as a detestable character. In accordance with the basic moral precept 'do as you would be done by', an empathic identification of the reader with some character, is the basis for a sound judgement of that character.

Another 'bad' character in the stories is Andrew, an angry, self-centred, arrogant man who views other people as intolerable irritants. Again, I have used a first-person voice for Andrew and have tried to use humour to soften what otherwise would have been an ugly sketch. He is so overweening in his attitudes that the reader, I hope, cannot but laugh at him, or at least enjoy the spectacle of his rages, which ultimately harm nobody but himself.

Aside from the characters, there are several actions or pieces of behaviour which merit some kind of moral judgement, and where none is provided by the neutral author. James Findlay's treatment of the pregnant Samina - sending her home and cutting off communication with her - is reprehensible, but his inner state of mind is sympathetically presented and we may hope the reader

will be kind to him. Other cases of behaviour demanding moral censure are: the way in which Deva is treated by the diners in the restaurant; Diana's fervent materialism which induces her to browbeat her daughter into doing as she, her mother, wishes; Bobby and his assistants in the sewing course at Malimode, conning the simple country women into making bed linen sets which they will sell; Abraham taking Gladys' umkhukhu in 'Umlutha'; and Gladys being cheated at the Housing Office. These are all presented without authorial comment or judgement.

The question is: does silence imply condonation or approval? Does it deny moral engagement on the author's part? The answer is no, and this again on two grounds: the assumption of moral sensibility in the reader, and the provision of eloquent detail in all the above cases, to give a forceful illustration of the moral outrages being perpetrated.

In addition to individual characters and pieces of behaviour which demand moral condemnation, there is a great deal of political injustice illustrated without comment in the sketches. For instance, there is the huge gap between rich and poor shown by Wellington, Conan and James and Diana on the one side, and Gladys, Zondi, Dushi, Alfrons on the other. There are the remnants of apartheid customs evident in the relationship between Mrs Levine and Anyway, and the passing of traditional isiZulu ways of life in the stream of urbanization. Conan's courses are evidence of the materialistic individualism of much of society. Though these political features are not overtly described as reprehensible or bad or sad, that is the judgement that the reader will, we hope, come to.

'The narrators do not ultimately comment or pass judgments on the worlds they describe. They certainly describe some of the characters and events with a wry humour, but they do not impose a clear system of values or political attitudes on the diversity of what is depicted. But this does not mean that there is an absence of political or moral engagement; the engagement is just less overt, residing in the meticulous attention to the different worlds the characters occupy, the respect for their choices and Weltanschauung, and in many cases an attempt to understand their motivations (even if they are conmen, crooks or criminals)' (Supervisor's comment).

Morality in a large sense underlies much of what we call good fiction. F R Leavis in 'The Great Tradition' (1950:8) took it as a necessary concomitant of literature and he undertook a serious study of the relation between the architecture of a work and the moral interests of the author. His comment on Jane Austen is illustrative: 'Her interest in "composition" is not something to be put over against her interest in life; nor does she offer an "aesthetic" value that is separable from moral significance. The principle of organization, and the principle of development, in her work is an intense moral interest of her own. ... She is intelligent and serious enough to be able to impersonate her moral tensions as she strives, in her art, to become more fully conscious of them. ... Without her intense moral preoccupation she wouldn't have been a great novelist'.

Looking at things from the reader's side, we are moved by a great novel in an indelibly moral manner. We are made better, more thoughtful and imaginative people by reading *Crime and Punishment* or *Pride and Prejudice* or *Madame Bovary*. The fact that reading a good novel involves an 'extension of our sympathies towards other selves' was recognized by a canny Chief of Police in Mexico City who, according to the anecdote in Wood (2008:para96), required his men to read novels from a list of great works that he drew up, so they could extend their vocabularies, acquire experience by proxy, and be more committed to the values they had pledged to defend. Putting yourself in someone else's shoes, even when that someone is a fiction, is the key to moral sensitivity and sound judgement.

4. *Fictional Identity; Iconic and Particularist Texts*

In this section, I want to look at the question of whether my characters are stereotypes or simply types (discussed also in the chapter on 'Representing Difference'). Of course, no writer wants to produce stereotypes. The very term is pejorative, implying, as it does, characters devoid of individuality or real qualities of their own, clichéd, exemplifying nothing but well-worn and over-used features. But I think there is a sense in which my characters, and indeed all fictional characters, enjoy a kind of universality which makes them iconic, or emblematic of their kind and representative of a type, or several types, even if ultimately they are a unique representative, and the intersection of all their kinds or classes has only a single member. It was my intention to create fictional characters who would illustrate the various ethnic, socio-economic and linguistic sectors of our diverse society, not in order to produce ethnographic specimens but to show how a social matrix works through an individual's life and behaviour. But that they do also represent ethnographic, etc., types is undeniable, and I think it is unavoidable that fictional characters should represent various types of people.

This line of thinking was suggested to me during a class discussion, when one of the group asked me if the Donny in 'The Hooks in Jazz' was the same Donny whose parents were Dlabela and Nokuthula Ngidi in 'Ukuhlalisa Umsamo'. It seemed to me then, before I had fully rounded out the character of Donny in other sketches, that it didn't really matter, they could be the same man. And this kind of representationalism is found in all my characters. Diana is an example of a materialistic, power-hungry social climber though there is plenty that renders her *sui generis*: her husband James; her responses to Bonisiwe in the Greek bakery, to the news about the Bell school, to Conan in the personal power course, and to Wellington's mansion; her children, her small Korean saloon, her bridge and book club. The detail of her life renders her unique but she remains a representative of a type or types.

The same kind of analysis could be done on, say, Alfrons. He represents the construction worker on a minimum salary of R350 per week, working on gigantic and luxurious apartment blocks, sleeping rough because his shack is too far away to go home every night, a youth with little English come from a poverty-stricken home in the KwaZulu countryside to town, looking for work which an uncle manages to get for him. Thus far, it is the story of thousands of young men. What makes Alfrons unique are the individual details of his life and story: his unusual name, the fact that he lost his money in a game of umlabalaba and couldn't buy food, his friend Dushi, the place they slept in.

That any fictional character must thus participate in various types is affirmed by Milan Kundera, in discussing Thomas Mann's views (1995:12). In a section entitled 'The well of the past', he shows the essential role of precursory human identities in creating a fictional character. The cast-off brother has precursors in many Biblical stories: Cain and Abel, Benjamin and his brothers, Isaac and Esau, and anyone writing of this kind of brotherly relation is ineluctably drawing on the 'well of the past'. So also Diana draws on all previous ambitious wives who scorn their gentler, more intelligent husbands; Alfrons is the successor of all poor and unlucky labourers who have lost their money.

I would like to extend this idea of types preceding any new creation of a character, and point out that the terms in which a character must be described are words with a general meaning, and part of that meaning will refer to previous examples of its use. Thus, in describing Diana as 'ambitious', or in showing her behaviour as 'ambitious', I am casting her as a type, that of ambitious women. In describing Wellington as super-rich, we make him one of a whole class, and the reader will identify his character in terms of previous experience of both real and fictional super-rich men.

This very general reference to types previously known by the reader, a reference effected simply in virtue of knowing the meaning of a term, has the effect of lacing the text with recognizable forms or kinds of people. Understanding and interpretation of fictional characters and their behaviour take place via recognition of patterns. In a text such as mine, where many different patterns are to be found, their deployment becomes important in the overall effect. We might say that my text is a strongly patterned text with a consequently iconic character.

In contrast, we might call 'particularistic', a text which does not draw so frequently or widely on general types, but concentrates rather on the explication of a few characters to their fullest extent. The focus then is on *sui generis* individuals rather than kinds of people, and the result will be the creation of a sense of unique personalities in a singular reality. I have throughout adopted a realistic style, but it has not been a thorough-going particularism in the sense sketched above; it has been a particularism tempered with much use of types.

Chapter 2 - Representing Difference

1. Introduction

Since the text I am presenting includes depiction of individuals from many different sectors of contemporary South African, specifically Johannesburg society, including English South Africans, Afrikaners, Coloureds, Portuguese, Zulu, Greek, Sotho and Jewish people, and these all come from a range of economic and educational backgrounds, the issue of representing people different from myself is one that cropped up early and frequently in the course of my writing, both in class discussions and in my own thinking.

The attitude that has evolved in my work as a result of these reflections, is an unwillingness to place emphasis on difference at all. Of course, differences among various sectors of our society do undeniably exist, and cannot be ignored. But when the idea of a single multifarious society is a fiducial line in some piece of writing, as it is in mine, then the differences among people shrink in significance. While they are acknowledged, I do not see them as absolute divisions barring interaction or knowledge, or self-imposed constructions which dictate perceptions, and across which communication can take place only with difficulty and misunderstanding. But these are all features of the concept of the Other as it has been developed in cultural studies, and these would make representations of cultural difference theoretically problematic. I deal with this specialized concept in the first section below.

Some other aspects of literary representations of difference are: judging what an authentic representation of difference might be; the issue of entitlement or of deciding whether a writer has the right to represent some sector of society different from his or her own; and the question of what the writer's intentions in depicting difference are. Finally, I discuss a special case of writing about difference, i.e., representing the speech of people different from myself, in both first- and third-person voices.

2. The Concept of the Other

An early (1949) analysis of the concept of the Other in the context of gender studies, is Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. She traces how ideas of femininity are to a great extent a male construction imposed on women by men. The image projected is such as to facilitate the domination of women by men, the feminine type including features like weakness, a lack of reason or logic, timorousness, incompetence in practical matters, etc. In their relations with men, women tend to fulfil male expectations and act in submissive and weak ways. What men thus experience of women is just their own projection and the real woman behind the image is unknown. In fact, the female

Other is unknowable behind the veil of the male construction. A T-shirt expressing this idea was popular among feminists in the eighties: it read 'I am not who you think I am'.

There is something of truth in this vision of gender relations but for polemical purposes, de Beauvoir ignored the fact that women frequently flout the roles prescribed for them (she herself was a notable exception). In the context of literature, there is a long tradition of men writing sensitively and insightfully about women, thus not finding them unknowable, or being able to reflect only the male image of women, a tradition that only an intransigent radical feminist would deny.

A text that focuses on cultural rather than gender difference (which is my focus in the body of sketches too) is Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1994). In this study of the discipline of orientalism, Said further develops the notion of the Other and Othering. Western, especially English and French students of the East, from the date of their first interactions with it, developed a stock notion of what it was to be an Oriental. The concept included such characteristics as craftiness, laziness, sensuousness and lack of discipline and moral fibre. It was propagated by colonial administrators, writers, explorers, artists - in short, all those classes of Westerners who had dealings with the East - for consumption at home but mainly in the interests of maintaining dominance over the peoples in their Eastern colonies. It was a tool of the power relations obtaining between the East and its Western colonizers.

Again, as in the case of gender, the culturally Other lay unknown and unknowable, behind the veil of the myth. Because it served an explanatory function, because it enabled the Westerner to say 'Oh we understand these Johnnies alright', there was no awareness of ignorance and no motive for trying to find out what these Others were truly like, which anyway would have militated against Western domination.

That the West did the same thing in relation to Africa is the theme of V Y Mudimbe's *The Invention of Africa* (1985). Here, features of the myth included the primitive, a lack of reason or logic, emotionality and high degrees of sexuality, ignorance and childlikeness. Again, the myth was promoted by writers, artists, administrators, etc, and again, it served to maintain the dominance of the West over its African colonies. The theory of apartheid embodied an extreme version of this imposition of a pernicious identity on the Other.

The language in which the myth was expressed was another vehicle for the exercise of dominance. English both by association with the colonial masters and by virtue of its expressive power, displays an inherent ability to dominate. Willem Boshoff has spoken of an 'imperial English, plundering the languages of the world, and behaving "like the bully at school" ' (Vladislavic, 2005:52). Afrikaans too, became for many the language of the oppressor in the years of the apartheid regime. The languages of the culturally different were denigrated and excluded from

educational programmes and public forums. Language itself thus becomes an agent of Othering, or placing those who are culturally different into an alienated and subordinate position.

Now the question arises: how can someone like myself, from a white English-language background, write about black people in South Africa today with any justice? In terms of the theory, they must be objects of my Othering who will be perceived in terms of the myths propagated in order to secure their subservience to whites. Again in terms of critical theory, I am in no position to offer any defence against the charge because I am in the grip of the imperialist viewpoint.

Andile Mngxitama (2001:6) refers to 'the old unresolved questions of white writing of the black story and how unquestioned paternalist perspectives of the past are being perpetuated in post-1994 township writing'.

Nevertheless, some points may be offered regarding the theory of the Other in general. The first concerns the time-frame of its subject. The theory is a production of *postcolonial* studies, which suggests that the genesis of the practice was in a time past. Of course, the discipline concerns itself with present-day issues in former colonies, but they are former colonies. The conditions under which the domination of indigenous populations arose, no longer exist and we may expect that the practices of Othering will in due course also fall into abeyance. But I must concede that in the case of South Africa, apartheid was such an extreme form of Othering that its effects will take a long time to dissipate.

As Said (1994) said, the purpose of a myth of the Other was for domination. In a post-colonial world, power relations are (formally at least) no longer skewed in favour of Western powers at the expense of indigenous populations. In South Africa, since the coming of democracy in 1994, all sectors of the population enjoy equality under the law. The sort of domination that exists is economic rather than ethnic. This too must eventually militate against the practices of cultural Othering that still prevail in our society.

The paradigm of the Other is the Oriental or black African in the presence of early white imperialists, where the degree of alienation is high. These two types of 'native' were very different from the colonists and there was a lot of ignorance about them. To the extent that interaction takes place between the subject group and the Other now that power relations have been formally normalized, the myth will be challenged and the paradigm case will be vitiated. Familiarity with people from different ethnic groups is no longer the impossibility that it was in the days of apartheid; we have had twenty years in which to interact with each other, to start learning each others' ways and forging some sense of common identity. Given the hybridity and continual flux of personal identity, interaction must erode the myths of the Other and practices of Othering.

The prominence that the theory of the Other has achieved and the degree to which it has been developed, ensure that in intellectual circles, there is self-consciousness about it. Othering is the object of criticism wherever it can be observed; it no longer passes as normal. People with a social conscience are aware enough of the practice, to want to avoid it themselves and discourage it in their fellows.

Lastly, I would argue that a certain sort of writerly stance is in itself polemical against Othering. While it is true that writers, along with artists, historians, administrators, etc., contributed to the creation of myths about the Other, there were always those writers who countered the stereotypes, tried to do justice to the Other, and exposed Othering for what it was, e.g., *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Do these considerations justify me in writing about the Other? They will not satisfy those who 'assume an authenticity of experience that can only be experienced from the inside, and also, perhaps, a concept of subjectivity that is strongly determined by given religious/cultural factors' (Supervisor's comment). But this position quickly leads to a cul de sac in which nobody can write of anything but their own experiences. It denies the imaginative constructions of people who are in any way different from the writer, and of their experiences, and that is the very stuff of fiction. I do not claim to be able to experience as a black person does but I write respectfully, imaginatively and always aware of the pitfalls of Othering, of black people and their experience.

In what follows I shall avoid the theory-laden term 'the Other', and use 'different people' in its place, to mean people who are different in some way from the writer.

3. *Authenticity or being 'true' to different people*

With the proviso that it is the individual I am interested in portraying rather than a type of person, much of my work does deal with blacks and people of various other ethnic groups, so it is fair to ask how accurately, or authentically, or justly I represent these groups. The overall style of the pieces is realism, so the question might even be how *truly* they depict the group in question, and each question brings its own slant to the issue. Accuracy and truth imply a straightforward correspondence view of representation: different people exist in objective reality and if the representation provided by a writer matches in all essentials the reality, then we have a true or accurate representation. Would that things were so simple. Just one complicating factor in this naive view is that the writer is obliged to select aspects of the target group to depict. An absolutely exhaustive or comprehensive representation of a culture would be an ethnographic ideal not one appropriate to fiction, and in either case, an impossibility. Which are the 'essential' aspects of some culture? And would members of that cultural group agree with the writer's choice of essentials? Another difficulty for the correspondence view is that representation and object represented are

categorically different so that comparison is impossible except in some vague metaphorical sense which undermines the claims of rigorousness that adherents of the view like to imbue it with.

To ask for the *authenticity* of a representation of different people, introduces a new note. If something is authentic, then it comes with some inherent kind of warrant or guarantee of its acceptability. The question then becomes: who provides this warrant? Who gets to judge on the authenticity or otherwise of the representation? And what are the criteria for authenticity? An initial response might be that it is the readers who judge, and they are certainly one kind of authority on the satisfactoriness or otherwise of the representation. In my case, the readers would probably be people like myself with just a sprinkling of different people among them, if at all. It is unlikely that a rural black woman would read these texts, impossible that an illiterate black labourer should (two of the different people I write about, in 'Women of Madimole' and 'Hunger' respectively). The readers' response remains an important test of satisfactoriness, though not quite authenticity; readers may feel satisfied to find their unfair stereotypes confirmed. An authentic text would not embody obvious misrepresentation or over-simplification.

It is also possible to treat the question of authenticity as a non-question, to say that authenticity is an effect on the reader, an illusion, and that it is a category mistake to compare fictional characters to real people. Fiction does not make claims of empirical fact but 'as if' claims. The world in which they must be tested is a world of the writer's imagination, a fiction.

In my view, the most important question is how *justly* or fairly the story portrays different people. As Wittgenstein (1953) with his 'language games' and John Austin (1962) in his 'speech acts' persuasively argued, the intention with which a representation or claim of fact is made, is definitive of the criteria for its success or otherwise, and I believe this applies even to the 'as if' statements of fiction. There is a moral dimension to representation once we introduce the notion of the writer's purpose (cf. section 5 below).

4. Questions of right and entitlement:

Apartheid consisted in systematic discrimination against anyone who was not white, and inhuman atrocities were perpetrated against non-whites by the white regime. White representations of blacks at this time often occurred in 'struggle' fiction (like Athol Fugard's play *Boesman and Lena*, *Die Swerfjare van Poppie Nongena* by Elsa Joubert, or Nadine Gordimer's short story 'The Ultimate Safari'). Because blacks were denied a voice of their own in public spaces, and were rendered invisible to white society by the policies of separate development, and because of unacknowledged (even unconscious) attitudes of dominance still present in white writing, critical theorists today may be sensitive when a white chooses to 'appropriate' black stories and depict black people in the

various aspects of their lives (as I have done). Questions of right and entitlement are raised, springing from the view that black stories are best told by black writers.

In a recent review of Anton Harber's book *Diepsloot* (2011 Jonathan Ball), entitled 'Whose Story Is It Anyway?' (2011:6) Andile Mngxitama writes: '... one suspects the likes of Harber have not had to confront the question of how and why a white researcher would care to intrude into black spaces. The ethical questions related to this problematic view have never been subject to sustained critique because of the power of white knowledge-making industries. Such a critique would force white writers into much-needed self-reflection when writing about the black condition.' And in a companion piece, Kwanele Sosibo (2011:7) says: 'But ultimately, as Harber himself concedes, *Diepsloot's* story would be better told by those who reside in it'- better told than by the white Harber.

Against this, there is the ideal of contemporary South African society as a single heterogeneous community in which there are properly speaking, no unbridgeable differences. The claim that all things black may be the subject of fiction only by blacks would militate against any community of all South Africans, and such a policy has all the old evils of apartheid in it. It is twenty years now since the dismantling of apartheid and the repeal of the repressive laws in which it was embodied, and it is perhaps time that we turned our gaze forward and not backward, aware always of the past, and trying not to replicate it.

In my collection of texts, blacks, whites, coloureds, Greeks, Portuguese, etc., are usually shown in interaction, as a realistic representation of our society demands. In even the 'whitest' of pieces, 'Silk Road', there is inevitably some reference to Tryphina the maid, that necessary concomitant of white middle-class existence in Johannesburg. Plainly, an author is entitled to write of his or her own experience and if that experience is of black people, then he or she is entitled to write of blacks, in interactions like these. It is to be hoped that the experience will not be coloured by the myth of the Other; attentiveness to the detail of different people's existence will help on this score .

Four of the stories in the collection are about blacks only, events that take place within black families and communities ('Hunger', 'Women of Madimole', 'Umlotha' and 'Homesick') and these I am willing to concede might have been better written by a black person. But they are stories about South Africans, and of importance to every South African, because they are stories of injustice that need to be heard and nobody else is airing them. Further, they are all fictionalized accounts of stories told to me as matters of common knowledge and interest, by black people, thus a free sharing of the black experience with a white.

Some of the pieces might be considered to be treading on sacred ground. In 'Ukuhlalisa Umsamo', mention is made of traditional black religion, viz., ancestor worship; in 'Umlotha', Gladys

has some sharp things to say of the traditional custom that all a married couple's property must devolve on the deceased husband's family; in 'Sacrifice', Donny visits a sangoma to consult his amadlozi or ancestors because he believes he is the object of a curse, and he slaughters a cow (rather ineffectually) to honour his friend Wellington's ancestors. The intention (to represent as faithfully and realistically as possible) with which these depictions were done surely avoids any charge of impiety or disrespect.

It seemed to me that to exclude stories about blacks when my purpose was to depict Johannesburg society, was unthinkable. To deny black people a major part in a text in which the organizing principle is intended to be the notion of the interwoven web of urban community, would be to do them a worse and more culpable injustice, to silence them and make them invisible. To leave them out would be to imply that they are negligible elements of our society.

Of course, no portrayal of a society in short pieces of fiction can do justice to each and every sector of that society, and to omit some (say the lorry drivers, or the physically challenged) does not necessarily imply that they are negligible. The principle of selection must have a certain level of generality across social categories. So I have tried to represent blacks and whites even-handedly and within the category of 'blacks', Zulu and Sotho, Indian and Coloured people are included, poor labourers and well-educated people, bourgeoisie and the super-rich; within the category of 'whites', Jewish, Portuguese, Greek, Chinese, Afrikaans and English-speaking South Africans are to be found, again across different economic strata. The links across all these categories illustrate that no one class is hermetic with respect to any of the others, rather, that the interactions among them all are the warp and weft of our social fabric.

5. *The Writer's Intention in Representing Different People*

In the collection of stories, my chosen style is realism. This entails that I am bound to represent some aspect of reality in a more or less recognizable manner. Does this entail that my intentions must be solely to achieve a true or accurate picture of that reality? No. An analogy with statements is apposite here. An indicative sentence is a truth claim about some fact in the world but it may, indeed must, have a very different force from its statemental one; in John Austin's phrase, it has a 'performative' aspect (Austin, 1962). For instance, someone says 'Those shoes are dirty'. It's a statement of fact which may or may not be true, or its truth may be arguable, but it can be used to *command* the wearer to clean them, to *insult* him or her, to *instruct* him or her to get off the carpet. So too, a representation of some ethnic group might have some representational aspects but what the (imaginative) representation is used by the utterer to do, is even more important to the overall story than the lifelikeness or otherwise of the depiction. In my case, at least one of the intended

effects is to evoke empathy with the Others depicted: to create insight into the contemporary dilemma of traditionally-raised amaZulu, into the plight of the homeless, the poor, and the victims of bureaucratic fraud.

My overriding intention in all the representations of alien or different ethnic and cultural contexts, has been to show how his or her social matrix (convention, religion, culture) affects the individual emerging from it, and how particular lives are shaped by the context in which they are seated. The focus is always on individual persons and not the generic types they exemplify. To intend no more than a series of cultural types in these texts would have been to produce dry specimens in an ethnographic display cabinet with none of the liveliness of a recognizable individual. (Cf. however, the note on typing in Chapter 1, part 4.)

In avoiding stereotypes, I have tried to depict real people in all their idiosyncrasy; Mrs Levine, an old Jewish widow, contrary to expectations, lives alone in growing poverty; Alfrons, a penniless black labourer, is surprisingly sharp and eloquent; Gladys, an obedient Zulu widow, nevertheless has courage enough to defy the customary disposition of a deceased estate.

In so far as my characters do exemplify certain types, I have tried to be scrupulously fair in representing their type, always maintaining a respectful awareness of the dignity and autonomy of my subject.

As discussed in Chapter 1, section 3, the notion of intention in literary criticism is not a straightforward one. The author's conscious intention might be quite imperceptible in some text, and conversely, a critic might ascribe an intention to the writer which is rather a feature that the critic has described in the text. However, when writing of different people, an author might have any or all of several possible intentions like stereotyping, caricaturing, satirizing, or poking fun at, and it is from these that I wish to dissociate myself.

6. *Writing the Speech of the Different People*

The voice in which someone different from the writer tells his or her story, or in which he or she speaks, is crucial to the success of the representation. Language is an important marker of ethnicity. A fair-skinned Turk, let us say, living in London and keen to 'blend in' with the English population, might adopt English ways of dressing, eating, spending leisure time, etc., but however diligent he or she is in practising an English accent and idiom, his or her speech will betray Turkishness, or at least foreignness, to an English ear. In the melting pot that is South African society, there is a Babel of voices (eleven official languages plus those of other countries) each speaking his or her own native tongue, and the ideal of a shared social space is achieved largely by the use of English as a common tongue. (I have said 'largely' but am hard put to say what other means there are of unifying our

various ethnic sectors, of giving different peoples a sense of common identity, unless it be devotion to the bare principle of a 'rainbow nation'.) But virtually everyone in South Africa does have some English and so it serves as a lingua franca.

Within the mode of realism in fiction, and in the project of representing differences in one society, it is important to capture the nuances of various styles of speaking English. In doing this, I have relied on both memory and observation, and where possible, I have consulted with people from various ethnicities on the English speech of their kind. Slipping words now and then from the character's home language into his or her speech, as non-English speakers are inclined to do, helps in the success of the representation. Further, there are ways of using English which are characteristic of various cultures; that the English speech patterns of isiZulu speakers reflect those of isiZulu, will be shown in the Appendix to this section.

The representation of English in the mouths of non-English speakers, is the subject of intensive discussion by J M Coetzee (2007:119-140). He identifies a stratagem that he calls 'transfer' in Pauline Smith's writing: 'Whether we look at Smith as a novelist working with foreign material or as a translator of Afrikaans culture, her enterprise - preserving (or sometimes in fact creating) marks of origin for her material - is therefore an unusual one. For this process I will reserve the name transfer, which I will define as the rendering of (imagined) foreign speech in an English stylistically marked to remind the reader of the (imagined) foreign original' (2007:121).

There are many instances of 'transfer' in my collection of stories. Illustrating, as they do, several different ethnicities in a realistic style, there are bound to be differences from standard South African English speech in them. Characters occasionally use foreign words when there is no English equivalent or when the foreign phrase rises naturally to their lips. Examples of this in my texts are when Luís' father kisses Lulu's hand in a show of Portuguese gallantry and says 'Muito prazer' (much pleasure), or when Tossie uses Afrikaans words like 'voorstellingsklere' (the clothes in which confirmation candidates are presented in church) or nagmaal (the Afrikaans churches' version of holy communion), or when Bonisiwe, discovering her handbag slit open, exclaims 'Inkosi yami!' (Oh my god) and Mrs Levine exclaims 'Oy veh!'

When they speak English, foreign characters may use slightly unidiomatic sentences, as when Granny Dona Ana says to Lulu: 'Come, I show you something', (where an English speaker would have said, 'Come, I'll show you something'), or when Gladys says to Tossie: 'No taxis today, is Sunday. My legs - eish meddem - is too sore' (for 'No taxis today, it's Sunday. My legs, oh Madam, are very sore). The justification for the unidiomatic speech is realism. This is how people of different ethnicities do speak English, as anyone familiar with them will recognize.

All the issues that arise around writing of different people are exaggerated when an author chooses to write in the first-person voice. Now there is no acknowledged distance between author and subject, no possibility of the writer taking a 'neutral' observer's stance; the writer assumes the role of the other person. Nevertheless, that this difficult project can be achieved, is evidenced by Elsa Joubert's highly successful novel *Die Swerfjare van Poppie Nongena* 1978). The eponymous heroine tells her story in the first-person voice, in a voice that has been adjusted in the direction of standard Afrikaans (and in the translation, of standard English), and it is still a complex story, evocative of the emotional tenor of her people's lives (amaXhosa and Coloured), and acknowledged as a classic of Afrikaans literature.

In the story 'Hunger', we find the limiting case of Coetzee's 'transfer'. The main difference between this story and Smith's novels is that they are not written in the first-person voice; she is representing in English, characters who would be speaking in Afrikaans among themselves, and whose thoughts, observations and experiences would likewise have been in their mother tongue. Alfrons in 'Hunger' is speaking in English to an unseen audience. Nevertheless, there is a similarity between the two cases, and Coetzee's remarks on 'transfer' are relevant to 'Hunger'. Alfrons is unfamiliar with English and his memories of his experiences would be formulated in isiZulu, so that his speech is indeed 'the rendering of (imagined) foreign speech in an English stylistically marked to remind the reader of the (imagined) foreign original'.

Since not many of the readers of 'Hunger' will be isiZulu speakers, the stylistic markers in Alfrons' speech will not 'remind' them of the 'original', but they will serve to identify Alfrons as umZulu, as unsophisticated, from a rural background, a labourer. How will stylistic echoes of isiZulu do this when readers know no isiZulu? Simply because in the multiplicity that is contemporary urban South African society, readers will have come to know people like Alfrons, will know independently of their speech that they are amaZulu, and come to recognize their linguistic patterns as those of a Zulu speaker, which in turn reinforces the perception that this is a Zulu. It further enables readers to judge critically whether Alfrons' speech patterns ring true for a man of his background. And should a reader know no people like Alfrons then he or she will not have the means of testing the accuracy of Alfrons' voice, but will have to grant authorial licence on this point.

(In the Appendix following this chapter, some main correspondences between Alfrons' English speech patterns and those of isiZulu are traced.)

Some further points of difference: Coetzee refers again to 'transfer' when he says that Smith knew that the Afrikaans of her chosen milieu was 'close enough to her own English in some of its characteristic structures to be domesticated simply by the process of *faux-naïf* translation that I have called transfer' (2007:130). Alfrons' speech involves a great deal of sincerely naive translation of

characteristic isiZulu structures and it is doubtful if the resulting language could be called 'domesticated'. It borders rather on the wilderness of unintelligibility.

Coetzee refers to 'transfer' again when discussing how Paton (2002:16) renders the English of Zulu-speakers. He quotes the following passage in which a Zulu explains gold-mining to a fellow Zulu:

'We go down and dig it (the ore) out, umfundisi (sir). And when it is hard to dig, we go away, and the white men blow it out with the fire-sticks. Then ... we load it on to the trucks, and it goes up in a cage, up a long chimney so long that I cannot say it for you.'

This passage is 'marked for Zulu origin, not only by the transcription of Zulu words like *umfundisi*' but by certain solecistic translations of isiZulu concepts into English. So, 'dynamite' becomes 'fire-sticks', 'mine shaft' becomes 'chimney', 'take cover' becomes 'go away'. I think that Paton's choice of words is defensible both within the practice of transfer and on the grounds of realism of representation, and that Coetzee's criticism is somewhat arbitrary. For example, the word 'chimney' for a mine shaft, says Coetzee, is indefensible because there is already a Zulu word for a mine shaft, viz. 'umgodi'. But if the primary meaning of 'ushimula' (chimney) is not a mine shaft, neither is the primary meaning of 'umgodi' a mine shaft. It is 'a hole' and it is entirely credible that when thinking of something not sinking downwards but rising to the surface, as in this passage, the speaker should have preferred 'chimney' to 'hole'.

Another point that needs to be taken up in some detail is Coetzee's criticism of Paton for putting a solecistic use of the definite article into the mouth of a Zulu speaking English: '(referring to ore in a mine) 'the white men blow it out with *the* fire sticks'. Thus Coetzee: 'Paton is content to create the *impression* (Coetzee's italics) that a transfer from Zulu has taken place. We see the trick (sic) most clearly in the phrase "the fire-sticks". Zulu speakers speaking English often have difficulty with the English article, since Zulu has no corresponding lexical form. But it is of course a mistake to conclude that Zulu speakers cannot make the semantic distinctions for which English relies on the article. "The fire-sticks" merely reproduces a common mistake made by Zulus speaking English; it says nothing about Zulus speaking Zulu' (2007:132).

In conceding that this kind of misuse is typical of Zulus speaking English, Coetzee has surely justified Paton's inclusion of it. The practice of transfer (alluding to a foreign language behind English speech) takes place, both for Paton and Smith (and for me) within the parameters of realism in the novel. They both want their characters to appear credible individuals of a certain type. Of course Paton, in depicting Zulus, is going to have them make 'common mistake(s) made by Zulus speaking English'. Further, it is not Paton's (or Pauline Smith's) project, to reflect the Zulu (Afrikaans) thoughts or subliminal language from which their characters' English issues, so it is hardly fair to say, with the imputation of a lack, that the misuse 'says nothing about Zulus speaking Zulu'.

An aside: I am not sure that isiZulu *does* have the means of making 'the semantic distinctions for which English relies on the article'. 1. 'A man is strong' and 2. 'The man is strong', with the distinction in meaning shown by the English indefinite and definite articles, must both be translated as 'Indoda inamandla'. Context is then relied on to make the particular meaning evident. It is possible to achieve something of the English universal reference by simply using the plural: 'Amadoda anamandla' = Men are strong; and to secure the particular reference by using a demonstrative isiZulu pronoun to translate 2.: *Lendoda inamandla* = *This* man is strong. But then we are going some semantic distance beyond the English 'a' and 'the'.

One last point on which I must take issue with Coetzee is his claim that: 'South African fiction is full of examples of people (and peoples) to whom a language limited and simplified in various ways is attributed, and whose range of intellection and feeling is by implication correspondingly limited and simplified' (2007:120). The same view is repeated when he says: 'The overt purpose of transfer is to make the reader imagine the words he is reading have a foreign original behind them. The artificial literalism of passages like the above, however, conveys in addition a certain naivete, even childishness, which reflects on the quality of mind of its speaker and of Zulu speakers in general' (2007:132).

'Artificial literalism' of translation is the first recourse of someone speaking a foreign language, when faced with an impasse of expression, and a first-language isiZulu speaker without much education may well sound naive, even childish, in English, and his or her language may well be 'limited and simplified in various ways'. (This is exactly the case when an English-speaker without much isiZulu tries to speak in that language.) To go from this to the conclusion that aspersions are being cast on 'the quality of mind of its speaker and of Zulu speakers in general', and that the speaker's 'range of intellection and feeling is ... limited and simplified' is an unsupported inference. There might be some justification for holding it true if, in the context of the whole piece of fiction, there were nothing more to tell a reader about a particular character, if his speech were all a reader was given of him. In the context of 'Hunger', however, there is a more rounded portrait of the man. Alfrons illustrates that the implication does not necessarily follow: though his English speech is limited and simple, naive and even childish at times, his behaviour is enterprising, intelligent, complex and emotionally sophisticated.

Appendix

In the story entitled 'Hunger', a young Zulu bricklayer tells his tale in English to a sympathetic ear. His language is ungrammatical, unidiomatic, lacking in vocabulary and limited in syntax, as would standardly be the case with such a young man. My purpose was to make this young man identifiable,

from his dialect, as being of a certain type: a rural Zulu labourer with an elementary level of education. Alfrons shows his individuality in his idiolect: a tendency to use 'on' as a preposition for all seasons, etc., (see below), but there are plenty of other ways in which Alfrons Sibaya establishes his individuality than in his speech patterns: his courage in the face of hardship, pride in his work and his umlabalaba prowess, his gratitude to a friend, a stoical acceptance of his lot, and more.

In writing in this voice, I relied on my familiarity with the conversation of one particular young Zulu bricklayer, a great raconteur who loved nothing better than to tell stories as we worked side by side on a building project. I have trusted to memory and an ear for language to guide me in recreating his speech, but there is an underlying correlation between the speech patterns he employed and his native tongue, which is explicated here by way of a grounding rationale, and which has interest in its own right. Further, it is illuminating to trace the way in which the isiZulu and slang words he uses may be accessible to a non-Zulu-speaker.

In the rural district from which he came (Nqutu in northern KwaZulu), Alfrons would not have mingled with English speakers at all. We may assume that his education in a rural school was in his home language and any English he learned there would have been rudimentary. The most he might have heard would have been an occasional programme in English on TV, always assuming there was an accessible TV in his environment. The language with which he was thoroughly familiar, his mother-tongue, was isiZulu.

When such a young man comes to the city, he is thrust into an environment that requires him to speak and understand English, in communication with non-Zulu fellow-workers, with shopkeepers, perhaps with his bosses (as was the case when he spoke to me). There is a lot he wants to say but he doesn't have the means of saying it. So when he comes to a place where ignorance prevails - he just doesn't know how to say this - he falls back on the lexicon and sentence patterns that he is familiar with.

He is not alone in this. Thousands of rural immigrants to the big cities like eGoli employ the same strategy. It gives to their speech a recognizably Zulu character, and of course it also marks them as rural and uneducated. It does not follow that they are simpletons or unintelligent.

These are some of the ways in which Alfrons' English deviates from the standard; the deviations reflect the inherently isiZulu character of his mind and speech.

Vocabulary:

Alfrons' speech is peppered with isiZulu words for which he simply doesn't know the English and can't find a circumlocution:

amasela, waBenzis, amapoyisi, suka, izimpethu, lima, muthi, amaphelane, yebo, insangu, utshomi wami, umlabalaba, khula, sibele, pangelo, iloli, bhulukwe, omakhelwane, Tswana, kwadile, shepile,

unogwaja, amasi, impela, amadlozi, ziphandla, mathumbu, shisanyama, hashukile, umhlaseli omkhulu, ngempela.

(i) *Inferring meaning*: If it is a true isiZulu word, the hearers' (or readers') best chance of understanding it, unless they understand isiZulu, is to rely on inference from context. This is something Alfrons would confidently expect his hearer to do. For example:

'I learn from the old bilikis when I am *daka dibi*. Then my job is just to fill the bhala from the big mixer ...'

'daka dibi' = boy who supplies the men with daka. 'Daka' (=mortar) is well-enough known in English to give the hearer a clue as to the meaning of 'dibi', especially when it is followed by a reference to the 'big mixer' and 'fill the bhala'. Originally, 'udibi' referred to a young boy who followed the impis with supplies of food, clothing, spare weapons, etc., for the fighting men.

Another example of a word whose meaning is obvious from context is 'amasela' (thieves) in 'razor wire on top to keep out amasela'.

Sometimes, the English equivalent of a word is given later in the text by way of explanation, so Dushi refers to 'pangelo' and later calls them 'ginfowl'.

(ii) *Recognizable words*: many isiZulu words have their origins in English or Afrikaans. In the sentence above, there are two examples of this kind of isiZulu word, where the sound of the word is a clue, for the English- or Afrikaans-speaker, to its meaning. Again, Alfrons would feel sure that his hearer would get the meaning from the sound of the word.

'bilikis' = brickies or bricklayers, 'bhala' = barrow

When we remember that there is no 'r' sound in isiZulu, and it is almost invariably rendered as 'l', then the translation is even easier. And sometimes an 'l' will be rendered 'y' as in 'amapoyisi' (Afrikaans 'polisie' = police).

Other words relying on the hearer or reader's ear for understanding: utshomi (chum), iloli (lorry), bhulukwe (Afr. broek = trousers), kwadile (Afr. kwaad = angry), shepile (cheap), amasi (Afr. amaas = buttermilk, and this time it appears that the Afrikaans word originates in isiZulu).

(iii) *Widely-known words*: he uses isiZulu words so well-known that they have entered South African English, e.g., 'umkhukhu' = shack or informal dwelling place, is well-enough known to stand by itself and an added consideration is that there is no exact translation of it in English since it incorporates the connotations of a self-erected house in an informal settlement, made of materials that came to hand rather than being bought, and not built to any formal design.

Again, the meaning of 'vuka' (wake up, rise) is far enough in the public domain (Vuka Sizwe! = Wake, the Nation, and *Vuka* on buses bringing commuters to work) to expect that its meaning will be grasped by any South African. Context also plays an informative role here. Other of Alfrons'

isiZulu words which have entered South African English are 'yebo' (yes), 'daka' (wet mortar), suka (get out), muthi (medicine), omkhulu (great)

(iv) *Opaque words*: some isiZulu words will not yield their meaning in any of the ways suggested above, but they are few: amaphelane (cockroaches), amadlozi (ancestors), isiphandla (hide bracelet as charm), ngempela (in truth).

(v) *Slang*: he uses working-class jargon which is translinguistic: majitas (men) and bras (fellows), waBenzis (luxury cars), dushi (Cape Coloured), sisi (sister), tiger (R10) and some Afrikaans words: voetsak (get out), pap and sous (mieliemeal porridge and gravy), kakking (defecating).

Syntax:

(i) *Subject-verb combinations* are frequently unidiomatic. We have the following instances in Alfrons' speech:

My uncle, he get me; the majitas, we are amaphelane; the young bras, they don't put down money; little brother, he come; this brother, he die; my mother she cry; my mother she pick me up; Dushi, he say; that cat, he got soft hair.

Where an English speaker simply says 'my uncle got me', 'the majitas are the ...', etc., the Zulu not well-versed in English is inclined to give the subject term and then repeat the reference to it with a pronoun before the predicate.

This is a reflection of isiZulu usage where the subject term has a class prefix which is repeated as a subject concord prefixed to the verb. So, the thought 'ubaba utholile' in isiZulu is rendered literally 'the uncle he get' by Alfrons in English; and 'umfowethu omncane ungenile' becomes 'little brother he came into'; 'lomfowethu ufile' becomes 'this brother he died', etc.

(ii) *Sentence structure* is simple with few embedded clauses or dependent phrases, not because isiZulu is limited in this regard but because Alfrons doesn't know the mechanisms of English grammar well enough to use subordinate clauses.

(iii) *Prepositions* in Alfrons' usage are usually not idiomatic but idiosyncratic, as in the following passage:

'So we sleep **on** small places **by** the work **at** night - **on** the back of shops or **by** the river, the men **on** that building, sometimes other men too. There is too much building **in** Sandton then, very big and high places, and the men **from** working there always sleep **on** the small places'

where standard usage would be:

'So we sleep **in** small places **near** the work **at** night - **at** the back of shops or **by** the river, the men **from** that building, sometimes other men too. There is too much building **in** Sandton then, very big and high places, and the men **[from]** working there always sleep **in** the small places'.

Some further examples: 'the gates open **on** themselves' for 'by themselves'; 'he take us **on** this good hotel' instead of 'to this good hotel', and 'the trees **on** us' for 'trees over us'.

Alfrons displayed a preference for the pronoun 'on' to cover many different situations. This tendency towards uniformity may be rooted in the fact that the locative in isiZulu is a single construction. It differs for different classes of noun but is usually formed with a prefix of 'e' and some variant of 'ini' or 'eni' as suffix. So 'umshini' - a machine; 'emshini' - in, on, at, by, from the machine; 'idolobha' - a town; 'edolobheni' - to, from, in, at the town.

(iv) *Subject-verb concords* are frequently awry, plural nouns with single verbs and vice versa: '**It** take long time', 'The **houses** all round that place **is** big', '**it** smell bad', '**He** talk a lot about that place, how it is so nice with all the mountains and he got his own horse there and lima with oxen and the people there are good, but **it** get very cold', '**He** give me nine cows'.

This is understandable when we remember that in isiZulu, the concord of subject term and predicate is achieved very differently from English. The class prefix of the subject term is repeated as a verbal prefix and not, as in English, as a suffix indicating number. Thus: 'The child plays' = 'Umntwana udladla'; 'The children play' = 'Abantwana badladla'.

(v) *Tenses of the verb* are simplified with no use of the preterite, and the simple present doing duty for most verb uses, as in 'I learn from the old bilikis when I am daka dibi', 'I am there', referring to time past. The future tense is also replaced with simple present, e.g., 'Dushi say **he** take us there' for 'will take'. Past participles lack their terminal '-ed', probably due to the fact that Alfrons has learnt all his English by listening to the speech of others and this ending is mostly only slightly enunciated. So: 'They **are** please with a rich white cat', 'she **is** finish'.

The explanation for this might simply be that the verb is a most complicated part of speech, in both English and isiZulu (Doke, 1992:124).

(vi) *Adjectives and adverbs* are limited and often not idiomatically used, e.g., 'the work **is** heavy', where 'heavy' is a direct translation of 'kunzima' meaning both hard or difficult, and heavy. A characteristic way of intensifying adjectives is with 'too' rather than the correct form: '**too much** building in Sandton', 'too much ice', 'That cat is **too fat**'. When an adverbial qualifier is used, it is in adjectival form: 'put the box down there very **slow**', 'He scream **bad**', 'break his neck **quick**', 'I eat **good** that night'.

(vii) *Possessives*: Alfrons never uses the apostrophe-s ending to form a possessive noun. He is familiar with some possessive pronouns and uses them freely, as in: 'behind they walls', 'our things and our cardboards', 'on his head', 'in they own fence', 'my mother', 'my mouth', 'you eyes', 'you face', 'they wings is cut', 'in his skin'.

Note the use of 'they' for 'their' and 'you' for 'your'. The difference to a foreign ear is difficult to pick up in speech so these pairs of words are easily conflated and since the substantive pronoun is the known word, it is used for the possessive too.

He also uses 'the ... of ...', as in 'the inkhukhu of my uncle', 'the house of us', and 'the place of Solly', which is closer to the isiZulu construction: 'inkhukhu ka-baba wami', 'ikhaya lathi', 'indawo ka-Solly'.

Sometimes he will use an article to avoid the possessive when that would be more natural: 'she push the sibele (nipple) in my mouth' where 'her sibele' is indicated, and 'to get the money' when 'to get my money' is better.

Chapter 3 - Underlying Structure

1. Introduction

The structure and organisation of the texts has been a main issue for me, both in the writing of the texts and in class discussions of them. There is some prejudice (see quotation below) against the careful planning of a work of literature, from those who demand a 'spontaneous, free-flowing' text and who see planning as constrictive of a writer's originality. Kundera, on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of form for all artists, including the writer of fiction, and the need to be creative in arriving at a form for the text. He claims that 'The prejudice against constructional thinking as a "non-artistic" element that mutilates the "living" quality of characters is just sentimental naïvete from people who have never understood art' (1995:18).

He expands on this later, saying that Beethoven completely changed the form of the sonata over his lifetime, discarding the pre-established structure and making each piece unique, 'radically individual. ... This idea is the first item in his artistic testament addressed to all the arts, to all artists, and which I shall state thus: the composition (the architectural organization of a work) should not be seen as some pre-existent matrix, loaned to an author for him to fill out with his invention; the composition should itself be an invention that engages all the author's originality' (1995:170).

In visualizing the architecture of my collection of texts, I have been inventive. The twenty-two texts vary greatly in their subject matter (as indicated in the chapter on *Representing Difference*) and style of presentation, in order to represent the heterogeneous society that exists in present-day Johannesburg. There are, however, links between the pieces since these diverse elements are all parts of one whole and interaction among them is the stuff of which a society is constituted; so, the same characters appear in two or more stories, there are cross-references to events, things, places and people; and there are links which lie across gaps that the reader is invited to fill in for him- or herself. It is in this last respect that I think I may claim some originality: the degree to which the reader writes the characters' stories for him- or herself.

Such an approach is a narrative device, and such devices are not innocent of implications for the writer's world view. The dislocated yet linked nature of the stories illustrates what I take the character of contemporary Johannesburg society to be, so the reader will optimally be provoked to write not only the fuller stories of the characters, but also the 'story' of what that society in its entirety is like.

In class discussion at various times, there were many different metaphors offered to define the structure of the text. These included: a patchwork quilt, an archipelago with connecting land masses submerged, accretions of a crystal, a tower of Babel or charivari, strands of a rope, a woven fabric, a

rainbow (nation), a spider's web, bones in a skeleton, a paper chase, a jigsaw puzzle, a join-the-dots puzzle, a pastiche, a collage, a mosaic of splinters, and a tangled bush (deurmekaarbos). By way of elucidation, I shall unpack some of these in section 2.3 below.

2. *Organizing Principles*

In spite of the diversity of the pieces, there are some organizing principles evident in them. There are at least four unifying considerations: the stories share a common *topography and locale* (and chronology, though this is not so evident as a unifying factor because the stories are not essentially indexical of time), being set in or near Johannesburg around 2010; all the characters can be seen as integral or peripheral elements of *Johannesburg society* and the collection of their stories is also the story of that society; the lives of various characters intersect and overlap in subtle and unexpected ways, thus connecting the stories and these connections can be characterized as *bridges and gaps*; and finally, there is a common theme running through them: the characters in the stories are for the most part *aspirational*, seeking to deal in some way with the materialistic and unequal urban culture that is contemporary Joburg.

2.1 *Topography and Setting*

The physical background to the great majority of the stories is some recognizable Joburg locale. In 'Anna Purrna' the boys take their prize cat to the National Championships at the Coca Cola Dome, Northgate; Bonisiwe, the girl who loses her purse, works at a Greek pastry shop (recognizably Fournos) in a suburban shopping mall and later has lunch with her aunt at Melrose Arch; Mrs Levine and Anyway live in an old, well-treed suburb and travel to it through the imposing buildings of Sandton's CBD, later they visit Sandton City at Christmas time; 'Hunger' presents the backstreet hideyholes of a labourer's Sandton and the building of its office and apartment towers; James Findlay visits a Newtown jazz club from his Plein Street highrise office; Tossie encounters Gladys on a street in her home suburb of Buccleuch; Deva waits table at a five-star restaurant off Sandton Square; Conan's courses are held in an exclusive club like the Rand Club and in his own mansion in a typical enclosed security complex; Loki comes out of the degradation of an overcrowded tenement building in the South while James and Diana Findlay and their children live in an upmarket home in the North, with servants, pool and patio, and Diana plays bridge at the nearby Country Club; Andrew in 'The Immaculate Character' catalogues the nuisances and pinpricks he encounters going to work along Joburg's roads, from the child beggar at the robot to the inefficient municipal workers; the casa Portuguesa we visit is in Rosettenville and the Zulu umkhukhu of 'Umlatha' is in Diepkloof; the story of Donny's sacrifice takes the reader from his own doctor's rooms to a sangoma's cave

(admittedly this scene is not in Joburg) to a fake Sheik's rooms in Westdene, to the mansion of his friend Wellington, which is also the scene of a lavish party; in 'Homesick', the locale is Alexandra Township at a time of flooding.

Three of the pieces do not have an immediate Joburg locale. 'Ukuhlalisa Umsamo' tells of the sadness of a traditional Zulu couple when they see their way of life dying, yielding to the ways of the city, so it is deliberately set in a country district in order to form a backdrop for comparison with the contemporary urban culture that their grandchildren bring with them on a visit. 'Chief of the Monkeys' is a story within this story. The setting for 'Women of Malimode' is peri-urban, a settlement within an hour or so's drive of Joburg and close enough for plenty of interaction between the two to take place; again, the semi-rural setting and the characters in it invite comparison with their urban counterparts. The stories show the long-range effects of a pervasive urban culture, affecting people beyond its topographical limits.

Apartheid embodied an ideological organization of space as well as race, in its 'native locations' and group areas, and in its race classifications, and there was to be no crossing of the spatial and racial divides. In a post-apartheid South Africa, the barriers do not exist formally, though a shadow of them remains in the collective memory and in social practices. But even these are fading fast as encounters across borders become more and more common. The set of stories illustrates these transitional movements in a transforming society.

There is another way in which space serves as a unifying agent in the texts: the interactions of characters inevitably take place in a range of spaces.

There are sites of learning: in 'Personal Power' and 'The Sacred Order of Power Eternal' many diverse characters come together in the seminar room, and in 'Women of Madimole', the venue for the course in sewing skills to empower rural women is a school hall.

The private space of the home is a theme in the collection of texts, with homes as diverse as the people in them. It is the field against which the drama of isiZulu's decline is played out ('Ukuhlalisa Umsamo'); it is the setting of excited preparations for a cat show ('Anna Purrna'); it is the quiet space in which two people (Mrs Levine and Anyway) share their old age; it is the scene of degradation from which Loki springs; Camilla finds her conflict with her mother taking place in their comfortable home. The Portuguese home ('Uma Casa Portuguesa') is defined by its people and physical attributes (the grapevine, the blue tiles); the best umkhukhu in Diepkloof ('Umlotha') is the site of Zondi's pride and grief and joy; Wellington's extravagant party takes place in a home which is a wonderful mixture of isiZulu and European elements, and the fact that it is opened to a medley of party invitees, makes it something of a public space too. An interesting turnabout happens in 'Hunger', when the public spaces of Eskom servitudes and school car-parks become the private

spaces of home for construction workers like Alfrons and Dushi; and the empty space where a home should have been is the subject of 'Homesick'.

The single theme of 'home' is explored in a variety of ways. Each home has its own distinct character and it colours and expresses the lives of those who live in it. For instance, the Ngidi's homestead in the country is characterized by rich isiZulu culture and history, illuminating the character of the couple who have made it so. Mrs Levine and Anyway live in a house still organized according to the long-superseded apartheid relations of mistress and servant; it fixes the tenor of both their lives. That it has fallen into decrepitude, from its heyday under apartheid, tracks the decline of the social sector from which Mrs Levine comes.

On the other hand, much of the action takes place in public spaces: James meets Donny in a jazz bar; the cat show is held in the Coca Cola Dome; a Greek bakery in a shopping mall is the scene of 'The Purse'. It is to a mall that Mrs Levine and Anyway repair one Christmas season; Deva sets himself a personal challenge in an upmarket restaurant; Tossie spends her Sunday morning in church in 'Psalmen en Gezangen'. Loki engages in drinking brandy and smoking dagga at a playpark, and the public roads of Jozi are the scene of Andrew's monologue in 'The Immaculate Character'.

Public spaces are by definition places where people meet. The trajectories of different characters' lives intersect here, often haphazardly, sometimes by design. James Findlay's meeting with Donny Ngidi in a jazz club is a surprise to both of them and it has consequences at least for James, in opening up the wounds of the past. Another chance interaction is that between Bonisiwe and Diana, typical of so many interactions between the privileged and the disadvantaged, and serving to sadden Bonisiwe while Diana barely notices her. The moment at which Loki sees his 'sister' Lulu in a passing car, is full of drama. Lulu sees the violent bully on the pavement and recognizes with horror that he is searching for her; Loki is pleased to have marked his prey. This is not a chance meeting but is brought about by Loki's intentions.

2.2 Joburg Society

That this is a highly diverse society emerges from the chapter on *Representing Difference*. In my Proposal (Malherbe, 2010) I made the claim that where South Africa in the time of apartheid could be characterized as a modern society, post-apartheid society could be understood with the help of postmodern ideas and strategies.

'The outstanding characteristic of our society seems to be its heterogeneity - there are many groups in South Africa's population with their own distinctive identities. Since the fall of apartheid, interaction among them all has increased ... The various ideas in postmodernism seem to offer an effective prism through which to view the salient characteristics of South Africa at present; in the

same way, the previous regime yields to a modernist analysis. Before 1991, the country was ruled by the ideology of apartheid, an extreme version of a totalitarian theory centred around the dichotomous black/white distinction, with any shades of difference strictly disallowed. Apartheid was, in Lyotard's phrase (1984:xxiv) a "meta-narrative"; it was a regulating principle which ordered all aspects of society inflexibly and without exception, arrogating absolute truth to its views and even invoking a deity to validate them. In this, it drew on the axioms of modernity and at least some of the brutality of the ideology lay in the assumption of universal truth with its concomitant suppression of dissent and strategic elision of differences among people.

If apartheid was based on typically modern principles, then the reactive post-apartheid dispensation might be expected to evince postmodern principles. In fact, the reaction to apartheid *has* entailed recognition of what it denied: the separate identities and rights of the multifarious people of our country. Postmodernism shows that hegemonic theories are not indubitable, that the individual is free to challenge or reject (not 'refute' for this implies a competing ideology) tyrannical universalist ideologies, and this is liberating. "I define the postmodern as incredulity toward meta-narratives" (Lyotard, 1984:xxiv). As diverse communities come into their own, freed of the inhuman restrictions of the old regime, there has been a flowering of diversity, a transformation of "black and white" into "rainbow", and this has been a liberation' (Malherbe, 2010:6).

In fact, a society which acknowledges its own intrinsic heterogeneity, cannot logically support specific metanarratives, since the metanarrative relies on theoretical generalizations over the whole of some society, generalizations which then apply to each of the units of that society. For instance, in the days of apartheid, everybody was either white or non-white. To claim that contemporary South African society does have a meta-narrative (the meta-narrative of diversity) is to overlook that a meta-narrative must apply to each of the people making up that society. It does not make sense to say of an individual that he or she is diverse. And a disjunctive generalization which manages to name all the various ethnic, economic, linguistic, etc., aspects of diversity in our society, is hardly a generalization but an enumeration.

The collection of stories aims to reflect the dislocated nature of contemporary social interaction in Joburg. People from vastly different walks of life meet by accident, like Tossie and Gladys in 'Psalmen en Gezangen', or Bonisiwe and Diana Findlay in 'The Purse'. They might meet and interact in the course of home-life or work, like Anyway and Mrs Levine in 'Living Together' and 'Steady Arm'; like Deva and the diners he serves in 'Time of Trial', like Andrew and the people he encounters on his way to and from work ('The Immaculate Character'). Sometimes the interaction is set in the framework of leisure or hobby ('Anna Purrna', 'The Hooks in Jazz', 'Uma Casa Portuguesa', 'Gifts of Fortune'), sometimes, diverse people come together in the context of self-improvement (Conan's

courses, 'Sacrifice', 'Women of Madimole', 'Silk Road'). But whatever the nature or context of the interaction, it often has an air of happenstance, fortuitousness, since it has not come about by direct planning or intention but is rather the result of the sheer proximity of people (in the public spaces of Johannesburg, as discussed above). This society is one that knocks about in a haphazard way, elements bumping into each other painfully ('A Good Day for Loki', 'Women of Malimode', 'The Hooks in Jazz') or gainfully ('Personal Power', 'The Sacred Order of Power Eternal', 'Gifts of Fortune').

Nevertheless, beneath the welter of unintended and fortuitous interactions, is a pattern of implicit connections that link seemingly disparate elements like James Findlay and his secretary Lulu, Loki and Bonisiwe, Diana Findlay and Mrs Levine, Gladys and Anyway. The reader is invited to follow the clues that will explicate the pattern, since ultimately, every single character has some connection to every other character, as is possible in a chosen segment of society.

2.3 Bridges and Gaps

The notion of a gap implies some distance between two or more things, certainly a separation. There is also the implication that the gap is the nothingness of an unknown quantity, because if it were plainly filled with something, it would not be a gap. For something to bridge a gap, it must link the two sides of the separation, either by filling in the gap or by throwing some link across the two. This is the understanding of 'gaps' and 'bridges' that I make use of here.

In my Proposal (Malherbe,2010:5) I used the term 'short cuts form' to signify the textual schema I intended to follow. It was inspired in part by the film of that name (Altman, 1993) based on the short stories of Raymond Carver and itself giving rise to a book of the stories in the film with the title *Short Cuts* (Carver, 1995). The distinguishing feature of these stories as retold by Altman is that they were all set in Southern California, they all depicted the diverse types making up Los Angeles society, and there were surprising links between various characters. In his Introduction, Altman says that the stories are 'more about what you don't know rather than what you know, and the reader fills in the gaps, while recognizing the undercurrents' (Carver:7).

That the reader should fill in the gaps is also the explicit intention of Henry Fielding in his novels, and the reader is exhorted in pages of direct address to make the effort of supplying meaning, interpreting and inferring where description is (deliberately) lacking. For instance, the reaction of Lady Booby to Joseph's unco-operativeness when she attempts to seduce him, is not described. The reader is invited to imagine it; 'the nondescription of Lady Booby's surprise ... create(s) a gap in the text. The narrative breaks off, so that the reader has room to enter into it. ... Thus the reader's imagination is left free to paint in the scene' (Iser, 1974:38). In this way, the reader creates the *gestalt* of the text for her- or himself.

My project is rather different and the challenge I issue to the reader is not to achieve the thorough-going constitution of the text that Fielding would want. It is simply to notice the liberal clues laid down in the various stories as to links between certain characters, objects and events, and to infer the relations and events that are hinted at in these clues. In class discussion, warnings were sounded about 'making the reader work too hard' and doubts were expressed as to whether readers would pick up the clues, scattered as they are among various stories. I think the fact that the seminar group read the texts not in a piece but with gaps of several weeks in between, made it difficult to pick up the clues or put the bridges in place. It will not prove difficult for a reasonably alert reader who reads all the texts consecutively and in the order given, in which the time sequence is straightforward. The possibility of a jumbled-up chronology was tempting but in the end I decided to aim for maximum impact of the clues and so a chronology which follows the order of the stories.

What are these gaps and bridges? Sometimes the gap is huge and important, as when James Findlay speaks of his longing for his unknown child, and Lulu speaks of the father she has never known. The reader is able to bridge this gap with the information that James' long-lost lover was called Samina ('The Hooks in Jazz') and Lulu's disclosure that her mother was called Samina and her unknown biological father was from Britain ('Uma Casa Portuguesa').

Another important gap is that around the mystery of where Loki got his wealth from, why he refers to it as 'sewing machine nyuku' ('A Good Day for Loki'), and why he should think he 'gave up' Lulu's cellphone, purse and jewellery for it. The answers lie in 'Women of Malimode', where Loki's habit of using violence to steal from his relatives is discussed. The poor security of the school hall is mentioned, as well as the presence of thirty new sewing machines in it (machines for the 'development course' which was just free labour). The reader is invited to imagine the scene in which Loki used violence to take Lulu's purse, cellphone and jewellery, and she bargained for them with the information about the much bigger haul of the sewing machines.

Sometimes the gap is small and of little consequence, as when Bonisiwe has her pink Hello Kitty purse stolen while on a taxi ('The Purse') and Loki finds a pink Hello Kitty purse on the windowsill and proceeds to look through Bonisiwe's cards in it and then rip it apart ('A Good Day for Loki') - this being a filament that serves to make an indirect connection and also to develop the idea of everyone's interconnectedness. Sometimes the gap is significant: a missing cat and Deva's speculations as to her fate, change the course of his life. The reader is able to fill in this gap by reading 'Hunger'.

There are lacunae in the text which the reader will not be able to complete from information given within the stories. These are inconclusive situations, inviting speculation and an imaginative rumination on what might have been the case. For instance, the reader is not told whether Loki does

ever make a connection with Lulu in her new home in Rosettenville, or whether James and Lulu do realize that they are father and daughter, or whether Mandai and Deva do eventually restore their relationship. I do not think it my duty to tie off every loose end and present the reader with a neatly and completely determined story or set of stories which precludes any speculative involvement of the reader in the text.

The interconnectedness of all the characters, however, can be traced from the first piece, where Deva and Mandai are introduced. Their prize cat is the dinner of Alfrons and his friend Dushi who later lodges with Gladys and Zondi, Gladys being the unwelcome passenger of Tossie whose husband Andrew has an immaculate character and is in the self-improvement course with Mandai, who is a relation of Luís who is the boyfriend, later husband, of Lulu, who is the daughter of Samina (Babs Jacobs), friend of Rafiloe, and James Findlay, who is the husband of Diana and father of Camilla and Sebastian, and the friend of Donny Ngidi, husband of Irene, friend of Wellington and son of Dlabela and Nokuthula Ngidi, etc, etc. Conan's courses draw together several key characters, notably Diana and James, as does Wellington's grand party.

Discussion of some of the metaphors that came up in the seminars to describe the text (listed above in the *Introduction* to this chapter) may help to elucidate the nature of its underlying form.

The idea of an archipelago with connecting land masses submerged is apt because the stories are usually outstanding events or occasions in the characters' lives. There is a great deal not written about but which the reader is able to infer from the stories, in the same way that islands can be seen as mountains on some landscape and the underlying landmass inferred from their shape. That the stories are outstanding events in people's lives chimes with the idea that most of ordinary life is conducted on 'autopilot' and it is only the events of significance that are remembered or that stand out in anyone's biography. Then, there is the idea of connectedness: the islands may appear separate and different, but they are really all part of the same landscape, the water here playing the role of the gaps we have spoken of. Can we call this 'a submerged novel' in any sense? I think the answer is 'yes', given the interconnectedness of all the characters. There are many more characters than the standard novel employs and their relationship to each other is sometimes tenuous, but with certain allowances for diffuseness, we can see them all as making up a single complex narrative. (See below for the collection of linked short stories by Elizabeth Strout which is subtitled *A Novel in Stories*, and Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad*.)

Seeing the stories as accretions of a crystal is probably the result of their coming to the group's attention in batches over time, but this metaphor captures the aspectual nature of the whole. The stories present various aspects of one society (the crystal or gemstone) and their diversity reflects the different facets of that society.

The metaphor of a tower of Babel or charivari brings attention (somewhat pejoratively) to the diverse or diffuse nature of the text as a whole. There are twenty-eight characters in all the stories. Of course, some are more important than others, which serves as a means of organizing them all into ten clusters defined by closeness of relationship. There are links between the clusters. The question that must be asked is whether twenty-eight characters, even reduced to ten close groups, are not too many for a reader to handle in one text purporting to be a unity, to be about one community. I think it will depend very much on the individual reader as to whether this degree of diffuseness is welcomed as an expansive and liberating departure from the norm, or whether it is rejected as hopelessly over-complicated and confusing. But the reader who does stay with the text will be rewarded by the gradual emergence of the linked pattern.

Wittgenstein (1953) is the original author of the strands-of-a-rope metaphor. In his investigations into the idea of 'language games' he asks what there is in objective reality that is the referent of the word 'games'. Every set of features common to some games will not completely fit other games. He concludes that games are linked in the way that strands of a rope are connected: no single strand runs the length of the whole rope but shorter strands are locally connected in a way that gives the rope strength: A to B, and B to C, and C to D, but not A to C nor B to D. This new development in mereology offers a way of understanding a whole in which diverse parts are connected only indirectly. So too the different characters in my stories are connected locally, in ways that mimic the strands of a rope (see the fifth paragraph above here). Again, the whole rope represents the single society of all the characters in the stories.

To see the stories as a spider's web is to focus on the multifarious nature of the links between people. In a web, each nexus would represent an individual character and the strands radiating out from that nexus to others, would represent the relationships among people. Thus, for instance, Diana Findlay has connections to James (her husband), Bonisiwe (at the Greek deli), to Lulu and Luís (her husband's employees), to Mandai, Andrew, Wellington (fellow personal-power students); Lulu has connections to Samina, Rafiloe, Loki (from her home in Malimode), Luís (her boyfriend, later husband) and James (a double connection, one hidden), and so on. It will not do to press this metaphor too far - I don't think an illustration of all the connections between characters would have the exact symmetry of a spider's web - but it captures an important aspect of their interconnectedness.

The bones-in-a-skeleton metaphor is best understood if we suppose the bones to be an archaeological find, say the remains of a long-dead dinosaur buried in some ancient swamp. Then the task of the archaeologist is to re-assemble the dinosaur's skeleton, piecing the bones together in a way that makes them into one coherent whole. Carrying the metaphor across to my stories, we

see that pieces of bone stand for bits of information which the reader is given, e.g., that James' first love was called Samina, and that Lulu's mother is called Samina and that her biological father, whom she has never met, came from Britain, that he 'always paid for her', etc., and then it is up to the reader to assemble the pieces into a single story. The idea of fitting pieces together to make an intelligible picture is also behind the metaphors of a jigsaw puzzle and a mosaic of splinters.

The notion of a pre-existent pattern or picture is the sense of the metaphors of a join-the-dots puzzle and a building or boat built bit by bit to a blueprint. These imply rather more 'writing to a pattern' than I am conscious of having done. The picture that the dots make up, and the blueprint, were never clearly in my mind as I wrote. There were certain themes of a post-apartheid society that I wished to illustrate, as set out in the Proposal, but the whole picture or ground-plan emerged in the process of writing, so that it post-dated the writing and not the other way around. Connections suggested themselves from one story to the next; for instance, it was possible to insert Mandai as a guest at the Portuguese lunch after I had written the story, realizing that it would further the story of his relationship with Deva, would link him to Luis and Lulu, and further the theme of multiculturalism. There is, nevertheless, a pattern discernible in the whole text.

Lastly, the stories have been compared to a tangled bush (*deurmekaarbos*). A shrub whose branches are intertwined in complex and intricate ways is a good depiction of the relationships that exist among the characters in the stories, showing how their paths criss-cross, touching each other at various points, and yet all forming one organic whole - a single bush.

It is worth noting that the metaphors which seem intuitively to be most apt, are those involving imaginative reader-participation in the construction of the text.

Texts having the form of 'linked short stories' are increasingly evident and popular at present. An early example is Kundera's *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1980); highly original in form, it is 'a novel in seven parts that were independent yet so closely bound that anyone of them read by itself would lose much of its meaning ... by giving each part the nature of a short story, I made unnecessary the whole seemingly unavoidable technique of large-scale novel composition' (Kundera, 1995:165). Each part deals with the same themes.

A later book with this form is Alice Walker's *By the light of my father's smile* (1998), quite new in its conception: the dead write their chapters about the living from some afterlife vantage point, just as the living do. It is the story of an oppressive patriarchal father, Mr Robinson, a pastor of some church, who travels to a primitive community to do missionary work. The stories of his daughters Magdalena and Langley are told in their own voices, and there are gaps which the reader must fill in by inferring information, to get a comprehensive view of what happened.

Michael Cunningham's *The Hours* appeared in 1999: a triptych telling the stories of Virginia Woolf's writing of Mrs Dalloway and her subsequent suicide, of how post-war bride Laura Brown came to leave her husband and children after reading Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, and of how Clarissa ('Mrs Dalloway' to her dying and troubled poet-lover) tried to give him a party but he committed suicide first. A brilliant, stylish book, winner of the Pulitzer Prize, it depends on the gaps and links in it for dramatic effect. One obvious link is the novel *Mrs Dalloway*. Another (evident only at the end) is that Laura Brown is the absconding mother of the troubled poet-lover; the small boy who was Laura Brown's son, is the dying man as a child. This is similar to what I am trying to do, i.e., keeping characters hidden and making disclosure a matter of the reader's inference.

Winner of the Caine Prize for African fiction in 2006 was the story *Jungfrau*, from Mary Watson's *Moss* (2004). It consists of 11 short stories featuring the same characters, interconnections among whom are often implicit, awaiting the reader's explication. The wicked Jessica or Jez is a main figure, occurring in most of the stories; Evie, Sean, Alice and others form the filigree of character that carries the stories. There are many gaps, and at the beginning of the last story, 'Endpiece', Watson sets out her conception of form in a beautiful piece of text about storytelling. The questions that arise are about where to start, how to construct a narrative and which events to choose to carry it forward. She believes that it's the little asterisks of omission or elision, that hold the story up 'as the stars hold up the sky', a poetic view of how successful involvement of the reader in text-interpretation by way of gaps can transform and enrich the reading experience.

Two books which are close in organization to what I am attempting, i.e., linked short stories, are *The Turning* by Tim Winton (2005) and *Olive Kitteridge. A Novel in Stories* by Elizabeth Strout (2008; winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction 2009). In the stories of both, the same characters appear again and again, from different points of view - now as the main character, now as just a peripheral bit-player - and at different times of their lives. In both, the stories are centred on a small town. In *The Turning*, the seventeen stories are all about a couple of families in and from an industrial harbour village on the western Australian seaboard called Angelus. In Strout, the topographical centre is a small Maine town. In my case, the stories are all centred on Johannesburg.

There is an additional formal principle giving the stories cohesion in each. Winton's stories all ostensibly have the theme of a 'turning', or pivotal point, that causes someone's life to take a different path, though in some of his stories, it is hard to make the case for such a pivotal point. Strout's pieces all involve to a greater or lesser extent, the character of Olive Kitteridge, though in a couple of the stories, the device looks a bit flimsy as Olive is added like a fifth wheel to the story. No additional organizing principles were necessary in my view. The linking of characters in one particular location across a set of stories is all the unity these stories need and it provides a very

satisfactory form of cohesion. Indeed, the subtitle of Strout's book is 'A Novel in Stories' and the reader will concede that the set of texts *is* a novel, complex, diffuse and intricately told, but the story of one town, one set of characters. The subtitle thus expresses more than just the publisher's fear that a book of short stories won't sell.

It may even be the case that linked short stories are the literary 'flavour of the month'. The Pulitzer Prize for novels announced on 19 April 2011 was awarded to *A Visit from the Goon Squad* by Jennifer Egan. The citation praised her 'inventive investigation of growing up and growing old in the digital age, displaying a big-hearted curiosity about cultural change at warp speed'. According to the *New York Times* (19 April) report of the award 'she radically re-imagined the novel genre by writing a series of interlocking stories'. She is quoted as saying: 'At one point, I was calling it entangled stories. It's a little mysterious in its genre. In a way, who cares? As long as it feels like a story.'

'Linked short stories' seems to be a common epithet for a variety of forms, some very different from Winton, Strout, and what I have done. Just two examples are *Love in Infant Monkeys* by Lydia Millet (2009) and *Eucalyptus* by Murray Bail (1998). Both have been described as 'linked short stories' but they are nothing like the two discussed just above. The Millet is a collection of stories about animals, usually though not always in interaction with some celebrity, thus a unity of theme but no links between characters. *Eucalyptus* is a romance in which a suitor, Scheherezade-like, tells unrelated stories to a girl, stories which only justify the description 'linked' in so far as they are told by one person to one audience within a larger story.

These two attributions of 'linkage' show that it is necessary to define our sense quite clearly, and we shall say that stories are linked in our sense if and only if there are characters that recur in them and each character can be linked to any other character by some means, direct or indirect. Sometimes the link will be supplied by a common pursuit, as in Conan's courses where Andrew, James and Diana, Wellington, Mandai and Luis all know each other as fellow students. Sometimes the link will be a personal relationship like marriage or parentage. Sometimes it may be bizarre and not necessarily known to the parties, as when Alfrons and Dushi are linked to Mandai and Deva by the fact of having eaten their cat. The essence of a link is just that it brings two or more people into a shared experience that, were it to be discussed by the parties, would result in recognition. 'Oh, you are the one who ...'.

This definition may be a bit strained at times. Consider the link between Diana Findlay and Anyway. It would run from Diana through Lulu to Loki to Anyway and Diana would 'recognize' Anyway only as 'a victim of Lulu's criminal cousin'. But in the main, it will serve to justify the claim of connection between characters.

2.4 Aspirations

Lastly, there is a unifying theme in all of the stories and this time we do not even have to except that oddity 'The Chief of the Monkeys'. In one way or another, all the stories deal with people seeking to better their lives, or escape some kind of distress. Because of the great variety of contexts, there is a corresponding variety in the kinds of aspirations portrayed.

Diana's context is that of a comfortable middle-class lifestyle, but it is felt as unendurable by her because she cannot see herself ever reaching heights comparable to, say, Wellington's degree of luxury, and she seeks to rise above her perceived mediocrity through Conan's courses in 'personal' and 'sacred power'. Her beatific vision is dictated by a thoroughly consumerist society, a vision she evinces upon first seeing Wellington's luxurious mansion, with the remark: 'Oh this is divine ... I could be happy if I had a place like this.'

In a much humbler way, Gladys is 'homesick' because she has no home of her own; she deals with her lack rather ineffectually by daydreaming of the home she might have had, and it is her son Zondi who brings her back to a practicable course of action. She has had one home taken from her by the harsh rules of customary devolution of property ('Umlutha') and though she longs for it, she feels fairly hopeless about ever having a home of her own. In contrast to Diana, who already possesses a fine house, Gladys' longing for a home expresses a basic human need. The comparison points to the wide gap between rich and poor in our society.

Another home is that in 'Uma Casa Portuguesa'. It is a centre of happy family life and a source of joy to its inhabitants. The context from which aspirational longing arises in that story is of another kind: the very personal unhappiness of Lulu regarding her spotty escutcheon (an unhappiness experienced by many in our diverse society) which she deals with by sharing it with the warm company at that luncheon table.

The home is prominent in the stories of Mrs Levine and Anyway, though the distress from which their aspirations arise, is muted, centred in the passing of their whole way of life, formerly comfortably off and now sliding into poverty and decrepitude. All they hope for is to be able to maintain the status quo for their remaining days. Similarly, the distress experienced by Dlabela and Nokuthula Ngidi in 'Ukuhlalisa Umsamo' is that of seeing their traditional home and way of life passing away, a grief that they do not know how to deal with because it seems inevitable, and it is Donny's source of distress too, which he tries to deal with by consulting various shamanic healers.

Sometimes the distress is of the most basic kind. Alfrons is living rough, earning a pittance as a labourer, and is desperate with hunger when he and Dushi conspire to capture, braai and eat Anna Purrna. Loki's misery is endemic: that of a boy with no prospects and a settled habit of crime and violence who deals with his situation by substance abuse and criminal violence. Belesi in 'The Chief

of the Monkeys' is also engaged in crime though it is a source of satisfaction to him until he is caught. There is endemic misery in the poverty-stricken community of Malimode, which makes the promised sewing skills programme seem like salvation to Rafiloe, and even when the skills learned are minimal because the women have merely been used as free labour to produce sheet sets, Rafiloe is glad she has learned something to offset the numbing emptiness of her life.

All the participants in Conan's courses have their own private griefs and dissatisfactions to deal with and they perceive the courses as a means to salvation. Wellington, in spite of his vast wealth, feels there is something eating at his heart which he tries to deal with by excess in everything: food, furnishings, clothes, his houses, his celebrations. Andrew, in spite of his apparently overweening self-confidence, needs affirmation which he hopes to get in the course. Mandai, having just broken up with Deva, is at a loss to fill his time and mind.

Loss is a locus of distress in several of the stories. Her mother's materialism is the source of anxiety for Camilla Findlay because Diana is determined to make her daughter share her tastes. Camilla wants nothing more than to stay at home, at her old school with all her friends, but Diana will make her go to a high-powered school for leaders and she will lose all that *she* values in service of her mother's values. 'Anna Purrna' sets the scene for the loss of his beloved cat for Mahadevan (Deva), a trauma that will shake him to the roots and result in a change of his basic life-orientation. A smaller loss (though to its owner it was a huge loss) is the purse that is stolen from Bonisiwe on her way to work one morning, a loss aggravated by Diana Findlay's interaction with her in the Greek bakery. The loss of his unknown child is a source of grief to James Findlay and though he longs to know her, he is trapped in a marriage that precludes his ever finding or reclaiming the child.

All the stories thus have a theme of distress of some kind, usually springing from the circumstances of our present society, and of how people deal with that distress, aspiring to better themselves through consumerism, crime, 'spiritual' improvement, etc. These means to redemption are all indicative of a certain political and social milieu, and even when the protagonists don't achieve the sought-after state, their stories are aspirational.

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