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Nostalgia contretemps: A theory of contemporary South African literature

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Introduction: nostalgia *contretemps*

> The future. She placed her finger under the words.
> No, I signalled with my eyes, no, no, don't come with your silly games now
>
> *Agaat* – 12

As the concept of nostalgia continues to be explored with revivalist energy, definitions become increasingly obfuscated and meaning proliferates into sometimes overwhelming forms of relativism. I make this assertion at the outset if only to state an accusation that may be leveled against this thesis in which I challenge the boundaries of nostalgia by embarking on a re-evaluation of its temporal frameworks. My aim, however, is to account for the context specific manifestations that nostalgia assumes within the South African national and literary imaginary as nostalgia *contretemps*.

Seminal theorists such as Benedict Anderson (1986) Homi Bhaba (1990) and Slavoj Žižek (2000) have long since established how the nation, as a socio-political structure, gains discursive presence through narrative production and contestation. Indeed, this belies a complex relationship between the nation and the literary, where often the literary is – for better or worse – in service of nationalist projections. Literature however, through an awareness of narrativity, is less a purveyor of national ideology. Instead, it is a deeply reflexive mechanism that can simultaneously employ and react to discursive structures. More importantly, in its imaginative and generative capacity, literature often assumes the ethical role of creating space for the nation that is always 'other' to itself.

In the South African context, various literary theorists express relief as they come to define 'post-transitional' South African literature through its very ability to step out of its 'national

service' (Frenkel and MacKenzie 2010, Medalie 2010, Jamal 2010 and Barnard 2012: 652). In recent years the term 'post-transitional' has come into usage in South African cultural and literary studies. Its aim is to account for the dynamic changes that occur within a national and literary imaginary after discarding the politically laden impetus of the anti-apartheid struggle and the easy optimism of post-apartheid nation-building. Yet, this illusion of escape is somewhat premature. It fails to account for the ever-evolving nature of political discursive strategies and the literary imaginary. As I argue and illustrate during the course of this thesis, it seems more constructive to explore contemporary literature as a direct reflection of a national imaginary that is constantly changing and being reinscribed as opposed to reading the literary as severing its prior engagement with the national imaginary.

In contending this position, I assume a state of untimeliness in relation to the 'post' of post-transitional literature, irrespective of the fact that the literary texts I examine in this thesis, with publication dates that range from 2002-2010, could easily be categorised in this way.[1] Through a close-reading of Mark Behr's *Kings of the Water* (2010), Justin Cartwright's *White Lightning* (2002), Imraan Coovadia's *High Low In-between* (2009), Anne Landsman's *The Rowing Lesson* (2007), Marlene Van Niekerk's *Agaat* (2006) and Zoë Wicomb's *Playing in the Light* (2006), I explore these narratives as symptomatic of a national imaginary grappling with the very elusiveness of a 'post-transitional' South Africa, and which now makes its accommodations through the conceptual frameworks of nostalgia.

[1] Arguably, my analysis alludes to the contre-temporary nature of these texts.

Nostalgia, etymologically speaking, reflects a desire for an idyll (*nostos*), through an assertion of longing, return or loss (*algia*). It is, quite literally, the dis-ease of dis-placement. My chosen texts all share a common plot structure of a young protagonist who has chosen to live outside of South Africa but now returns to mourn the death of a dead or dying parent. In some senses, these narratives bear traces of exile writing, a familiar genre in the South African context.[2] But considering that legal restrictions of apartheid no longer apply and conditions of postmodernity and globalization have turned us all into 'exile' figures of sorts, 'expatriate fiction' now appears to be a more fitting classification.[3]

[2] Much as Jean Starobinski suggests in "The Idea of Nostalgia" (1966), nostalgia and exile share common themes. Arguably, this makes the genre conducive to the exploration of nostalgic affect. As a case in point, Dennis Walder reflects on his experience as a South African exile, stating that "of course, however I would seek to define myself in relation to my place of origin, as an exile, emigre or, as Christopher Hope once defined himself to me, an escapee, I have to acknowledge that any remembering I indulge in will already be part of a cultural framework that to some extent […] predefines my remembering" (2005: 425). Having spent a childhood in South Africa and his adulthood in the UK, Walder recounts how his early memories are subject to aesthetic representations that make him liable to nostalgia. However, understanding that Romantic feelings for his white existence in apartheid South Africa are questionable, he wonders if the South African white exile can be brought into a less problematic and more authentic relationship with memories of the past. For a more general overview of exile writing in the South African context see Tlhalo Raditlhalo's "Writing in Exile" (2012).

[3] Furthermore, this distinction allows for the reflexive irony that has developed in response to the 'exile' figure of late. In *Lost Ground* (2011), Michiel Heyns also employs a white male protagonist, Peter Jacobs, who returns to South Africa after living in London for the past 22 years. Engaging in conversation with a young, black woman, Nonyameko, the following exchange is had:

> "'You are a novelist who is having trouble finding a subject in England, and now you have come out here to write a novel about an ex-South African coming back, let me guess, to be by the bedside of a dying parent – yes, the dying parent is obligatory, like a necklacing in the novels of the eighties – a man who is forced to revisit the past, or *confront* the past, more particularly his own tortured past, the torture usually figurative, sometimes literal, involving the Truth and Reconcilation Commision. At the end of the novel he will go back to England vaguely defeated and strongly relieved.'
> 'You seem to have the plot off pretty pat.'
> 'Oh, the plot is standard ex-pat. We have had about twenty of those, treating us to their momentous return to the mother country and the examination of their own entrails and consciences. The details may differ but the essence is the same: a mixture of self-examination and self-congratulation, with poor tired old South Africa serving as both punch bag and security blanket. Your novel, like the others before it, will sell reasonably well and be commended in the press. The Brits like being reminded that South Africa is after all as backward as they always suspected before they were obliged, for a short while, to profess admiration.
>
> (Heyns 2011: 28)

Heyns's ironic stance is interesting in that it already implies a set of ready thematic and structural conventions that govern 'ex-pat' literature. Additionally, the irony is suggestive of impatience with the sentimentalism these texts sometimes exude.

However, the broad description of 'expatriate fiction' is also crude in that there are notable variations in the repetition of this central thematic concern. Behr's *Kings of the Water* is the only novel that narrates the experiences of a homosexual protagonist named Michiel. As a result, this novel explores, with greater focus, themes of sexual shame, guilt and confession when the protagonist returns to South Africa for his mother's funeral. Cartwright's *White Lightning* is the only text that employs humour and reflexive irony as a means to explore the protagonist's return to South Africa and his mother's last days. Coovadia's *High Low In-between* forgoes the pastoral emphasis that is central to many of the other texts, and is, by far, the most politically situated novel. The death of the father in this novel is the result of a political murder and the son, Shakeer (who returns and unexpectedly learns of his father's death) seeks resolution of his father's murder case. The sense of mourning is deliberately conflated with the political and we are never allowed to escape the harsh circumstances of South Africa by slipping into reveries of personal memory, as is possible with the other texts. In *The Rowing Lesson*, Landsman uses her female protagonist as a 'medium' for her dying father: when Betsy returns to South Africa to sit at her father's death bed, the protagonist expresses a desire to 'enter' his body in order to access the memories it contains. The style is eulogistic and, in comparison to the other narratives, finds a greater level of narrative resolution. *Agaat* is interesting in that Van Niekerk has made the formal decision to use the expatriate narrator, Jakkie, only for the prologue, when he is returning to South Africa for his mother's funeral, and the epilogue, when he is leaving South Africa soon after the funeral. The rest of the narrative consists of the experience and pain of his absence as reflected through the stories of the female characters, Agaat and Milla De Wet. In Wicomb's *Playing in the Light*, the protagonist, Marion, is not an expatriate figure in the strict sense of the

word. Yet Marion is proud of her 'European' standards of living and, rather tellingly, owns a travel agency. Also, she does eventually embark on a long trip out of the country during the course of the narrative. Her ageing father does not die but Marion soon discovers the secrets behind her parentage and she is forced to mourn for the parent figures that she never knew to be her own. Through textual analyses, I aim to examine the remarkable consistencies as well as the significant differences in order to illumine how these novels delineate a rather complex and specific relationship[4] between the national imaginary, nostalgia and time.

As contemporary theorists such as Svetlana Boym (2001) and Susannah Radstone (2007) suggest, it is impossible to think nostalgia without time. In *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001) and *The Sexual Politics of Time*: c*onfession, nostalgia, memory* (2007) they argue respectively that while nostalgia appears to have largely topographical investments, it is time that ultimately assumes the role of ensuing and enabling force. [5] As a result, they both view the onset of nostalgia as a direct result of our birth into the awareness of time.

Boym argues that before the invention of mechanical clocks in the 13th century, people were largely uncurious about the time, which meant that a shortage of time was never a concern and

[4] As can already be intimated, in dealing with 'expatriate fiction', this thesis focuses more closely on the traditions of white writing in South Africa and is by no means an exhaustive representation of contemporary South African literature. This explication of the White imaginary will become clearer as I proceed.

[5] This position ostensibly stems from Immanuel Kant who suggested that "what a person wishes to recover is not so much the actual *place* where he passed his childhood but his youth itself. He is not straining toward something which he can repossess, but toward an age which is forever beyond his reach" (Starobinski 1966: 94). At present, adopting this temporalised understanding of nostalgia is a reflection of how we have come to think of nostalgia in terms of growing abstraction. Starobinski (1966), Boym (2001) and Radstone (2007) all provide eloquent surveys of the development of nostalgia from a more concrete experience (geographical and bodily) to a more abstract one (temporal, memory-based, psychological and emotive). Indeed, this is to also to situate my study as complaint with more contemporary nostalgia studies.

societies generally existed in a state of temporal ease. Time did not bear any potential to arouse discomfort, anxiety or desire. However, Boym states that "the diagnosis of the disease of nostalgia in the late seventeenth century took place roughly at the historical moment when the conception of time and history were undergoing radical change" (2001: 8). The pivotal shifts of the 17th century allowed for a time-conscious ethos to take root in human thought, forever altering the experience of temporal ease into one of temporal dis-ease. As Boym so lucidly illustrates, nostalgia is embedded in the unique awareness that time and experience can be other than what it is.

Both Boym and Radstone read this as symptomatic of the 'linear' Judeo-Christian model of time which gained increased significance during the Enlightenment and the Renaissance eras. But as time assumed an increasingly irreversible, expansive and forward-looking trajectory, humanity begins to seek out ways to explore its reversibility and particularity—the first mode of temporal 'rebellion' is arguably that of nostalgia. For as Boym states, the early nostalgic, "instead of aspiring for the universal and the progressive looks backward and yearns for the particular" (2001: 11).

From the 17th century onwards, nostalgia underwent several other modifications but remained committed to its retrospective temporality. It is only the circumstances of modernity that garner enough temporal significance to effectively reconfigure the experience of nostalgia. Boym argues that the painful experience of history in the 20th century taints the past with feelings of suspicion and disappointment and so proves to be an insufficient 'locale' for nostalgic thought. In seeking distance from the past, rather than proximity to it, nostalgic gestures began to be made

in the present. The new-found value of the present, as a temporal expression of immediacy, means that nostalgia too con-temporizes. Modern thinkers are thus "nostalgic for the present, yet they strive not so much to regain the present as to reveal its fragility" (Boym 2001: 23). Nostalgia, in this modern instance, is *both* produced and experienced in the present through an awareness of and longing for its lost potential.[6] It creates an open and unpredictable present in which all possibilities proliferate, inadvertently leaving one open to nostalgic feeling as one is left to lament all of the failed possibilities of the present that have not come to pass.

Turning to postmodernism, Boym argues that nostalgia is here "reduced to an element of historic style; it was not a quest for another temporality" (2001: 30). Similar to Radstone, Boym highlights how postmodernity does not alter the pre-existing temporal experiences of nostalgia but ironises the experience of nostalgia itself.[7] In the light of this observation Boym argues that "it seems more important to revisit the unfinished critical project of modernity, based on an alternative understanding of temporality, not as a teleology of progress or transcendence but as a superimposition and coexistence of heterogeneous times" (2001: 30).

In *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001) Boym coins the term 'reflective nostalgia' which has gained much critical currency in nostalgia studies: it effectively mediates between the excesses of

[6] While Radstone discusses the expansiveness of the present, she argues that nostalgia is produced as a result of modernity's fundamental ambivalence and anxiety towards the past and the future (2007). This differs from Boym's premise that nostalgia is located or produced in the present itself.

[7] In *The Poetics of Postmodernism*, Linda Hutcheon describes postmodern nostalgia as a style rather than an affective condition. She states that "this is not a nostalgic return; it is a critical revisiting, an ironic dialogue with the past" (Hutcheon 1992: 4). Nostalgia is understood as an unsentimental interrogation of the past, which is acknowledged as fundamentally inaccessible. Furthermore, she insists that postmodernism is equally jaded with notions of progress. Hence, Hutcheon's description of postmodern nostalgia also appears to reify or reproduce the temporal frameworks of modernity's present in hyperbolic and frenetic form (1991, 1992 and 2000).

modern and post-modern definitions of nostalgia and brings their strengths together in hybrid form. Her seminal suggestion is that one can effectively reinterpret modernity's nostalgic locale of the present in order to develop an ethical and culturally inclusive experience of nostalgia. Reflective nostalgia thus accepts the irretrievability of the past and allows for an affective affiliation with it through distances that are often humorous, ironic or critical. She argues in favour of a contemporary experience of nostalgia that, despite expressing itself through a "coexistence of heterogeneous times" (Boym 2001: 30), finds its homogeneity in the present. It displays the flexibility of the present by allowing for the various potential relations between memory, distance and affectivity.

In the South African cultural context nostalgia is becoming a central preoccupation[8] and recent analyses often cite 'reflective nostalgia'. Martin Hall and Pia Bombardella explore how the GrandWest Casino in Cape Town "situates itself precisely in the nexus of nostalgia and desire; an enchanted world, larger than life itself, that recalls the magic of the past and projects it into the future, and the possibility of fabulous riches to be attained through gambling" (2007: 247). They argue that the space is an exemplification of reflective nostalgia because the employment of the past has no investment in reclaiming or memorializing history. Instead, it is exploited for its aesthetic appeal as a backdrop for entertainment and capitalistic consumption. The nostalgic architecture, design and décor of the casino are thus not meant to be read in terms of truth, authenticity or history but as postmodern playfulness and decontextualised 'borrowings'.

[8] The 3rd Apartheid Archive Conference: 'Narratives, Nostalgia, Nationhoods', was held at the University of the Witwatersrand during 27–29 July 2011. It was entirely devoted to questions around nostalgia across various disciplines.

Looking more particularly at Zoë Wicomb's *Playing in the Light*, Dirk Klopper argues that the novel deploys "a mode of reflective nostalgia, a nostalgia that knows there can be no return to the past even as it describes the return of this past" (2011: 155). His analysis of the novel examines how Wicomb uses very self-reflexive narrative techniques to distance us from events in the novel. As a result, we are skeptical – less inclined to give in to the idealizing impulses of nostalgia. In this manner he reads the novel as ultimately critical of nostalgia. Instead he suggests that nostalgia is located in the various uncanny figures and events of the text that explore the past as the return of the repressed or as a haunting of the past on the present.

In *Native Nostalgia* (2009), Jacob Dlamini explores the complex dynamics of black experiences of nostalgia in contemporary South Africa. As Dlamini has noted, applying a nostalgic framework to contemporary South Africa presents one with the obvious difficulty that the past is almost always synonymous with apartheid and hence, a sense of fondness for one's past feels illicit and taboo. In order to mediate this impasse, Dlamini employs Boym's reflective nostalgia as both central and favourable to the development of his analysis of contemporary society. *Pace* Boym, Dlamini suggests that the impetus for nostalgia arises out of an "anxiety about what has gone on in post-apartheid South Africa" (2009:156). This disillusionment, he argues, leads one to dwell more fondly on the sensuous and personal memories of the past.

In reading for the particular forms that nostalgia assumes within the imagination of black South Africans, he asserts that black South Africans can revisit the past through distances that are ironic and playful and thus effectively escape the 'state' imposed perception of an impoverished apartheid past. Much like Boym, this reading of nostalgia allows Dlamini to position nostalgia as

resistant to 'the times', for by escaping into reveries of the past the current discontent with social and political infrastructure is made evident. Furthermore, nostalgia takes on political and ethical inflections by allowing Black South Africans to reclaim the past on affective terms that are self-determined in the present.

Jennifer Delisle, likewise, defends black representations and experiences of nostalgia (2006). She addresses how nostalgia is often dismissed as apolitical escapism and argues that reading Gcina Mhlophe's play, *Have You Seen Zandile?* in this manner is superficial. Writing prior to Dlamini (2006), she argues that the play, in accounting for the positive and personal memories of black experience, aims to make a political gesture in itself. She cites Njabulo Ndebele's salient recognition of how black representations often assume a symbolic role as opposed to a rendition of a life or personhood and argues that nostalgia counteracts this easy temptation. By bringing pleasant memories to the fore, by refusing to let feeling become subservient to social cause, nostalgia assumes political importance.

In this manner, Mhlophe's play is seen as counter to the homogenizing and amnesiac processes of nation-building in South Africa which, Delisle argues, places too much emphasis on trauma and victimhood.[9] Yet despite the fact that nostalgia helps to complete memory by accounting for neglected affect, Delisle suggests that it must be read as reflective nostalgia because there is also the awareness of loss that stems from the protagonist's sense of discontinuity and dissatisfaction in the present (2006: 395).

[9] She argues that the tendency to reduce black existences to spectacles of trauma has only been affirmed by the TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission). In seeking to actively unearth trauma, the TRC is seen as marginalising the non-traumatic aspects of the past (Delisle 2006).

Contrary to Delisle, Dennis Walder understands nostalgia as dubiously complaint with post-apartheid nation-building. In *Postcolonial Nostalgias: Writing, Representation, and Memory* (2011), Walder conducts a reading of nostalgia in various postcolonial literary contexts. Based on personal experience as a South African living in exile (Walder 2005), he expands upon the complex uses of memory in the postcolonial context. In South Africa, he notes "a significant new focus upon creating a re-imagined national past involving new representation of the Bushmen" (Walder 2011: 63) which "apparently brings with it an imagined, new national narrative designed to include guilt-stricken white Afrikaners as well as liberal-English poets" (2011: 69). In seeking to foster a common identity and homeland, the South African democratic government encouraged readings of the imaginary plenitude of the San as the shared ancestor of *all* people. Walder finds this deeply unethical, especially considering how these San representations match those of colonial fetish for a pre-colonial African past.[10] Ultimately, he appears unenthusiastic about South African uses of nostalgia in literature, deducing that "generally, the experience of exile and loss, suffering and struggle, embodied in South African writing in English has tended to swing between the poles of this kind of nostalgia and the more sentimental, indulgent, and the unreflective kind" (Walder 2011: 62).

Similarly, David Medalie's assessment of South African fiction is that "in the majority of cases, the nostalgia is glib, unambitious and utterly lacking in self-consciousness" (Medalie 2010: 37). Yet in "The Uses of Nostalgia", he develops a term of his own – evolved nostalgia – in order to

[10] Similarly, Shaun Viljoen discusses a trend he calls "the return to the archive" where there is a new focus "on the injustices done to the indigenous peoples of the country by early colonisers. This, in turn, led to a renewed interest in the history and culture of the San and Khoikhoi in Afrikaans literature" (Viljoen in Viljoen 2012: 464).

illustrate that there are, indeed, exceptions. Conducting a comparative close reading of Jo-Anne Richard's *The Innocence of Roast Chicken* and Anne Landsman's *The Rowing Lesson*, he argues that the latter effectively uses nostalgia in order to draw creative relationships between the past and the present. Furthermore, he is receptive to its display of the *processes* of memory which he reads as a refreshing departure from static depictions of the past. He argues that this use of nostalgia is mature. It is able to apply a critical lens to the past as well as to the present and does not simply seek to make the past subject to utopian impulses and the present to dystopian ones. For Medalie the uses of nostalgia in contemporary South African literature are to represent and acknowledge its transformative potential in relation to both the past and the present.

In light of these 'local' accounts, it is evident that nostalgia is generally accepted as an emotive, ironic or political re-reading of the past or our memories and thus places great emphasis on the temporal location of the present. This serves well to substantiate Boym's conviction that, as a contemporary and global culture, the nostalgic 'reading position' of the present is still a largely relevant one (2001). Yet contrary to these theorists, I argue that the temporal framework of the national imaginary is not entirely predisposed to normative experiences of nostalgia.

In *The Future of Nostalgia*, Boym traces a longstanding relationship between the nation and nostalgia. She states that when the medical definition of nostalgia was coined by the Swiss doctor Johannes Hofer in 1688, "Hofer seemed proud of some of his patients; for him nostalgia was a demonstration of the patriotism of his compatriots who loved the charm of their native land to the point of sickness" (Boym 2001: 4). And as nationalism expands across Western Europe, nostalgia becomes reified as an "expression of new patriotic feeling. The epidemic of

nostalgia was no longer to be cured but to be spread as widely as possible" (Boym 2001: 11). Indeed, many theorists illustrate how nostalgia has often been used to construct a nation and to fortify feelings of national sentiment during times of crisis by allowing for 'a necessary forgetting' (Dames 2001, Santesso 2006, Radstone 2007 and Walder 2011) which ensures that "the *nostos* of a nation is not merely a lost Eden but a place of sacrifice and glory, of past suffering" (Boym 2001: 15). Moreover, Aaron Santesso illustrates how, apart from idealizing the nation's past, nostalgia also encourages the fraternal affect of a "mutually shared past" (2006: 93) for citizens.

This definition of nostalgia is fully conversant with Anderson's unpacking of the temporal frameworks of the modern secular state in *Imagined Communities* (1986). Anderson argues that the nation-state imagines itself to extend out of the past and "still more important, glide into a limitless future" (1986:19). From this we understand that the past, present and future are all employable temporalities in the construction of a nation. Moreover, Anderson argues that the nation, as "an imagined community is an idea of steady, solid simultaneity through time" (1986: 63). Hence the nation is often perceived as one that is subject to the modalities of linear time, progressing from past glory into future greatness.

The South African nation, however, presents an anomaly in this regard. For not only is the past fraught with vivid memories of oppression and trauma which makes it less pliable for idealistic representation, but also, as Leon De Kock points out in *South Africa in the Global Imaginary* (2004), the South African paradox is that our historiographical unity lies in a history of division as opposed to an experience of a mutually shared past. As a result, the national imaginary proves

to be somewhat 'incapable' of experiencing nationalistic forms of nostalgia as they are conventionally conceived.[11]

In "Cracked Heirlooms: memory on exhibition", Ingrid De Kok states that

> The political transformation of South Africa, represented so powerfully on 10 May 1994 by the inauguration of Nelson Mandela as president, was interpreted by most of its citizens as triumph premised on compromise. For support of the new government and goodwill in general to be sustained, that compromise would have to be experienced as worth it: worth the pain and suffering, worth the capitulation. Since the past has to meet the present through settlement, not revolution, it needed an accompanying rhetoric about how to process the future: and that process was divined as the act of nation building
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> (1998: 57)

The South African democratic state, born anew in 1994 as a nation that sought transformation, marks a distinct temporal break with its own past. This implies a national construct that does not extend out of the past but, instead, seeks distance from it. One notes the over-emphasis on the future as a temporal locale in order to construct a national rhetoric, or rather, a rhetoric of nation, for it is out of the promised ideals of the democratic future that the South African nation arises. Furthermore, we witness the ready awareness of *transformation* of the past. By stating a need to transform the past as opposed to an acceptance of it, a utilitarian approach is adopted towards the past such that it may 'count' in favour of the future-oriented nation-state. It is evident that the birth of democratic South Africa is reliant on a temporal framework that is not of Benedict

[11] It is worth noting that some theorists argue that the South African nation does, in fact, employ a more conventional nostalgia in order to reify the nation. As previously referred to, Walder sees evidence of this in the use of San history to construct a common ancestor for *all* South Africans (2011). By way of comparison, the nostalgia that I seek to define is not entirely removed from the 'political scripts' of the state, but it is not entirely subject to it. As I proceed, I seek to uncover the nostalgia that pertains to the affective investment and experiences of citizens and may, at times, serve to critique political narrative and hegemonic definitions of the nation as opposed to being exclusively defined by it.

Anderson's 'sovereign order' but more akin to the kind of temporal experience described by Derrida in *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (1998).

In *Archive Fever*, Derrida considers the postmodern experience of time. He states that "the technical structure of the *archiving* archive also determines the structure of the *archivable* content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future" (Derrida 1998: 17). Derrida argues that in present times, technology predetermines our experience of the archive. The postmodern environment is one of instantaneous recording and communication, making the pace of the archive frenetic; it produces and institutes itself in the same moment. Hence, the present is already a form of 'memory' that exists only in relation to an anticipated future. However, while Derrida reads this archival phenomenon in particular relation to our times, he insists also that it fulfills the apriori role of the archive to display an invested interest in a future as opposed to a past. Hence, one must understand the archive as "no longer, at least, in a temporal or historical modality dominated by the present or by the past" (Derrida 1998: 33) but as that which always pledges the future (1998: 18). Our desire for the future, he suggests, is a prominent structural feature that ultimately determines and colours our experience of time and historical events.

This future-oriented impulse, although prominent in the establishment of the South African democratic state, is not entirely exclusive to it. It has much deeper roots that entwine in preceding ideologies of postcolonialism, liberalism, African nationalism and its particular relation to christian messianism. In his rather fine analysis of South African nationalism, *Do South Africans Exist?* (2007), Ivor Chipkin notes that early "opposition to racial segregation and

apartheid was framed in the terms of Cape liberalism and christianity" (2007: 63). Dating back to the 19th century, the liberal tradition in South Africa was informed by christian ideology and philosophies of humanism. Beginning with the abolition of slavery in the Cape colony, a white minority sought ways to challenge colonial law. Through sociopolitical interventions of a similar kind, liberalism continued to form a consistent voice of dissent during the apartheid era.[12] Apart from overtly christian oppositional sectors (in both black and white churches), movements such as Black Consciousness[13] and African nationalism[14] also employed future-oriented messianism as structurally intrinsic to their ideologies. Yet, "the year 1955 is, schematically, a moment of rupture" (2007:63), states Chipkin. Not only does political opposition become increasingly secular in its appeal and approach, it also becomes variegated in political and racial affiliation. Ultimately, Chipkin claims that South African nationalism came to be "defined in terms of *resistance* to colonialism, racial segregation and apartheid" (2007: 20) [emphasis mine]. Yet in order to realise themselves through notions of resistance (both to and in the present), utopic projections thus became a necessary and central feature in all of these various resistance sectors.

For as Agnes Keller explains, "Utopia is 'somewhere else'; what is here and now is precisely what Utopia is not. That which Utopia is not, is termed 'reality'" (1993: 50). The utopic

[12] Peter Blair states that white liberalism began with the impulse to engage otherness. This idealistic core, Blair suggests, has made liberalism consistently problematic and gradually pluralistic over the years (2012).

[13] Thengani H. Ngwenya states that "in line with its conception as a transformative philosophy, Black Consciousness took, as its point of departure and *raison d'être*, the need for political freedom rather than hankering for a return to some mythical and untouched glorious past regarded as defining the essence of being African" (2012: 504). Ngwenya suggests that Black Consciousness poets took to the active rewriting of history in order to strategically engage with emotive forces such as hope and anticipation for a better future.

[14] Ntongela Masilela argues that in seeking to forge a 'national spirit' rather than tribal or ethnic one, cultural leaders actively took to more Western notions of progress in order to realise their desire for resistance and transformation (2012: 328).

imagination − fuelled by resistance to the present − bears great potential for ahistorical escapism. On the other hand, Keller also illustrates how utopias often find relevance in historical time by undergoing eschatological interpretation. She states that "the timeless can be imagined, and normally also thought, only in and by time, that which is to be expected only in future time; without time, there is no timelessness" (1993: 50). Hence, the timeless 'nowhere' of utopia is usually thought of in terms of a future event.[15] Keller suggests that by situating utopian impulses *in* time, we can exploit its ethical or moral drive to carry us beyond merely escapist ideals.[16] Arguably, the South African historical context provides example of both the use and abuse of utopia as outlined above.

In *The Mind of South Africa* (1990) Allister Sparks notes that during the struggle

> both sides claim a divine imprimatur for their cause in a country that is universally religious as it is socially divided. Just as the themes of faith and politics have been intertwined in the history of Afrikaner nationalism, so have they, too, in the struggle of the black South Africans […] a black theology of liberation which claims that Christ's mission on earth was to identify with the poor and the oppressed. As the two nationalisms square up to each other, it is as much a theological civil war as a political and military one
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> (1990: 278).

[15] Similarly, in "Epic and the Novel", Bakhtin notes that "the appearance of the utopian element in this genre is symptomatic, although it is, to be sure, timid and shallow. The inconclusive present begins to feel closer to the future than to the past, and begins to seek some valorized support in the future" (1981: 26).

[16] She states that

> Major utopias are not mere figments of human imagination. They draw their strength from actuality; they exist, insofar as they exist, in the present. Utopia is lived, practiced, maintained by men and women as a form of life, to a certain extent, as possibility permits, at least within the confines of a narrow circle of people
>
> (Keller 58).

While Afrikaner nationalism uses christian eschatology to justify the retention of apartheid order, the political theology of anti-apartheid movements justified the abolishment of the present order and expressed a 'religious' desire for utopia that is yet to come. Despite the fact that Keller employs a term such as the 'Jewish-Christian imaginary' in order to describe eschatological and messianic thought (as do most theorists), this conflation makes difficult work of understanding Sparks's incredulity in observing how opposing political forces can both – at the same time – claim messianic rights. For the term 'Judeo-christian', while seeking to account for the fact that they both rely on messianic structures, fails to account for the radically different temporal accents they each employ.

Speaking about the rise of Afrikaner nationalism, Sparks highlights how this was informed by beliefs "of a chosen people in their promised land, imbued with a sense of divine mission and equipped with a utopian ideology" (1990: 31). He thus defines it as a fervent form of "sacral nationalism" (Sparks 1990: 31) that ultimately sought redemption of the *volk.* As a culturally inclusive construct, the *volk* is undeniably informed by feelings of 'lost innocence' and became invested in a search for 'the pure', 'the organic' and 'the natural'. It is a model of a lost utopia that needed to be reclaimed on South African soil as "a home for posterity, even unto the remotest future" (Sparks 1990:147).[17] Yet this is a messianic construct in which the past and the future are decidedly fixed. These two temporal points serve as mirroring devices for each other, operating on the imagined premise that "the past had been great and there would be a regeneration of that greatness through a spiritual awakening of the nation" (Sparks 1990:164). Intriguingly enough, this creates an arbitrary experience of time.

[17] And understanding this as God's Will, it becomes perverse justification for apartheid as the restoration of the purity for *all* cultures – not only the *volk*.

In *The Future: an essay on God, Temporality and Truth* (1989), J.R. Lucas explains how "our understanding of time has deep implications for our view of reality and God" (1989: 209). Lucas begins with an exploration of how the perception of god as timeless, eternal and unchanging stems from Greek philosophy (more specifically, the Platonic tradition where the 'good' is always outside of time). Implicitly, this relies on a non-temporal reality where god cannot be "compromised by any taint of temporality or transitoriness" (Lucas 1989: 210). Somewhat paradoxically, in seeking out the non-temporal reality of god, a human conflict with time ensues. It is an eschatological structure that rejects, even despises time – the very thing that removes us from redemption and the presence of god. Hence, the messianic *telos*, in this regard, is always to restore the passage of time to the timelessness of god. And as Lucas rightly argues, when the sense of the eternal is fixed, it becomes less of an indicator of a future and more of a definition of a static and frozen temporal modality (1989).[18]

In the South African context, Afrikaner nationalism exuded a similar temporal condition. Rather tellingly, Sparks notes that "their isolation froze them in time" (1990: 42). This poignantly highlights the static quality of Afrikaner utopianism that used messianic rhetoric to escape rather than confront questions of their own cultural relevance in relation to South Africa's larger sociopolitical reality at that time. On the contrary, the strain of christian messianism that informed resistance movements delineates the temporal difference between the absolute and the

[18] This is easily discernable in Walter Benjamin's description of Klee's angel in "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1968: 258). Exhibiting a 'Judiac' sensibility of time, Benjamin perceives – with a mild sense of terror – a fragmented (as opposed to absolute) rendition of the past and a future that is something other than the past (as opposed to a mirror of it). The sense that the future may, in fact, have dynamic agency (as opposed to a preordained pattern) is troubling. Benjamin's interpretation of this image ultimately projects a desire for temporal perfection that makes him prone to both apocalyptic and nostalgic affect.

improvised, the static and the dynamic, the past and the future – the Old Testament and the New Testament God. In *The Future,* Lucas states that "if time is a perpetual becoming, a weaving rather than an unrolling, we cannot take a static view of the universe, but must see it as dynamic, in which something is always happening, vague possibilities crystallizing out into sharp actuality" (1989: 209). Modeled in direct opposition to Afrikaner nationalism, resistance movements in South Africa sought out and relied on 'definitions of a god' whose active interventions in time could allow for a future as dynamic change and radical alterity. Moreover, in deducing that the past and present has been a miserable exercise in human folly, the future takes on added significance as a distinctly ethical pursuit of subjectivity and a construct of 'home'.

Arguably, it was the 1994, post-apartheid regime that marked this 'event' of arrival in the national imaginary and encouraged readings of utopia incarnate which, as Keller so eloquently describes, is as an exceptional point in history where "for just a short period that people exceed their average moral performance […and] these periods always retain their utopian flavour in our common memory" (1993: 60). Yet in more recent times this protention of hope now appears to have transformed into despair. The 'event' of post-apartheid South Africa is no longer looked upon as the pinnacle of progress in the national imagination as the future that it was intended to reveal has not arrived – indeed, one might argue that it ceases to count as an 'event' at all.

In "Rewriting the Nation", Rita Barnard notes "a distinct shift in mood that occurred in the course of Mbeki's presidency" and "the more disenchanted writing that has emerged in the new millennium" (2012: 652). She understands 'post-transitional' South Africa not merely as an

epochal or temporal description but as one that also accounts for feelings of disappointment because not much appears to have changed for many (2012). Instead, the true 'event' may have been the significant realisation of what Mario Di Paolantonio describes as "a narcissistic national ego" (2000: 153) whose imaginary plenitude always leaves its citizens to deal with its inevitable imperfections. Nevertheless, Barnard maintains that "it would be a mistake for the literary historian to retrospectively minimise the extent to which the political transition marked a true watershed, and one that left an ineradicable thematic and formal imprint on South African writing" (2012: 653).

Similarly, in the Introduction to *Load Shedding* (2009), Sarah Nuttall and Liz McGregor state that South Africa has entered its difficult years. The political upheavals that have occurred since 2007, they argue, have marked a shift in the country's self-representation and signaled the onset of the early symptoms of depression for its citizens. Nuttall and McGregor state that the country is now left with the "the feeling that we were living at the end of the dream years, at the tail end of our big Idea" (2009:10). They allude to the weariness of a cultural imaginary that grapples with the complexities of post-apartheid South Africa, a nation that has now lost sight of the expected or anticipated ideals of a democratic future. Utopia becomes a less apt description for the nation, giving way instead to a nascent nostalgia. Yet the complexity of this national malaise lies in the fact that it is nostalgic for a future that has never arrived. And this, in turn, has led to a desire for an idyll—*nostos*—through an assertion of longing return and loss—*algia*—for a future time that has never been or never arrived—*contretemps*.

***

In "Aphorism Countertime",[19] Derrida conducts a reading of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Through this study we learn that the term *contretemps* can imply mishap, syncopation, inopportunity, out of time and in counter-time. Derrida analyses the play in order to outline its central preoccupation with the anxieties and 'accidents' of time. He proceeds by first establishing the homogeneity of 'objective' and 'external' time, as it is an awareness of this linearity that proves to be the apriori condition out of which the *contretemps* arises. In making a display of the various 'accidents of timing' that occur in the play, and which ultimately lead to its tragic end, Derrida explores how linear time opens up the possibility for 'elsewhere' for the characters. In the play this is expressed through the lovers' wish and desire for the reversibility and malleability of time − for a different time − such that their tragedy may be undone or 'rewritten'.

Much like the *contretemps*, Boym insists that nostalgia, as a state of temporal dissonance, can be effectively read as a rebellion against the ever-narrowing parameters of time.[20] Nostalgia is deemed to be of an aneconomic order that seeks to disrupt an increasingly capitalistic agenda of linearity. Yet, exploring the Derridian *contretemps* further, we find that it is determined also to carry us out of the 'now' as opposed to granting it privilege as a centripetal framework. Contrary to contemporary nostalgias, which utilize the present and the past to challenge the future, the *contretemps* actively employs the future as a means to challenge the present and the past (Derrida 1992: 419).

[19] The French title is '*L'aphorisme á contretemps*'. I have decided to retain the French term *contretemps* as I find the English translation to be a poor one as it only serves to signify 'against time'. Derrida also theorises this term in *Specters of Marx: the state of the debt, the work of mourning, and the new international* (1994a) and provides brief mention of it in *The Politics of Friendship* (1994b).

[20] In her text, Boym describes nostalgia as an awareness that "the time of their happiness is out of joint" (2001: 21) – a seeming echo of the Derridian *contretemps* which also famously presents its argument through Hamlet's line, "'The time is out of joint' " (Derrida 1994: 19–20), in *Specters of Marx*.

As Boym, Radstone and Starobinski lucidly illustrate, nostalgia has proven to be a historically malleable term and is often amenable to contextual interpretation − especially in relation to time. Through their careful expositions on the explicit relationship between time and nostalgia, one notes that nostalgia is a largely temporal dis-ease that is incited by a need to cope with time and, more importantly, with 'the times'.[21] Hence, to talk of nostalgia *contretemps* is to suggest that the future may indeed serve as an organizing temporality for nostalgia. It is to propose a reading of nostalgia that is out of time with current theoretical conceptualizations[22] that validate nostalgia as an *experience* of the *present*. To talk of nostalgia *contretemps* is to grant the future unexpected prominence such that it may also begin to account for contemporary experiences of nostalgia as they occur within the South African national and literary imaginary.

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In light of the above, it is not surprising that South African literature has a history that can be described as "future-obsessed" (Horn 2012: 526). Margaret Lenta's "Fictions of the Future" is a representative example of how the writing position of the "interminable interregnum" (1988:133) was viewed by writers and literary critics during the transitional years. Working through the intensity of the imaginative void, she notes that there were "fictions which read like attempts to predict and perhaps influence the kind of future which South Africa will have after the

[21] Furthermore, it is interesting to note how theorists of nostalgia often unwittingly rely on the structural premise of the Fall. Starobinski comes close to this realisation in stating that "this painful experience, provoked by the uprooting of the conscience from its familiar surroundings, became the metaphorical expression of a much more profound rupture, the separation of man from the ideal" (1966: 95). Through a definition of this kind, he marks a definitive passage from messianic utopia to nostalgia, suggesting that these conditions are indelibly bound.

[22] Indeed, the word *contretemps* can also serve to signify 'disagreement'.

revolution" (Lenta 1988:133). Lenta was, however, critical of the manner in which the future was constructed or perceived by writers such as Nadine Gordimer, J.M. Coetzee and Karel Schoeman. She found literary representations of the future "curiously unmoving" (1988:142), precisely because they were derived from past and present fears and expectations, leaving no room for "new possibilities which will emerge from the revolution, in order to produce a new kind of individual or life style" (1988: 143). Likewise, Nicholas Visser's "The Politics of Future Projection in South African Fiction" (1993), voices a liberalist's grievance of texts that "fail to imagine a future that is more than a mirror image of the present" (1993: 69). To his dismay, this serves to "reinforce anxieties by suggesting that the future can only be worse than the apartheid nightmare we already know" (Visser 1993: 80). It is only in Gordimer's *July's People*, that Visser finds a creative future-oriented vision of "readiness to move forward toward it and the desire to carry her readers with her" (1993: 80).

Michael Green's *Novel Histories: Past, Present, and Future in South African Fiction* (1997), is a more systematic engagement with future-oriented writing in the South African literary context. Green cites the onset of this trend as early as the 1980's and reads it as a fairly common feature of South African literature. Apart from delineating its prevalence in various texts, he delves into the enabling philosophical structures and narratological techniques. Somewhat paradoxically, Green explores a temporal form of resistance where

> works seek to comment upon the past and present by projecting the implications of the past and the present forward into time. In this they reverse the standard techniques of historical fiction, but remain directly related to them. In any event, attempts to give meaning to the past generally involve […] an implied or explicit appeal to the future. Hence the term 'future histories'
>
> (1997: 244)

His argument relies almost exclusively on Frederic Jameson's notion of historical form as that which critiques and judges the present and thus realises itself as a resistant form in relation to it. Accordingly, in *Novel Histories*, Green illustrates how the past, present and future are all deployed in South African fiction as historical sites that actively seek to offer resistance to various stages of the political 'present' of the South African sociopolitical context. Furthermore, he argues that drawing an essential relationship between the past and the future relies on an ideological and historiographical investment in notions of progress. And rather insightfully, he remarks that the teleological use of historical form in literature is undoubtedly a result of liberalism.

More recently, Peter Horn illumines how this future-oriented literary trend has undergone transformation in recent years. He examines how contemporary literature uses the future to convey a sense of devastation in the present and has become, instead, an imaginative impasse in current writing:

> Mandela's election brought fewer changes than many had hoped for. For artists steeped in the resistance mode – like playwright Maishe Maponya and performance poet Sandile Dikeni – this has proven to be not just a bewildering period, but a vexing one. They have both maintained that, whatever the political gains, this half-baked situation was not the revolution they had been creating for. Many had the feeling that 'The future has arrived and therefore disappeared. A great source of dreaming has ended, and with it, a great source of dread'
>
> (Horn 2012: 540)

Horn illumines how arriving at the tail-end of the liberalist impulse has stunted the creative investment in the future for many writers who now find a messianic engagement with the future

unsustainable. Similarly, through an examination of K. Sello Duiker's *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* and Niq Mhlongo's *Dog Eat Dog*, Thabo Tsehloane argues that there is "a 'struggle fatigue' or 'hope fatigue' about imagining further possibilities of change" (2010: 80). Tsehloane explains that the post-apartheid state narrated itself in such stringently messianic terms, allowing for no alternative futures to be entertained. However, the reality of its current non-realisation has problematised the very notion of the future itself. Through a discussion of how both characters and authors experience feelings of depression, fatigue and bewilderment in relation to the seeming loss of the future as an imaginative temporal station, these two contemporary studies convey how the affective condition of nostalgia *contretemps* can be limned in both the South African national and literary imaginary.

In the texts I examine, this is made more apparent through the uncanny evocation of seminal texts like Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter* and Karel Schoeman's *Promised Land*. In *Promised Land*, George, the white, male protagonist, has emigrated from South Africa and returns to the family farm many years later. This novel is set in the future, almost twenty years after the revolution has occurred. It is a hypothetical narrative where the revolution is imagined as reversed power/racial roles that has led to the disempowerment of Afrikaners. According to Lenta and Visser, Schoeman's text is noted for its good liberalist intentions but regrettable effects (Lenta 1988 and Visser 1993). In *Burger's Daughter*, Rosa Burger's father, Lionel, is a struggle icon. However, his Marxist aspirations for the Future do not yield results during the liberation struggle − "do you still believe in the future? The same Future? Just as you always did?" (Gordimer 1979: 115) wonders Rosa as he withers away in jail. Venturing out on her own, Rosa eventually realises that "I don't know how to live in Lionel's country" (Gordimer 1979:

210). She grapples with ethical questions about her right to remain in South Africa and travels out of the country for a while − the journey helps her to understand something of her precarious connection to South Africa as a white liberal. By returning us to the rich tradition of future-oriented writing and the narrative of the returning émigré, the narratives I examine revisit concerns about liberalism and the relevance of the future as it currently undergoes nostalgic interpretation.

In order to mark the condition of nostalgia *contretemps* in this thesis, my first chapter, "The Logic of the Looking Glass", examines the narratological and thematic uses of time and temporality in contemporary fiction as that which is governed by the *contretemps*. In *Specters of Marx* (1994), Derrida discusses the *contretemps* as an experience of time and space that is essentially 'out of joint'. Similarly, the *contretemps* of the looking glass world – a trope which Imraan Coovadia develops in *High Low In-between* – is an expression of temporal dis-ease and irrationality in present day South Africa. Much like Derrida suggests of the appearance of the *contretemps*, I argue that the representation thereof in contemporary South African literature effectively relays a desire for a future-oriented temporal framework. However, this is now subject to a crisis of confidence, instead giving rise to feelings of loss and nostalgic affect.

My second chapter, "The Longer Future", explores how the temporal disjointedness of the *contretemps* subsequently leads to an awareness of historical contingency. As Green's illustration of 'future histories' suggests, history in the South African national and literary imaginary has often been explored as an eschatological or redemptive narrative. Now, however, having lost the ability to read experience and the past as "an irreducible experience of the future"

(Derrida 1998: 68), characters make various attempts to recover the past in order to discover a more authentic and suitable modality for historical narrativity. For some characters this results in distinctly apocalyptic renditions of history as they seek to escape from the vulnerability of historical contingency. For others, the scrutiny of the past outlines a willingness to accept historical contingency on its own terms as a pervasive but more sustainable historical modality that will ultimately allow for the longer future to unfold.

In chapter three, "Death is An-other Country", I explore how questions of mutability are further explored through representations of death and mourning. As characters return to grieve the loss of a parent, they remain caught in the processes of ineffectual mourning that more often gives rise to melancholic feeling. I illustrate how representations of death as a discursive experience of radical alterity recedes in these texts as authors opt for more fluid structures that no longer support sharp distinctions of 'an-other country' that will arrive. Instead, conditions of spectrality become prominent features in these texts and allude to a discursive appreciation of death as intrinsic to life. In this manner, feelings of loss become entirely unremarkable and effectively reconfigure the painful suffering and melancholia of nostalgia *contretemps*.

In my final chapter, "A Spoiled Existence", I explore the self-referential use of the artist-protagonist in these texts as a metatextual interrogation of the politics of belonging. In the tradition of what J.M. Coetzee has termed 'white writing' (1988), land has always assumed the role of the m/other and has been subjected to projected experiences of the self and the latent anxiety of belonging to the land. Through the use of inter-generational plots, where specific mother-son and father-daughter relationships are explored, these texts question the paternal

metaphor of the m/otherland as an ancient or 'edenic' plenitude that nevertheless reinforces an inability to belong to her/it. Instead characters gesture towards 'a spoiled existence' as an alternative 'locale' from which effective discursive relations to ensue. In this manner, these texts address forms of literary nostalgia and seek to reinscribe the alienating stance of a being-in-longing to one of belonging in the white literary imaginary. I thus examine how these novels forego desire as a primary mode of relation and place emphasis on empathy and its ability to produce extra-familial connections instead. I explore how, in the light of contemporary political thought, the centrality of affect can be viewed as prescient rather than merely sentimental in its response to current developments in the national imaginary.

In my conclusion, "Celebratory Crocodile Tears", I further query the use and significance of affect, particularly that of nostalgia, in contemporary society. Currently, many post-transitional thinkers appear impatient with conditions of affect and perform various dismissals of the traces of lost hope and melancholia that continue to linger in the national imaginary. In this manner they read expressions of nostalgia *contretemps* as a regrettable failure to adjust to the post-transitional times (De Kock 2004, Nuttall 2009, Frenkel and MacKenzie 2010, Titlestad 2010 and Jamal 2010). On the contrary, I argue that this position fails to acknowledge that "the nation binds affectively [and] it does so not (merely) through a facile dispensation of its force, but rather by attempting to answer the subject's desire for identification" (Di Paolantonio 2000:153).

Arguably, the desire to read for a post-transitional state is a premature gesture of containment; an intellectual discomfort that pathologises and seeks to remedy affect. In an examination of nostalgia in Ivan Vladislavic's *Double Negative* (2011), Zoë Wicomb argued that nostalgia is a

choice of sentimentality over aestheticism. Citing Richard Rorty, she opined that sentimentality can help save us from a rational project and its ensuing effects of distance and irony (Wicomb 2011). Similarly, I conclude this project with the suggestion that the post-transitional must also seek to consider how nostalgic affect as "a more 'democratic' disease" (Boym 2001: 5) can support the ethical and sociopolitical development of the national imaginary.

Chapter One: The Logic of the Looking Glass

> over the decade, mortality had increased by a thousand a day. The government, of course, objected to these terms. First of all, who was counting? Second of all, who were they to define a day? Why should we simply accept the European definition of a day?
> It was the logic of the looking glass
>
> *High Low In-between* –151

In Imraan Coovadia's *High Low In-between*, it is possible to account for the trope of the looking glass world as representative of the temporal circumstances of contemporary South African society. In *Through the Looking Glass*, Lewis Carroll narrates the story of Alice who enters the looking glass and reaches a world where everything functions in reverse – which is to say, contrary to expectation. Furthermore, during an exchange with the White Queen,[23] Alice establishes that she now inhabits a world that is governed by a *contretemps* and is greatly confused and disoriented by her looking glass experiences. Similarly, I argue that "the logic of the looking glass" (HLI: 151) in Coovadia's text is indicative of temporal, spatial, logical and moral reversal. In its appropriation, the looking glass duly serves to portray a society immersed in chaos, injustice and disorder. However, this is by no means specific to *High Low In-between*; as I illustrate in this chapter, the experience of time and temporality in contemporary South African fiction finds much wider expression as a *contretemps*.

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[23] "The rule is, jam to-morrow and jam yesterday—but never jam *to-day*."
"It *must* come sometimes to 'jam to-day,'" Alice objected.
"No, it ca'n't," said the Queen. "It's jam every *other* day: to-day isn't any *other* day, you know."
"I don't understand you," said Alice. "It's dreadfully confusing!"
"That's the effect of living backwards," the Queen said kindly: "it always makes one a little giddy at first—"
"Living backwards!" Alice repeated in great astonishment. "I never heard of such a thing!"
"—but there's one great advantage in it, that one's memory works both ways."
"I'm sure *mine* only works one way," Alice remarked. "I ca'n't remember things before they happen."
"It's a poor sort of memory that only works backwards," the Queen remarked.

(Carroll 1998: 171-172)

In *Specters of Marx: the state of the debt, the work of mourning, and the new international* (1994), Derrida relies on yet another literary text in order to elaborate on the *contretemps*. In Hamlet's declaration that "The time is out of joint" (Shakespeare 1: 5: 188), he reads an expression of "something in the present that is not going well, it is not going as it *ought to go*" (Derrida 1994: 23). The 'untimeliness' of time, or dislocation in the present is, for Derrida, an expression of desiring a future that no longer seems possible. This example does well to illustrate how affect and expectation find temporalised expressions, for Hamlet's miasmatic experience of the present lies in the lost trajectory of time that – now – cannot arrive at the expected or imagined future.

Furthermore, Hamlet's sense of temporal disorientation is also, as Derrida indicates, centered on the awareness of the claim that the specter of his dead father – as a vision from the past – is able to make upon him. Hence, Hamlet is caught in a *contretemps*. He inhabits a present that is not present (presence) at all: the past, present and the lost traces of the future all converge in an *untimely* and disordered fashion.

Closer to the local context, Achille Mbembe's notion of temporal 'entanglement' appears to resonate well with the Derridian *contretemps*. In "Time on the Move", featured in *On the Postcolony*, Mbembe, like Coovadia's Shakeer in the epigraph, does not "simply accept the European definition of a day" (HLI: 151). Instead he explores the link between subjectivity and temporality in order to account for African temporal experiences. [24] He describes 'entanglement' as "discontinuities, reversals, inertias, and swings that overlay one another, interpenetrate one

[24] In *Entanglements* (2009), Nuttall makes a direct application of temporal 'entanglement' to the South African literary context.

another, and envelope one another" (Mbembe 2001: 41). A ruptured temporality that negates linear and sequential trajectories, he argues, is more true to the lived time of African existence and experience.

However, Mbembe's philosophical determinism appears to limit his aims. The reasons for building a defense for 'entanglement' as that which extends out of the *longue duree* of African existence as opposed to any identifiable 'age' or epoch is noble but not unproblematic. Evidently, it serves to challenge the Western centrality of rationality, linearity and the philosophical racism upon which it rests for, as he rightly notes, "fluctuations and indeterminacy do not necessarily amount to lack of order. Every representation of an unstable world cannot automatically be subsumed under the heading 'chaos'" (Mbembe 2001: 10). But in reading 'entanglement' as an apriori or essentialist experience of the postcolony, Mbembe's restorative account of African experience appears prescriptive.

This is discernable in Mbembe's discussion of the "peculiar time that is *emerging time*" (Mbembe 2001: 16), that "is appearing in a context—today—in which the future horizon is apparently closed, while the horizon of the past has apparently receded" (Mbembe 2001: 45). Much like Derrida's conviction about Hamlet's disappointment with the trajectory of time, Mbembe asserts that the temporal location of expectation and anticipation – the future – feels increasingly elusive for Africans. However, unlike Derrida, Mbembe is determined to deride emotions of gloom and despondency in relation to emerging time. Furthermore, he does not allow for the possibility that anxieties around emerging time may in fact induce states of

temporal entanglement. To do either of these things would be to compromise the theoretical and philosophical frameworks of 'entanglement'.

In this regard, Coovadia's non-fictional understanding of lived time in the South African context finds a correlative in Mbembe's essentialism. In "Midnight", Coovadia speaks more specifically about the temporality of the South African Indian population, which is the same demographic that finds narrative representation in *High Low In-between*. Coovadia begins by talking about the difference between cosmological and historical time. Historical time is that which places "emphasis on economic and cultural processes, and also the psychological time of human beings" (Coovadia 2009b: 45). Contrary to cosmological time, it allows for subjective expression and is thus able to mark temperament rather than Time.

For South African Indians, Coovadia insists that the Doomsday Clock (a concept initially invented to monitor fluctuations of historical time in American society), is always set at five minutes to midnight, meaning that the present "is always the beginning of the end" (2009b: 46). According to Coovadia, the future is experienced as undeniably apocalyptic which, in turn, gives rise to a present marred by fear.

It is also worth noting how Coovadia's observations are further particularized by separations of class (Thurman 2009). Having reached his conclusion, Coovadia admits to a more personal struggle with nostalgia *contretemps*; "I've never known what to say to people who are certain that South Africa has lost its future, partly because they may be right and I have no contradictory theory" (Coovadia 2009b: 47). He also acknowledges that "there's no Doomsday clock ticking

for the majority of South Africans" who have "a sense of owning the future" (Coovadia 2009b: 50). He thus acknowledges that his ideas have little application for the black majority from which he separates himself. Ultimately, this forces him to concede, instead, that "we have no national relationship to time. We live by different clocks" (Coovadia 2009b:50).

Nevertheless, the South African Indian experience of time that he accounts for places great emphasis on the future, albeit in apocalyptic form. And, as expressed in the epigraph, Coovadia insinuates that this particular hold on time easily evolves into expressions of stereotypical African "chaos" (Mbembe 2001: 10). In his critique, Coovadia opines that South African Indians have remained culturally isolated and have thus *always* experienced the future as apocalyptic. Hence, like Mbembe, there is a desire to read for an essentialised *longue duree* of temporal experience as opposed to something specific to the post-apartheid epoch.

Noting, with some dissatisfaction, Mbembe's essentialism, Ashraf Jamal provides his own account of a lived temporality in South Africa. He employs Hal Foster's concept of "future-anteriority" which "foreground[s] the will-have-been: the future-anterior tense 'that replaces the stable, self-contained temporality of the 'past', 'present' and 'future'" (2010: 14-15). Akin to observations I have made in the Introduction, Jamal asserts that South Africa works on a determined logic of future-orientedness that has led to a persistent desire for 'grand' messianic narratives. While he is critical of its teleological structure, he nevertheless argues that it needs to be given full consideration because it has produced a "disaffected mood" (2010: 16), as can be evidenced in popular literary texts such as J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999) and Lauren Beukes's *Moxyland* (2008).

Where Mbembe ignores the consequences of 'emerging time' and Coovadia reads the future as eternally apocalyptic, Jamal argues that we must take seriously this failed hypothetical time of 'future-anteriority' in order to account for the national psyche that "has never satisfactorily addressed a latent sensation that South Africa as a country suffers the unease of never having begun" (2010: 16). Yet having expanded on 'lived time' in South Africa, Jamal's recommendations become increasingly curative. He 'diagnoses' it as schizophrenic: a swing from extreme optimism to current pessimism that narrows the parameters of subjectivity and experience. As a result, he conceives of 'open time' where temporal interplay will make all allegiances impossible. Much like Mbembe's 'entanglement', the theorisation of 'open time' ultimately negates the 'lived time' it seeks to account for and thus fails to consider the ethical potential that resides within it.

It is for this reason that I employ the Derridian *contretemps*, granting it precedence over Mbembe's notion of 'entanglement', Coovadia's expansion on 'historical time' and Jamal's 'future-anteriority' in this study. For, as Derrida asks − somewhat rhetorically − in *Specters of Marx*, "what if disadjustment were on the contrary the condition of justice?" (1994: 19-20). Working against Heidegger, he argues that the *contretemps* is the very means by which one gains access to justice and the modality of the future upon which it is premised. The *contretemps*, he argues, does not 'destroy' the importance of the future, and the sense of justice we attach to it, but serves to protect it against overdetermined messianism that often limits rather than reveals the future to us. Instead, in the *contretemps*, the future and its potential for justice are allowed the

alterity to adhere to 'untimeliness' and we must – in an act both active and passive – await its arrival.

This, however, is far from a romantic ethical stance of deferral. It is a radical ethic that carries us over the threshold of complacency and ennui and into the gross dislocation of the *contretemps*.[25] Derrida states that "to be 'out of joint,' whether it be present Being or present time, can do harm and do evil, it is no doubt the very possibility of evil. But without the opening of this possibility, there remains, perhaps, beyond good and evil, only the necessity of the worst" (1994: 29). To assume one's (dis)placement in the *contretemps* is to acknowledge rather than deny the sheer discomfort of a rupturing present. It is a 'dangerous' vigil amidst the fragments of time where it is entirely possible to betray the very future we seek. For Derrida, it is better to accept the odds of a radical potential for justice (and the inherent potential to betray it) than to either deny the discomfort of this (dis)placement or to lament an already impossible desire to escape the *contretemps* altogether.

This is precisely the dilemma that Derrida identifies in Hamlet's assumption of the *contretemps*. Hamlet feels uncomfortable in the present where time and its promises have come undone and he assumes that in order to seek justice, he must set time 'straight' again. Derrida argues that because Hamlet expresses such reluctance in the light of the *contretemps* that has been placed upon him, it is Hamlet who is 'out of joint' – converting a sense of the "disadjusted to unjust" (1994: 20). Relying on Heidegger's distinction between *Dike* (right/order) and *Adikia* (disorder),

[25] I call this a radical ethic because it appears to resonate well with Kierkegaard's conceptual usage of anxiety as the means by which one encounters freedom. Hence, anxiety must be embraced and navigated in order to reach the most creative moment of change (Salverson 2000: 72).

Derrida explains how the presence of *Adikia* usually implies the absence of *Dike*. Hence, there is often – like Hamlet – the easy assumption that 'disorder' equates injustice. In other words, we very easily interpret the *contretemps* as the onset of anomie and seek ways to escape it.

One of these means of escape is arguably nostalgia. In *Amnesiac Selves: Nostalgia, Forgetting, and British Fiction 1810 – 1870,* Nicholas Dames suggests that the chronotype of narratives of nostalgia is that of managing dislocation. In stating that "dislocation is the dilemma nostalgia is invented to solve" (Dames 2001:12), Dames argues that nostalgia can provide jointure in light of current disparity. In effect, nostalgia does not provide escape from the *contretemps* by resolving it, but by presenting an affective modality through which it can be experienced, expressed and even explained.

As I aim to illustrate in this chapter, this is not dissimilar to temporal and affective experiences relayed in contemporary South African literature. Through a close reading of time and temporality in my chosen texts, I uncover how the present is certainly that of the – sometimes exaggerated – discomfort of the *contretemps*. The sense that time has gone awry or continues to slip away from various characters, I argue, is indicative of the pervasive sense of loss that governs the future. It is a reflection of nostalgia *contretemps* where the hope is that the future will return and ultimately restore the characters to time.

Yet, in this, it is also of ensuing interest to examine how these texts 'weigh up' the merits of normative nostalgia for the past against those of nostalgia *contretemps*. What one uncovers is a broad aversion to normative nostalgia: fewer authors seem willing to explore either the anodyne

or subversive potentialities of the romanticized past as characters are often, themselves, impatient with nostalgia or undergo some form of narrative refusal of their nostalgic affect for the past. We find a more general application of what Klopper observes in his reading of Wicomb's *Playing in the Light* where nostalgic feelings more closely resemble compulsive returns of the repressed or the uncanny as opposed to serving as a voluntarily affective modality (2011). This skeptical or dismissive rendition of normative nostalgia, I argue, implies an abiding authorial/ethical hesitancy towards the constructive uses of normative nostalgia in the South African context. Hence, it is similar to what Aaron Santesso finds, where "the relationship with nostalgia is surprisingly complex: the power of nostalgia is recognised, but scorned at the same time" (2007: 133).

In comparison, representations of nostalgia *contretemps* are more complete. They display and employ both *nostos* and *algia*. Hence, the affective investment in nostalgia *contretemps* is much more unproblematically sustained. Mostly, there is narrative space to lament the loss of the future or to seek means by which to possibly restore the future and remedy time. There is, however, also the liminal awareness of an inability to escape the *contretemps*, and a subsequent need to think in less nostalgic terms within this temporal framework.

In the Prologue of *Agaat*, Jakkie De Wet has received a telegram from Agaat giving notice of his mother's impending death. He is making his first journey back to the farm, Grootmoedersdrift, after leaving South Africa in 1985. It is both the news about his mother and the prospect of having to head back to South Africa that induces a state of 'inertia' for Jakkie who, in the Prologue, wrestles with himself in the form of interior monologue. Van Niekerk makes his sense

of temporal displacement clear by illustrating the discrepancy between external time that records the systematic journey to the airport and the *contretemps* that he inhabits as he slips from the past to the present and into the future in a haphazard manner. Hence, despite moving forward in time, Jakkie is caught in "stop-start traffic" (A: 1) whilst being, "in two places at once" (A: 1). He admits to being consumed by "the time of my childhood" (A: 1) and also at the same time contemplates the "Hereafter" (A: 1) which, he admits, is a "strange word in my head" (A: 1).

Jakkie's response to the onset of the *contretemps* is to attempt re-orientation by sieving through the past in order to re-establish both the 'concrete' and linear qualities of time. His recalls his very first departure from South Africa and appears to use it to search for a stable 'beginning' of a sequential (and thus sensical) experience of time. As narrated, this journey happened "eleven years ago" (A: 1) on a "fourteen hour flight" (A: 1) when he had "a ten-day beard" (A: 1). We learn that he left home "that morning, still dark" (A: 1) and he further clarifies this time as "four o'clock in the morning" (A: 1). Van Niekerk utilizes the concrete signifiers of clock time in order to illustrate Jakkie's desire to escape the present *contretemps* by restoring temporal and narrative linearity. However, it is not long before the past fails to produce order and, instead, only exacerbates the *contretemps*. As Jakkie departs he realises that he is often consumed by the past. Now noting the irony of his return, he states; "fare forward traveler! Not escaping the past. *International Departures*" (A: 4). The forward journey, he realises, has never been made: the memories of home are so pervasive that he feels trapped in an inescapable past.

Van Niekerk portrays Jakkie's nostalgia for the past as distinctly pathological. It is an involuntary emotive response that does not elicit pleasant feeling but arouses self-loathing and,

more importantly, a desire to escape from it. Furthermore, nostalgia, despite finding narrative representation, is ultimately disallowed. In the Epilogue, the gap between nostalgic memory and reality results in a

> discrepancy, a gritty feeling ever since I set foot on land. The trip from the airport, the light glaring white, the blaze that blinds one. Arid red lands next to the road, black shadows of bluegums, pit dams with yellow condensation-rings, a last slimy dreg at the bottom. It's always been like that. When and where did my romantic yearnings originate?
>
> (A: 676- 677)

As Jakkie acclimatizes he becomes increasingly aware of the disparity between his imagined landscape and the actual farm. This is a rather typical example of how Van Niekerk employs nostalgia with the intention to illumine a ruse in the lives of her characters.

This narrative choice is equal to Mark Behr's representation of Michiel, the protagonist in *Kings of the Water*. Like Jakkie, he is also taken by the unexpected force of memory that floods back into his mind as soon as he enters the plane back to South Africa; "unable to ditch the virulence of memory he took a pill" (KW: 2). Michiel's memories are complex in that they speak both of an environmental nostalgia and also of past trauma and the novel sets up a tension of his wanting to preserve memory in the form of nostalgia yet, at the same time, wanting to discard it more traumatic formations. As he drives back to the farm, the sensuous aspects of memory take root in the present and Michiel – who is deeply nostalgic – is taken away on a pleasant reverie, feeling "as if he has never been away" (KW: 1). However, arriving at the gate of the farm, he notes the following: "*Paradys – Dawid & Beth Steyn*. Rust has nibbled away part of the white lettering. A stranger might take a moment to infer the P and the s of the farm's name. But he is not a stranger" (KW: 1). There is some measure of relief in confronting the fact that the nostalgic idyll

of the farm exists only in his memory. For in bearing witness to the passage of time he assumes that the trauma of the past will be equally irrelevant in the present.

Michiel's return is additionally difficult because his homosexuality caused a rift in the family. Over time, he has mended his relationship with his mother but has had no contact with his father. When his father's first words are that of a sarcastic welcome, Michiel goes off on an internal tirade – "so much, then, for mellowing. This is to be every bit as miserable as expected. Not time, disease nor the fresh face of death have made the old man relent" (KW: 17). The present thus serves to debunk nostalgia but reifies the past he wishes to discard. Behr thus marks Michiel's present as perverse in its remorselessness and, feeling the discomfort of this *contretemps*, he wonders "why, in the name of all the gods, did he agree to come to the farm?"(KW: 17). For both characters nostalgia is not the anodyne that alleviates the burdens of past trauma and present dislocation. Instead it *is* the very trauma they wish to escape, for its very romanticism keeps them from calibrating the present and, furthermore, making progress toward the desired future.

For *Agaat's* Jakkie, nostalgia interrupts his very desire to assume a Canadian identity. At this late point in his life he is forced to confront defeat; "do they see through me nowadays, the older students? Do they want to set me talking, get me going? Do they think I need bloodletting, like a feverish horse, moonstruck lovers, inconsolables?" (A: 8). Self-doubt speaks into the realisation that the desired assimilation into his new surroundings, or the ideal of the envisaged future self, has not been entirely successful. In relation to his Canadian peers, it is he who is 'out of time' – always belated in terms of the future; "here the blood has long since been spilt. Cold. The

massacres efficiently commemorated, functionally packaged, sanitized. Only I, more freshly cut by history, trying to find my own way in the cool archives" (A: 2). Jakkie looks enviously upon the manner in which Canada has created an amnesiac effect around its colonial past. As he notes, this historical 'blank slate' leaves citizens open to the sensibilities of the future that have forever eluded him. The same applies to Michiel, who must now acknowledge exile as a failed attempt at a future; "relaxing at last into what felt like a future for the next millennium waves of nostalgia washed through him" (KW: 82). Much like Jakkie, he imagined that exile would allow for certain liberties of identity. Much to his disappointment, he understands that he has been seduced by a false expectation of the future and he must now concede to failure in this regard.

Furthermore, *Kings of the Water* makes explicit how failed teleology is not merely an existential mode of subjective reading but one that resonates with the national imaginary. This is achieved through the direct illustration of how the South African exile, as one who acted on liberalist convictions, is particularly vulnerable to nostalgia *contretemps*. Michiel and Jakkie surreptitiously escape to London and Canada respectively because they empathise with the struggle. Yet while Jakkie appears to refuse any further allegiance to South Africa, Michiel often frequented the Commonwealth Institute in London where politicians and academics were meeting to debate around issues of the New South Africa. Michiel recalls the excitement of these gatherings as he was incited with the hope of South Africa's new democracy; "there was nothing feigned to Michiel's applause […] In a future such a this – although even its beginnings would be unrealizable in his lifetime – Michiel *could* picture himself. For the first time in months he was back, if not at Paradys, then at least somewhere else in that country. Was this outlawed organization, this *movement*, something he could belong to?"(KW: 130). Like the rest of the

crowd Michiel imagines the new 'home' in direct opposition to the current home he has in South Africa. In contrast to the one he left voluntarily, the 'future' home is one that invokes feelings of belonging.

But Michiel is soon disillusioned: during the question and answer session the issue of gay and lesbian rights is raised and quickly dismissed with a strain of nonchalant bigotry. As a homosexual who has fled from homophobic territory, the suggestion that the 'New' South Africa will be much like the old one sets him on a different course. An irate Michiel decides to disown South Africa: "send a mule traveling the world, it still won't come back a horse. Let them stew in their hateful white and black fat, together. May that country burn with all of you in it. He never returned to anything hinting at South Africa; changed direction when the accent found him on the street, in bars and on Hampstead Heath" (KW: 132). The imagined future is perceived to be 'lost' as it begins to resemble a mere repetition of the oppressive past and present instead.

Yet, what is interesting and unique to *Kings of the Water* is that Michiel's assumption of nostalgia *contretemps* is challenged. Later in the novel, Michiel recalls meeting with friends in California who had just returned from South Africa. They are extremely complimentary about South Africa's constitution and the progressive stance the country has taken in relation to LGBT rights. However, during this conversation "he relives the incidents at the Commonwealth Institute. Was that not only the other day? How could Africa's oldest liberation movement so rapidly have changed its mind?"(KW: 180). Confronted with evidence to suggest that modest change is in the offing, Michiel remains obstinate in his relation to the future as 'lost'.

Behr implies that imbibing in nostalgia *contretemps* is entirely premature and is, in part, informed by a misreading of contemporary South Africa. When Michiel returns to South Africa and encounters transformation, he is only able to meet it with disbelief and skepticism. In this regard, Michiel is portrayed as subject to a personal nostalgia *contretemps* as none of the South African characters experience feelings of loss in relation to the future and thus accept the present as a timely and healthy transition to what is still to come. Hence, it is Michiel who is 'out of time' with the country. Aware of his own sense of irrelevance he knows that he has returned "as little more than a voyeur. No longer a participant but in a brief walk-on part as a spectator, a member of the chorus. South Africa's Miracle he sees and hears in the media, the phrase of both earnest and self-congratulatory dinner-party conversation. [...] He knows, as he has for years, that his home – whatever a home is – is no longer here" (KW: 50). For Michiel the 'miracle' has long since come and gone and he reaffirms exile status as a continued means of harboring nostalgia *contretemps*.

On the contrary, narratological technique in *Agaat* serves to affirm the sense of a 'lost' future. Returning to the character of Jakkie De Wet, we find that he only narrates the Prologue and Epilogue, meaning that he frames a 'beginning' and 'end' for us as readers. Yet, there is the intrinsic irony of the prologue – as a beginning *and* an end in itself – that is worth considering. In *Dissemination*, Derrida labels his preface an 'Outwork' and therein discusses how the prologue or preface always evokes the irony of appearing as "a semantic after-effect" (Derrida 1981: 16) that "recreates an intention-to-say after the fact, the text exists as something written—a past—which, under the false appearance of a present, a hidden omnipotent author (in full mastery of his product) is presenting to the reader as his future" (Derrida 1981: 6). By carefully sifting through

Hegel's philosophical prefaces, Derrida argues that the preface is a curious piece of writing: it exists in the future perfect because it announces the masterful trajectory of the text that will proceed in its entirety. Also, he illustrates how it inherently conforms to the *contretemps* − in order to come before, it must be written last; it must be able to foresee the end in order to suitably serve as an epistemological beginning.

Ostensibly *Agaat* makes conscious use of this feature, for in relation to the narrative present (which is that of Milla's last days on her deathbed), Jakkie's journey back to South Africa presumably occurs much closer to the end of the narrative. Hence, the prologue does indeed carry us forward in time. Yet Van Niekerk puts the proleptic function of the prologue to use only in order to demonstrate its failure. In the Prologue, Jakkie has just been informed that his mother is dying and, rushing to South Africa, he expects to see his mother upon his return. Often, he wonders; "will she recognise me? With the beard?" (A: 2), "will I still recognise Ma?" (A: 3). The text thus anticipates a reunion – but that does not occur. What we have instead, is a demonstration of the fallibility of the 'future perfect' tense of the prologue.[26] Arguably, it is not without significance that Van Niekerk utilizes the prologue to render an account of failed prolepsis. From this we infer an inability to rely on the ideological function of the prologue itself and experience hesitancy about investing in the 'future perfect' it promises. Along with Jakkie, the reader experiences how imagined expressions of the future get 'lost' and thus disappoints through its non-arrival.

[26] In *About Time*, Mark Currie accounts for this as rhetorical prolepsis. He argues that rhetorical prolepsis is a narratological form that sets up the anticipation of the future in order to later illustrate its failure. Rhetorical prolepsis is thus a means by which to thwart expectations or to show how they have failed to come about (2007).

In comparison to the sentimental characterisation found in *Kings of the Water* and *Agaat*, Justin Cartwright's *White Lightning* takes a tongue-in-cheek approach to the exile character. James, the protagonist, has lived in London for 25 years and returns to South Africa because his mother is dying. At the outset James professes a more cosmopolitan temporal modality which is that of living in the existential present. His personal philosophy is that of arbitrariness; "it's a hopeless task, this obligation to try to profit from experience, to make some personal capital out of adversity" (WL: 2). He has rid himself of the illusions of time and meaning and imbibes the series of presents that do not conform to any sequential logic and form. Hence James is somewhat pleased at how well-adjusted he is to the present times and his ability to enjoy it with relative ease.

Yet, like Jakkie and Michiel, James once envisioned life outside of South Africa as the burgeoning of a future self and similarly, London has not treated him well as he found that his "sense of destiny, of a sort of inevitable success, had taken a pasting" (WL: 38). In the novel, James recounts his succession of professional failures that have ushered him into accepting destiny as a farce. In this regard, the text enforces a new reading of how a 'lost' sense of the future and its destinal logic condemns him to an experience of time as an endless repetition of the present.

In this light, it is possible to read James's attempt at resettlement in South Africa as a means of restoring his faith in the future; "I am enjoying a different process, freeing myself from the tyranny of the past which has constrained me unfairly […] London's outlines are becoming unclear. I hope for this fog to spread gradually over all my past, obliterating my sins" (WL: 125).

Understanding something of South Africa's penchant for future-orientedness, he believes himself to be in the right temporal environment to discard the past and find optimism in the future again; "it occurs to me that in this way, without intending it, I will have joined my countrymen, for whom amnesia is a necessary condition" (WL: 125). And by allowing for new beginnings, a life in South Africa will cure the *contretemps* of having always "suffered from this anxiety of being in the wrong place" (WL: 44). However, in its entirety, *White Lightening* serves to display how the future, in this South African context, is an utterly false notion in itself and how James's future, in particular, in South Africa is governed by sheer impossibility.

Comparable to Jakkie and Michiel, James is taken aback by the rush of memory upon entering the country. Yet he is able to discern nostalgia from other forms of memory, making it easier to dismiss. When James pages through his mother's photo albums he notices that "what my mother wanted was to remove from her pictures anything discordant. She seemed to be trying to return to a time and a place when she had been happy" (WL: 51). He feels guilty for the emptiness of her life and her reversion to nostalgia is viewed with extreme pathos. As a result, James observes rather than experiences his own nostalgia.

In one incident, James feels compelled to drive to his childhood home that "nearly thirty years on it still enfilades my dreams" (WL: 111). However, he is caught trespassing by the security guard and it is a claim he cannot deny; "I am in fact an intruder, intruding on the half-remembered past" (WL: 112). Moving further away from his childhood home, he is dismissive of his nostalgia which he evaluates as useless; "I can see no use for these thoughts or good reason for my visit to the old house" (WL: 114). Instead, he analyses it, using the immersion in the past to

separate various strands of memory, "I find this unpicking of memory soothing. But do we unpick memory? I don't really think so. Nor do I think there is necessarily anything instructive in memory" (WL: 114). Cartwright, however, rather mercilessly 'outwits' James in his cerebral attempts to stave off or control memory. He achieves this through the narrative development of a more primal form of memory, called phyletic memory, which can be interpreted as an archaic environmental nostalgia.

As understood by James, phyletic memory is an instinctive and involuntary response to environment that relies predominantly on smell; a subconscious faculty that humans are said to share with the rest of the animal kingdom. When James walks aimlessly through the fields near the Helderberg mountains he stumbles upon a farm called 'Nooitgedracht' which, as he says, "in my excited state I took to be more than a coincidence because it means 'unexpected' in Dutch" (WL: 5). His experience on this farm enforces an unexpected return to the past as the residues of phyletic memory begin to play upon him. Walking towards the farm, James states that "as I walked down the farm road, I entered the past, without seeing the portals […] every detail of the landscape was familiar to me, and these details seemed to be calling to me on private frequencies although the gist of their message was unclear" (WL: 3). The aromas of the garden are of an uncanny variety and they transport him to a forgotten past buried much deeper than the recollected or conscious past: it "resounds in the bony cavities of my face calling up deep memories" (WL: 28). This incident begins a journey for James as he slowly begins to uncover the hidden excesses of phyletic memory. Later in the day, he also taps into what he assumed to be a forgotten language; "I find my Afrikaans appearing from nowhere like the lines of half-forgotten poetry which sometimes rise spontaneously" (WL: 28). However, just as James

discovers his archaic memory of the land, the land also appears to have one of its own in relation to him – the 'colonialist' – and thus, quite literally, rejects him.

By the end of the narrative, despite his initial wish to resettle in South Africa, James's plans all undergo some form of sabotage – the farm collapses and after shooting Piet, the baboon, James is forced to return to London. The gross failure of his resettlement is interpreted in primal terms as the African land re-enacts James's state of fundamental non-belonging as a white subject in Africa. In light of this cruel rendition of the return of the repressed, James's archaic perception of the land begins to parrot a form of African belatedness or primitivism.

In *On the Postcolony*, Mbembe states that Africa is often a *negative interpretation* where it serves to account for what the West is not. In temporal terms, this implies a state of belatedness and omnipotent 'pastness'. Africa is often seen as

> resistant to change. Time—'it was always there,' 'since time immemorial,' 'we came to meet it'—is supposedly stationary: thus the importance of repetition and cycles, and the alleged central place of witchcraft and divination procedures. The idea of progress is said to disintegrate in such societies; should change occur—rare indeed—it would, as of necessity, follow a disordered trajectory and fortuitous path ending only in undifferentiated chaos
>
> (Mbembe 2001: 4)

In *White Lightning*, James is disheartened, initially, by his fellow South Africans who think in these exact terms. Talking about the general approach to Africa, he speaks of the population in terms of a 'they':

> they see a strange and lethal lethargy, whose miasma will spread to consume vineyards, golf courses, schools, roads, hospitals, records offices, and even domestic bees […] No

> one, including black people know how to ward off this African plague. This is what they believe in their hearts, that Africa is a plague. It troubles them
>
> (WL: 164)

In *White Lightening*, James is aware of the sense of African time as inherently tardy or stagnant. The use of a distanciated 'they' implies a need to think differently in relation to current despair. Hence, James views characters like Pennington, the white lawyer who helps James during the acquisition of his farm, unkindly. As James states, "there's been a delay. In my affairs, there's often a hitch. Pennington says that it is nothing, just the fact that the new masters are always drunk in the office. Welcome to Africa, he says" (WL: 117). Pennington finds nothing surprising about the moral vacuity and disorder of the 'new' regime. Because Africa is subject to stagnant time, change is perceived as an illusion. In turn, this incites feelings of hopelessness which becomes realised as corruption and greed in Pennington's case.

However, when James's plans begin to fail and he loses faith in the temporal possibilities of change in South Africa, he returns to old temporal expressions of archaic Africa. Near the end of the novel he thus states that "time has no importance here; it has no meaning to my mother, but also very little to me. As the bonds loosen which hold my mother to this place, to this bed, time's implacable but imaginary constraints have no force" (WL: 145). He submits to time immemorial which he correctly describes as the unfathomable state of the "dissolution of time" (WL: 145). Ultimately, the reversion to time immemorial negates any expression of agency or of a temporal future. However, in using the expression of a lost future to explore the impotence and guilt of the white exile, Cartwright, somewhat questionably, condemns Africa to its anti-Western essentialism that makes the future an entirely inapplicable temporal mode.

Finding this an utterly intolerable state in which to live, James is left with the 'non-option' of resuming the existential present that he initially inhabited in London. However, having already understood, while in South Africa, that "it's an unsettling realisation that your life has become a series of random events that have somehow lost their proper order and significance" (WL: 211), we understand that he returns without the initial sense of bravado. Caught between the inescapable past of Africa and the loss of the future in both London and South Africa, James has only the present. Cartwright thus characterizes him as a perverse victim of the *contretemps* where he is now stuck with the absurdity of a life that is without "the faintest delineation of meaning" (WL: 212).

Without any of Cartwright's ironic angst, Anne Landsman's *The Rowing Lesson* also consolidates the loss of the future through a depiction of the immanent value of time immemorial. Betsy Klein, the narrator and protagonist, keeps watch at her father's death bed along with her brother, Simon, and her mother, Stella. She addresses her father who is in a coma:

> A CLOUD CROSSES the face of the sun and you slide into the cold again, and I'm pulling Ma's cardigan across my shoulders and shivering. She's reading the newspaper, searching perhaps for the comic strip from the old days, Modesty Blaise and Willie Garvin up to their tricks, scaling walls and deep sea diving flushing out evil wherever they go. But it's a different time and a different place, and I can't even find the tongue that will ask Do you remember Modesty?
>
> Instead she is plunging into a litany of terrible crimes, the four-year-old girl who was raped by ten men, the white housewife who was stabbed and thrown into her own pool to drown I'm shouting, Stop it! And she says, I'm just telling you what it says in the newspaper.
>
> I'm hanging onto your every breath, the faint whistle as the air escapes from your lips. The pause, where time stops, and so do you, and then the next inhalation and the merry-go-

> round spins around and around, and I'm flying backwards with you, leaving Ma and her newspaper and the screens and machines behind
>
> (RL: 109)

In this extract Betsy struggles with her mother's apocalyptic exposition on post-apartheid South Africa. In response, she remembers the Modesty Blaise cartoon strip where justice reigned over evil and so expresses a desire to inhabit this "different time and a different place" in order to escape the unforgiving reality of the present. However, with some awareness, Betsy negates this nostalgic attachment. Her idealised childhood memories are acknowledged as such and she affords it no "tongue" in the present. Despite not sharing her mother's hysteria, Betsy empathises with the unjust present. And having rejected an escape through a nostalgic past, her claustrophobia is symptomatic of the *contretemps*. Instead, Betsy expresses a desperate plea for "the pause, where time stops". Her desire is to exit time completely. She imagines a transcendental utopia that is presumably attached to the finality of her father's passing. However, there is still "the next inhalation and the merry-go-round spins around and around", indicating that escape can be envisaged but not attained. And so the rest of the novel serves as an account of Betsy imaginatively 'entering' into her father's body in order to access his memories.

In "The Uses of Nostalgia", David Medalie argues that this process, and the novel at large, is an example of a critical or evolved nostalgia. *The Rowing Lesson* is cited as a refreshing departure from 'baser' uses of nostalgia in contemporary South African literature (the example he cites is this regard is Jo-Anne Richard's *The Innocence of Roast Chicken*) where the past is a static and unreflective idyll from childhood. On the contrary, Medalie notes that "Betsy Klein returns to South Africa, to her dying father, not in order to observe how the past is closed to the present,

sealed forever in its unique remoteness, but in an attempt to find points of contact, of interplay, between past and present" (2010: 43). The past and the present are equally demanding and relevant in relation to each other; they are read as transformative in their ability to define the narrative experiences of either. The impression of momentum, in both technique and narrative, allows for a constructive, creative and generative use of the past that helps us to understand and read the present as something other than a slave to a nostalgic past.

By extension, I argue that the text is, instead, informed by the affective impulses of nostalgia *contretemps* where the narration belies an investment in the future as opposed to the past or the present. In the text the narrative style accounts for her father's past but is also employed when Betsy wishes to speak to her father in the narrative present. Closer to the beginning of the text she states that "by the time I got here, you had stopped struggling. I miss the flailing you, grotesque as it was. At least you were alive then and not laid out flat in death's waiting room, in an end-stage coma" (RL: 26). By engaging him in a conversational present, we begin to discern a wish or denial of his present condition; "I'm the one escaping now, staring out the hospital window" (RL: 26). Her need to address her father directly is a means to animate him, for it insists on a dialogical relation between them even when he is not available to listen and respond. Furthermore, recalling his past in the present also takes on the intent of, quite literally, re-membering him. Her narrative recall maintains a state of relevance for a being and identity that is evidently slipping further away from the present.

Significantly, in order to escape this painful reality, she must then cling to the prospects of hope. She must anticipate the "time [when] you're really going to wake up" (RL: 102). Betsy makes

consistent pleas of this kind, hoping that it will incur future action; “all I want to see you do, just one more time, is sit up and wash your hands, one palm slipping over the other, raising a froth to a foam, hot water pouring down on them from the tap, washing all the germs away, But the hands don’t move” (RL: 27). As stated, this version of the future never arrives. Her hopeful expectations are thwarted as he eventually passes during the course of the narrative. Hence, Betsy is ultimately forced to accept that she inhabits “the Cape of No More Good Hope” (RL: 101).

In turn, *The Rowing Lesson* displays a remarkable ability to narrate the utter embrace of death as Betsy finally gets to enter the utopic space of “the pause, where time stops, and so do you (RL: 109). In *The Rowing Lesson*, the reader encounters another spacio-temporal dimension called Ebb ‘n Flow as an ‘outside-of-time’ tropic overlay that Betsy consciously employs in order to narrate her father’s personal history and, more importantly, his death. Ebb ‘n Flow is a lagoon in Knysna that her father adored and visited throughout his life. Betsy thus exploits its metaphoric potential to indicate the space of idyllic perfection as this is presumably how her father viewed it during his childhood. Furthermore, these sections are more deftly imbued with qualities of magical realism in relation to the rest of the text, suggesting again a utopic ‘nowhere’ as opposed to a historical locale from her father’s past.

Medalie also notes the presence of these “epiphanic experiences in the past and what E.M. Forster would have called ‘eternal moments’ (the most significant of which are associated with rowing a boat on the Ebb ’n Flow, a stretch of the Touw River)” (2010: 40). Yet he divorces this locale entirely from his discussion of nostalgia, choosing instead to read nostalgia in the complex

interplay between the narrative past and the present that "both contain dystopian elements" (2010: 40). But if neither the textual past nor the present is subject to affective idealization or suggestive of a longing to 'return', then it becomes unclear as to how and why this qualifies as nostalgia as opposed to being defined as a reflective or novelistic use of memory.

Arguably, it is Ebb 'n Flow that serves as the nostalgic locale of the text. Closer to a definition of nostalgia, Ebb 'n Flow is the idealised space that father yearns for throughout his life and ultimately returns to in death. In the final sequence of the text, which is presumably an account of her father in the moment of his death, Betsy and her father row their boat in Ebb 'n Flow. Though her father has been on the river many times before he has never made a journey into the source before, but now the river must be navigated until he reaches the mysterious point at the very top of the lagoon.

Ebb 'n Flow is often subject to originary temporal descriptions such as "Now and forever" (RL: 73) and "the beginning of the beginning" (RL: 243) and bears allusions to William Wordsworth's "spots of time" (11. 258) in *The Prelude*. As described by Wordsworth, these are moments of such intensity that they are forever able to help him transcend the present. More significantly

> Such moments, worthy of all gratitude,
> Are scattered everywhere, taking their date
> From our first childhood—in our childhood even
> Perhaps are most conspicuous
>
> (Wordsworth: 11. 274-277)

In Book First of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth recalls a childhood memory where he, prompted by Nature, takes a Shepherd's boat out on the lake (discussed further in chapter four). These and other immanent experiences from childhood and the subsequent revisitation through memory are deeply nostalgic gestures that result in repletion for Wordsworth. These "spots" are worthy of unadulterated idealization as they aid a transcendental escape from time. Similarly, in *The Rowing Lesson*, death is represented as a regressive trip: Betsy states that she is helping her father make "the opposite trip, the backwards birth, the horrible return" (RL: 145). In seeking articulation of death as a 'backwards birth' the text highlights a unified source and thus suggests the immanence of an absolute return.

Much like *White Lightning*, *The Rowing Lesson* also displays the reversion to frameworks of time immemorial after the subsequent disappointment of a future-oriented hope. Here, however, it is portrayed as a celebratory transcendence that Betsy actively seeks out as opposed to the undesirable return of the repressed in *White Lightning*. Furthermore, Betsy's father makes a successful transition into death, suggesting the complete dissolution of time; the future can no longer be perceived and can no longer be experienced as loss. There is only the affirmation that Betsy has made the ultimate journey, along with her father, altogether escaping time and nostalgia *contretemps* to the desired utopia where "the sunlight is divine" (RL: 279).

In opposition to Landsman's celebratory use of utopia to escape time, Zoë Wicomb cautions against its temptations, alongside those of nostalgia. *Playing in the Light* makes clear its reservations about nostalgia in the South African context. In the text the protagonist, Marion, is a business entrepreneur who no longer stays with her ageing father but frequently worries about

him. Marion's perception of her father's nostalgia is directly comparable to James's judgment of his mother in *White Lightning*. In both cases, the protagonist views the parent's nostalgia as a form of geriatric escapism.

Marion notes that her father, John, is hopelessly lost in the past. She imagines that "in the cramped tin-roofed terraced house in Observatory, he often thinks of the old farm" (PL: 4). She assumes that her nostalgic father wiles away his time remembering his family and the farm from his childhood. John's experience of the present is that of 'dead' or 'empty' time, an idle present that is only interrupted by his daughter's presence. Awaiting Marion's weekly visit, "John shuffles along the passage […] The last trip to the lavatory had turned out to be a false alarm, a waste of time […] He is sure that he can hear her car rising above the sounds of the city. Nowadays, John insists that he has a gift for identifying individual cars, for which he is grateful – it distracts from waiting. This is what he does, how he gets through time" (PL: 6). Due to the emptiness of the present, John's nostalgia becomes so severe that temporal confusion sets in; "for sure, it is Marion's Mercedes shooting along Main Road; and then the sound becomes steadier as it slides into the clippety-clop of horses' hooves. No more than a boy he is, holding the reins, his lithe body tense on the wagon kist as they negotiate the narrow, winding road of the Swartberg Pass" (PL: 7). The sounds of the present grow dim as the sounds of the past take precedence and John confuses the one for the other—the present for the past. As he embarks on his reverie of the past he soon forgets the urgency with which he was awaiting his daughter's visit.

In his state of temporal confusion, we see that John is equally susceptible to nostalgia *contretemps*. He is

> moved by his own helplessness, his inability to protect his darling child, he lets on after all: This country is going to the dogs, he says, wringing his hands. To think how hard we fought, took up arms for a decent life, for a country of which we can be proud…
> Marion stares at him in amazement. Is he losing his marbles? But Pappa, she says, you've never supported the liberation movement. What on earth are you talking about?
> […] It pains him, he says, to see how things are going to pot, to think of the good old days now all in a heap, collapsed, but in his confused politics he has somehow collaged the rehabilitated image of Nelson Mandela into that past. Also a jintelman, he says, how it must pain that poor man, seeing the country go to the dogs.
>
> (PL: 14-15)

With disbelief, Marion listens to her father recall a past he never lived. And with even greater incredulity, she listens to him empathise with a 'lost future' he had consistently remained passive towards. By illustrating how John incorporates nostalgia *contretemps* into his delusional state, Wicomb provides critique of how easily the sentiment can be subject to abuse. However, it illumines how widespread a condition it is in contemporary South Africa as it is already subject to superficial re-appropriations of this kind.

Wicomb also reveals other nostalgic formations in contemporary society as somewhat unsavoury. The narrative includes a shop owner called Mr. Mahmoud who also used to be a UDF (United Democratic Front) struggle poet. When he relates his history to Marion, she notes how his "eyes grow misty with nostalgia for the bad old days of resistance against apartheid" (PL: 63). As one so actively involved in the anti-apartheid struggle, Mr. Mahmoud longs for the revolutionary spirit that granted him a status more purposeful than that of a shop owner.

Furthermore, his opportunism shows in his attempts to remain 'relevant': "well, that old stuff is passé now, Mr Mahmoud says, it's all the rainbow-nation poetry that's in vogue. But he believes that the past has not been properly raked over, thus he is working on a series about the San people and their dispossession" (PL: 183-4). As Dennis Walder notes in *Postcolonial Nostalgias*, this particular incident in Wicomb's text is a satirical allusion to the nostalgic exploitation of the San history for the purposes of South African nation-building (2011), a concern previously discussed in my Introduction. Mr. Mahmoud hopes that latching on to the nostalgic appropriation of the San as the 'common ancestor' of all South Africans will return him to his previous role as national orator. In all senses, nostalgia is shown to be part of an exploitative economy that perpetuates old misgivings and the same can be said of utopian escapism in the text.

The narrative opens with an introduction to a rather self-satisfied Marion in her home environment. Her sea-side apartment in Bloubergstrand serves as a sign of accomplishment for a young business entrepreneur. However, this quickly begins to resemble a construct of a timeless utopia through which Marion escapes 'the times' in South Africa. She has bought a lavish four-poster bed that she first saw in the pages of an English décor magazine. Marion states that it is not just a bed but "rather a bower for an egte fairy princess, who would lie for a hundred chaste years in gauzed limbo, waiting for the world to change into a better, a more hospitable place. Marion knows the bed is extravagant, foolish perhaps for such a small flat – but what the hell, she deserves it, this marker of her success."(PL: 2). Just like her apartment in Bloubergstrand (as opposed to a more conveniently located apartment in the city of Cape Town), the bed sets her apart from the world and serves as some reprieve from the present. It is part of her deliberate attempt to maintain distance from the world in a typically utopian form; finding the world

inhospitable, she must escape to a space of protection where she is content to wait it out in her idyll, "for a hundred chaste years in gauzed limbo". But this state of removal is short-lived:

> lately, the four-poster has turned against her. There have been times, propped up with her magazines, when something buzzes in her ears, a sense of swarming that grows louder and louder, even as the sunset, which she can see from her bed, curls in serene pink and gold across the horizon and the cool Atlantic laps at Robben Island. Then, for a moment, she seems to gag on metres of muslin, ensnared in the fabric that wraps itself round and round her into a shroud from which she struggles to escape
>
> (PL: 2).

This incident is, quite literally, the initial visitation from the specter of her dead grandmother and so it serves as an entry into the vulnerable circumstances of time. By virulently compromising the space of Marion's utopia, the specter forces her to confront the past. This resonates strongly with Derrida's discussion of spectral tropes and the manner in which it effects a *contretemps*. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida argues against the declaration of the end of Marxism that accompanied the collapse of Communism and the rise of global capitalism and liberal democracy. Using Marx and Engel's *Communist Manifesto* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Derrida uses the appearance of spectral tropes to explore their subversive effects in relation to capitalism. As explained, the figure of the specter is representative of that which is neither present nor absent. Neither dead nor alive, the specter undermines the logic of presence and the present. This is an obsessive project for Derrida and it is here developed as hauntology or spectral poetics. Through analyses of *Hamlet* and *Communist Manifesto*, Derrida illustrates how the event of the specter's arrival is "what seems to be out front, the future, comes back in advance: from the past, from the back" (1994: 10). In this seemingly paradoxical fashion, the specter condemns us to the *contretemps*. It is that which invokes and enforces the past upon us. In this way, it is also disruptive in terms of the future, for it forces us to abandon any preconceived or narrow

conceptions of the future in order to make allowance for the specter. Derrida evokes the ghost in order to critique the over-determined messianism of late capitalism and democracy that finds more succinct expression in Fukuyama's claims of the end of history.[27] In response, Derrida argues that the ghosts of the political and economic past will continue to haunt human history and thus help to curtail the violent effects of an over-determined and unethical future. For this reason he states that the specter, by evoking our past, is always "repetition *and* the first time" (1994a: 10). The event of arrival is perpetual rather than singular and is continuously disruptive in its ability to reveal new futures.

This particular rendition of the *contretemps* is strikingly relevant in a reading of *Playing in the Light*. Not only does this text make clear how the teleological drive of the 'new' South Africa has been subject to capitalistic interpretation, it also makes an application of the specter in order to account for the marginalised past in relation to the future.

In *Playing in the Light*, Marion admits to having "voted for the Nationalists", even though "she knew deep down that those policies were not viable. But what could one do, short of joining the hypocritical English voters and betraying your own?" (PL: 28). She sets herself apart from a liberal white identity, which she views as distasteful. However, this has not prevented her from fully adjusting to post-apartheid times as "now she understands only too well that the past was a mistake, that things are better now, for instance, things like tourism. She certainly can't complain

[27] In *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992) Fukuyama argues that history has developed along Hegelian lines by revealing a developmental trajectory that is reaching fruition in global liberal democracy and free-market economics. He appears to be well aware that his thinking is guided by messianism and the tone is celebratory as he explores the triumph of democracy and capitalism at present. In this regard, he declares that the 'end of history' is upon us and tries to conceive of our post-historical existences.

about the boom in travel" (PL: 28). Marion's sense of commitment is relayed in purely economic terms; as the owner of a travel agency, the 'new' South Africa has certainly helped her thrive and economically secure her private utopia.

Wicomb makes clear how Marion appropriates a national narrative for narcissistic purposes as her ambition makes her impatient with people who "fail to move forward and look to the future" (PL: 48). A seemingly patriotic sentiment is, instead, an expression of great intolerance for the residue of the past that reminds of her of her 'white' complicity. Speaking about the security guards who stand outside her office car-parking, she indignantly notes: "you can't go anywhere nowadays without a flock of unsavoury people crowding around you, making demands, trying to make you feel guilty for being white and hardworking, earning your living" (PL: 28).

Ultimately, Marion's utopian tendencies and her tenacious drive towards self-sufficiency are, in themselves, indicative of the fact that she has little investment or faith in South Africa's present or future. Yet, the magnificent haunting that Marion undergoes (discussed further in chapter three) entrusts her with the past and hence, the potential for a future. As she uncovers the history of her grandmother, Marion's world widens to the revelation of an entire family she never knew she had and she finds herself increasingly committed to building a life for herself in South Africa.

Again drawing a comparison to *White Lightning*, we find that both authors demarcate nostalgia from a repressed memory that seeks a return. However, unlike Cartwright who inscribes this return as one that reinforces the inability to escape time immemorial and thus close-off any

prospect of the future, Wicomb is intent on demonstrating the transformative force of the return of the repressed as that which ultimately introduces a vision of the future. While *White Lightening* is dismissive of all forms of memory because none is constructive – the return of the repressed is distinctly destructive in this text – *Playing in the Light* reserves its 'suspicions' primarily for nostalgia in *all* of its forms and maintains the integrity of the specter to seek a viable address through Marion.

In this manner, Wicomb utilizes the specter to suggest a widening of the teleological frame to become more inclusive but certainly not to declare its loss. Again, this resonates with Derrida's interpretation of the specter whose robust energy thrusts Marion out of her timeless utopia such that she may seek a different future through the continuous return of the spectral past. In this manner, *Playing in the Light* appears disinterested in representing nostalgia *contretemps* as a pervasive condition as it is more invested in illumining a future that is only just beginning.

With similar intentions to Wicomb, Marlene Van Niekerk also cites the re-visitation of the past as central to the thematic and structural concerns of her novel, *Agaat*. In the narrative present, Kamilla (Milla) De Wet is on her deathbed and is being nursed by Agaat. However, it soon becomes apparent that the present is, in fact, a contest between Milla and Agaat over the monopoly of the past; "who's going to give in first? On the facts of the past? Or does our assignment lie here in this present?"(A: 435) asks Milla as they square up against each other. Much like with Marion in *Playing in the Light*, Milla also has her own version of utopia that must be forcefully compromised in order to illustrate a necessary 'birthing' into the vulnerabilities of time and, more specifically, the *contretemps*.

For Milla, utopia lies in the intricate maps of the family farm that she has inherited from a long lineage of ancestors. She finds great comfort in looking at the maps precisely because they convey a sense of hermeneutic pleasure; "what is fixed and where? What real? If only I could once again see the places marked on the map, the red brackets denoting gates, cattle-grids, sluices, the red is-equal-to sign of the bridge [...] Maps attend lifetimes. What is an age without maps?"(A: 81). The maps are heralded for their ability to offer spatial and temporal fixity. To look over the maps is to find confirmation of a perfectly ordered world that has not changed and is not subject to change.

Significantly enough, it is Agaat who denies Milla a viewing of these maps. Throughout events in the narrative present Milla is trying to direct Agaat's attention to the maps; "there, behind the little blue books, lie the maps that I want to see. And you may have dominion over my hours that you count off there and apportion with your devious little snake-hand and your white casque in front of the clock face, Agaat" (A: 65). Here Agaat is perceived as a vengeful keeper of time who denies Milla the maps that link her to her desired utopia. Hence, like Marion's specter that expels her from utopia, Agaat makes it impossible for Milla to experience the timeless 'nowhere' of the maps. Like Marion, Milla must instead enter the discomfort of the *contretemps* where the re-evaluation of the past becomes central to the creation of new temporal orders. [28]

[28] Other tropes in the text that suggest a relinquishing of utopian frameworks are that of Milla's garden and the rainbow that Agaat embroiders for Milla. As a young woman, Milla dreams of a garden on the farm that resembles "paradise" (A: 458) but by the end of the narrative, Agaat has taken over the arrangement and planning of this garden and Milla has little control over and access to it. Ostensibly, Van Niekerk uses the image of the Rainbow to take a dig at the utopianism of post-apartheid narrativity. When Agaat finally reveals the large piece of embroidery that she has been working on, Milla is filled with pity. Milla imagines that Agaat has laboured over this embroidered rainbow in order to fill her "empty time" (A: 217) but Milla considers it "a waste of time" (A: 218). Milla is averse to the image's "perfection, purity, order. Adversaries are they all, the devil's own little helpers. How my heart burns to tell her things! Not that I can see it. Now that it's too late" (A: 219). Instead, the new hope at the end of the novel

More generally, it becomes interesting to note how the *contretemps* is developed in the text as Agaat consistently employs time and temporality as 'weapons' against Milla and thus positions herself as a temporal adversary. Consider the early paragraphs of Chapter Two and Chapter Four, which opens with the clinical narration of clock time over which Agaat presides; "half past nine on the alarm clock. Punctual to the second" (A: 39) and "Agaat doesn't need an alarm. Every morning just before the grandfather clock chimes the hour, she awakens. By then I have been lying awake for a long time" (A: 76). Milla's observation of Agaat's timely precision is a common narrative technique − the ardent display of functional-time evidently serves to make a mockery of a subject who has ceased to function at all; "what is the time? I don't want to know. In the front room the grandfather clock ticks. My room limns itself from hour to hour, completes itself everyday. My room is a perverse painter. I am the still-life" (A: 102-103).

From Agaat we mostly get a sense that this mastery of time is a matter of personal pride but Milla positions Agaat as her antagonist in this game of temporality and her careful nursing is often met with disdain; "what an ado about nothing everyday!/ What a farce!/ Pastime, Agaat calls it sometimes"(A: 152-153). Here the play on "pastime" is indicative of both the useless passing of time and the fact that the present, for someone who is all too aware that she is dying soon, already feels like the past.

is to understand that "now is the time when she should be improvising with me, instead of nursing me singlemindedly, but she can't grasp it. Once upon a time she could, but she taught herself not to. I taught her not to" (A: 65). The narrative treatment of these tropes, much like the maps, suggests a need and desire to perceive experience without the phantasmagoric presence of overwhelming utopias.

Yet Agaat does not merely employ her mastery of clock-time in the functional present to antagonize Milla – the future is also strategically leveraged to cause upset. When Milla expresses a desire to see the maps of the farm in chapter one, Agaat interprets or actively misinterprets as she pleases and rather snidely reads from a Farmer's Weekly magazine instead:

> New developments in the practice of crop and pasture rotation: The south-western districts after 1994? Nay what, you know all about that. What about: The future of small-grain cultivation in South Africa? That's just up your alley, Ounooi, the future […]
> The future. She placed her finger under the words.
> No, I signaled with my eyes, no, no, don't come with your silly games now
>
> (A: 12)

The consideration of the future is an equally cruel proposition for a dying Milla and Agaat appears to be aware of the effect that it has on her. She pushes this temporal marker, quite literally, towards Milla in order to give expression to the sense of vacuity that it arouses.

Agaat's temporal 'tyranny' thus achieves the desired effect of enforcing the *contretemps* upon Milla as a disjointed "map of days, a calendar, that I have and that she writes on every day. But I can't see that far any more. And what do I care for time? One day is like another in this decoction she has devised for me" (A: 158). Milla experiences the present as a series of indiscernible shifts as "time that streams away backwards, time that ticks on ahead, being wound up for the running down" (A: 64). And in a state of clear discomfort, Milla exclaims that it is "that time again on Grootmoedersdrift! Yes-and-no time!" (A: 305). Unable to talk, Milla must succumb to conveying messages with her eyes. In this particular incident, Milla tries to direct Agaat's attention to the itch that she wants her to scratch on her body. Agaat, however, cannot read Milla's mind and she grows frustrated with Milla's inability to communicate clear meaning

to her. It is interesting to note that this break-down in communication is here presented in temporal terms of undecidability which marks the desire for a more linear structure that will result in a more definitive trajectory of meaning.

Derrida's exegesis on the links between temporality, ontology and communicative meaning in *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond* (1987), prove useful here. In this rather expansive text, the 'envois' section serves as an epistolary preface that employs the letter as a vehicle for its own deconstruction. Derrida writes a sequence of letters that are penned by JD to an audience that ranges from Plato to Freud to an anonymous addressee. These letters are presented as items in an aneconomic exchange as Derrida's text operates as both narrative event and philosophical critique. In the 'envois', despite all the hyperbolic playfulness and endless digressions, Derrida nevertheless de/constructs a clear picture of the discourse of the letter for us. The discourse of the letter, he argues, is governed by what he terms 'The Postal Principle'. This principle gives rise to the three posts (stations) of the post: the letter relies on the sender, the system of transmission and lastly, the destination. What 'The Postal Principle' assures us, according to Derrida, is the determinism that leads us to believe that a letter will always arrive at its destination. By regulating the three stations of the post, the letter always arrives with meaning that is clearly communicable and always already discernable (Derrida 1987). It is in this manner that the 'epoch of the post' gives rise to a closed system in which the letter always arrives. The value of 'The Postal Principle' is that it operates in an anticipatory mode that always ensures the future arrival of the message. It modulates time in a linear and sequential manner such that the message does not do astray. Hence, communicative logic always relies on the future in which meaning arrives.

This is, however, far from what Milla experiences in the *contretemps*; "that's my technique nowadays. Progress through misunderstanding. I just had to get the misunderstandings going first. The first would lead on to another until I had reached my goal. It's a retarded kind of logic. Gone are the days of the shortest distance between A and B. Now we're doing the detours, Agaat and I" (A: 11-12). The linear or sequential chain from A to B has been severed and so Milla must travel off-course. As the narrative progresses, Milla finds that she must abandon the hope of 'arrival' and succumb to the detours and misunderstandings as the prospect of arriving at meaning no longer bears any promise. Indeed, *Agaat*, like the other texts, once again illustrates the realisation of a failed teleological structure. Yet, in this novel, much like in *Playing in the Light*, the acceptance of the discomfort of the *contretemps* does not amount to abandoning a teleological arch but reconfiguring it in the hope of a radically different version of the future.

At the outset, Agaat has torn out and stuck the first page of Milla's old journal on the reading stand to upset her. As Milla is paralyzed, she cannot turn away from this forced confrontation of her own version of the past. Burning with shame, she states that

> I was young. And it was not the first entry. The real beginning of it all I never wrote down. Never felt up to revising those depths.
> Not after I'd found out what I'd brought upon myself.
> Where, in any case, does something like that begin? Your destiny? Where does it begin?
>
> (A: 10).

In *Agaat*, much of the narrative is devoted to acknowledging that the perception of the past is 'false' and needs to grow more inclusive of what it has previously marginalised. In the case of Milla, it is the violent gesture of obliterating Agaat from her account of family history. However,

as can be discerned here, the contestation of the past must happen because the version of the past that exists is a dysfunctional 'beginning' and has thus created a discordant understanding of the present and a failed future. For without a clear understanding of where the past begins, the entire trajectory of journeying towards and arriving at a destination are similarly compromised. Hence the novel, in its entirety, serves to account for Milla's submission to Agaat's inquisition of the past. For in finding a truer 'beginning', they can re-establish a destinal framework that will, once again, allow for the re-habitation of the future.

In contrast to almost all the texts analysed above, Imraan Coovadia's *High Low In-between* is a novel firmly committed to the narrative present from which it rarely shifts its narratological focus. Not taking many detours into the past, it offers a rich and textured expression of the *contretemps* through the present day experiences of Nafisa and her son, Shakeer, who narrate alternate chapters.

In the text, Shakeer returns to South Africa with the expectation of attending his father's retirement party. But by the time he reaches home, his father has allegedly shot himself and he is now in time for his father's funeral instead. As plans undergo rapid changes, Shakeer experiences time as halted or lacking; "everything happened with great suddenness. The arrangements for the burial were made. It was necessary to complete the ceremony before sunset. Nobody could panic because time was short" (HLI: 39). And this compression of time inevitably gives rise to feelings of chaos; "Shakeer disliked the disorder around him. A Muslim funeral was invariably haphazard, given the restriction on time" (HLI: 40). He resents the rushed nature of the ceremony as he cannot keep up. Shakeer succumbs to a state of numbness or

incomprehension; “time passed without consciousness on Sharky’s part, as if he were reading a book with an absent mind, forgetting the pages just as soon as he turned them over” (HLI: 55).

As per the *contretemps*, Shakeer assumes his father’s death to be untimely; “his family was supposed to have turned the corner. His father had been recovering from the serious illness of the previous year. The transplant, performed by Mackey and David Gerson, had given him the chance to live. A kidney had been found in the nick of time” (HLI: 46-47).
Furthermore, there is also the sub-plot where love is also deemed untimely: when Shakeer meets Leila, his ex-girlfriend from university, he begins to wonder why he had not married her. For him, the flaw is that of failed teleology; “but things were as they had developed rather than as they were intended to be. By the time you saw the drift the inertia was too great to move them back into a rational direction” (HLI: 168). Shakeer recalls being rather fond of Leila and feels the tug of old attraction towards her. But now she is married with two children and the rectification of the ‘lost’ trajectory of time seems impossible.

It is interesting to note how much Shakeer’s narrative resembles that of Shakespeare’s Hamlet: Shakeer’s father has suffered at the hands of political sabotage and his murder staged as a suicide. Feeling the injustice of having his father’s good reputation slandered, Shakeer decides to pursue his father’s murder case. And similar to Derrida’s assessment of Hamlet, the need for justice translates into a desire to restore the dislocation of the *contretemps* (1994). Yet like Hamlet, this pursuit is futile and only leads further into the *contretemps*. Shakeer’s earnest desire for justice is met with indifference and he is forced to acknowledge that “people had a different sense of time in Durban” (HLI: 164). As he attempts to follow up on the case with the police he

realises that he must instead concede to the inevitability of "a looking glass society. Nobody and nothing was in charge. His nausea dissipated on remembering this fact" (HLI: 103).

Despite the fact that the murder is solved in the end (though entirely by his mother's wits) Shakeer perceives present day South Africa to be inhabited by a host of 'looking glass creatures' (HLI: 170) who, in accordance with "the logic of the looking glass" (HLI: 151), succumb to corruption, opportunism and greed. Hence, it comes as no surprise to Shakeer that even his mother, Nafisa, is upset by his pursuit of the murder case and chooses to believe in his father's suicide instead; "it was rare for Nafisa to be angry with him but then all the rules were suspended in a looking glass universe" (HLI: 118). Finding that there has been a mere swapping of an old corrupt justice system for yet another, he exclaims with great exasperation; "how stifling it was, South Africa! How repetitive!" (HLI: 96).

This is comparable to *White Lightning* where Cartwright employs African belatedness as a temporal modality to highlight the loss that James experiences in relation to the future. Here, however, there is the added emphasis on how justice becomes an unfathomable concept when there is no access to a future in which to think it. Again this development is fully compliant with Derrida's temporalisation of justice in *Specters of Marx* where, via *Hamlet*, he explains that the future is the necessary means by which we understand justice (Derrida 1994). Hence, Shakeer's great lament that "time improved nothing" (HLI: 95) in South Africa is indicative of a world in which justice seems structurally impossible. And much like Milla in *Agaat*, he experiences great isolation in the realisation that "there was no means to convey a message from one to another, or if there was, it was transmitted by the logic of the broken telephone so that it was garbled on

arrival" (HLI: 51). In the *contretemps*, where no communicative act allows for suitable arrival, we again bear witness to the failure of destinal logic. Ultimately, Shakeer grows to believe that "the future was as dark as the diviner's tea. So, now he came to think about it, was the present" (HLI: 215).

This fatalistic surrender to nostalgia *contretemps* can also be witnessed in the outcome of the subplot. When Shakeer initially meets Leila he is hopeful about rekindling their relationship because he feels that they were meant to be together. Shakeer begins his bold pursuit to win over a married woman but eventually gives in to doubt.

> Sharky imagined that for uncounted years the two of them had been sitting and standing in these positions, in this tiled kitchen with its saucepans, blocks of knives and ladles, and the sanded lozenge of the chopping board. In this imaginary kitchen they had become used to each other, had begun to fit into each other and become pieces in a single puzzle, which was the shortest definition of love. But it was impossible to return to what should have been normal. What had happened had taken the place of what should have happened. Now it had a claim of its own
>
> (HLI: 218).

When Shakeer visits Leila he imagines a different present and future for their relationship. However, he also learns – after they have intercourse – that Leila is not prepared to leave her unhappy marriage. Shakeer is disappointed by her investment in the status quo and he dismisses the unrealized potential for a better existence as an impossible fantasy.

Yet, *High Low In-between* also holds an invariably different response to nostalgia *contretemps*: while Shakeer becomes consumed by it, Nafisa's narrative accounts for the more positive

employment of the *contretemps* by displaying the ability to eventually divorce it from feelings of loss and nostalgia.

Nafisa's husband, Arif, was a medical researcher working on HIV/AIDS research in South Africa. Through mysterious events, involving political and professional sabotage, he was forced into retirement and subsequently became depressed and ill. In the light of their politically active contributions to the liberation struggle, Nafisa finds the current political environment particularly disheartening. And like Shakeer she vocalises her sense of grave disappointment; "seeing the speed at which that world receded brought Nafisa's heart to a halt. So much of their lives, so much life and energy, had gone into opposing the old government" (HLI: 21). The present that she inhabits is clearly one of squandered expectations and, in effect, produces a dismal outlook of contemporary South African society.

A family friend, Jadwat, has also succumbed to nostalgia *contretemps*. He was once the mayor of Richmond but "recently Jadwat had made known he was done with day-to-day politics. Liberation had been unkind to his ideals" (HLI: 14). Despite the fact that Nafisa is often irritated with Jadwat's need to complain and is, more generally, disinclined to agree with him, she accepts that "Jadwat was correct. This new country they had helped to create was more treacherous than one might have anticipated" (HLI: 25). It thus follows that, similar to that of Marion's father and Mr. Mahmoud in Wicomb's *Playing in the Light*, Nafisa and Jadwat are also liable to experiences of struggle nostalgia. As stated

Nafisa experienced the strangest tug of fellowship when she saw ministers from the defunct National Party mentioned in the newspapers. After a while old enemies were almost like old friends.

> She was struck by their obituaries. It was odd that you could regret the passing of an old enemy. In retrospect, compared with what had followed, the old government had been too obvious, too inexpert, to disguise its malignity. There were more subtle enemies…
>
> (HLI: 21).

In the light of present anomie, Nafisa expresses a longing for the apartheid past when life, for people such as Jadwat[29] and Nafisa, was governed by the teleological narrative of liberation. However, her nostalgia strikes her as "odd", suggesting a sense of bemused distance. Much like in previous textual analyses, *High Low In-between* problematises nostalgia for the past. In attempts to further trivialize nostalgic feeling, Nafisa, later in the text, smells the acetic passages of the hospital and comments that "it proved you could be nostalgic for anything. How odd!" (HLI: 126). Again reverting to the expression of nostalgia's 'oddness', Nafisa underlines how displaced nostalgia feels in relation to the past and she reserves nostalgic affect for a lost future instead.

Similar to the rendition of Shakeer's nostalgia *contretemps*, Nafisa's experience is also rendered in temporal terms. At the outset, Nafisa states that she has been living through "a difficult year" (HLI: 11) and her sense of mourning is distinctly related to the future as "her ready tears were pre-emptive, the prediction of some circumstance of which she had no knowledge. Since her husband's operation she had sensed some catastrophe waiting to show itself" (HLI: 11). As her circumstances bear down on her, Nafisa becomes increasingly anxious about the future that now spirals out of her conceptual control. Hence she describes herself as "slow, she knew, to work

[29] Expressing similar sentiments, Jadwat states that "the days when we could rely on our friends in the movement are long gone. Today it's every man for himself" (HLI: 24).

out what happened around her. Others were rapid" (HLI: 27). And feels herself to be subject to temporal dislocation; "however fast she drove, they seemed to be motionless" (HLI: 37).

In the novel, the unknown future event that Nafisa fears is her husband's murder. Thus when she walks into the bedroom her husband's dead body is not met with shock but with uncanny recognition; "she recognized the scene just as if she was remembering it from the day before. There was nothing in the room to surprise her. She could understand exactly what had happened. She had known about this in the morning. She had known about it the day before, the month before, and in fact since the moment of her birth" (HLI: 38). Despite the fact that time has now met her fearful expectations of the future, Nafisa still appears to be disoriented as she begins to trace time in a backwards motion – all the way to her birth. However, we see that this is, for Nafisa, the first time that she gets to experience a form of temporal coherence that has eluded her since the outset of the novel. She is able, once again, to trace time – albeit in a backwards trajectory. Finding an experience of time that has brought its expectations to fruition, Nafisa feels herself born anew in time; "Nafisa was struck, at the moment, by the thought that her life had just begun" (HLI: 38).

She finally succumbs to the looking glass with reckless abandonment: "for she was Alice and has been Alice from the first breath she took" (HLI: 185). Here Nafisa must relinquish notions of the future; "the future, Nafisa thought, belonged to the Roses[30]" (HLI: 178). Her sense of hopelessness makes her feel arbitrary in the space; "Nafisa couldn't regret these alterations. She wasn't nostalgic. The place never belonged to her" (HLI: 238) and so decides that "she would

[30] Rose being an incorrigible nurse with whom Nafisa has had many abrasive encounters in the hospital.

unload all her burdens. She would sell the house and leave the country behind" (HLI: 181). However, Coovadia challenges the 'ease' with which she accepts her losses and makes the decision to emigrate, as the initial 'high' of surrender quickly turns to feelings of extreme dissolution, fatalism and hysteria. And, by the end of the novel, the uncomfortable journey of the *contretemps* results in a celebration of her tardy awakening that

> tomorrow would mark the beginning of the future. Tomorrow she would have her first tomorrow…She has grown up late in life. It had taken such a quantity of experience, more than was allotted to a lifetime, but she had blossomed into sympathy with every creature in the universe.
>
> (HLI: 247)

Ultimately, Nafisa finds it impossible to leave South Africa as she embraces the 'tomorrow', to which she re-commits herself. The reaffirmation of teleology as an open-ended and decidedly more modest prospect than utopia is something this text shares in common with Wicomb's *Playing in the Light* and Van Niekerk's *Agaat*. As texts that encompass characters who actively choose to remain in South Africa, it is interesting to note how these authors suggest that they *must* challenge the affective conditions of nostalgia and nostalgia *contretemps* in order to do so.

This is in direct comparison to the temporal sensibilities of émigré characters such as Jakkie in *Agaat*, Michiel in *Kings of the Water*, James in *White Lightning* and Shakeer in *High Low In-between* who all employ nostalgia *contretemps* as the very means by which they maintain distance from South Africa. As outlined in this chapter, an awareness of the *contretemps* results from the realisation of a future that feels lost. However, the reflexive turn towards the employment of normative nostalgia in order to remedy the discomfort of the *contretemps* is problematised in these texts. Instead, nostalgia *contretemps* prevails as a means by which to understand the present *contretemps*, where the affective investment in a lost future accounts for

the sense of dislocation one feels. The curious thing, however, is that nostalgia *contretemps* does not 'alleviate' dislocation but rather serves to provide a reason for it. As Fritzsche states, "nostalgia therefore acts as a mechanism that uses the discontinuities that have been made available by revolutionary narrative in order to make parochial misfortunes socially meaningful (2001: 1595). Similarly, nostalgia *contretemps* provides meaning to the sense of dislocation they must continue to feel in order to retain their status as émigrés.

In opposition, the characters that choose to stay on in South Africa all pass through nostalgia *contretemps* in order to realise that they must live in the ruptured temporality of the *contretemps*. As evidenced in this chapter, this is by no means an anti-messianic stance. Rather, there is the ability to retain the importance of the future as a temporal modality but in a manner that is significantly less prescriptive. The suggestion of a 'false-start' as far as the future is concerned is indeed strong, bringing with it the rejuvenating quality of a 'new beginning' in the present *contretemps*. And, if Mikhail Bakhtin is to be believed, the novel is the most appropriate place in which to begin a process of this kind. In "Epic and the Novel", Bakhtin comments on how the Enlightenment brought with it a new kind of writing and a new kind of novel. He argues that the novel became a vehicle for temporal and social expansions taking place within society. Hence, one finds in that novel that "the more actively and consciously it moves into the future the more tangible and indispensable its inconclusiveness becomes" (1981: 30). Similarly, as I have tried to illustrate in this chapter, the treatment of time of temporality in contemporary South African writing is indicative of a transition of this kind where the *contretemps* is the very means by which one actively encounters the future anew.

Chapter Two: The Longer Future

If everything from now on will be different (which is also to say the same), will the past be different too?

Playing in the Light – 106

You reach forward into the past, then pull your arms and the boat back into the longer future

The Rowing Lesson – 241

In this chapter I illustrate how renditions of nostalgia *contretemps* in contemporary South African literature leads to a growing awareness of historical contingency. The 'blow' of history is palpable in these texts as the literary imaginary limns the moment of recognizing "paradoxically, *the present itself* – our present can only be conceived only as the outcome (not of what actually happened in the past, but also) of the crushed potentials for the future that were contained in the past" (Žižek 2000b: 90). Hence these novels express a newfound vulnerability in relation to the past and through the employment of apocalyptic rhetoric, allude to a desire for different historical modalities that will allow for the unfolding of "the longer future" (RL: 241).

In *Novel Histories*, Michael Green argues that Jameson's definition of 'history'[31] provides a useful explanation of historical form in South African literature. Historical writing, as described by Jameson, is a resistant form. It inscribes the past *against* the historical present in order to critique it. Likewise, Green maintains that much fiction written during the apartheid era uses the future – as opposed to the past – to condemn and critique the historical present. Using Jameson's

[31] Green defines it as follows; "history, then, if it is to have an historical significance for the present, must be able to create the past powerfully enough, as Frederic Jameson resonantly puts it, 'to come before us as a radically different life form which rises up to call our own form of life into question and pass judgment on us' (1988a:175). It is not enough to tell the history of the present though the past; it is the challenge to the present that the past may represent that is its most powerful form" (1997: 113).

model, he argues that this use of resistant form counts as historical writing and coins the term 'future histories' (1997) to classify these texts.

Green states that writing 'future histories' implies "belief in the nature of history as developmental, hierarchical, and, in the formal sense at least, progressive. Historicism of this sort is central to crucial points in the liberal agenda" (Green 1997: 281). A progressive view of history is arguably necessary during periods of political upheaval, and, as many have noted, often interchangeable with a broader understanding of postcolonial nationalism (Naficy 1999, Gaylard 2005). Likewise, the anti-apartheid struggle relied on progressive notions of history to carry the national imaginary out of its oppressive past and towards a radically different future. As Green notes,

> punctual transitions since 1990 in South Africa, which cumulatively fulfil the standard narratological requirements necessary for the status as an *event* ('the transition from one state to another state') in a rather literal political sense, have equally been forceful and public enough to qualify as rupture, a break, an end to history itself as South African history has been so long conceived.
>
> (1997: 4)

The post-apartheid nation was not merely read as that which progressively extended out of history, but rather as that which occurred despite history. Closer to a revolutionary mode of historical interpretation (despite the fact that the South African example stressed its transformative as opposed to revolutionary intentions), the post-apartheid nation employed difference as central in relation to its past. Furthermore, the abrupt entry into a post-apartheid state signified the historical moment of 'arrival' into this radically new reality. Yet, as already implied above, this presents an ideological vacuum as far as a progressive modality of history is

concerned. Accordingly, many post-transitional theorists have noted the strong temptation to read Francis Fukuyama's 'end of history' scenario into contemporary circumstances.

For example, Thabo Tsehloane reads K. Sello Duiker's *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* (2001) and Niq Mhlongo's *Dog Eat Dog* (2004) as indicative of

> a 'struggle fatigue' or 'hope fatigue' about imagining further possibilities of change. The post-apartheid state thus projects itself as the 'end of history' which cannot be transcended. It perceives itself as a perfect society and state beyond which no kind of different future is possible
>
> (2010: 80)

As Tsehloane explains, the future-orientedness of the post-apartheid state impressed itself upon its citizens as an ultimate political and social perfectibility that can also be witnessed in Fukuyama's discourse on liberal capitalism (see also Jamal 2010, Frenkel and MacKenzie 2010). Because the post-apartheid nation was narrated in stringently utopian terms − where alternative futures were never required or entertained − the reality of its current non-realisation has problematised the very notion of the future itself and given rise to a 'post-transitional' South Africa that now resembles a merely reactionary dystopia. This dissenting opinion is widespread amongst cultural and literary theorists who collectively imply that post-apartheid nation building has more narrative appeal than sociopolitical value. Perceiving history as a revelation of progressive goals, they opine, is less conducive to the aims of reform (De Kock 2004, Nuttall 2009, Frenkel and MacKenzie 2010, Titlestad 2010, Barnard 2012).

Furthermore, critics have noted how a future-oriented political and social 'script' consequently reworks memory and history into a product of democratic ideals. The hermeneutic and politically conservative accruement of the past, they argue, is ethically dubious in that it allows for no relation to the past to develop outside of future mediation (De Kok 1998, Nuttall 1998, Ndebele 1998, De Kock 2004, Shepherd, Murray and Hall 2007, Brenmer 2007, Jamal 2010, Barnard 2012).[32] Hence, they suggest a need to explore more ethical and enduring historical modalities for sociopolitical narrativity. Mostly, they advocate for historical and historiographical recovery of the past on its own terms such that history may begin to account for that which has been marginalised by both the apartheid and the post-apartheid regimes.[33]

Ostensibly, this resonates with schools of postmodern historiography where there is the need to "confront and contest any modernist discarding or recuperating of the past in the name of the future" in order to have "a dialogue with the past in the light of the present" (Hutcheon 1990: 19). In *The Poetics of Postmodernism*, Linda Hutcheon explains postmodern historiography as an essentially distanciated articulation of the past where the incessant need to read the future as radical difference has been directed towards the past, making history a site of discontinuity rather than continuity. Similarly, Green (who, like Hutcheon, cites Michel Foucault), states that postmodern historiography does not believe in identification or sameness but evokes otherness by allowing "the past to resist being appropriated by the present" (1997: 174). Hence, the postmodern relation to the past is obsessive, but remains tentative and skeptical. The archive

[32] On the contrary, Andrè Brink is willing to participate in what is seen as a 'necessary forgetting': he argues in favour of the narrative power to heal and reconcile a broken nation (Brink 1998). Hall and Bombardella also suggest that practical realisations of the visionary should not be dismissed as a mere 'cheat' on the past but should be accepted for the potential future that it makes allowances for (2007).

[33] This development also serves to account for growing defenses of nostalgia in contemporary South Africa (Medalie 2010, Delisle 2006 and Dlamini 2009).

must continually be acknowledged as a self-conscious production in the present (Hutcheon 1992).[34]

Yet according to Derrida, the return to the archive does not necessarily entail an abandonment of teleology (1994 and 1998). In *Specters of Marx*, he insists that "the paradox must be sharpened: the more the new erupts in the revolutionary crisis, the more the period is in crisis, the more it is 'out of joint,' then the more one has to evoke the old, 'borrow' from it" (Derrida 1994 :109). Derrida states that when the post-revolutionary impulse erupts as the *contretemps*, the return to the past is reflexive. However, unlike (and presumably in direct opposition to) Foucault, Derrida's notion of historiography bears no postmodern compulsion to sever its ties with the future. The 'borrowing' from the past is precisely that − historiographical recovery is never seen as an attempt to locate difference exclusively in the past. Instead, these gestures toward the past occur, always, for the sake of the future.[35] Furthermore, declarations that "the future *is* its

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[34] According to Hutcheon, other salient features of postmodern historiography include humour and parody in relation to the past (1991, 1992). These, however, are largely absent in the South African context where the past is still mainly subjected to largely sentimental representations.

[35] This is directly comparable to Žižek's interpretation of Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in both *The Ticklish Subject* and *The Fragile Absolute*. In *The Fragile Absolute* he states that

> the New emerges in order to resolve an unbearable tension in the Old, and was as such already 'present' in the Old in a negative mode, in the guise of an infinite sadness and longing. This is what, on a totally different level, Walter Benjamin was trying to articulate in his explicitly anti-evolutionist notion of the Messianic promise of a revolutionary Act that will retroactively redeem the Past itself: the present revolution will retroactively realize the crushed longings of all the past, failed revolutionary attempts. What this means is that, in a properly *historical* perspective as opposed to evolutionist historicism, the past is not simply past, but bears within it its proper utopian promise of a future Redemption: in order to understand a past epoch properly, it is not sufficient to take into account the historical conditions out of which it grew – one has also to take into account the utopian hopes of a Future that were betrayed and crushed by it – that which was 'negated', that which did not happen – so that the past historical reality was the way it was.
>
> (2000: 89)

I have placed this here, as a footnote, because despite the fact that Žižek makes an overly-liberal interpretation of Benjamin – who in 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' appears to have great contentions with *any* notion of the 'future' and invests primarily in the modern promise of the 'now' for redemption of the past (1968) – it nevertheless reads as a particularly lucid, and thus helpful, exegesis of Derrida's historiographical position.

memory" (Derrida 1994: 37) [emphasis mine] imply a reading of history as a system of 'sameness'. This is a historical modality that, unlike those that seek out difference as located either in the past or the future, illustrates how history, time and experience can be read as comparatively similar.

Arguably, the archival turn in contemporary literary output can be interpreted in this manner. There is a clear sense that progressive ideals of history have enforced a denial of the past and a warped perception of the future as exceptional. The representation of historical contingency thus captures the onset of "something else" that "strikes a blow at the teleological order of history" and Derrida again identifies this as the "*Contretemps*" (1994: 77). Ultimately, the resistant mode of reading the past and the future recedes in favour of a system of sameness as many texts explore the potential of this historical modality to allow for a more sustainable understanding of the future. These texts resume dialogues with the past in order to demonstrate how it has more *direct* implications on the future. Yet, in doing so, authors also illustrate how the employment of historical sameness is equally open to abuse and misappropriation.

Previously, I discussed characters like Jakkie De Wet in Van Niekerk's *Agaat*, Michiel in Behr's *Kings of the Water*, James in Cartwright's *White Lightening* and Shakeer in Coovadia's *High Low In-between* as symptomatic of nostalgia *contretemps* because of their struggle with the loss of teleological certainties in their lives and environments. Abandoning their ideals of history as progressive, they now view the future apocalyptically. Yet in order to justify these visions, they must rework the past accordingly, for as Frank Kermode points out in *The sense of an ending*, "apocalypse depends on a concord of imaginatively recorded past and imaginatively predicted

futures (2000: 8). Yet in order to do this, they must shift from reading history as a mode of opposition to history as a system of sameness.

In the Prologue to *Agaat*, Jakkie traces over the past, narrating his clandestine departure from South Africa as follows; "that morning, still dark, the smell of wet soot, Gaat giving me the little key to the sideboard so that I could take out my papers. Her face grey and sad, her cap askew. Four o'clock in the morning, the only one who knew where I was headed and why" (A: 1). Significantly, this episode of recollection ends with a query in the future tense; "will I ever be able to forgive myself?" (A: 1), belying a hope for a redemptive future in the light of past misgivings. He seeks a historical sequence that marks a future as different from the causal chain of events. This, however, remains an open-ended question in the text; the lack of an answer itself serving as a rhetorical device that confirms loss.

But in the Epilogue, Jakkie decides on a different rendition of history. When he returns to the farm for his mother's funeral, the need to demonstrate the consequential links between the past, the present *contretemps* and an apocalyptic future becomes crucial to his perception of events. He notes that Agaat has inherited the family farm and he sees her as a much more appropriate choice than him as Agaat understands the land and has firm control over all of its affairs. However, he then subverts his rationale, later perceiving her control of the farm as a false sense of agency: "her creator is keeping remote control. Six feet under" (A: 682). The power dynamics that once governed his mother's relationship with Agaat are seen as present despite her death. Furthermore, Jakkie explores the monstrous effects of their past: Agaat is still, in Jakkie's view, an "Apartheid Cyborg" (A: 677) who carries 'old' habits into the future. He states that Agaat

urges everyone to sing *Die Stem*, the old national anthem of South Africa, at the funeral because "she would have no truck with the new anthem" (A: 675). The manner in which he represents the funeral and the cruelty of his South African surrounds serves to imply an impending dystopia of sorts.

> It's not a country for me to live in. To study, yes.
> Yesterday's newspaper I left at the airport. Remarkable journalism. Rugby players on the front page and the back pages and the centre pages, lawlessness and corruption, child rape, political denial of AIDS, middle-class sex scandals, letters from indignant creationists.
> Hów in God's name is it to carry on from here?
>
> (A: 683).

In the extract above, the terse and controlled opening sentence is followed by a cascading rant about the irrational and hopeless state of the country. And much like in the Prologue where Jakkie ends with a query about the future, the same occurs here – this time with an apocalyptic tone. However, just as the example from the Prologue reveals his messianic hope, this one illustrates how it has been replaced with apocalyptic fear. Here we see the altered results of the two historical modalities. Moreover, Van Niekerk employs structural symmetry to illumine the correspondence between Jakkie's historical mirrors: it becomes evident to the reader that while Jakkie believes that he is offering a more full account of past atrocities in the Epilogue by investing in a future that seems equally atrocious, Van Niekerk alludes to the fact that he is nevertheless making teleological investments.

Apocalyptic theorists such as Agnes Keller and Stephen O'Leary offer theoretical expansion on how apocalyptic thought can be read as a 'negative' interpretation of eschatological structure. In *Arguing the Apocalypse*, O'Leary unpacks the Greek definition as "revelation or unveiling" that

"makes manifest a vision of ultimate destiny" (1994: 5). Similarly, Keller highlights how apocalyptic thought is heavily informed by biblical notions: "the end of all things is the goal as well as the purpose of all things […] God's miracle is not the destruction of the world that has reached its end, but the promise that there is life after the end" (1993: 67). As discussed, apocalyptic thought is theistic in nature; a specific manifestation of messianism rather than that which is opposed to it.

The difference, however, with apocalyptic rhetoric lies in its use of violence or destruction, which is by no means arbitrary. According to Keller "violence, too, is supposed to have a saving power" (1993: 66) which suggests that it provides redemption from perceived anomie but also makes it seem purposeful in light of an apocalyptic vision. Hence, violent and oppressive circumstances can be viewed favorably as they make the 'end' − as an event − seem imminent. Ultimately, what the apocalypse provides is a means by which to remain within the frameworks of eschatology during trying times, while seemingly invested in a more rational project.

Thus, it is key to note that Jakkie *struggles* with his nostalgia for the past.[36] His dismissal lies primarily in perceptions of irrationality. Hence, the text deems the effects ironic, for in wanting to allow the past to 'speak', Jakkie nevertheless instrumentalises it in favour of his apocalyptic vision.

In *Kings of the Water*, Behr's characterization of Michiel draws a similar portrait for the reader. Like Jakkie, he divorces himself from his 'irrational' nostalgia. Furthermore, he is evidently

[36] In Chapter One I illustrated how most of these characters experience nostalgia for their pasts as an uncanny return of the repressed that leads to gross discomfort.

invested in a historical reading of sameness and is thus exasperated by his South African friends and family who are seemingly 'duped' by narratives of historical progress and transformation. And, more forcefully than in Van Niekerk's treatment of Jakkie, Michiel's apocalyptic vision of South Africa does not survive the interrogation it undergoes in the text.

When Michiel recalls his mother's visit to California, he finds her optimism disconcerting; "the New South Africa where *things are positive, growth as far as the eye can see. The country looks like one enormous building site.* She'd just read and admired Long Walk to Freedom" (KW: 8). Instead, he reads this as the strength of his mother's denial about the uncomfortable past that led to his departure and years of strained relations. During this trip Michiel eventually confronts his mother about the unspoken past, more especially about his brother's suicide. But she is taken aback by his rage and is "mystified at what he was referring to" (KW: 91). His mother's desire to transform the painful aspects of the past in favour of a messianic future remains strong. This is in direct opposition to Michiel who believes that the past, as a source of suffering, must be acknowledged as it informs the shame he continues to feel.

The same dynamic informs Michiel's interaction with Karien. Karien was once Michiel's girlfriend and when she fell pregnant they both decided on an illegal abortion. Not long after, Michiel fled the country and left his parents to look after her. Having lost contact with her, Michiel now seeks to make amends. But when she speaks to him about the past she is candid, affable and unfazed. Karien evokes the image of her bleeding on the backseat of the car after her abortion and "laughs, making light of the enormity she has just handed him. 'Yesterday's another country'. She winks." (KW: 147) Her light-heartedness catches him off-guard. Michiel cannot

grasp her easy relation to the misfortunes of the past and is not relieved but disturbed by her nonchalance. Unlike Michiel, Karien sees her trauma as belonging to a removed time out of which she has grown and developed into something other. She has willingly incorporated the pain of the past as part of her life. But he remains "unconvinced by her lack of regret or anger at him. 'Schreiner also wrote that all that's buried is not dead,' he says. If she has lived in him for so many years, has he not also been alive in her? Where is her rage, or at least her memory of it?"(KW 151).

Contrary to the opinions of his mother and Karien, Michiel thinks about the future of South Africa in terms of a vengeful apocalypse. In the text, Michiel recalls stumbling across the black graves on the farm. He remembers noting how they were older than the white graves; a sign of the first settlers before the farm was taken over during the 1913 Land Act. Now he wonders if Mamparra, a labourer on the farm, will declare the present as the time to reclaim the land, much like farm workers have done in Zimbabwe. He assumes this is a more reasoned account of how South African history will unfold.

However, in *Kings of the Water*, Behr portrays Michiel's perception of history as symptomatic of trauma. In the text we learn that Michiel has for many years been visiting a therapist who in response to Michiel's obsessive relation to his past, has stated that "when acute trauma has not been reasonably integrated it superimposes itself over future experience – new trauma in particular – without the psyche knowing what's occurring" (KW: 82). Much like Van Niekerk, Behr reveals how a desire for historical causality has been grossly misappropriated by the

traumatic cycle of repetition. Both authors make it clear how their male protagonists fashion the circumstances of the past in order to make the apocalyptic future a plausible projection.

In *High Low In-between*, Shakeer no longer identifies himself as a South African and listens with condescension as Govin whines that "it's quite something, the new South Africa, not what we anticipated" (HLI: 159) when he relays the story of how hostility has been directed at Indian medical professionals at a local university. Shakeer snidely remarks that "the controversy was considered to be the beginning of the end. For them the end was always beginning. Sharky [Shakeer] was irritated by the imprecision. People's fears, in South Africa, had the conformity of their hopes" (HLI: 153). Shakeer is quick to draw parallels between earlier messianism and current perceptions of apocalypse. He understands how frustrated hope has mutated into current disappointment and future projections of dystopia. Yet while Shakeer is analytic in his approach, he is no less susceptible to apocalyptic thinking, as can be discerned from the text's employment of the detective narrative.

In *Novel Histories*, Green discusses how the detective genre is committed to the recovery of the past and thus involves "moving forward in order to move back" (1997: 224). In *About Time*, Mark Currie also notes the temporal peculiarity of the genre by illustrating that the premise of detective fiction is to proceed from effect to cause. Currie states that "the structure of progression as regression […] as many historiographers have observed, is always an account of the present, and an attempt to dominate the past by understanding it from the point of view of the present, as if progress is a continuous improvement of that understanding"(2007: 88). Both Green and

Currie argue that the detective narrative is precisely that of seeking historical causality within a given set of circumstances.

In the moment of discovering his father's body, Shakeer confronts the unpleasantness of suicide with great anger.

> Yet the professor had shot himself. He had pierced himself in the chest! All his teachings were therefore suspect. Sharky couldn't see where to begin; how could he unpack everything he had learned falsely from his father?
>
> (HLI: 41)

Immediately, Shakeer takes issue with the past, viewing it with suspicion as it fails to offer an account of the present in which his father has committed suicide. Hence, it is the past that must be interrogated – either reconfigured in order to adjust to these circumstances, or uncovered such that the present may be entirely disproved.

After suffering severe doubts about his father's ability to take his own life, Shakeer clings to memories of his father that speak only of a great tenacity to live. He recalls how "his father, in his sixties, had been in a hurry. His research was years behind schedule" (HLI: 97). This serves as reason to believe that something is amiss and so he decides that he is "going to prove it" (HLI: 61). Shakeer promptly opens a murder case. However, proving this murder means recovering the version of the past that will help make a reality of this idea. Much like a detective, Shakeer insists that "there were always warning signs and they were identifiable only in hindsight. You had to think backwards and live forwards" (HLI: 41). Paraphrasing Kierkegaard, he states his intent to establish verisimilitude between the future and the past.

In the narrative, the murder is eventually brought to light. But the resolution of the detective narrative does not restore original conditions of justice and hope. On the contrary, having this murder proven as a past historical event is directly indicative of South Africa's corrupt circumstances. As Shakeer sees it, the fact that a noble citizen can be murdered by his closest friend is evidence enough of a looming apocalypse.

High Low In-between does not stray from theistic interpretations of the apocalypse. It is, in fact, more precise in its application. In the final scene of the novel Shakeer goes to the beachfront to participate in the Taziya ritual. Following behind a replica of prophet Hussien's coffin, Shakeer becomes one of the members participating in an age-old tradition. Eventually the coffin is set alight and placed in the ocean after which Shakeer states that "so long as he didn't turn back to look the flames would never go out" (HLI: 268).

Arguably, the desire to witness this religious ritual, from the otherwise atheistic Shakeer, strikes one as odd and forceful. Yet, it can be read as indicative of hope for the absolute annihilation and purification that the apocalypse promises. Through the use of a religious framework, Coovadia alludes to the messianic will that lingers despite Shakeer's ostensibly disinterested remonstrations about South African life.

In *Novel Histories*, Green defines an 'empty' rendition of the future as that which drains the future of its meaning giving capacity (1997: 276). Talking about this 'empty' form of the future in Christopher Hope's *The Kruger's Alp*, Green remarks that "the trouble is Hope simply debunks the content of a progressive idea of history, rather than deconstructing its form. He can

only empty its form, and then play with its shell" (1997: 279-280). Green critiques Hope's satirizing of progressive time by arguing that he merely renders the form absurd but offers no meaningful alternatives in relation to the future.

As can be discerned above, a similar critique can be made of these male protagonists. In each text, authors highlight the flawed premises on which apocalyptic thinking rests. Each of their characters seeks to provide a more authentic account of historical causality between the past and the future. However, the endeavour to read the future as something other than messianic difference often results in a perverse form of messianism that perpetuates an intolerance to the past. Ultimately, this serves as an illustration of characters who remain bound to the condition of nostalgia *contretemps* as they cannot detach from progressive readings of history, only render it in absurd and apocalyptic form.

Yet, looking beyond these particular male protagonists, contemporary literary output does not impose an outright dismissal of apocalyptic rhetoric, only a very particular form of it. In *Arguing the Apocalypse*, O'Leary claims that "the interpretative traditions that surround the Apocalypse have tended to emphasize elements of either tragedy or comedy in the eschatological narrative, and thereby adopt the perspectives of the tragic and comic frames in their constructions of historical time" (1994: 69). The tragic mode "conceives of evil in terms of guilt; its mechanism of redemption is victimage, its plot moves inexorably toward sacrifice", whereas

> comedy conceives of evil not as guilt, but as error; its mechanism of redemption is recognition rather than victimage, and its plot moves not toward sacrifice but to the exposure of fallibility […] time is open-ended, allowing for the possibility of change, while

> the tragic conception of Fate promotes a view of time and human action as closed and 'predetermined'
>
> (O'Leary 1994: 68).

Assessing these two modes of apocalyptic rhetoric, O'Leary argues that the tragic framework is much more literal as it emphasises a predetermined catastrophe that will bring an end to time and history. On the contrary, the comic apocalypse is an allegorical mode of interpretation. The presence of violence or evil is thus understood as part of human error, ignorance or foolishness that can be overcome and thus neutralizes the grave undertones of the tragic mode. Furthermore, through a display of relativity and open-ended time, there is no predestined struggle but, rather, an ongoing awareness of violence or evil "as recurrent and normative" (O'Leary 1994: 75). The comic apocalypse measures the historical flux of human error and folly which can be altered through recognition and development. It is a means by which historical contingency is employed to understand the presence of evil without tragic despair and to consider options for rectification. Hence, "the comic Apocalypse offers a goal that recedes even as it is pursued—and harnesses this pursuit as an engine of social change" (O'Leary 1994: 90). In comparison to the tragic mode where time is irreparable and human action is ultimately futile, the comic mode allows for conceptions of social and political action to evolve in the light of perceived error.

Unlike the tragic mode employed by the male protagonists discussed above, we find that other characters, either in the same or different novels, also seek more authentic encounters with the past. However, ascribing to the comic rendition of the apocalypse, the emphasis lies in an exploration of historical contingency as representative of the past itself, thus imbuing the future with these very same qualities. In this regard, these narratives offer a more sustained and

sustainable version of historical sameness, as there is never the intent to use history as illustrative of any definitive end.

In *The Rowing Lesson*, Landsman accomplishes this mainly through the tropic use of Ebb 'n Flow. As narrator, Betsy establishes her father's connection to Ebb 'n Flow. She marks it in his memory as a space of his idealised childhood and as she continually refashions this trope, it grows in its potential to signify both nostalgia and utopia.

In the text, Betsy states that "the sea is the breath in your body, the tide going in as you breathe in, the tide going out, as you exhale" (RL: 73). As represented here, the pulse of Ebb 'n Flow is an animating life force. It is a cycle of being "renewed and restored, renewed and restored" (RL: 73), which suggests a regenerative function and possibility of time. Ultimately, Betsy relies on Ebb 'n Flow in order to illustrate how the past has always been subject to the sorrow and the subsequent arrival of hope, as will be the future. For this reason she actively constructs a narrative of her father's willingness to be restored and renewed across the vicissitudes of his tumultuous life.

In one episode set in Ebb 'n Flow, Betsy is out on the water with her father and he teaches her to row. But the weather changes suddenly and her father becomes stern with her as he grows fearful. The experience frightens her but ultimately, what she recalls is that her father saw how "the sky is clearing and a rainbow stretches over the hills and into the sea" and thinks, "tomorrow will be a good beach day. You want to wake me and tell me but you can't. You want to tell me lots of things but you can't" (RL: 79). Here Betsy examines the past in order to

illustrate how her father's temperament celebrated restoration after the proverbial 'storm'. And later in the text, this lesson is once again expounded during a family outing.

> Ma is standing on the jetty with Simon and she's waving and furious, an SOS going with her arms. For crying out loud, you want to say, we weren't captured or chased or beaten or anything. The lightning left us alone and the river's not deep and here we are. *Môre is nog a dag.* Tomorrow's another day. Look at the horizon line, blue and light as a dream. A good day for the beach.
>
> (RL: 80)

Their mother's hysteria is met with her father's nonchalant reassurance of tomorrow and its impending beauty.

Later in the text, Betsy recounts her parents' honeymoon trip to the Wilderness. Her father, Harold, takes his new bride, Stella, out into the lagoon. Betsy's narrates this event as she imagines it unfolding for her father who rows the boat:

> and then it's in front of you, as you lean back towards Ebb 'n Flow. You reach forward into the past, then pull your arms and the boat back into the longer future [...] Simon and I are taking turns at the gnarled base of the tree [...] I swing into the light and I'm so pale and bright that it's impossible to see me. Stella shades her eyes from me, and so do you.
>
> (RL: 241)

Employing techniques of magical realism, this passage blends her father's memory with the future of his children's arrival that has not yet occurred. It also expresses Betsy's creative awareness that she has, in fact, inserted herself into the world of Ebb 'n Flow as an invisible but perpetual entity by foregrounding her narrative presence in relation to events as they occur. More significantly, this extract draws upon the paradoxical movement of the stroke of the oars that must propel backwards in order to build momentum to push the boat forward. Arguably, this can

serve as a metaphor for the anticipatory archive[37] where the past and present are inscribed with the intent to narrate the future. Hence, the recollection that this text offers is not only subjective but also prospective.

Finally, at the end of the novel, Betsy's turn to illustrate her knowledge of the rowing lesson has come. There is a poetic account of her father's final journey to Ebb 'n Flow which is symbolic of his solitary journey towards death. At some point during his trip, Betsy appears in her father's boat to placate him; "it's me, Betsy, standing at the prow of your boat. I'm not going to hurt you. Just sit back and relax. You don't have to row anymore. I'll do all the work" (RL: 275). However, what is interesting in this closing scene of the novel is that while she takes charge of the boat she still insists; "I'm not going to save you. You have to save me, Dr. Dad. Isn't that why you became a doctor?" (RL: 276) and later asserts, "I am your very last patient" (RL: 278). He is still seen as the one who, in effect, guides her whilst rowing. She cannot, or does not, allow him to slip into the past as she carries them both forward into the future. By carrying forward her father's ethos of Ebb 'n Flow, Betsy is then able to find a constructive means of moving forward despite the loss of hope that she currently experiences.

As suggested by the name, Ebb 'n Flow captures an ethos of "downstroke, upstroke, downstroke, rounded wave. You can't stop at the top. Downstroke, backpedal […] Upstroke! Upstroke!" (RL: 277-278). The lesson that Betsy takes from her father is that of mastering and embracing the circuitous movement of experience, time and history. In this regard, David Medalie's observation that the narrative past transforms the present of the text is salient (2010). The

[37] See the Introduction for a discussion of Derrida's *Archive Fever* (1998).

narration of the past structurally alters the present through the establishment of a new historical modality that will serve some idea of the longer future. In this manner, the text conforms to Dames's specific understanding of "the idea of proleptic memory: what is remembered is remembered because it will recur […] we remember in the light not only of past relevance but, more important, in light of future relevance […] Singularity is not the watchword of associative memory; repetition is" (2001: 136). Through the complex illustration of historical and emotive fluctuations in the past, *The Rowing Lesson* teaches that historical contingency in an uncertain present and undefinable future should no longer inspire fear but the boundlessness of hope that inevitably returns.[38]

Somewhat less idealistically, Nafisa accepts her husband's death with a certain amount of fatalism in *High Low In-between*. She perceives it as a timely 'event' in a new apocalyptic order. Using her husband's death as a symbolic end to her progressive ideals of South African democracy, she now realises that "she ha[s] no entitlement to a future […] she should vanish" (HLI: 141). Nafisa seeks to embrace her altered reality in the "looking-glass world, with its blank and impermeable prospect" (HLI: 141). Yet she must work backwards in order to make her South African dystopia a plausible and historically grounded reality.

[38] There is, however, the question of how much Betsy dehistorises the past as it is nevertheless instrumentalised in order to bring to mind her father's emotional tenacity in relation to – and perhaps despite – history. Furthermore, as explored in Chapter One, the end of the narrative implies a utopian escape from time. In comparison to other texts, the recollection of the past can be considered largely apolitical, highly personal and emotive which, in turn, makes the text vulnerable to accusations of anti-historical representation. Unlike Jakkie in *Agaat* and Michiel in *Kings of the Water*, Betsy is content to rely on her father's emotive resistance to apartheid and suffers no 'guilt' or shame in relation to her father's political quietism. In fact, she appears to value his emotional resilience precisely because it allowed for emotional sustenance *despite* his sociopolitical context.

This process can be surmised from Nafisa's dilemma with the summons letter that she has been issued by the Receiver of Revenue. Almost twenty years ago, Nafisa put money away in a London bank account. This money has never been declared and she has recently been summoned to appear in court and is set to lose almost all of her assets. She has been carrying the letter around for many weeks and could not bring herself to tell Arif about the letter, "he would be appalled at the idea of a court proceeding. They had given the better part of their lives to the movement" (HLI: 25). She knows that he would have seen it as an insult; keeping money aside for a possible escape would have been a form of betrayal and cowardice.

For herself, she tries to unpack personal reasons for putting this money aside. Nafisa recalls events from 1983 during which their phones were tapped and when "nothing had been certain; whether Arif would be detained in a week, or whether she would go to work at King Edward in the morning" (HLI: 65). As she begins to interrogate her own past, she finds new safety in the fact that the past was a period of great uncertainty and fear. It is the first realisation that the uncertainty she felt in the past is congruent with the uncertainty she now experiences in the present.

The attempt to seek out the root of dystopia can also be witnessed in Nafisa's attempt to distance herself from her South African identity. When speaking to Jadwat she claims that "in the past, when it comes down to it, this was not our country. It belonged to the Europeans and the multinationals. In the future it is not likely to be our country either" (HLI: 24). A curious statement for a former political activist, this nevertheless indicates her desire to find an historical explanation for her current sense of alienation. She thus articulates her sense of not belonging

through a notion of *never* having belonged. Hence, rather than mourning the failures of messianism, she can now more easily accept that "nothing had changed" (HLI: 73). Nafisa thus makes a gravely apocalyptic pronouncement of the country's fate and makes plans to leave.

It is, however, significant that Nafisa's narrative continues past this point of apocalyptic revelation, resembling what O'Leary describes as the comic mode of apocalyptic rhetoric. Furthermore, in comparison to Shakeer, her apocalypse is internalized, marking a journey of personal death and rebirth. In the text, Nafisa undergoes destruction of her 'old' self − "she was like a cockroach and could survive a nuclear blast" (HLI: 128). This process if often represented through metaphors of atomic dissolution that seek to render her "on the level, in the dust" (HLI: 225). Quite firmly, the narrative reinforces a structure of apocalyptic renewal; "everything was coming to an end. At the same time everything in the universe was beginning again" (HLI: 246). There is also the comic recognition of error as Nafisa declares that in "this new life she was beginning, this new life built on the foundations of another life, there would be no new tears" (HLI: 247). Past perception is seen as flawed and renewal lies in rectifying her false perceptions about what life in South Africa requires. Having combed through the past and survived the *contretemps* of the present, Nafisa embraces the principle of uncertainty by acknowledging that historical contingency is inevitable and thus demands different human responses from her in order to meet this new reality.

In *Agaat*, Milla De Wet embarks on a journey similar to that of Nafisa. Van Niekerk conducts a rigorous exegesis of the past through the use of different temporalities. Each chapter is an amalgamation of the various temporalities that the novel employs and Milla returns to different

versions of the past in an episodic fashion in order to question its errors. In the earlier sections of the recollected past, Milla can still recall the easy optimism of her youth. Her life, then governed by Christian ideals of providence, gives rise to a feeling of a timely present. Jak, her new fiancé, has been introduced into the family and it has just been settled that he will take over the family farm, Grootmoedersdrift, as soon as they marry. She tells Jak that "we're getting married at the right time" (A: 27), giving rise to feelings that "ownership and history and heritage all were finding their course, as it was predestined, with the brute energy of a good start" (A: 31). The manner in which Milla relates the recollected past does appear to fulfill the criteria for a nostalgic idyll, but there is too much distance between the narrator and past narrative events. Milla's tone is closer to that of bemusement as her ability to believe in such an unfolding of history now strikes her as naïve.

Mostly, we find that Van Niekerk utilizes the past in order to display its progressive erosion as opposed to its providential development. Already by the second chapter, Milla suffers the shock of being abused by Jak before the wedding − an event through which she "gained another perspective on that afternoon" (A: 48). By the third chapter, time refuses to submit to a progressive scheme as it is already noted for its barren or stagnant quality; "he tapped against your stomach as one would tap against the glass of a silent clock to see if the hands won't move" (A: 71). It is at this point in the text that the expectation of a progressive history leads to feelings of isolation and desertion; Jak proves to be an inadequate farmer and an abusive husband and Milla cannot fall pregnant. Nevertheless, Milla remains determined and stoically accepts the dwindling evidence of her dreams as a matter of faith in the promises of messianic time.

However, as Milla reviews her persistence in pursuing her dreams, she begins to understand the anxious nature with which she clung to them.

The violence of desire is highlighted by an illustration of its ability to, perhaps unwittingly, impose upon and ultimately control others. A resentful Jak accuses her of being a domineering story-teller: "I don't buy your story. I don't buy it any longer, do you hear! I don't buy it! Your tale that you spin everyone!"(A: 354) In the text messianism bears the power to manipulate and control through maintaining a monopoly on the future. Milla alienates those around her by seeking to construct closed narratives on their behalf. As the text progresses Milla becomes increasingly aware of the inapplicability of what was once her very 'timely' sense of the future.

It is ultimately Milla's love for Jakkie, her liberal son, that ushers in a radical revision of historical structure. In an incident in the recollected past, Jakkie has returned from the defense force and conflict soon erupts in the De Wet household. A drunk Jak interrogates his son about his political views and when Jakkie refuses to answer his father becomes obstinate and lashes out at the entire family. Milla asks herself, "how long did it last? Half an hour, an hour?" (A: 599). Time takes on a surreal quality and she notes how Jak's movements begin to resemble "a piece of clockwork running down" (A: 600). The family dispute is narrated as a poetic rendition of the breaking point of time after which Milla appears to be awake in, and vulnerable to, the immediate present for the first time. Finally, there is "no sign of the meal earlier or of the discord […] Here it is now, you thought, the last link, that's chafing through. Everything you lived for, everything that you built up, all the facades that you maintained, the whole lie that you lived. The last link" (A: 601).

Like Nafisa in *High Low In-between,* the apocalyptic narrative is internalized and realized as comic or erroneous. At this terrifying point Milla assumes that she is approaching death: "you went and sat on a chair in your room in the dark, a woman over an abyss, the coming of morning a ghastliness, the first thrush a deathly herald" (A: 602). Of further significance is the actual fire that burns down the barn during the party they host on the farm that night. Milla walks around in a daze and witnessing parts of her farm being consumed by flames does not arouse feelings of anxiety or loss. Instead she remembers that "for the first time in how many years, you were soberly and austerely awake of what was happening" (A: 602). More significantly, the sense of change this moment inspires serves as a mysterious "pointer for the future," where "if only I could read all these together, you thought, all these signs, if the meaning of everything could only be revealed to me here" (A: 612). Milla learns something about the ephemeral nature of the future that is forever marked by uncertainty as opposed to teleological dreams.

Ultimately, in *Agaat,* Van Niekerk uses this revision of the recollected and diary past in order to import this historical modality into the narrative present where Agaat seeks an account for Milla's unfaithful record of history in her diaries. Just as Milla has come to understand the future as largely undefinable, she reads the past accordingly. And now coming to terms with the nature of her diary accounts of Agaat's life, she states that

> the beginning you never recorded. You couldn't bring yourself to it. It would take too long, you told yourself. A piece of explanation while everything was already in motion. Your marriage, farming with all its ramifications. There was something cryptic about the beginning. You always told yourself, one day. When you're not so busy. When you'll be able to focus. When you'll be able to sit down at your leisure and try to piece together everything as it happened.

(A: 653)

There is an element of regret as Milla wonders what the present would be if she had made the effort to accurately record the past. Yet, the ultimate lesson that Milla gleans from her incomplete archive is that of humility. There is a sense that any account she could have provided, or can provide, for Agaat will inevitably hamper Agaat's reality and impose new historical burdens on her. Hence, Milla's understanding of the past and the future mirror each other, the new historical modality is that of understanding that the past, present and future are bound by an unknowablity that must be protected.

Wicomb's *Playing in the Light* similarly explores historical contingency as a viable means by which to approach the past. In the text, Marion is caught off-guard by the revelations of the past. In her adulthood she makes the radical discovery that her parents were 'play-whites': an apartheid classification of 'coloured' people who managed to pass as white citizens during apartheid. Marion's mother, Helen, orchestrated this project of 'passing' on behalf of her entire family. Upon discovering the truth about her parents, Marion queries their motives.

> Did they think of themselves as dissidents, daring to play in the light? Or as people who could mess up the system, who could not be looked up in libraries, who had escaped the documentation of identity? She thinks not. They thought only of their own advancement (PL: 122).

Marion understands that her mother passing as a white citizen was informed by a desire for progress so radical that it effected an unnatural fissure with the past. Helen's ruthless pursuit is further aided by the church as she admires Fr. Gilbert who "spoke enthusiastically about the future and the infinite human capacity for renewal, which Helen read as a good sign" (PL: 141). In the church she also "found a ready example in Christ, who died on the cross before rising as a

Saviour, whose love washed away the past, the old misdemeanours, and who would not object to renewal" (PL: 142). The sacrificial nature of Christ makes noble her endeavours and confirms the hope of future salvation from the past.

Considering that "Helen's achievement was her legacy to Marion, a new generation unburdened by the past" (PL: 150), Marion's blasé attitude towards the past is fitting. Marion is happy to contemplate a world which does not 'calculate' the weight of the past on the present. She is rather irritated by the relentless 'limbo' of the present (which for Marion is best exemplified by the TRC) as she seeks only the bright possibilities of the future.

However, Wicomb's portrait of Marion is meant to expose the superficiality of such a scheme. Marion is willing to admit that the past was a mistake only insofar as it ceased to be politically and economically viable. The fact that the New South Africa has helped the tourism industry, and as a result her business, is confirmation that the country needs to continue pursuing the future without distraction. Wicomb clearly cites this dismissive attitude towards the past as capitalistic, myopic and irresponsible. As a result, the text is resolute on making a journey of (re)discovery in order to challenge Marion's understanding of history as something that she can escape.

Through a confrontation with Tokkie's ghost, Marion is thrown into uneasy realizations about her family and her past. Apart from learning that her parents were play-whites, she also learns that Tokkie, whom she assumed to be their domestic worker, was actually her maternal

grandmother. After making these shattering discoveries, Marion takes a long trip overseas in order to re-evaluate her life from afar. Upon her return, she is left with the following concerns:

> The difference – that is what Marion cannot get her head around. How can things be the same, and yet be different? Is the emptiness about being drained of the old, about making room for the new? Perhaps it's a question of time, the arrival of a moment when you cross a boundary and say: Once I was white, now I am coloured. If everything from now on will be different (which is also to say the same), will the past be different too?
>
> (PL: 106)

In the latter part of the text, Marion grapples with the choice between reading her past as a manifestation of difference or sameness in relation to present experience. Arguably, the last question is a leading one; Marion's actions thereafter imply the full embrace of an entirely different reality that alters the past accordingly.

Much like *Agaat*, *Playing in the Light* enforces an ethical reservation on the full recovery of the past. Hence, even when Marion learns the identity of her grandmother, she "promises herself, tomorrow, another day. Then she will spell out the word, whatever it may be: Grandmother, Grandma, Granny, Ouma, Mamma – a new word, naked and slippery with shame" (PL: 107). Not only are the words that Marion will speak in relation to the past left opaque, so is the future in which she is meant to do so. Both the past and the future remain essentially defamiliarised historical locales in the text as they must remain open.

Reading the text through a historical modality of this kind also goes some way toward explaining the quizzical ending of the novel where Brenda and Marion have a dispute about Marion's father's history. After Brenda tells Marion that she has been writing a story about her father's

past, “Marion swerves, pulls off the road. Her voice is cold with rage. So in the guise of a do-gooder, you went back to prise more out of a lonely, senile old man who was grateful for your visits?” (PL: 217). She then instructs Brenda to “Get out. I know my father’s fucking story” to which Brenda tersely replies “I suspect you don’t” (PL: 217). Ending the novel with this confrontation raises questions about motivations that inform historical recovery as Brenda is an aspiring writer in search of a story.

In *A Philosophy of History In Fragments*, Keller highlights how during a period of upheaval, a paradoxical situation arises out of the desire to overcome historical contingency by ultimately accepting it as predetermined (1993). As expressed in these texts, contingency is itself the new historical modality by which the past is read and the future interpreted. Yet for Beral Lang, it is in precisely this manner that apocalyptic rhetoric becomes central to postmodern historical modalities. He argues that postmodernism uses disruption as its only certainty. Hence there is often a premature need to claim the end, as the apocalypse ensures historical continuation and continuity (1986) and thus realises a version of “the longer future” (RL: 241).

Moreover, as noted by Andreas Huyssen, the postmodern apocalyptic impulse not only moderates our expectations of historical time but also ensures the perpetuation of utopias. Contrary to understandings of postmodernism as a post-utopian ideal, he argues that “the discourse of the end of utopia is as endemic to the utopian imagination as its visions of other worlds, other times, or other states of mind” (Huyssen 1995: 85). Through the recurrence of the apocalypse, the utopian impulse is revived rather than destroyed in a given sociopolitical context. Huyssen’s observation speaks into the peculiar insistence in contemporary South African fiction

where the ‘open’ historical field produced by contingency is meant to protect not only the past but also the future that it impacts and recreates.

Hence, Derrida’s historiographical system, which tolerates the paradox of “the messianic without messianism” (1994: 73), provides the clearest understanding of how, exactly, historical contingency is ideally conceived in the literary imaginary. As he states in *Specters of Marx*, “even if the future is its provenance, it must be, like any provenance, absolutely and irreversibly past” (1994: xix –xx). Operating with some fundamental understanding of the same, the past and the future are seen as simultaneously unique and yet indelibly bound to each other. In this manner, the past and future, by maintaining their own radical alterity, infer the undeterminable unto each other. Derrida argues that this can be read as messianic in the sense that the ethical value of the future is allowed to endlessly extend, and anti-messianic because it also remains forever ‘other’ to our intentions and disrupt any understanding of a ‘past’ or ‘future’ as ‘old’ and ‘new’ respectively.

Ultimately, historical contingency as realised in contemporary South African literature appears to be far less daunting and existentially challenging than one might assume. Expressing how the onset of historical contingency has left us with equal measures of hope and skepticism regarding historiography in South Africa, Louise Bethlehem states that “the work of transition remains unfinished, however, so too does our historiographic narrative of the past” (2010: 106). In this small statement we witness the early recovery of a desire to continue with the ideals of transition, but only through a historical modality that more maturely reflects upon the past and, in turn, its future.

Chapter Three: Death is an-other country

> It is difficult to believe that the woman who chafed my shivering body – Matt also had goose bumps at bath-time – is the same woman now waiting at a faint borderline to be admitted to another country.
>
> *White Lightening* – 112

In current South African writing one finds a prevalent plot structure that involves a protagonist who lives abroad but is forced to return to South Africa to confront the reality of death through the loss of a parent. In this chapter I will offer analyses of my chosen texts as useful illustrations of how structural representations of death can be read as symptomatic of nostalgia *contretemps*. In addition, these texts also present reactionary impulses that seek to alleviate these feelings of loss through active attempts at mourning and re-examinations of how one approaches and perceives death. Ultimately, I uncover the discernable discursive shift in representations of death in contemporary South African literature in order to illustrate how these texts represent a new ideal of 'post-transitional' South Africa as a country that grants spectral citizenship to its inhabitants.

In *White Lightening*, the protagonist, James, states at the outset that "I was waiting for my mother to die" (WL: 1). He is resigned to the fact that she must pass away and does not face this prospect with any apparent angst. This appears to be a common reaction in the texts: in Van Niekerk's, *Agaat*, the protagonist, Jakkie is summoned back to South Africa by an urgent telegram that notifies him of his mother's impending death. In the Prologue and Epilogue, in which we encounter Jakkie, we learn that he has actively been working on mourning for many

years. He desires the completeness of an ending – a wish that is made evident when he travels back to South Africa. Similarly, in Behr's *Kings of Water*, Michiel returns to South Africa for his mother's funeral. Much like James in *White Lightening* and Jakkie in *Agaat*, he does not have a close relationship with his mother and her sudden death arouses shock but not despair. The common lack of grief, I argue, implies a willingness to embrace the death of a parent because it symbolizes a discursive entry into 'an-other country'.

In *Death, Desire and Loss*, Jonathan Dollimore states that death has often been governed by notions of perfection, which comes "from the latin *perficere* – to accomplish, bring to an end" (1998: 73). He illustrates how many schools have taken to interpretations of death as a final state of arrival because it allows for pleasant transcendental expressions of life's journey. It is also worth noting, however, that death is perceived as a teleological aspiration and finds a discursive coeval in Derrida's description of border-based logic.

In *Aporias*, Derrida entrenches his entire discussion of the philosophical aporia around discourses of death. Understanding aporias as plural rather than singular, he provides descriptions of the various kinds − "In one case," he states, "the nonpassage resembles an impermeability" (Derrida 1993: 20). The first philosophical school that Derrida identifies employs a visible border between life and death that proves to be uncrossable once reached. In turn, this results in the philosophical inability to know and to talk about one's own death. He points to the irony that when one is dead, one cannot utter the 'I' by which to speak of it (Derrida 1993). Because life and death are perceived as singular, and hence separable, the border represents the mark between perception and what lies beyond perception. In this manner, the

radical alterity of death is respected through the constant assertion of distance. It is granted exclusive discursive 'territory' or, perhaps, a form of extra-discursive 'space' to exist as otherness.

As cited in the epigraph, James perceives his mother's death as the necessary border to be crossed to enter into 'an-other country'. Not only does Cartwright reveal the logic of a border-based approach to death, but self-consciously pitches James's response through nationalistic rhetoric. Through the thematic desire for death as border-crossing activity into a new national space, *White Lightening* alludes to the frameworks of post-apartheid South Africa where alterity has been similarly employed to sustain the messianic infrastructure of the 'New South Africa'. However, what we have in all of these texts is the portrayal of a structural inability to sustain such border-based beliefs in relation to death which, I argue, is suggestive of their waning applicability in the South African national context. One finds that the texts, all in their own ways, provide forms of critique and revision of this notion by illustrating how it has led to a state of impossibility, represented as melancholia, and hence, directly revealing the formations of nostalgia *contretemps*.

In *White Lightening*, Cartwright employs his protagonist, James, to cast skepticism over border-based notions of death. As James watches over his mother and reflects on the course of her desolate life and her current decrepit state he is forced to re-evaluate his opinions about what death entails. Evoking Virgil, he states that "I agree that life is thin-spun, but I can't believe that she, or her essence, will fly off to join the numbers of the stars, as much as I might wish it" (WL: 41). He can no longer accept death as that which signifies a happier prospect of graduating into a

desired state of predetermined perfection.[39] Instead, he grows to believe that the other side of the border is, in fact, "a departure to nowhere" (WL 41). Here Cartwright appears to challenge nationalistic discourse by expressing both the loss of the fantasy and alluding to the irony that nothing 'new' can arrive when thinking within the constraints of predetermined messianism. As an alternative, James opens himself up to the prospect that death need not be informed by destinal logic and thereby grants death the radical alterity that it deserves. In the text, this hopeful re-evaluation of death becomes so appealing that James indicates a desire to die alongside his mother such that he may have access to an-other country that now defies messianic definition: "I have a curious notion suddenly, that I should lie next to her and die with her" (WL 41). James consequently seeks out his own 'death', and in the text this is portrayed as a desire for self-dispossession.

According to Dollimore, death has been incorporated into Western consciousness through theological principles of renunciation and self-denial. In this manner, 'death' is a welcome reprieve from bodily desire and the existential pain of individuation (Dollimore 1998). Subsequently, self-dispossession allows for readings of death as intrinsic to, or coexistent with, life. In *White Lightening*, James envisages a merger of this kind. It is for this reason that he decides to buy a farm and settle down in South Africa, feeling that the country will inspire him to find happiness beyond or outside of his ego. His hope now lies in dissolution as opposed to

[39] Furthermore, James's aversion to Virgil also stems from resentment he feels towards his father. In his anthropological study of bees, his father often quoted Virgil and accordingly perceived bees as exemplary life forms who attain immortality after their earthly lives expire. James derides his father's theories by suggesting that they were successful merely because they provided reassuring fables for the masses (WL: 45) (This critique also resonates with that of cultural critics who argue that post-apartheid narrativity served as a ruse and false cure for a ruptured society). James simply cannot believe that his father ever haboured such noble ideals, considering his desertion of the family to pursue his ambitions. He concludes that his father, who knew so little about life, could know nothing about death.

separation: “in the end it will all come to the same thing. I don’t find these thoughts depressing. On the contrary, I recognize the freedom of accepting the necessary. For the first time in months I feel liberated. My life too will fade into the geological and physical facts, and I don’t give a fuck” (WL: 53). With similar intent, he vows to learn Zulu or Xhosa because he believes that he might access the consciousness of others through language. James also nurtures a relationship with Piet, the baboon, through whom he enters a profoundly peaceful state of consciousness.

However, it is here that the text makes apparent the Derridian aporia of border-based logic by illustrating the awareness that death, as a state of impermeability, dictates that the border is always uncrossable once reached (1993). Because death is governed by a border, it keeps one from its realisation and reduces it to impossibility. Consequently, just as the narrative space for death through self-dispossession is introduced, it is exploited for its aporetic ironies as all attempts at engaging otherness fail dismally.

What *White Lightening* appears to re-establish – through negation – is that the border of death cannot be transgressed. James ends up hurting more than helping the Xhosa family, the farm that he seeks to nurture goes bankrupt and Piet ends up having to be shot. The narrative of James’s time in South Africa ends with the dismal realisation that “the limits of my language have met the limits of my world” (WL 243). James begins to realise that despite the allure of death as radical alterity an encounter of this kind is fallacious precisely because the boundaries between life and death exist as an assertion of distance between the two. He appears to be resigned to an existence of limitations and borders that will forever keep him away from the much desired prospects of death but nevertheless maintains a boundary that seeks to respect its alterity.

This aporetic impossibility can also be gleaned from the portrayal of James's mother who remains tellingly silent throughout the text. James is left with the task to guess, constantly, at her deathbed experience. For example, when he visits his mother in hospital she sighs, which he interprets as follows; "I guessed that what she glimpsed was unknowable and utterly blank, bearing no meaning at all, and that was the horror" (WL: 8). James can only project his own opinions of a horrendous death upon her. In this manner, it soon becomes apparent that James cannot enter his mother's consciousness and experience death alongside her.[40]

Consequently, he must learn to live with a perpetual sense of loss for 'an-other country' that will never arrive and James makes a hasty return to London. This resembles a melancholic longing of sorts, for the pathos of James's awareness of his self-negating desire is indicative of an unceasing despair; in order to maintain the ideal he must continue to grieve its impossibility. Ultimately, we find that *White Lightening* gestures towards the alterity of the future and the hope for 'an-other country' (by asserting James's longing for it), yet simultaneously closes off the possibility of its arrival by encapsulating it in a narrative of loss, hence exemplifying the condition of nostalgia *contretemps*.

In *Agaat*, Van Niekerk challenges border-based beliefs by portraying the sheer impossibility of mourning. Despite expressing a wish to see his mother before she passes away, Jakkie eventually gets to South Africa and feels "relieved after all that I was too late. Couldn't have stomached it" (A: 677). He has never had a strong connection with Milla and as he casts an eye over her

[40] Inter-generational relationships of this kind will be more closely examined in Chapter 4.

belongings he feels alienated and distant from her. Having no way or means of accounting for her identity, he feels stuck as to how to consolidate their relationship at her funeral − because loss cannot be sufficiently identified or understood, Jakkie struggles to mourn.

Furthermore, much of his hostility towards his mother stems from the shroud of secrecy she created around Agaat's existence in their lives. Agaat was more of a mother-figure to him but the closeness he felt and still feels to her was and is corroded by the racial and class politics of apartheid. Throughout his life Jakkie has felt that he knows too little about Agaat to lay claim to a definite connection to her and she plays heavily on his conscience even though he no longer resides in South Africa. In this novel, much of the narrative is structured around the mystery of Agaat's history and the secret bedtime story that she shared with Jakkie when he was a boy. Despite his wish to not remember, Jakkie still cannot erase this story from his mind as it keeps flooding back into his consciousness, which is indicative of a haunting of sorts.

In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida defines the nature of the specter as aneconomic in its potential to haunt. The imposition of the ghost is limitless − felt in relation to the past but also as an arrival that "seems to be out front, the future" (Derrida 1994: 10). Derrida explains that the figure of the specter is representative of that which is neither present nor absent. As an always-becoming body, we cannot locate, identify and name it and therefore, we can never successfully mourn for it by ensuring its burial. The specter introduces us to a liminal reality that compromises the notion that life and death are divisible entities – it declares the border non-existent. It invites us

into the borderless space of absolute hospitality where one is meant to assume responsibility for the other by playing host to it (Derrida 2000).[41]

Agaat provides an interesting elucidation of hauntology, for it is clearly not only the fissures of the past that exact a haunting force upon Jakkie but also a more profound sense of loss – that of imagined loss. Because Jakkie remains uncertain as to who Agaat is and what their true relationship entails, this carries further obsessions as to what their relationship is in the present and could have been in the future. Nevertheless her omniscient absence-presence asserts itself upon him and Jakkie harbours a residual hope that the intimacy of their connection will result in full realisation when he returns to South Africa for his mother's funeral, which will serve as an 'event' of arrival.

However, when he returns, the idealistic quality of this hope is compromised. The imagined intimacy that he shares with Agaat in his dream is far from the woman he encounters on the farm. He finds her clinical and hostile, consumed by bitterness that comes with a life spent in servitude. The empty narrative of her past that he has always longed to hear and the hope for a future relationship is turned into palpable loss as he describes her as an 'Apatheid Cyborg" (A: 677) – a disembodied and empty soul. Encountering this reality, he remains determined to mourn his losses: "mourning is a life-long occupation, says my therapist. That is what I must do then.

[41] It is worth noting the parallels between the Derridian theorisation of absolute hospitality towards the other in *Of Hospitality* and the borderless embrace of death in *Aporias* − both demand a reappraisal of subjectivity in favour of the other. This ethical relation to the other negates the borders of the subject by making a demand for true hospitality as an act encompassed in the host's 'death'.

Must learn to do. Mourn my mother, my mothers, the white one and the brown one. Mourn my country" (A: 683).

Despite Jakkie's determination, haunting compromises the very frameworks of mourning and as Jakkie flies back to Canada, he reflects:

> What remains? Grieving. Grieving till I've mastered the hat-trick. The difficult triple sanity: Wafer, stone, and flower in turn. De Wet individuated. Do I hear something under the engine noise, through the air conditioning? A melody? A rhythm?
> Why that? Of all things? Gaat's story, the last story that she always had to tell me before I'd go to sleep, the one she never wanted Ma to hear
>
> (A 683).

The wish to mourn is followed by the immediate arrival of Agaat's secret narrative. She has only ever shared this story with him and it is his inheritance to carry despite himself. He is caught in the 'messy' borderless space of spectral poetics (Derrida 1994).

Much like Derrida's ethical stance in *Specters of Marx*, *Agaat* casts a skeptical eye over the Freudian construct of mourning by illustrating its impossibility. According to Freud, "mourning is regularly the reaction to loss" (1917: 3041) but "melancholia behaves like an open wound" (1917: 3049). The distinction he draws is that mourning can be completed as one detaches from the lost object, whereas melancholia develops from a pathological relation to the lost object and cannot effect any closure in relation to it. Mourning allows for the return to a healthy ego state but melancholia often results in a host of morbid symptoms. The psychoanalytic diagnosis thus persuades the melancholic to adopt a more suitable mourning strategy.

On the contrary, Derrida argues that the Freudian experience of mourning is a fallacy − only an anxious containment of the specter by seeking to condemn its becoming body (as half body and spirit) to death (1994). Exhibiting this lack of closure, Jakkie is left with the burdensome inheritance of Agaat's secret story (presumably her version of her personal history). Significantly, it is a story that additionally carries, "Good's [Agaat's] mourning because she cried without tears" (A: 689). The inability to mourn is a recurring trace that passes from Agaat to Jakkie, suggesting an endless strain of melancholia for the loss that has occurred and for what continues to remain missing.

Much like the repetitive and improvisatory style of the bed-time story used in *Agaat*, Derrida similarly argues that the specter is both "repetition *and* the first time" (1994: 10). For Derrida, that which we are forced to inherit from the past is responsibility of and for a future that will allow for the return of the ghost. By allowing for its iterability rather than mere repeatability, one allows for the potential newness of the story yet to be told in the future. However, Jakkie has no intentions to live with ghosts and seeks to deny the borderless space in which spectrality operates. And by seeking escape from it he becomes increasingly melancholic about the inability to exorcise these ghosts.

Identical to James in *White Lightening*, Jakkie typifies nostalgia *contretemps* by maintaining a wish for 'an-other country' as a fantasy of alterity. The loss they both encounter is twofold: realising, firstly, that if the future is to be maintained as an exemplar of radical alterity it will be forever unattainable (this is more self-consciously the case with James in *White Lightening*) and,

secondly, that the *new* of alterity can never follow the dictates of their messianic hopes. Because of these aporetic clashes, the future becomes enveloped in a dual economy of loss as they grieve for the alterity that never comes and the messianism that proves too forceful. As I have tried to illustrate, their common reaction is that of labouring through loss by eventually seeking release from it through acts of mourning. However, the impossibility of mourning leaves them perpetually melancholic as they continue to cling to border-based beliefs of death as the alterity of 'an-other country'.

Through the representation of nostalgia *contretemps*, the texts foreshadow an awareness that the messianic perfectibility of border-based approaches embedded in national rhetoric has come to be felt as inauthentic – a poor philosophy for 'post-transitional' South Africa. Intriguingly enough, the shifting discursive relations that one finds in contemporary literature do not suggest a loss of idealism but a reconfiguration of it. This is communicated through a prominent inclination towards an ethical repositioning of death as a borderless discourse.

In Mark Behr's *Kings of the Water*, the protagonist, Michiel, has a desire to mourn that is equal to Jakkie's *Agaat*. We learn that he has employed the services of a psychologist, Glassman, and much like his male counterparts in the previous narratives, Michiel subscribes to the psychological dictum of mourning and has come to South Africa with this intention in mind. He is aware that "at some point he will have to allow himself to weep. It will be the first thing Glassman asks when he gets back: *And how did you mourn?*"(KW: 58).

Upon arrival, Michiel is pained by the fact that his father cannot, like him, use his mother's death as a reason to put aside their old animosity. Despite his peace offerings, his father "will not allow me to mourn my mother" (KW: 35). Contrary to the possibilities of mourning that Glassman outlines for Michiel's trip, it proves to be impossible in his South African context; "what layers of disconsolation had he entered? Or is it the grief of all memory repeated in the superlative? Never over and done, only done over" (KW: 81). Comparable to Jakkie in *Agaat*, Michiel cannot find the closure he desires and the text thus exhibits an equal resistance to mourning. Michiel spends much of his energy in this pursuit but the sheer frustration with which his efforts are met leaves him perpetually melancholic. Arguably, this serves as Behr's ethical, and somewhat didactic, critique of Michiel's melancholic temperament. For what the text appears to suggest, most particularly through Michiel's encounters, is that death cannot be perceived as exterior to life. The text alludes to the use of a borderless discourse of death where mourning is no longer required.

In *Aporias*, Derrida describes such an approach as that which "stems from the fact that there is no limit. There is not yet or there is no longer a border to cross, no opposition between two sides: the limit is too porous, permeable, and indeterminate" (1998: 20). Here death is perceived as a discursive engagement that denies the use of any borders. It cannot be captured in the language of differentiation but allows for the possibility that death is interior to and inseparable from life. Contrary to Jakkie's resistance to hauntology and James's inability to attain some form of self-dispossession, Behr appears to be amenable to the prospect of interiorized perceptions of death as a potentially practicable approach for Michiel.

In San Francisco, Michiel lives with his partner, Kamil, who has contracted AIDS. Currently, Kamil's fate hangs forever in the balance and Michiel cannot bear the agony of uncertainty. What he longs for is either the certainty of death or the assurance of Kamil's life—a complete mourning or no reason to mourn. Noting this characteristic in Michiel, Kamil accuses him of exhibiting a narcissistic desire to control rather than empathise. In a heated argument, Kamil concludes that "it's not the thing itself, it's what we do with it; not what has been done. It's what we do with it now. Perfection is stasis and that's fascism" (KW: 203). According to Kamil, who lives with the very real probability of death, Michiel needs to learn to embrace the 'impurity' of their lives as death-infested.

Behr conducts a generous exposition of Michiel's deficient need for absolute mourning by illustrating how it amounts to stasis rather than pragmatic action, abstract judgment rather than personal empathy. Contrary to Michiel, characters like his mother, Karien, Benjamin and Kamil all display an uncharacteristic ability to tolerate the inevitability of death and a willingness to incorporate it into their acts of living and do not experience any apparent sense of loss. An approach of this kind serves to counteract nostalgia *contretemps* through an assertion that the 'borders' between life and death are, in fact, porous (or non-existent) entities. Employing this borderless approach to death does not allow for the foreclosures of mourning because it forestalls the very perception of loss itself. As a result, the melancholic yearning of nostalgia *contretemps* is marginalized by denying loss a place in the future.

The novel ends with Michiel on the way to the airport when his brother phones to notify him about the 9/11 attacks and states that all flights to America have been cancelled. He remains

waiting on the side of the road, unsure about whether he is meant to turn back or continue heading for the airport. Behr leaves him suspended – between borders – suggesting that a challenge is being levelled at Michiel. And it appears as if Michiel has gained much from his South African counterparts. Through various inter-textual allusions of the following kind (this one from Boris Pasternak), Michiel is ushered into a new vision of death – his own:

> here too, Karien or Ounooi has folded in the corner of the page: The Grown Marksman … *A tall, strapping shot, you considerate hunter… Phantom with gun at the flood of my soul … Start me, I pray, from the reeds in the morning, Finish me off with one shot in my flight … And for this lofty and resonant parting Thank you. Forgive me, I kiss you, oh hands of my neglected, my disregarded Homeland, my diffidence, family, friends*
>
> (KW: 229).

By the end of the novel he begins to suggest a new mourning must occur for the self who so willingly perceived loss as an inevitable feature of 'post-transitional' South Africa. Michiel desires self-dispossession as a means to gain access to a more expansive spirit that will allow for communal rather than subjective bonds to be made.[42]

The Rowing Lesson by Anne Landsman similarly portrays how the resolution of grief can be attained, not through mourning, but through the reconceptualisation of loss. Betsy, the protagonist, has returned to South Africa because her father is in a coma. Initially Betsy assumes the role as the advocate of life and remains obstinate about his recovery, but by the end of the

[42] Arguably, this follows from Derrida's ideal of absolute hospitality. In *Of Hospitality*, Derrida presents the utopian prospect of the Law of absolute hospitality as an aneconomic exchange that requires the host to relinquish his/her power in honour of the other. In bringing about this obliteration of distance and difference between host and guest, the Law of absolute hospitality overrides the hierarchical relationship of conditional hospitality and thus makes a home for the other within the self (Derrida 2000).

novel it is evident that she has made a graceful acceptance of the inevitability of death that has been placed before them.

In the text Betsy's journey is mapped through the entry into her father's body. This visceral traversability can be usefully understood through Avery Gordon's definition of sensuous knowledge. In *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, she states that

> Sensuous knowledge is a different kind of materialism, neither idealistic nor alienated, but an active practice or passion for the lived reality of ghostly magical invented matters. Sensuous knowledge is receptive, close, perceptual, embodied, incarnate […] It tells and it transports at the same time. Sensuous knowledge is commanding […] to experience a profane illumination is to experience the sensate quality of a knowledge meaningfully affecting you […] Sensuous knowledge always involves knowing and doing. Everything is in the experience with sensuous knowledge. Everything rests on not being afraid of what is happening to you
>
> (Gordon 2008: 205).

According to Gordon haunting is a phenomenological impression whereby the specter enters through the sensual faculties of being. She understands haunting to have a more tangible quality,[43] serving to interrupt on the level of the body. Entering thus, knowledge, transportation and change become possible; in trusting the circumstances of haunting as primarily sensual, the specter induces knowledge that is exterior to the self and, more importantly, incites new action.

Landsman renders the exchange between bodies with immense poetic care as she uses Ebb 'n Flow to mark Betsy's journey into her father's being. Navigating his interiors she states that,

[43] She argues that while Derrida understands the specter as an absence-presence, she maintains that the ghost has presence (Gordon 2008).

"your breathing is more rugged now, and I can feel the tightness spreading inside my own chest" which implies that "perhaps I have angina too", leaving Betsy with the realisation that "we are all dying too" (RL: 216). According to Betsy's narration, death is not the exclusive property of the dead or the dying but can be accessed through direct contact with another body. The text illustrates that the space between life and death is a fluid passage that allows for a borderless and limitless inter-relationship between the two. In the text this also registers in the fact that Betsy is pregnant and awaits both the birth of her son and the funeral of her father – she is poised at the brink of both life and death and often expresses the tenuous and ambivalent nature of this space. Furthermore, the text relays her father's past in second person narration which draws attention to the fact that it is a shared narrative rather than one that belongs exclusively to Betsy or her father.

At first, Betsy's intention is to cure, clean and heal; "we're back in the sea of bad blood and I wish I had a net, a fish net or any kind of net to clean up the mess, to strain the poison out, to fix you up"(RL: 47). Initially, there is great faith invested in the healing properties of narrative and Betsy believes that by recovering her father's narrative she will help restore him to life. This stems from a childhood memory of the time when her father introduced her to the myth of Asclepius:

> Look, Betsy, at the cover of The Lancet, all my medical journals. See that symbol, the intertwined snakes? That's Asclepius' stick. Asclepius would put his patients to sleep with a magic potion, an ancient sleeping pill, and then he would put his ear to their mouths and listen to what they said. What he heard told him what had made them sick, and then he would find a cure.
>
> (RL: 140).

Like Asclepius, Betsy assumes that she must listen for his curing narrative. However, just as Gordon outlines, with the arrival of sensuous knowledge, the sustained engagement with his body means that Betsy soon begins to lose control, eventually learning that the anodyne is more for her than her father.

In the final section of the novel, which is meant to represent her father's passing, Betsy takes the journey with him. Yet, in order for her to accompany him she must also seek a semblance of her own death; "I'm putting the stone into your hand, closing your fingers around it. I am your very last patient […] Cut me with this stone, and we can both rest. Look, I've got your hand in mine. I'm doing all the work for you. There's blood all over us" (RL: 278). By describing herself as his patient, we understand that the roles of host and guest have become unclear. Betsy does not seek to accompany him to the precipice of death in order to release him. Instead, the ending of the novel suggests that neither of them ever have to depart company. In closing, Betsy states that "we're walking up the old road together, and the sunlight is divine" (PL: 279), suggesting that the experience is not one of loss but a celebration of non-dualism where they can forever maintain a form of idealistic reciprocity between the living and the dead. In *The Rowing Lesson*, Betsy's elegy for her father circumvents grief, not by effecting the closures of mourning but through a sustained relation with him as 'not dead' because he continues to live in her.

In *Agaat*, Van Niekerk strives to make a case for this new ideal but goes further than Behr and Landsman to explore also its aporetic complexities. As previously illustrated, Jakkie is unwilling to assume the space of a borderless death by denying the specters that haunt him. Yet, a direct

counterpoint is the characterisation of his mother, Milla, who seeks out the aneconomic structures of haunting as a hopeful prospect of the future.

Milla has motor neuron disease and awaits death in a state of paralysis. She narrates her experience from her deathbed as a paradoxical condition of death marked by two oppositional impulses of plenitude and nothingness. She often states her position as that of being "between heaven and earth" (A: 44, 81) and questions the existence of a transcendental reality or, on the contrary, the mortal truth of a body that merely passes away.

Initially, Milla desires a transcendental death. This is most clearly expressed in her attachment to the maps of the farm. The maps serve as part of a projectionist fantasy that corresponds to the mapping of the self and the body. Accordingly, Milla turns to these maps in order to commemorate and consolidate her life – she wishes to conduct her own project of self-mourning:

> Between the land and the map I must look, up and down, far and near until I've had enough, until I am satiated with what I have occupied here. And then they must roll it up in a tube and put on my neckbrace again like the mouth of a quiver. And I will close my eyes and prepare myself so that they can unscrew my head and allow the map to slip into my lacunae.
> So that I can be filled and braced from the inside and fortified for the voyage
>
> (A: 105).

By ritualistically pouring over the maps, which have attained a sense of cartographic perfection, she can begin to imagine her life drawing to completion as she makes a departure into another world. Significantly, Agaat deliberately withholds the maps from her for most of the narrative. And as a result, she feels as if Agaat condemns her to the empty reality of her putrefying and

mortal body. She is stuck in a "purgatory according to Agaat" (A: 158), an interstitial space in which she is already 'dead' but cannot appreciably embrace death's onset as a transcendental unity. Agaat's care is seen as a sadistic form of nursing as it sustains and denies Milla either life or death as ultimate realities. In turn, it is this paradoxical space, where selfhood is denied, that allows for an opening where haunting occurs. The narrative rendition of haunting in *Agaat* is deeply evocative and like in Landsman's text, complies with Gordon's theorisation of the experience as a sensuous thrust into knowledge.

In her state of utter passivity Milla is a receptacle for sensuous experiences that she can no longer create or control. *Agaat* illustrates the borderless exchange that occurs under such circumstances as Milla and Agaat are not merely represented as intimate with each other but intrinsic to each other. For example, when Agaat is brushing her teeth Milla states that "it gives her an opportunity to get into my mouth, under my tongue, behind my teeth" (A: 60). The extent to which Agaat imposes upon Milla's body suggests acts of penetration that are both loving and provocative. Furthermore, now that Agaat is left to interpret Milla's thoughts, she is able to do so with a great amount of accuracy and can assume Milla's subject position on her behalf. When the doctor comes to visit he thinks that Agaat is mad for being able to read Milla's thoughts but Milla states that "I signal to Agaat yes, and you're also quite sound of mind. Tell the man our imagination is a shared one, tell him we thought each other up" (A: 212). Milla is aware that she cannot claim a single subject position as they are one and the same being; "when Agaat leaves me alone, like today, I am nobody. Between me and you no fissures of differentiation" (A: 101). It is an intimacy that is represented as both terrifying and extremely touching.

Yet *Agaat* also uncovers the aporetic effects of what haunting entails and thus displays greater resistance to idealism. Now that Milla is a paralyzed receptacle, she notes that this has led to a radical shift in power in their relationship. She is no longer a subject but one who is subjected to Agaat's subjectivity. As a result, Milla embodies the ironic state of captivity where she is both host and the hostage, revealing the inherent perversity of violence that absolute hospitality equally makes possible. In *Of Hospitality*, Derrida argues that "it is the master, the one who invites, the inviting host, who becomes the hostage – and who really always has been" (2000: 125). In making an aneconomic invitation, the host relinquishes power and becomes vulnerable to any abuse that the guest may wish to render. It is precisely because of this antinomic result that Derrida maintains that absolute hospitality must be approached with a measure of caution as practicable hospitality. He argues that since absolute hospitality is always idealistic, its application is bound to bring us less than satisfactory results of the aporetic kind (Derrida 2000).

As hostage, Milla is often frustrated that Agaat "interprets me to the brink of Babel, to the threshold of death. But there are limits! Back! Stand Back! You're too close! My death is of me! And my bed! There are boundaries!"(A: 450). She expresses powerlessness that arises because of the lack of boundaries between herself and Agaat. Yet it is only through enduring the discomfort of the haunting effect that sensuous knowledge arrives and Milla is quickly consumed by shame. She realises that Agaat has always been condemned to a shadowy existence – a ghostly figure without any access to being. Throughout the narrative Agaat is consistently represented as being "half in the shadow" (A: 348), suggesting her precarious position in relation to Milla. As is re-iterated through Milla's journals, Agaat's life has always been, literally, confined to the borders of her interpretations and as a result, Agaat is often, only, a weak parody of her:

> You watched her, her gestures, her phrases, her gaze. She was a whole compilation of you, she contained you within her, she was the arena in which the two of you wrestled with yourselves.
> That was all she could be, from the beginning.
> Your archive
>
> (A: 554).

It is, in fact, Agaat who has spent her entire life in a state of captivity and, as an act of transformation, Milla surrenders to the haunting claim that Agaat now makes upon her. As Agaat continues to antagonize her about her journals, Milla is well aware that none of Agaat's audacious pronouncements would have been possible if Milla could still talk. She embraces this state of debasement, realising that Agaat too, has a desire for closure that is equal to her own and she makes allowances for grieving that is not merely her own: "perhaps we are jointly out of our minds to think we can complete this project in the allotted time. All the parts of it. The remembering, the reading, the dying, the song" (A: 212).

However, because they are caught in the mutuality of unconditional hospitality, Agaat can only pursue her project *through* Milla and they remain active participants in each other's lives. Milla often has dreams of Agaat accompanying her to her grave and imagines that in death she will find in her hand, "*the hand of the small agaat*" (A: 674). Yet, in one such dream she imagines that Agaat "arose out of that grave of mine last night" (A: 646). In wonderment she questions whether her hospitality and death will eventually allow for Agaat's otherness to come into being in the future.

This is poignantly registered through the maps which, as previously noted, Milla reads as extensions of her body and being. Towards the end of the narrative Agaat eventually presents

these maps to Milla. She tacks the maps up on the wall for Milla to view and simultaneously issues Milla with an enema. Agaat then proceeds to point out various places that Milla would possibly like to see and Milla states that "of some of them I've never heard. She's inventing half the names" (A: 403). Agaat has a map of her own that is in parasitic relation to Milla's maps.[44] She continues listing names of places on the map and they are "released from her like a flood" (A: 405). It is poignant to note that this occurs while Milla is caught in the humiliation of her own faecal stench – her body and her maps are being made 'empty' while Agaat makes her stamp on the map by listing "everything that you forgot and never even noted in your little books" (A: 405).

In *Ghostly Matters*, Gordon opines that

> the ghost is primarily a symptom of what is missing. It gives notice not only to itself but also to what it represents. What it represents is usually a loss, sometimes of life, sometimes of a path not taken. From a certain vantage point the ghost also simultaneously represents a future possibility, a hope
>
> (2008: 63-64).

Gordon insists that the specter always outlines that which is lacking in any given society. However, in drawing attention to what is missing, it is not meant to be embraced as a melancholic figure of what cannot come into being—as perpetual 'lack'—but as a reminder of that which must by necessity, be incorporated in the future. Through the metaphoric use of the maps, *Agaat* alludes to the possibility of narratives that are yet to entrench itself upon this cartographic space, leaving the reader to imagine the potential of the other that one must await and can only arrive through an uncomfortable unconditional invitation.

[44] This parasitic condition also exists in relation to the wild fennel that Agaat has planted over the years as her unique trademark. Eventually, it starts to grow wildly and spreads all across the farm land and beyond.

Likewise, *Playing in the Light* narrates an experience of haunting. In the text, Wicomb portrays post-apartheid South Africa as primarily informed by a fundamental unwillingness to grieve its ghosts. When Marion unearths repressed memories of Tokkie's death, she recalls that "her mother held her and wept tears that left muddy rivulets down the pink pancake makeup" but nevertheless decided that "it was plain folly to go to the funeral" (PL: 32). Instead "they would have their own private mourning at home, she said. Helen made it sound like a party, a special treat, but on the day of the funeral nothing happened; they didn't speak about it or put their arms around each other" (PL: 32). As a child, Marion cannot understand the discrepancy between her mother's evident grief and her decision to forego mourning for Tokkie. As an adult, Marion's haunting initially occurs through a recurring dream of Tokkie. When these dreams grow in intensity, she is pushed into the revelation that Tokkie is her maternal grandmother. Despite the rage of having this secret kept from her, Marion believes it is her duty to mourn belatedly her grandmother. She is undaunted, deciding that "she should get on with it, lay the ghost" (PL: 81). However, Wicomb illustrates the ghost's resistance to Marion's exorcism, indicating that it requires far more than mourning rites.

The haunting in this text is displayed as virulently aneconomic as it expands disproportionately in relation to its subject, Marion. The ghost is represented as an entity with agency to corrupt and demand, to place expectation on the living. Soon, Marion cannot go through her day without seeing Tokkie everywhere and in everything. As she revisits a haunting image in a newspaper article, "the eyes of the stranger hold hers accusingly, calling her to account: for what, for the callous fold across the face? But no; it hisses a command to

remember, remember, remember" (PL: 54). Marion cannot understand why she is drawn to this picture as she usually finds TRC narratives, of the kind recounted in the article, tedious. As the ghost continues to insist on remembering, it becomes clear that it is not merely the ghost of Tokkie that encroaches upon Marion, but a broader understanding of the missing past. The ghost thus resembles what Gordon describes as "a social figure […] tied to historical and social effects" (2008: X). In this manner her identification with what is 'new' in South African society is forced into unspoken considerations of the 'old' that is limned by the ghost of her dead grandmother but not exclusive to it. And as apparitions change form, assuming identities from Tokkie to Patricia Williams (from the TRC article), to an unknown woman, Marion is pushed further still towards her own spectral recognition. When in Wuppertal, Marion meets Mrs. Murray, who grows wide-eyed: "O *gits*, it's like seeing a spook, because from down here with your face tilted like that you look like the splitting image of Mrs Karelse my dear!" (PL: 97). The ghost of her grandmother overshadows the identity of its host in order to make itself known. In turn, it is Marion who begins to resemble the ghost. Becoming and feeling increasingly disembodied, she notes that "when she tries to speak, not a word issues from her lips. She slips into Boetie's chair, light and empty as a ghost" (PL: 105).

As the liminal awareness of her own shadowy existence grows, Marion describes herself as

> a reluctant traveler who has landed in a foreign country without so much as a phrase book. She forces herself to step out gingerly into its strange streets, her arms clutched, hugged to her chest […] she does not know why she ventures into a world she has never known, never wished to explore, except that somehow it is the least she can do for the demanding stranger, for Patricia Williams, whose face is that of the beloved Tokkie, and whose eyes point at the connectedness of this foreign country with her old familiar world.
>
> (PL: 75)

In an examination of the trope of 'home' and its relation to travel in *Playing in the Light*, Minesh Dass uncovers how "the state of being necessarily unhomed" (145: 2011), allows Marion to forge a racial identity that is free from shame. Hence, the various disruptions of homely spaces in the novel are interrogations of preconceived notions of race that she must discard in order to feel 'at home' within herself (Dass 2011). The excerpt above also exemplifies this 'unhoming' effect as Wicomb describes the "old familiar world" as that which is also a "foreign country". It is one where Marion is able to co-exist with ghosts as opposed to cordoning them off as other. In this manner, the text exploits the liminal space between the living and the dead and seeks to realign the discourse of 'post-transitional' South Africa.

Yet, as Wicomb suggests, the manner of exploration in this space is decidedly cautious. Marion is disempowered; without a "phrase book" she acknowledges her inability to communicate effectively with ghosts, let alone play advocate for them. The discomfort of living in a foreign country means occupying the space in a state of constant destabilization. Hence, the act of belonging is always tentative, working through a series of interrogations rather than claiming citizenship as a performative gesture.

Accordingly, Marion remains plagued by an inability to decide and decipher what counts as other concerning her identity. In a heated exchange with her lover, Marion reveals this displacement as follows:

> Look, she interrupts vehemently, let's be accurate about this. My parents were the play-whites; they crossed over. I was white, now I will have to cross over; but if those places are no longer the same, have lost their meaning, there can be no question of returning to a

> place where my parents once were. Perhaps I can keep crossing to and fro, to different places, perhaps that is what the new is all about – an era of unremitting crossings. Geoff thinks that is too exhausting; it's a piece of nonsense, he says, perhaps utopian nonsense. You should be so lucky, he laughs, but without conviction. Is she theorizing the rainbow nation?
>
> (PL: 107)

Just as Derrida argues, and Geoff exclaims in this example, the endless considerations involved in attempting to establish boundaries in a borderless space can be paralyzing and futile. However, as Geoff also notes, there is something 'utopian' about Marion's wish to establish concord between two seeming variables in her life. Precise in its allusion to the ideal of absolute hospitality, Marion's work must exhaust, because the spectrum of consideration is inexhaustible. She must forever occupy something that resembles a 'foreign country' rather than a home in which she can be comfortable.

Furthermore, Marion's 'foreign country' is also fraught with the ethical difficulty of deciding the extent to which the spectral can and should be allowed to speak. For as Derrida discloses in *Of Hospitality*, the aporetic circumstances of absolute hospitality invariably allow for perverse forms of violence to arise. In the text, Marion learns that she is not merely to converse with ghosts but must also learn to discern the limits of what can be spoken.

Towards the end of the novel, when Marion seeks to make peace with her father, she visits him at his home. However, what she encounters surprises her. She

> puts her hand to her mouth to suppress a gasp. Her father stands in the doorway like a ghost from the past. The gloves, yellow with age, are slack around the withered hands. In this get-up, his skin waxy like a corpse and enveloped in the mustiness of dust and mothballs, he is an emblem of the phantasmagoric past
>
> (PL: 155).

Her father greets her in his old traffic-officer uniform, granting her another sighting of a ghost. In this moment where he tries to recover the former glory of a job that he only managed to obtain because he had passed as a white citizen, Marion feels something of a ghost that needs to be slain. This indicates that while haunting implies a certain embrace of boundlessness in relation to hospitable extension, it must – in practicable measure – exercise discernment, itself a form of limit, in order to become an ethical stance. It is here that the text makes a crucial distinction between the apathetic forces of nostalgia and the regenerative power of haunting. For as both Gordon and Derrida suggest, haunting does not bear a relation merely to the past but, more importantly, to the future.

Yet, despite offering us the tenuous proposition of the 'foreign country', in *Playing in the Light* there is also a lesson about how to makes oneself at home with the uncanny. By the end of the novel, Marion realises that she no longer sees ghosts in her surroundings but maintains that

> next time the image appears, distorted on the drapes of her bed or stretched on the water, she must not bury her head and blubber; next time she will try to look squarely into that face and meet its eyes
>
> (PL: 177).

She vows to honour and acknowledge any guest that should enter her domestic space. There is a sense of banality about ghostly interruptions that will recur as she anticipates their return. In this

manner, *Playing in the Light* illumines the missing past as that which is only ever under partial recovery, and requires the future as a locale in which perpetual returns of the specter continue.

Imraan Coovadia's *High Low In-between* also seeks close identification with the spectral. And like *Agaat*, it relies on dual narration in order to delineate this position. As previously illustrated, Jakkie narrates through border-based discourses of death and borderless reflections on death are central to Milla's narrative. In *High Low In-between*, the discursive stances of Shakeer and his mother, Nafisa, mirror those of Jakkie and Milla respectively.

Unlike the male protagonists discussed above, Shakeer is caught off-guard and suffers extensively after the sudden loss of his father. He has secretly identified with his father who "was inside him and at work, every minute, inside his soul" (HLI: 56). Accordingly, his father's passing feels likes his own.

> [Shakeer] imagined he was lying there, inside the sheet, in the place of his father. He was too terrified to breathe as the clay fell on him, building up and rapidly blocking the light. His translation into the ground was so decided that, for an instant, he felt the cool pressure of the sheet on his own arms and smelled mud in his nostrils. He felt movement of the blood in his head. It was loud as a truck
>
> (HLI: 55).

The claustrophobic image is suggestive of the stifling circumstances under which his father worked and lived as a research scientist in South Africa. Shakeer feels that his father's magnanimity and intellectual promise was wasted on an unthinking and foolish society. At the funeral he is surrounded by people who are "unable to imagine that any other man's death carried certain implications for his own destiny" (HLI: 57). He broods over the underhanded

circumstances that led to his father's death, ultimately signifying a much larger social ill; "in a sense, this singular action was the endpoint of a far longer process. His father's life escaped through an exit far greater than a bullethole" (HLI: 47). The loss of his father represents a much more fundamental tear in the ethical and moral fabric in society, rendering it vulnerable to corruption and irrationality.

However, as one who has committed suicide, his father is now guilty of irrational action himself. From the outset, Shakeer's grief is enveloped in the fact that, "it wasn't certain what event they were mourning" (HLI: 107). Everyone finds it uncharacteristic that his father has taken his own life and this uncertainty makes the funeral an extremely uneasy affair. As he states, "the uncertainty about his father insinuated itself into every other fact in their lives. His own feelings, as much as those of his mother, found no definition so long as their subject was indefinite" (HLI: 95). Comparable to Jakkie and Michiel, Shakeer is left with the predicament of impossible mourning. This experience, however, proves to be a temporary discomfort for Shakeer. It is a transitory space that culminates in the recovery of his father's untainted reputation.

Once the murder is proven Shakeer confirms his departure from 'this world' along with his father's. By the end, he ratifies the perception of a dystopic South Africa and will have no further part in it. Ultimately, the Taziya ritual that he attends in the final scene of the novel can be read as an indication of complete or 'successful' mourning as the effects of ritual and monumentalisation often serve to contain and tame emotions of grief and loss. They are acts of mourning that concretize the 'pastness' of memory, emphasizing distance rather than proximity to it. In this manner, Shakeer accompanies the tomb, but only to watch it be burned and to walk

away. He thus stands as an exception in comparison to other characters in this main analysis, none of whom can effect the closure of mourning to this extent. Yet *High Low In-between* offers us a radical counterpoint in the characterization of Nafisa, whose interactions with death highlight the forcefulness of Shakeer's mourning project.

In contrast to Shakeer's shocked reception of death, Nafisa's state of heightened emotional sensitivity greets the arrival of death as an anticipated event.

> Nafisa believed that her ready tears were pre-emptive, the prediction of some circumstance of which she had no knowledge. Since her husband's operation she had sensed some catastrophe waiting to show itself
>
> (HLI: 11).

At the outset, she often breaks into spontaneous tears and feels out of joint, describing her presence as "spectral" (HLI: 31) in relation to others. Through a fluid understanding of her relation to death, she already appears to inhabit a liminal space. Hence, there is a sense of foreboding as Nafisa and Estella drive Shakeer home from the airport. She imagines that they are "like three mourners" (HLI: 37), waiting for death to arrive. True to her premonitions, Nafisa discovers her husband's dead body in their bedroom. Staring down at his corpse, she is keenly aware of what this image signifies: "she recognized the scene just as if she was remembering it from the day before. There was nothing in the room to surprise her" (HLI: 38).

Nafisa's preemptive mourning culminates in this moment. And like Shakeer, she feels that "Arif had murdered himself, and murdered her along with him" (HLI: 38). Yet dying along with her husband becomes a means by which her earlier feelings of liminality are, somewhat ironically, relieved. The direct confrontation of death ostensibly solidifies and reinstates a feeling of duality

between life and death. And so "Nafisa was struck, at the moment, by the thought that her life had just begun" (HLI: 38). In some radical manner, her husband's death allows for her rebirth. Exploring her world without her husband, it dawns on her that

> a piece of news would remain with her rather than being passed on to Arif. She was an atom where once she had been part of a molecule. Even as a girl she had never been an atom. The thought was terrifying; at the same time it thrilled her
>
> (HLI: 127).

Being on her own for the first time in her life is a new experience of subjectivity. At moments in the text, Nafisa feels exhilarated by her newfound authority and brazenness. However, Coovadia quickly exposes the aporetic inability to escape from death when working within the frameworks of a borderless discourse of death. Nafisa's new-found subjectivity is marked as fallacious as soon as she enters the King Edward Hospital again.

Soon after the funeral, Nafisa makes the decision to return to work as a medical professional. Working in a public hospital, she cannot help but notice that "many of her patients had disappeared from the wards over the years without a word of explanation" (HLI: 120). Despite her individual efforts, she touches base with the inevitability of death and the futility it makes her feel: "the majority of people had always been disposable here. Now, the difference was, everyone was disposable" (HLI: 131). Through her return to the hospital, Coovadia erodes the seeming dichotomy that stands between Nafisa's life-giving role as a doctor and the death-entrenched reality of her patients. The border reveals itself as porous or entirely irrelevant.

Her contaminable existence is reiterated when she is accidently pricked by a needle after injecting an HIV positive patient. This 'accident' happens because of the negligence of Rose, a

malevolent nurse: "Rose was still smiling. She said, 'Can I fetch you a cup of tea? Doctor, you look as if you have seen a ghost'" (HLI: 134).[45] Nafisa is 'pricked' into an altered reality that numbers her as one amongst the 'dying' in South Africa. She is advised by Govin to go on an emergency pack (to prevent the contraction of HIV) as he, in this manner, made "sure he hadn't converted" (HLI: 134). Nafisa refuses. She embraces the humbling reality of her patients as her own, not seeking to prevent the 'conversion' from doctor to patient, from life to death, perhaps, for the first time, seeing the discourse of borders as a ruse:

> Nafisa couldn't tell what she had become, in the past week, in the past month, or year for that matter, or was in the process of becoming. There was some transformation underway even before the accident in the morning. She could sense it inside herself. There were enormous forces in motion. They were a tide which ran against everything which had conspired to take Arif's life away from her
>
> (HLI: 144)

The pervasive reality of death reintroduces the earlier condition of spectrality that, as she notes above, predates her husband's death. Nafisa finds herself immersed in the spectral space in which the text begins. Again she becomes disembodied, a ghostly evocation that only finds a voice through those around her: "often Nafisa couldn't recognise her own voice in what she said. She saw herself in others more easily" (HLI: 144).

Comparable to characters in *White Lightening*, *Agaat* and *Kings of the Water*, Nafisa seeks death through the act of continual self-dispossession. Soon her assets will be seized by the Receiver of

[45] In this regard, Coovadia ostensibly exploits the hospital for its antonymic potential to deliver the realities of both hospitality and hostility to the reader: as a practising medical doctor, Nafisa invests faith in her humane profession but grows exasperated when she witnesses the hostility she experiences in her interactions with both nurses and patients.

Revenue, helping to liberate her from her upper-middle class trappings.[46] Finally, when the husband of her now dead patient, Millicent, comes to make an irrational demand that she, the doctor, should help pay for Millicent's funeral, Nafisa does not turn him away. She accepts that "this man had been waiting in the wings, a nobody who became a somebody as he moved in her direction. Control of her life, the constant addition and subtraction of her sorrows, had been taken from her by these nobodies. These apparitions!"(HLI: 231). This is much like in *Agaat* and *Playing in the Light*, where Milla and Marion experience the sheer discomfort of attempting absolute hospitality but remain firm because of the ethical propensity to allow for the other, or 'nobodies' in this particular example. Nafisa is exhausted by the demands that will continually be made of her, but she must host and grant presence to 'apparitions' so often ignored by society.

As Nafisa actively accepts the borderless presence of death, the title of the text takes on added significance. In a moment of frustration she states that "she would sell the house and leave the country behind. She would find out who had murdered her husband. She was fed up with this in-between condition. In every direction she would push things to a conclusion" (HLI: 181). As expressed, the dualism of a 'high' and a 'low' provides the comfort of borders that can provide definition for our experiences. On the contrary, the constant flux of the in-between does not appear to offer Nafisa a happier or more comfortable life, but certainly aspires towards a more

[46] In *High Low In-between*, the discourse of borders also serves as an indictment against the financial fortification of the South African Indian population. Despite the fact that Shakeer's family was subjected to apartheid law, his parents did not experience the gross economic and educational inequality that was doled out to the black masses of South Africa. Because both his mother and father were allowed to practise as doctors, his family enjoyed a fair amount of socio-economic ease. Commenting on his mother's lavishness, Shakeer states that "the middle class, he thought, was its own jailer" (HLI: 208). He observes how "his mother was outnumbered by her objects" (HLI: 210). It is also for this reason that Shakeer is angered by his father's murder because it shattered the assumption that "his family enjoyed a certain immunity from circumstances" (HLI: 42). And by the end, he cannot make the transition to live "in this country [where] there was no promise of an undisturbed life" (HLI: 47). Nafisa, on the other hand, learns to embrace the wonder that it is "strange to live amongst strangers" (HLI: 247) for the first time, using the limitlessness of the borderless space to challenge racial and class constructs of separateness, isolation and individuation.

empathetic one. In direct contrast to Shakeer, who enforces a conclusion of his mourning and his life in South Africa, Nafisa accepts that she will never know a reality that is immune to suffering, death and undecidability. Their differing opinions are made clear during an exchange where Shakeer argues that one can call no man happy unless he is dead. To which Nafisa replies; "all the same you were dead. Could you be happy without thought, life, motion? It was moronic reasoning. Her son was a moron. So was she" (HLI: 192). In *High Low In-between*, as well as in *Agaat*, the reader is, somewhat uncomfortably, poised in-between these two perceptions and left to decide what the difference between lost hope and new hope amounts to in the transitional present.

With the exception of Shakeer, the impossibility of mourning results in a melancholic condition of nostalgia *contretemps* for many of the male characters discussed in this chapter. And while given ample textual representation of their attempts to mourn the impossible alterity of border-based discourse, they are ultimately portrayed as unsuccessful. Their condition is one where "nostalgia constitutes what it cannot possess and defines itself by its inability to approach its subject, a paradox that is the essence of nostalgia's melancholia" (Fritschze 2001: 27). They are thus seen as exhibiting the "pathological disposition" (Freud 1917: 3041) of melancholia which appears to resist the developmental changes that occur within the national and literary imaginary.

Instead, the reconfiguration of loss is presented more appreciably in these texts. It is also seen as a means by which to overcome nostalgia *contretemps* entirely. Through the employment of a borderless discourse in representations of death, conditions of spectrality are integrated in living. Applying Žižek's description, 'post-transitional' South Africa is where "one becomes a full

member of a community not simply by identifying with its explicit symbolic tradition, but when one also assumes the spectral dimension that sustains this tradition: the undead ghosts that haunt the living, the secret history of traumatic fantasies transmitted" (Žižek 2000b: 64). The pervasive use of ghosts in these texts evoke a desire to learn to live with the unspoken atrocities of history and the spectral fantasmatic history of the events that have not taken place in the national imaginary. It invites a spectral form of citizenship that allows the living and the dead to co-exist and to disrupt the premise of separable existences. As outlined in the textual analyses, building a relation to the spectral is exhausting and uncomfortable as it renders impossible any form of final assimilation. In this regard, it is an ethical ideal that voluntarily employs the unfinished economy of melancholia whilst depathologising it. Hence, it no longer resembles a dis-ease, but rather an awakening to the specters that we have always contained within ourselves and who continue to undo us.

Chapter 4: A Spoiled Existence

> Fie on't, ah fie, 'tis an unweeded garden
> That grows to seed, things rank and gross in nature
> Posess it merely.
>
> *Hamlet* 1.2.135-136

> She was open to every type of spoiled existence. Existence was there to spoil,
> to go bad, to go off, to go sour
>
> *High Low In-Between* − 229

In the epigraph, Hamlet laments living in an "unweeded garden". Exhibiting qualities of being "rank and gross in nature", the nation of Denmark has given way to a spoiled existence. And as Derrida argues in *Specters of Marx*, he curses his lot because he has been elected as "a righter of wrongs" (1994: 21) despite his wishes. According to Hamlet, the integrity of Denmark rests in his ability to avenge his father. He must redeem it from the contagion and corruption – the *contretemps* − that has spread as a result of Old Hamlet's death and Gertrude's and Claudius's marriage. Hamlet assumes the role of dramaturge in order to do so: through the direction of the players he aims to retell the uncanny tale of "The Murder of King Gonzago" such that recognition of a crime and subsequent justice may ensue.

In contemporary South African fiction, we are presented with a similar possibility of creative intervention in the light of present *contretemps*; each text discussed in this thesis characterizes its protagonist as an artist. In *White Lightening*, James is a film-director and scriptwriter, in *The Rowing Lesson* Betsy is a painter, in *High Low In-between* Shakeer is a photographer and *Agaat's* Jakkie is an ethno-musicologist with singing talent. In *Playing in the Light* and *Kings of the Water* we find slight variations: Marion is a business entrepreneur and Michiel is an English

teacher. Nevertheless there is still the presence of the artist figure: in *Playing in the Light* Brenda longs to become a creative writer and Karien has painted the mural that hangs on the wall of the Steyn household in *Kings of the Water*.

Furthermore, like Hamlet, these artists cite an interest in recovering the past. Their obsessive gestures of return involve projects that recall the archaic and mythological to the reader. In this manner, I argue that they enforce an uncanny recognition of the "dream topography" (Coetzee 1988: 7) that persists in the white literary imaginary. Hence, I suggest that these texts employ their artist-protagonists as part of a meta-textual gesture that ultimately engages the literary nostalgia of the white imaginary in an attempt to reinscribe it. For unlike Hamlet who can never resign himself to the "unweeded garden" and wishes to return to a tamed and territorialized garden instead, contemporary South African fiction indicates a desire to engage the spoiled existence on its own terms. Inherited politics of belonging are thus duly interrogated, allowing for potentially altered discursive interactions with the m/otherland.

In *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa*, Coetzee's literary analyses underscore a tradition of white writing governed by anxiety and the tenuous politics of belonging. In response to this state of profound insecurity, white writing has cultivated the Southern African landscape as central to its literary imaginary by employing it as the very means through which the white subject can be rendered intelligible.

Examining the *plaasroman*, Coetzee argues that the more prominent means of appeasing the anxiety of belonging was made through ownership and domestication of the landscape as farmed

territory. He notes that the discursive strategy is that of establishing belonging through the emphasis on predial lineage. Because Africa seemingly led to "the degeneration of man into brute" (1988: 3), it was thus "an anti-Garden" whose heinous qualities had to be kept at bay through the extensive efforts of farming practice. Hence, unlike the European tradition of the Romantic sublime, tranquility, peace and virtue were never seen as qualities intrinsic to the land and had to be cultivated within the controlled space of the farm.

On the contrary, Coetzee describes "a rival dream topography"

> of South Africa as a vast, empty, silent space, older than man, older than the dinosaurs whose bones lie bedded in its rocks, and destined to be vast, empty, and unchanged long after man has passed from its face. Under such a conception of Africa – 'Africa, oldest of the continents' – the task of human imagination is to conceive not of social order capable of domesticating the landscape, but any kind of relation at all that consciousness can have with it
>
> (Coetzee 1988: 7).

Discussing the work of English lyric poets such as Thomas Pringle, Roy Campbell, Guy Butler and Pauline Smith, Coetzee identifies fantasies of an archaic and mythical Africa with which one can merge consciousness and attain a form of essentialised belonging. In this version, Africa does gain Edenic status but there is a dilemma of "a silence that remains incomprehensible" (Coetzee 1988: 9), and into which the poet can never enter. This is because "the language being sought after is a natural or Adamic language, one in which Africa will naturally express itself" (Coetzee 1988: 9).

Working within the frameworks of a colonial imagination that often found the African landscape to be resistant to representation, the lack of accurate signifiers for the land leads to its subsequent

interpretation as barren and inscrutable. And as Rita Barnard notes, this topography is "the product of a particular version of the sublime, [and] thus relies on an act of erasure" (2007: 28). Hence, the poetics of alienation, as an aesthetic effect, reproduces its conditions of sustainability. Drawing inspiration from Romanticism, the unceasing lament is for an impossible language to converse with the land.

Upon inspection, this presents a quintessential nostalgic fantasy. As Jean Starobinski and Svetlana Boym illustrate, philosophers and artists (particularly the Romantics) often expressed desires to return to a more 'natural' existence. Regarding Nietzsche, Boym argues that there was always the hope of moving "beyond memory and forgetting into cosmos and wilderness" (2001:25). His was a fantasy for a 'pre-nostalgic' man, without consciousness to separate him from the cows in the field (Boym 2001). Starobinski more astutely ties every fantasy of nostalgic return to the structural premise of the Fall where every repetition is but a "metaphorical expression of a much more profound rupture, the separation of man from the ideal" (1966: 95).

Furthermore, Coetzee identifies the use of paternal metaphor to symbolize this failed communion with the land in white writing. He cites representations of the land as a "hard mother" whose qualities of indifference or coldness never allow for adequate bonding or nurturing (1988: 9). In *Gynesis* (1985), Alice Jardine uses a largely psychoanalytic framework to explore the dynamics of sexual difference in Western discourse. Probing the 'feminine' in text, she explains how paternal metaphors are the product of patriarchal discourse as it ratifies the negation of the m/other. She argues that 'woman' "has occupied the space of substitution on the paradigmatic axis of the metaphor" (Jardine 1985: 32). In turn, the symbolic field of 'woman', and all her

attributes, assumes the space of the void, the other and the unrepresentable as a counterpoint to masculine plenitude, centrality and subjectivity (Jardine 1985). In any discursive system, the feminine and maternal are essentially lacunae for projected fantasies of masculine subjectivity. Somewhat ironically, the very employment of paternal metaphor ensures that the feminine undergoes constant erasure despite citing a desire to hear her 'speak'. [47]

Here we also have a diagnosis for Hamlet's mother, Gertrude, whom Janet Adelman describes as "less powerful as an independent character than as a site for fantasies larger than she is, she is preeminently mother as other, the intimate unknown figure around whom fantasies swirl" (1992: 30). In *Suffocating Mothers,* Adelman suggests that Gertrude evokes moral revulsion because of her sexuality. Her presumed affair with Claudius and collusion in King Hamlet's murder leads Hamlet to a realisation of "his mother's newly contaminated body" (Adelman 1992: 17). He thus makes direct reference to her body and the Kingdom of Denmark as an "unweeded garden", indicating how ideas of infestation, pollution and filth have sullied what was previously held in high esteem. This particular moment traces the loss of the Edenic garden that projects originary fantasies of purity unto the maternal body.

Adelman argues that despite Shakespeare's continued use of female characters in this manner, the play nevertheless highlights the significant disjuncture between Hamlet's perception of

[47] As noted by Huffer, psychoanalysis relies on a "gendered articulation of the nostalgic structure" (1998: 40) in order to map nostalgia through the Oedipal complex. According to theorists (Huffer 1998, Boym 2001, Rubenstein 2001 and Radstone 2007), nostalgia is first realised at the stage of maternal separation and subsequent individuation. The child, desiring the plenitude of oneness he/she experienced with the mother, seeks to return to that state of unity. Nostalgia is thus seen as a desire for the pre-oedipal state when the subject possessed no individual consciousness but remained immersed in union with the mother. It is an irrecoverable desire and longing that is mapped on and projected unto the mother's body (Jardine 1985, Radstone 2007), and ultimately gives rise to the archetypal trope of "the ever-questing son" (Huffer 1998: 16).

Gertrude and that of the audience. It helps us discern the exclusive nature of Hamlet's "fantasies of maternal malevolence, of maternal spoiling, that are compelling exactly as they are out of proportion to the character we know" (Adelman 1992: 16).

In contemporary South African fiction, there is a similar foregrounding of paternal metaphor in the white literary imaginary. Like Hamlet, many of the protagonists in my chosen texts return home to parents who evoke feelings of loss, uncertainty and, at times, disgust. Moreover, by making use of the familial narrative and the discomfort of filiation, these texts explore the discursive potential to reinscribe the literary imaginary and henceforth renegotiate the politics of belonging in relation to the land.

Mothers and Sons

In Cartwright's *White Lightning*, James is charmed by the static environment of South Africa. As he watches ants march out of an ant-hill, he muses about the fact that "ants have been at it for aeons. But they have not evolved" (WL: 4). Similarly, his fascination with Italian bees is due to their "connection with antiquity: 29 BC to be precise" (WL: 162). Using Virgil's description of the lives of bees as an intertextual reference, James wants to own them because they exude "a never-ending impulse to life" (WL: 163), and grant an appreciable view of time without end. The animal kingdom, as primordial other, is one that James seeks to commune with. This is most clear in his assertion of kinship with a baboon named Piet. He approaches Piet on familial terms by "speaking to him as a friend, or as a relative" (WL: 157).

The farm on which he eventually settles is also self-reflexively described through literary modes of the "pastorale" (WL: 4). Upon entering the farm, he feels that he "has entered the past, without seeing the portals" (WL: 3). He wonders "if these were the same vine leaves that the Greeks ate" (WL: 3) and is charmed by the "farm girls still bearing the imprint of the lost peoples. It was a watermark, in their cheeks and eyes, as though their ancestors were giving me a timely lesson in immortality: look, nothing dies for ever" (WL: 7). For James, Africa induces "a sort of primal and barbaric mystery" (WL: 142). It is where his phyletic memory is awakened.[48] This is further evidenced in his daily swim in the ocean which he often thinks of in baptismal terms. More generally, James feels that South Africa has released him from previous narcissism because he is dwarfed by nature at every turn.

In *White Lightning*, the overlay between the m/other and nature is jejune. As James sits at his mother's bedside he states that "despite my own failures and transgressions against women, I have always believed that women have deeper roots in this earth and a clear connection to humanness" (WL: 53). It is evident that James has not only come to Africa to makes amends with his white heritage but also to atone for his previous neglect of women by gestures of compassion towards his mother.

Yet, as illustrated in previous chapters, this journey amounts to a reiteration of white alienation in Africa. James, despite his efforts, cannot renegotiate the terms of engagement with his m/other. He remains in the company of a 'hard mother' − a point that is aptly displayed in James's disingenuous attempts to penetrate his mother's comatose consciousness as she lies on

[48] As explained in the text, phyletic memory is an instinctual memory base that connects the animal to its environment. It resides in the subconscious as biological data that allows for the orientation and survival.

her death bed. Hence, landscape 'speaks' in its historically unclear and harsh tones: "I can't say that the message is that I overreached myself – landscape doesn't deal in specifics – but the crude message is one of place. And I understand it" (WL: 189). This leaves James with no option but to return to the UK.

Agaat's Jakkie also appears to makes gestures of atonement; his anthropological queries indicate a need to rescue feminine art forms from obscurity.

> *Private Speech, Public Pain: The Power of Women's Laments in Ancient Greek Poetry and Tragedy, Mourning Songs of the Dirty Goddessess: Traces of the Lamia in Orthodox Baptismal Rites of the Levant, Echoes of the Troll Calls in Romantic Scandanavian Choir Music*. Terribly obscure, all of it. Another one about the polyphonic wailings of Australian aboriginal women when somebody dies off
>
> (A: 15).

Jakkie's mother, Milla, cannot relate to his obsession with ancient civilizations and mythical lore. She judges his non-contemporaneous research as romantic escapism; "not about the headline news, he writes, but about 'the little grey bushes', whatever that's supposed to mean" (A: 243). Making an intertextual reference to Athol Fugard's *Notebooks 1960-1977*, Van Niekerk alludes to the popular reading of Fugard as one caught in a Romantic tension to his m/otherland.[49] Hence Jakkie's environmental nostalgia for "the little grey bushes" (Fugard 1983: 172), upon which he can no longer trample, belongs to a specific tradition of reading the landscape as a wounded entity that must be endlessly waited upon in an act of atonement.[50]

[49] In his *Notebooks*, Fugard claims that it is ultimately the "little grey bushes" that makes a one-way exit permit out of South Africa "an intolerable thought". He states that "I've known it was so, but until this afternoon never felt out exactly what would be involved. […] But it was that scrub underfoot … the nameless deformed little grey bushes, half their roots exposed by the shifting sand … the thought that I might possibly one day never again walk over them in that silence and innocence … a keen pain, intolerable sense of loss" (Fugard 1983: 171-172).

[50] Fugard continues: "then tonight, talking to Sheila - telling her that the idea had come to me yesterday at this table, that my life's work was possibly just to witness as truthfully as I could, the nameless and destitute (desperate) of this

Yet Milla's caustic comments fully relay how Jakkie's obsession with the environment, in turn, amounts to an erasure that bears no relevance to the world at large. Hence, she impatiently dismisses his romantic sentiments about the farm by deeming them frivolous and irresponsible. Unlike *White Lightening*, which relies solely on satire to critique, *Agaat* uses Milla to suggest frustration with this tradition where "an aesthetic preoccupation with the land, however restrained or even tragic, […] masks a resistance to thinking about South Africa in sociopolitical terms" (Barnard 2007: 27).

This nevertheless informs his relationship with Agaat, his 'surrogate' mother. In the text, Jakkie has the following exchange with her

> I always wanted to know where you came from, what your name means.
> Yes, you were an inquisitive one, you
> One day, not yet.
> One day when? I'm leaving, remember.
> One day when the time is ripe.
> It's time, the oranges are rotten!
>
> (A: 589).

Jakkie perceives Agaat's identity in much the same manner as he views the elusive mystery of "the little grey bushes". He assumes that a revelation of their secrets will allow for truths about life and belonging that have otherwise evaded him. Yet she remains unwilling to yield the plenitude of her identity to him. Accordingly, like Hamlet, he conflates her impenetrability, as a hard mother, with a metaphor of decay and an expression of the *contretemps*. And by the end of

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one little corner of the world. This is what could be lost … those little grey bushes in the shifting sands of the dune." (1983: 172). In his review of *Notebooks 1960-1977*, Coetzee reads this as a gesture of "bearing witness […] by which he means, love the insignificant, the forgotten, the unloved" (1992: 370)

the narrative, this plagues Jakkie's representation of the entire farm. Hence, it is in the same turn of phrase that Jakkie must "mourn my mother, my mothers, the white one and the brown one. Mourn my country" (A: 683). The easy homogenisation implies that mothers and land are equal sites of disappointment. Nevertheless, he cannot mourn the loss of a hard mother, as her very impenetrability makes possible his desire for her, so South Africa remains "unavoidable" but also something to which he can only "listen at a distance" (A: 682).

Imraan Coovadia's *High Low In-between* also uses Nafisa's perceptions of Shakeer to outline his Romantic temperament. Her son is a travelling photographer whose

> choice of subjects was curious, and even outdated. When she visited him in California he had an exhibition in a Santa Monica gallery comprised of portraits of holy men in Benares, Varanasi. She had seen something similar in a gallery in Knightsbridge when Harold Wilson was still in office.
> But you really could never tell with Shakeer. Nafisa sometimes identified something irrelevant in his character. It caused her pain to see it, to see anything imperfect in her son or husband or brother. Shakeer had been talking about writing a novel for years
>
> (HLI: 28).

Like Milla, Nafisa criticizes her son's atavistic and abstract disposition. Nevertheless, his malingering condition is exacerbated in South Africa, as Shakeer can find no imaginative response to the country. He has "never taken an interesting photograph at home. He could never quite understand what he was looking at in Durban, what he was supposed to make of it" (HLI: 208). As a photographer who takes pictures all over the world, there is a numinous – if not ominous – quality to Africa that resists his artistic vision.

However, he seeks to remedy this situation through an interesting choice of subject. When Estella consults her local sangoma about her daughter's epilepsy, Shakeer decides to join the expedition with his camera in tow. The sangoma is described as follows:

> She had a very dark, very rugged face not unlike the Aborigines Sharky had encountered in a bar near Alice Springs and with whom he had spent a fortnight taking photos. The diviner was rocking back and forth, opening her mouth wide whenever she looked up to reveal black gums in which a few teeth were buried as sparsely as tombstones
>
> (HLI: 212).

Her archaic presence appears to arouse a sublime awareness of death. Shakeer becomes mesmerized by her preternatural language. As she spoke he "had difficulty dividing word from word. The sentences in his ear had become an indivisible stream. But then the diviner's words became clearer than any he remembered hearing. They were the clearest words in his life …" (HLI: 213). The sangoma initiates a collapse between signifier and signified to the point where thought breaks off into ellipsis. Shakeer appears to have gained access to a desired afflatus as he "had found somebody who could account for his situation. She had some quantity of knowledge" (HLI: 214). Her art of discernment is powerful and deemed authentic when she accurately predicts the emotional concerns that he carries. Yet, despite this hopeful turn of events, when Shakeer eventually develops the pictures of the sangoma, they are merely "predictable" (HLI: 264) and he tears them up. Far from illuminating some pristine knowledge of Africa, the visit to the sangoma inspires the old frustration of blankness and impenetrability. Instead, he chooses to read the sangoma as an exemplification of African ignorance and irrationality, qualities directly projected unto his mother, Nafisa.

Like Jakkie, Shakeer shares many personal qualities with mother but "similarity didn't help him understand this other parent" (HLI: 203). He states that "his mother was not a psychological person. She refused to step back and survey the canvas in its entirety" (HLI: 98). Comparable to his encounter with the sangoma, confrontations with his mother amount to a stalemate because she resists self-consciousness and, in this manner, "his mother typified the country" (HLI: 99). The sangoma, mother and country are all aligned in their ability to arouse alleged plenitude that finally disappoints – they are exemplifications of a hard mother. Like James in *White Lightning*, this miasmatic dynamic applies to every woman in his life: "his destiny with women was fixed. For Leila, like Ginger, was a maze. She needed mapping. Whereas he would take every last wrong turning and blind alley. He was dedicated to trial and error, and more to error" (HLI: 253).

What one confronts in these male characters are essentially Oedipalised narratives that arrive at an impasse that can only find resolution in exile. With the exception of Shakeer, most of the male characters are inflicted with the burden of a 'poisoned father'[51] who remained apathetic to the right-winged apartheid regime. Subsequently, these male characters find themselves willing but unable to forge meaningful relationships with their mothers. Receiving neither the willed desire of the m/other nor identification with the father, they are left with an unresolved Oedipal conflict where desire oscillates between maternal fusion and paternal identification but only ever results in lack. Hence, they are left to seek resolution and individuation elsewhere – far away from the family in a foreign land. By using these male characters to dramatize the politics of

[51] In *The Sexual Politics of Time, Confession, Nostalgia*, Radstone identifies the figure of the poisoned father in post-Holocaust German Literature as a trope that expresses grave disappointment with the Fatherland. Again, this is not dissimilar to Hamlet's understanding of Claudius who displays the perversity of what a father is capable of. In *Hamlet's Absent Father*, Avi Erlich discusses Claudius as Hamlet's "weak father" (1977: 58).

belonging through the tradition of irresolvable desire – desire as lack – these characters arrive at a fundamental condition of non-belonging. In tracing a discernable pattern, these texts perform a self-conscious exegesis of the aporia of the white literary imaginary.[52]

In "The liberal tradition in fiction", Peter Blair defines liberalism as a tradition of seeking, comprehending and engaging otherness through a humanistic framework. He argues that its presence, particularly in South African literature, has continued to evolve over time (Blair 2012). Steering away from earlier strains of patronizing paternalism, the critical approach became increasingly that of non-imposition, perceiving the other as extra-discursive. With the rise of post-structuralism, it is now commonplace for white writing to illumine the complex – and often idealistic – stances akin to Levinasian (1987) and Derridian (2000) explorations of ethical hospitality. However, Blair notes that the more current deployment of what he terms a "sacrificial ethic" (2012: 492) has allowed for the predominance of a "liberal funk" in contemporary white writing. Now, he argues, there is the discernable "abandonment of the liberal ethic of reciprocity" because "the prospects for reciprocity remain bleak" (2012: 492). This is due to the fact that desire is only ever a negative possibility that is redeemed through (a

[52] More self-conscious in this regard is Michiel Heyns's *Lost Ground*. Peter Jacobs, a white male ex-patriot states that

> I feel a certain appeal in the very emptiness, something melancholy in its meagreness and yet comforting in its permanence. It's a landscape without clutter, without noise, without much ambition, neutral, perhaps even negative. It's not a landscape that conforms readily to a formula: it refuses to be reduced to a cliché or even a meaning. What must it be like to live here? An eternity of tedium or a tranquil refuge from a more purpose-obsessed world? Could I return to its stony comfort?
> I grin inwardly at my dramatization of the landscape, really just my self-dramatisation projecting itself upon insentient soil and sky. Having returned after twenty-two years of self-imposed exile, I'm trying for an emotion; the truth may be that I don't feel anything in particular other than the heat and dust. James [his ex-boyfriend] would say it's ex-pat syndrome; he's sat through enough evenings of maudlin ex-South Africans sentimentalising over a country that they have no intention of returning to except for the annual family get-together at somebody's beach house. 'So, you've left – so deal with it,' was his take on ex-pat nostalgia. 'We live in the age of emigration.' He himself seemed to feel nothing for his native Jamaica
>
> (2011: 62-63).

rather ascetic) ethical abstraction that forever produces and reinscribes its own lack. He reads Coetzee's *Disgrace* and Cartwright's *White Lightning* as exemplifications of this trend where narratives of fatalistic white marginalization and exile are realised.

As these texts illustrate, the discursive gesture of contemporary white liberalism is one that ensures its own failure. It expounds the aporia where 'silence' is critiqued *and* valorized in relation to the m/other and, as Derrida explains, it results in paralysis − for one can only enact the step which is not a step and take an active part in not acting (1993). Similarly, in *Gynesis*, Jardine suggests that the discourse of "inner speech", the "secret", the "quiet" and the "private" are part of the male economy of language where "woman" remains an object that blocks the flow of desire (1985: 68). Hence, the 'feminine' is deliberately employed in the narration of an essentially patriarchal condition of unattainability.[53]

As artists, these male characters are, in effect, parodies of "the failure of the historical imagination" (1988: 9) that Coetzee identifies in *White Writing*. Coetzee himself expresses a hope for a language that will eventually replace the discourse of silence by asking when white writing will present the truth as that which resides in what is said instead of what is not said (1988: 84). Despite maintaining the ethical reserve in relation to the m/other in his own creative

[53] Deleuze and Guattari are also critical of the discourse that inscribes desire as lack. They argue that it is the very 'conspiracy' of psychoanalysis and the tyrannical reign of Oedipus (1984). In the *Anti-Oedipus*, they argue that psychoanalysis has brought about a fallacious understanding of the unconscious and its capacity for desiring-production. They claim that Freud "neuroticizes everything in the unconscious at the same time he oedipalizes, and closes the familial triangle over the entire unconscious" (Deleuze and Guattari 1984: 62). Through the insistence that the taboo of incest exists within the familial situation *because* the subject desires it, Freud constructs desire *as* prohibition. Hence, psychoanalysis invents the very desire it prohibits, making it inherently contradictory and confining it to "the double bind, the double impasse" which is, they argue, "a common situation, oedipalizing par excellence" (Deleuze and Guattari 1984: 88).

output, there is a sense that the discourse of desire as lack generates the inevitable fatigue of seeking a clandestine escape from it.[54]

As literary theorists like Rita Barnard and Chris Thurman imply, the seminal status of a text like *White Writing* coupled with Coetzee's creative *oeuvre* obviates the presence and possibility of belonging as inscribed by various other South African white writers. Both critics make reference to Fugard's *A Lesson from Aloes*, highlighting how this text offers two distinct possibilities to the reader concerning the politics of belonging.

In Fugard's play, Piet is a retired activist turned botanist (with a penchant for South African lyrical poetry) who attempts to name an unclassified species of aloe throughout the play. In the vein of *White Writing*, Thurman argues that there is potential to read Piet's desire to label and belong as informed by an "impulse to control and to assert one's authority [where] the more malicious processes of conquest and naming leave the victims of colonial history without any sense of belonging" (2010: 246). He implies that any desire to belong – no matter how seemingly innocent − must consider how belonging and displacement are mutually exclusive terms, the same law applying in any given ecosystem and sociopolitical context. Barnard also notes how this play is "often taken as a rather simplistic depiction of an Afrikaner's stubborn sense of filiation and rootedness" (2007: 12). Much like Milla's interpretation of Jakkie cited earlier, Piet

[54] Barnard also notes this as a guarded wish in the text: after claiming that all we have to read is the feminine ellipsis in the white literary imaginary, he then poses this rather utopian question to the reader. However, she then warns that "we should not underestimate the cautiousness of Coetzee's language […] *White Writing* admits to pastoral or utopian desires only in the form of a rhetorical question and indicates a strong awareness of the untimeliness of such desires" (Barnard 2007: 33).

is read as a prime example of romantic attachment to the land that overlooks the sociopolitical consequences.

Yet in *Guy Butler: reassessing a South African Literary Life*, Thurman proffers Butler's claim that the inherently imperialistic myopism of the Romantic imagination can be counteracted through the construction of a more 'indigenous' lexicon: "to Butler, however, 'naming and taming' was essential for poetic purposes and for development of an authentically South African tradition of English poetry" (2010: 246). Butler's ideals of overcoming difficulties involved in building an indigenous lexicon accepted the imperfect work of forming a South African body of writing that would aid the expression of belonging and ultimately help forge a South African identity. Likewise, Barnard expresses personal frustration with the inability to 'name' and argues that despite prior readings, *A Lesson from Aloes* "strikes me instead as a celebration of the human capacity for affiliation and cultural grafting" (2007: 12). As these arguments imply, non-representation is a self-defeating ethical position to assume and so, they opt for the fraught business of entertaining more humane ideals of direct engagement − they choose the lesson of the aloes' indigenous unshakable endurance instead. While this argument does, on some level, appear "naïve" (Thurman 2010: 248), it suggests that there are possibilities of moving beyond the impasse of a being in longing to a state where one merely belongs.

Fathers and Daughters

In my chosen texts, the female characters occupy an analogous position. Abandoning the Oedipal story in favour of Electra's, the characterization of father-daughter relationships introduces an

attempt at discursive engagements with desire that do not necessarily amount to loss. In *Entanglements,* Sarah Nuttall argues that the state of South African post-transitionality involves leaving behind the constraints of messianism, which she reads as a victory of experience over expectation (2009). As I will illustrate, the female characters are initiated into a state of belonging, precisely because theirs is a bond not forged in desire but born out of empathy and experience.

With the exception of *White Lightning*, where there are no significant female characters, the texts also illustrate how these women are subject to a hard mother. However, the distinction is that their relationship with their mothers is not governed by ambivalence like Oedipus, Hamlet and the male protagonists discussed above. Instead, their mothers possess the hyperbolic proportions of Clytaemnestra who flaunts her 'patriarchal' power and wickedness over her daughters. She is a hard mother that, as Electra teaches, one must not learn to love but conquer in honour of Agamemnon, her feeling, 'feminised' and victimized father. In doing so, Electra chooses an orphaned existence amongst the ruins of her previous life. Yet in this spoiled existence resides the possibility of reinscribing the familial narrative on extrafamilial terms.

In *The Rowing Lesson*, Betsy's mother is characterised as anxious, panicked and paranoid. Betsy struggles to relate to her. She imagines that her mother must have been disappointed by her father's lack of ambition as he never aspired to become more than a 'country doctor'. Most significantly, Betsy's mother resists Ebb 'n Flow. When her father wishes to go out on the water her mother "doesn't want you to go. She doesn't want to worry about whether you'll come back or not" (RL: 266). Her mother has always been explicit about her dislike for the water and is

always waiting, fearfully, for the safe return of her husband and children over the years. Hence, when her father makes his last journey he is upset, again, that "she wouldn't come with you. She hates the water. She can't even swim" (RL: 271). This leaves Betsy with the task of accompanying him to Ebb 'n Flow.

In *Playing in the Light*, when Marion uncovers the truth about her past, she narrates the tale of her birth as her mother, Helen, might have perceived it; "she thought of the baby as an uninvited guest, arriving with an extraordinarily large, cheap suitcase that bumped along through the birth canal" (PL: 134). Because the child threatens to unravel Helen's act of passing as white, Marion's birth is seen as a monstrous arrival. However, as the novel progresses, representations of monstrosity are transferred to Helen. Marion states that "she is exhausted by the idea of Helen, by the bits and pieces she has had to put together, by the construction of a sci-fi monster of moulded steel plates, ill-fitting bolts and scraps of rusted corrugated iron" (PL: 175). Helen's ambition is illustrated as both sadistic and masochistic as she denies her very identity in favour of upward social mobility as a white woman.

Accordingly, Marion's father lived out an emasculated existence in the family. Helen, a fierce matriarch, would often excoriate him for his 'backward' behaviour in order to enforce her plans. As Marion recalls, her mother felt that he "simply did not pay attention. He fell short of her vision; he did not take the task of reinvention seriously" (PL: 126). It is evident that, even as a child, Marion's sympathy lies with her father: "the child winced at her [mother's] unfairness" (PL: 10).

As an adult, Marion feels that Helen's death has brought relief into the family. Indeed, her father has grown so relaxed that he has no qualms about the 'unweeded garden' that sprouts in his backyard anymore. Now "John does not understand the urge to fight nature. I grew up in the veld, he says; I don't mind things going a little wild" (PL: 12). No longer subject to the controlled 'gardening' that his wife inflicted upon them, John's untamed backyard reads like an act of emancipation as opposed to senescent behaviour, as Marion fears.

Similarly, in *Agaat*, Milla identifies her mother as the undeniable matriarch of the family farm: "only one person had a voice in the house where you grew up, and that was your mother" (A: 24). Milla understands that her father's sensitivity was overshadowed by her mother who "hád finished off your father. He'd become ever more silent with the years" (A: 28). Her mother arouses distinct feelings of disgust in Milla:

> she stretched out her hand. The elbow was stiff. It was only half bent, slightly extended in front of her […] At last she dropped her hand. There it lay, in her lap, large, weathered, with gnarled joints [...] You couldn't look away from the hand. You thought, let go of me, I'm infected already, you can't make me any sicker than I am
>
> (A: 145).

Her mother is incapable of showing affection and Milla is constantly left fearful of her crippling judgement and narrow-mindedness. Thus, when her mother dies, "I didn't really cry […] Yes at last liberation from her […] how do you defend yourself against your own mother? Her directions regarding the funeral felt like a last trial" (A: 311). Like Marion, Milla cites relief as the prevailing emotion after her mother's passing.

Furthermore, Milla recalls the ceremonial fuss that her mother requested for her funeral. But as Milla relates how the headstone kept falling down due to excessive rain that year, we understand

something of her mother's antagonistic relationship with nature as the ground in which she is buried constantly rejects her enforced commemoration. This, in direct contrast to "Pa who wanted nothing but for his ashes to be scattered on the Tradouw" (A: 311). Unlike her mother's imperiousness, her father's sensitivity is such that Milla reads him in accord with nature as he does not seek to impose upon it.

It is significant that when Milla gives birth, with Agaat by her side, she invites the memory of her father into this female communion. As she is submitted to the agony of labour she remembers that "you heard yourself, your voice was in her. You heard your father with the animals, when you were small, where you stood next to him in the old stable on Grootmoedersdrift, the language of women that he could speak better than your mother" (A: 181). In her opinion her father has gained a greater understanding of nature despite the fact that her mother has exercised more authority on the farm.

Like Betsy in *The Rowing Lesson*, Milla feels the greatest affection for her father and finds it necessary to assure his legacy. "The books she [her mother] and Jak wanted to get rid of, all of them, but you stopped them. Don't think that just because Pa is ill you can do as like with his things, you said […] you would study them too and make them your own" (A: 45-46). The above incident implies threat, as maintaining her father's legacy involves protecting it from her mother and husband. In particular, she is most attached to the farming volumes from which he used to read to her as a child. Through these volumes, which she studies over the years, she engages with her father's agrarian philosophies and adopts them as her own.

In *High Low In-between*, Nafisa never once mentions her mother but this narrative omission is significant given the fact that she harbours such fond memories of her father. She claims that "the daughter inherited her father's disposition. It happened like that in families; sons were like their mothers. Nafisa, much more than Nawaz, had her father's temperament […] her father insisted he had been granted special privileges by providence. He allowed nobody to sympathise with him […] in spite of every calamity" (A: 123). Nafisa proudly remembers her father as a man of little means but of great tenacity and enthusiasm. Considering her character development, it is evident that her father's disposition, to which she claims inheritance, is central to the kind of engagement she seeks within herself and in relation to her fellow citizens.

In these familial relationships, the maternal signifier is displaced. The hyperbolic representations of hard mothers make them irredeemable and leave daughters to revert to father figures in order to find feminine identification. However, in doing so, these daughters offer a rendition of desire that is not thwarted from the outset but fundamentally fulfilled through their fathers' affections. In this familial economy, desire is ultimately declared a non-entity – a feature that is further transposed to their archaic and mythical investigations in the texts. Far from working towards an irredeemable nostalgic fantasy, these characters are able to close the gap between desire and its object, ultimately dissolving the allure of the archaic return in the white literary imaginary.

As discussed previously, Ebb 'n Flow is a central trope in *The Rowing Lesson* that Betsy employs in the narration of her father's life. The lagoon is a static space that is not subject to time – "now and forever" (RL: 73) – and thus precedes being. The novel portrays the lagoon as "the source" (RL: 277) out of which everything extends and returns, hence the name Ebb 'n

Flow. Similarly, the novel develops the trope of the coelacanth, a sea-creature that "people thought had been extinct for millions of years" (RL: 38). Like Ebb 'n Flow, it serves to signify her father's secret awareness of life as a return journey to a primal source. The coelacanth appears to be his private handle on the world, a fable that he uses for his own playful purposes of self-narration.[55]

Furthermore, Betsy records her father's obsession with the female body which genders the source to which he returns as feminine. In just one example, Betsy recalls her father at "five and your mother and your aunts were changing into their bathing-costumes and their breasts, all six of their breasts, were out at the same time and you never ever forgot the living, breathing sight of all that softness" (RL: 7). The feminine presence in his life, like Ebb 'n Flow and the coelacanth, has a primal attraction that evokes both terror and awe. Not surprisingly, these tropes are often conflated − a technique that itself implies a fundamental unity towards which they all work.

Yet unlike the previous examples where desire for the feminine only demonstrates elusiveness, Betsy employs the discourse of desire in order to map her father's final union with the feminine that preoccupies him throughout his life. A key example is her father's encounter with his first cadaver as medical student. It is an old coloured lady whom they chose to name "*Grootouma*, Great Grandma" (RL: 166). For her father it is "the first woman's body you have ever really

[55] Ultimately, Betsy narrates and provides all forms of organizing logic to her father's story. It is thus her act of storytelling that is invested in the obsessive return to the source, a means by which she imagines her father's end. The fact that it is Betsy who is searching for the primal origin is further iterated through her own artistic projects. In the text we learn that Betsy is a fine artist and much to her father's disappointment, does not paint pictures of nudes but a series of extinct animals. When she reveals her art to her father she states that "I pointed to my favourite, the quagga, extinct cousin of the zebra with its striped head and neck, the rest of its body plain brown, a creature that lived right where you were born. You looked at it as if you were looking at a rival" (RL: 29). She is taken aback by her father's dismissive and inattentive attitude as he finds no value in recuperating the prehistoric past. Hence it is Betsy, as both artist and narrator of her father's story, who seeks a prehistoric beginning.

looked at", and it arouses "only cold, only terror" (RL: 164). Significantly enough, they are conducting a minute dissection of her breast tissue and her father has to "carefully clean out each pathway, each root of this fatty, collapsed flower" (RL: 167). The entry into her body evokes primordial fear but also serves as an awareness of "Ebb 'n Flow, where the river begins, folded into the dense bush, the trickle curling its way out of that lobe of glandular tissue. And here's where it opens into the sea …" (RL: 167). Furthermore, the mindfulness that the cadaver comes from a lineage of San takes him "back to the Western Cape of a million years ago" (RL: 169). Hence, this encounter is able to grant presence to a force of life that supersedes history. The desire for merging with an archaic consciousness is not met with silent refusal.

The ultimate example lies in the final scene of the novel. Ebb 'n Flow takes on the form of an erotized space of feminine oneness. All around and underneath the water's surface "an armada of naked women float on their back with their legs crooked, their vaginas open wide. Here are all the women you could have had, you might have had, you wanted to have had. Here is your undoing" (RL: 273-4). The sublime fantasy of women multiplies and becomes increasingly grotesque, alluding to the "troubled pleasure" (392) that Wordsworth encounters while rowing on a lake as a child. In Book One, the moment initially appears to be that of solitary bliss[56] but he finds himself dwarfed by an ominous cliff (also personified as female in this poem) and quickly rushes home. However, the sublime reality of what he encounters on the lake is so potent that

> for many days, my brain
> Work'd with a dim and undetermin'd sense

[56] The moon was up, the Lake was shining clear
Among the hoary mountains; from the
Shore I push'd, and struck the oars and struck again
In cadence, and my little Boat mov'd on
(Wordsworth 1.386-389)

Of unknown modes of being; in my thoughts
There was a darkness, call it solitude,
Or blank desertion, no familiar shapes
Of hourly objects, images of trees,
Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields;
But huge and mighty Forms that do not live
Like living men mov'd slowly through the mind
By day and were the trouble of my dreams

(Wordsworth 1.421-430)

The sublime revelation of Nature as an amorphous entity threatens preconceived notions of apparent beauty as well as the boundaries of his identity and meaning. The overwhelming display of boundlessness and formlessness interrupts the confidence of "living men" and must thus be contained through active and voluntary recollection. Significantly, Betsy's father cannot turn away from this moment− as he grows increasingly anxious, Betsy imagines herself as the green girl who comes to placate him and ensures his safe passage to the source. Aiding the embrace of sublime dissolution, she insists that "death is fierce after all" (RL: 279) and not only accompanies him, but chooses to 'die' alongside him.

In *Agaat*, Milla's obsessive search for a beginning speaks of remorse for not including Agaat's history in her diaries. But Milla also seeks a beginning that does not necessarily conform to any strict notions of history. When Agaat "wants to come and force it down my gullet. My unconsidered writing", her immediate response is to ask "what's the sense of that?" (A: 11). There is a clear disillusionment with historiographical recovery[57] and so we discern that the

[57] This is so, presumably because it has been employed 'badly'. See Chapter Two for an examination of historiography in the novel.

beginning Milla desires supersedes history. As Milla states, there is "something cryptic about the beginning" (A: 653), and this version appears to elude the act of writing altogether.

> you always told yourself, one day. When you're not so busy. When you'll be able to focus. When you'll be able to sit down at your leisure and try to piece together everything as it happened. The name. As if that would help. *Gyrinus natans*. Excuses, all of it.
> Now you understand the actual reason. Or óne of them.
> It wasn't meant for the diary.
> Nothing about it was meant for the diary.
> It would have to be taken up into the family saga direct: Grootmoedersdrift, farm, house, man, wife, child.
> First child.
> From the beginning. It was never a story on its own.
> Especially not the early beginnings.
>
> (A: 653)

Searching for a tangible point of investigation, her mind flits across the rational, scientific and Latinate name for the whirligig – *Gyrinus natans* – but this does not suffice. She dismisses it as yet another distraction from something much more fundamental in the puzzle of the beginning.

Much later in the text, the beginning is, in fact, found in an esoteric sound; "that was the beginning. That sound. You felt empty and full at the same time from it, felt sorrow and pity surging in your throat, Ggggg at the back of the throat, as if it were a sound that belonged to yourself"(A: 657). Here Milla describes the very first sound that she hears rushing out of Agaat's mouth when she rescues her as an infant. It is a sound that immediately makes the world seem "bright and strange" (A: 658) and summons the very first arrival of the whirligig. Hence, the beginning that Milla is after is an affect – the very first impulse of love that she feels for Agaat −

which is then followed by the mysterious inscriptions of the whirligig who makes surreal traces on the water.

Recovering affect as a beginning is significant because, as stated in the above quote, Milla needs to upack the "family saga direct" (A: 653). Initially she states this as an inventory of "farm, house, man, wife, child" but then corrects herself and calls into being the "First child" (A: 653). Within her own family, Milla attests to feelings of alienation; Jakkie, the child for whom she yearned, has turned into "my child the great absence" (A: 242) and residual disappointment leads her to question; "did we bring him up wrongly?" (A: 243). Despite the fact that Jakkie is the "blood of your blood" (A: 603), he fails to correspond to the exchange of mother and child.

Agaat thereby confounds the boundaries of the biological family and offers instead a lucid portrait of extrafamilial identification. In a diary entry Milla records the following: "am I your child? asks Agaat. You're my little monkey, I say" (A: 572). In the present, Milla thinks regretfully about the manner in which she denied Agaat. Ultimately, the journey that Milla undertakes is that of recognizing the "child that I pushed away from me" (A: 540). The novel is clear in its intent to reclaim Agaat's status as Milla's child. Yet, this is far from a romantic proposition. As stated, Agaat is and will always be "a discarded child" (A: 55) and her disability serves as a constant reminder of the abusive circumstances in which she was found and the spoiled existence which they mutually inhabit as mother and child.

In this manner, all of the texts override the construct of the hard mother through the supplementation of what I describe as a 'suffering mother' who instills belonging through experience and empathy. Like Deleuze and Guattari's valourisation of the schizophrenic who, ideally, never wishes to be cured (100: 1984) in *Anti-Oedipus*, the archetype of a 'suffering mother' adopts sickness, psychosis and "every type of spoiled existence" (HLI: 229) in order to allow for the shared engagement of human suffering. In turn, Deleuze and Guattari suggest that the polyvocal identifications of the schizophrenic ensue and allow for the potential to rethink the familial situation on "extrafamilial" or "subfamilial" terms (107: 1984). Similarly, by looking beyond the Oedipalised structure of desire as lack, these authors consider empathy (as the profound ability to inhabit the experience of others) to be a constructive and de-essentialised instrument for belonging. Hence, the connections that these texts encourage are non-exclusive, developing portraits of asymmetrical and 'damaged' families who engage rather than exclude the excess or 'extra' and thereby transgress upon heteronormative definitions of the family.

As discussed in Chapter Three, Milla's paralysis and grotesque body leads to immense empathy for Agaat's suffering as the denied child and mother in the De Wet family unit. For not only is she an unacknowledged child, but also a suffering mother in her own right. Initially Milla resented the bond between Jakkie and Agaat, but now she realises that "it's Agaat who's been most badly hurt. She pines for him" (A: 244). Despite the lack of biological connection, Agaat has always proven to be Jakkie's more 'natural' mother. The text hints at this fact as Jakkie was voluntarily breastfed by Agaat as a baby. Hence, Agaat and Milla both exhibit qualities of the

suffering mother − "the sickness belongs to us two" (A: 35) − stressing the unity of their mutually deformed or spoiled bodies which, in turn, also informs a reading of the farm.

As Gerrit Olivier poignantly notes, Agaat works "on the metafictional level" by presenting "an extended wake at the deathbed of the farm novel" (2012: 322). In telling a story of absolute deteritorialisation between all of these maternal bodies, the genre of the *plaasroman* is brought into awareness of its own spoiled existence. Yet as Van Niekerk ostensibly suggests, it is one worth spoiling as the ignominious silence of black characters in the *plaasroman* (see Coetzee 1988: 74-75) and the subjective reading of identity in relation to ownership dissolve along with it. Working with this spoiled existence, the novel reveals an opening to Agaat's otherness which, as revealed in her name, is a gem[58] but also a ditch[59] (Moore-Barnes 2010).

Similar to the resolution of mythological investigations in *The Rowing Lesson* and *Agaat*, *Playing in the Light* uses the figure of the mermaid, and Marion's desire to become one, to graft a narrative of successful metamorphosis. As a child Marion's father endearingly referred to her as his "meermin, his little mermaid. This was because he loved the sea, though he called her a child of the sea" (PL: 23). And much to her mother's dismay, she is easily entranced by her father's stories

> I'm a mermaid with a fishtail, the little girl sang as she struggled to bandage her legs together. Her mother snorted, even as she helped to wind the cloth into a bound tail. It's Campbell's nonsense that prevents him from getting on in life. No good being half a woman and half fish, half this and half that; you have to be fully one thing or another,

[58] The priest suggests the name Agaat (Dutch for Agatha). It carries the symbolism of Agate, a semi-precious stone.

[59] She is often referred to as Gaat in the text, leading to the Afrikaans word 'gat', which means a ditch or a hole.

> otherwise you're lost. Mermaids are the silly inventions of men who don't want to face up to reality, to their responsibilities, the fantasy of losers who need an excuse
>
> (PL: 47)

Marion's mother, Helen, is often exasperated by her husband's whimsicality, but the fantastical nature of the mermaid helps her father in his clandestine attempts to instill pride in his daughter. For the mermaid that her mother so despises presents biological hybridity as something other than shameful.

As an adult, Marion recalls how she always wanted to see a mermaid. And, one day, while looking out at the sea "she thinks that Patricia Williams has returned, but then it seems to be a mermaid, holding like any mother a baby to her breast" (PL: 185-6). The mythological appearance of the mermaid eventually finds resonance in the present as Marion grows to identify with it. But the extended trope of water, along with the use of mermaid imagery, implies that Marion must first learn to navigate through water before she can arrive at metamorphosis. Arguably, the fact that ghostly figures such as Tokkie and Patricia Williams often appear on the surface of the ocean suggests a summoning of sorts. And when Marion decides to take a trip to the UK to explore her ancestral heritage, her father states that "nothing will give him greater pleasure than seeing his mermaid across the water" (PL: 186).

When in London, Marion finds herself weeping uncontrollably. The rainy weather forces her to stay indoors and it is here that she finds "a place in which to cry. Wantonly – for Helen, the mother, and for representations of herself, which are of course not herself and thus permissible. In this room, with a rug across her knees like an old woman, the world imprints itself on her

afresh; her days are rinsed in rain" (PL: 191). It is a process of mourning for her old self and a simultaneous 'baptism' into a new identity.

Significantly, this is also the point at which the guinea-fowl presents itself again; "in the twilight, Marion hears guinea fowl squawking in the trees. She knows there are no guinea fowl in England, but the sound is unmistakable" (PL: 193). [60] The guinea fowl evokes the Greek myth of Artemis who was slain and whose sisters "because of their weeping, were by the will of the gods changed into birds. These are called Meleagrides, 'guinea hens'" (Ovid 8. 531).[61] Following the myth, their metamorphosis occurs as a result of their gross sympathy and grief. Through her own sorrowful experience, Marion grows to recognise that "many versions of herself exist in the stories of her country" (PL: 191). Hence Wicomb makes it clear that the value of suffering does not lie in the fortification of identity[62] (more typically the case in a *bildungsroman*) but in its ability to allow for a metamorphosis into a more empathetic being.

[60] The first one is found dead on her patio at the very beginning of the novel and leaves her stunned as to what it could possibly indicate.

[61] The full account of the sisters' excessive mourning reads as follows:

> Not if a god gave me a hundred mouths . . . could I rehearse his [Meleagros'] sisters' threnodies of woe [at his death, which was brought about incidentally by Artemis]. All decency forgotten, black and blue they beat their breasts, and, while his corpse remained, that corpse they fondled, fondled hour by hour; they kissed their brother, kissed their brother's bier; then ashes - and his ashes in their urn they held tight to their hearts, and threw themselves down on his tomb and clasped his name engraved; and on that name poured forth their flooding tears. At last Latonia [Artemis], sated with the ruin of the house of Parthaonaie [Oeneus], raised up the sisters (all save Gorge and [Deianeira] the wife of Alcmena's son), clothed them in plumage and along their arms spread wings and in their faces, once to fair, set beaks and launched them, changed, into the air [as guinea-fowl, Greek *meleagris*]
>
> (Ovid 8. 531).

Also, there is some echo of Electra's excessive mourning over the loss of Agamemnon and the alleged loss of Orestes.

[62] This point is corroborated by Miki Flockemann and Johan Jacobs: Flockemann, quoting from Johan Jacobs's analysis of the text, states that "Wicomb's novel does not leave Marion with a greater understanding of herself, but rather that the 'cultural repositioning of herself is an ongoing process, and one that is necessarily inconclusive'" (Jacobs in Flockemann 2010: 9).

Like in previous texts, empathy allows for the exploration of extrafamilial identifications. Much of the text is invested in Marion's query about the legitimacy of her family. When she initially suspects that she may have been adopted, she begins to "realise for the first time that biology is not everything, that John is nothing less than her father, misguided perhaps, but only in the service of his unconditional love for her" (PL: 77). Overall, Marion's attitude towards family can be deemed revolutionary as she moves from having no family to claiming ownership of an entire family she never knew she had. It is an uncanny experience of familial connection, most clearly demonstrated by Tokkie's specter that has come to claim status as her grandmother.

In *Kings of the Water*, Karien also views suffering as a liberating force. She states that it helped her "eventually to walk away from Ounooi's spell. It was wonderfully terrifying" (KW: 197). She explains that Ounooi, Michiel's mother, wanted Karien to become a judge but "'more than anything I wanted to make art.' She tried over the years, to explain this to Ounooi" (KW: 198). Significantly enough, it is the harrowing experience of her botched abortion and subsequent miscarriage that allows for this possibility; "recuperating at Paradys, she started drawing and painting again. In the weeks after the pregnancy terminated she decides she would not return to law. She had fresh paint stains on her fingers and beneath her nails" (KW: 196). Additionally, the misfortune of the miscarriage left Karien barren. After unsuccessful attempts to bear children, she adopts two children who were orphaned as a result of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Again, she feels grateful for her spoiled existence that has led her to think more expansively about notions of family.

Furthermore, adversity has granted her a keen, empathetic eye. She states that after the miscarriage "'I drew only what I saw from there […] Workers went by with sheep going to the abattoir. I painted the back of the herd passing by the ripe pomegranates. It seemed such an important thing. Then, just a single sheep, looking back" (KW: 197-198). Similarly, when Michiel sees Karien's painting that hangs on the walls in the Steyn household, he describes it as "a large oil painting of an Nguni cow's face in tan, chocolate brown and white. The glassy gaze above the moist black snout contains shadows of whom – or whatever she is looking at" (KW: 21). The artwork arouses discomfort through an awareness of vulnerability that does not belong exclusively to the lives of animals but also to the 'shadow' self which is reflected in the surface of the cow's eye.

It is significant that Michiel is the only male protagonist who can vouch for the presence of the suffering mother. Presumably, Michiel's homosexuality makes him more predisposed to the experiences of the disenfranchised like many of the female characters. At the very end of the novel, when Michiel pulls over on the side of the road, he goes into an open field and a white horse appears and seems to follow him. He decides to feed it an apple and when the horse comes closer he can "see the reflection of himself tiny in the pupil of each eye. The horse turns from the fence, seems to waver, then heads back into the veld" (KW: 236). The shadowy figure in Karien's painting is evoked here as Michiel spots his own reflection in the horse's eyes. More significantly, the eye is unhealthy but he "touches with his free thumb the pus and drip from one scarred socket" (KW: 236). He does not turn away from its affliction but endearingly strokes it at the seat of its pain.

Ultimately, *Kings of the Water* seeks to displace its own title through an illustration of how the water belongs to the daughter instead. When the children are playing in the dam and they divide themselves into opposing teams of boys and girls to fight for ownership of the single plastic tube that floats in the middle of the dam, the boys have a rhyme to intimidate their enemies; "we're the kings of the water, and you're the henchman's daughter" (KW: 210). However, Karien and Lerato soon jump into the dam to help their daughters win the war and it is not long before the boys begin to sulk at their loss, leaving them with no option but to call a truce in the middle of the dam. Having access to mothers who empathise with their collective female plight exhibits how the modalities of the suffering mother can serve to establish non-hierarchical and extrafamilial "kingdoms" that now fall under the rule of the 'henchman's daughters'.

In Coovadia's *High Low In-between*, Nafisa also challenges the false sense of separation to those around her. As a doctor, Nafisa has witnessed inordinate amounts of suffering and tragedy. Yet she has escaped the adverse circumstances that seem to plague her patients. Her initial reaction is to respond with exasperation; "everybody had a story from the Cape to Cairo. It was best not to ask about it unless you had the time and sympathetic energy to hear them out, from start to tragic finish" (HLI: 133). Yet her husband's murder places her on a par with the rest of humanity. Because of her personal adversity

> Nafisa saw that she had a story of her own to tell. Why, she could outdo Rose, exceed Rose and her scar, Estella and her daughter. She was almost proud. When it came to the quantity of tragedy, for the first time, there was no clear and bright line between her, her family, and the rest of the continent. There were no exemptions. How much of her life had proceeded on the assumption there were?
>
> (HLI: 133)

It is only personal tragedy that awakens a feeling of mutual suffering and allows for the realisation that her existence has been governed by separatist notions of materialism, class and race. She thinks pitiably about the Indian-Zulu conflict that persists; "in this province, KZN, they were neighbours, their lives were entangled, yet they were as far apart as any two points on the globe" (HLI: 69). Realising the strength of racial and cultural divisions, her trajectory is that of seeking out the minute core of similarity between herself and others.

As illustrated in Chapter Three, material dispossession becomes the primary means to detach from her old life and to develop a new principle of belonging. For Nafisa, it becomes a means by which to encounter an archaic experience of universality as an *anima mundi*. As she denounces ownership of her many possessions, she becomes "free of her fears, she could therefore surrender her contempt. She would be on the level, in the dust, with everyone and everything" (HLI: 225). Often her self-narration reduces her identity to the smallest fraction of life, frequently referring to herself as an atom (HLI: 127, 180, and 247).

Like the other female characters, the narrative allows for realisation of desired identification as "she had blossomed into sympathy with every creature in the universe, even with Govin, with Ismail Kader, Estella, and Jadwat, with the gramnegative bacterium which Moonsamy's small lab cultivated on a Petri dish, with herself and her son,with the pebble underneath her foot …" (HLI: 248). She thus gains entry into both the animate and inanimate world, the ellipsis at the end of this quotation suggesting the infinite nature of the spectrum of identification.

As is the case in other texts, this extension also involves a fundamental re-evaluation of family. Significantly, Nafisa sets herself apart from her husband and son on the grounds of experience.

> 'Ah, Estella. My son, my husband, they always know better than everyone else. They read books and they think that books, and a large vocabulary, and whatever understanding you can find in a book, are a substitute for experience. But I have to say, I don't believe in books so much. They are no substitute'
>
> (HLI: 34)

Her husband and son stand accused of exploiting knowledge in acts of self-preservation and egoism. In contrast she believes that experience alone can overcome the current fractures and divisions amongst humanity. She thus finds Shakeer's abstract relation to the world troubling[63] and like Milla, feels that "she had brought him up incorrectly" (HLI: 23). Similarly, Nafisa concludes that "she was alone in her family" (HLI: 34).

Yet while her husband and son make her feel superfluous, "Estella was the individual who needed her, Nafisa, the most" (HLI: 33). As their relationship is somewhat volatile, Nafisa understands that "her feelings about Estella were irrationally intense, as if two of them were unhappily married" (HLI: 32). Nafisa is often moved to extreme anger by Estella and also expresses feelings of great tenderness for her in other instances.

Like the exchange between Milla and Agaat, Nafisa and Estella are able to engage in each other's suffering as an act of mutual empathy. Nafisa states that "Estella, the maid, was

[63] At the very end of the novel, Nafisa offers a vexed lecture to her son: "'from far enough away everything is the same and yes, it is useless. It is useless to get out of bed in the morning if you adopt the universe's point of view. But we don't live far away, Shakeer, like Govin. We're right here and the cosmic point of view, your cosmic point of view, is simply irrelevant'" (HLI: 259).

miserable because of Nafisa, her employer. If one was unhappy then so was the other. In this one way Estella and Nafisa were, people said, like mother and daughter" (HLI: 9). Similarly, Estella confirms the same feeling in relation to Nafisa when she notes: "Madam, you are not in a good mood this afternoon. You are not. I don't blame you for it. I understand the feeling you have as a mother, because I feel something similar with my daughter" (HLI: 33). They have an uncanny understanding of each other's pain and experience as a suffering mother.

Yet, interestingly, *High Low In-between* offers a divergent reading of the extrafamilial encounter. Unlike *Agaat*, where the narrative seeks to include Agaat within the normative signification of familial relations, this text portrays the difficulty of having no signifier to explain and label Nafisa's relationship with Estella. Although, she describes them as "unhappily married" (HLI: 32), at another point she describes Estella as "the daughter she had never received" (HLI: 245). Nafisa tries, with difficulty, to cast their connection in familial terms. But the relationship always denies and also exceeds the language of familial relations.

Their relationship is excessive in that Nafisa shares greater intimacy with Estella than with her biological son, yet the peculiarity also entails acknowledging the fundamental inequality of Estella's position as an employee, which makes the claim of a familial connection presumptuous. Hence, the language of familial signification never settles in the text (at the very end of the text Shakeer defines them as lovers) and this can be read as indicative of the extrafamilial quality of their relationship which both exceeds and is exceeded by the language of familial signification. Yet this asymmetrical family is exactly the kind that Nafisa seeks to celebrate in her affirmation

of a spoiled existence for "otherwise, there would be no need for love and forgiveness" (HLI: 229-230).

Writing the Nation

Arguably, the difference between perceptions held by the male and female characters marks a distinct shift in contemporary culture. As Michael Chapman and Margaret Lenta argue in the preface to *SA Lit: Beyond 2000*,

> a critical concern with difference in the 1990s has shifted to a concern with connection. If indeed this is so, it is appropriate that attention shift from Coetzee's refusal to impose the Self on the Other (that is how several influential critics, initially responding to Coetzee in the 1990s, interpret his fiction) to Krog's pursuit of what Helize van Vuuren refers to here as a 'syncretic identity'
>
> (2011).

In line with this trend, the texts I have examined seek to inscribe belonging as a mutually affirming gesture that does not enforce displacement upon the other. However, the mode of execution differs substantially from Van Vuuren's understanding of 'syncretic identity'. Conducting an analysis of Antjie's Krog's later poetic preoccupations with oral African narrative styles, Van Vuuren identifies acts of translation where a "communal identity might emerge, with the best of African culture and the best of Western culture combined in one syncretic whole" (2009: 233). However, understood in this manner, the acts of cultural, poetic and linguistic amalgamation amount to a smoothening or flattening out of the cultural field. In this light, empathy and identification cannot occur within a hybrid context without the creation of a national syncretic identity.

According to Leon De Kock, gestures of this kind undermine the fundamental heterogeneity of the South African nation and literary imaginary where "schisms, barriers, and misperceptions have been the rule" (2004: 9). De Kock argues that the homogenizing ideals of the post-apartheid "we" has led to a crisis of "unresolved heterogeneity" (2004: 9). As a result, he states that "the act of returning to the zone of the seam appears to be compulsive. It is the place where the divided culture must return time and time again where the impossibility of origin and unity is staged repeatedly" (De Kock 2004: 12). Like the cultural return enacted in Krog's controversial San poetry, De Kock argues that the obsession with origins is a means by which the imaginary attempts to suture difference. According to him, this is a *faux pas*, as the only historiographical unity that South Africans share is a history of division. Furthermore, taking into consideration the ethical concerns that accompany the dissolution of difference, De Kock opines that the cost of denying the essentially fractured nature of the South African subject and literary tradition is much too high.

De Kock understands the quest for origins as "an incessant mark of desire that cultural inscription in the divided country seeks the site of lost origins, a lost or never-realised wholeness" (2004: 12). In active contestation of this position, the texts I have examined do not endorse the discourse of desire and ultimately undermine the search for lost plenitude by forwarding the proposition of a spoiled existence. Furthermore, whereas Krog's method is "adoption of elements from the African oral traditions" (Van Vuuren 2009: 233), suggesting an attempt at familiarising herself with the other, my analysis has revealed a desire to negate the familial by alluding to the necessary expansion from the familial to the extrafamilial exchange.

It is important to note that in dramatizing originary returns, so utterly embedded in the white literary imaginary, it is more accurate to describe these texts as engaging in what Aaron Santesso describes as "literary nostalgia" (2006: 21). He argues that nostalgia of this kind is never to be confused for personal or unthinking repetition. Instead, it involves the metatextual employment of nostalgic tropes in order to comment about society or about the literary devices themselves. It is an analytical form that aims to defamiliarise rather than affirm. In the case of South African literature, I have argued that the return is made in order to shut down the very economy of nostalgic return itself. Furthermore, I have illustrated how a nostalgia of this kind is no longer the prevailing affect through which encounters with land occur, as the very structure of nostalgia suggests a being in longing to be − in a usually utopian − elsewhere. Moreover, as Elspeth Probyn suggests in *Outside Belongings,* when equations of belonging are "posed in term of inherent right, we can perhaps render incomprehensible the phrase 'go back to where you belong'" (1996: 29). Ultimately, a spoiled existence helps confront essentialism by unsettling the fallacy of a homogenous narrative and reintroduces hybridity back into the national imaginary.

As Ivor Chipkin notes in *Do South Africans Exist?*, questions and anxieties of belonging are intrinsic to a national identity that bears no cultural markers in order to define who 'the people' are. Like De Kock, he highlights the instability of a sociopolitical community that cannot generate a limit in order to constitute its identity and questions how this can be done without betraying concepts like hybridity and democracy; "what is missing […] is an explanation of how a plurality of identities 'becomes a singularity through its condensation around a popular identity'" (Chipkin 2007: 94). For Chipkin, the answer lies in the French emphasis on fraternity, defined as "a brotherhood; hence, family" (2007: 204). As the novelists featured in this thesis

intuit, official modes of citizenry are insufficient for the homogeneity of a nation. Instead, there is a need to read others affectively, which results in the formation of an extrafamilial unit.

In its political application, fraternity is not merely a sentimental antidote but a structural imperative for a democratic nation to exercise equality. Making use of Laclau's political theories, Chipkin highlights how democratic encounters can only occur when enfolded by feelings of solidarity. Hence, despite not having a particular culture or language, like the French, by which to determine the concrete limits of fraternity, the presence of fraternity, as affect, can still perform the conversion of a hybrid populace into a people. This is because "the affective bond allows us to think of a hegemonic formation with an external boundary, i.e. a *particular democratic society*" (Chipkin 2007: 210). According to Laclau the affect must have an existence that is independent from and larger than the people who maintain it as a source of pride. In this manner, the fraternal affect becomes the bridge for democratic relations as individuals acknowledge a mutual state of citizenship with others.

In "Midnight", Coovadia draws on Whitman to illustrate a lack of such a fraternity in contemporary South African society. He states: "'just as you feel, so I felt.' Very few, if any, Indian South Africans could say anything of the sort about the future […] our intimacy with the crowd of the future ('Just as you feel, so I felt') has vanished" (2009b: 51). Coovadia argues that South African citizens do not have the emotional capacity to construct a democratic national identity. This current lack of cohesiveness in society, he feels, is only exacerbated by the South African tendency to privatise experience. More pessimistically, he suggests that South African

Indians, in particular, are most lacking the much needed empathy to carry them toward a South African future.

In contrast to Coovadia's despondency, Chipkin believes that South Africa is "in a position, finally, to give to the demos its proper limit as a democracy. The boundary encloses citizens who share a special solidarity produced in and through democratic encounters. What lies beyond demos is not another nation, but the nation *tout court*" (2007: 218). At this particular historical phase of national development, Chipkin identifies the shift from a hybrid populace into a democratic nation. Through numerous acts of democratic interpolation, he suggests, citizens fortify the fraternal connection that is always identified as greater than the sum of its parts.

Viewed as such, the writers discussed in this thesis appear to serve the aims of this burgeoning nationalism by citing the centrality of affect in forging extrafamilial bonds. In turn, they can be described as somewhat anachronistic in relation to 'post-transitional' writing trends that celebrate the luxury of not having to engage with national discourse. Furthermore, the use of the artist figure is arguably a self-reflexive strategy that examines "the social possibilities and limitations of fiction at a particular sociohistorical moment" (Gaylard 2005: 275) and aids the exploration of narrative modalities that will more effectively serve these processes of democratic interpolation.

In the texts there is overt awareness of narrative and other forms of aesthetic production as essentially flawed; characters are vitriolic about its inability to function as anodyne and are skeptical of any totalizing 'cure' it seemingly provides. Ostensibly, this serves as a self-

conscious reflection on the failures of post-apartheid political narrativity. For much like the incomplete nature of this national project, the artist figures grapple with incomplete projects that find no natural or satisfying conclusion. This, again, is not far off from Hamlet's rendition of "The Murder of Gonzago", which yields equally ambivalent results. As John Wain argues "the whole ruse of staging the play has failed […] Hamlet is no plotter. Deeply meditative, he cannot gear his meditation to action; he acts only in rash, bounding sorties" (1964: 152-153). Wain faults Hamlet's professionalism as a director, finding that he is never focused enough to achieve his aims of assessing Claudius's guilt. Hamlet's inconclusive play, finally, does not rescue him from the *contretemps*.

The artist figures in the texts I discuss attempt to profit from this seeming loss. For as I will illustrate below, the imaginative project evolves into that of developing a *contretemps* writing that can accommodate the excessive nature of democratic interpolation. In this regard, the texts all offer a measured riposte to Plato's *The Republic*. As will become evident, the imagination is placed on trial for its ability to falsify circumstances and mislead citizens through seductive fantasies. However, by ultimately reaffirming the space for creative narrativity as a more authentic rendition of democratic interpolation, the texts assert that position of the artist remains central to the active construction of the national imaginary.

In Behr's *Kings of the Water*, there are many allusions to the misconstruing imagination and the fear of constraining narratives. Michiel makes reference to a movie called 'Misery', which is based on a Steven King novel:

> In the film version of Steven King's *Misery*, someone who is a slave only to her own insanity tells her captive, a writer, how hobbling was done to laborers on the Kimberly

> diamond mines. The she breaks both his ankles with a sledgehammer. In the book, she cuts off his foot with an ax. Thus she coerces from him the book she desires – believing a story alone, rendered as she wishes it, will secure meaning in her life – only to have him smash in her skull with the typewriter. He will hobble through the rest of his writing life
>
> (KW: 156)

Michiel proffers an example of how the hermeneutics and teleology of narrativity are motivated by insanity and have dire consequences. Like Hamlet, the portrait of the artist has an air of defeatism here; he has only the capacity to 'fight back' or act in self-defense – the tool of his trade (typewriter) is put to perverse use as an instrument of violence. Michiel appears to empathise with the writer whose imagination is held hostage and subsequently scarred such that he has to live out the rest of his existence in half-measures.

As Michiel diagnoses the social-ills of South Africa, he cites a failure of imagination as a primary cause. Upon witnessing the impoverished existence of the workers on the farm, he asks

> which of these women who walk miles up and down lines of fruit trees beating tins to scare off birds and baboons have dreams of a boardroom? Working in the big house – *that* might constitute the farthest reaches of imagination. Who imagines themselves cocooned in fleece, waving little flags amongst the nations of the world under stadium lights? How much of imagination, too, is dulled by our station within the hierarchies of ownership, labour and unemployment?
>
> (KW: 55)

Michiel believes that the South African imagination has always been barren and continues to suffer as a result of this creative void. Somewhat ironically, the imagination is here conceived as that which places restraints on its citizens rather than aids their liberation.

In Cartwright's *White Lightening*, James once worked as a film director and scriptwriter in London. By the time he enters South Africa he appears to have given up on his creative ventures. He recalls many of his professional failures in London, one of which involved a corporate project where he was hired to market a new resort, aptly named 'Arcadia'. James suitably employs an idea of 'paradise' as central to his marketing plan as "the original idea of paradise, as an area enclosed against the world, is a persistent one" (WL: 189). He attempts to make utopia a reality by playing on a universal desire for 'place' as free from the circumstances of time. Yet in a farcical manner, the marketing campaign falls apart and the island upon which the resort is to be built is destroyed by a hurricane. In Cartwright's version of a 'paradise lost', James learns that mutability infects everything, a point that is reiterated through the account of James's other professional failure as a director of a pornographic film.

As the story develops it becomes evident that he carries a latent hope that South Africa will grant him creative rejuvenation and James is excited when he stumbles upon what seems to be an innovative idea for a new movie script. However, his ideas are harebrained and as readers we are never convinced of the creative optimism he feels. Eventually, as his stamina to write this script wanes, James has time to consider how he always thought that film was a justifiable creative pursuit: "film had seemed to me to re-order and add a new lustre to life, to events, to stories; film was the finest art form ever" (WL: 69). The cinematic allure is that of preserving and respecting the determinism of narrative by redeeming one from the arbitrariness of life. However, art has not delivered on its promises and he is left disillusioned: "film itself had no power […] What a delusion! I had mistaken the self-congratulatory complicity of the film world for something more magical, even something numinous" (WL: 69). Cartwright captures the temporal efficiency of

cinematic narrative by illustrating James's desire to subject life to a creative vision. However, as the 'reel comes undone' for James, Cartwright illustrates how this creative impasse is precisely the experience of the *contretemps* – it is a "dissolution of time" where "under the circumstances, I see no reason to be scrupulous with times and dates and characters" (WL: 145). As an artist who has lost faith in narrative structure, he lives with the "unsettling realisation that your life has become a series of random events that have somehow lost their proper order and significance" (WL: 211).

Similarly, *Agaat* elaborates on the failures of narrative and the subsequent inability to narrate. Despite Jakkie's affinity for the arts he is skeptical of current literary output from South Africa. He claims that he is "less ambitious than some of my contemporaries. The finely cultivated, the intellectuals, incredible how they elected to live after the foul-up in Angola. Attack and defense as always, one after the other self-exculpating autobiographical writing, variants on the Hemingway option" (A: 5). In comparison to his white, male coevals who fought in the Angola border war, Jakkie feels disinclined to turn experience into narrative. He judges their autobiographical acts as self-serving. Hence, in relation to current artistic production in South Africa, he states that "I was not in accord" (A: 5). The creative impulse of South Africa has left him feeling disconnected to his peers who are able to produce restorative narratives in relation to their trauma.

Jakkie is characterised as virulently resistant to the completeness of narrative. As discussed in Chapter Three, he is haunted by the bedtime story that Agaat has shared with him and he wonders if forcibly bearing witness to that story has "delivered me from completedness"(A: 6).

The narrative is in no way restorative, but one through which he arrives at the discomfort of incompleteness. The inability to arrive at completeness through artistic means also registers in relation to music as he touches base with the unsettling silences that only he can discern as "unsingable intervals" (A: 8). Jakkie displays awareness of the *contretemps*¸ the logic of temporal breaks that disturb the production and consumption of an aesthetic object. So he questions, "is listening enough? For how long? Before I am forced to do something?"(A: 682), feeling his inability to account for that which escapes his lexicon as a trained ethnomusicologist. Jakkie bears witness to the emptiness of sound, song and narrative but he does not know what to do with it.

Like Jakkie, Shakeer also alludes to imaginative trauma. When in South Africa he states that "my imagination needs time to recover" (HLI: 252). As readers we are led to assume that this moment of recovery will present itself when, at the end of the novel, Shakeer develops the few photographs he has taken in South Africa. However, the results prove lackluster; he finds the pictures of the Sangoma predictable and he tears them up. However,

> the other photographs, still soaking in the trays, hadn't fixed. Shakeer picked up one of them in his hands. They were only half-formed shapes of black and white. You couldn't make out what the scene was supposed to be. It was a looking-glass photograph. Light was different through the looking-glass. It couldn't be fixed into a clear image
>
> (HLI: 265).

As an artistic production that comes out of the *contretemps*, the imagination cannot produce clarity or insight and this final image alludes as much to the possibility of a future development as it does to the stagnancy of an imagination that has no power to illumine and represent.

In *Playing in the Light*, Marion grows to realise that she is, essentially, without a story. Due to the fact that her parents had to live in a state of denial, "Marion is struck by the paucity of her parents' lives" (PL: 119). In the text, 'whiteness' begins to serve as a statement of blankness. It is the shroud that effaces and denies history. As she states, "the whiteness they pursue is cool and haughty and blank, history is uncool, reaches out gawkily for affinities, asserts itself boldly, threatens to mark, to break through and stain the primed white canvas that is their life" (PL: 152). One finds similar allusions to 'whiteness' as indicative of a blank narrative in *Agaat* and *Kings of the Water*.

But for Marion, the chance encounter with Outa Blinkoog proves highly significant. As described, he has an other-worldly, "apparition" (PL: 87) who appears in "a ramshackle cart decorated with outlandish shiny things and streamers of coloured cloth, piled high with objects made of beaten, painted and pierced tin, including what look like toy windmills, whirring in the movement of the cart" (PL: 86). Despite the derelict appearance, Marion and Brenda are "mesmerized by this man. By his extraordinary eyes – for they are different, one green and one black, set in an ageless, mahogany face" (PL: 87), and they forego trained instincts of fear to talk to him. His jovial manner and ease of speech grants him an oracular stature and the realisation that he is a visitor from another world; "he is a peacock man, a brightly coloured creature from mythology, a messenger from the gods" (PL: 87). Outa Blinkoog proves to be a formidable storyteller but unlike the character and poet, Mr. Mahmoud, he is not sentimental about the dying San culture. He is not nostalgic when it comes to the past and insists that people must "make new Beautiful Things" (PL: 90) instead.

Eventually, he shares his own artifacts with them. One is a large piece of tapestry with separate panels resembling "chapters on cloth" marking "the different little stories that grow inside the big story" (PL: 90). When he explains the process, Marion states that "he is unstoppable, barely comprehensible, as he launches into a narrative that has no end, each fragment leading to another" (PL: 87-8). Just like the recycled art that he produces from scrap materials, his mode of storytelling consists of fabulously stitched together narratives that possess both qualities of the unfinished and the excessive. Similarly, Marion's history begins to assume this narrative style as she reveals a deluge of historical pieces that can only be imperfectly stitched together.

Miki Flockemann argues that a post-transitional aesthetic in the novel can also be discerned in "the imagined glimpses of post-racialized senses of self as suggested by the contradictory and multivalent uses of 'light' and 'play'" (2010: 27). She suggests that "Marion experiences an epiphany of sorts triggered by what could be described as an open-minded experience of 'light', *as* light itself, rather than as a concept which up to that point seemed always tainted by race-inflected complicity and pretence" (2010: 27). As I have previously suggested, Flockemann believes the text to be operating within the metaphoric spaces of 'whiteness'. She argues that Marion gains new insight on 'light' and 'white' and begins to view them as more expansive than the racial concepts to which they have been previously attached.

However, this analysis fails to account for the challenge that the text offers to the intrinsic connection between 'white' and 'light'. Pursuing my reading of 'whiteness' as indicative of a blank narrative, Outa Blinkoog again presents a narrative alternative. As Marion and Brenda depart, he presents them a lantern with the following sentiment; "light, he says, that is what we

take too much for granted; coloured glass helps us to remember the miracle of light" (PL: 89). Significantly enough, the lantern emits "green and red flicker" (PL: 92) and is appreciated as a coloured and variegated experience of light that does not adhere to the singularity of a white light. Marion's journey thus appears to encompass not merely the neutralization of 'light' as a concept but the realisation that the self can be aesthetically realised through forms of asymmetrical polyvocality, much like how light is composed of a multitude of colours.

In *Agaat*, we find a similar inclination towards the excessive and unfinished narrative. Milla De Wet is described by her husband, Jak, as "far-fetched Milla! Your imagination is too fertile for your own good" (A: 151). Throughout their unhappy marriage he is condescending about her literary and lyrical gifts. As she herself looks back on her past, she concedes that literary activity may indeed be escapist and she feels disillusioned with its promise of a restorative cure. She recalls the promises of Goethe's lyrical poem, *über allen Gipfeln* (The Wanderer's Nightsong II)[64] from her university studies but now exclaims "how false are the promises of the poets" (A: 42). The restful stasis of Goethe's vision is a utopia fabricated in words that has consistently eluded her.

Like Jakkie, she adopts a more skeptical attitude towards narrative. The novel's present begins with the penitent realisation that she too has written a poor and incomplete story about Agaat. Forced to confront her journals, she feels alienated from her own creation; "the writing on the torn-out page doesn't even look like my handwriting to me" (A: 10). Her immediate reaction is

[64] In the text the poem is in original German. A translation of the quoted section reads: "Up there all summits/ are still./ In all the tree-tops / you will/ feel but the dew. / The birds in the forest stopped talking. / Soon, done with walking, / you shall rest, too." (wikipedia)

to rectify the oversights of the past narratives by trying to re-create them. The text captures beautifully the intense imaginative effort she employs in order to move her arm to write a revised narrative to replace the misconstrued one. However, she is paralysed and the impulse to write is futile; "I manage to draw one leg of the m before the pen slips from my fingers and rolls over the bedspread and falls from the bed. My hand lies in the splint like a mole in a trap" (A: 22). Much as Milla desires to account for elisions of past narratives, she cannot. Her paralysis appears to be symbolic of a state of creative frustration and futility which is directly felt in the present as narrative incompleteness.

Similar to James in *White Lightning*, Milla hankers after the phantasmagoric garden that brings to mind an Edenic space of paradise. It is significant to note that Milla only ever views the garden through the mirror and can never view it in totality. It is always a "fragmented garden" (A: 134), "cut out on three levels" (A: 153), and "a garden multiplied" (A: 154) and Milla praises Agaat for her efforts. Yet interestingly enough, when the garden is finally viewed, as an end-product in the Epilogue (which Jakkie narrates), the garden is a dystopic space. He views its grandeur as grotesque and gains none of the pleasure that Milla does through her excessive yet fractured lens.

In the narrative Agaat takes it upon herself to read Milla's diaries aloud "in a sequence determined by her. With so many omissions and additions that nobody, not even you, would ever be able to ascertain the true facts" (A: 654). Milla initially suffers with the realisation that the expected narrative of her life has been abandoned in favour of this post-haste conclusion. This is comparable to *White Lightning* where Cartwright employs cinematic metaphors to imply that the

reel of narrative has come undone. Agaat's timing does not seek to install the lost sense of linearity to Milla's life but subjects it fractures that speak more of "Chance. Coincidence" (A: 654). More importantly, she accepts the wager that it places on the future. The story, as it is told, must come undone and become subject to insertions.

In *Agaat*, this is reiterated stylistically: the text employs five narrative modes all of which are subject to ellipsis of varying degrees but serve as interruptive imbrications in relation to each other. Yet it is arguably the stream of consciousness narration that is the most blatant example of interruptive force. These sub-sections, captured in italics, are also made distinct by the free-writing form that foregoes the use of punctuation and upper-case letters. The content of these pieces appear to be internal monologues that Milla has with herself on her deathbed and serves to capture the anxiety of a 'trapped speech', as she cannot vocalize any of it. The last of these sections (which ultimately concludes Milla's narrative in its entirety) ends with a return

> *to the smallest circling water-creature zealously writing everything reflects so with open eyes into the white light so whispering my soul to go*
> *in my overberg*
> *over the bent world brooding/in my hand the hand of the small agaat*
>
> (A: 674).

Earlier in this chapter I illustrated how Milla unpacks the secret of the whirligig as "a single ripple inscribing the surface of the water with rapidly successive perfect circles, overlapping, circling against one another, fading away, a weltering writing on water" (A: 658). She is fascinated by its intangible inscription that causes an endlessly spiraling motion on the water before it fades. As in the case of Outa Blinkoog in *Playing in the Light*, *Agaat* employs the whirligig as a metatextual exemplification of 'new' narrative modalities. The rapid movements

of the whirligig create excessive ripples on the water – its narrative is subject to a series of fleeting traces that are bound to be omitted or interrupted during its course. More significantly, it is an inscription in which "*everything reflects*" (A: 674). Like the view of the garden in the mirror, it posits a series of fractures and excessive interpolations as an aesthetic vision.

Overall, in staging the capacity of the imagination to yield less than desirable results, these texts oppose the fantastic and totalizing features of post-apartheid narrativity. The nature of the post-apartheid political script has been deemed hermeneutic and 'oppressive'; a changed perspective that was captured by the plethora of artistic reflections on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). As many theorists have argued, the TRC directly expressed the salience of narrative as anodyne for a traumatized society primarily because it suited the political aims of reconciliation and transformation and less because it allowed for mending of the individual and national psyche (De Kock 2004, Nuttall 2009). Undoubtedly, the TRC left South Africans questioning the ethics of whether narrative can account for traumatic experiences and more importantly, whether the disclosure of narrative imparts a curative and therapeutic property to those who tell and to those who listen.

As a result, much artistic production – post-TRC – adopted an exceptionally self-reflexive stance in relation to narrative and was thus increasingly realised through postmodern aesthetics of disruption, elision and incompleteness. Similarly, the texts I have analysed, mark how this contemporary aesthetic expresses loss and failure in the light of old narrative modalities of the national imaginary but these texts also seek to adopt an appreciable view of this spoiled

existence by marking its potential to more suitably account for democratic interpolation as an inherently excessive and unfinished act of narration.

Conclusion: Celebratory Crocodile Tears

> How sure you'd have to be that the story you tell is indeed of the you that will prevail […]
> No, Marion decides, the stone tablet cannot be for the ephemeral lives
> of people; it is for gods, with their messages and commandments.
>
> *Playing in the Light* − 204

Writing this conclusion in the wake of Nelson Mandela's passing, I cannot help but wonder if the national imaginary has taken a conclusive step away from nostalgia *contretemps* and begun to embrace what Nicholas Dames refers to as the "prestige" of nostalgia. Relying on Maurice Halbwach's idea that "when we reconstruct an image of the past, we bestow upon it a prestige that it has never before possessed" (Wood 2006: 5), Dames argues that nostalgia has a very specific talent for turning "distance and disconnection into the very principle of pleasure" (2001: 242).

As I have argued in this thesis, the national imaginary has thus far made anomalous use of nostalgic form; unable to delve into the wonder of the past − so heavily tainted by the political oppression of apartheid − nostalgic intent was displaced into the ideals of the post-apartheid future that never arrived. There was never anything prestigious about our nostalgia. It presented a complex and exaggerated denigration of the present and a melancholic, and at times desperate, desire to return to illusive promises of the utopian future.

As South Africa lives through the occasion of national mourning, Nelson Mandela's death appears to be an event equal to the historical rupture of the post-apartheid nation and thus brings a seeming conclusion to the clingy fixation that has accumulated around the non-arrival of this

nation. Assessing the dense media coverage, it is evident that Mandela shifts from political icon to legend. Death itself serves as a circumstance to illustrate that he was truly beyond history – a visitor amongst us. And through the act of grieving, the man and the initiation of South African democracy are divorced from what we consider real and are categorised as a sublime concept to which we can never return.

This, however, is far from a pessimistic prospect – it can, in fact, become a very strategic use of nostalgia in light of national development. For in acknowledging the sheer unrepeatability of Nelson Mandela, we also lose the desire to hanker after a post-apartheid utopia, knowing that these very laments taint the prestige of memory itself.

Accordingly, Mandela's death has given us our very own version of a Golden Age. A nation looks back and seems to acknowledge that we were once great. For now, words like 'pride', 'honour' and 'dignity' feature in descriptions of our collective past. We have become a country of noble birth, far from previous expressions of a monstrous birth to describe our lopsided exit from the womb.

I am sure that South Africans will spend time questioning the veracity of applying such unadulterated nostalgia to this particular point in history. And it is indeed necessary to be wary of the possible abuse that nostalgia can inflict upon it. But there are potentially constructive ways in which nostalgia can aid a young democracy such as South Africa. Considering Ivor Chipkin's identification of affect as a prerequisite for democratic interpolation discussed in Chapter Four,

maintaining Nelson Mandela as a nostalgic institution can certainly buttress the South African national imaginary in this regard.

Aaron Santesso similarly stresses the nationalistic importance of nostalgia in particular by arguing that a nation's golden age, both "simultaneously real and legendary […] responds to what its creator imagines as a present need of the nation, and that might inspire citizens to answer that need and therefore improve the current state of the nation" (2006: 96). Having prestigious political nostalgia means that the national imaginary is nonchalant regarding its sense of pride and identity. This is a feature that puts the South African nation on par with others and challenges feelings of exceptionalism that have continually plagued its sense of self-perception. In this manner, nostalgia can bring us towards what Ronit Frenkel and Craig MacKenzie describe as a 'post-transitional' state that foregoes feelings of exceptionalism in order to allow for readings of South African development in relation to other postcolonial nations and transnational trends (2010).

Furthermore, Santesso argues that the mythic identity of a nation is practical, able to help with present challenges. In the South African context, the presence of prestigious political nostalgia need not serve as an anodyne narrative for a country's problems. This is precisely why post-apartheid rhetoric proved problematic – with all of our supposed unity as a nation placed in the future, the present became a host of constrained conversations. In both political and personal contexts, few wished to unravel something that had not yet been obtained, even if this came at the cost of denying our fundamental hybridity and inequality. On the contrary, assuming mythic

unity in relation to a collective past grants an affective base that may serve to support rather than hamper democratic exchange.

Hence, prestigious nostalgia grants permission to abandon the anxious dream of the future and thus enables a more realistic examination of the present. It is, as Michael Titlestad's riposte to the concept of 'post-transitionality' states, a moment to consider a present that is certainly "post-ideological" and "post-teleological" but, in his opinion, not necessarily "post-transitional" (2010). As he argues, definitions of the "post-transitional" are entirely premature or fallacious in the South African context. Instead, contemporary South African literature illumines the paradox of 'transition' as a permanent feature of socio-political development. Contrary to the appraisal of 'post-transitional' culture, 'transition' completely defies teleological discourse by opposing claims of arrival and embracing change *ad infinitum*. Similarly, the texts I have examined all delve into this undulating rhythm, but unlike Titlestad's sense of an existential *fait accomplis*, they celebrate this stance as not merely authentic but also as an ideal worthy of pursuit.

This is made apparent through the use of dialectical form in these novels. They appear to draw inspiration from Socratic dialogue as characters with opposing ideologies dramatise the contestation of ideas currently present in the national imaginary. As readers we are invited into the rhetorical disproving of 'older' strains of liberalism and nationalism and more persuasively guided towards a particular character who typically holds views suited to a transitional South Africa. More significantly, the characters who maintain a position of transition are the ones who choose to stay, which again proves its salience in relation to contemporary South African society.

In my first chapter, I examined this contestation through representations of time and temporality. Through an illustration of nostalgia *contretemps* as a prevailing response to a future that currently feels lost, I explored how characters respond to the discomfort of time gone awry by attempting to recover the lost trajectory of time. While some characters lament the inability to replenish messianic hope and exacerbate their feelings of nostalgia *contretemps*, others explore the alternative of merely inhabiting the *contretemps*. As suggested in these novels, a lack of resistance to the present *contretemps* offers a different expression of time and an entirely new experience of the future to flourish. Their journeys encourage us to think more generously about the kind of expectations we place upon time. As suggested in these texts, South Africa still relies on the salience of the future, but no longer requires the heavy-handed determinism of early post-apartheid rhetoric. Hence, for the characters who choose to remain in South Africa, life assumes an open awareness of the future as that which accommodates interruption as part of its evolution.

Following on from the examination of the *contretemps*, my second chapter dealt with the growing awareness of historical contingency in contemporary literature. The future-orientedness of the South African nation has imbued the national imaginary with a distinctly proleptic understanding of history. Much to the consternation of many theorists, the South African archive has consistently allied itself with the future to the detriment of the past. However, historical contingency is an expression of vulnerability in this regard – an indication that characters lack the confidence to read historical developments as a teleological and redemptive narrative. For some characters the disillusionment proves tragic, leading to an apocalyptic rendition of historical events. These characters are portrayed as merely reactionary, casting events in a deliberately dystopian light in order to justify their convictions about a future apocalypse. Other

characters, however, explore comic renditions of the apocalypse. As described, the comic apocalypse uses historical contingency to account for human error as opposed to evil or guilt. By uncovering the very contingency of their own pasts, these characters awaken to a historical modality that can accommodate both failure and progress. Ultimately, historical contingency allows for an ability to think in broad historical strokes and makes for a more mature and sustainable appreciation of history.

Chapter Three marked conditions of mutability through textual representations of death. I outlined how theories of alterity inform ideas about death and also appear to underpin a desire for South Africa as 'an-other country'. Accordingly, characters return to South Africa to mourn the death of a parent, hoping to effect a closure that will allow for the 'new' to arrive. Perfect mourning, however, proves elusive for almost all of the characters. Instead, they are caught in a melancholic state of loss and for some, this leaves them continually plagued and haunted. Again, the suggestion is that of working with, as opposed to against, melancholic frameworks. This is seen in characters who seize the opportunity to live in close proximity to death: for some this involves acts of self-dispossession, for others it involves recognition of the ghostly entities that surround them. In this manner the texts dramatise the discursive modification of death and life as borderless − shattering the illusion of 'an-other country' as an entirely separate entity. Instead, death and otherness find parasitic relations to the self and the presence of ghosts amplifies the call towards spectral citizenry in South Africa.

The notion of a contaminated reality also featured in Chapter Four where I discussed the trope of a spoiled existence as is currently being employed in the literary imaginary. Through a

metatextual analysis of the artist-protagonist, I argued that contemporary South African fiction delves into the discursive underpinnings of the white literary imaginary in order to de-essentialise its nostalgic fabrications. Through the use of discursive archetypes such as the hard mother, these novels parody and thus put into effect re-inscriptions that allow for different relations to the land.

Here, my discussion examined the distinctly gendered nature of the pattern that I have outlined. For while the male characters remain caught in an Oedipal economy of desire in relation to their hard and unyielding mothers, the female characters usher us into a spoiled existence. Unlike their male counterparts, the female characters use the Romantic nostalgia of the literary imaginary to illustrate the dissolution of desire. Swopping the Oedipal narrative for that of Electra, these female characters show how a being in longing can, in fact, choose to simply belong. By working with the trope of a 'suffering mother' instead, characters undergo various acts of suffering and widen their empathetic base to include those around them. The spoiled existence thus emphasises belonging as the mutual recognition of suffering.

Furthermore, I explored how the spoiled existence resonates with the current need for a collective affect through which democratic practices can be realised. Using Chipkin's argument, I suggested that these authors intuit the national importance of forging an emotive connection other than desire. In turn, I explored how this gives rise to aesthetic explorations as the artist-protagonists seek new methods of representation in relation to their changing world. What one finds is that an altering conception of time, as the *contretemps*, requires different narrative techniques in order to capture its interruptive and improvisatory energy.

Not surprisingly, the need to find new ways of reading are becoming equally pressing in the contemporary literary context. Sarah Nuttall and Rita Barnard, in particular, argue for a new critical project that returns to micro or text-focused readings (Nuttall 2011, Barnard 2012). As noted, South African literature has always been subject to heavily interpretative and symptomatic readings of national malaise and development. Along with other 'post-transitional' advocates (De Kock 2004, Frenkel and MacKenzie 2010), Nuttall and Barnard are of the opinion that the time has come to liberate the South African writer, text and reader from ideological presumptuousness.

The narrative and aesthetic technique used by characters in the *contretemps* makes a gesture equal to this immanent mode of writing and reading. As outlined in Chapter Four, qualities of excessiveness, incompleteness and interpolation plague attempts of conclusive narration. However, somewhat paradoxically, I nevertheless maintain that the anti-hegemonic movement is an exemplification of contemporary nationalistic sentiment as it exemplifies the widening terrain of democratic engagement. For example, the understanding of nationalism that informs all of the novels in this study appears to respect Leon De Kock's call to "let doubt return. Let the tatty, patchwork 'rainbow nation' (in Breyten Breytenbach's description, a 'pot of shit') become once more, in representation, the normal thing that it is in the streets, the shacks, and the bloody intellectual parlours of the old 'new' South Africa" (2004: 22). For De Kock, this manifesto expresses dissatisfaction with political narrativity but nevertheless posits a utopian solution that is akin to sociopolitical terrain of the 'unweeded garden' and 'spoiled existence' outlined in Chapter Four.

In this manner, it is, perhaps, possible to read ourselves, as critics, as symptomatic of an era. For the 'post-transitional' stance of many literary theorists is partially reactionary, rebelling against the constraints of politically motivated apartheid literature and hermetic post-apartheid narrativity. This is also coupled with the desire to read for the transnational relevance of South African literature (De Kock 2004, Frenkel and MacKenzie 2010, Nuttall 2011 and Barnard 2012). In turn, these critics express undue skepticism regarding ways in which literature continues to inform national projections. And perhaps for South Africans, who remain "unsure of what they are, and seeking to remind themselves as they proceed" (Chipkin 2007: 177), the need for imaginative meanderings into new utopias may continue to prove necessary for a while yet.

In "The Way We Read Now", Nuttall also cautions against a critical tradition of suspiciousness, arguing that it results in a "denigration of affect" (Nuttall 2011: 1) and enjoyment. Similarly, the texts I have analysed also highlight the centrality of affect and question the significance and value of taking emotion seriously. In the Introduction, I alluded to the manner in which 'post-transitional' theorists pathologize the condition of nostalgia *contretemps* by reading it as a mere failure to adjust to contemporary changes in South Africa. Somewhat prescriptively, they suggest that emotional attachment to the post-apartheid utopia is unethical and unproductive. As we settle into more normative stains of nostalgia in South Africa, I wonder whether it will receive a warmer reception than its predecessor, nostalgia *contretemps*. Slavoj Žižek's response to Nelson Mandela's passing in *The Guardian* already warns us to be wary of nostalgia as it will prevent us from scrupulous political action. He advises that "we should thus forget about celebratory crocodile tears and focus on the unfulfilled promises his leadership gave rise to" (Žižek 2013).

While Žižek may be referring to more superficial enactments of national grief, he is nevertheless impatient with South Africa's nostalgia (possibly Mandela's politics too) and hence, derides affect. Contrary to this position, I've argued that celebratory crocodile tears may in fact allow for the social cohesiveness necessary for sociopolitical action. Nevertheless, the question remains as to whether nostalgia will indeed find a productive place within the national imaginary.

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