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DAMON GALGUT AND THE CRITICAL RECEPTION OF SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURE

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

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ABSTRACT

Damon Galgut has been a prolific contributor to South African literature since the early 1980s, but has only recently gained recognition as a significant presence in our cultural landscape. This thesis considers what the vicissitudes of Galgut's critical reception — which have seen him, by turns, celebrated, ignored and even explicitly discounted as a noteworthy South African author — reveal about the shifting standards of cultural legitimacy which have been set for local writers since the late apartheid years. It offers, in turn, an extended close reading of each of his novels and considers the challenges which they pose to hegemonic assumptions about developments within the field of South African literature over the past three decades. I demonstrate that no coherent line of transition can be traced across the individual novels which make up Galgut's oeuvre. They represent, instead, shifting degrees of discordance and concordance with an epochal metanarrative of South African literature and the progressive transformation of the field which it implies. In so doing, they enliven us to the thematic and aesthetic heterogeneity which has always already constituted the field.

Keywords: Damon Galgut, South African literature, authorship, critical reception

DECLARATION

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

_____

Sofia Lucy Kostelac

26 May 2014

In loving memory of Jos Nooy and Elly Chappel

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INTRODUCTION

In 1982, at the age of 19, Damon Galgut made his debut on the South African literary scene with the publication of *A Sinless Season* to considerable critical acclaim. Impressed by the young author's 'exceptional sensitivity' (von Hirschberg) and 'sharp intelligence' (Ronge), local reviewers generally concurred that he would become a significant presence on our cultural landscape. History, it seems, has borne them out. Over the past thirty years, Galgut has produced a substantial oeuvre comprising seven novels (with his eighth, *Arctic Summer,* forthcoming in May this year), a sizeable collection of short stories, a series of plays and a single film script. Since his 2003 novel, *The Good Doctor,* was shortlisted for the prestigious Man Booker Prize, it is primarily as an accomplished novelist that he has become known. In the last decade, his work has continued to attract prize endorsements both locally and internationally, including nominations for the Commonwealth Writers' Prize, the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award, the Ondaatje Prize, the O Henry Award, the Sunday Times Fiction Prize, the University of Johannesburg English Literary Award and the M-Net Literary Award.[1] In 2010, *In a Strange Room* earned him a second nomination for the Man Booker Prize.

The approbation of his work during the last decade, however, belies a tumultuous and uneven career history, in which Galgut very nearly failed to secure legitimacy as a noteworthy and credible South African author. Although his third novel, *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* (1991), would attract a degree of critical interest and recognition, the remaining works which

[1] Galgut's prize endorsements are listed on his agent's website. See http://www.tonypeake.com/agency/clients/damon_galgut.htm

he published during the eighties and nineties — including *A Small Circle of Beings* (1988) and *The Quarry* (1995) — were met with plain disinterest by scholars, reviewers and prize committees alike. By the late nineties, almost twenty years after the enthusiastic reception of his precocious debut, he was faced with the prospect of falling into obscurity altogether when he was unable to secure a publisher, either at home or abroad, for 'Free Fall or Flight'; an autobiographical manuscript which would — in an especially overt demonstration of industry fickleness — eventually be published to critical acclaim when Galgut developed it into *In a Strange Room* ten years later.

Galgut's writing first came to my own attention, unsurprisingly, through the many accolades which *The Good Doctor* attracted, though I had been reading contemporary local writing with interest since my undergraduate years in the late nineties. My ignorance about the significant body of work he had already contributed to South African literature, prior to his Man Booker shortlisting, gave me pause, foregrounding, as it did, the ways in which my knowledge about the field had been curated and, I felt, unduly circumscribed. Indeed, his previous novels, which were all out of print by the time *The Good Doctor* was published, seemed, to my mind, to possess the aesthetic sophistication and thematic texture to have attracted significant scholarly interest, if not an especially wide readership. Yet, Galgut's work has not, as I explore in this study, been readily accommodated by the dominant preoccupations of South African literary studies over the past three decades and he remains — despite his recent accolades — a relatively marginal figure within the discipline. The National English Literary Museum (NELM) archives list only twenty scholarly articles in which mention of his writing is made; of these, only five take his novels as their primary focus. Since I began this study in 2009, however, his writing has been slowly moving into a more prominent position in the

academy, appearing on undergraduate reading lists and in an increasing number of postgraduate studies like my own and I suspect that he is poised to become a figure of considerable academic interest within the next few years.

The vagaries of Galgut's critical reception — which have seen him, by turns, celebrated, ignored and even explicitly discounted as a noteworthy South African author — make his career an especially apposite case study through which to examine the shifting standards of cultural legitimacy which have been set for local writers over the past three decades. In this study, I examine how the protocols of reading which have informed Galgut's reception figure into larger debates about the changing contours of South African literature since the late-apartheid years and consider, in turn, what kinds of pressures these protocols have placed on local literary production. I suggest that writers like Galgut, whose careers have spanned the epochal distinction which is generally asserted between apartheid and post-apartheid literature, have been subject to especially demanding and often irreconcilable cultural expectations. Compelled, during the apartheid years, to demonstrate their political commitment, at the expense, if necessary, of aesthetic considerations, South African authors have since been required to evince their emergence — with appropriate stylistic sophistication and thematic variation — from the 'cultural-boycott hothouse' (de Kock, 'History' 115) of the 'old' South Africa. The perception that Galgut has not always successfully negotiated these competing demands accounts, to some extent, I suggest, for the ambivalent position he has generally occupied in the field.

My emphasis in this study is foremost on Galgut's novels; to each, I have dedicated a single chapter in the chronological order of their publication. In each chapter, I position the novel

within the larger literary-critical debates which informed its reception, before offering an extended close reading of the text itself. Throughout this thesis, my methodology is thus primarily inductive, whereby I examine developments within the field of South African literature from the perspective of a single author's contribution to it, rather than the other way around. In so doing, I hope to offer a partial and necessarily provisional series of responses to the question which Leon de Kock posed in a recent essay on the 'construction of "South African English Writing"', in which he argues that criticism of local writing, since the late 1970s, has largely been dominated by a deductive mode of reasoning, which appropriates writers primarily in terms of their representative value for pre-established interpretative schemes. 'What', de Kock asks, 'would our construction of the field look like if we switched our literary-critical argumentation from a largely deductive mode to an inductive mode?' ('Notes' 108). More fractured and rhizomatic, I would aver in response, than the epochal metanarrative of South African writing — which posits a line of transition from the creative bondage of the past to the heterogeneity and capaciousness of the 'now' — generally allows. Indeed, one of the major difficulties which I encountered in the early stages of this study was in trying to describe Galgut's writing in the definitional terms — including 'anti-apartheid', 'post-apartheid', 'post-postapartheid', 'post-anti-apartheid' and 'post-transitional' — which posit the existence of clearly definable 'phases' of South African literature and imply its progressive transformation. Although scholars regularly trouble the teleology inherent in this schematisation of the field,[2] its hegemony nonetheless persists, as I demonstrate in the proceeding chapters, and has proven to be an especially inhibiting factor

[2] In his introduction to *SA Lit: Beyond 2000*, for example, Michael Chapman reminds us that '[p]hases of chronology are ordering conveniences rather than neatly separable entities' (2) and draws on several recent works of South African literary criticism — including David Attwell's *Rewriting Modernity: Studies in Black South African History* — to demonstrate that South African literary culture 'has never constituted a linear path from oppression to liberation' (3). The anthology's premise, however, is that South African literature 'beyond 2000 begins to mark a quantitative and qualitative shift from the immediate 'post' years of the 1990s to another "phase"' (1), a claim which re-institutes a progressive trajectory.

in the reception of Galgut's writing.

i.

To write about a 'field' of South African literature is, to some extent, to invoke a misnomer, as de Kock himself has convincingly demonstrated. The term implies a clearly delineated and cohesive terrain, which is not borne out by even the most cursory glance at the cultural and linguistic heterogeneity of the region and the plural histories from which it derives. As de Kock notes:

> Literary 'fields' — entities, groupings — require some reason other than the mere convenience of geography for their existence: they need minimal convergence in the domains of origins, language, culture, history, and nationalism (contested or not) to become, in some sense, cohesive and inter-referential. But in the South African case each of these domains fragments into heterogeneity the moment one looks more closely at the literary objects at hand. […C]ultural heterogeneity is nothing new or surprising in the context of globalisation, but the South African case is peculiar because it remains to this day a scene of largely unresolved difference. ('SA in the Global Imaginary' 1)

De Kock follows by adumbrating the fractured and fractious histories and the myriad literatures they have produced, which make it both impossible and undesirable to consider South African literature as 'a singular or unified field' (7). He proposes, instead, the metaphor

of the ‘seam’ (11) as a way to foreground, rather than elide, its radical incommensurability. The image provides an apt visualisation of the paradox which inheres in any attempt to yoke together the ‘infinitely [great] diversity of objects and forms’ (de Kock 5) which have always already characterised literary production in the region, as the seam attempts to suture together disparate elements, but nevertheless inexorably bears the trace of their separation. So, too, is South African writing marked by a ‘crisis of inscription’ (de Kock 11), which gives the lie to any claim about its cohesiveness.

In this study, I take the incommensurability of ‘South African literature’ as my point of departure and do not attempt to resolve its definitional instability. Instead, I telescope the argument, in order to explore the ways in which its heterogeneity is borne out as much by a close analysis of a single writer’s oeuvre, as it is by the broader literary historical critiques, which scholars like de Kock have conducted. Indeed, I suggest that Galgut’s novels evince the dynamism which, as Raymond Williams influentially demonstrated in *Marxism and Literature,* necessarily constitutes cultural production *within* a particular historical milieu and not only across several of them. I maintain the use of the term ‘field’, however, in order to evoke the homogenising pressures which hide the real plurality and discontinuity of local literary production to confer legitimacy onto only a select group of authors, who come to metonymically represent South African literature as a clearly identifiable — and hence marketable — cultural product. My understanding of the term is thus informed by the ‘field theory’ of Pierre Bourdieu and his analysis of the symbolic and material forces which govern and circumscribe cultural production. For Bourdieu, the ‘symbolic capital’ which accrues to certain authors above others within a particular literary field, is not a product of the intrinsic value of their work (a concept he rejects altogether), but, rather, a measure of their capacity to

negotiate the structures of authority and prestige specific to their socio-cultural context. Works of literature are subject, he demonstrates, to accreditation by 'specific authorities of selection and consecration' (Jenkins 135) — including publishers, reviewers, critics and prize committees — who collectively set the limits on what constitutes legitimate cultural production. From this perspective, the notion of a literary 'field' denotes less a cohesive and clearly delineated terrain than it does a 'site of struggles in which what is at stake is the power to impose the dominant definition of the writer and therefore to delimit the population of those entitled to take part in the struggle to define the writer' (Bourdieu, *Cultural Production* 42).

In the context of South African literary production, definitions of cultural legitimacy have been significantly mediated by the ideological and commercial interests of a metropolitan readership, as Andrew Van der Vlies has recently shown in his study on *South African Textual Cultures*. In his examination of the publication and reception histories of works by several canonical local writers — including Olive Schreiner, Alan Paton and Zakes Mda — Van der Vlies demonstrates how the British and, to a lesser extent, American publishing industries have historically exercised jurisdiction over cultural definitions of what 'properly' constitutes South African literature. The versions of 'South Africanness' which they construct are by no means ideologically innocent, as Laura Chrisman has argued, but work to consolidate the hegemony of a liberal white English identity. Focusing her attention on the promotion of local writers by mainstream publishing houses in the UK since the 1980s, Chrisman argues that South African writers have generally been appropriated by the British market to further the interests of a conservative, neocolonial agenda, which asserts the political, moral and intellectual authority of the erstwhile coloniser. During the apartheid years, this entailed the

deployment of a 'particular form of imperialist nostalgia' (110) which dissociated English colonial rule from the logic of racial oppression and '[installed] the empire as the lamented, rightful custodians of black development into political modernity' (110). The anti-apartheid struggle was, from this perspective, construed primarily as a liberal humanist endeavour with its philosophical roots situated firmly in the colonising metropole. Since the end of apartheid, however, the British market's identification with the ideals of anti-racist transformation in South Africa has waned, Chrisman argues, as its transition into a democratic state has been perceived as less than exemplary. She suggests that the current market has a predilection for politically sceptical works from South Africans, which demythologise emancipatory, nationalist ideals, in order to bolster a 'pessimistic version of metropolitan Englishness', characterised, 'not, as before, by its intellectual authority to lead anti-racist transformation, but instead by its superior knowledge of the futility of such a project' (119).

Chrisman's analysis suggests, then, that gaining accreditation as a noteworthy South African author entails negotiating the conservative values and neocolonial agendas which undergird the circuits of metropolitan validation. Her discussion resonates strongly with the work of a scholar like Graham Huggan, whose critique of the Booker Prize industry examines the modes of cultural imperialism which inform the accreditation and dissemination of postcolonial texts more broadly. Huggan argues that the award — through its invention of a 'postcolonial exotic' which commodifies cultural difference (28-33) — has secured England's cultural hegemony over its former colonies, despite the erosion of its political influence. Writers who earn recognition and prestige in this way are thus also often faced with the problem of accounting for their perceived complicity with the award's neocolonial values. Such tensions — as I explore in chapter five — have played out in the reception of *The Good*

Doctor, which, while earning Galgut considerable prestige, has also seen him accused as a cultural and political conservative, particularly from the perspective of local critics. Indeed, the demands imposed on local literary production directly from within the country have proven no less difficult for Galgut to negotiate than the vagaries of metropolitan accreditation — a point which is borne out with particular clarity by his early career history.

ii.

Galgut was born in South Africa's capital city, Pretoria, in 1963. His early childhood would be marked by his diagnosis with cancer at the age of six and the protracted period of treatment which followed. Interestingly, Galgut has spoken of his authorial vocation as partly having been a product of his illness and the therapeutic role which storytelling played during his long hours of convalescence: '[Writing] is a strange activity, a strange way to spend your day […] I think there's a direct psychological connection with being a sick child, and being read to' (qtd in Miller 142). He would recover to thrive, ostensibly, as an accomplished scholar during his school years. Indeed, by the time he made his career debut with *A Sinless Season* in 1982*,* he had already enjoyed most of the literary accolades which the South African schooling system of the time afforded. When he was head boy of Pretoria Boys' High School, his one-act play, *No 1 Utopia Lane*, won the Pretoria Play Festival for High Schools; he was placed third in the English Olympiad, a national competition which annually attracts hundreds of entrants, and won *The Star / Argus* newspapers' annual short story competition. It was judged by South African authors Marguerite Poland and André Brink, who described Galgut's entry as 'mature' and 'original', with a 'good balance of the narrative and the moral' (qtd in 'Damon's Entry').

After the success of *A Sinless Season,* Galgut's literary career seemed to develop steadily. By the time he was twenty, he was hired as the resident playwright for the Performing Arts Council of the Transvaal (PACT), in which capacity he saw several of his plays go into production. The plays provide some indication of the sheer breadth of Galgut's thematic interests at the time. Their contents ranged from the historical concerns of *Echoes of Anger,* which dramatised the life of the Russian mystic, Rasputin, to the intensely personal and corporeal interests of 'Alive and Kicking', which took the trials of male menopause as its central theme. In 1983, *Echoes of Anger* and *No 1 Utopia Lane* were published in a single volume by Jonathan Ball.

The many accolades which Galgut received in his youth, however, belied his pronounced sense of social marginalisation, as well as a deep distrust for the forms of institutional recognition which had helped to bolster his profile. In a 1995 interview with Marc Wilmot, he spoke openly about his struggle against the modes of indoctrination which characterised South Africa's apartheid-era schooling system and expressed deep regret about his attempts to conform to its puritanical norms:

> For a very long time I tried to believe that I could buy into the system. The head boy thing was a symbol of the person I was. For a long time I was living a lie […]. I tried to do what was required, to be the person, not that I was, but that I felt I needed to be. In retrospect I have been trying constantly to undo that. […] I see my writing as an act of sustained revenge — I am speaking to the person that I was — it is a revenge on my past and what I had become. (135)

In the same interview, Galgut linked the critical perspective he had since gained on the dominant system to his homosexuality, which had placed him directly at odds with the heteronormative white hegemony under which apartheid operated: 'I wouldn't change my sexuality for anything because to be gay immediately puts you in the position of the outsider, and I like that position […] If I had been a straight man born into society, there would have been a lot of things that would never have occurred to me, that I would never have questioned. It would never have occurred to me to resist' (134). His emphasis in the interview on the dangers of being unwittingly 'conscripted into a system' (135) clearly resonated, not only with his struggles against indoctrination at school, but also with his years of compulsory military service in the South African Defence Force (SADF), which he had completed shortly after the publication of *A Sinless Season* in 1982. Although no mention is made of his time in the SADF in the Wilmot interview, conscription would become a recurring theme in Galgut's writing and, as I explore in my analysis of *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* in chapter three, would draw his writing into an expressly political realm later on in his career.

Galgut's early works, however, did not overtly address his apartheid-era context, despite his obvious feeling of antagonism towards its oppressive machinations. They concentrated, instead, as I explore in chapters one and two, on expanding his authorial purview beyond his immediate context and testing the limits of his creative autonomy. This, in turn, would put him at odds with the oppositional imperatives of anti-apartheid writing and its hegemonic investment in forms of politically engaged realism, as I elucidate below. As a young writer, then, Galgut would come to feel himself twice alienated: first, from the draconian society into which he had been born, and second, from an inflexible oppositional culture which, he felt,

circumscribed his creative autonomy. Yet, despite his claims that he was content to 'remain an outsider' who actively resisted 'buying into the beliefs, values and thoughts of a system, any system' (qtd in Wilmot 134), he would nonetheless go to some lengths to try to reconcile his early writing with the oppositional practices of anti-apartheid literary culture and thus make his work available to the ethico-political debates which dominated South African literary studies at the time. His efforts to do so evince Galgut's awareness that 'an important influence upon the classification of creative projects as legitimate endeavours is the objectification achieved by criticism' (Jenkins 135). The rhetorical manoeuvres involved in attracting serious scholarly attention evince his implicit understanding of the peculiar logic which structured the field of South African literature during apartheid and made definitions of cultural legitimacy inseparable from an author's demonstrable commitment to the 'real'.

iii.

In Bourdieu's formulation, the literary field does not characteristically possess a high degree of authority in mediating knowledge and power *across* other fields. Journalism, on the other hand, is situated at the 'heteronomous pole' of cultural production, where it occupies a 'pivotal role […] in circulating to a wider audience the knowledge of other, more specialised fields' (Garman 77). It thus possesses a marked degree of social power and authority in constructing the dominant and 'legitimate social vision' (Garman 77) of a particular socio-historical context. In the context of cultural production in apartheid South Africa, however, the field dynamics which Bourdieu identifies were significantly complicated by the machinations of state censorship, which interfered with the logic under which the field of literature and journalism both conventionally operate. Ironically, the state control exercised

over the dissemination of South African literary works accorded the field far greater social power than it would ordinarily possess, confirming, as it did, literature's interventionist and oppositional potential. Conversely, the state control of the media worked to delegitimise the journalistic field, which derives its social power from its claims to political objectivity. This produced a curious reversal, in which cultural commentators frequently looked to literature and not journalism for the 'legitimate social vision' of apartheid South Africa. In this formulation, the literary text assumed — as Louise Bethlehem has noted in her keen analysis of South African literary culture under apartheid — a 'vatic' power, often reinforced by the 'shamanistic' comments of South African writers themselves (Bethlehem 94). Nadine Gordimer's caveat to her 1982 James Lecture to the New York Institute for Humanities provides a representative instance: 'Nothing I say here will be as true as my fiction'.

Of particular significance for my discussion is Bethlehem's argument that these claims to the referential authority of the literary text were instrumental in securing writers and critics alike a 'vicarious form' (96) of socio-political agency and ethical legitimacy. Her study shows how a specular or 'stenographic' (Bethlehem 94) understanding of literary mimesis was regularly invoked in literary discourses under apartheid, in order to dispel the hermetic or self-referential tendencies of fictional discourse and, instead, insist upon its potential to expose hitherto censored socio-political 'truths'. This rhetorical manoeuvre — which Bethlehem terms the 'trope-of-truth' — granted the writer and critic a form of socio-political agency, equipped to use literature as a 'weapon' against apartheid. It also required them — with no small degree of urgency — to *exercise* this power, in order to 'effect' socio-political change. This arrangement, in its most stringent form, constructed a clear binary between literature's aesthetic and political functions and required the writer to subordinate the former to the latter

in no uncertain terms. Bethlehem notes that this 'rhetoric of urgency' (96), through which literature was required to forfeit its 'properly literary status' (97), was a predominant feature of black South African literary discourse, but was certainly not absent from debates amongst their white contemporaries. It primarily manifested within white literary discourse, she argues, as an 'anxiety concerning escapism' (101) because of the structurally contradictory position of the white liberal writer, whose position of privilege in the apartheid state rendered them vulnerable to charges of political complicity. In this context, the notion of urgency was regularly 'called into play to close the gap between commitment to the "greater human cause" and its textual articulation' (101), once again imbuing the writer with socio-political agency. In both articulations, the rhetoric of urgency promoted a commitment to the tenets of a narrowly conceived mode of documentary realism, which elided the forms of mediation between (literary) word and (political) world.

South African literary scholarship under apartheid was not, of course, devoid of scepticism towards such notions as the existence and recoverability of an objective, historical truth or ignorant about the discursive codes which mediate between literary constructs and socio-historical realities. Nor was it wholly accepting of the wedge which the more radical proponents of protest literature drove between aesthetic concerns and political commitment. Indeed, the important contributions of scholars like Lewis Nkosi and Njabulo Ndebele, who criticised the formal impoverishment of much of the political realism that was being produced by black writers, evince the extent to which the binary logic perpetuated by the 'rhetoric of urgency' was subjected to critical doubt. The extent of the efforts made to gauge the precise nature of the relationship between socio-political reality and the novel is particularly evident in the reception of J.M. Coetzee's early writing, which generated strongly

dissenting positions regarding the absorption of novelistic into historical discourses and yielded a number of theoretically rigorous *ripostes* to uninterrogated assumptions about the operations of literary mimesis.[3] The significant point is not that writers and scholars were unaware of literature's mediatory function or of the contested nature of historical 'truth', but that — because the ethical value of literature was conceived in primarily referential terms — this knowledge had to be strategically repressed by agents wishing to accord literature, as David Attwell eloquently phrased it, 'an achieved political potency' (ctd in Bethlehem 105).

That Galgut was keenly attuned to these debates and the constraints they placed on the representational modes available to the South African writer is suggested by a 1989 lecture, which he delivered to the National Reading Circle in Welkom, entitled 'Reality and the Novel'. The talk — which would later be published as an essay in the South African literary journal, *New Contrast* — attempts to critique and enlarge the dominant understanding of politically responsible writing under apartheid, in order to defend himself against accusations of 'avoiding socio-political issues, of writing about personal obsessions that have nothing to do with the country at large' ('Reality and the Novel' 53). As its title implies, the lecture examines the nature of novelistic referentiality and reveals Galgut's considerable unease with the reification of fictional discourse under apartheid. He begins with a pointed reminder that tries to divest the novel of its mimetic burden:

> The novel is fiction. It deals with an imaginary story and imaginary people, often in locations that are imaginary too. Unlike biography or journalism, it does not purport to show us lives or events that have any basis in reality. By

[3] See, for example, David Attwell, 'The Problem of History in the Fiction of J.M. Coetzee'.

definition, it is unreal. (51)

This opening claim is quickly supplemented by the apparently 'paradoxical' (51) idea that, '[o]n another level, the novel is purely and absolutely about the real […] The only reason we read novels is because they have some kind of bearing on our lives' (51). Galgut tries to upset specular understandings of literary mimesis and suggests, instead, that the relationship between fiction and reality is transformative, mutable and even contradictory; that it may be characterised by alienation and displacement, rather than fidelity: 'It is a mistake to believe that only overtly political novels reflect this country. Even books that attempt *not* to deal with "relevant" issues are a reflection of politics — after all, a refusal to face up to realities is part and parcel of our daily lives here' (53). He argues, too, that this relationship is no less apparent in the surrealism of a writer like Samuel Beckett than it is in the critical realism of Nadine Gordimer:

> In the books of each writer, there is a sense of a created world, a world with its own laws, behaviours, possibilities. Gordimer's world is recognisably closer to the one we live in, inasmuch as it is dealing with the people and places we know. She writes about South Africa, and her themes are the themes of South African life […]. By contrast, we can recognise few external landmarks in Samuel Beckett's world […]. Our world does not seem like his world; but, somehow, we know this place too. Beckett writes of an inner landscape, removed from the material plane. And this, says Beckett, is reality: people living alone. Nadine Gordimer and Samuel Beckett: each is writing deeply out of themselves; out of their own sense of what it means to

> be alive. In many ways, their visions seem diametrically opposed. But they don't cancel each other out. We can relate to each reality, because it is true. (52)

Galgut makes his argument here in the dominant terms of South African literary discourse under apartheid: namely, through recourse to the notion of literary 'truth-telling'. His primary objective is to expand the stylistic and generic choices that can effect such 'truth-telling' to include non-realist modes of signification: 'Novels that are apparently steeped in the fantastic, the surreal, the impossible, are dealing as much with reality as those that are concerned with politics and pain' (53). Although he claims to have chosen Gordimer and Beckett 'at random' (52), they are by no means incidental case studies. Gordimer, as 'that most canonical and paradigmatic of South Africa's white literary opponents of apartheid' (Bethlehem 100), provided the measure against which the ethical value of white South African writing in English was regularly judged, while the gestures of alienation and estrangement, which characterise Beckett's writing, represent a literary sensibility that is, arguably, closer to Galgut's own. As I explore in chapters three and four of this study, they represent extreme versions of two literary approaches that he would experiment with and try to reconcile in the years to come; that is, a politically engaged realism and an austere, even surrealist expressionism. In reconciling both their approaches to a paradigm of ethical literary truth-telling, he tacitly makes a case for the legitimacy of his own creative pursuits in the context of apartheid South Africa.

'Reality and the Novel' thus represents Galgut's attempt to enter directly into the debates which had preoccupied scholarship about apartheid South Africa's most noteworthy authors

and contribute his own theory about the exact operations of fictional reference. He clearly rejects the Aristotelean notion of mimesis as being the mere 'imitation of action', but does not go so far as to endorse the poststructuralist tendency to 'conflate fictionality with a general notion of narrativity that encompasses nonfictional narrative' (Walsh 110). Nor does he appear to support the controversial claim made by Coetzee, in the same year, that rivalry characterises the relationship between the discourses of history and fiction.[4] He appears, instead, to be in search of a model of literary mimesis that protects the generic integrity of fiction, without diminishing its historical and political valency.

In the paradox which Galgut detects in fiction's simultaneous autonomy from and imbrication with our understanding of the 'real', I would suggest that his understanding of literary mimesis comes close to the 'tripartite' model advanced by Paul Ricoeur. In *Time and Narrative* (vol.1), Ricoeur argues that mimesis is comprised of three stages or 'moments', which he terms 'prefiguration', 'configuration' and 'transfiguration' (53). Prefiguration consists of the pre-existing knowledge and competencies which we bring to narrative, while transfiguration denotes the reception of the work, as shaped by the interpretative activity of the reader. Importantly, configuration refuses the status of mimesis as imitation and mediates between the notion of fictional autonomy on the one hand and its historicity on the other. As Richard Walsh explains, configuration 'is not the reproduction of something already given but creative production: it doesn't operate ahistorically, but paradigmatically, allowing for the possibility of innovation or derivation from narrative norms within a context of [what Ricoeur calls] "rule governed deformation"' (Walsh 118).

[4] See Coetzee, 'The Novel Today'.

Ricoeur's model, then, conceives of the relationship between narrative and temporal reality as a matter of coherence rather than equivalence. This accords with Galgut's claim that 'all literature is a record of its time' ('Reality and the Novel' 53), regardless of its recognisable correspondence with the world we inhabit. Ricoeur's model, however, implies a further dimension, which helps to account for the difficulty Galgut experienced in his efforts to legitimise his literary pursuits: namely, that mimesis does not solely describe the representational decisions of the author, but is, instead, the product of a negotiation 'between the fundamentally conservative forces of prefiguration and transfiguration, and the innovative faculty of configuration' (Walsh 119). In this model, the interpretative activity of the reader does not occur at a remove from the text itself; it is neither simply descriptive nor diagnostic, but actively inscribes the communicative possibilities of the creative work. Because these forces were especially inflexible in the context of anti-apartheid literary culture, they would result in the 'transfiguration' of Galgut's intense portraits of the trials of maturation and individuation into thin allegories of larger historical processes; significantly, even by his own account of the ethico-political relevance of his writing, as I demonstrate in the chapters which follow.

CHAPTER ONE

A Sinless Season and the Crime of Escapism

In her effusive review of *A Sinless Season* (1982), Stephanie Von Hirschberg claimed that 'Damon Galgut must be one of the most promising literary discoveries in South Africa' who, judging by the merits of his authorial debut, would likely go on to 'produce a succession of books that will set him high in the ranks of our country's literary aristocracy'. Her enthusiasm was shared by Barry Ronge, who hailed the novel's publication as 'a significant event' which 'marks its young author as a force to be reckoned with in the future'. The fairly sizeable local readership which it attracted further underscored its positive reception: it apparently 'proved so successful', as Ingrid Nortin noted in her feature on Galgut for *The Star* newspaper in 1984, that it warranted a second printing by Jonathan Ball, its original South African publisher, before it was distributed in the American and British markets by Penguin and Viking respectively.[5] Upon its publication in the United States in 1985, the novel was favourably reviewed by Kem Nunn in the prestigious *New York Times Book Review*, who agreed that the 'young South African author [was] someone to watch' (7).

Given South Africa's strongly politicised literary culture and the urgency with which it behoved local writers to engage with their socio-political context, the positive reception of *A Sinless Season* seems, in retrospect, surprising, as the novel bears none of the hallmarks of engaged anti-apartheid writing. It is, instead, a 'kind of Gothic murder mystery', as Nunn described it (7), which tells the story of three friends — Scott Berry, Raoul Dean and Joseph Hamilton — who are sent to a reform school in a remote coastal town after committing a

[5] My citations in this chapter refer to the 1982 edition published by Jonathan Ball.

series of petty offences. Joseph, the meekest of the trio, is murdered shortly after their arrival, setting in motion a macabre plot in which Scott and Raoul will discover their own capacity for brutality and betrayal. Entwined in the torsions of the murder mystery narrative is an exploration of the repressed and aggressive sexual energies of the boys who attend Bleda Reformatory, giving the lie to its civilised and orderly veneer. As a strongly anti-realist text, *A Sinless Season* combines the prep school novel's characteristic focus on the trials of psycho-sexual maturation against a backdrop of institutionalised discipline and control with the portentousness of the metaphysical detective story, whose protagonists — as Michael Holquist memorably phrases it — typically 'wish to solve the crime of their own existence' (154).

The enthusiastic reception of *A Sinless Season,* while probably at least partially attributable to the novelty of its author's youth, also suggests that a market did exist — both locally and internationally — for works by South African authors which lacked direct engagement with the political reality of apartheid; a point perhaps more convincingly borne out by the enormous success of a writer like Wilbur Smith. I suspect that it was, however, precisely within such company that the young Galgut was deeply reluctant to be cast, as it would — by associating him with forms of popular escapism deemed reprehensible from the hegemonic perspective of anti-apartheid literary culture — discount him from consideration as a 'serious' South African author. Indeed, his real anxiety about being charged with the 'crime of escapism' — to borrow Louise Bethlehem's term (100) — is apparent in 'Reality and the Novel', a short essay in which Galgut, as I outlined in the introduction, sought to demonstrate the political commitment of his work, despite its ostensible disengagement from the immediate exigencies of his socio-historical context. Claiming that a metonymic relationship

exists between the many aspects of 'our South African reality' (54), Galgut argues that his exploration of repressed homosexuality in *A Sinless Season* constitutes a critique of the 'Calvinist morality' (54) that undergirds both homophobia and racism. His defence of the novel is worth quoting in more detail, demonstrating, as it does, the extent of his conviction that it represented a principled critique of apartheid South Africa:

> There is nothing clearly political in this story. The ultimate crime: there is no mention of black people at all. It would be easy to dismiss this story as irrelevant in socio-political terms. Let us look at this more closely.
>
> In my view, apartheid is a very male mythology. Common values tend to cluster together in any ideology, and there are strong, vital links between things such as racism and sexism. From there it is but a short jump to homophobia, with all that that implies. […] In light of this, my story can be read entirely differently. One cannot speak about sexual taboos in a boarding school in Johannesburg without speaking of all that lies behind those taboos. There are no clear edges to our South African reality, beyond which things become irrelevant. In reality, everything is linked. And if you write about one thing, you are writing of many others. It is short sighted to believe differently. (53-4)

Galgut is not, of course, incorrect that strong connections exist between racial, gendered and sexual prejudices, but these connections are not delineated in *A Sinless Season.* Unlike *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs,* the novel does not explore the politicisation of homosexuality in the context of apartheid South Africa, but, instead, quite explicitly dehistoricises its drama of

psycho-sexual maturation. Indeed, as I explore in this chapter, *A Sinless Season* evinces, in intriguing ways, a young author concerned with extending his authorial purview beyond the immediate imperatives of anti-apartheid writing and claiming for himself a place within a larger and more worldly literary tradition. It is significant that 'Reality and the Novel' should so emphatically represent the opposing imperative, suggesting, as it does, the extent to which Galgut would, in the early years of his career, come to internalise the criteria which anti-apartheid literary culture — and its coercive 'rhetoric of urgency' — set for the serious and principled South African writer. In my reading of the novel, I argue that *A Sinless Season* asks to be taken seriously, not as a veiled socio-political critique, but as an ethical drama which concerns itself with a series of weighty moral conundrums which Galgut positions as transhistorical in their scope. That he would feel compelled to prove a work of such obvious moral seriousness innocent of the 'crime of escapism' is indeed telling of the peculiar strain of coming of age as a young writer in the context of apartheid South Africa's strongly proscriptive literary culture.

1.1.

Upon its publication, *A Sinless Season* invited numerous comparisons with William Golding's *The Lord of the Flies* for its exploration of 'the evil that boys do', to borrow the title of Nunn's review. Like Golding, Galgut suggests that the potential for brutality exists in children and adults alike and that youth cannot be read as a symbol of innocence or purity. Given certain catalysts, the 'gentlemanly' scholars of Bleda Reformatory engage in acts of arson, animal abuse, rape and murder, only to emerge afterwards with their masks of innocent civility firmly affixed. The novel, importantly, is less concerned with the moral nature of the

acts themselves than it is in the position from which they are judged. Its focus, in other words, is on the ethical code which informs moral judgments. In their various meditations on the nature of sin, the boys at the reformatory question the criteria which distinguish virtue from vice and much of the novel's philosophical drama concerns Scott's apprehension of the ontological uncertainty which attends these categories. Discovering that no external, transcendental measure of morality exists, he is confronted with the problem of moral relativism and its potential to sanction nihilism and anarchy.

Bleda, the name of the reformatory, foreshadows the many acts of violence and betrayal which ensue as the boys discover the arbitrariness and inadequacy of their traditional moral codes. The historical Bleda was co-ruler of the Hun Kingdom with his younger brother, Attila, a figure who takes on special significance in Scott's philosophical reflections on the nature of good and evil. Speculation about the reasons behind the demise of the brothers' joint leadership varies from theories about Bleda's willing abdication to his assassination by Attila, but, given the novel's gothic tenor and its thematic interest in the limits of loyalty and solidarity, it is clear that Galgut had the latter version of the mythologised history in mind. As the mystery behind Joseph's murder unfolds, Scott becomes both victim and perpetrator in a series of brutal acts, which not only call into question the nature of sin, but also express the macabre suspicion that emotional and intellectual maturation inexorably entails some form of violent betrayal.

Galgut sets Bleda Reformatory in the greater 'New Baytown' area, a fictionalised locale which he significantly obscures when he describes the novel's setting as a 'boarding school in Johannesburg' in the above quote from 'Reality and the Novel'. Only the novel's peripheral

action, which comprises a series of flashbacks from the boys' first meetings, is, in fact, set in Johannesburg, thus presenting us with a double, superimposed vision of two worlds — one which is historically and geographically verifiable, while the other is mysteriously 'elsewhere'. Like the Johannesburg setting, the two dated headings which bookend the novel also promote verisimilitude, by fixing its temporal setting between 19 January and 13 March 1961.[6] The intervening plot, however, is abstracted from these precise dates to the extent that they seem to be, upon completion of the novel, entirely arbitrary; indeed, no other reference is made to this pointedly evoked socio-historical context. These spatiotemporal displacements, through which the reader is first promised and then denied a mode of realist engagement, are, I would argue, by no means accidental, but are pointed attempts to mitigate the text's saturation by the overdetermined apartheid-era context of its production. They suggest that Galgut was already, at this early stage of his career, keenly attuned to the mimetic burden which anti-apartheid literary culture placed on the South African novelist and was concerned with discovering the representational strategies through which he might secure himself a degree of creative autonomy from its Procrustean imperatives. In *A Sinless Season,* he gestures towards the hegemony of realism in South African literature, only to turn his back on it and quite boldly stake his claim to alternative modes of fictional engagement.

The combination of real and fictionalised time-space thus produces an unstable chronotope — to borrow the Bakhtinian term which links spatiotemporal configurations within texts to the historical conditions from which they emerge (Bakhtin 85) — which inhibits a strictly historicist reading of the novel. If *A Sinless Season* dramatises the coming of age of a young

[6] The dates which Galgut chose were, indeed, historically significant, in that they marked the months during which the change to South Africa's status from a union to a republic was taking place. South Africa was declared a republic on 31 May 1961, following a referendum held amongst white voters the previous October.

South African boy, its indeterminate chronotope allows Galgut to signal that Scott is not only South African and that his moral and metaphysical trials also belong to a larger philosophical and literary history. This point is also repeatedly underscored in his many allusions to Attila and Bleda, which provide a transhistorical perspective on the moral quandaries that the novel dramatises. Attila, in particular, is an ongoing point of reference in Scott's struggle to define his own ethical code. He is the subject of a heated exchange early in the novel between Scott, Raoul and Anthony Lord, an established border at the reformatory, who is reading a book entitled, 'In Defence of Attila'; a title which confounds Scott's naïve and unambiguous sense of morality: '"But [Attila] was evil," Scott cried. "He killed men and he was evil"' (30). In his cool response that Attila was 'just a man' and perhaps only 'a victim of himself' (30), Anthony presents Scott with an ambivalent ethical code, which rejects judgments based on binary conceptions of good and evil. He challenges Scott to examine the premise from which his unambiguous pronouncements are made and suggests that true morality begins with introspection.

In his interactions with Anthony, Scott is presented, for the first time, with the unsettling prospect of undecidability; that moral judgments cannot be passed, in other words, without enduring uncertainty and contradiction, however unendurable this experience will likely prove. Galgut, as I elucidate in more detail below, positions Anthony's undecidable ethical code — which insists on the irreducible singularity of every ethical decision — as the responsible alternative to the naïvety of moral heteronomy on the one hand and the anarchy of moral relativism on the other. In this way, the novel endorses — albeit in a fairly rudimentary way — a 'postmodern ethics', to borrow Zygmunt Bauman's term from his study of the same name, which argues for a conception of morality that is attuned to its

inexorable ambivalence and non-rationalism. Drawing primarily from the philosophy of Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas, Bauman attempts to install ambiguity and contradiction as the philosophical premise for morality: 'The moral self moves, feels and acts in the context of ambivalence and is shot through with uncertainty. Hence the ambiguity-free situation has solely an utopian existence […but is] not a realistic target of ethical practice' (Bauman 11). In awakening Scott to the irresolvable encounter with ambivalence which moral responsibility entails, Anthony becomes for him the very embodiment of the unconventional ethics which he preaches: 'Scott met the unfathomable gaze of Anthony Lord, who sat, cross-legged and cross-armed, on his bed, above, below, and beyond decency or corruption, friendliness or hostility' (45). Yet, despite Anthony's advocacy of an introspective and independently reasoned ethics, his Buddah-like pose (mentioned at several points in the narrative)[7] and imposing surname suggest that he becomes, for Scott, a figure of moral and intellectual authority.

The debate over 'In Defence of Attila' immediately precedes the discovery of Joseph's bloodied corpse, which sets in motion a series of events that will test the viability of Anthony's ethical argument. The discovery is made by Raoul and Scott in a scenario which has all the hallmarks of the classic Gothic tale: an innocent journey turns into a surreal nightmare as the boys descend the bluffs of Bleda in search of belongings left on the beach that afternoon. The environment becomes increasingly menacing as dusk falls; the wind 'shriek[s] in the blackness' (35), while the thick foliage comes to resemble a 'thickly fanged' mouth (35) as the 'ghostly' and 'soulless' (34) light retreats. After the horrific discovery of

[7] I suspect that Galgut had the morally ambivalent Marlow of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* in mind in his characterisation of Anthony, but the latter is too thinly sketched to fully support the comparison.

Joseph's body, described as 'a gory, staring face of wide eyes and broken teeth' (39), the stylised Gothicism of the passage gives way to a focus on the internal anguish of Scott, who is left with a series of painful questions about mortality and the apparent purposelessness of life:

> This blindness, to Scott, was no more than a physical extension of all inner nullity. One exists, while others cease. Intimations of immortality. Death. The taking and extinguishing; the ending and passing; the no longer and never; dust and ashes. Where was Joseph now? (44)

This thematic focus on Scott's internal anguish reveals that Galgut's interests extended well beyond the melodramatic excesses and plot involutions of the conventional murder mystery to include the more portentous preoccupations of metaphysical crime writing; a genre which resists the conclusiveness of its traditional antecedent 'with the intention, or at least the effect, of asking questions about mysteries of being and knowing which transcend the mere machinations of the mystery plot' (Marivale and Sweeney 2). As Patricia Marivale and Susan Sweeney explain, in metaphysical crime fiction, the rationalism of the traditional detective plot — which makes death explicable and life's mysteries resolvable — gives way to 'unfathomable ontological and epistemological questions: What, if anything, can be known? What, if anything, is real?' (4; see also Holquist 153). For Galgut, who returns to the genre in three subsequent novels — *The Quarry, The Good Doctor* and *The Impostor* — the metaphysical crime thriller provides a peculiarly apposite way to pose intense questions about the limits of knowledge and the nature of subjectivity in a form which, nonetheless, foregrounds and exploits textual artifice to create drama, tension and mystery.

Joseph's murder unleashes the primal anarchism of the scholars at the reformatory: Raoul's rape follows the murder and later, the headmaster, Mr Hall, is targeted in a series of cruel attacks, which shatter the sense of 'homeliness' (8) he had attempted to foster at Bleda. In an act of vengeance, Raoul murders Spencer Hardy, the boy he accuses of Joseph's murder, but who is also, the narrator implies, an agent in his ritual violation. Finally, Raoul turns on Scott and threatens his life, before running away from Bleda, in an attempt to escape prosecution. These acts are narrated in such a way as to support Anthony's understanding of moral ambivalence and undecidability; in each case, judgment is complicated by the fact that the boys are implicated in each other's acts of cruelty to produce a vicious cycle of victimisation and vengeance. Moreover, at a psychological level, the narrative gestures towards masochistic and sadistic impulses, which further confound any unambiguous definitions of victim and violator. Raoul's rape, for example, is narrated in terms which suggest the co-existence of a consciously-enacted resistance and a subconscious, masochistic submission:

> Nothing prevented [Raoul] crying out but the sound would not fall from his tongue […] Moving down the shallow steps from the cloakroom door, he realized with an immediate giddiness that his lack of resistance was not wholly motivated by fear or even confusion, but in itself constituted a fascinated curiosity about the reason for this abduction. Rough once more, the fingers spidered down his shirt buttons and his pyjama top was wrenched from him. Then the hands dropped, and, reacting for the first time, Raoul clutched at his pants. But his grip was prised effortlessly free and as he was hurled violently down onto the tiles Raoul felt his last protection stripped

away with a tiny piece of cloth. He was, in every applicable sense of the word, naked.

Still, he did not cry out. (53-4)[8]

Later, when Mr Hall's daughter, Adelle, is caught in a barbed wire trap after an illicit meeting with Raoul and Scott, both boys, we are told, are beset by the 'arcane suggestion posed in their circumstances' (100). While Raoul takes advantage of her helplessness, Scott looks on 'hypnotised with perverse fascination' (100). Although Scott breaks free from this trance to help Adelle, he recognises in himself the sadistic pleasure he derived from her defencelessness; a recognition which denies him any feelings of moral goodness which might otherwise ensue from the rescue. In an atavistic image, Scott 'crawl[s] away' from the scene, 'knowing why he had been afraid earlier. This was a night of revelations. Adelle had freed herself from the wire, but for him there could be no escape' (102). Anthony's suicide follows shortly after this encounter and represents a final loss of innocence, leaving Scott with the nihilistic desire for self-destruction: '[H]e had just lost all that was beautiful and good, and he had nothing left, nothing and he wanted death' (120).

1.2.

By the end of the narrative, then, both Scott and Raoul have passed through a series of moral crises which finally make any categorical distinction between good and evil untenable for both boys. For Raoul, the collapse of moral categories produces a void out of which no

[8] For a Foucauldian reading of the rape as a product of institutionalised forms of discipline and control, see Woods 168-9. See also de Waal, 'A Thousand Forms of Love', 237.

judgments can be made: ‘There’s no such thing as judgin’ or fairness in this place. We just do things to each other, that’s all. We do things because of the way we feel inside, an’ we hurt each other ... but we don’t judge things!’ (165). Scott, the more introspective and intellectual of the two boys, tries to be less despairing about the possibilities for moral reasoning and attempts to find an alternative philosophy which does not equate ambivalence with nihilism. If no distinction can be made between ‘bearing the burden of evil and that of good’ (169), Scott imagines that it is finally through the recognition of an inescapable suffering that affirmation can be found: ‘Scott had seen evil in Raoul, but he knew that there had been none. He had seen evil *and* suffering in his world, but no longer. There was only suffering’ (169; original emphasis). It is through the acknowledgement of their shared suffering that Scott is able to reconcile the two antithetical figures in his life, Raoul and Anthony, and invest their tragedies with some moral significance:

> And — a slow dawning to him — he had realized that, ultimately, there was no real difference between Raoul Dean and Anthony Lord […] Each had been primarily concerned with wringing from every instant of existence the orgasmic fulfilment of the purest emotion, of pleasure, of pain. Yes — each had suffered what to him was nothing less than agony (what is the distinction between bearing the burden of evil and that of good?). Each had been consumed beyond his control in the heat of his own pain. (169)

In his efforts to ascribe suffering a positive moral value, Scott is reminiscent of the protagonist of Wordsworth’s dramatic verse tragedy *The Borderers*, the work from which *A Sinless Season* takes its epigraph. Wordsworth’s poem dramatises the murder of a guiltless

man, Herbert, through the machinations of Oswald, the play's Romantic hero-villain. Like Scott, Oswald endures a moral crisis — which, in his case, concerns his unwitting murder of an innocent man — after which he comes to reject a traditional, binary understanding of good and evil. He undertakes to teach Marmaduke, the leader of an outlaw forest band, the same lesson. Oswald reveals to Marmaduke his own capacity for cruelty by manipulating him into the murder of Herbert, after which he instructs him, in the section of the poem which Galgut chose for his epigraph, that:

> Action is transitory – a step, a blow,
> The motion of a muscle — this way or that —
> 'Tis done, and in the after-vacancy
> We wonder at ourselves like men betrayed:
> Suffering is permanent, obscure and dark,
> And shares the nature of infinity.
> (*The Borderers* l.1539 – 1544) (*A Sinless Season* epigraph)

Marmaduke's actions, Oswald points out, cannot be seen to be motivated by either unambiguous virtue or vice. His murder of Herbert was predicated upon his conviction (instilled by Oswald) that Herbert represented a threat to his men and thus the murder represented a 'necessary evil'. Once the manipulation becomes apparent, Marmaduke is forced to face his own moral fallibility and can no longer redeem his actions through recourse to the notion of a greater good. Like Raoul, Marmaduke comes to 'despair of all moral reasoning' (Thorslev 85), but Oswald assures him that heroism can be achieved through suffering: 'Great actions move our admiration, chiefly / Because they carry in themselves an

earnest / That we can suffer greatly' (l.1536-1538). Oswald argues that suffering is 'permanent'; in other words, it transcends human limitations to partake of 'the nature of infinity'. As such, he considers it to be a greater measure of man's worth than his transitory actions, informed, as they are, by innumerable vicissitudes.

It is clear that Galgut tried to borrow the moral framework of *The Borderers*, in order to work through the problems of ethical undecidability in *A Sinless Season.* In both texts, the realisation that no objective or immutable measure of morality exists entails suffering for the protagonists, which, in turn, is figured as man's only redemption in a labile world. The crucial difference between these two texts appears to be in the apparent end result of this line of thinking. Wordsworth builds into his dramatic poem a pointed critique of the undecidable ethical code outlined above. In the absence of a transcendental and unambiguous moral framework, Oswald releases himself of all traditional values and, as Peter Thorslev has pointed out, 'comes to the philosophical conclusion that all morals are relative and that the end of freedom justifies any means' (90). After prolonged intellectual suffering, Oswald finally claims a perilous freedom, which not only releases him from condemnation for his own crime, but which he also uses to manipulate others into acts of murder and betrayal. By positioning a nihilistic and anarchic relativism as the end result of Oswald's encounter with moral ambivalence, Wordsworth appears to reject an undecidable ethical code as a viable philosophical means of confronting the moral world. *A Sinless Season,* on the other hand, appears to endorse this code. Scott's recognition of man's irreducible moral complexity facilitates his intellectual and psychological maturation rather than his descent into nihilism:

> [Scott's] weariness was the end result of more than simply a bodily exhaustion: his mind, in reaching a deeper understanding of himself and his circumstances, had drained itself of thought and emotion. He retained now a conscious knowledge that, perhaps, he had always had inside.
>
> He knew who Attila was. (168)

By the end of the narrative, Scott's suffering has instilled in him a greater capacity for empathy: he is unable to condemn either Anthony or Raoul for their respective acts of suicide and murder and, instead, consciously endeavours to understand the 'agony' (147) upon which these acts were predicated. In his ability to accommodate the inherently non-rational character of morality and to tolerate the ontological uncertainty which this scheme entails, Scott appears to be, in Bauman's terms, the exemplary 'moral self facing up, without being tempted to escape, to the inherent and incurable ambivalence […] which is already its fate' (15). In terms of the novel's metaphorical scheme, the growth of his moral imagination is signalled by his empathetic reinterpretation of Attila, not as an evil man, but, finally, as 'the corroding, unchanging, faceless suffering of the human heart' (169).

The novel's dramatic plot twist, however, restores the congruity between Scott and Wordsworth's Oswald and complicates the novel's stance on the viability of an undecidable ethical code. Scott admits to Raoul that he murdered Joseph and lays his fate in the former's hands. Raoul, who is about the be arrested for the murder of Spencer Hardy, can either reveal Scott's crimes — and bind Scott's future to his own — or keep his secret and secure his freedom. Scott's fate remains unresolved and the novel concludes in the impasse of Raoul's

decision-making. Retrospectively, we can identify Scott's apprehension of ethical ambivalence (as articulated in Anthony's reflections on Attila) as the catalyst for the dangerous shift in his consciousness, which ultimately results in murder. This point is explicitly articulated during Raoul and Scott's night-time journey to the beach at the beginning of the narrative:

> Somewhere, somehow, maybe as Raoul thumbed the cyclops stare of the torch into the night, or as Scott denounced Attila as evil by his actions, the awakening took place without the awareness of those who stood under its sway. For here, for now, the madness is begun. (13)

By situating murder as the product of a world-view stripped of moral certainty, *A Sinless Season* appears to concur with *The Borderers* that the non-rational character of morality can only end in abject violence. The individual, it seems, is unable to successfully navigate the metaphysical and ontological void left after the collapse of traditional, binaristic moral schemes, and is left, instead, at the mercy of an 'awakened insanity' (*A Sinless Season* 33).

Despite its dire outcome, *A Sinless Season* indicates that such an awakening is an unavoidable part of intellectual maturation. The development of the mind, the novel suggests, involves the mutilation of innocence which characterises the so-called 'natural' self. In this regard, *A Sinless Season* shares with *The Borderers* the '[dark] intuition', as Geoffrey Hartman phrases it, 'that the mind of man may generically be linked to death' (761). It is through murder that Scott comes into full consciousness of his autonomy; that is, he understands his capacity to reject extrinsic ethical duties and to reason *and* act outside of

conventional moral codes. At the end of the novel, it is in his capacity for self-analysis that Galgut attempts to redeem Scott, who admits that feelings of painful jealousy motivated him to murder Joseph:

> Scott relives for one ghastly minute the fragmentation of his soul as he propelled Joseph from the brink. He lives, too, that deeper level of pain. The years and years of possessing jealousy, his violent resentment of Joseph, his own fanatical devotion to Raoul. He tastes the bitter culmination of fury as he sees Joseph's figure against the cliff edge and knows the opportunity to a life alone with the one person he has been unable to leave behind through time. Raoul. But in the end, it all comes back to the pain: the pain inside. That is the only 'why' that is important. (171-2)

Scott's confession is not altogether convincing — indeed, the revelation of his obsession with Raoul seems factitious, given his infatuation with Anthony — but it is, nonetheless, the solution which the novel offers to the ethical drama staged in the narrative. After enduring the anarchism born out of the collapse of moral heteronomy, Scott, in a final reversal which once again restores the novel's faith in the viability of ethical undecidability, has developed an autonomous sense of moral responsibility, articulated in terms of a restored loyalty and devotion to Raoul. The final interaction between Scott and Raoul gestures towards a Levinasian scheme, in which Scott positions himself in an unequal relationship to Raoul, in whose hands Scott has left his fate:

> Scott has told Raoul that he will never leave him, but the choice, now, is Raoul's. And Raoul knows it. If he says nothing to anybody about the black garment, then Scott is free. Free to find his chains. If he tells what he knows, then Scott will be with Raoul forever. Free also — in spite of bars — because they are friends. And that is all that matters. (171)

Scott articulates his devotion to Raoul in terms that are not predicated on reciprocation; whatever Raoul's final decision, their friendship will endure. In this regard, he fulfils Levinas's criteria for 'being *for*' the Other, which entails a disregard of 'whether the Other is for me or not' (Bauman 50). For Bauman, following Levinas, this 'asymmetry' is one of the defining traits of a moral stance: 'Moral stance begets an essentially *unequal* relationship; this inequality, non-equity, this not-asking-for-reciprocation, this disinterest in mutuality, this indifference to the "balancing up" of gains or rewards — in short, this organically unbalanced and hence non-reversible character of "I versus the Other" relationship is what makes the encounter a moral event' (Bauman 48; original emphasis). According to these criteria, Scott re-emerges as a 'moral' character at the end of the novel; safeguarding the destructive potential of his autonomy by 'being for' Raoul rather than for himself.

On one level, then, *A Sinless Season* might be read as a kind of ethical mimesis, in which Galgut dramatises the intellectual labour entailed in discovering an autonomous moral code, which embraces ambiguity and contradiction, without conceding to relativism and nihilism. At the same time, however, he also alerts us to the fictionality of the narrated events, reminding us that the novel's moral drama is mediated by generic conventions and an established literary tradition. In this regard, the epigraph from Wordsworth's *The Borderers*

does not only illuminate Galgut's thematic concerns in the terms that I suggest above, but also serves to signal to the reader his clear identification with an English literary canon which transcended the immediate pressures of anti-apartheid literary culture. Indeed, as Gérard Genette reminds us in his analysis of the paratextual devices through which an author mediates the relationship between the text and the reader, 'the epigraph in itself is a signal (intended as a *sign*) of culture, a password of intellectuality. While the author awaits hypothetical newspaper reviews, literary prizes, and other official recognitions, the epigraph is already, a bit, his own consecration. With it, he chooses his peers and thus his place in the pantheon' (160). By starting his fictional career with a citation from that most canonical of Romantic English poets, Galgut claimed his right of inheritance to an expansive and worldly literary tradition.

A Sinless Season thus evinces a young literary sensibility drawn to the rich potentiality which fiction offers in its dialogical relation to *other* texts, histories and imagined worlds — a potentiality, I have suggested, which Galgut found troublingly circumscribed by the political exigencies of his immediate context. As it thematises the trials of maturation, the novel also bears evidence of a young writer struggling with basic questions about fictional autonomy and the extent to which the novel internalises its socio-historical context. It does indeed represent, as might be expected from a first-time novelist, a bold attempt to 'escape' from the perceived constraints of a hegemonic literary culture and to legitimise alternative modes of fictional engagement. While such an impulse hardly seems a reprehensible 'crime' in retrospect, Galgut's defence of the novel suggests that he would soon come to internalise the ethico-political imperatives which anti-apartheid literary culture explicitly placed on the South African novelist, and would eventually concede, as I explore in my discussion of *The*

Beautiful Screaming of Pigs, to its demand for politically engaged realism. Before doing so, however, he would turn his attention towards the intensely private and peculiarly circumscribed microcosm of 'that small circle of beings, the family' (*Small Circle of Beings* 112).

CHAPTER TWO

The Singularity of *Small Circle of Beings*

The description of the 2005 reprint of *Small Circle of Beings,* published by Atlantic Books, promises us a collection of stories which will '[transport] us to 1980s South Africa where politics begins at home'.[9] In the title novella, however, 1980s South Africa is never explicitly cited as the story's setting, which, in fact, remains unspecified throughout the narrative. Indeed, *Small Circle of Beings* is a work of curious omissions: the protagonist herself is unnamed but for the odd reference to her unmarried family name, as is the illness which threatens her son David's life. This is not to say that the novella is definitively not set in South Africa, but rather that there is a blurring between the fictional events and their extra-textual referents, which frustrates our efforts to read *Small Circle of Beings* as expressive of a historically definitive time and place. In order to impute a late-apartheid context to the novella, as the publishers do, we have to pass through a number of interpretative mechanisms, which prove especially revealing of the modes of literary evaluation that informed and, I suggest, constrained the reception of Galgut's early writing. Indeed, as I explore in this chapter, a reading which too readily reconciles *Small Circle of Beings* with the socio-historical context of its production is likely to miss its astute reflections on the peculiarly and painfully disorienting effects of illness which, the novella suggests, render the material realities of the world external to the suffering of the sickened body both inaccessible and uncannily insubstantial.

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[9] The description can be found in the publisher's blurb for *Small Circle of Beings* on amazon.com. See http://www.amazon.com/Small-Circle-Beings-Damon-Galgut/dp/184354461X. My citations in this chapter refer, however, to the original edition of the text, published in 1988 by Lowry Publishers.

Upon its original publication in 1988, *Small Circle of Beings* generated considerably less interest than *A Sinless Season* had in 1982: the National English Literary Museum (NELM) archives have only three local reviews of the novel on record and it has not, to the best of my knowledge, received any published scholarly attention. A restrained, unassuming work about the private betrayals and bereavements of an individual domestic life, *Small Circle of Beings* did not readily articulate, at the time of its publication, with South Africa's heavily politicised literary culture, nor did it — unlike *A Sinless Season* — have the novelty of Galgut's youth to recommend it. Although it was thus primarily received with plain disinterest, the novella did prompt the ire of at least one critic, who — predictably — remonstrated Galgut for his disengagement from the socio-historical realities of his immediate context. Writing for the *Southern African Review of Books,* Marianne Puxley conceded admiration for the collection's stylistic achievements (describing herself as 'a little in love' [25] with the elegance of Galgut's prose), but expressed dissatisfaction with what she viewed as its considerable ethico-political failures. Her review is worth quoting at some length, exemplifying, as it does, the 'widespread assumption', as Derek Attridge notes, 'that any responsible and principled South African writer, especially during the apartheid years, will have had as a primary concern the historical situation of the country and the suffering of the majority of its people' (*J.M. Coetzee* 33):

> Being a little in love, I could have overlooked any flaws in Galgut's world all too easily. However, I feel bound to raise an eyebrow at Galgut's restricted field of vision. In four out of five stories, his characters lack any broad social or political context.

> Some would regard it as unfair, in a literary review, to censure an author for what he doesn't deal with. Some may even think it's refreshing to find a South African writer who is not seeking to capitalize on the presently marketable aspects of the situation in South Africa. […] One doesn't, after all, dismiss contemporary British novelists who don't refer to Thatcherism. Nevertheless, any current writing that doesn't comment, even obliquely, on apartheid, must inevitably invite some criticism.
>
> The 'small circle of beings' that Galgut writes about are whitefolks. In the title novella black people are shadowy, servile figures. The white woman narrator shows no understanding of, or sympathy with, her servants. […] This really points up the difficulties of writing from a perspective that is not one's own. Without evidence to the contrary, it is tempting for the reader to assume that the author concurs with his character's views. (Puxley 25)

Puxley's review bluntly outlines the aspects of Galgut's literary sensibility which, by the late eighties, had failed to earn him much symbolic capital in the field of South African literature: the solipsism of his narrative perspective, his choice of 'marginal' subject-matter and, most significantly, his ostensible failure to expose and critique political oppression. For other critics, however, his work could still be rescued for ethico-political purposes and thus legitimised within the corpus of anti-apartheid writing. In an admiring review of the novella, for example, the South African poet, Douglas Reid Skinner, argued that

> *Small Circle of Beings* is about the complexity of the relationship and division between inner being and social being, individual and history, self

> and other. It is written from within, from felt experience, and out of an inner history that subtly represents outer history: as the family, so the society. Far from being 'disengaged' from its historical time and place, it most emphatically explores the human conditions of that time and place. (67)

Implicit in Skinner's review is what Clive Barnett — in his analysis of the 'institutional and rhetorical conventions' (287) which shaped the reception of South African writing during the late apartheid years — has termed a 'mimetic conception of allegory' (293), which insists that a referential relationship necessarily exists between a text and the socio-historical context of its production, no matter how vaguely delineated its spatio-temporal setting. From this perspective, Galgut's preoccupation with familial scission and strife represents an indirect, but not unprincipled, exploration of South Africa's socio-political realities. This approach — which also inheres in the publisher's description of the novella as a story in which 'politics begins at home' — thus allows the reader to locate evidence of Galgut's political commitment in what is perceived as his ineluctable submission to context. Despite its deliberate fictional veiling of South Africa as its explicit extra-textual referent, as well as its reticence towards temporal qualifications, the novella can, nevertheless, be celebrated as an exemplary expression of its author's 'time and place' (Skinner 67) and thus admitted into a recognisable and morally sound tradition of anti-apartheid writing.

The deployment of the mimetic conception of allegory, as Barnett's discussion shows, was especially effective in securing J.M. Coetzee's credibility as a principled anti-apartheid writer, serving to 're-anchor' those works in his oeuvre which lacked a definitive socio-historical setting to South Africa as 'a stable extra-textual referent synonymous with

racism' (293). In his response to the reception of Coetzee's work in these terms, Derek Attridge has recently argued 'against allegory' (*J.M. Coetzee* 32) in his analysis of *Life & Times of Michael K* and *Waiting for the Barbarians,* and asked how we might respond to apartheid-era texts in ways that resist the instrumentalist thinking implicit in this mimetic or, in his terms, historicist approach. This discussion forms part of Attridge's larger critique of literary instrumentalism, which is expanded upon in *The Singularity of Literature,* the companion work to his study on Coetzee. While acknowledging the 'valuable insights that this mode of reading has produced and no doubt will continue to produce' (*J.M Coetzee* 33), he warns that, by measuring a text's responsiveness to a pre-determined set of criteria, the instrumentalist approach also risks reducing the literary work to 'a fixed linguistic structure' (*J.M. Coetzee* 10), unamenable to reinterpretation across diffuse and unpredictable contexts. His response is to refocus attention on the 'performative' character of the literary 'event'; that is, on 'its potential for reinterpretation, for grafting into new contexts, for fission and fusion' (*J.M. Coetzee* 10). In an argument which draws on the literary philosophy of Jacques Derrida and Maurice Blanchot, amongst others, Attridge argues for our 'hospitality' towards 'singularity, inventiveness, and otherness, as these manifest themselves in the event or experience of the work' (*J.M. Coetzee* 11). A reading which responds to a text's singularity is, then, one that does not rely on recourse to established meta-narratives or pre-texts, but 'takes into account as fully as possible, by re-staging them, the work's own performances — of, for example, referentiality, metaphoricity, intentionality, and ethicity' (*J.M. Coetzee* 9).

Significantly, Galgut himself deployed the mimetic conception of allegory in his attempt to defend *Small Circle of Beings* against charges of political indifference in 'Reality and the Novel'. Like Skinner, he claimed that, in the novella, socio-political concerns are not ignored,

but only metonymically displaced by the dialectic which necessarily exists between individual and social reality. In strongly rhetorical terms which rendered the misinterpretation of his work an expression of political naïvety, he claimed that '[w]e who are opposed to the government curse their stupidity and blindness. But it is just as blind […] not to believe that what takes place in the family relates to what takes place in the state' (55). These comments evince Galgut's keen awareness of the logic through which his writing could be legitimised in the context of anti-apartheid literary culture, but do little justice to his sensitivity towards those aspects of private human experience which do not leave a trace on the wider, socio-historical world. Following Attridge, I endeavour in this chapter — against Galgut's own directives — to 'resist the allegorical reading' (*J.M. Coetzee* 35) of *Small Circle of Beings* and to preserve, rather than resolve, its many indeterminacies, including its ambiguous chronotope. Contrary to Galgut's claims in 'Reality and the Novel', I suggest that the novella deliberately obscures the overdetermined socio-historical context of its production in apartheid South Africa, in order to direct our attention to a singular, rather than a collective, form of suffering.

2.1.

The question of how exactly *Small Circle of Beings* should be positioned in relation to Galgut's late-apartheid context is complicated by its dramatisation of events which so clearly resonate with his own life and his childhood battle with cancer. Indeed, at the level of plot, the novella arguably invites us to impute Galgut's biography as the primary framework for our reading, thus resolving the ambiguity of its spatio-temporal setting and rendering the text amenable to the historicist reading outlined above. Importantly, however, he chooses to

narrate the story, not from the perspective of the ailing child — which we would associate with Galgut's own — but from the point of view of his mother, a socially withdrawn woman who seeks out a life of rural isolation. The narrative displacement curtails the autobiographical reading and we see Galgut at work, as he was in *A Sinless Season*, with a mode of writing that first invites and then unsettles the assumption that the operations of the text are straightforwardly referential.

By displacing the events of Galgut's life as our stable frame of reference, the novella inhibits our efforts to re-historicise its vaguely delineated setting and directs our attention, instead, to the intensely private world of its narrator, who is presented from the outset as a woman altogether estranged from her socio-political context. Indeed, she labours to create 'a life removed' (21) from human society in the rural home which, we learn, has belonged to her family for generations. In her references to the servants, Salome and Moses, who have worked for the family for decades, Galgut hints at the larger socio-historical inequalities which support the narrator's privilege, but are excluded from serious examination in her own narrative. An isolated and withdrawn figure, her preoccupations are primarily with the domestic routines of daily life on the farm and her role as mother and wife to David and Stephen respectively. It is from this hermetic world, wholly constituted by the 'small circle of beings' which makes up the nuclear family, that she derives her sense of safety and identity.

The novella primarily concerns itself with the dissolution of this fragile nucleus and the subsequent crisis of subjectivity which it engenders in the narrator. The effect of David's illness is to further contract her already acutely circumscribed world, until she becomes alienated even from the sanctuary of her family home. Fissures soon appear in her marriage

to Stephen, whose emotional reticence she can no longer abide in the presence of David's abject suffering. It soon becomes apparent that little more than the hypnotic routines of everyday life cemented relations within the family:

> There was a time when we would all eat together, assembled in comfortable silence in one corner of the kitchen. I suppose it's a blessing to be free of obligations like these. Now, after eating, Stephen comes through and joins me. He sits on the opposite side of the bed, leaning forward in his chair, hands between his knees. Neither of us speaks, to each other or to David. (46)

David's disease annihilates their quotidian lives by rendering its pleasantries and obligations untenable, without which the couple prove unable to communicate and Stephen eventually becomes an unrelatable figure, regarded as 'someone long lost' (73) by the narrator. These feelings of estrangement extend to the few other individuals in her life, who increasingly attain an insubstantial, spectral quality. '[T]hese people are strange to me', she remarks of her mother, Salome and Moses, 'like friends remembered from long ago' (45). Though they continue to inhabit the same home together, they are all unable, she notes, 'to touch in any real way on my existence here, on David's, in the tiny space between these four walls' (45).

The sense of radical defamiliarisation engendered by David's illness is also registered in spatio-temporal terms. As his condition deteriorates, the narrator's already hermetic life on the farm is reduced to the 'most solitary of confinements' (44) in David's bedroom which, in turn, is contracted to an intense focus on his body which is in a state of constant rupture: 'He bleeds from every orifice, tiny private trickles of blood that stain the sheet' (40). During the hours of vigil at David's bedside, time is also rendered indeterminate: 'There is no longer

such a thing as day or night: in the narrow room it's easy to be unaware of what takes place outside. I am always here'(44). Unable to assuage or even fully comprehend the ravages waged on her son's body, the narrator is consigned to a moribund passivity, narrated as an interminable and objectless waiting: 'I wait and wait and wait, till it seems I have heard no other sound in forty-two years than the dragging wheeze of David trying to draw breath' (47).

The severity of David's condition eventually necessitates a move to the city; a locale which is understood by the narrator as the prototypical site of isolation and alienation and as the antithesis of the 'safety' she has crafted for herself in her rural home: 'The city. The words strike in me like a heavy iron clapper, sending out echoes in images of tall dirty buildings, streets as deep as rivers, cars, windows, noise' (36). Here, she resides in 'a series of strange rooms' (72) during David's hospitalisation. In these spaces of acute unfamiliarity, she registers the extent of the internal ruptures and emotional seclusion wreaked by David's illness:

> I want to cry, but I can't. Tears have become more difficult for me of late, requiring too much effort. But a crack has opened in me somewhere as I sit listlessly on the bed and stare, unseeing, at the smoky square of the television set and the figures moving on it. The crack inside me widens. It's the first night I've spent utterly alone, in my life. (73)

This, then, is the central movement which the narrative traces; not a centrifugal one, from 'inner' to 'outer' history (Skinner 67), but a centripetal contraction, from safe familiarity to perilous estrangement and from an immersion in the familial realm to an unwitting and

painful withdrawal into the self. During this time of introspection, the narrator becomes witness to her own negation by: her husband, who has an affair during her time in the city; her own mother, whose senility renders her unable to recognise her daughter; David's doctors, who treat her as 'a meddler, a busy-body' (65) and, finally, the illness itself, which consigns her to a tortured passivity. The evisceration of self entailed in these multiple traumas is registered in the affectlessness of the above passage; increasingly, the narrator loses the capacity to react with appropriate emotion to the multiple losses catalysed by her son's illness. Her divorce from Stephen, too, passes as a 'gentle affair' (72), contrary even to her own expectations: 'I'd imagined that ten years would make an awful racket and thunder when they finally tore apart. But it's not the case at all. They fall from us gently, those years, slipping off our shoulders and melting into the dark' (69-70).

As these personal and emotional losses mount, the narrator becomes increasingly focused on her role as David's mother; perhaps the only aspect of her identity which has remained relatively stable since the onset of his illness. Witnessing his suffering has, however, drawn her into a fixation on their pre-oedipal bond and she imagines him in regressive terms, with the physiological dependencies of an infant prior to individuation:

> Chains do exist. People are bound. Nine years ago I gave birth to this boy. Over the months – eight and a half of them – the weeks, the days, that I carried him, he became part of me in elemental, cellular ways. [...] He continues to live in me, not yet discharged. I am his haven and his prison. He will never leave alive, despite the evidence of this child, nine years of age, who is crying now in my arms. (22)

The assertion of this primal bond becomes a way for her to mitigate the unrelatability and inexpressibility of the pain which regularly consumes David, rendering it shareable and mutual, rather than psychologically and physically isolating: 'The sound of his cry is in tune with something in me, so that for a moment we sing out together: high, lonely and in pain' (67). This gesture of mutuality — of a shared and communicable pain — is, however, counterpointed by its antithesis: the apprehension that empathy cannot abate David's pain and that his suffering severs him from the comfort of the maternal bond: 'There is a seam in him that is unravelling, somewhere in the deep dark places under the sheets that cover him. I can't reach there with hand or prayer' (38). Similarly, the narrator's fantasies of regressive re-integration with David are countered by stark images of his alterity in illness, made visible in the physical abnormalities produced by the cancer: 'I look at David one day and see him, with a jarring shock, as a stranger might. How much he's changed. How pale he is, how thin he's getting' (30).

The narrator's attempt to empathetically share in her son's pain thus always gestures towards its own impossibility; towards the irreducible alterity of David's illness and the incommunicable nature of his suffering. This aporia is also reflected in the metaphors employed by the narrator in her efforts to comprehend the nature of his illness, which is rendered entirely opaque by the scientific discourse of the doctors. Since these men, we are told, '[speak] a language I cannot understand' (33), David's exact medical diagnosis is never conveyed to the reader. We learn only of a 'growth' developing in his throat, imagined by the narrator as 'a living swelling thing that has bred in his body and that now feeds on him. I see it as a creature with a face. In the gloom, its tiny animal eyes regard me steadily' (32). Later, upon examining the tumour itself during consultation with David's doctors, it appears

altogether less menacing: ‘It’s an innocuous thing, this growth; not at all what I had imagined. Tiny and red and almost harmless, like a small sea creature trapped where it does not belong’ (34). Both comparisons make the same substitution to describe opposing concepts: the image of a ‘small creature’ is used to suggest both the tumour’s aggression and its innocuousness. In short, the metaphoric operation stumbles: it fails to augment meaning through substitution and, instead, works primarily to indicate that the concept of the ‘growth’ and David’s illness more broadly cannot be wholly accommodated by the narrator’s cognitive apparatus. We thus witness the loss of an ‘innocent’ relationship to language, in which the signifying chain can be relied upon to produce the reassuring illusion of stable referentiality. This loss is perhaps most apparent in the term ‘growth’, which has transmuted to denote precisely that which negates David’s development.

2.2.

In its brief third and fourth sections, the novella shifts its attention from the immediate trauma of witnessing David’s deterioration to the enduring psychological and emotional wounds it inflicts on the narrator. In these sections, the threat of his illness has abated; his cancer goes into remission and the pair return to their rural home, where the narrator attempts to re-establish the routines which filled her days ‘before the sickness began’ (87). ‘So we are all restored to what we were before’, she claims, once the house has been cleaned and the garden tamed. ‘There is a routine in our lives which keeps us safe’ (87). The remainder of her narrative, which stages a series of inversions, discloses the extent of her self-delusion. Her home, once her anchor and sanctuary, is now revealed to be the very site of her negation: ‘This house has been the scene of my undoing. While I sat with David in the hospital [...]

other people occupied this area. Without my knowledge or consent they performed actions that unpicked the seams of my life' (89). Stephen's reticent but benign presence is replaced by that of Cedric, a quick-tempered and violent man, whose irascibility the narrator mistakes for passion. Her bond with David, too, is damaged by Cedric's cruel interference and now the once sterile and alienating hospital is re-envisaged as a space of familiarity and intimacy: 'We no longer speak, this boy and I. The equality we had achieved in bedrooms and in hospitals is gone. I see now, for the first time, that he is not as small and gentle as he was' (101). But the most bitter of these reversals proves to inhere in 'that small circle of beings, the family' (112), which finally fails to provide either intimacy or identity, but operates instead as a nexus of negation, violence and estrangement for both David and his mother.

In the absence of the threat of death posed by David's cancer, the narrator concedes to feelings of resentment about the multiple losses she incurred during his illness and admits to being a 'bitter woman' (92). In defiance of the asymmetry of the ethical relation, she now seeks reciprocation from David for past sacrifices (100; 121) and confesses the 'resentments I hold despite myself. I must blame [David], I suppose, for what he did to me: the husband I lost, the lover that I gained' (123). Nonetheless, her own narrative — in which she imagines herself as 'someone who has not lived deeply enough' (19) and is self-described as having 'lost [her]self' (20) in the domestic routines of marriage — reveals that his illness only made visible the fissures that already existed in her relationships and, importantly, within her own identity. The narrative technique, too, indicates a problematic lack of agency by denying her a name and, as a result, the authority which a first-person narration might otherwise connote. This exclusion also prohibits us from identifying with her through anything other than the roles in which she endures some form of negation, whether as Stephen's (ex-) wife, Cedric's

(victimised) lover or even as David's (now estranged) mother. As such, she remains an almost spectral presence in her own narrative or, as she phrases it herself, a woman 'full of shadows' (92), 'riven from inside' (115).

The narrator's discourse thus constantly signals the limits of self-revelation through narrative by rehearsing a double gesture of assertion and negation: as she claims presence and authority for herself through the apparatus of her first person narration ('I can do as I please. I am my own woman' [21]), so the narrative simultaneously stages her undoing. Galgut does not try to resolve these tensions by imagining her restoration: she remains at the novella's conclusion a wounded and afflicted figure, 'mourning' (116) her many losses. Yet *Small Circle of Beings* also indicates that, in the experience of profound loss, there may be something to be gained ethically: by the end of the narrative, the protagonist is free of a loveless marriage, as well as an abusive lover, and is finally able to embrace her own mother, despite the uncomfortable alterity which she represents in her senility: '[S]he lies down beside me, a thin and parched white figure who is soft, at last, to my touch. We cling to each other' (127).

This final image of consolation through the maternal bond is especially significant, given the estrangement that exists between the pair throughout the novella. The narrator's mother, also denied a first name, haunts the periphery of the narrative and acts to unsettle the façade of safe and agreeable domesticity which her daughter labours to create in their home. In her senility, she comes to represent everything which the narrator herself works to keep at bay: filth, decay and the disturbing possibility of a loss of self and identity (13; 15). Senility has dehumanised her in the eyes of the narrator, who admits that '[i]t is difficult for me

sometimes to regard her as entirely human, despite the evidence of her four limbs and her face' (11). After witnessing David's illness, however, she comes to a different understanding of her mother's condition: not as the opposite of her own rationality, but rather as its repressed condition. Her mother's 'madness' ultimately comes to represent a 'reversed' but not untrue perspective on the events in the narrative:

> [My mother] wanders each day on the lawn about the house, surveying her domain from her fierce and shattered face. She comes to me one day and takes me by the hand. Did I know, she whispers, that David is terribly ill?
>
> 'No, Mother,' I say. 'That was long ago.'
>
> 'No,' she says. 'That was now.'
>
> Time is a meaningless affair to her. She moves without effort between past and present. But it occurs to me that there is a vision in her madness: for yes, the sickness has continued, growing without sound in the combustion of our hearts. (124)

In the absence of a rational chronology, the idea of healing and progress through time proves factitious and these comments thus resonate truthfully with the narrator's sense of an enduring pain. David's illness, it appears, has made her more accommodating of alterity; not only to her mother and her senility, but also to the possibility that this 'otherness' exists within herself: 'I value her presence now, why I cannot say. It's a comfort for me to have her there, an older, dimmer version of myself, a reminder to me of what I may become' (40).

Small Circle of Beings, then, is not an expansive text; it does not gesture towards a larger socio-political reality but is, instead, a novel of painful contraction which stages its protagonist's withdrawal from society and even family into a difficult and largely unresolved self-reckoning. In hindsight, it makes what appears to be a very modest and human claim: that, in the experience of acute individual suffering and bereavement, our historical horizons are likely to recede from view. That approaching such subject-matter, traditionally so comfortably within the novel's ambit, should have seemed ethically wanting — even from the perspective of its author — strikingly reveals the extent to which the category of the literary was circumscribed under apartheid. Revisiting the novella twenty-five years after its original publication, however, also reveals that not all apartheid-era writing was, in fact, politically saturated, despite the strongly historicist logic which governed its circulation and which Galgut himself had internalised. Indeed, contrary to his own claims about the novella, *Small Circle of Beings* quietly asserts the significance of an individual, apolitical life and its legitimacy as a subject of fictional investigation. It represents an authorial purview which Galgut would radically rethink as he turned to the tenets of politically engaged realism in his following novel, *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*.

CHAPTER THREE

'Down to Reality': Conceding to the Demand for Realism in *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*

Published in 1991, *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* could be read as the third of Galgut's novels of maturation. Like *A Sinless Season*, it charts the difficult psycho-sexual maturation of its protagonist and, like *Small Circle of Beings*, it explores this process in a context characterised by familial scission and dysfunction. Yet, *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* also represents a significant departure from the dehistoricised worlds of those first works to an open engagement with Galgut's late-apartheid context. The novel examines the trauma inflicted on a young white South African Defence Force (SADF) conscript, Patrick Winter, by his forced participation in the so-called 'Border War', in which the apartheid state sought to quash the liberation movements operating north of its border and maintain mandatory control over its immediate neighbour, South West Africa. According to Galgut, it was written out of a conscious sense of his moral responsibility, as a South African writer, to engage in forms of literary redress: 'If you have any kind of moral sense as a writer in South Africa you will need to speak out […] I reached a point where I felt I had to take some kind of stand in terms of the history of this country. Morally there was no other high ground than writing and giving utterance to experience' (Galgut in Wilmot 130).

These comments evince the extent to which Galgut had, by the early nineties, internalised the 'rhetoric of urgency' (Bethlehem 96) which dominated anti-apartheid literary culture and the ethical role of witnessing which it conferred on the South African author. Although he had argued in 'Reality and the Novel' that *A Sinless Season* and *Small Circle of Beings* did not represent abstractions from the material realities of history and politics, his turn to realism in

The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs indicated his concession to the hegemonic notion that it was incumbent on South African writers to engage social and political themes in more direct, unambiguous ways. From Galgut's perspective, conceding to the demand for realism [10] entailed, as it did for many local writers, considerable aesthetic compromise: 'The weight of oppression in the history of South Africa has been so extreme that people don't have the flexibility to use their imaginations […] So, if you like, this country's gravity brings you down to reality' (Galgut in Wilmot 130). His dissatisfaction with the novel was further underscored by his decision to revise *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* substantially upon its republication in 2005. 'This book has troubled me since it was first published in 1991', he remarks in the Author's Note to the revised edition. 'The rhythms of the language have always sounded discordant on my ear' (*Beautiful* [2005]).[11]

In expressing such reservations about the novel, Galgut positioned *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* directly along the axes which, as I outlined in the introduction, structured debates about legitimate literary practice in the context of apartheid and asserted a dichotomy between an author's artistic freedom and his ethical responsibilities, as well as between politically engaged and aesthetically nuanced writing. His lamentation of the novel's compromises — while clearly an expression of his dissatisfaction with the restrictions placed on local literary production — thus also tacitly indicated its legitimacy as a work of principled anti-apartheid writing. With *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs,* Galgut would indeed prove himself innocent of the 'crime of escapism' (Bethlehem 100) and begin to negotiate a

[10] I borrow the phrase 'demand for realism' from Ken Barris, who uses it throughout his discussion on anti-apartheid literary culture in his PhD thesis, 'Fractious Form: The Trans/Mutable Post-Apartheid Novel'.

[11] To distinguish between the two versions, I have included their respective publication dates in the in-text citations. The criticism on the novel which I refer to by Heyns, Rogez, Gagiano and Munro are all based on the original edition. My citations are from the 1992 reprint of the original version by Abacus Books and the 2005 publication of the revised edition by Penguin Books.

degree of visibility and credibility within the field of South African writing. The novel attracted significant scholarly attention and would also earn him his first writer's prize; the CNA award — organised, as the name indicates, by the Central News Agency, a local chain of book and stationery stores — which was presented to him in 1992. Although the CNA award would have lost much of its prestige by the time it was retired in the late nineties,[12] its bestowal on Galgut in 1992 still placed him amongst the 'indigenous literary pantheon', to borrow Shaun de Waal's phrase, which the prize had promoted and endorsed since its inception in the early sixties (see de Waal, 'Farewell to the CNA award'). Indeed, the prize — which had, in the words of its chairman, '[taken] up the cause against censorship, vigorously and implacably' (Slater, ctd in de Waal) — was regularly awarded to J.M. Coetzee, Nadine Gordimer and André Brink (each of whom won it at least three times), thus placing Galgut amongst the most canonical of anti-apartheid writers.

Galgut's turn to a mode of politically engaged realism, in short, successfully attracted the forms of symbolic capital which would help to legitimise him within the field, but this recognition was not gained without a pronounced sense of compromise on his part. In this chapter, I consider what this turn to realism entailed, in an effort to trace the effects which anti-apartheid literary culture — and its strongly coercive 'rhetoric of urgency' — had on the composition of Galgut's work. In particular, I consider the changes it effected in terms of his representation of subjectivity and the problems of alienation and isolation which regularly characterise his protagonists. Indeed, the sense of intractable solipsism from which they

[12] The prize had always been, to some extent, compromised in public opinion by its commercial associations, but had nonetheless established itself as one of South Africa's principal literary prizes by the early seventies, as Brian Green notes in his discussion of the history of the award (see 'This Beacon in Our Murky Lives'). In his article for the *Mail and Guardian* on the subject of the prize's retirement in 1997, Shaun de Waal suggests that its decline was largely a result of the CNA 'taking itself ever downmarket' until the public had 'ceased to associate [the chain] with the kind of books that win prizes like the one that bore its name'. See 'Farewell to the CNA award'.

typically suffer is a characteristic which places them at odds with the tenets of engaged realism, as they are understood in Lukácsian terms, and it is thus perhaps not surprising that *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* takes Patrick's estrangement from his social and historical environment as one of its central problems. I argue that, unlike *A Sinless Season* and *Small Circle of Beings*, the novel endorses the Aristotelean dictum — so central to Lukác's conception of engaged realism — that '[m]an is *zoon politikon,* a social animal' (Lukács 19), necessarily enmeshed in his socio-political context and measurable in terms of his interactions with it. These are the grounds, of course, on which Lukács famously distinguishes 'great realistic literature' (19) from modernism, which errs, in his view, in its representation of the subject as *constitutively* asocial and confined to the limits of its own experience. Such an understanding of subjectivity, he argues, assumes that external reality is inherently inexplicable, thus rendering the socio-historical environment unavailable to critique.

Importantly, a progressive ideology underpins the relationship which Lukác's posits between a character and his socio-historical context. He insists that 'there is an intimate connection between a writer's ability to create lasting human types (the real criterion of literary achievement) and his allegiance to an ideology which allows belief in social development' (57). This progressive ideology inhered, too, in the demand for realism which anti-apartheid literary culture made — prioritising, as it did, the possibility of individual and social advancement away from apartheid's oppressive machinations — and is apparent, as I explore in this chapter, in the emphasis which Galgut places on Patrick's gradual conscientisation and the potential for interracial reconciliation which it engenders. While *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* is thus by no means a realist text in the classic tradition which

Lukác's describes, it does bear traces of the Lukácsian influence on the tradition of anti-apartheid literature into which Galgut was writing.

While the notion of man as *zoon politikon* is advanced in Lukác's work as a representational imperative, it is presented as an ethical one by Hannah Arendt, whose political philosophy, I argue, resonates strongly with the kind of claims which *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* makes about the exercise of individual agency in the context of large-scale political oppression. Indeed, the novel explicitly links the question of Patrick's culpability in the war to the problem of his estrangement; he lacks the 'worldly condition' which, in Arendt's terms, would make him capable of exercising his 'freedom' — in her qualified sense of the term — to resist his co-optation into a system of political subjugation. Like Lukács, Arendt insists that man is a 'social animal', but does so in order to stress that our individual freedom is radically contingent on our interaction with others. She thus rejects the possibility of the existence of a private, 'inner' freedom, which might allow the individual to 'be a slave in the world and still be free' (*Past and Future* 147). 'The experiences of inner freedom', she notes, 'are derivative in that they always presuppose a retreat from the world, where freedom was denied, into an inwardness to which no other has access' (*Past and Future* 146). Freedom is available to the individual only insofar as he exercises it within a public realm; it is, Arendt argues, an active, public and social phenomenon.

Importantly, the notion of the *zoon politikon* is never actualised in Patrick himself; instead, it is positioned via Galgut's favourable characterisation of Godfrey and his 'comrade', Andrew Lovell, as the ethical alternative to Patrick's alienation. Whether it constitutes a viable or only utopian alternative for an individual possessed of such intractable solipsism as Patrick

remains unclear in the novel's ambivalent conclusion. I read *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* as a concerted, but not conclusive, attempt to imagine how we might find a way out of alienation and guilt back to a realm of human connection and commonality after apartheid. That Galgut was not resolved about how such a reconnection might take place is underscored, not only by a degree of ambiguity in the original novel, but also by several significant changes which he made to *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* before its republication in 2005. The revised version, which I examine in the final section of this chapter, presents an altogether less optimistic view of the potential for Patrick's development from alienation towards communality after suffering the traumas of history. As a strange double of the first edition — Galgut describes it as being 'not quite a new book, but not the old one either' (*Beautiful* [2005], Author's Note) — I suggest that the 2005 revisions bring *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* in line with the more pragmatic and cautious view of human nature, which is characteristically expressed in his prose. The two versions are, of course, positioned significantly on either side of the epochal distinction which is generally asserted between anti- and post-apartheid literature and, when read comparatively, provide unusually specific indications about the ways in which Galgut responded to the changed structures of feeling which emerged in South Africa in the intervening years, as well as to the internationalisation of his readership after *The Good Doctor* was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize.

3.1.

The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs commences as Patrick undertakes a journey back to Namibia, a year after completing several months of compulsory military service in the

country as part of the apartheid state's efforts to entrench white minority rule in the region. The trauma of war had proven — as it had for hundreds of young, white South Africans yearly conscripted into the SADF — intolerable to Patrick, who was 'honourably discharged' from the army after 'going *bosbefok'* (literally 'bush-fucked'), to borrow the crude colloquial term often used to describe post-traumatic stress disorder in the context of the Border War. The term *bosbefok,* like many other eponyms[13] used to denote the psychological damage inflicted on soldiers, suggests not only the mental torment of war in general, but also conveys the strange dissociative effects produced, in this specific context, by the bush itself; that is, by the vast and ostensibly undifferentiated tracts of rural land — routinely unspecified in military communications about the war[14] — which soldiers were forced to patrol in ongoing anticipation of an enemy attack. Indeed, one of the many perversities of the 'Border War' was, of course, that the 'border' which SADF conscripts were forced to 'defend' was an unlocatable cypher; not a permanent fixture between South Africa and its neighbours, but an ambiguous and shifting zone of military operations largely conducted far outside the country itself. It was, as Patrick reflects, a 'mythical site', created by state propaganda to engender fear about the 'monstrous and unknown things which dwelled [beyond]' ([2005] 57). He experiences the many enervating months spent patrolling this 'unstable, fluid frontier', as the historian Gary Baines describes it (5), as 'an existential test, a contest of endurance between my soul and the material world around me' (*Beautiful* [2005] 57-8). The novel's strange and haunting title conveys this peculiar combination of surreality and very real brutality which conspires to produce the state of acute dissociative trauma from which Patrick suffers.

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[13] Including 'soldier's heart', 'shell shock', 'combat neurosis' and 'operational fatigue'. For a full list, see Kaplan and Sadock (620) which also provides the history of the disorder as it was first diagnosed in relation to the 'psychiatric morbidity associated with Vietnam War veterans' (618).

[14] On the 'secretive nature of the war' see Gary Baines (5-6), who notes that soldiers' whereabouts were routinely concealed from the civilian population.

The final catalyst for Patrick's psychological breakdown is the death of his only friend, Lappies, with whom he had a brief sexual encounter; an aspect of the novel that has received considerable critical attention. Indeed, most of the scholarship on the novel focuses on its status as an example of gay writing under apartheid,[15] a perspective from which it is often found wanting, because of the expedient link which, as I explore later, the novel seems to establish between homosexuality and political dissent. Moreover, it fails to offer an extended exploration of the complexities attendant on gay identity under apartheid, because the question of Patrick's homosexuality is, in fact, left open: he neither expresses desire for Lappies, nor does he derive pleasure from their sexual encounter. The significance of Patrick's sexuality is thus subsumed into the larger problems of his introversion and solipsism which alienate him even from his own desire. The novel does, however, unequivocally indicate that the source of Patrick's feelings of estrangement from the world is the militaristic white patriarchy which dominates his social environment and draws him, in his feelings of otherness, to identify with the social marginalisation which Lappies represents.

Galgut represents Patrick as an individual ill-suited to the politically and socially brutal world into which he is born. A soft-spoken, sensitive child, he retreats from the oppressive machismo of his father, Howard, and brother, Malcolm, into a close relationship with his mother, Ellen, with whom he identifies as a co-victim of male dominance. He struggles with the various forms of male socialisation, such as sport and hunting, which would induct him into the world of homosocial camaraderie and privilege typified by his father's uncouth but powerful friends, who readily incorporate Malcolm into their circle. Patrick, on the other

[15] See, for example, Heyns, and Munro, *The Dream of Love to Come* 95-7.

hand, is from childhood an estranged and isolated figure, who responds to his marginalisation from a hegemonic white masculinity through withdrawal and repression rather than defiance.

The novel suggests that Patrick's struggle is foremost against the oppressive gender politics which characterise his late-apartheid context. Patrick himself is initially unable to link this to South Africa's broader socio-political turmoil. Defeated by a patriarchal system which has long dictated that he conforms to norms at odds with his nature, Patrick's practised submission has made him quite unable to interrogate the implications of his conscription into the South African Defence Force: 'Rankless and gormless, my presence was required for defence […] Accepting this role without question (as I'd accepted every role in my life), I was flown to the north in a lumbering Dakota and left on the side of an airstrip' ([1992] 65). Via a series of tropes involving hunting and slaughter, however, the novel unambiguously situates military conquest as an extreme manifestation of an aggressive masculinity broadly valorised in South African society under apartheid. As bullets descend around Patrick during his first (and only) encounter with guerrilla fighters, for example, it is the image of the 'trophy' leopard mounted on an 'island of bark' ([1992] 74) in the entrance hall of his father's house that first occurs to him. Military violence, Patrick subconsciously registers, is the terrible end product of the general disregard for life normalised in South African civil society as a patriarchal prerogative.

The hunting motif in *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* accrues further significance when considered in the broader context of the conventions of *grensliteratuur,* a term which refers to

the substantial body of Afrikaans literature produced, from across the political spectrum, [16] about the Border War during the seventies and eighties. As H.P van Coller has demonstrated, hunting frequently operated in propagandistic *grensliteratuur* as a metaphor for war and functioned to legitimise and valorise the SADF soldier, as well as to dehumanise his hapless enemy (ctd in Roos 151). Galgut inverts the trope to reveal the cowardice of the hunter / aggressor who, in the case of Patrick's father, 'hadn't even got out of the Land Rover' ([1992] 10) to shoot his prize leopard. The novel's deployment of the hunting metaphor thus works to unsettle the symbolic economy of Border War propaganda by demythologising the notion of virile masculinity on which it trades. For Patrick, however, the awareness that the machismo of his brother and father is at least in part a charade does little to assuage his feelings of inadequacy and fear. The threatening connotations of the hunting motif are reactivated when Malcolm, incensed by Patrick's ineptitude in a casual game of rugby, warns him about the patriarchal world he is so ill-equipped to survive: '[Malcolm's] snarling, not unlike the leopard in the entrance hall behind. "It's a man's world, Patrick," he whispers. "It's a man's world"' ([1992]19).

It is thus not surprising that it is the machismo of war and military training, rather than the prospect of the violence itself, which Patrick initially finds most threatening about his conscription into the army. During his year at the 'border', Patrick has to contend with the brutal 'militarized masculinity' (Drewett 94) of Commandant Schutte who, disturbingly, resembles his brother Malcolm ([1992] 68). Here the novel dramatises Michael Drewett's claim that '[i]n apartheid South Africa […] the processes of gendering and militarisation were

[16] See Henrietta Roos's survey of *grensliteratuur* (141-3), which indicates that the term describes both the bald propaganda of writers like Johan Coetzee and Piers Pieterse, whose romanticisation of the war encouraged a 'general acceptance of official policy' (141), as well as the politically subversive texts of, for example, Koos Prinsloo and Etienne van Heerden.

inseparable' (95) as Patrick, to his astonishment, is forced once again to endure the rituals of masculine socialisation which reduced him to tears in childhood:

> It was Commandant Schutte's view that 'sport made men out of monkeys.' Amazed and astounded, I found myself forced to play rugby. When the shadows were long and the heat from the ground was tapering off, teams of soldiers scrabbled for possession of a rough leather ball. Kneeing each other, swearing and spitting, we fought on the baked, cracking earth […] Looking more like my brother as my tiredness increased, [Commandant Schutte] watched over my shame. ([1992] 68-9)

Patrick's failure to master the basics of 'masculine training' positions him on the feminised side of the gender binary which, as Drewett's study shows, buttressed the SADF's military propaganda and justified conscription as a boy's essential passage into manhood. He argues that the SADF 'engaged itself in a process of dispelling gender ambiguities and maintaining clear distinctions between masculinity and femininity. Within this unambiguously masculine space the SADF undertook to make men of new recruits' (Drewett 102). Patrick internalises this logic and registers his failure to conform to stereotypical gender roles with shame and self-loathing: 'I would never be part of their club. Excluded forever from their strange fraternity, I watched from outside in my shame' ([1992] 71). His private feelings of aberration and otherness are confirmed when Schutte exiles him from daily rugby practice to patrol the camp along with Lappies, who shares Patrick's incompetence on the sports field.

It is against this backdrop of mutual inadequacy and ostracisation that Galgut stages the relationship between Patrick and Lappies. Importantly, their friendship is defined in terms of deficiency; both men lack a coherent sense of self and identity, but seem to have little else in common: 'There was an emptiness in me that corresponded to something in him. He, like me, was at odds with the world; removed from the laws of camp. Our otherness made us a pair' ([1992] 67). This mutual 'emptiness' seems particularly important to bear in mind when considering the broader significance of their brief sexual encounter later in the narrative, which has been taken up by several critics as comprising the novel's core socio-political statement:

> I don't know how it happened — who touched whom first — but at the darkest corner of the camp, we stopped. We fumbled with buttons, we slung our guns. I remember his breath on my neck. Standing pressed together, the continent about us, we took each other in hand. Tugging and gasping, we moved our wrists in rhythm. It was an act of revenge, undertaken in pain: against men, who had made the world flat. 'Leave me,' I gasped, but it wasn't to him: I was speaking to Malcolm, my father, to Schutte, 'Leave me,' I called down the well of my past, to those who'd colluded against me. ([1992] 76)

Rejecting the patriarchal taboo against homosexuality, this is Patrick's first act of defiance against hegemonic white masculinity. Because the novel has so clearly situated white patriarchy as the tyrannical structure which produces apartheid and war (Heyns 115), we are invited to read this homosexual act as an obviously political one, as Michiel Heyns has argued in his reading of the novel. Galgut's 'model of patriarchy', he notes, 'would seem to

establish a self-evident link between gay identity and political dissent: to dissociate oneself from heterosexual patriarchy is to disown the political situation which it has wrought' (115). Yet, as Heyns's qualified phrasing ('would seem') here implies, Galgut's novel complicates this logic and finally, as I elucidate in more detail below, rejects it as a reduction of the ethics entailed in real political activism and dissent. Significantly, the 'fumbling exchange' ([1992] 112) does not prove even privately liberating for either Patrick or Lappies. Still indoctrinated by an inflexible heteronormativity, they regard their 'transgression' with shame and it ultimately serves not to forge solidarity between them, but to sever their bond: 'My solitude, perhaps, had begun in that moment as we hastily did up our flies' ([1992] 112).

Because the question of Patrick's sexual identity remains unexplored after this point in the narrative, Heyns has suggested that '[p]erhaps what Galgut's novel most effectively dramatises is the perplexity of the white male homosexual in South Africa, who cannot allow himself even the luxury of a struggle for his own liberation' (117). The novel also suggests, however, that sexual identity is but one aspect of selfhood and that personal liberation within a politically oppressive context cannot take place in these terms alone. Politically, Patrick and Lappies's relationship is characterised by complacence. On the single occasion that Patrick openly questions the arbitrariness and injustice of conscription and the 'Border War' in general, it is Lappies who discourages his conscientisation:

> One night, as we sat outside the tent, listlessly tossing stones, I said to Lappies:
>
> 'D'you ever think about it? Being up here.'
>
> 'What do you mean?'

He was looking curiously at me. Embarrassed, I went on:

> 'I don't know anything about SWAPO. I don't hate them. I'm just here for two years because I have to be. It's a law. I might have to shoot them. They might even shoot me. But I don't know why I'm doing this. It's got nothing to do with my life.'
>
> Lappies considered these thoughts, flipping a pebble with his hands. 'No,' he said, gravely. 'You mustn't think about it. If you think about it, you'll be mad.' […] 'Don't think about it. Don't think so much.' ([1992] 73-4)

The relationship between Lappies and Patrick cannot help either man develop the assertive self-confidence needed for political dissent, because they replicate each other's fearful, submissive natures. By representing Lappies and Patrick as 'empty', compliant men, Galgut's novel appears reserved about claiming a *causal* link between homosexuality and political defiance. The development of Patrick's identity — and his broader conscientisation — is facilitated, not through the contiguous Lappies, but through his encounter with the racial, cultural and political difference represented by Godfrey, the black SWAPO activist with whom his capricious mother has a brief affair. It is within this critically neglected aspect of the novel that Galgut suggests, as I explore in the next section, the ethical labour involved in bridging the chasm between self and other and in establishing an identity which defies the norms of South African white hegemonic culture. Here, Galgut develops his preoccupation with the inner torment which Patrick suffers into an examination of the potentially restorative effects of extending the self outwards, towards a hitherto unknowable alterity.

3.2.

Between Patrick and the radical alterity initially represented by Godfrey exists Andrew Lovell, a white SWAPO activist — ostensibly based on the historical figure, Anton Lubinski — whom Patrick never meets, but whose example of political martyrdom initiates his own process of self-reckoning. Lovell acts as a kind of 'mediatory other' in the novel, who facilitates Patrick's eventual identification with Godfrey. The news that Lovell was assassinated in Swakopmund provides the catalyst for the first significant shift in Patrick's consciousness:

> [W]ithout knowing why, something lurched in my chest […] I had never known Andrew Lovell and now never would; but his death felt obscurely important. I had a dim sense, somewhere in myself, of approaching a cardinal point. A centre of gravity shifted in me. ([1992] 82)

Patrick is struck by the significance of Lovell's assassination precisely because they share the same apartheid era *habitus*: Lovell was not born in Namibia, but in South Africa, and was only a few years Patrick's senior. At the time of his death, Patrick learns, he was facing charges for refusing to serve in the SADF ([1992] 81). Lovell is the first real example to Patrick of what the exercise of agency within a politically and socially oppressive context entails and presents a significant challenge to his sense of resigned determinism. Because they share the same socio-historical origins but took such divergent paths politically, Patrick comes to see Lovell as his unrealised 'alter ego'. Upon meeting Lovell's girlfriend, it is this sense of identification with Lovell that he attempts, but fails, to communicate:

> I struggled to speak, to give voice to what I contained. *Your lover who died,* I wanted to say, *was all that I'll never be. I'm sealed into myself by a terrible wall: a transparent, tenuous membrane. Though I strain and I beat, my efforts are muffled, my cries are eaten by silence. I have longed for a way to vent my country from me, to bawl it from my flesh. Andrew Lovell,* I wanted to tell her that day, *was my other, impossible self.* ([1992]140)

By this late point in the novel, Patrick has come to understand that what distinguishes him from Lovell and makes him incapable of performing similar acts of self-determination and political dissent is his introverted solipsism, which has rendered all his feelings of antagonism towards the dominant hegemony mute. Thus, although cultivated in childhood as a defence against an inhospitable world, it is precisely his reclusiveness that puts him at the mercy of the socio-political system into which he was born.

It is in its critique of Patrick's solipsism that *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* endorses the Arendtian insight that human freedom is primarily *not* a private phenomenon, but is, instead, active and public. Theorised in the aftermath of World War Two, much of Arendt's political philosophy is concerned with the questions of how totalitarian regimes are able to mobilise civilian populations to do their bidding and to what extent we are able to resist our co-optation into a system of political oppression. Thus, although postulated in a context distinct from Galgut's own, her work provides a peculiarly appropriate lens through which to view the questions *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* poses about Patrick's culpability in the war. Indeed, the novel might be read as a sustained dramatisation of Arendt's claim that '[w]e first

become aware of freedom or its opposite in our intercourse with others, not in the intercourse with ourselves' (*Past and Future* 148). The example of Lovell indicates, for the first time, to Patrick that he is 'free' (in Arendt's qualified sense of the term) to reject the system into which he has been conscripted, despite the fact of his birth as a white South African. In the passage quoted above, Patrick also recognises that a philosophical, 'inward' identification with the tenets of freedom is not synonymous with being free in the context of apartheid because of the state's coercive measures. Lovell is only able to 'vent' his country from himself, to borrow Patrick's terms, because he publicly acted against it. Lovell thus comes to embody Arendt's notion of 'freedom-as-action', which claims that '[men] *are* free — as distinguished from their possessing the gift for freedom — as long as they act, neither before nor after: for to *be* free and to act are the same' (*Past and Future* 153).

During the funeral-cum-SWAPO rally which Godfrey organises to commemorate Andrew Lovell, Patrick is exposed, for the first time, to this form of active and public freedom. The rally is dramatised as a series of epiphanic moments for Patrick, who is momentarily released from his stultifying solipsism as he partakes of the commemoration:

> As my foot stamped the ground, a hand touched my back: Godfrey pulled me towards him. With his other arm, he embraced my mother. All three of us were singing: my mother, her lover, myself. She turned her face towards him. For a second I saw how things could be: part of a mass, of a singing congregation, the family to which I'd never belonged. I stamped hard on the earth, treading my past. ([1992] 155)

Although Lovell's example provides the catalyst for Patrick's conscientisation, it is Godfrey, as this sentimental image suggests, who actively draws him out of his solitude towards communal participation. Godfrey remains a curt and thinly characterised figure throughout the narrative, bearing out Mathilde Rogez's claim that *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* suggests 'the impossibility of reaching the Other through words, partly because the Other remains absent from the page' (124). Indeed, it is a largely unspoken but nonetheless apparent bond which develops between the pair. Godfrey tacitly acknowledges Patrick's trauma and, instead of rejecting him as a 'sworn enemy', includes him in the community of SWAPO activists. Although he initially introduces Patrick facetiously as his 'comrade' ([1992] 80), Godfrey later uses the term to denote a sincere acceptance of him in an act which momentarily relieves Patrick of the burden of racial guilt:

> He introduced me, that day, as his comrade. (I will always be grateful for that.) And, because I accompanied him, the others welcomed me too. 'Comrade,' they called me, hitting palm against palm. They smiled when they caught my eye […] Absolved of being white for this hiatus in time, I took bitter sips of my drink. ([1992]135)

Patrick and Godfrey's bond develops through action rather than dialogue and it is through participating in Godfrey's activism that Patrick finds some reprieve from the traumatic symptoms that continue to plague him; the activities he undertakes with Godfrey are described in terms of 'lightness', 'grace' and 'rapture' ([1992] 102; 154; 148). Patrick's development, however, is not simply from guilt to exculpation; in his interactions with Godfrey and Lovell's legacy, he is forced to reckon with the memories of his own

participation in the Border War and the young SWAPO combatant that he unwittingly killed during duty. As Godfrey and Patrick dig Andrew Lovell's grave in preparation for the funeral, Patrick recalls the 'deaths that inhabited [his] life' ([1992] 151):

> I remember the soldier I'd slain on the border. I thought of the way that he fell.
>
> Then I found myself thinking this:
>
> *Did I shoot Andrew Lovell?*
>
> *No,* I thought, *I* am *him.*
>
> Can one be what one kills?
>
> The possibility blinded me […] Were there two selves in my round, tiny skull: Andrew Lovell and the man who had shot him? ([1992] 152)

Patrick realises here that his complacency has produced in him an almost schizophrenic ambivalence: philosophically, he identifies with the freedom Lovell represents, but his unwilling participation in the Border War has placed him on the side of subjugation. Here, the novel again reiterates that the source of his compliance exists within his isolation and introversion, which have rendered him incapable of the exercise of 'freedom-as-action': 'I was convoluted, involuted, bent on myself. Like the whorls of a shell, my patterns ran in. They never linked up with the world. My individuality was my isolation; my personality an absence. I stood outside movements and masses and words. There was too much desert in me' ([1992]159-60).

Patrick's emphasis on what he calls his 'emptiness' and 'hollowness' (terms he also uses to describe his mother and Lappies) recalls Joseph Conrad's oft-cited descriptions of the company agents who carry out the dictates of colonial exploitation in *Heart of Darkness*. Conrad's description of these men as 'hollow at the core' (165) suggests that their malevolence issues, not from their intrinsic immorality, but from their vacuity. Arendt famously uses the image in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* to describe the prospectors who flooded into South Africa during the gold rush, in a critique which forms part of her larger analysis of the foundations of the country's 'race society'. For Arendt, these men were distinct from the adventurers of antiquity, who rejected the limits of civilisation in search of material wealth; these prospectors, she argues, were the *product* of the superfluity of men and capital produced by modernity (*Origins* 189). The crucial distinction for Arendt concerns the question of agency. These men, she argues,

> had not stepped out of society but had been spat out by it […].Their only choice had been a negative one, a decision against workers' movements, in which the best of the superfluous men or of those who were threatened with superfluity established a kind of countersociety through which they could find their way back into a human world of fellowship and purpose. They were nothing of their own making, they were like living symbols of what had happened to them, living abstractions and witnesses of the absurdity of human institutions. They were not individuals like the old adventurers, they were the shadows of events with which they had nothing to do. Like Mr Kurtz in Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness,' they were 'hollow to the core,'

> ‘reckless without hardihood, greedy without audacity and cruel without courage.’ (*Origins* 189)

For Arendt, ‘hollowness’ comprises the facets of selfhood which make us susceptible to the the vicissitudes of history: passivity, ‘inwardness’ and disconnection. The lack of volition Patrick feels in relation to his context places him, by his own reckoning, on a continuum with history’s many ‘hollow men’ who ‘were nothing of their own making’ and thus provided the conditions under which injustice could thrive. His time with Godfrey, however, instills in him an urgent need to assert himself against this vacuousness, which characterises not only his own identity, but also his mother’s. In the penultimate chapter, he dissociates himself from Ellen’s rejection of Godfrey in his first act of defiance against her. The emotional exchange suggests the depth of Patrick’s feelings of responsibility towards the example Godfrey has set:

> ‘I don’t want to be...what we are. I want to be redeemed,’ I told her savagely. ‘I want to be redeemed from myself [...] I don’t want to fail [Godfrey]. Christ,’ I said. I stood up. I was full, suddenly, of immeasurable disgust: at my life, at how little it meant. My pain, neurosis, onanistic caresses: a vortex of introspective lust. ([1992] 160)

Patrick’s defiance of his mother — and the ethical vacuity she represents — is narrated as a pivotal act of self-definition and inner transformation: ‘Something enormous, I realized, was happening. Things were changing inside me’ ([1992] 159). The question of whether this change constitutes an ‘abstract’ rather than a ‘concrete’ potentiality — to borrow Lukác’s

distinction (23) between the subjective properties which manifest only within a character's psychology and those that find expression in his interaction with his social context — is, however, raised in the scenario which follows: Patrick finds himself in a park with an old German man, who had earlier tried to co-opt him into his reactionary politics ([1992] 92). Despite his desire to dissociate himself from the old man's racism, Patrick finds himself acquiescing to his greeting in an unwitting gesture of complicity: 'Before I could stop myself, I found I had waved back at him' ([1992] 161). Their brief exchange is a reminder that there exists a considerable gap between internal, subjective developments and their manifestation in social reality.

The novel, then, does not stage the radical transformation of Patrick; it in fact concludes with what almost appears to be his regression as he returns to his oppressive homeland along with his mother and her new boyfriend, a conservative Afrikaans farmer. At a superficial level, very little seems to have changed for Patrick; he continues to suffer from the debilitating symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and still appears to be at the mercy of his impulsive mother's whims. Galgut offers us only the nascent stages of Patrick's individuation from an oppressive and alienating white hegemony into a realm of identification with others. By the end of the novel, Patrick's maturation is far from complete, but he has come to reject his withdrawal and solipsism as viable responses to the ethical demands generated by apartheid's many inequities. In its insistence that Patrick's alienation is not an essential, immutable condition, but rather a product of historical forces which can be worked through only in relation to this larger context, the novel asserts a dialectic between individual subjectivity and socio-political reality, which is in keeping with the tenets of engaged realism.

It represents the closest approximation to protest literature and its implicit faith in the transformative effects of political conscientisation to be found in Galgut's oeuvre.

3.3.

As I indicated in my introduction, the conclusions which I have drawn about *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* are, to some extent, complicated by the revisions which Galgut made to the novel before its republication in 2005. The second version is less apologetic for its fidelity to Patrick's interiority and also less hopeful about the possibility for the development of intersubjective understanding between self and other after the traumas of apartheid. Indeed, the extent of Patrick's inner transformation is significantly diminished in the rewrite, as is the intensity of his identification with and sense of fidelity towards Godfrey. The rewrite is roughly thirty pages shorter than the original, making it an altogether leaner, more austere version.

The reduction in length is due largely to the elimination of a number of expository details from the original edition. The opening chapter of the revised version, for example, dispenses with several of Patrick's reflections about the tensions between his mother and grandmother in favour of an augmented metaphoricity:

> We came down the drive. The headlights picked out the house, the garage, the silent, patient figure in front.
>
> 'Oh yes,' said my mother. 'There she is. Waiting for us. She's always waiting. Like the sphinx.'

> ‘Mom,’ I said.
>
> She came forward to welcome us. Diminutive, dour, she was wearing the same soiled apron I remembered from every previous visit. It was two years since I’d last been here.
>
> She came to me first. ‘Patrick,’ she said. She held me by the shoulders.
>
> ‘Hello, Ouma,’ I said.
>
> Then she went to my mother. They embraced cautiously, with tender hostility, in the wash of the light from the car. ([2005] 1)

The image of the sphinx and the oxymoron of ‘tender hostility’ are the two significant details added to Patrick’s initial description of his grandmother and they allow for greater narrative economy than the exposition of her reticence and inscrutability in the original. This operates in tandem with a reduction in the already sparse dialogue between characters throughout the novel; the exchanges between Patrick and his mother, for example, are terser in the revised edition and Patrick is, in general, less inclined towards placating her. The staccato rhythms of the prose already evident in the original are thus underscored in the rewrite and even greater emphasis is placed on Patrick’s struggle to communicate.

In addition to developing the novel’s metaphorical register in the rewrite, Galgut also reworked some of the novel’s existing imagery to alter its connotations. The most significant example in this regard concerns the surreal image which comprises the novel’s title. ‘The beautiful screaming of pigs’ refers to Patrick’s impression of the rituals of slaughter which

take place weekly on his grandmother's farm. In the original version, Patrick recalls in detail how, as a child, he was fascinated by the noises the pigs made before execution:

> When I was younger, I have to confess, their screams were beautiful to me. On those occasions I holidayed at the farm, I was up at six on Tuesday. [...] With the first rays of sun coming down to the ground, wrapped in a thin silver mist, I watched pigs being carefully struck. And afterwards, when their yellow carcasses had been dragged to the barn, I would go to the place where they fell. There, in the blood that had soaked through the ground, I made the print of my hand. ([1992] 28)

The indifference which Patrick feels towards the suffering of the animals in childhood suggests that innocence is always already tainted and the image serves, as Andrew van der Vlies has noted, 'as an indictment of the violence supporting his privilege' ('Built on Slaughter' 24). His involvement in the Border War, however, has made him all too aware of this violence. He returns to his grandmother's farm after his year of service newly sensitised to suffering and the pigs' screaming now strikes him as 'hideous' ([1992] 28). The revised edition retains Patrick's morbid fascination with the slaughter, but his childhood and adult reactions to the sound of the pigs' screaming are significantly reversed:

> I had always, as a child, been deeply disturbed by the sound, but I could never keep away. Whenever a pig was killed, I was there, among the watching black children, in the first rays of sun, with my hands over my ears.

> And afterwards I followed the trail of the carcass as it was dragged bloodily to the barn, to be butchered.
>
> It was a sign of my state of mind or soul that on this particular morning the screaming of the pig sounded almost beautiful to me. It didn't evoke violence or fear, but a train of gentle childhood memories. Soft-focus memories, moments on the farm. ([2005] 26-7)

In this revised version, Patrick appears as the archetypal 'fallen' man, removed from the prelapsarian innocence of childhood by an unscrupulous world. His nostalgic lament for a lost innocence underscores the corrupting influence of war, which appears to have inculcated in him an impassivity that allows him to aestheticise the slaughter. The image of the beautiful screaming of pigs thus accords Patrick quite distinct — even opposing — psychological responses to the trauma of war: the first version suggests that the violence of war has sensitised him to suffering, but the second indicates that it has anaesthetised him to it. Although Patrick seems, in the first version, to identify with the helplessness of the creatures being led to slaughter 'more in a demeaning than a morally empathetic way' (Gagiano 98), his aversion to their screaming since his return from the Border War nonetheless registers as the more appropriate of the two responses. His eerie fascination with the sound in the rewrite indicates a fundamental disconnection in Patrick from basic human feelings of empathy and compassion, which casts greater doubt over his capacity to readjust to societal norms after the trauma of war. The image is, in addition, more portentous in the rewrite, as it metonymically registers larger horrors which go unmentioned in the first edition: 'the sound of a pig dying [...] is the noise of babies being abandoned, of women being taken by force, of the hinges of the world tearing loose' ([2005] 26).

These changes to the novel's central metaphor are in keeping with the darker tenor of the rewrite, which is, in general, more reserved about the chances for Patrick's recovery. Although Godfrey remains an unequivocally positive influence on Patrick, Galgut qualifies the extent of their identification with each other and Godfrey's acceptance of Patrick. The significant detail of his description of Patrick as his 'comrade', for example, is omitted from the rewrite, as are the euphoric terms which Patrick uses to describe his time with Godfrey. Their excursion to the SWAPO offices also proves less significant. Indeed, Godfrey is less inclined to integrate Patrick into his world and he is received with apathy by the other activists. The interaction, accordingly, does not provide him with momentary respite from the burden of white guilt: 'They were happy to see Godfrey; there was a lot of hand-slapping and chatter. He didn't introduce me to anybody, but I was accepted as a background detail to his life that didn't need to be explained' ([2005] 114). Patrick's real respect and admiration for Godfrey remains intact: in both versions, he describes himself as being 'a little in love' with Godfrey ([1992] 135; [2005] 115) but, in the second, these feelings seem to have a reduced potency in effecting real change in Patrick's life. He is less able, for example, to defy his mother when she rejects Godfrey and does not experience the same profound sense of inner transformation when he does confront her ([2005] 128-130).

The sentimentality of Patrick's nascent conversion — from a privately tormented, solipsistic figure to a conscientised individual able to imagine the possibilities of communal participation — is, thus, significantly attenuated in the second version of the novel, which expresses far less faith in the capacity for the individual to heal from history via immersion in his social milieu. Indeed, from the perspective which the revised edition offers us, the dialectic which exists between an individual's subjectivity and his social reality seems only to

engender suffering and the novel provides flimsy grounds on which to imagine Patrick's future recovery. The revisions to the novel do not simply demonstrate Galgut's maturing aesthetic, then, but also indicate a pronounced change in the structures of feeling implicit in the first edition. Published on the eve of apartheid's demise, the original version of *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* expressed, on the one hand, horror at the atrocities of the past, but also, more tentatively, reserved hope in the reconciliatory possibilities of the future. Indeed, the representation of Godfrey and Patrick as reconciled 'comrades' is, arguably, a pre-emergent expression of the sentimental version of interracial togetherness which would become hegemonic in the discourses of 'rainbow nationalism' in South Africa's early democracy. The changes which Galgut made to the novel in 2005 suggest that, in the intervening fourteen years, this version of individual and collective transformation had come to seem troublingly programmatic and in need of careful qualification. The second version evinces, not an outright rejection of that earlier vision, but a keen awareness of the ways in which the literature of struggle — with its implicit investment in the promise of individual and social progress — had falsely smoothed its trajectory.

The years that passed between the publication of the two versions of *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* witnessed significant developments in Galgut's career, which also account for the changes he made to the novel. Its republication was, of course, aimed at the international readership Galgut had gained after *The Good Doctor* was shortlisted for the Man Booker prize in 2003 and which, arguably, expected the worldlier and more sceptical perspective that he would articulate in that well-received novel. His real dissatisfaction with the earnest realism originally represented by *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* was, however, already apparent in the striking departure he would take from the tenets of political engagement in his

proceeding novel, *The Quarry.* It is, arguably, his darkest novel to date and represents his unequivocal rejection of the ideological and aesthetic compromises which anti-apartheid literary culture had, from his perspective, engendered in his writing.

CHAPTER FOUR

Cultural Renewal or Exhaustion? On the 'Postmodernism' of *The Quarry*

As a work largely accommodated by the tropes governing the reception of late anti-apartheid writing, *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* went some way to securing Galgut's reputation as a noteworthy South African author. Although not a commercial success, the novel earned him his first writer's prize and received considerable scholarly attention. In short, *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* signalled that Galgut was beginning to achieve the forms of prestige and critical acknowledgement which Bourdieu sees as requisite for securing legitimacy within the field of literary production. His next novel, however, would do little to bolster his critical reputation. *The Quarry* is the second of Galgut's metaphysical crime thrillers and, like *A Sinless Season*, it deploys the tropes of failed detection to foreground the insoluble nature of a series of existential mysteries. Unlike his debut novel, however, *The Quarry* generally received lukewarm responses from reviewers and was poorly supported by Viking Penguin, who declined to distribute it internationally. To date, it has not received any published scholarly attention and would only be cursorily reviewed in the international press in 2005, when it was re-issued by Atlantic Books in the wake of the Man Booker short-listing of *The Good Doctor*.

The Quarry is, arguably, Galgut's most formally experimental novel. It provides even less narrative intervention and guidance than the episodic *In a Strange Room*, the earliest drafts of which he started writing shortly after completing *The Quarry.* The mid- to late-nineties clearly represented a period of intense experimentation for Galgut and heralded his unequivocal rejection of the earnest realism represented by *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs.*

Indeed, we might read *The Quarry* as a dystopian reprise of that earlier novel, redeploying its tropes of boundaries, journeys and landscapes in intensely defamiliarised and ironically self-conscious ways. Its anti-realism is signalled from the first chapter, which places an unnamed protagonist in an unspecified setting; the reader is introduced to 'the man' who, we learn, is on the run from the police, but other matters of personal history and psychological interiority remain obscured by an apparently disaffected narrator, who retains an austere distance from the events and characters. Making no attempt to establish the circuits of reader-character identification that drove the first-person confessions of Galgut's earlier novels, this anonymous figure at times deliberately obfuscates its object of narration, until the law and its transgression — metaphorically figured in the narrative as the 'hunter' and his 'quarry' — become indistinguishable.

The cultural climate of the early post-apartheid years seemed well-disposed to the anti-realist impulse of *The Quarry.* Published in 1995, the novel is chronologically the first of Galgut's post-apartheid novels and its release coincided with an unusually euphoric moment in South African literary studies, which celebrated the liberation of local writing from the mandates of solidarity and witnessing into more worldly, experimental and postmodern forms: 'Now that freedom has made new kinds of formal and cultural daring more possible', observed Elleke Boehmer in her 1996 essay on 'South African fiction in transition', 'it will be liberating to see the lens of vigilant social observation crack across to give life skewed, fragmented, appended, not by apartheid as before, but as part of the manipulation of aesthetic form' (53). Drawing on Bakhtinian theories of the novel as an inherently 'democratic' form, Graham Pechey ventured that '[t]he literature which South Africa's post-apartheid condition both needs and can deliver is the many-voiced *ekstasis* which frees us from the future of hopes and

fears and admits us to a sphere of "unexpectedness", of "absolute innovation and miracle"' (73). A similarly utopian sentiment can be discerned in André Brink's expression of faith in the 'regenerative powers' of South African literature, 'not simply to escape from the inhibitions of apartheid but to construct and deconstruct new possibilities […] and to be willing to risk everything in the leaping flame of the word as it turns into world' (27).

It is with this sense of anticipation for the 'new' that Christopher Roper reviewed *The Quarry* in *The Southern African Review of Books* in what remains the only unequivocally positive review of the novel: 'One would be tempted, if it did not involve the perpetuation of a cliché, to state that this novel signals the beginning of the writing of a New South Africa in fiction, and certainly the creation of a new authorial position from which to speak'. Yet, as I go on to explore in this chapter, the novel's ethical and affective bearing towards the post-apartheid 'moment' is markedly distinct from those endorsed by the scholarship cited above, which, with varying emphases, anticipates an 'opening out' of local writing through ludic, polyvocal and productively indeterminate forms into a creative reorientation towards the future: '[O]ne looks forward', noted Boehmer, 'to an open-endedness that makes room for new and various ways of thinking about the future — no longer the inevitable interregnum, arrested birth, the moment before death — in short, the foreclosure of the frozen penultimate' (51; see also Brink 27). The hermetic world of *The Quarry,* including its univocal, voyeuristic narrator, its inscrutable protagonist and its relentlessly dysphoric mood, appears to be far removed from this expansive, participatory vision. Evident in the novel's 'experimentalism', I argue, is not a creative embrace of the future, but an expression of antagonism towards the apartheid past and the restrictions it placed on the writer's agency.

Such feelings of antagonism are not uncommon in the history of 'experimental' writing in South Africa; a substantial tradition of which had, of course, preceded the political watershed of 1994[17] and had long had to defend itself against charges of political indifference and effete aestheticism, particularly during the heated realism debates of the seventies and eighties. By the time *The Quarry* was published in 1995, the term 'experimental' had become something of a 'catch-all' for a variety of anti-realist forms, which implicitly problematised the referential status of fiction and thus pre-empted and rejected uninterrogated assumptions about its capacity to bear witness to socio-historical 'truths'. Although the critical climate had ostensibly warmed towards such modes by the mid-nineties, *The Quarry,* it seems, was sufficiently abstruse and expressionistic to invite criticism along the familiar lines which essentialised form in relation to content. With the exception of Roper's enthusiastic endorsement, most reviews of the novel tended to credit Galgut as a gifted 'wordsmith' who regrettably 'didn't have much to say' , as Jeremy Gordin phrased it (21). A similar sentiment was expressed by J.U. Jacobs, who felt that 'Galgut's novel leaves us unsatisfied: we come away from its many promises with a feeling of having finally been given little more than a cleverly extended metaphor' (72). And, although taken with 'freshness of […] Galgut's prose', Mark Gevisser still expressed the reservation that 'sometimes the writing […] is too terse and abstracted, boil[ing] down to nothing at all' (34).

There is, indeed, what we might call an evacuation of meaning from the *The Quarry*: it deploys a series of familiar tropes related to land, identity and race, only to reveal them as red herrings, which will ultimately fail to signify, or, at least, to signify in the ways we have come

[17] In a recent survey, Michael Green sees the 'experimental line' in South African writing extending as far back as the 'flagrant' hybridity (788) of Sol Plaatje's *Mhudi* to the modes of 'postmodern self-consciousness' apparent in the contemporary fiction of writers like Ivan Vladislavic and Anne Landsman. See Green, 'Experimental Line', 788-92.

to expect. These tropes, and their implied narratives, are presented in such a way as to emphasise their static conventionality. From Galgut's perspective, they are vacuous — even bankrupt — cultural forms, which stifle literary language and curtail its author's agency. I read the 'vacuity' noted by the critics above, then, not as the inadvertent product of Galgut's overwrought style, but as an expression of cultural exhaustion engendered by the proscriptive tradition of South Africa's literature of socio-political engagement and the priority it placed on realism. As Justin Fox noted in his brief comments about the novel in a survey article of South African road narratives, *The Quarry* 'revels in the possibility of saying nothing' in a country which has 'for so long been forced to speak or [has] been spoken for in a political voice' (453). In declaring the archive of canonical apartheid themes, motifs and narrative strategies a cultural dead-end for the post-apartheid writer, however, *The Quarry* leaves us with the problem of what lies in their wake.

4.1.

At the centre of the interpretative problems posed by *The Quarry* is the inscrutable man, whose character is too vaguely sketched to fully command the status of protagonist. We neither know anything about his history, nor his psychology. His emotions and actions are strangely undifferentiated, making it impossible to discern intention or motivation: 'There was a quality to his movements that was perfunctory and detached so that all activity was one. Crying or washing, it was the same to him' (3). This impassivity extends to the act of murder, which the man commits in an equally perfunctory fashion. His victim is Frans Niemand, a minister who stops to help the man while on his way to take up a new missionary post in the nearby town. After they share the communion wine stored in his vehicle, Niemand

sexually propositions the man, who then turns on him and murders him with the wine bottle. The sacrilegiousness of the scene sets the tone for the remainder of the narrative, in which the man, after dumping Niemand's body in a nearby quarry, steals his vestments and masquerades as the town's new minister.

The apparent causality of *The Quarry*'s plot hides the fact that we are never actually privy to the motive for the murder. Was it a premeditated scheme, in which the man had decided upon identity theft as a means to facilitate his own escape? Or was it an act of homophobic rage against Niemand's unwanted advances? Is this his first murder, or is murder precisely the charge from which he is trying to escape? The anticlimactic description of the murder itself does not yield any clues about its purpose or intention:

> The man was holding the bottle by the neck and he raised it to one side and brought it down with force on the side of the minister's head. He fell sideways, twitching. The bottle broke in mid-air where the minister's head had been and the wine exploded redly, like blood. Or perhaps it was blood. Then the man bent and picked up a rock that had lain untouched there till now and brought it down on the skull of the man below him and stove it in. (27)

This early scene prepares us for the novel's many acts of withholding: if there is a motive for the murder, we never learn of it, nor do we ever discover what emotions, thoughts or beliefs drive the man's actions in general. Given the generic tendencies of crime fiction to direct the reader's attention to repressed or abjected content that cannot find verbal expression, we

might plausibly expect such information to be revealed only indirectly; perhaps, for example, through the metaphoric logic of condensation. Yet, we are unable to accept the title's invitation to 'quarry' our way through the metaphoric and symbolic content of the narrative to the 'truth' of the man's motive, as there is a deliberate muddying of metaphoric logic throughout the narrative. In the above passage, for example, we cannot decipher which is the literal term — the wine or the blood? In which direction, in other words, should our interpretative 'excavation' proceed? The 'sliding' of the metaphorical into the literal ('perhaps it *was* blood') is one way in which *The Quarry* signals that there may in fact be no 'buried' content here to unearth, in which case the murder *is* the arbitrary act it superficially appears to be.

The novel's secondary characters are not possessed of the same motivelessness that characterises the inscrutable man; instead, they are all unable to match intention with consequence and fall victim to events largely beyond their comprehension. The two petty criminals, Small and Valentine, suffer the worst of these unintended consequences when their theft of the man's possessions unwittingly implicates them in Niemand's murder. By 're-stealing' Niemand's (evidently worthless) possessions, they mimic the man's own theft in what becomes a trope of empty pantomime and valueless exchange sustained throughout the novel. Yielding no profitable outcomes, the characters' actions generally prove vacuous gestures in a farcical plot not of their own making. Even the zealous Captain Mong, so driven to track down Niemand's murderer, appears to be a scripted, 'empty' character as he ritualistically enacts the role of police officer. The narrator's emphasis on his obsession with the accoutrements of power — including the gun and motorbike that make him 'not altogether human' (57) — is echoed in Small's forlorn fascination with Niemand's cassock,

which ‘had a sensual texture that his life did not and its smoothness was strange and consoling’ (56). Identity, stature and power, the novel suggests, are all acquired extrinsically, through a process of elaborate costuming which hides the characters’ insubstantiality and, ultimately, their arbitrary interchangeability. Their ubiquitous vacuity is underscored both figuratively and literally throughout the narrative by: the circus imagery, which describes the characters as ‘pantomimic’ (5) and ‘harlequin’-like (3) and, later (in another example of the metaphorical ‘sliding’ described above), the travelling circus, which comes to visit the small town.

The quarry itself is, of course, the central image of ‘emptiness’ in the novel and the focal point of all the plot machinations. As a grave for Niemand’s body, a site for Small and Valentine’s marijuana crop and a hiding place for the man, it is associated with concealment and secrecy. Yet, like the landscape which surrounds it, the quarry has no intrinsic meaning; it is only made meaningful through ‘what you dream up in it’ (*The Quarry* 10). Its metaphoric associations are stripped away as the narrative progresses, until it is rendered wholly uninterpretable in the concluding passage:

> In the middle of the day everything in the quarry is lit from above by the sun. The boulders, the tiny trees, the vine growing up the cliff-face. All still and clear, static and visible. Nothing moves in the quarry. [...] Then the sun goes down and the shadow in the quarry changes. It gets darker and objects are slowly lost in it, their outlines consumed. The shadow thickens. Then it isn’t shadow anymore. It’s darkness and the darkness in the hole is no different to the darkness above it but you can’t see down into the quarry. It was dug a

> long time ago and it goes down deep into the ground. There might be water in the quarry, or movement, or nothing. There might be no bottom to it. (192-3)

In this final passage, all meaning is evacuated from the quarry; it is no longer a 'container' for the characters' secrets or a site that can be 'mined' for hidden content, but forms the vanishing point for all significance in the novel instead. If the image of the quarry operates metaphorically, then it does so perversely and ironically, to signal the failure of metaphor to augment meaning through associative thinking: beneath all the figurative layers, there 'might […] be nothing'. As an image of depth which privileges surface, the quarry signals the interpretative demands which the novel tries to make of the reader: namely, that we resist the temptation to 'plumb the depths' of the narrative in search of some latent, hidden meaning and, instead, refocus our attention on its manifest, 'surface' content.

The Quarry's attempt to call our attention to the significance of surface over depth is especially apparent in Galgut's surrealistic treatment of the landscape, which tries to render the land unavailable for discursive appropriation. Initially, Galgut includes a few details, which indicate that the novel is set somewhere along South Africa's west coast (the reference to the indigenous *fynbos* [20] is the most tangible clue), but then refuses to admit this landscape any ideological or historical significance. This is in marked contradistinction to the *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs,* in which the land was wholly defined in socio-political terms. If that earlier novel represented the land as being overdetermined by masculinist and nationalist fantasies, in *The Quarry,* Galgut tries to imagine a landscape which yields neither to man's desires, nor to the vicissitudes of history. His uncanny descriptions of the land, which render it both familiar and strange, attempt to recall and then dissociate the land from

the cache of metaphors it acquired through apartheid's struggle narratives and restore its irreducible surface materiality. The novel asks that we read the land not as a metaphor for 'something else', but, instead, as an ambiguous, even uninterpretable entity; one that 'might mean everything and perhaps nothing at all' (*The Quarry* 8).

By inviting the reader to prioritise its ostensible, visible content and attend to its 'surface' rather than its 'depths', *The Quarry* enters into a longstanding debate about the value of 'symptomatic reading', which, broadly speaking, encompasses the interpretative method that takes 'meaning to be hidden, repressed, deep and in need of detection and disclosure' (Best & Marcus 1). Although symptomatic reading, as Umberto Eco has shown, has a long history that dates back at least as far as to the Gnostics (ctd in Best & Marcus 8), it is perhaps most readily associated with the method outlined by Fredric Jameson in *The Political Unconscious* (1981). Here Jameson argues that the work of interpretation is one of unveiling or unmasking, in which the critic must seek 'a latent meaning behind the manifest one' (*Political Unconscious* 60). Jameson argues that the mechanisms of narrative work ideologically to provide imaginary resolutions to the real contradictions engendered by history, which thus leaves the 'strong' critic with the task of revealing the truths that 'remain unrealized in the surface of the text' (*Political Unconscious* 48). The 'weak' critic, presumably, would be seduced by the ideological work of narrative and blindly and unknowingly preserve it. Hence, interpretation could never proceed on the basis that 'the text means just what it says' (*Political Unconscious* 61), for to do so would be to perpetuate the hegemonies through which domination operates. 'If everything were transparent,' Jameson argues, 'then no ideology would be possible and no domination either' (*Political Unconscious* 61).

Jameson's contention that symptomatic reading is capable of unearthing the power structures which make domination possible, renders literary criticism a form of activism and affords it greater currency in the socio-political realm in which, if we recall Bourdieu's formulation, it characteristically enjoys little influence. This explains its traction in the South African academy in the 1970s and 1980s: as a methodology, it tacitly secured the ethico-political agency of the critic, reassuring him of the real social relevance of his work. From the perspective of its detractors, however, symptomatic reading conducts an assault on the integrity of the literary text, as well as on the artistic autonomy of the author. This position was articulated as early as 1965 by Susan Sontag, in her now well-known manifesto 'Against Interpretation'. Sontag does not use the term 'symptomatic reading', but her descriptions of the 'modern style of interpretation' (6) clearly tally with the method Jameson would outline almost twenty years later in *The Political Unconscious*. Interestingly, the tropes of 'excavation' and 'quarrying' which *The Quarry* utilises to stage its own resistance to interpretation recall the precise terms of Sontag's argument: 'The modern style of interpretation excavates, and as it excavates, destroys; it digs 'behind' the text, to find a sub-text which is the true one' (6). Sontag condemns 'modern' critics for their tendency to alter the meaning of a text by deferring to Marxist and Freudian metanarratives. In strongly rhetorical terms, Sontag rejects the notion that elaborate interpretative manoeuvres are required to bring the 'true' meaning of a literary or artistic work into plain sight. Instead of trying to show what a work means, Sontag argues, the critic should endeavour to show 'that it is what it is' (14).

Sontag's argument suggests that symptomatic reading is premised on uninterrogated assumptions about the mimetic function of art. Because mimetic theories 'assume that art is

always figurative' (Sontag 4), they imply that an act of decoding or translation is required to make its literal meaning — and hence its value in the material world — apparent. Symptomatic reading, in other words, meets the 'challenge' which mimetic theory sets for 'art to justify itself' (Sontag 3), thus setting up the critic as art's legitimising agent. It is precisely this hierarchy which *The Quarry* implicitly resists by interrupting the transposition of quarry and landscape from physical phenomena into figurative signifiers. Confronted with the possibility that our interpretative 'excavations' may yield no significant critical insights, the novel asks us to occupy what Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, summarising the work of Anne-Lise François, have described as 'a paradoxical space of minimal critical agency' (Best and Marcus 17), in which we do not attempt to gain mastery over the text, but learn to 'tolerate the noninstrumental'. In a formulation which recalls Sontag's directive to 'show' that the literary object 'is what it is', François suggests that we learn to adopt a critical practice which is satisfied with 'bearing witness to the given' (35; ctd in Best and Marcus 18).

In Sontag's model, the release of the critic from the activism of symptomatic reading entails an affective dimension: no longer confined to the task of wresting meaning from a resisting text, he can now embrace it in its 'pure, untranslatable, sensuous immediacy' and avail himself to an 'erotics of art' (14). The heady, early post-apartheid literary scholarship cited above found itself similarly exhilarated by the prospect of a new mode of writing that would allow the critic to abandon the hermeneutics of suspicion and attend, instead, to the 'absolute innovation and miracle' (Pechey 73) of literature. Yet, the 'depthless' aesthetic of *The Quarry* invites no such euphoric response. It rehearses instead a 'flattening out' of affect in which emotions are defused to the extent that they become undifferentiated, so that the man's

apparent apathy, for example, seems no more or less significant than Captain Mong's rage. Emotions seem noteworthy in the novel only for their inefficacy; their failure, in short, to shape or inform the events that conspire against the characters in any significant way. This, in turn, reduces the range of affective responses available to the reader. How are we to respond to the apparent lack of feeling with which the man murders Niemand? Are we to register it with the same impassivity that the narrator does? If so, how close does this bring us to normalising the violence *The Quarry* represents? The novel troubles us with the ethical implications of the minimal critical agency its 'depthlessness' apparently allows for, suggesting that the effort involved in 'tolerating noninstrumentality' — the idea, in other words, that we cannot turn to literature for models of how to overcome injustice and domination, or use its criticism to diagnose the constraints placed on our freedom — may come without the affective rewards which critics like Sontag imagine.

From Jameson's perspective, both the intensification and the waning of affect constitute coterminous rather than antithetical responses to the critical and creative rejection of the symptomatic 'depth model' and both should be understood as 'significant symptom[s…] of postmodernist culture' (*Postmodernism* 20). In his now canonical treatise on *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,* Jameson effectively recuperates the repudiation of symptomatic hermeneutics by reading it symptomatically, as a clue to a larger cultural logic which underscores postmodern cultural production. Postmodernism, Jameson argues, characteristically replaces depth with surface, in an effort to 'render older models of perception […] archaic and aimless' (*Postmodernism* 22). The aesthetic effect is typically a dissociative one, akin to the schizophrenic's loss of relational logic, 'bearing a mysterious charge or affect, [sometimes] described in the negative terms of anxiety and a loss of identity,

but which one could just as well imagine in the positive terms of euphoria' (*Postmodernism* 35-6).

The flat affect produced by *The Quarry*'s rejection of symptomatic 'depth' seems fairly typical, then, of the postmodern aesthetic which Jameson describes. It is thus not surprising that a critic like Roper, receptive to the novel's anti-realism, would herald it as 'introduc[ing] a particular brand of post-modernism to South African fiction'. Yet, it is worth recalling here Jameson's proviso that postmodernism is more than the sum of its experimental parts. It is, he is careful to stress, the 'superstructural expression' (*Postmodernism* 5) of late capitalism; its fetishisation of the 'new' and, hence, its predilection for aesthetic innovation, a product of the 'frantic' economic demand for 'fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods' (*Postmodernism* 4). The experimentalism of *The Quarry* and the fervent calls for the 'new' which characterised cultural conversations about South African literature during the immediate aftermath of apartheid, were clearly responses to a set of socio-historical pressures markedly distinct from the economic and geo-political ones which Jameson maps. The distinction is significant because, I would argue, *The Quarry* represents a desire for, rather than the manifestation of, the postmodern dissociation of the 'real', which Jameson describes, particularly as it pertains to the novel's relationship to '"real" history' (Jameson *Postmodernism* 28). In other words, in terms that I elucidate below, it aims to reproduce postmodernism's 'break' with history, but is not engendered by it.

4.2.

In his now well-known argument about the postmodern weakening of history, Jameson argues that 'real history' has been displaced by the 'history of aesthetic styles'; that, through the logic of pastiche or 'empty' quotation, we can no longer access the past as a putative reality, but can only gaze upon it 'by way of our own stereotypes about that past [...] which itself remains forever out of reach' (*Postmodernism* 33). Although this is clearly meant as an indictment of postmodernism, it is precisely this sense of an attenuated and inauthentic relationship to the past which Galgut tries to render in *The Quarry* through his presentation of the stock tropes, styles and symbols of the literature of socio-political engagement as thoroughly conventional — even exhausted — paradigms no longer able to represent the apartheid past, but only (to paraphrase Jameson) our ideas and stereotypes about that past. The endless reproduction and recycling of cultural forms and archetypes, the novel claims, lead to their evacuation; a point metaphorically underscored by the trope of empty pantomime examined above. Hence, the characters find themselves in a world of signifiers void of historical referents; one in which 'all the old symbols had died' (*The Quarry* 58) and nothing yields a connection to the past.

The Quarry, then, explicitly critiques the ways in which we have come to represent the past, but in another, broader sense, it also questions the capacity of narrative to represent the past at all. In this regard, it partakes of a generalised postmodern scepticism towards the notion of fictional reference, but makes a specific case against the cultural investment in the notion of the novel's allegiance to reproducing the 'real' in the South African context. Its antagonism towards mimetic understandings of literary representation is apparent not only in its hostility

to the logic of symptomatic reading explored above, but also in the overt grammatical and linguistic 'malfunctions' which Galgut introduces into the narrative. Initially, these comprise the fleeting omission of punctuation marks, the first of which occurs without warning in the middle of an otherwise grammatically coherent first chapter. Its effect is to break up the surface of the text's apparent verisimilitude and announce its departure from the codes of realism:

> When he heard the sound ahead, he did not hesitate but went into the grass on the right and closed the yellow sheaves behind him like a curtain. He crouched there on the earth that was hard but warm like the living flesh of some basking reptile and looked out through a gap in the stalks at a small patch of road perhaps ten metres wide and listened to the noise of the engine get closer and louder till it filled and passed through that empty space that arena as small and charged as the stage of a theatre and had a vision brief but potent of a blue bakkie in the front of which sat a florid farmer in short sleeves and a hat and next to him his fat dour-faced wife and in the back on two metal drums a labourer lying in bone-breaking repose all three of them rendered in perfect profile as though by the brush of a manic painter who was visionary and occasionally brilliant but almost certainly mad. (7-8)

The verbal tableau which the narrator creates here out of a quotidian scene of a farmer, his wife and labourer, foregrounds the way in which narrative functions to aestheticise rather than straightforwardly represent the world. The comparison of the image's rendering to the 'brush of a manic painter' moreover indexes the novel's aesthetic fidelity to anarchic

impulses which rally against the syntagmatic linguistic structures generally prioritised by literary realism. Similar ungrammatical intrusions are introduced into the narrative with increasing frequency, until they accumulate in the concluding chapters to produce an almost 'schizophrenic' break in the text's semantic logic. The final fifteen chapters, which diminish in length as their cogency wanes, primarily consist of short fragments of prose with often unclear denotative values. The forty-fifth chapter, for example, reads as follows in its entirety:

> and clutching and dragging and pulling at him he broke free of them and ran he ran up [*sic*] the main street between the solemn assembly of watchers sitting in their chairs lying on their backs standing their telescopes and cameras and fragments of coloured glass pressed to their eyes and the light was the light of some other planet with a dwarf star for a sun cooling slowly to an ember whole continents and seas below sealed up in ice preserved in the layered gloom that might have emanated from him he ran in all the thick hot stillness he was the only point of motion of frenzy (175)

Multiple simultaneous escapes are described in these frenetic, cacophonous last chapters: the man and Valentine exploit the escape of a circus animal to distract the locals as they make their own attempts to escape trial and imprisonment for Niemand's murder. Their flight occurs against the backdrop of a solar eclipse, which is included, presumably, to heighten the already acute surrealism of the scene. As Mong begins his search for the man, the alternative meaning of the term 'quarry' is foregrounded, as the chase is rendered in the terms of a hunter pursuing his prey. Importantly, though, the distinctions between the man, Valentine, Mong

and the circus animal are cataphorically blurred across these last few chapters. This contrasts sharply with Galgut's use of the hunting metaphor in *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs,* where it foregrounded the fixed hierarchical structures which secured the dominance of aggressively patriarchal men. Here, the men are differentiated only by their respective but interchangeable positions on a continuum of violence and degradation. Their conflation with the circus animal, moreover, underscores their shared dehumanisation and lack of agency over their wretched fates.

The chase ends with the transformation of the hunter into his quarry. After murdering the man, Mong emerges as the embodiment of the anarchy he sought to quash, and is depicted in terms which distinctly recall the narrator's descriptions of the man: 'He himself looked crazed and messianic in his rags and his filth and his hair. He had only been on the road for three days but already he had taken into himself some of its logic, its lore. His sole destination was motion' (189). From this perspective, the distinction between the 'hunter' and his 'quarry' represents a false hierarchy and is reduced to a linguistic function; that is, to the arbitrary assignation of signifier to signified.

The Quarry's fragmentary structure, its rejection of the 'depth model', as well as its scepticism towards the notion of mimetic fictional reference, all signal Galgut's renunciation of the conventions of realism in favour of what, from the perspective of the post-apartheid fatigue with the literature of socio-political engagement, seemed like a more worldly, postmodern aesthetic. Importantly, though, despite its use of these properly 'postmodern' devices, *The Quarry* produces nothing of the ludic, productive polyvocality we tend to associate with the postmodern 'free-play of textual signification' (Norris 76), and which

tacitly informed cultural expectations for the modes of artistic rejuvenation to be engendered by the demise of apartheid. It presents, instead, a world of diminishing representational and interpretative possibilities, in which the overdetermined forms of a proscriptive tradition had produced a creative impasse, figured in the novel's conclusion by the 'unfigurable' aporia of the quarry itself.

In order to qualify any genealogical claims about *The Quarry*'s 'postmodernism' then, it is worth recalling, at this point, Jameson's argument about the effects produced by the 'schizophrenic' formal and syntagmatic disruptions we associate with postmodernism. Such features, he notes, only cease to 'entertain a necessary relationship to the morbid content we associate with terms like schizophrenia' when they become the cultural norm, and thus become available 'for more joyous intensities' (*Postmodernism* 37). The same devices mobilised under a different cultural logic would likely retain their negative affect, hence Jameson's reminder, once again, that we understand postmodernism not as a style, but as a 'cultural dominant' (*Postmodernism* 4). Such is the case, I would contend, with *The Quarry*: it represents the conscious deployment of postmodern devices, not the 'superstructural' expression of a dominant postmodern cultural logic. It engineers a break with the 'real' in a context (contrary to the one Jameson describes) in which the notion of the novel's fidelity to 'real history' was still peculiarly hegemonic, and had, from Galgut's perspective, stymied cultural production in South Africa to the extent of producing a creative 'vacuum'. Its schizophrenic aesthetic retains the 'older affects of anxiety and alienation' (*Postmodernism* 37) which Jameson associates more properly with literary modernism than postmodernism and these command our attention precisely because they exist as the affective traces of the inflexible ethico-political restrictions placed on both literary production and interpretation

during apartheid. In this regard, my reading of the novel makes a significant departure from Roper's interpretation thereof. For him, *The Quarry*'s 'postmodernism' signals Galgut's entry into 'a zone of landscape where the anxiety of misrepresentation is an irrelevant one'. In this chapter, I have argued the opposing point; that the bleak dysphoria of *The Quarry* suggests that the South African writer's 'anxiety' to appropriately and ethically represent his context had, by 1995, engendered a score of negative emotions which could not be recuperated by the critical and creative promise of the 'new' in post-apartheid writing.

CHAPTER FIVE

Towards a Narrative Identity in *The Good Doctor*

In a 2006 interview with Andie Miller, Galgut described the years following the publication of *The Quarry* as the most trying of his professional life. The novel's abysmal sales and its failure to generate any significant critical attention made Galgut a poor prospect for publishers. The filmic adaptation of the novel, which was released in 1998, did little to bolster his profile. Grossing only $3000 in the United States, according to the Internet Movie Database, the film was a dismal box office failure, even by independent art-house standards. Of course, *The Quarry* (in both forms) was never widely marketed or distributed and, in that sense, its poor performance was a foregone conclusion. The larger point, however, is that Galgut had lost what little cultural capital he had earned as one of South Africa's most promising writers with his precocious debut in the early eighties and, by the late nineties, he was clearly no longer perceived as a marketable South African author by the publishing industry. His next manuscript, a memoir titled 'Free Fall or Flight', which would later be developed into *In a Strange Room*, was rejected by both South African and British publishers. He told Miller that, of all the works he had completed, he 'rated it [the] most highly' (145) and its outright rejection left him with the prospect that there was no viable market for his writing, either at home or abroad.

The Good Doctor, then, was Galgut's 'last shot at something', as he described it, and he was 'astonished and amazed' to discover that it had been long-listed for the 2003 Man Booker Prize: 'My career had been in decline for the last ten years […] Quite frankly I would have been delighted just to be published in England' (qtd in Kennedy 7). *The Good Doctor* was

placed on the shortlist ahead of works by numerous high-profile authors, including Martin Amis and J.M. Coetzee, but would finally lose to D.B.C. Pierre's debut novel, *Vernon God Little,* in one of the Committee's more controversial choices in recent years.[18] Nonetheless, the short-listing alone was sufficiently prestigious to revive Galgut's career and prompted the republication and re-branding of his previous novels, with the exception of *A Sinless Season,* which he by then considered to be a regrettable, 'cringeful event' (qtd in Kennedy 7). The new Penguin editions of Galgut's novels, which featured oblique, evocative cover photography and enthusiastic blurb endorsements by fellow South African writers, lent credibility to his oeuvre and positioned him as a significant figure in South African letters. Several critics in the global reviewing network which the Man Booker Prize annually attracts, concurred, and welcomed Galgut as 'the bold fresh voice of South African fiction' (Merritt) and the 'most talented' of South Africa's 'younger generation' of writers (*The Economist*).

The story of *The Good Doctor*'s reception and the legitimacy it lent Galgut in the field of South African literature exemplify the extent to which, as Andrew van der Vlies has argued, the 'construction of a notional national literature' is dependent upon 'transnational' forms of cultural production and validation ('SA in the Global Imaginary' 707). Moreover, its success in attracting these forms of validation ahead of the *The Quarry* and 'Free Fall or Flight' sheds some light on the larger cultural politics which determine the construction of a text and its author as marketably South African. In an analysis, which I consider in more detail later, Ken Barris has argued that *The Good Doctor*'s largely positive reception by reviewers and its

[18] *Vernon God Little* was considered an insufficiently literary choice by more than one critic. Theodore Dalrymple's scathing review for *The Spectator* constituted perhaps the most extreme expression of this position: 'The Booker Prize winner was a work of unutterably tedious nastiness and vulgarity, written by a man with no discernible literary talent [...] Any kind of mediocrity would have been preferable, but [the judges] were probably scared not to side with vulgarity. Fear of appearing elitist in this country is now greater than any desire to preserve civilisation'.

endorsement by the Man Booker judges are primarily products of neocolonial tendencies in the United Kingdom's cultural market and its predilection for South African 'books which predict failure for the new dispensation' (Barris, 'Realism' 35). Such novels, Barris argues, serve to bolster an emerging 'postimperial English identity' defined by its scepticism towards the possibility of successful 'anti-racist transformation' in the former colonies (Chrisman, ctd in Barris, 'Realism' 35). His interpretation of the novel also sees its ostensible adherence to the tenets of political realism as an effective — but anachronistic and ethically suspect — means through which Galgut 'maintains his novel in the South African literary canon' (39) and hence secures its appeal to a metropolitan audience.

Barris's reading of the novel is underscored by the familiar cultural expectation, explored in the last chapter, that literary developments match political ones and that post-apartheid writers produce an innovative body of work responsive to the newly discovered freedoms and transformed ethical challenges of a democratic milieu. His central criticism of the novel is that it 'fails to move towards the invention of what might become a post-apartheid episteme; towards reshaping the South African literary canon, rather than stretching it curiously out of shape' (39). By the late nineties, however, the cultural infatuation with the rhetoric of cultural rebirth, originally born out of an understandable sense of euphoria over apartheid's demise, had become unsettlingly doctrinal. The emergence of 'rainbow nationalism' meant that increasing priority was placed on the renunciation of a shameful past, while the hearings conducted by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission produced a political discourse, as Shane Graham has argued (8-9), which was criticised for promoting collective healing and nation building at the expense of individual material and moral restitution. In this context, the prioritisation of the 'new' sometimes masked a reactionary and politically expedient impulse

to swiftly bury the past. That the notion of a 'new' literature also implied, at least from the perspective of the country's political leaders, that writers address the present with an appropriate measure of optimism and 'political correctness' was made especially apparent in the ANC's hostile response to J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* and the novel's inclusion in their submission to the Human Rights Commission's investigation into racism in the media in 1999.

Galgut had already signalled an early, even prescient, suspicion of the rhetorical investment in the 'new' in *The Quarry* and, in *The Good Doctor*, he again 'ignores the call', as Maria Cabarcos-Traseira has argued, for 'artists to contribute to the rebirth of the country by leaving the past behind and by attempting to define the identity of the new, the future South Africa' (42-3). The novel contests what Raymond Williams has described as an 'epochal' (*Marxism and Literature* 121) understanding of history, which reduces the past to a series of dramatic breaks from which the borders between the old and the new can be clearly discerned. Such a reading of history, he shows, creates discursive blocks which tend towards homogenisation and the production of master signifiers, which come too easily to define the socio-political and cultural developments of a particular era. *The Good Doctor* disrupts the epochal reading of South African history, which locates a clear rupture between the old and the new, by dwelling on the irrepressible resurgence of the past and its capacity to stifle the present. History exercises a stranglehold over the lives of *The Good Doctor*'s characters, thus rendering hollow the progressive 'mantras' of 'innovation and change' (*The Good Doctor* 35) which had so quickly come to the fore to dominate post-apartheid discourse.

While Barris condemns the novel on the grounds of its apparent scepticism towards the success of South Africa's transformation, Cabarcos-Traseira and Michael Titlestad have both argued that, in fact, it represents a far more trenchant and pragmatic intervention into the uncritical discourses of social change than Barris acknowledges; one which might serve 'as a basis for a realistic ethics in the post-apartheid dispensation' (Titlestad, 'Allegories' 114). In this chapter, I build on this perspective to argue that *The Good Doctor* confounds the simple line of transition between the old and the new South Africa, not out of a cynical pandering to the tastes of a metropolitan readership, but because it distrusts the reduction of the intellectual and ethical work entailed in effecting even the smallest degree of personal or social change. The novel rejects an epiphanic formulation of change as that which is dramatically and observably manifested in favour of one which is calibrated to the subtle shifts in thinking, which are not always extrinsically perceptible, but without which any level of transformation, public or private, is unlikely. It also qualifies the Aristotelian dictum which Galgut had so earnestly endorsed in *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* and had become hegemonic in realist anti-apartheid writing: namely, that 'man is *zoon politikon*' (Lukács 19) and thus cannot be conceived as distinct from his socio-historical environment. As part of a larger subversion of the realist conventions it ostensibly invokes, *The Good Doctor* unsettles such determinist forms of contextualisation and, in its conclusion, quietly claims our right to the cultivation of an interior life not wholly contingent on developments in the social world.

5.1.

From its opening chapter, *The Good Doctor* sets up a dialectic between the earnest optimism of Laurence Waters, a young doctor completing his compulsory two years of community

service, and the wearied scepticism of Frank Eloff, a veteran doctor who greets Laurence's fresh-faced idealism with more than a little impatience. Frank and Laurence hold apparently irreconcilable views about the state of the 'new' South Africa and the role which the medical profession might play in redressing the country's dire socio-economic inequalities. Laurence is wholeheartedly invested in the narratives of rainbow nationalism and wants to 'do work that means something' (43) by providing medical care in some of the country's remotest areas. He believes that 'the old history doesn't count' (53) and that the many divisions wreaked by apartheid should no longer obtain. Frank views Laurence's faith in change and progress as hopelessly naïve and possible only because of a youthful ignorance which blinds him to the enduring wounds inflicted by the past. He warns Laurence that '[t]he past has only just happened. It's not past yet' (6). They have, in effect, two contradictory conceptions of time: from Laurence's perspective, time 'passes and flows away', while from Frank's it 'endures and remains', to borrow Paul Ricoeur's distinction ('Life in Quest' 22). The chasm between their different orientations to the apartheid past is aptly demonstrated by Laurence's nostalgic interpretation of military service, which he imagines to have been a meaningful rite of passage into adulthood, but which constitutes a defining and enduring trauma for Frank: 'Conscription had been part of the life of every white man for forty years and then suddenly, overnight, a new law was passed and it vanished. Now here was this white man, one generation away from me, who looked on this part of my life as history' (64).

The many tensions which arise out of Frank and Laurence's opposing belief systems play themselves out against the backdrop of a dilapidated and hopelessly ineffective hospital servicing a 'tiny trickle of human need' (8) in one of South Africa's ten erstwhile homelands (Galgut, in his characteristic preference for obfuscated settings, declines to specify which).

The bleak setting provides ample support for Frank's disillusionment as, under the complacent leadership of Dr Ngema, who is waiting for a promised redeployment to one of the country's urban centres, the hospital has become a haven for theft and indolence and is generally too poorly equipped to aid even the occasional patient. The homeland itself is clearly not sufficiently populated to warrant the hospital's existence and Frank is aware that the government would prefer to close it down, were they to give the matter any sustained attention. The homeland, however, is a wholly forgotten locale which seems perpetually on the brink of eroding from sight: 'Nothing could be maintained here, nothing stayed the same. Metal started to corrode and rust, fabrics rotted, bright paint faded away' (17). The dereliction of the homeland is not represented as solely the result of current inefficiency and ineptitude but is, counterintuitively, its very precondition. Because the homeland does not exist in response to any of the organic factors which would normally encourage settlement, it is innately moribund; a 'token imitation' (19), as Frank describes it, of a functioning community.

In setting Frank's disillusionment against Laurence's idealism in the context of systemic socio-political dysfunction, *The Good Doctor* has invited frequent comparison with Graham Greene's *The Quiet American* (see Deveson, Brink, Eder and Messud), which juxtaposes a young American reporter's naïvety about the Vietnam War with the hardened perspective of an older British journalist. However, the significant influence of Anton Chekhov's short stories, which Galgut announces in his title and epigraph, has generally been overlooked. *The Good Doctor*'s epigraph is taken from Chekhov's 'An Artist's Story', a short story, first published in 1896, which subjects the ostensibly admirable attitude of philanthropy to rigorous critique. Chekhov's criticism in this regard seems especially significant, given his

own extensive work with the poor. As a medical doctor, Chekhov regularly dedicated his time to charitable work, which earned him the altruistic reputation which Neil Simon would pay homage to, and gently parody, in his 1974 play 'The Good Doctor'. Yet, in many of his stories, Chekhov rejected the idea that philanthropy is innately moral and, in 'An Artist's Story', he even suggests that social activism might belie a peculiar form of narcissism. The irony implicit in the conventional use of the idiom, 'the good doctor', captures something of this possible slippage between the care of others and the self, and it is along this fragile boundary that Galgut's novel treads.

Although Laurence's mindset reflects a troubling degree of historical ignorance, *The Good Doctor* does not altogether reject the energetic optimism which his character represents. Despite his exasperation with Laurence's naïvety, Frank is forced to admit that his 'involvement and effort showed up a lack in me' (63) and his presence, in a significant aspect of the novel which I explore in more detail later, compels Frank to examine the basis of his disconnectedness and apathy. Moreover, the clinic, which Laurence sets up in a nearby village, measurably bolsters the morale of the hospital staff and he is even able to generate some semblance of community spirit when he throws a party for his girlfriend, Zanele. Yet, as in Chekhov's story, the assumption that philanthropy is the untainted product of unselfish moral goodness is submitted to critical doubt. Galgut reveals a degree of self-deception at work in Laurence, which blinds him to his own motives. We discover roughly halfway through the novel that Laurence has refashioned the story of his childhood in what appears to be an attempt to secure paternal legitimacy, although the degree of conscious fabrication which Laurence engages in remains unclear. He is either unwilling or unable to acknowledge that he was raised by a young, unmarried mother, who had been abandoned by his father.

Instead, he adopts the narrative which his mother had constructed for him in his early childhood: that his parents had died in an accident and that she was his sister. Zanele's comment to Frank that 'it's all history now. I don't know why he lied to you' (105) inadvertently reveals the ironic affiliation between the two men: despite his frequent claims to the contrary, the past endures for Laurence as much as it does for Frank. His enthusiasm for South Africa's 'glorious future' (103) is motivated at least in equal measure by a desire to bury his own past as it is by a philanthropic investment in greater social change.

Frank detects an anachronistic moral prudishness in Laurence's story, wryly noting that '[a]s dark secrets go […] that's pretty disappointing. It's not the middle ages anymore' (105), yet the implications of Laurence's self-deception prove to be serious, despite the apparent banality of the lie itself. We learn, for example, that it has ensured Laurence's loneliness: Zanele reveals to Frank that, despite Laurence's ostensible commitment to friendship and community, he 'doesn't have friends' (104). His ardent effort to befriend Frank stems from an understandable but excessive need for recognition and approval. They never develop the mutuality and trust necessary for friendship, at least in part because Laurence constructs a fiction of self-constancy that erects a barrier between himself and the ambivalence and contradiction of others; he simply cannot tolerate any evidence which might suggest, for example, that Frank is anything other than 'a good man'. He subscribes to the unambiguous and binaristic moral code which Galgut had rejected as an adequate response to the variegated condition of human character as far back as *A Sinless Season*. This code condemns Laurence to a narrow perspective on the world, which borders on intolerance, and is the central feature which makes him anathema to Frank: 'So simple: one issue, all the complexities and contradictions reduced to a single moral needle-point. And that was

Laurence. Something was either good or bad, clearly and definingly so, and you acted accordingly' (134).

That Laurence's reductive morality is not only irritatingly juvenile from Frank's perspective, but also potentially pernicious in its more general long-term effects, is suggested by the connections which Galgut establishes between Laurence and several of the novel's other characters. When Frank discovers that Zanele is, in fact, not African, but an American named Linda, who changed her name while undertaking humanitarian work in Sudan, the similarities between her and Laurence are made clear: both have fashioned an identity contingent on the care of others to mask a level of unease with the self. While neither Laurence nor Zanele would ever consciously endorse injustice and have, in their minds, dedicated their lives to redressing it, their lack of self-knowledge and blind faith in their own moral goodness make them troublingly impressionable. Frank summarises the problem when he reflects on the evening he spent with Zanele, during which he witnessed her surprisingly coquettish attitude to the homeland's deposed 'puppet dictator':

> It all came down again to simple, unreal ideas. Earlier in the evening [Zanele] had seen me as a villain because I'd told her I'd been in the army. And now this awful little man was some kind of icon to her, just because he'd been in charge. Never mind the homeland, the violence, the greed; never mind the dirty politics and meaningless titles. It was the clear moral universe that Laurence inhabited, in which no power was ever truly false. (120)

The ‘grand designs’ and ‘unreal ideas’ on which Laurence and Zanele rely to secure a sense of identity and purpose are dangerous because, Frank suggests, they are also the province of ideologues and despots, who secure power through the reduction of complexity and ambiguity. The novel’s most extreme and dangerous expression of this reductive ethos is Colonel Moller, who ‘was drawn in on a hard, tiny centre of himself, in the way of people who live in devotion to a single idea. In a monk this can be beautiful, but in him it was not’ (191). Frank also detects in Laurence’s philanthropic schemes a level of self-regard which generally renders them ineffective; a suspicion borne out by Laurence’s impractical search for the remotest of locations in which to hold his clinic:

> ‘It was just a gesture, Frank, you know? A symbol. If you can do it in the furthest place, you can do it in the nearest one too.’ He’d done the same thing by coming to the hospital. It wasn’t enough for him to go where life or fate assigned him. No, he had to grandstand with some big display that meant nothing to anybody except him. Irritably, I told him, ‘Symbols have got nothing to do with medicine.’ (83)

In his attraction to ‘symbolic value’ (161) over substance, Laurence also ironically resembles the complacent Dr Ngema, whose mantra of ‘innovation and change’ (35) belies a self-interested commitment to the status quo, lest she should risk unsettling the political connections who have promised her redeployment. She supports Laurence’s plan for a monthly clinic only when she perceives the political clout their success might secure. In turn, Laurence’s willingness to remain quiet about Tehogo’s systematic theft of hospital property, in exchange for her support, reveals the spuriousness of his own unambiguous moral code.

Galgut draws connections between Laurence's self-righteousness, Dr Ngema's expedience and Moller's violent single-mindedness, not, I would argue, to vilify him, but to signal the ethical danger of a belief system adopted without introspection and an awareness of our complex and so often compromised motives.

Given the thoroughness with which Laurence's idealism is critiqued, it would seem that, on balance, *The Good Doctor* endorses Frank's more sceptical, weary attitude towards the world. His position as narrator naturally renders his perspective more seductive than Laurence's, whose views, of course, only ever reach us via Frank's mediation. Moreover, in contrast to the complex interiority which Galgut grants Frank, Laurence's relatively thin characterisation arguably reduces him to little more than our narrator's foil, augmenting through his child-like thinking the veracity and maturity of Frank's disillusionment. From this perspective, Frank's 'pessimistic view is granted the imprimatur of truth' (Barris, 'Realism' 26) and *The Good Doctor* appears to express an unambiguously dysphoric attitude towards the possibility of South Africa's successful transformation. Leaving behind for the moment the question of whether endorsing this bleak perspective is necessarily ethically suspect, I'd like to examine first the authority of Frank's narration and the extent to which Galgut invites us to trust in his views. In the next section, I examine Frank's unreliability as part of the novel's larger subversion of the tropes of confession and revelation which are unsettled, I argue, precisely to test the veracity of unequivocal truth claims.

5.2.

Following the obvious connotations of his name, Galgut makes Frank a candid protagonist inclined to acknowledge his own faults and limitations. His self-deprecating attitude lends his narration a 'brazen ring of truth' (Hope), signalling, as it does, an apparently fair-minded and trustworthy willingness to impose the same standards on himself as he does on the world. Yet, there are early signs in the novel that Frank's narration will not be one of full disclosure: for example, the truth of his affair with Maria, a poor rural woman who manages a small curio business out of a run-down shack in the nearby village, is initially kept as much from the reader as it is from Laurence (20-3). Frank's intense regard for privacy and distrust in the motives of others make him prone to self-concealment and he has created out of his personal and professional life apparently hermetic worlds, which allow him to operate with relative autonomy: '[F]or a while I had two lives: one that was empty and adrift, in the hospital by day, and another that was illicit and intense, by the side of the road at night. The one had nothing to do with the other' (28-9). His narration, then, consists not simply of the forthrightness implied by his name, but of a curious combination of candour and reticence not dissimilar to the ambivalent disposition of Chekhov's narrator in 'An Artist's Story'.

The indeterminacy which Frank's ambivalence introduces into the narrative is also a property of memory itself and he regularly couches his recollections in terms which foreground their inherent unreliability: 'This particular memory is grainy and formless as a dream [...] I see myself driving out of town. But that is a false image, made from all the other nights I drove that road' (184). He admits, too, that his point of view is an often obfuscated one, in which key elements seem to hover just outside of plain sight 'at the periphery of [his] vision' (68).

This ‘peripheral’ perspective heightens our sensitivity to occluded or masked content and unsettles our faith in that which appears to be clear and unambiguous. At the level of plot, the novel is also consciously elliptical. Galgut omits key orientational details, which would allow us to piece the different elements of Frank’s story together into a coherent picture. We never discover, for example, the truth of Tehogo’s involvement in the Brigadier’s smuggling syndicate or, for that matter, whether the Brigadier is even running such a scheme. We learn that Frank was wrong in his assumption that Maria was involved with the Brigadier, but never discover what does happen to her after she disappears from the village. Instead, Galgut establishes a pattern of revelation, followed by obfuscation, which confounds our interpretative efforts to derive clarity and resolution from Frank’s narrative.

For Barris, these enigmatic narrative choices represent a ‘code of absence’, which accounts for the novel’s failure to ‘position itself as a post-apartheid text’ (24). He argues that this code stems from Galgut’s use of ‘conscious anachronism’ (26) in which tropes from the archive of apartheid-era writing, such as the stereotype of the malevolent army commandant, are cast adrift in a contemporary setting. Because ‘these tropes draw on conditions which are absented from the narrative’ (Barris, ‘Realism’ 24), Galgut is finally unable to represent action and character in *The Good Doctor* as anything other than suppositional. Thus, although the novel was generally received as a work of politically engaged realism and benefited from the British market’s predilection for South African novels in this tradition, Barris argues that its representational qualities are wholly undermined by ‘the densely enacted principle of absence’ (32).

Galgut's wilfully enigmatic approach has, however, a very established line of development of its own which can again be traced back to Chekhov, via his influence on the modernist retreat from the so-called 'event plot' towards consciously open-ended forms. As Adrian Hunter has shown, the indeterminacy of Chekhov's narrative method, in which the 'consequential relationships between elements' (Hunter 72) are consciously suppressed, was to have a marked influence on the devices which authors like Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield would use to unsettle culturally authoritative perspectives. Galgut, I would argue, is similarly influenced by Chekhov's 'interrogative' approach, in which '[w]hat the writer does is not so much to *solve* the question but to *put* the question' (Mansfield, ctd in Hunter 72; original emphasis). As the novel's critique of Laurence's naïve political discourse aptly demonstrates, Galgut is openly distrustful of hegemonic narratives which offer premature resolutions to our problems and mask our inexorable ambivalence. As I explain in more detail below, the novel's many lacunae, which eventually deprive us of closure in the novel's conclusion, work to establish the ethical principle that the stories we tell about ourselves and our histories need to be kept resolutely open-ended, if we are to develop in our capacities as empathetic subjects.

Galgut's enigmatic choices in *The Good Doctor* also have a particular history in terms of his own development as a writer and are clearly derived from his narrative experiments in *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* and *The Quarry.* As I argued in the last chapter, *The Quarry*'s austere extradiegetic narrator, who steadfastly withholds crucial orientational material about the novel's characters and its setting, signalled Galgut's open rejection of the earnest realism which he had adopted in *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*. Although *The Good Doctor* explicitly addresses Galgut's contemporary socio-historical environment and recalls us to his

protagonist's interiority, it does not do so via a return to the tenets of realism. Galgut, instead, combines the sincere introspection of the first person mode of address in *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* with *The Quarry*'s narrative reticence. The result is the pronounced ambivalence of Frank's discourse, which demonstrates neither an unambiguous faith in the revelatory powers of narrative, nor an outright dismissal of them. The novel suggests, instead, that narrative is inherently and ineluctably a form of equivocation; transmuting and concealing at least as much as it preserves and reveals. Its many lacunae operate as 'blind spots', which remind us that we are confined to Frank's narrow perceptual ambit, which, not unlike our own, is necessarily provisional and indeterminate. This is a characteristically modernist expression of epistemological doubt, which unsettles the realist code of interpretability on which Barris's reading relies.

While Galgut's doubt in the capacity of narrative to reveal plain truths finds formal expression in the many gaps and omissions of Frank's narrative, *The Good Doctor* also takes the problem of narrative indeterminacy as one of its main thematic concerns. Indeed, one of the central struggles which it charts is the difficulty Frank experiences in offering a self-critical, but not self-punishing, account of his life. Despite his tendency to prevaricate, Frank appears invested in the idea that the tools of narrative can help him better understand what he so often feels to be a senseless, even meaningless life. As the events in which he becomes embroiled become ever more complex and mysterious, he tries to integrate his experiences into a coherent plot, which will make them decipherable and meaningful. In doing so, another ironic similarity between Frank and Laurence is revealed: both men construct fictions in an attempt to alleviate their feelings of loss and alienation. Unlike Laurence, however, Frank finds himself ultimately dissatisfied with the false resolutions offered by conventional

narrative schemes and finally discovers not his story's closure, but the changed self-understanding and difficult 'ethical re-orientation' (Titlestad, 'Allegories' 114) that emerge through the telling of it.

One way of describing Frank's development, then, would be to say that he learns to become a more responsible narrator of his own life, recounting it in such a way as to facilitate rather than forestall self-understanding. The novel's claim that greater self-understanding is ironically fostered through the 'very pathos of narrative's failure' (Wood 6) to secure the closure which it so seductively promises, is one which philosophically allies it with Paul Ricoeur's work on 'narrative identity', which also finds in the resources of narrative the paradoxical capacity to both inhibit and promote our development as ethical agents. In the next section, I offer a brief description of Ricoeur's work on narrative indeterminacy, in order to account for the ethical value which *The Good Doctor* finds in a life recounted.

5.3.

Following his conceptualisation, which I outlined in the introduction to this thesis, of mimesis as a 'three-fold mediation' — 'between man and the world, between man and man, between man and himself' ('Life in Quest' 27) — Ricoeur argues that our lives are constituted by a 'genuine demand for narrative' ('Life in Quest' 29) because we use the tools of narrative to synthesise the heterogeneous components of lived experience. Put plainly, we come to understand our lives through the stories we tell about them. In this model, narrative is not subservient to life, but constitutive of it; indeed, it is the very precondition of identity and selfhood, because it allows us to answer the question, 'Who are you?' Ricoeur thus uses

the term ‘narrative identity’ to suggest the ways in which our sense of being a subject is always already mediated by the rules of storytelling. He argues that this principle also obtains at a larger socio-historical level: the organisational mechanics of narrative are as essential to the production of a national identity, for example, as they are to an individual one.

Because both historical- and self-knowledge are mediated by narrative, both are also subject to its drive for order and unity. The narrative work of synthesising the disparate elements of experience can easily slip into a process of homogenisation, in which difference is displaced to serve the interests of the dominant culture. Even counter-hegemonic forms, in other words, can eventually ossify into monological grand narratives. Indeed, such is, arguably, the case in the transmutation of anti-racist discourses in South Africa into the more doctrinaire expressions of rainbow nationalism. At the level of individual identity, the fiction of the self as a wholly self-constituted and autonomous *cogito* also relies on the coherence which narrative lends experience, granting us the capacity to censure aberrant content from the rational stories which we tell about ourselves. Yet Ricoeur insists that the genuine work of narrative is to reveal what he considers to be the inexorably protean nature of identity, both at an individual and collective level. Following the post-structuralist view of subjectivity, he stresses that we can only ever know ourselves incompletely. We can never enjoy full mastery over our own identity, not least because of the extrinsic pressures of our social environment, which will shape us in innumerably complex ways over the course of a lifetime. Accordingly, he insists that an ‘ontological break’ (‘Narrative Identity’ 191) exists between understanding identity as a fixed and permanent entity and appreciating its plural mutability (‘Narrative Identity’ 190-2). Using its dual Latin translations, he refers to these distinct understandings of identity as *idem* and *ipse* respectively, as Richard Kearney explains:

> The story told by a self about itself tells about the action of the 'who' in question: and the identity of this 'who' is a narrative one. This is what Ricoeur calls an *ipse*-self of process and promise, in contrast to a fixed *idem*-self, which responds only to the question 'what'? (*On Stories* 152)

Although narrative has its 'deceptive proclivities' (Kearney, *Owl* 110) towards stasis and homogenisation, Ricoeur argues that it is fundamentally a self-contesting system, which will invariably betray its indeterminacy and provisionality, since one version of events can always be displaced by another, just as a rigidly imposed grand narrative will generally prompt contesting stories. It is precisely out of this dialectical tension between continuity and discontinuity that narrative identity emerges:

> [N]arrative identity is not that of an immutable substance or of a fixed structure, but rather the mobile identity issuing from the combination of the concordance of the story, taken as a structured totality, and the discordance imposed by the encountered events […I]t is possible to revise a recounted story which takes account of other events, or even which organizes the recounted events differently. ('Life in Quest' 31)

The *ipse* or protean subject is thus formed *through* the act of recounting a life story, since the competing drives towards the unity of a single story, on the one hand, and the proliferation of stories which can be woven from the same material on the other, create productive tensions for Ricoeur, which make identity available to revision and reinterpretation. Any ethical

expression of selfhood must, then, open itself to the revisionary processes which always already constitute narrative, so that '[t]he subject becomes, to borrow a Proustian formula, both reader and writer of its own life. Selfhood is a cloth woven of stories told' (Ricoeur, ctd in Kearney, *Owl* 108-9).

It thus becomes clear that, for Ricoeur, a mutable narrative identity is intrinsically a literary one, since we rely on the use of certain literary devices — plot, composition, character, point of view and so on — to tell the stories of our lives. Yet we are also, Ricoeur stresses, already 'entangled' ('Life in Quest' 30) in stories *before* they are recounted; stories have a 'pre-history' ('Life in Quest' 30) in lived experience that form the background to our narrative shaping of them. From this 'double analysis' ('Life in Quest' 30), Ricoeur argues that

> it follows that fiction, in particular narrative fiction, is an irreducible dimension of *self-understanding*. If it is true that fiction is only completed in life and that life can only be understood through the stories that we tell about it, then an *examined* life, in the sense of the word as we have borrowed it from Socrates, is a life *recounted.* ('Life in Quest' 30-1; original emphasis)

Here Ricoeur claims that the 'examined' life, which Socrates famously advocated as being the only ethical one, is not one born out of solitary meditation, but is, in fact, a narrative *act,* which involves the individual in the ongoing — essentially literary — processes of ordering, revising and reinterpreting the raw material of lived experience. It is through a narrative process of recounting our life that we can work towards an understanding of ourselves in relation to the world and thus develop the critical capacity to challenge the set of socio-

political and cultural norms into which we are born. Ricoeur's emphasis on the 'play between concordance and discordance' ('Life in Quest' 31), which characterises narrative, means — importantly — that the self-knowledge we derive from this process is never static and absolute, but instead involves, as Kearney phrases it, 'a hermeneutically examined life free from naïve archaisms and dogmatisms' (Kearney, *Owl* 109).

The idea of the 'examined' life, in both Socrates's and Ricoeur's formulations, involves a social dimension, since our lives ought to be examined not only by ourselves, but also by others. We require a witness to our evolution as human subjects, if we are to be spared the feeling of alienation which comes with leading a wholly solitary life. For Ricoeur, the dialogical character of narrative always invites such a witness: because a story is necessarily addressed to another, whether actual or conjured, it invariably moves the individual out of the closed 'circle which I form for myself' (Ricoeur, *Fallible* xv) and into an exchange with others. In short, narrative identity makes the individual an interlocutor who, in the act of addressing himself to someone else, acquires 'a sense of being a "subject" capable of acting and committing ourselves to others' (Kearney, *On Stories* 151).

In *The Good Doctor*, it is from this sense of capable and accountable selfhood which Frank determinedly retreats when he takes up the position at the hopelessly dysfunctional hospital. The decision, we learn, was fuelled by his desire to exile himself from a life in which he had endured a number of personal disappointments, including a failed marriage, a betrayal by his best friend and a dysfunctional relationship with his father. His life at the hospital is consequently an exceptionally guarded and self-protected one, in which he tries to insure himself against the risks of forming meaningful bonds with others. Despite his 'disturbingly

powerful' (28) attraction to Maria, for example, Frank admits that it 'suited me […] that we weren't able to talk in any real way. We came together for the primal, intimate act, while keeping a huge distance open between us' (28). The resentment which Frank feels towards Laurence, then, is not only a result of his aversion to Laurence's idealism, but is also a product of the threat which Laurence poses to his privacy and autonomy. By the novel's conclusion, however, Frank comes to understand that the imposition Laurence made on his life acted as the catalyst for a fundamental change in his own disposition:

> And now my life has taken root again. I know I won't be stuck here for ever; other places, other people, will follow on.
>
> A whole new sense of the future, because of one tiny change. Which makes me wonder if all of this might have happened differently if I'd never had to share my room. (222)

Laurence facilitates this pragmatic 'opening out' of Frank's perspective, not by way of example — indeed, his own myopia remains intact to the end — but by making Frank answerable, for the first time in many years, to someone other than himself. His arrival renders Frank's self-sufficient and guarded posture an untenable one. In sharing a room, Laurence becomes a witness to Frank's life and denies him the privacy he requires to conduct his affairs without accountability. Moreover, he makes Frank answerable, in a very literal sense, through his insistent questions about Frank's beliefs, relationships and past. These finally force Frank to examine the events which led him to accept 'failure as an inevitable part of [his] condition' (70) and understand that, despite his fallibility, he is not wholly without agency. By prompting Frank into giving an account of himself, then, Laurence

ultimately affords him the many benefits of self-understanding that come with the hermeneutically examined life which Ricoeur describes.

Although Frank feels that he has 'come into [his] own' (222) by the novel's conclusion, Galgut is careful to distinguish his self-acceptance from the easy, but ultimately false, respite of absolution, which the novel rejects as an ethos which borders too closely on expedience and amnesia. Indeed, the behaviour of the novel's most brutal character, Colonel Moller, is a clear indication of the malevolence which perdures when the slate of the past is too freely wiped clean. While Frank is never guilty of the active brutality which Moller exercises, he comes to realise that a sin of omission put him into complicity with Moller when he failed to intervene in the colonel's torture of a SWAPO soldier. When Maria disappears, Frank recognises that he has continued to be remiss in his responsibility to others in the intervening years and acknowledges the harm he has done in this way:

> I felt my guilt towards Maria as a massive neglect and blindness. I was wretched. And what I'd done, or failed to do, to her, was no different in the end from what I'd done here, closer to home. In the hospital. In this room. (183)

In the last frantic and, at times, perplexing chapters of the novel, Frank attempts to find relief from the guilt he feels towards Maria and Laurence. Faced with a series of unexplained events, in which Tehogo is shot and then kidnapped from the hospital along with Laurence, he tries to organise the disparate events and characters in his life into a narrative scheme, which will make them intelligible and meaningful. Out of the few clues which Frank half-

discovers and -invents, he weaves a tale reminiscent of a crime thriller, which features Moller and the Brigadier as the malign forces from the past who return to disrupt the present. In this version of events, he casts himself first as the 'macho hero' (185) who tries to rescue Maria, and, later, as the ill-fated martyr who sacrifices himself for the safe return of Laurence:

> I saw how I would go in amongst all the amazed faces to the one face that mattered and fall on my knees in front of him.
>
> *I am here,* I would say, *to offer myself in exchange. Not for Tehogo — he's one of you, take him. For the other one. He is nothing to you, I know that, but to me he has become everything. Everything, at least, that I am not. Character is fate, it is my fate to have done nothing with my life, except to watch and judge and find everything wanting, so allow me in my final moments to transform myself. I beg you, take me in his place, give me a death that will make sense of my life, do what you want with me, but let him go.* (209)

Frank's attempts to find closure in this way prove hopelessly ineffective and end in a pitiable anti-climax: he discovers only a deserted old army camp which provides no evidence to support his conspiracy theory. He finds no recompense, either, when his revelation to Colonel Moller of their past affiliation is greeted with plain indifference: 'He wasn't interested any more. I had made my little confession, but he couldn't give me absolution' (211). In drawing Frank's drama to a close in this way, Galgut denies his protagonist catharsis and exculpation: in the absence of any palliation for the past, Frank must, instead, learn to live mindfully and introspectively with its burdens.

Through Frank's failure to derive restitution from the drama he constructs for himself, *The Good Doctor* rejects the trite resolutions which complex and ethically demanding problems so often find in narrative convention. Left without a denouement to his own plot, Frank concedes that he cannot derive the moral finality from his own vexed life that he would expect to find in the traditional story structure: 'This was a story without a resolution — maybe even without a theme. I was only here to learn again how much I didn't know and would never understand' (220). Through this metafictional self-consciousness, *The Good Doctor* articulates a trenchant critique of the dialectics of literature and life; one which suggests that, as Ricoeur has shown, our understanding of life and our place in the world is mediated as much by narrative convention as our fictional worlds are by the vicissitudes of lived experience. If narrative understanding can help us lead an examined and hence responsible and accountable life in the way that Ricoeur claims, *The Good Doctor* also stresses his implied corollary: that the 'unsettling and tacky and strange' (*The Good Doctor* 200) aspects of experience and identity should not be too readily recuperated by the organisational powers of narrative, lest we substitute 'symbols' and 'grand designs' for the real work of understanding ourselves and our context.

The Good Doctor, then, advocates caution in the stories we tell about ourselves and our history, since these narratives ultimately dictate the limits of our ethical responsiveness. As Ricoeur argues, '[w]e do not mistake ourselves without also being mistaken about others and our relations to them' (*Recognition* 257). Frank errs as much in his narrative of inevitable failure as he does in his fantasy of heroism, since both are aimed primarily at self-protection: the former allows him to abdicate all responsibility for his treatment of others, while the latter is an attempt to ease his consequent guilt. Importantly, it is only once he dispenses with the

schematic solutions to his own vexed failures that he finally feels as though he has 'come into [his] own' (222). In this way, the novel's unresolved ending articulates a third possibility; that is, the realisation of a narrative identity, both fallible and capable, which opens itself to the possibility of change.

Significantly, Galgut does not provide an objective correlative for Frank's internal development. The conditions in the hospital continue to deteriorate and Frank is left, in the novel's concluding passages, as one of only four remaining staff members with insufficient resources to offer anything more than a day clinic: 'So the situation is dire and the prospects are not good' (222). This dismal conclusion to the socio-political situation which it represents makes *The Good Doctor*, not unlike Coetzee's *Disgrace*, vulnerable to 'appropriation by cultural conservatives' (Cowley 23), who argue that it reveals the bleak 'truth' about the abysmal failure of South Africa's transition. From the perspective of the liberal critic, this would make him a reactionary figure, unable to meet the creative and ethical challenges of imagining a new South Africa. Yet Galgut is scrupulous in resisting the temptation to impose the contrived resolution onto the socio-political problems he depicts, which failed at the level of Frank's interiority. The novel's rejection of a blind faith in the certainty of change is finally not an expression of cynical 'afro-pessimism'. It does suggest, however, that for ethically meaningful change to occur, we have to learn to tell a very different story about ourselves at an individual and a collective level: one which rejects the false closure and moral certitude promised by the rhetoric of historical watersheds in favour of the more ambivalent and far less triumphant work of recounting our failures without absolution, but also without despair.

CHAPTER SIX

A Critique of Residual Cultural Forms: The Pastoralism of *The Impostor*

The epigraph to Galgut's 2008 novel, *The Impostor*, recites the inscription which fronts the statue of Cecil John Rhodes, situated in the historic Company's Garden in Cape Town: 'Your hinterland is there'. The well-known statue depicts Rhodes pointing north towards England, exhorting the expansion of the British Empire across the vast intervening territory from the Cape to Cairo. With its commanding possessive pronoun, the inscription rehearses the colonial promise of prosperity to the intrepid immigrant who, it seems, possesses the land even before he arrives. It is, as David Bunn has argued, 'a vision of heroic boldness and manorial authority' (98), the fault lines of which are abundantly clear from our postcolonial perspective. Indeed, the less charitable contemporary interpretations of Rhodes[19] would see him as the first of the many impostors which Galgut offers us in this novel: a ruthless businessman who mercilessly exploited the land and its people under the guise of enlightenment and progress. By the time we are reminded of the statue again in the novel's concluding sentence, the colonial icon has been demoted to the status of a forgotten and irrelevant relic, 'rusting and discoloured and streaked with bird-shit' (215).

The tarnished and denuded image of Rhodes seems a fitting conclusion to a novel which ostensibly takes the disinheritance of a white, middle-aged man from the structures of power and privilege in post-apartheid South Africa as its central theme. We are introduced to its protagonist, Adam Napier, just after 'everything had unravelled for him' (13), largely as a

[19] Peter Godwin discusses the strong trend towards 'presenting Rhodes as a caricature of pure evil' in recent South African and British filmographies and biographies. See 'Rhodes to Hell'.

result of his complacency during the early years of the country's political transition. Oblivious to the economic pressures of Black Economic Empowerment, it comes as a 'deep, cold shock' (13) to Adam to discover that he had spent the last six months in his job grooming his own replacement: a young, black intern who better served the company's 'racial quotas' (13). After his retrenchment, he is unable to sell his home because of its location in a once 'trendy and vibrant and multicultural' (14) Johannesburg suburb, which had deteriorated into a haven for squatters, crime and drugs. When the property is repossessed, Adam finds himself 'stranded — alone and futureless in the middle of his life' (14). It is on this interval which *The Impostor* focuses, during which Adam retreats from the harsh realities of the city to what he imagines will be the pastoral idyll of a small Karoo town. Here he hopes to rekindle the poetic aspirations he had held in his youth and plans to dedicate his days to the writing of poetry inspired by the beauty of the natural world.

This outline readily accommodates a reading of the novel as an allegory of white displacement and socio-economic demotion in the 'new' South Africa; a perspective from which Galgut again appears to be a cultural conservative. Read as a microcosm of a widespread malaise, the rapid deterioration of Adam's prospects, the decline of the multicultural dream his suburb once represented and his exile from the country's economic centre are versions of the post-apartheid condition, which, arguably, pander to some of the more reactionary 'white fears' in contemporary South Africa. Moreover, the many thematic similarities which the novel shares with *The Good Doctor* make it possible to read *The Impostor* as a fairly seamless extension of the project Galgut started in his Booker-endorsed achievement; one which is apparently aimed squarely at 'exposing a world of corruption and rapacity behind the talk of "new dawns" and "reconciliation"' (Skidelsky). Indeed, these are

the terms in which the novel was primarily received within the British press, whose reviewers tended to see *The Impostor* as a welcome exposé of a country in decline (see, for example, Smart, Cartwright, House and Skidelsky). The trend towards reading the novel as a representative portrait of South Africa's declining 'post-Mandela' years (Cartwright), however, was perhaps best exemplified by Paul Gessell's review for *The Ottawa Citizen*, which praised Galgut for examining 'the truth of his homeland':

> The seemingly omnipresent corruption in South Africa is repeatedly found in *The Impostor*, a story in which crooked black politicians take bribes from white businessmen intent on raping the land. Galgut's take on his country is a sobering one. He feels the world must know what is really happening in his country and he does not see other authors lining up to write these stories.

The strongly historicist logic at work here makes Galgut readily appropriable as a representative author of post-apartheid South Africa: he has, Gessell concludes, 'very much become the voice, at least the white voice, of the new South Africa'. Significantly, the discourse of literary 'truth-telling' and reportage so prominent in the reception of apartheid-era writing is strongly apparent in all of these reviews and is used to fix Galgut firmly within the ambit of a recognisable national literature. Justin Cartwright, for example, argues that 'Galgut's novel […] intends a report on the state of South Africa', while James Smart reads it as an 'angry commentary' on the state of the nation.

While the 'post-Booker' appropriation of Galgut as an exemplary South African novelist appears to have served him well in the British and North American markets, I suspect that it

has, ironically, discouraged the development of substantial academic interest in his recent writing from scholars working in the field of South African literature. In a recent essay, Leon de Kock has argued that the category of the national has been steadily de-prioritised, and even discredited, in 'literary-critical and imaginative writing coming out of South Africa since the early 1990s' ('Judging' 28). Initially a response to the intellectual and artistic claustrophobia engendered by the years of cultural boycotts during apartheid, this development has also been strongly abetted by the rapid acceleration of globalisation over the past twenty years. De Kock surveys a range of contemporary South African authors, whose works stray from a narrowly conceived national imaginary and who produce their writing from a range of diasporic locales, to ask the question of whether the category 'South African literature' still has any conceptual or descriptive value. He cites Nancy Fraser's work on 'transnationalising the public sphere' to argue that, in a world of growing global connections, it is no longer possible, nor desirable, to presuppose the existence of a hermetic national literature, upon which a 'solitary national identity' (Fraser, ctd in de Kock, 'Judging' 28) might be based. He adds, however, that it is also not possible to dispense entirely with the category of the national and suggests, instead, that it needs to be reconceived in provisional and protean terms, which can accommodate the flux of a rapidly changing world:

> So I would argue that the category 'South African' as a marker of a literary field remains important, even necessary for a sense of history and determination in what one might call a 'national imaginary', but that the space of the 'national' has irrevocably entered the fluid waters of 'trans', the transitive cusp of crossing and recrossing, of absorbing the fictional self into

> (now easier, more fluid) spaces of related elsewheres, and of absorbing the otherness of such elsewheres into the fictional self. ('Judging' 33)

De Kock's essay suggests that this 'transnational rupture' has created what Hans-Robert Jauss would call a new 'horizon of expectations' (23) for South African writing; one that prioritises texts which 'loosen' themselves from deterministic conceptions of the nation and cut across narrow local concerns to reach a reconstituted readership of 'reflexive modern subjects' who 'identify as fellow humans across national boundaries' (Garman, ctd in de Kock 29).

If the transnational perspective which de Kock describes has indeed become hegemonic in South African literary studies, it would explain why the field has not been especially receptive to Galgut's recent writing, particularly if it accepts the version of his work promoted in the British and Canadian reviews cited above. From this perspective, Galgut appears to be perpetuating a stereotype of South Africa as a static, hermetic locale, unable to extract itself from a disastrous history. Indeed, it seems to be from the very distance which Galgut allows these reviewers from the 'otherness' of post-apartheid South Africa, in all its endemic corruption and mismanagement, that their approval generally stems. This is clearly a version of the nation wholly at odds with the 'transitive' one de Kock describes, in which South Africa sheds its exceptionalism to enter into a shifting and provisional global network. Even a reading which does not reduce *The Impostor* to an unambiguous allegory of the nation, however, would have to concede that its focus is somewhat out of kilter with larger trends in South African writing. This is especially apparent when the novel is compared to the other South African titles it was grouped with when it was shortlisted for several local literary prizes, including the M-Net Prize, the Sunday Times - Alan Paton Literary Prize for Fiction

and the University of Johannesburg's Prize for Creative Writing. Of the thirty seven titles originally submitted for the M-Net Prize, for example, Jane Rosenthal notes that *The Impostor* was one of only four texts which 'touched overtly on South African politics' (ctd in de Kock, 'Judging' 51), while the larger trend — in an exemplification of the 'transnational' developments which de Kock outlines — was towards writing which showcased how 'South Africa and South Africans have become part of the wider world' (Rosenthal, ctd in de Kock, 'Judging' 51).

Thus, although *The Impostor* has received endorsements from several South African literary scholars — including de Kock, who praised it for being 'a superbly rendered, atmospherically loaded, stylised piece of fiction that commands admiration' ('Judging' 57)[20] — the novel, like *The Good Doctor*, seems to belong to an older tradition of South African writing, which is not readily accommodated by recent critical trends. This is arguably why Galgut's growing prize endorsements have not translated into substantial scholarly attention. The perception of his fictional project as an accomplished, but outmoded, one has also been fostered through his frequent 'post-Booker' comparison to J.M. Coetzee, whose place in the South African canon he is often considered to be taking. Shaun de Waal, for example, suspects that 'the British publishing industry has a limited number of slots for South African writers at any given time […] Galgut is moving into the Coetzee slot' ('Look back'). Although there are clear lines of influence between the two authors, some of which I explore in this chapter, it could be argued that the cumulative effect of Coetzee's prominence in the reception of

[20] These comments have been taken from de Kock's evaluation of the novel in his capacity as a judge for the M-Net and UJ prizes. De Kock includes the full transcription of the judges' notes for the M-Net prize in 'Judging new "South African" fiction in the transnational moment'.

Galgut's writing is to render it a belated and derivative contribution to South African literature.

Like *The Good Doctor*, then, *The Impostor* has generally been received as a representative portrait of the 'new' South Africa written in the tradition of socio-political engagement that was so dominant in the 'old' one. Yet, along with what might be considered its recognisably residual characteristics, the novel also contains generic elements which ally it with some of the emergent forms evident in contemporary post-apartheid writing, including, for example, its conscious incorporation of the conventions of metaphysical crime writing. It becomes especially difficult to consign the novel to a straightforwardly residual tradition, however, in light of its explicit and self-conscious critique of the ethical and imaginative limitations of residual cultural forms. Interestingly, Galgut makes his protagonist guilty of precisely the same charge of anachronism that has, as I explored in the last chapter, been levied against him. Adam's cultural perspective is a decidedly colonial one and, for much of the narrative, he projects the tropes of an outmoded colonial pastoralism onto his post-apartheid setting. The result is one that Galgut represents with no small degree of irony: despite the noblest of intentions, Adam, to borrow the terms in which Ken Barris formulates his repudiation of *The Good Doctor*, 'unwittingly reproduces a social topography that is stratified in racial terms' ('Fractious Form' 219), and, I would add, gendered ones as well.

Galgut's critique of Adam's unwitting ethnocentrism forms part, as I explore in this chapter, of *The Impostor*'s larger diagnosis of the factors which inhibit the development of a truly cosmopolitan ethico-political order in post-apartheid South Africa. I use the term 'cosmopolitan' in its egalitarian rather than elitist sense, as the capacity to interact across

racial, national and cultural lines without suppressing difference. Cosmopolitanism thus understood concerns, as Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen argue, an 'attitude or disposition' (10) rather than a fixed set of beliefs; it denotes 'an orientation, a willingness to engage the Other' (Hannerz, ctd in Vertovec and Cohen 10). This understanding of the term has been invoked by theorists as diverse as Stuart Hall, Kwame Appiah and Julia Kristeva to advocate a non-communitarian ethics, in which our shared humanity provides the common ground on which a hybrid, non-violent public sphere might be formed. Kristeva's formulation of a cosmopolitanism which begins at the level of our most intimate psychological processes provides an especially useful paradigm through which to read *The Impostor,* as the novel similarly requires that we think psychic and social life together. If post-apartheid South Africa is troublingly stratified by the various forms of crime, corruption and expedience which the novel exposes, these factors, Galgut shows, operate out of a conception of the self which excludes its own otherness. We become capable of intolerance, injustice and violence towards others and the difference which they represent, to phrase the point differently, when we fail to heed the strangeness or alterity which always already constitutes subjectivity from within. That we seldom do so simply out of conscious intent is foregrounded in Galgut's sustained focus on the cultural forces which inadvertently protect Adam from the claims of others and to which I turn my attention in the following section.

6.1.

The first section of *The Impostor* focuses on Adam's attempts to begin a new life in the Karoo, where he plans to spend his days writing poetry in a house owned, but entirely neglected, by his younger brother, Gavin. Gavin is a wealthy Cape Town property developer

who, unlike Adam, is thriving in the post-apartheid economy. His business ethos is an unashamedly expedient and cynical one designed to exploit the country's rapid growth, with no regard for its human or natural resources. His developments include 'a marina and surf resort that destroyed a wetlands conservation' (17) and a series of old buildings, gutted of any historical value and subsequently furnished with the cheapest available fittings. In order to provide these ventures with 'legitimacy and investment' (17), Gavin fraudulently fronts his business with a pseudo 'empowerment' partner, a 'black man who was paid a healthy retainer just to stay home in Gugulethu' (17). The irony is not lost on Adam, who is affronted by his brother's unscrupulousness. It is thus with a feeling of 'moral clarity' that he rejects Gavin's offer of employment and tells him that, by dedicating his energies to poetry, he wants 'to make a contribution […] not a fast buck' (17).

While it is easy to summon indignation for Gavin's crass and destructive materialism, the novel equally questions the validity of Adam's self-righteousness and asks whether his own, apparently noble, poetic pursuits are in fact any less self-serving or harmful. Like *The Good Doctor*, *The Impostor* implies that moral choices are never disinterested and most of the narrative action is focused on uncovering the networks of complicity and self-deception which will eventually ally Adam with the very unscrupulousness he so easily condemns in his brother. Significantly, Galgut does not afford Adam narrative control and opts, instead, for a third person narrator with limited omniscience, who initiates an ironic separation from Adam's perspective through the mechanics of free indirect discourse. The effect is to diminish our uncritical regard for Adam's plight and foreground the inconsistencies which structure his world view:

> His brother would never understand. For Gavin, the goal of life was money and power, and he judged everybody by that standard. He assumed that everybody shared his aim, but of course that wasn't true. Adam believed in beauty for its own sake: Beauty with a capital B. He couldn't talk to Gavin about Beauty, but he saw his way forward clearly in that moment. He was a penniless poet, with nothing to offer anybody except words, but he was the real soul of the country. He was at the centre of things. (19)

The petulant 'Beauty with a capital B' implies a degree of childishness in Adam's convictions and humorously suggests that perhaps he does not quite have the makings of a great poet. But the more significant point here is the extent to which Adam represses the material conditions of his poetic exile, which is enabled entirely by Gavin's surplus wealth. His reluctance to acknowledge Gavin's patronage allows Adam to collapse the distinction between his own diminished circumstances and the real impoverishment of the rural lower-class. From this romantic and thoroughly middle-class perspective, poverty becomes a means of self-actualisation and Adam imagines that life as a 'penniless poet' will bring him closer to his 'essential self' (19).

When self-doubt begins to diminish Adam's poetic convictions, he concedes that his brother's success might indicate that, '[o]f the two of them, perhaps it was Gavin who stood closer to the core of things' (20). The novel, however, is less concerned with establishing whether the 'soul of South Africa' belongs to a poet or a 'crooked property developer' (21), than it is with showing that the distinction between the two is far more tenuous than Adam would like to imagine. This insight forms part of *The Impostor*'s larger critique of the simplistic morality of

Adam's pastoralism, which assumes that a rural life will necessarily be an unsullied one, devoid of the corruption and greed so rampant in the city. This opposition proves as false as the one Adam tries to establish between his poetic values and Gavin's materialism. Indeed, it transpires that Gavin's unscrupulousness is as endemic to the country as it is to the city; a point which Galgut underscores, as I discuss later, through the ironic inversion of the very pastoral tropes which Adam uses to imagine the moral compensations of an unadulterated rural life.

The Impostor's repudiation of the rural-urban divide thus reminds us, as Raymond Williams does in *The Country and the City,* that the pastoral idyll is 'a myth functioning as a memory' (43); a symbolic construction, in other words, which hides a less romantic history of class struggle and socio-economic inequality. The South African version of the pastoral has, moreover, its own particular set of exclusions which Galgut exposes through Adam's uncritical infatuation with poetry about the 'natural world' (18). Adam embarks on his poetic retreat fully expecting to be inspired by the unspoiled splendour of the rural landscape; this, we learn, is how he came to write and publish a small volume of 'intense and romantic' (18) poetry about nature during his adolescence. He insists that the natural world is untainted by politics and is thus the ideal subject for the poet seeking to restore 'Beauty' to a fallen world: 'When he looked at the state of the world, he always shrank away in helplessness and horror; it seemed almost a duty, an artistic obligation, to replace politics with aesthetics' (33-4). The arid Karoo, however, fails to meet his bucolic expectations and, instead, confounds him with its sheer desolation and alterity. In registering Adam's shock at this unanticipated landscape, Galgut rehearses the tropes of alienation and untranslatability which belong to a long tradition of South African landscape writing:

> [T]he landscape they were driving through resembled nothing that he knew. He had seen the Karoo before, of course, but always in passing, on his way to Cape Town or back to Jo'burg. He had never given it his full attention till now. There were sun- blasted stretches of plain, then sudden eruptions of oddly-shaped hills. The emptiness was powerful and strange […] Sometimes there would be a farmhouse, with a scattering of buildings, a few stick-like human figures. And sometimes there was a tiny dwelling, no bigger than a room or two, in the middle of a huge desolation. It didn't seem possible that anybody could live there.
>
> He had even begun tentatively to consider the poems that he might write. His early work, from the first collection, had been rooted in a very different landscape. Those were African poems: hymns to the Bushveld. The stark, stripped-down country-side he was passing through now was of a different order entirely. It wasn't African; not in any conventional way. It was more like the surface of some arid, airless planet, or perhaps it was the bottom of the sea. (21-2)

The perception of the African landscape as unfathomably vast, empty and strange is, as Coetzee has shown in the critical essays collected in *White Writing,* one of the dominant tropes apparent in white South African pastoral writing of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It rivals the version of the pastoral apparent in the Afrikaans tradition of the 'farm novel' or *plaasroman,* insofar as it rejects the idea that the harsh soil of Africa can be made to relent through the sheer labour of the farmer, who is ultimately more resilient than

the land. Adam's perception of the landscape here is in the tradition of the English-colonial poet, to whom the African landscape appears impenetrable, alien and desolate and whose intellectual, rather than physical, labour is required to 'conceive not a social order capable of domesticating the landscape, but any kind of relation at all that consciousness can have with it' (Coetzee, *White Writing* 7). It is far from a politically innocent perspective, as Coetzee shows, since it harbours the myth — so central to the justification of colonial expansion and white settlement — that Africa is essentially an unpeopled continent available for conquest. The apparently innocuous lone poet in Africa is thus a strongly rhetorical figure in South African writing and one of the many tropes through which the 'literature of white pastoral marks off for itself, and defends, a territory "outside" history where the disturbing realities of land and labour can be bracketed off' (Coetzee, *White Writing* 11).

The central irony on which *The Impostor* turns, then, is that Adam is writing directly into the very history from which he considers his poetic imagination to be exempt. In his uncritical appropriation of the role of pastoral poet, he unwittingly perpetuates an ethnocentric tradition whose consequences, Galgut shows, extend well beyond the realm of textual politics to inhibit his human responsiveness towards others. This point is underscored in another early passage, which ostensibly takes the Karoo's strange atemporality as its focus, but which also reveals the withdrawal from community and mutuality which this perspective entails:

> What he felt — it came to him after a week or two — was the absence of history. There was a sense of a white deadness before the lightning strikes. In this electric lull, the hands of the clock didn't move. There was only the land, rolling and vast and elemental, in which time was measured out in the

> shadows of clouds passing over, or the minute scrabbing of a beetle among grains of sand. […] Here the way things were seemed inevitable and natural, as preordained as the weather. There was the old racial division, all the whites on one side of the river, in their spacious and expensive properties, and all the coloureds on the other side, in the township, in their crowded little houses between pot-holed, neglected streets. Two or three times a day there would be a knock on Adam's door and it would be somebody looking for work. There was deference and desperation in the way they appealed to him, the men holding their hats in their hands and the women avoiding his eyes. He felt a curious mixture of pity and anger towards them. Couldn't they see he had nothing to offer, that he had lost control of his own destiny too, that his future was up to fate? (25-6)

The obvious irony here is that the 'old racial division' which strikes Adam as ahistorical and atemporal is clear evidence of the extent to which history has irrevocably imprinted itself on the landscape. His aesthetic pastoralism is thus shown to rely on an act of wilful blindness which has a troubling ethical consequence: it naturalises politically engineered inequalities and places them beyond the ambit of human intervention; they simply appear 'as preordained as the weather'. From this perspective, Adam's sensitivity to the plight of the town's indigent men and women, already curtailed by his misinterpretation of the parity of their circumstances, is further diminished. Satisfied that he has neither the agency nor money to assist, he determinedly retreats from their many appeals for help.

Galgut thus positions his protagonist in the stereotypical impasse of the colonial poet in Africa, who desires reciprocity with the land, but is incapable of forging connections with its people. The peculiarity of this position is highlighted in Adam's attempt to derive poetry from the focused examination of a stone: he expects that, with adequate meditation, the stone will 'speak' (35) to him and bring him closer to the unyielding heart of the landscape, yet he remains unresponsive to the real possibilities for exchange represented by the human attempts to engage him. The scenario recalls exactly the terms of Coetzee's critique in *White Writing*, which finds the image of the alienated poet, beseeching reciprocity with inert rocks and stones, the paradigmatic expression of the 'ethical and imaginative failings of the pastoral mode' (Barnard, *Apartheid and Beyond*, ch. 1):

> What response do rocks and stones make to the poet who urges them to utter their true names? As we might expect, it is silence. Indeed, so self-evidently foredoomed is the quest that we may ask why it persists so long. The answer perhaps is that the failure of the listening imagination to intuit the true language of Africa, the continued apprehension of silence (by the poet) or blankness (by the painter) stands for, or stands in place of, another failure, by no means inevitable: a failure to imagine a peopled landscape, an inability to conceive a society in South Africa in which there is place for the self. (Coetzee, *White Writing* 9)

Adam's resemblance to the colonial pastoralist that Coetzee describes does more, I would argue, than simply make of him an eccentric but harmless anachronism; it highlights, rather, the persistence of residual cultural scripts which continue to restrict, often in surreptitious and

ostensibly benign ways, the terms of our engagement with others. In the context of what has been dubbed a 'time of entanglement' in South Africa — in which recognition of interconnections between those historically theorised in their apartness has increasingly become an intellectual priority (Nuttall 8) — *The Impostor* asks, perhaps unfashionably, what the reactive forces are which still work to reify difference and keep us enclosed within our self-same worlds. In plotting the novel's many examples of failed intersubjectivity, however, Galgut also locates the discursive ruptures and affective openings in which hospitable relations between self and other become, albeit fleetingly, possible.

6.2.

Both *The Good Doctor* and *The Impostor* present us with what might be termed uncanny intimacies: ostensible strangers, who impose themselves onto the self-protected worlds of their protagonists with the unselfconscious familiarity of established friends. In Adam's case, two men — Canning and Blom — claim him as their sole friend and confidant, despite his obvious reluctance to play such a significant role in their lives. The most perplexing of the two is perhaps Canning, whose 'face means nothing at all' (45) to Adam, but who claims to have been a close friend of his from school and refers to him by the unfortunate nickname 'Nappy'. Although disconcerted by his inability to bring even the vaguest memory of Canning to mind, Adam is, after several weeks of isolation, lonely enough to accept an invitation to a dinner at Canning's home: a vast estate named 'Gondwana', which Canning inherited from his father. Adam is warier, however, of establishing any connections with his neighbour, Blom, who strikes him as being disconcertingly strange and even vaguely threatening. Moved by Blom's obvious need for human companionship, however, Adam finds

himself unable to reject entirely his neighbour's many attempts to establish a friendship with him.

By making Adam the reluctant confessor of these two uncanny figures, Galgut foregrounds the ethical question of what our duty is to the stranger who beseeches us. How entitled are we, the novel asks, to resist the demands which others make of us? Or, to phrase the question from a different angle, as Appiah has in a recent study, '[w]hat do we owe the stranger based on our shared humanity?' (*Cosmopolitanism*, 'Introduction'). Adam remains undecided on this point throughout most of the narrative and moves ambiguously between feeling 'pity and contempt' (160) for Canning and Blom. This ambivalence, we learn, is also self-directed: Adam is characterised as a figure at odds with himself and thus unable to decide on the strength of his moral feelings towards others. He is as much affronted, for example, by the bigotry of the patrons at Fanie Prinsloo's bar as he is by the 'vague and apolitical' (29) liberalism expressed by the likes of Gavin's girlfriend, Charmaine, yet he finds himself unwittingly adopting both of these apparently irreconcilable perspectives:

> In recent years, Adam had been experiencing a curious ambivalence […] In the distant past, he had always been clear about his moral position, but that wasn't the case any more. These days, he found himself taking the opposite stand to whatever political point had been raised. If people liked the new road, he would start to wonder what vices and problems the new road might bring. On the other hand, if people said the road was a bad thing, he would think of it as progress and development. His ambivalence was genuine; there seemed to be both a radical and a reactionary buried in him. More than

> anything, it was this fault-line in his psyche that he thought of as his new South African self. (28)

Without the incontestable evil of apartheid against which to shore up his beliefs, Adam feels altogether devoid of moral conviction and is ill-prepared for the more ambiguous, even aporetic ethical challenges of everyday life, which deny him the luxury of absolute self-certainty in the virtue of his moral choices. Out of his subsequent sense of internal division and contradiction, Adam conjures a curious presence which, he imagines, exists with him in Gavin's dilapidated home:

> So he was alone, but he didn't feel alone. He remembered what Charmaine had said about the house; about presences. It was more the accumulation of tiny signs into a single presence: the presence of the house itself, made of time and neglect and a few leftover intentions.
>
> It wasn't real, of course. It was only a shadow with no particular shape of its own. He thought of it as part of himself, a stray section of the mind that had ranged itself against him. It moved around the house as he did, behind him or off to one side, watching him. Listening. He could sense its attention, like a small, cold vacuum drawing substance towards itself, possibly out of him. (39)

This 'presence' is neither entirely threatening nor benign: it seems to precede the distinction between friend and enemy and is, instead, configured as a nexus for that which unsettles rational and cohesive selfhood. It is first associated with the disruptive power of the past and,

later, with the destructive potential of the desire Adam feels for Canning's wife, Baby. It also, however, has more positive connotations and is directly associated with the shift in his psyche which releases him from months of creative paralysis. In the exchanges which Adam has with this strange 'shadow presence', Galgut offers a very explicit dramatisation of the 'fault line' in his protagonist's psyche. The 'presence' becomes a figure onto which Adam projects his feelings of internal alienation and self-interruption, beseeching him with the transgressive and increasingly sinister possibilities which his conscious, rational mind rejects. These include the idea of murdering Canning, in order to secure a life with Baby and, later, in the plot's dramatic twist, the possibility of sacrificing Blom's life, in order to ensure his own survival.

Galgut's dramatisation of the internal alterity which disrupts Adam's sense of cohesive selfhood suggests the misguidedness of his inclination to project difference onto other people; a habit which is abetted, in no small part, by the cultural stereotypes implicit in his anachronistic pastoralism. The novel suggests that we are, to borrow Kristeva's phrase, 'strangers to ourselves'; beset by an originary alterity which we cannot exorcise through the paranoid projection of difference onto others. This point is underscored stylistically through Galgut's frequent use of paradox, which establishes an ongoing dialectic between familiarity and strangeness, as well as reason and unreason, and is indicative of the 'curious ambivalence' (28) which operates at the heart of selfhood. It is, for example, a 'neighbourly distance' (96) which Adam shares with Blom, while Canning — who claims to 'love [Baby] very badly' (55) — is described as his 'new-old friend' (106). Kristeva argues that it is through the conscious acknowledgement of our own inescapable capacity for contradiction, incoherence and inconsistency — our acceptance, in short, of our own 'inner strangers' —

that we might develop into ethical subjects sensitive to the claims of others. These are the conditions under which, she suggests, a 'new' cosmopolitanism might be formed; one that could 'work for a mankind whose solidarity is founded on the consciousness of its unconscious — desiring, destructive, fearful, empty, impossible' (192). *The Impostor*, I would argue, bears out this equation in the relationship it establishes between Adam's dissociation from the stranger who haunts him from within and the violence that is enacted on Blom, the stranger who threatens him from without.

Importantly, the novel concerns itself not only with the psychic, but also with the discursive requirements for the development of a genuinely shared and intersubjective world. I find it useful here to turn again to the work of Ricoeur, as I did in the preceding chapter, in order to describe the forms of mediation between identity and alterity which Galgut offers as alternatives to Adam's reactive thinking. Like Galgut, Ricoeur suggests that it is only through genuine labour that we might begin to unlearn the deeply-ingrained habits of ethnocentric thinking, which insist on the unfathomable strangeness of the other. In an essay titled 'Reflections on a new ethos for Europe', Ricoeur argues that the integration of self and other in a public sphere historically segregated along racial and cultural lines can only come about discursively, through acts of 'narrative hospitality' (5). This is a form of hospitality which, Ricoeur argues, entails the 'exchange of memories' (5) at both an individual and collective level. Narrative hospitality emphasises the dialogical nature of Ricoeur's carefully theorised concept of narrative identity, in which self-understanding is fostered not only through the stories we tell about ourselves, but also through the stories others, in turn, tell about us. Our receptiveness to the versions of ourselves presented to us by others — our willingness, to use Ricoeur's terms, to subject ourselves to a 'crossed reading' ('Reflections' 8) — constitutes

one aspect of narrative hospitality. The other involves 'taking responsibility, in imagination and sympathy, for the story of the other' ('Reflections' 6-7). This proposition is perhaps more radical than it ostensibly appears, since the story of the other always possesses the capacity to negate our own.

For Ricoeur, then, narrative hospitality involves us in the ongoing process of 'revising every story which has been handed down and of carving out a place for several stories directed towards the same past' ('Reflections' 7). Outside of such acts of crossed reading and narration, we run the risk of engendering the 'rigid and arrogant conception of cultural identity' ('Reflections' 7) which makes the violence of, for example, racism, xenophobia and homophobia possible. When we travel through the worlds (and words) of others through acts of narrative hospitality, alternatively, we return to an altered self, whose allegiances and interests are always being remade and enlarged. It is thus an *ipse* rather than *idem* self which narrative hospitality fosters; a self that 'takes part in the mobility of the story as a structured totality, and the discordance imposed by the encountered events' ('Reflections' 6). Whereas Kristeva posits an internal psychic process in which acceptance of our own alterity makes us more hospitable towards external others, Ricoeur offers an extrinsic discursive model, which stresses the same dynamic in reverse: subjecting ourselves to the crossed readings of others interrupts the self-certainty that blinds us to the 'work of alterity at the heart of selfhood' (*Oneself as Another*). The self retrieves its own suppressed difference, in other words, via a discursive exodus through the narratives of others. Both theorists similarly stress, however, the need to 'make oneself other' (Kristeva 13) or, as Ricoeur phrases it, to imagine 'oneself as another', in order to create the conditions for the development of a heterogenous and non-violent *polis*.

6.3.

It is with a strong sense of the larger social and public significance of narrative hospitality that *The Impostor* registers its many examples of failed dialogue, the most pronounced example of which is effected through Adam's peculiar amnesia about Canning. Outside of the mutuality of shared and exchanged memories, Adam has no real sense of allegiance towards Canning, the lack of which allows him to pursue an affair with Baby with little real regard for its consequences. Despite his stated admiration for Adam, Canning, for his part, appears no more capable of genuine reciprocity and seems to have befriended him primarily to secure an audience for his own good fortune in marrying Baby and inheriting Gondwana: 'He speaks of Adam as some kind of childhood hero, but except for a general air of reverence he shows no genuine interest in him' (86). Forged purely out of self-interest, theirs is a disingenuous relationship, whose expedience will finally implicate Adam in the destruction of Gondwana, despite his avowed love for its beauty, for it is, unsurprisingly, an expressly conditional form of hospitality which Canning extends to Adam and for which he extracts payment by making Adam a scapegoat in the corrupt business deal which will see Gondwana turned into a defunct golf estate.

It is Adam's pastoralism, once again, which blinds him to the material realities of his situation and to his interpolation into the ruthless economy which made Gondwana possible in the first place. Gondwana is, as Canning phrases it, a 'geographical freak' (57) — a lush, resplendent valley in the middle of the arid Karoo landscape. Its surreal quality, emphasised by the 'greeny-blue, outrageous shapes of peacocks everywhere' (56) accords with Adam's internal sense of strangeness and displacement. Yet, the setting is also familiar to Adam: in its lush

beauty, it nostalgically reminds him of the countryside of his youth and, unlike the desiccated landscape which surrounds the town, measures up to the edenic expectations of his poetic imagination. It is '[g]reen and intense', as he enthusiastically describes it to Baby, 'like life that can't be squashed down' (60). Baby's wry response, that she also grew up in the countryside, but that 'didn't make [her] love it' (60), is another reminder that Adam's pastoralism is enabled by his unselfconscious class and racial privilege. But this utopian version of the pastoral is most explicitly countered when we learn of Gondwana's origins: Canning reveals that his father had spent a lifetime acquiring smaller farms with the intention of amalgamating them into a single game farm, which he would have no hand in running, but would finance his life of seclusion in the nethermost region of the valley. While its name, 'Gondwana', conjures a prehistoric vista of undifferentiated and depoliticised space, it is the contrivance of a 'colonial dream of refinement and exclusion' (53), made possible by a grossly iniquitous economy. Adam's uncritical sentimentality about the land colludes with this mythologising perspective to mask this larger and less romantic story of Gondwana's origins.

Adam's pastoral reverie and the romantic narcissism which it implies are subjected to no small degree of irony in the second section of the novel, which sees 'Nappy' and Baby reduced to a pitiable parody of the originary couple, Adam and Eve, trapped in a dystopia of avarice, egocentricity and betrayal. We are always already fallen, the novel implies, and Galgut denies all of his characters recourse to the narratives of redemption and rebirth implied in the novel's many biblical allusions. His scepticism in this regard forms part of *The Impostor*'s larger critique of the allegorising impulse, which construes the quotidian world in terms of predetermined and immutable archetypes and reduces our capacity for empathy and

mutuality. Adam's poetic interpretation of Baby as a version of the Eve archetype, for example, makes her both more and less than human:

> He's been writing about *her* — about Baby. More specifically, he's been writing about his longing for her. Not as a would-be lover, that part is nonsense, but with a sort of metaphysical yearning. Until now, he's been trying to write poems about the wilderness, a world empty of people, while all the time he's needed a human being to focus on. And here at last she is, intervening between him and the landscape — not an identifiable person, but an emblematic female figure, seen against the backdrop of a primal, primitive garden. All of it is very biblical. (92)

This passage is typical of the self-contesting character of Adam's narrative: he admits to his need for human exchange, yet he cannot resist turning Baby into a literary device, an 'emblematic female figure' who symbolically mediates his relation to the land. The irony, of course, is that, while Adam imagines that his perspective is a startlingly original one, he is constructing a version of Baby steeped in the tropes of colonial discourse, which merge the black female body with the land to render it similarly available for conquest. Their ensuing affair is narrated in stereotypically primitivist terms, in which Baby unleashes the cerebral poet's most primal instincts: 'He becomes somebody else, a creature he doesn't know: this stranger-self is a powerful, goatish, reckless figure, who fornicates without restraint and talks dirty and doesn't care what damage he's doing' (129). In these moments, Adam identifies strongly with Canning's father, the hunter, who represents the epitome of an aggressive white masculinity: '[Adam] cannot shake off — even in these most intimate moments — the idea of

a connection between Canning's father and himself that passes through his black lover, using her as a medium' (129). By inserting himself into a patrilineal consciousness, Adam constructs for himself a fantasy of virile domination, in which Baby's subjectivity is pointedly negated.

Exalted archetypes, then, are shown to border very closely on reductive stereotypes, both of which recuse Adam from the demands of intersubjectivity by maintaining Baby's exotic otherness. Indeed, when Adam learns from Canning that Baby was once a prostitute, he recoils from the prospect of sharing in the story of her difficult past:

> [T]he burning curiosity he had felt about her has suddenly faded; he's not sure he wants to know all the tacky details of her life. He can imagine only too well what such a story might involve: the upward struggle out of poverty, the ruthless reliance on her beauty to create opportunities for herself, the sordid rooms and squalid situations she would have passed through […] No, it is better not to hear all that. It is possible, he thinks, to spoil everything. It is possible to know too much. (109)

In the absence of narrative hospitality, Baby remains typecast in racial and gendered terms as the avaricious 'black diamond' of the new South Africa; a femme fatale defined by her sexual power. This is an emergent stereotype of black femininity, bolstered by all the old ones: embodied and sexualised, Baby represents an intoxicating but threatening excess, sublimated through her reduction to currency within a patriarchal economy of exchange.

A predictable set of unfortunate cultural stereotypes also initially inform Adam's attitude towards Canning's servants, Grace and Ezekiel. The couple, we learn, have worked for Canning's family for their entire adult lives, but are unceremoniously dismissed by Baby when Grace accidentally learns of her affair with Adam. In their case, interestingly, Adam's stereotypical perspective often falters in light of their plain and very relatable humanity. This point is underscored by Galgut's use of bathos in the following passage, which describes Adam's apprehension of Ezekiel while bathing in Gondwana's river. The passage is worth quoting at length, not least to demonstrate its significant allusions to that most canonical — and perhaps controversial — of colonial texts, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*:

> First he can feel the eyes. A feeling, that's all — an animal alarm, some vestigial instinct in his cells. He remembers the unearthly roaring in the night as he peers into the trees, making out only light and shadow and the liquid movement of the birds. He turns sharply the other way. The far bank is even more inscrutable. He stares and stares — until, quite suddenly, he sees.
>
> It's a horrible moment. His body becomes colder than the water. Centuries of history drop away: the forest itself is staring at him — *into* him — with a dark face, lined and worn and old, marinated in ancient contempt. The face belongs here. Adam is the intruder, alien and unwanted; the single element in the scene that doesn't fit. He is about to vanish without a trace, and the shock jolts him off the rock, into deep water again.
>
> So they look at one another, the black face in the forest and the naked white man, treading water.

> Then he sees the hat. A dirty yellow hat, slanted skewly on top of the face. He knows this hat; he saw it yesterday, on the head of that old black guy, who must be as startled as Adam at this encounter. The world becomes ordinary as he enters time again. (68)

The stress on the mysterious unknowability of the African landscape, the atmospheric play with light and dark, as well as Adam's primordial dread, all strongly recall the thematic and stylistic textures of *Heart of Darkness* and work to ally Adam's perspective with a thoroughly outmoded colonial gaze. The primitivist tableau is countered, however, when the quotidian elements of the scene come in to focus; most notably the 'dirty yellow hat' which transforms Ezekiel from a bewildering primeval presence into a recognisable human being. The dramatic shift to an unadorned, colloquial register further underscores the misguidedness of Adam's exoticism. Yet, for all the irony directed at Adam's anachronistic primitivism, the echoes of Conrad's novella provide a serious reminder of the forces of cultural interpellation which mitigate our capacity to interpret the world differently. Just as Conrad's Marlow consciously disagrees with the hypocrisy and violence of colonialism, yet discursively reproduces its prejudices, so, too, is Adam unable to extract his perspective fully from inherited, reactive scripts about racial and gendered difference, despite his rational affiliation with more progressive views.

The fault-line in Adam's psyche, which he associates with his 'new South African self', is thus shown to develop out of the tension between his *habitus* and his context. His habits of mind and life, in other words, were acquired in relation to a very different social structure and poorly equip him for the challenges of a country in transition. This disjuncture accounts for

his pronounced anxiety about being an 'alien and unwanted' (68) fraud: his 'impostor' syndrome, to phrase it in the terms suggested by the novel's title. The development of a different *habitus* — better disposed to living with others and, by extension, to becoming more at ease with the self — is glimpsed in the bathos of Ezekiel's ordinariness which gives the lie to Adam's primitivism. From this perspective, Ezekiel can no longer function as a screen onto which Adam projects his feelings of strangeness and alterity. The production of otherness is interrupted, in other words, to reveal a common reality, in which Ezekiel is 'as startled as Adam at this encounter' (68).

That the paranoid projection of otherness operates not only across racial and gendered lines, but also within them, is highlighted in Adam's interactions with Blom, who comes to represent a version of white identity from which Adam is determined to distance himself. A 'mutually suspicious awareness' (24) exists between the pair from the moment of Adam's arrival and several weeks pass before they engage in conversation. During this time, Adam comes to think of Blom as 'the blue man' (24) by virtue of the blue overalls he wears while toiling for hours each day in his garden and workshop. The metonym effectively reduces Blom to something ineluctably strange and alien and his alterity is repeatedly underscored in these terms. When Adam witnesses Blom in his workshop, for example, 'he's not prepared for the weirdness of what he encounters when he gets to the doorway. In his blue overalls and goggles, in the glare of the blowtorch, Blom is an apparition from another planet' (125). Yet, there is also a sense in which he and Adam are very much alike: Blom, the narrator suggests, 'appears to be as lonely and singular as Adam himself' (24). When the pair finally exchange greetings, Adam is surprised to discover that Blom — like Ezekiel — is 'just an ordinary man. He looks avuncular and friendly; a neighbour, like any other' (72).

Unsurprisingly, Adam begins to find Blom tolerable once he integrates him into his sentimental pastoral narrative. After Blom helps Adam to repair his windmill, for example, he decides that 'Blom is a rough diamond, a real salt-of-the-earth type. The charity they've exchanged today is as simple and pure as the water still running into his dam. He is learning the country ways at last!' (75). As Stuart Thomas has observed in his analysis of the novel, Blom comes to represent the traditional values of the *plaasroman*, including the virtue of 'good stewardship' (Thomas 45) over the land, which conflates physical labour with moral rectitude. Adam tries — in anticipation of the spiritual and moral renewal which it promises — to replicate Blom's stringent work ethic by clearing out the dense weeds in his garden: 'Already — even though the cleared space is small — he feels good. It's the satisfaction of physical work: of honest sweat and broken skin' (76). His labour, however, proves to be entirely in vain when he discovers that, '[a]s fast as he had taken out the old dead weeds, new ones were suddenly sprouting' (95). Galgut invites here the allegorising impulse in the same moment as he troubles it: given the many forms of corruption which the novel exposes, we may be inclined to read Adam's garden of inexorable weeds as an allegory of the new South Africa, in which new evils have simply replaced the old ones. Yet, the logic through which we could effect this reading is undermined by the very nature of the book, which foregrounds the ironies and inconsistencies at work in selfhood and society, which make such symbolic abstractions impossible. If the interpretation of Gondwana as an edenic symbol of prelapsarian innocence failed to account for the immorality which Adam discovered there, it follows that reading Adam's garden as an allegory of South Africa as a failed state may finally be too schematic a way of accounting for the complex dynamics of a society in transition.

There is a more subtle point, I would argue, behind the futility of Adam's labour, which is hinted at in his dismay at his inadvertent facilitation of the weeds' resurgence: 'It's the water that's done it — the same water he'd used to soften the ground [...] The very means of clearing the ground is what will fill it again' (95). The scenario encapsulates the curious contradiction that vexes Adam throughout the narrative: that, even with the best of intentions, we are sometimes guilty of perpetuating the very insidious forces which we consciously reject. Because we are not always able to predict accurately the consequences of our actions, the harm we inflict or, for that matter, the good we effect, is not always simply a matter of conscious intent. We are fallible, in short, and this fallibility, Galgut shows, is precisely what implicates us in the lives of others. The narrator foregrounds this point in his description of Adam's motivation for seeking out Blom when he feels burdened by the guilty knowledge of his affair with Baby: 'He needs a human listener, somebody fallible who understands' (125). Importantly, though, 'he doesn't explain it to himself like this' (125) and later proves incapable of extending to Blom the narrative hospitality that he had once sought out in his neighbour. When Blom nonetheless insists on confessing the details of his violent past as an operative for the apartheid government to Adam, his rejection of Blom is terse and unambiguous: 'I'm not your friend. I don't want to know these things about you. I can't help you' (146).

It is the realisation of Blom's capacity for deception that most startles Adam, despite his growing awareness of his own 'gift for duplicity' (133) and the violence it allows him to contemplate. Galgut carefully plots the novel in order to show that, given the right pressures, Adam might himself be capable of comparable acts. Indeed, in his fantasies of murdering Canning, Adam comes to understand precisely the logic through which such atrocities could

be committed: ‘Even murder, [Adam] realizes, could become a habit. The first time might be difficult, but after that you were just repeating something you’d already done. Each subsequent occasion would be easier, until you could stand amongst piles of corpses and dream up lines of poetry’ (133). After Blom’s startling confession, however, Adam represses the knowledge of his own internal darkness and imagines himself entirely exempt from the ‘dark and dirty past of South Africa’ (148), which Blom has come to represent. His subsequent conversation with Gavin highlights the misguidedness of his simplistic morality and also reveals, in the only reference made to the matter in the novel, that the brothers were both conscripted into military service:

> This is a favourite theme of Gavin’s. He’d been up on the border for military service and had seen a bit of action. He liked to talk about how the country was full of apparently normal white men, many of whom had committed rape and murder and cut off SWAPO ears; these people were upstanding members of society now, their darkness buried underneath the surface.
>
> ‘But that’s different,’ Adam says, interrupting him. ‘We were conscripted. We *had* to go. This is somebody who *chose* to do this stuff for a living. He tortured and killed and kidnapped for the government. I mean, he’s a *bad* person.’
>
> ‘Oh, don’t be so naïve, big brother. There was a war on. That’s what happens in war. You think the other side didn’t do the same? At those ANC camps in Tanzania, there was also torture and murder going on. Those guys planted bombs in shopping centres, they blew up women and children — ’

> ‘It’s different,’ Adam says, dismayed. ‘They were on the right side.’ (148)

The reference to conscription underscores the point that we are not always free in the choices which we make and casts considerable doubt over the logic which Adam exercises in his judgment of Blom. In his dramatisation of the entwined fates of the two men, Galgut focuses our attention not on the question of whether Blom’s crimes are defensible, but on whether Adam’s condemnation of the man is justified. Significantly, Galgut retreats entirely here from the stereotyped villainy which made comparable perpetrators in his earlier novels — like Colonel Moller in *The Good Doctor* and Commandant Schutte in *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* — so easily condemnable. In so doing, he self-consciously examines not only the limits of Adam’s empathetic and ethical imagination, but also of his own. His subsequent focus, not on the details of the atrocities which Blom committed but on the vulnerable corporeality which makes him relatable both to the reader and even to Adam himself, suggests the grounds on which it might be possible to take responsibility, to recall Ricoeur’s entreaty, in imagination and sympathy for the story of an other, even — and perhaps especially — one whom we might otherwise find wholly abhorrent: ‘[Adam] keeps remembering, for some reason, the vulnerable glimpse of Blom’s skull that he’d had while he made his confession: he’s just a man after all, with a man’s fear of death’ (149).

When Adam makes the decision, then, to sacrifice Blom’s life, in order to save his own, Galgut makes it clear that he is only able to do so through a process of repressing both his own internal strangeness and the knowledge of Blom’s relatable ordinariness. In a case of mistaken identity, Blom dies at the hands of Canning’s corrupt associates, who were sent to

murder Adam instead. Although Adam anticipates this outcome, he leaves Blom to his fate, justifying the matter as belated retribution for the atrocities he committed in the past. He flees the Karoo and returns in the novel's conclusion to an ostensibly normal life in the city. Having abandoned his poetic aspirations and found respectable employment, he looks back on his months with Baby and Canning as a source of 'profound embarrassment […] the entire thing was an aberration' (207). He rationalises his memories of the 'other presence' (206) as a 'by-product of the depression he was going through' (206) and consigns the entire experience to history: 'Thankfully […] it was all very much in the past' (207). The reader is left with a palpable sense that history will repeat itself, however, when the amnesia which made Adam complicit in Canning's disastrous schemes is highlighted in the novel's concluding passage: 'It felt as if he'd left something behind, something vitally important that he would need in just a moment' (215).

The Impostor, to recall the terms in which the novel was primarily received by reviewers, is thus by no means a straightforward expression of Galgut's traditionalism, but is rather a novel in which he subjects established literary forms and conventions — his own amongst them — to a particularly rigorous form of metafictional critique. In this respect, the novel represents a literary sensibility which is closer to *The Quarry* than it is to *The Good Doctor,* despite the more obvious thematic and stylistic similarities which it shares with the latter. But unlike *The Quarry, The Impostor* unambiguously rejects authorial abdication as an adequate response to the demands of a society in transition: Adam's abandonment of his poetic aspirations also signals his resignation to an attenuated 'ramshackle' life of 'compromise and half-truth' (208) in which betrayal, deceit and exploitation are accepted as the uncontested norm. In the critical distance which it allows us from the creative and empathetic failures which so pitiably reduce

his mode of engagement with the world, *The Impostor* foregrounds the importance of creating literary forms which dispense with the deeply ingrained stereotypes of the past and the unfathomable others they create. In the restless experimentation of his subsequent novel, *In a Strange Room,* Galgut — unlike Adam — discovers a literary form able to articulate the kind of self-knowledge which discovers alterity within itself and thus mitigates the threatening strangeness of the external world.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Against Teleology: Feeling Backwards in *In a Strange Room*

In a Strange Room was published in 2010, only two years after *The Impostor,* making the first decade of the new millennium the most productive in Galgut's career. The novel attracted admiring attention from reviewers, who were almost unanimous in their praise for the polish and emotional intensity of Galgut's prose: he is 'the most sensitive of writers', noted Eileen Battersby in her review for *The Irish Times*, and the 'exactness' of *In a Strange Room* is 'almost unnerving'. It is a 'taut, mesmerizing novel', echoed Adam Langer in his review for *The New York Times*, while Jan Morris, writing for *The Guardian*, was equally unreserved in her praise: '*In a Strange Room* is a beautiful book, strikingly conceived and hauntingly written, a writer's novel par excellence, without a clumsy word in it'. The judges for the Man Booker Prize expressed their admiration in similar terms when they shortlisted *In a Strange Room* for the 2010 prize, describing it as '[a] novel of longing and thwarted desire, rage and compassion, […a] hauntingly beautiful evocation of one man's search for love and for a place to call home'. For William Skidelsky, the novel — with its unconventional narrative perspective and thematic departure from the socio-political concerns of post-apartheid South Africa — represents a watershed in Galgut's oeuvre: 'With this new book Galgut has struck out in a new direction and taken his writing to a whole other level. It is a quiet, astonishing work'.

The novel's enthusiastic reception, however, belies the story behind its difficult publication, as well as its protracted genesis as a work that was almost two decades in the making. Galgut had already completed substantial work on the novel, which he had originally titled 'Free Fall

or Flight', as far back as 2001, but was unable to secure a publisher for the manuscript at the time. It contained two of the three stories that would eventually make up *In a Strange Room,* each of which narrates a different journey taken by its protagonist, a man named 'Damon'. In the first, Damon undertakes a journey on foot through the mountains of Lesotho with Reiner, a German man whom he had met briefly on an earlier trip to Greece. Damon has an unspoken attraction to Reiner and the narrative explores his oscillation between rage and despair as the dominant Reiner dictates a strangely circuitous and increasingly taxing course for their journey. The loneliness of unacknowledged desire also permeates the second story, 'The Lover', in which Damon meets a trio of Swiss tourists — Jerome, Alice and Christian — while travelling through Zimbabwe. His attraction to Jerome is strong enough to compel him to follow the group as they travel back to Europe via Zambia and Tanzania, but both men remain too reserved to act on their mutual attraction. While an imbalance of power prevents intimacy from developing between Reiner and Damon in the first story, the mutual powerlessness of Damon and Jerome forecloses it in the second. Meaningful human connection, these stories suggest, is the province of those with kindness and courage and the introverted Damon finds himself bitterly lacking in the latter.

The vicissitudes of Damon's journeys are articulated through a combination of narrative perspectives to produce what is, arguably, the most striking stylistic feature of the stories: Galgut tacks between the first person voice of Damon, the protagonist, who experiences events as they unfold in the diegetic world of the narrative and Damon, the extradiegetic narrator, who observes his past self in the third person through the winding passages of memory. The combination dramatises the intransigent tension between the order which narrative imposes on events and the protean instability of the self who experiences them.

While the protagonist's name invites us to read the narrated experiences autobiographically, as Galgut's own, we are simultaneously alerted to the layers of mediation which make direct access to lived experience impossible and render any absolute distinction between memory and fiction untenable. Indeed, from Galgut's perspective, the two are entirely permeable to one another, governed as they both are by the narrative process of retrospective selection. In a 2010 interview with Anderson Tepper, he noted that: 'I believe that we construct our memories in the same way a story-writer constructs a fiction. The memory of any moment is made up of a disparate jumble of impressions and perceptions, out of which we pick in retrospect what we think of as the "central" or "meaningful" ones […] How different is this to the fiction writer creating meaning?'

Although Galgut considered 'Free Fall or Flight' the best work he had produced to date (see Miller 144-5), publishers were less enthusiastic about this hybrid, episodic work and, by 2001, only an abridged version of the stories had been published in the South African literary journal *New Contrast.* Over the next few years, Galgut would add a third story to the original pair, which he titled 'The Guardian'. Between 2005 and 2009, each of the three stories appeared in separate editions of *The Paris Review* before Galgut brought them together to form *In a Strange Room.* While the story of the novel's recuperation is indeed gratifying, I would argue that it is important to keep this history of the text's marginalisation in view, for it helps to narrate the uneven genealogy of Galgut's novels masked by the progressive accounts of the reviewers cited above and, indeed, the chronological structure of my own study. By examining Galgut's texts in their order of publication, I have been interested in tracing lines of development in his thought and literary technique, at the risk, however, of imposing an all too neat *telos* onto his oeuvre. As a work whose composition cuts across the publication of

his most recent novels, *In a Strange Room* provides unusually overt evidence of the 'rhizomatic' activity, to borrow Deleuze and Guattari's (6) suggestive term, which undergirds the linear trajectory of his publications. It bears traces, moreover, of Galgut's exclusion from the literary marketplace and, by inviting us to read its gestures of estrangement, interruption and dispossession as his own, unsettles his recent appropriation as a representative author of post-apartheid South Africa.

In this chapter, then, I read the difficulty of situating *In a Strange Room* in the lineage of Galgut's oeuvre as metonymic of the larger problem of mapping his writing onto a genealogy of South African literature which is stratified by the logic of socio-political watersheds and teleological development. In the innovative narrative strategies and generic ambiguity through which it stages its flight from the national imaginary, the novel could, arguably, be taken as evidence of Galgut's evolution from a writer preoccupied with the residual concerns of the past to one immersed in the creative possibilities of a 'post-transitional' present, a term which has recently been adopted by scholars like Craig MacKenzie and Ronit Frenkel to describe developments in contemporary South African writing. If transitional literature had been characterised by the project of redressing and excavating the past in the interests of constructing a shared nation, literature of the post-transition, Frenkel and MacKenzie argue, 'exhibits a reduced obligation to the logics of political commitment and […] purposely contests the national as its overriding context' (4). Characterised by a 'proliferation of genres, concerns and styles' (4), post-transitional writing, they suggest, represents a welcome diversification of the field.

Situating *In a Strange Room* within the trajectory which the notion of the 'post-transitional' poses, however, retrospectively elides the uneven and uneasy history of its composition, a danger inherent, as Michael Titlestad has recently argued, in 'cartographic' approaches to the description of literary and cultural developments. In his response to the proposed use of the term 'post-transitional' to describe emerging trends in contemporary South African writing, Titlestad cautions against efforts to map a clear path across our uneven literary 'terrain' via the 'consolations of taxonomy — and periodisation' ('Tales' 121). He argues that, while this approach is reassuring in the illusion of steady progress and development which it offers, it masks the awkward state of suspension, which more accurately characterises the post-apartheid condition. If the struggle against apartheid trained us to fix our gaze on an approaching horizon that might either prove to be a new dawn or an impending apocalypse, life after apartheid has, Titlestad suggests, cast us adrift in a future that never quite arrived: 'We are, it seems, currently in the muddy middle-ground typical of all postcolonial states, perhaps of all states, facing a range of both particular and shared challenges' (119). Citing the anthropologist Robert Thornton, he suggests that we understand our transition, 'not as teleology, not as a journey to a "final state", but as a permanent condition, "not unlike Trotsky's idea of a permanent revolution"' (120).

As I explore in this chapter, this state of 'permanent transition' — of existing on a mezzanine, to borrow Titlestad's analogy (120) — is one that resonates strongly with the condition of suspension, which is figured both in and by *In a Strange Room.* Poised, as it is, between fiction and memoir, novel and short story, *In a Strange Room* refuses us the clarity of generic classification, just as the looping journeys which it dramatises avoid orientation towards cathartic denouements and explanatory resolutions. It strands us, instead, on the precipice of

understanding, registering forms of insight and self-knowledge which are inseparable from self-doubt and uncertainty. Like Damon himself, we are forced to contend with the possibility that 'the silence, the suspension, is the only form of resolution this particular story will ever have' (81). This state of suspension is not, however, plainly synonymous with impasse: if we have, as Titlestad argues, been 'forever transitional and [if] all indications are that we are condemned to that plateau of being and meaning' (121), then *In a Strange Room* also requires us to understand this state of suspension in its mobile and temporal dimensions. The novel supplants teleology not with stasis, but with a form of dynamic intermediacy, which concerns itself less with starting and finishing than it does with the work of perpetual becoming.

7.1.

In the final journey which Galgut added to 'Free Fall or Flight' to complete *In a Strange Room*, Damon travels with his friend, Anna, to Goa in India and, subsequently, all the way north to the mountains of Ladakh, via Orchha, Khajuraho and Dharamsala (203). Collectively, Damon's journeys span three continents and nearly two decades, with each journey following consecutively on from the last. Galgut thus presents us with what is ostensibly a chronological account of successive stages in Damon's life, from young adulthood to early middle age, but simultaneously refracts this seamless trajectory through the motif of travel and its ephemeral, provisional connotations. The proliferation of geographical locales, the circuitous nature of each of Damon's journeys, as well as his restless demeanour, all diminish the possibility of linear subject development implied by the text's chronological tripartite structure.

Emphasised, from the outset of his travels, is Damon's lack of affinity with South Africa: his 'home' in only the most superficial sense. He returns to the country for reluctant hiatuses between his journeys and feels largely unaffected by the political developments which have unfolded in his absence, a point underscored by his reflections on the watershed elections of 1994:

> Everything has changed while he was away. The white government has capitulated, power has succumbed and altered shape. But at the level on which life is lived nothing looks very different. He gets out at the station and stands in the middle of the moving crowds and tries to think, I am home now, I have come home. But he feels as though he is only passing through. (29)

Damon's estrangement from South Africa stems less from an aversion to the country per se than it does from what might be termed his feelings of metaphysical homelessness — that is, his sense of perpetual emotional, psychological and intellectual dislocation from any single place. He cannot identify with South Africa as the locus of his identity, because he is 'hardly ever happy in the place where he is, something in him is already moving forward to the next place, and yet he is also never going towards something, but always away, away' (28). This itinerancy relativises South Africa, not only as a determinant of Damon's identity, but also in terms of its status as a site of paradigmatic political upheaval. In 'The Lover', for example, he visits a Tanzania which — on the eve of its own inaugural multi-party elections — is in a comparable state of anxious change: 'The newspapers are full of stories of possible violence and upheaval, the rumours on the train are edged with nervousness' (117). From this

perspective, South Africa sheds its exceptionalism to emerge as only one of many locales in transition.

If we pursue an autobiographical reading of *In a Strange Room* and accept Damon as a figure for Galgut's authorial consciousness, it follows that Galgut considers himself to be without privileged access to the inner workings of South Africa's transition. This self-construction casts retrospective doubt over the politicised reception of both *The Good Doctor* and *The Impostor*, allowing Galgut to unburden himself of the mantle of representative authorship and claim an authorial purview which extends beyond local concerns and affiliations. Yet, although *In a Strange Room* — through the autobiographical naming of its protagonist — invites us to revise our assumptions about Galgut's oeuvre in this way, its self-reflexive concern with the configurations of selfhood amounts to more than an act of canny authorial self-fashioning. Indeed, in the slippages which it orchestrates between author, protagonist and narrator, the novel suggests precisely the impossibility of positioning the self in fixed ways. The status of Galgut's authorial identity emerges, then, as but one aspect of the larger question which the novel poses; that is, how to narrate the self outside of an overdetermined sense of time and place. How does a 'fucked up South African' (96), as Damon refers to himself in 'The Lover', configure a sense of identity without the 'scaffolding' provided by the tropes — painfully delimiting as they may be — of our national history? What, moreover, does the self look like once it has been extracted from its affiliations with home and country? Importantly, the bifurcation of self from the meanings associated with place is by no means plainly liberating, but comes with its own peculiar burdens, as an early passage from 'The Follower' suggests:

> He watches, but what he sees isn't real to him. Too much travelling and placelessness have put him outside everything, so that history happens elsewhere, it has nothing to do with him. He is only passing through. Maybe horror is felt more easily from home. This is both a redemption and an affliction, he doesn't carry any abstract moral burdens but their absence is represented for him by the succession of flyblown and featureless rooms he sleeps in, night after night, always changing but somehow always the same room. (28)

The feeling of 'placelessness' occasioned by travel may, on the one hand, allow for the unburdening of the self from unwanted obligations; its capacity to do so is figured in the novel's many references to 'weightlessness' and 'flight'. On the other hand, it also has the potential to foster ethical indifference by making the individual a perpetual observer, disinvested from all that he surveys. The dangers inherent in this level of disconnectedness are aptly demonstrated by Reiner, who evinces a callous disregard for the people and history of any destination which he visits: '[N]othing matters except the empty space he's projecting himself into' (39). The group of tourists which Damon joins at Lake MacLear in Malawi — although devoid of Reiner's taciturnity — is similarly narcissistic: 'In this place each of them is at the centre of the universe, and at the same time is nowhere, surely this is what it means to be spiritually fulfilled, they are having a religious experience' (94).

The loss of a connection to home and its concomitant obligations to people and place is thus associated, by turns, not only with freedom and escape, but also with apathy, egotism, vacuity and even death. Indeed, Damon harbours an anxious fear that, through itinerancy, the self

may be dispersed to the point of negation; he 'feels no connection with anything around him, he's constantly afraid of dying' (28). The novel thus concerns not only the immediate ethical but also the larger metaphysical implications of the relationship between subjectivity and place. The latter is underscored in the title's allusion to William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, which Damon is reading while on his taxing journey around Lesotho with Reiner:

> The tiredness of the long walk will not leave his body, a numbness has crept into his bones. He wanders around the campsite, trying to revive, he thinks about everything and resolves nothing, he washes his clothes in the river and drapes them over the rocks to dry. Then he sits in the sun, listening to the water, reading. In a strange room you must empty yourself for sleep. And before you are emptied for sleep, what are you. And when you are emptied for sleep, you are not. And when you are filled with sleep, you never were. The words come to him from a long way off. (62)

The words which Damon recites to himself are taken from Darl's narrative, one of the fourteen perspectives on the death of Addie Bundren, which Faulkner offers us in *As I Lay Dying*. Aware of his mother's imminent death, Darl reflects on the nature of existence and the relationship between consciousness and being. To 'empty yourself for sleep' involves unburdening the self of all the concerns of the conscious mind. Darl's narrative proceeds by unravelling the paradoxes implicit in a Cartesian understanding of selfhood. If we are constituted by the faculties of the conscious mind, it follows that in sleep, we cease — ontologically speaking — to exist: 'And when you are filled with sleep you never were'. What is left, Darl wonders, of a self dependent on so fragile and intermittent a condition for

its very existence? The idea of the self as a mere container, to be filled and evacuated by the daily vicissitudes of thought, leaves Darl suspended in an existential quandary: 'I don't know what I am. I don't know if I am or not' (*As I Lay Dying* 80). Although these lines are omitted from explicit citation in *In a Strange Room*, they express an anxiety about the insubstantiality of selfhood which permeates Damon's narrative.

Importantly, Darl's portentous reflections are occasioned, like Damon's, by his departure from home. Removed from the extrinsic factors which inform our sense of identity, both characters are left to wonder what, if anything, essentially constitutes the self. In this way, both novels suggest that inhabiting a 'strange room' produces a heightened form of self-consciousness in which the nature of selfhood is examined. For Galgut, this state of intense self-awareness can, as the narrative splitting between Damon as narrator and protagonist demonstrates, facilitate self-understanding, but it can also act as a painfully delimiting force, which inhibits our capacity to form meaningful connections with others. At times, for example, Damon's self-consciousness produces a marked schism in his psyche, through which he becomes 'a spectator of [his] own behaviour' (71). Significantly, this feeling of internal division is most pronounced when he becomes actively involved in a situation; whether to assert himself against Reiner's megalomania or, less dramatically, to enjoy the touristic pleasures of travel:

> It is incredible to see the volume and power of so much water endlessly dropping into the abyss, but part of him is elsewhere, somewhere higher up and to the right, looking down at an angle not only on the falls but on himself there, among the crowds. This part of him, the part that watches, has been

> here for a while now, and it never quite goes away, over the next few days it looks at him keeping busy, strolling through the streets from one curio-shop to another, going for long walks in the surrounding bush, it observes with amazement when he goes white-water rafting on the river, it sees him lying in the open air next to his tent to keep cool at night, staring up into the shattered windscreen of the sky. And though he seems content, though he talks to people and smiles, the part that watches isn't fooled, it knows he wants to move on. (86-7)

That part of Damon which is the perpetual observer dissociates him from his actions, recalling him always to his apparently immutable solipsism and passivity. It is often with 'wry amusement' (117) that this 'other part' watches Damon, censoring his tentative gestures towards community and participation. When Damon follows Jerome all the way to Tanzania, for example, '[i]t sees all the complexities of the situation he's in and murmurs sardonically into his ear, you see where you have landed yourself' (117-8).

Of all the negative states associated with 'placelessness' — metaphysical dread, ethical indifference, paralysing self-consciousness — perhaps the most acute is Damon's sense of lovelessness. After many restless years of travel in which his disconnection from the world has become the norm, he 'thinks that he has lost the ability to love, people or places or things, most of all the person or place and thing that he is' (85). Undertaken in this state, travel, he admits, 'isn't celebration but a kind of mourning, a way of dissipating yourself' (85). The circular logic implicit in Damon's thinking — travel renders him incapable of love, yet he travels to escape his feelings of lovelessness — is reflected in the looping trajectories of the

journeys themselves, which always find him back where he started. That his pursuit of Jerome across Africa — or, for that matter, of Reiner around Lesotho — only serves to perpetuate his loneliness is, in this sense, a foregone conclusion. There is, however, more to be said about the unfulfilled desire for intimacy, which is inscribed in both 'The Follower' and 'The Lover', for it helps to explain the general disquiet which has attended Galgut's reception as a gay writer. His tendency to leave his characters in states of suspended desire, unable to surmount their sexual reticence, is at odds with the progress narratives of national and sexual identity, which have, as I explore in the next section, become co-mingled in the reception of post-apartheid writing and thus rendered Galgut's place within a genealogy of gay South African authorship an especially problematic and precarious one.

7.2.

In the contrast between Damon's relationships with Reiner and Jerome, Galgut explores the strange duality within love through which it both promises to nurture and threatens to harm. This volatility is especially characteristic of eros, Zygmunt Bauman reminds us, in which the desire for intimacy is incessantly coupled with the threat of destruction and even death. Describing the peculiar risk involved in forming intimate bonds with others, Bauman argues that 'there is but a thin boundary […] between a soft and gentle caress and a ruthless iron grip. Eros cannot be loyal to itself without practising the first, but cannot practise it without risking the second' (*Liquid Love*, ch.1). In their contrasting attitudes towards Damon, Jerome and Reiner arguably embody both of these twin facets; the former gently beseeching him while the latter controls and torments. Eros, just as Bauman claims, does not survive the separation. Untempered by tenderness, the 'struggle for ascendancy' (56) which characterises

Damon and Reiner's relationship, finally yields only resentment and the desire for separation, which is the very antithesis of love:

> By now even the most trivial events conceal some kind of groping for power. In the very beginning, two years ago, when they first saw each other in Greece, they thought of themselves as the same. On that lonely road they looked like mirror images of each other. Perhaps each of them thought of real communication as unnecessary, words divide by multiplying, what was certain was the oneness underneath the words. But now they refrain from talking because it might reveal to them how dangerously unlike one another they are. An image in a mirror is a reversal, the reflection and the original are joined but might cancel each other out. (56)

The image of the mirror aptly demonstrates the duplicitous contradiction on which eros turns; that is, that the pleasure of recognition also contains within itself the threat of negation. Reiner's unequivocal dominance means that the two can never be held in balance and that, after many months at his mercy, Damon's sense of self-preservation finally exceeds his desire for fusion, or 'oneness'. Yet, out of the tensions which characterise their daily routines, 'in which they lie next to each other and bump against each other in the dark, and look into each other's faces first thing in the morning' (52), a form of intimacy develops, which Damon is never able to establish with Jerome, despite the gentle and generous version of togetherness which the latter comes to represent:

> Alice and Jerome want to call their mother at home, it's been months since they spoke to her […] While he listens to this half of a conversation around the world, ah Maman, il est si bon d'entendre ta voix, the syllables of a language he doesn't understand convey an intimacy and affection that he does, and he can half-imagine this other life they come from, far to the north, which he's been invited to join. Should I go. Can I. His own life narrowed to a fork, at which he dithers in an indecisive rapture. (121)

Because they are unable to converse in the same language, a polite formality exists between the pair, which inculcates in Damon 'a melancholy as soft and colourless as the wind' (140). The language barrier between them is, however, only metonymic of the many internal boundaries — fear, introversion, unworthiness — which make Damon's desire for Jerome and for the life of 'intimacy and affection' which he represents, quite literally untranslatable. Devoid of the 'dark passion' which drives his relationship with Reiner even as it destroys it, Damon's attraction to Jerome is beset by its inverse; that is, by an incapacitating timidity through which the 'silence and distance between them [...] will amplify and grow, even as they become nicer to each other' (141).

Damon is thus never properly *in* love in either story; instead, he remains stranded on its precipice, unable to access its transcendent promise. Love thus acts as a cypher in the novel, connoting less a particular emotion than it does the forms of agency through which Damon imagines that he could become an active participant in the world, rather than a perpetual witness to the togetherness of others: 'If I was with somebody, he thinks, with somebody I loved, then I could love the place and even the grave too, I would be happy to be here' (86).

Significantly, it is only ever defined in the negative: subjected to Reiner's megalomania, Damon feels that 'to be loveless is to be without power', while, as a witness to the 'completion and unity' (137) Jerome enjoys with his family, it is to be without a home. Both definitions keep questions of desire and sexuality at bay, even as they are initiated by the strong physical attraction which Damon feels towards both men. Indeed, over the trajectory of the three stories, Galgut increasingly shifts his attention away from the erotic until, in 'The Guardian', it rests primarily on the dispassionate and virtuous form of love which Aristotle described as *philia.* His retreat from an open and candid exploration of same-sex desire has confounded some critics, who find his sexual conservatism impossibly anachronistic. In his facetious review for *The Washington Post*, for example, Ron Charles expressed his irritation with the 'unconsummated desire' which pervades the text in no uncertain terms. Writing about the sexual tension between Reiner and Damon, Charles notes:

> The hunky German walks around with his shirt off, sits on the edge of Damon's bed, daring him to make the first move. It's a scene of homoerotic passive aggression straight from the British prep school memoir of the 1930s. Except this is the 21st century, and there's no way to explain why these two modern, unattached adults imagine their relationship should be so burdened with the threat of transgression. They keep up this dance of denial for 70 pages, leading each other on a cruel walking challenge across Greece [*sic*]. 'Was what happened between him and Reiner love or hate,' the narrator asks, 'or something else with another name.' But we dare speak its name nowadays, Mr Galgut, and it's not so shocking or titillating as you suggest.

For Charles, the repression and strain which mark same-sex desire in *In a Strange Room* is laughably old-fashioned and renders Galgut a curious relic inexplicably ignorant of the liberalisation of attitudes towards sexuality since Stonewall. Implicit in his comments is a significant teleology which suggests that, because homosexuality has been progressively de-stigmatised over recent decades, shame and repression should no longer attend the representation of gay experience. Setting aside, for the moment, the substantial evidence which suggests that dominant attitudes towards homosexuality have not evolved to the extent which Charles implies, it is worth noting that his aversion to Galgut's 'closeted' representation of homosexuality is one that has become increasingly hegemonic in the reception of gay writing, as Heather Love has recently shown. In *Feeling Backwards: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*, Love argues that the interpretation of gay representation has, since the mobilisation of the gay rights movement in the sixties, been strongly informed by the logic of redress which, in response to a history of stigma and denigration, seeks to 'resist damage and affirm queer experience' (3). Even within contemporary queer criticism, with its scrupulous attention to the many social and ideological fault lines which make a linear, triumphalist view of gay history impossible, Love detects a deep commitment 'to the notion of progress' (3). '[D]espite our reservations', she notes, 'we just cannot stop dreaming of a better life for queer people. Such utopian desires are at the heart of the collective project of queer studies and integral to the history of gay and lesbian identity' (3).

The commitment to progress which Love finds in the reception of gay writing has its own South African iteration, which sees the negotiation of sexual identities intersect in complex ways with the construction of national ones. Because the struggle for LGBT rights in South Africa was imbricated with the larger struggle for political emancipation, it has been

subjected, as Tim Trengove Jones has shown, to the same — largely fanciful — teleology that has shaped the construction of a 'new' national identity. In this version of events, the extension of constitutional protection to sexual minorities after apartheid secured the social integration of LGBT citizens into a newly tolerant South Africa. The logic of watersheds, as Trengove Jones notes ('Gay Times' 97), was everywhere apparent in the judgments delivered by the Constitutional Court concerning gay rights, affirming the idea that the contrast between 'the past […] and future […] is stark and dramatic' (Mahomed, ctd in 'Gay Times' 97) and that gay citizens could expect to be accommodated by an evolved society. This narrative of progressive socio-sexual emancipation provided, in turn, yet another allegory of South Africa's political transition — this time as a 'period of coming out', as Albie Sachs memorably claimed, in which '[i]t's not just the gay and lesbian community that is coming out. The truth has been coming out [...]. We're all coming out [... and] we've become a better nation' (ctd in Trengove Jones, 'Fiction' 115).

The dream of a better life for queer people — to recall the terms of Love's discussion — thus also implied, in the immediate aftermath of apartheid, the dream of successful political transition, in which South Africa — like its gay citizens — could be released from its pariah status and welcomed into 'the global community of nations' (Barnard, 'Rewriting' 661). Indeed, the analogy between national and sexual politics implied as much a transition from parochialism to cosmopolitanism as it did from bigotry to tolerance. Sachs's analogy, made in 1998, also resonated with the discourses of transparency and disclosure, which circulated in the wake of the TRC hearings, making the figure of the gay South African not only a 'symbol of progress and a hoped-for national future', as Brenna Munro has argued ('Queer

Constitutions' 163; see also Munro, *The Dream of Love to Come* 173), but also emblematic of a buried national history which had finally been disclosed.

Given the peculiar symbolic freight of the 'coming out' narrative in the post-apartheid national imaginary, it is perhaps not surprising that Galgut's conservative representation of sexuality has engendered considerable discomfort in critics. His association of homosexual love with repression, impossibility and failure raises the spectre of the past in all its sexual, as well as political and cultural, backwardness, thus hampering the critical work of redress and affirmation. For Cheryl Stobie, for example, the sexual conservatism of *In a Strange Room* is 'in keeping with the national mood of disillusionment following the widespread euphoria after independence [*sic*] in 1994' (484). Her concern lies specifically with the representation of bisexuality in the novel which, she argues, reproduces a host of retrograde stereotypes. Writing about the characterisation of Reiner and Anna, Stobie argues:

> These bisexual characters represent excess, an inability to commit, insatiability and psychological instability, and embody the deep distrust many gays and lesbians feel towards bisexuals. They also represent the incommensurability and uncontrollability of bodies or states (in both senses) which have the ability to change, rather than being comfortably stable. (485)

For Stobie, the sexual conservatism of *In a Strange Room* is a troubling sign of a more widespread political regressiveness and clear evidence of Galgut's own resistance to change. This appraisal, however, overlooks the deep regret with which Damon's stagnation — despite his restless efforts to move, change and develop — is registered. The inability to move

forward is understood, for example, as a profound personal failing in 'The Lover', in which Damon, back in South Africa after travelling 'half the length of the continent' (132) in pursuit of Jerome, comes to

> [accept] the notion that the journey is over, and that he's back where he started. The story of Jerome is one he's lived through before, it's the story of what never happened, the story of travelling a long way while standing still. (133)

It is in this pronounced focus on the anguish of being left behind, arriving late and going nowhere that *In a Strange Room* registers an aspect of gay experience, which has particular relevance for a wider, but not straightforwardly allegorical, understanding of personal and national selfhood. Writing from different contexts, both Love and Trengove Jones remind us that the wounds of belatedness comprise a central aspect of queer experience. Citing Freud's interpretation of homosexuality as 'a failure of maturation' (21), Love argues that the stigma of 'immaturity and selfishness' (22) has long marked homosexual relations. Indeed, even within the ostensibly affirmative connotations of the 'coming out' trope is an allegation of belatedness; that self-perception and the formation of a social identity have somehow lagged behind the development of sexuality. As such, 'a gay presence in the world, a gay identity means, however we look at it, that we are […] "born late"', as Trengove Jones argues (Gay Times 101). By insisting on this temporal dissonance in his representation of same-sex desire, instead of submitting it to the teleological narratives of a collective 'coming out', Galgut suggests the ongoing pain of being unable to internalise the promise of progress and emancipation made by the forward march of history and claim the new versions of identity it

configures as one's own. It is in this sense — as a work which registers the enervating and potentially interminable lag between official and felt history — that *In a Strange Room* is, as one reviewer claimed, about 'a state that's extraordinarily relevant in South Africa today' (Roper, 'The Strangest of Rooms').

In a curious reversal of the conventional dynamics of the closet, then, *In a Strange Room* registers the feelings of shame and regret of *not* 'coming out' — or, at least, not with sufficient conviction and visibility — in accordance with the teleological demands of history. Beset by the painful burdens of 'feeling backwards' — to borrow Love's articulate phrase — the novel is structured by a strong desire for 'another time' (*Strange Room* 143), in which intimacy and affection might be possible. It is thus not only in its relation to place, but also time, that the novel's preoccupation with love asks to be understood. As Bauman, citing Levinas, reminds us, '[e]ros is "a relation with alterity, with mystery, that is with the future, with that which is absent from the world that contains everything that is"' (*Liquid Love*, ch. 1). To be loveless, Galgut suggests, is to be denied this affirming orientation towards the future, a point which is painfully underscored by the death of Jerome in the conclusion of 'The Lover'. In Damon's reflections on the tragedy, the transience of every journey — both literal and metaphorical — provides a heightened expression of the inexorable fact of human ephemerality:

> A journey is a gesture inscribed in space, it vanishes even as it's made. You go from one place to another place, and on to somewhere else again, and already behind you there is no trace that you were ever there. [...] The very air closes behind you like water and soon your presence, which felt so

> weighty and permanent, has completely gone. Things happen once only and are never repeated, never return. Except in memory. (146)

A portrait of terminal despair does not finally emerge, however, from the loss of futurity which *In a Strange Room* stages. Its terms of redemption are suggested in Galgut's frequent references to the persistence of memory across ephemerality; to 'that which endures and remains across that which passes and flows away' (Ricoeur, 'Life in Quest' 22). It is, as Ricoeur reminds us, within the special powers of narrative to mediate between these two poles and, in so doing, to configure significance out of discontinuity, fragmentation and loss.

7.3.

Although I have thus far primarily explored its preoccupation with states of emotional and social negativity, *In a Strange Room* is, in equal measure, a work which attempts to rescue the self from alienation and despair; to imagine a self that is capable, in the full sense which Ricoeur suggests, not in spite — but precisely because — of its fragility. Galgut's addition of 'The Guardian' to his original manuscript has much to do with the mood of quiet redemption which the novel achieves in its entirety: in contrast to the perilous isolation which Damon suffers in the first two stories, it explores the empathetic bonds which are formed through the experience of shared loss and vulnerability. Its sense of fragile connectedness is, in turn, buttressed by the impression of formal completion which the inclusion of 'The Guardian' lends to the novel, by transmuting its episodic and inconclusive structure into a recognisably tripartite one. To suggest that *In a Strange Room* achieves this impression of structural and thematic unity is not, however, to claim that it is neatly resolved, offers sentimental

consolations for the losses it dramatises, or that the schisms which mark Damon's subjectivity are healed. It is rather to suggest that its heterogeneous elements are synthesised, to recall Ricoeur again, 'into an intelligible whole' ('Life in Quest' 22), engendering a narrative understanding of the self that mediates between coherence and fragmentation and stasis and change.

In contrast to the claustrophobic introversion which Damon suffers in the first two stories, in 'The Guardian' he is forced to direct his attention outwards towards his friend Anna, in whose company he undertakes a trip to south Goa in India. Anna and Damon 'have a good friendship, she is like a sister to him, somebody he loves and who makes him laugh. Somebody he wants to protect' (153). It is with these feelings of familial love and protection that he invites Anna to join him on his trip, in the hope that it will help her to recover from a severe mental breakdown, which has left her dependent on a 'small pharmacy' (150) of psychiatric medication. It is apparent from the outset of their tumultuous journey, however, that Damon has woefully underestimated the extent of her illness and is hopelessly ill-prepared for the demands it will place on him. The narrative which follows traces his desperate attempts to save his friend, as he 'comes gradually to understand that the danger to Anna, the force from which she must be protected, is inside her' (154).

In 'The Guardian', then, Damon endures a different form of loneliness, stemming this time from the loss of an established connection with someone he loves and esteems. As Anna's behaviour becomes increasingly erratic and self-destructive, she becomes almost entirely unrecognisable to him; it is, he reflects, 'as if a stranger has taken up residence inside her, somebody dark and restless that he doesn't trust, who wants to consume Anna

completely' (159). Yet, there are still moments in which 'the person that he knows is visible and sometimes in the ascendant' (159-60). She thus becomes for him an impossibly contradictory figure, inspiring in him, by turns, anger and tenderness, patience and despair. This ambivalence finds its fullest expression in the weeks that follow Anna's attempted suicide, during which Damon is forced to battle the financial and bureaucratic complexities of India's poorly resourced hospital system, in order to save her life. The weeks of selfless toil rebound as resentment and Damon admits that, '[i]f she recovers, which it begins to seem she might, he doesn't know if he will ever be able to speak to her again' (184).

That Anna, finally, survives the suicide attempt and returns to South Africa does not provide any relief or catharsis for Damon after weeks of enervating vigil, and he is left with a lingering sense of guilt that he failed to prevent the tragedy in the first place:

> All of this, the confusion and frenzy around Anna is now on the other side of the world. He is not responsible, not accountable, any more. But of course in another way he will always be responsible for what happened and that knowledge is burned into him like a brand. (200)

Damon's sense of responsibility exceeds its conventional definition as 'the ability to designate oneself as the author of one's own acts' (Ricoeur, 'Fragility and Responsibility' 16). It is born, not out of his agency, but Anna's fragility; a distinction which Ricoeur offers in his reflections on the different forms of responsibility and their relation to human action. We feel, Ricoeur argues, 'enjoined by the fragile to do something, to help, but, even better, to foster growth, to allow for accomplishment and flourishing' ('Fragility and Responsibility' 16). We

do not, in this sense, take responsibility for the vulnerable individual who beseeches us, but are rendered responsible by them (see 'Fragility and Responsibility' 16-7). Fragility thus might confer on us responsibilities which we do not have the capacity to meet and it is this peculiar burden which Damon suffers in 'The Guardian'. Put plainly, although he is not responsible for the self-inflicted harm that comes to Anna, he *feels* — in what might be termed a sense of affective responsibility — fully culpable.

The disproportionate responsibilities which Anna's illness confers on Damon leave him with feelings of profound powerlessness and failure, the full force of which are only registered after she has returned to South Africa. He deeply desires some form of escape from the trauma, 'so he continues travelling, or running away' (205). In the journey that follows, he traverses India all the way to its northern border with Pakistan in the mountainous region of Ladakh, yet he is, unsurprisingly, unable 'to lose himself, mostly he is stuck in one place in the past' (203). His sense of temporal and spatial dislocation culminates in the disbelief he feels upon learning of Anna's death:

> There is more, but the words are blotted out by the fog that has filled the room, erasing time. The last two months never happened, she is sleeping on that bed in Goa, he has just seen the medicine wrappers on the floor and realized what she's done. He jumps up in shock and rushes out into the street. It's as if he has somewhere to get to, something urgent to do. He wants to call for help, he wants to grab hold of somebody passing and tell them to find the doctor, he wants to keep her alive. It takes him a moment to understand that

> the news is irrevocable, it cannot be undone. Not now and not ever, because the dead do not return. (205)

The journey with Anna has, it seems, been an especially painful exercise in futility, leading Damon — despite the urgency and intensity with which he tried to save her — only to the irrevocable fact of her death. Haunted by the past and the knowledge of his inefficacy, he continues his aimless journey, until the threat of nuclear war between India and Pakistan — another political upheaval from which he remains estranged — forces him to return to South Africa.

While Damon's 'fumbling, half-hearted exit' (205) from a country on the brink of war indicates the possibility of escaping from history as it unfolds in the external world, the self, the novel suggests, remains inexorably bound by memory and experience. Unlike physical places which have become, for Damon, a series of undifferentiated 'strange rooms', the self can never be dehistoricised, but carries, instead, a perpetually accumulating archive of feeling and memory as it moves through time and space. This is — as the anguish of reliving Anna's attempted suicide suggests — its most terrible burden, but also, paradoxically, the source of its salvation. The redemptive properties of memory are suggested in a coda to 'The Guardian', which belongs not to Damon, but Caroline, a stranger, who comes to his aid in his efforts to save Anna.

In the weeks of chaos following Anna's overdose, Caroline, a retired nurse who spends half of each year in Goa, becomes Damon's refuge, providing him with the practical and emotional resources to persevere with Anna's care. While profoundly grateful for her help,

Damon also feels disconcerted by Caroline, because she is so clearly afflicted by the wounds of her own past. Her husband, Damon learns, was killed in an accident long before in Morocco and, though she rarely speaks of it, he suspects that 'this is the central event of her life, one which has marked her deeply, despite the intervening time' (186). Witnessing Anna's ordeal powerfully revives her memories of his death and her sorrow about both tragedies becomes intertwined in such a way as to implicate Damon himself:

> [H]e feels he owes her a debt and at the same time resents that obligation, he wants to leave this whole experience behind, to erase every trace of it, but she's there every day to remind him. And she's carrying her own pain and loss, which have become grafted onto Anna and by extension onto him. She's in a bad state like him, not sleeping well, given to bouts of weeping. But she also seems to feel, though she doesn't say it aloud, that he's in some way a solution to her troubles, and he shrinks from that silent expectation. He has failed Anna, he will fail her too. (201)

Although Damon wishes to retreat from Caroline and the inescapability of the past which she comes to embody, his sense of indebtedness makes him her reluctant confidant when she expresses the need to share the full story of her husband's death. In the exchange which follows, a degree of intersubjectivity rarely found in Galgut's writing is achieved as Damon fully accepts the burden of her story:

> Almost as soon as she begins to speak, she's quaking and trembling. It happened thirty years ago, but it's as if she's living it again in this moment,

> and it becomes like that for him too. Her story travels into him, his skin is very thin, there's no barrier between him and the world, he takes it all in. And even afterwards when he wants to get rid of it he can't do it, in the weeks that follow as he tries to leave Goa and the village behind the things that he lived through there will recur in an almost cellular way, haunting him, and Caroline's story is part of it, joined somehow with Anna, all of it One Thing. (202)

The passage stands in stark contrast to the narrative inhospitality — to phrase the matter in Ricoeur's terms — which produces *The Impostor*'s bleak conclusion. While Adam refuses to be enjoined to the role of confessor or confidant, Damon — although he 'dreads taking it on' (202) — accepts full 'responsibility, in imagination and in sympathy, for the story of the other' (Ricoeur, 'Reflections' 6-7). Galgut suggests that responsibility thus taken requires, counterintuitively, passivity rather than action; a willingness, in other words, to receive, without censure or judgment, another's story, however unsettling or distressing it may prove to be.

By extending narrative hospitality to Caroline, Damon is momentarily relieved of his own feelings of terrible separation from the world, but only by accepting the burden of her history in addition to his own. Intersubjectivity thus achieved would seem more of an encumbrance than a respite, as Damon's sense of being haunted by Caroline's narrative suggests. Her story — the details of which are withheld from the reader — also augments his sense of powerlessness. He wonders, 'what can you do with a story like this. There's no theme, no moral to be learnt, except for the knowledge that lightning can strike from a clear sky one

morning and take away everything you've built […] leaving wreckage and no meaning behind' (202). The answer is structurally implied before it is thematically expressed. Read as discrete narratives, the three journeys of *In a Strange Room* are primarily centripetal; that is, they circle back on Damon, returning him, time and again, to the uncomfortable and apparently immutable reality of his inefficacy and isolation. Arranged as the concentric layers of a single narrative, however, his circuitous journeys radiate outwards to suggest the imbrication of his stories with the lives of others, who similarly struggle to find cohesion and belonging. Collectively, in other words, the stories prove centrifugal, opening out to trace the connections which exist between Damon and those whose lives intersect with his own. This point is underscored in the 'huge emotion' (207) Damon experiences when, in the concluding passages of the novel, he visits the grave of Caroline's husband in an effort to 'pay his respects' (206):

> Caroline's story from the beach is with him again, memory and words inseparable from each other. But it takes him a while to realize who he's really weeping for. Lives leak into lives, the past lays claim to the present. And he feels it now, maybe for the first time, everything that went wrong, all the mess and anguish and disaster. Forgive me, my friend, I tried to hold on, but you fell, you fell. (207)

Memory is divested, finally, of its stultifying powers as it enters into language or, as Galgut phrases it, is made 'inseparable' from words. By 'exchanging memories at the narrative level where they are presented for comprehension' ('Reflections' 7), to borrow Ricoeur's formulation, the past is made intelligible and shareable, releasing first Caroline and, later,

Damon from its thrall. From the perspective which her story provides, Damon comes to understand loss and bereavement, not as isolating emotions which confirm his existential loneliness, but as fundamentally human experiences which connect us across our divergent paths.

The implied answer to Damon's earlier question — 'what can you do with a story like this' — involves, then, integration. It is through the incorporation of Caroline's story into his own that Damon is finally able to 'feel' — in the present — 'all the mess and anguish and disaster' (207) of the past which he has laboured, in vain, to outrun. The experience of the present as a lived reality — rather than a 'drab dream' (203) from which he cannot wake — is thus restored to Damon through his acceptance of the ways in which the past inexorably 'lays claim' (207), but does not, thereby, foreclose the present. The rediscovery of a dynamic present is suggested more broadly in the novel's present-tense narration, which temporally fuses the intra- and extra-diegetic perspectives of Damon, the narrator, and Damon, the protagonist, to produce a version of selfhood which exists as a continual unfolding. The novel ends, appropriately, *in medias res,* as Damon resumes his journey and, by implication, his narrative of perpetual becoming, now divested of its isolating singularity: 'He dries his eyes and picks up a tiny stone from the ground, one like millions of others all around, and slips it into his pocket as he walks towards the gate' (207).

In the inventive representational strategies through which it scripts connections between the past and the present, self and other, *In a Strange Room* ostensibly bears the hallmarks of what, for some critics, constitutes a 'new wave' in South African writing; a 'post-transitional' phase which is 'characterized by an opening of literary style, form and concern' (Frenkel and

MacKenzie 7) as South African authors find themselves 'taken up in a wave of transnational forces' (de Kock, 'History' 114). Although purported in qualified, provisional terms, these new taxonomies cannot quite escape their teleological and emancipatory connotations: their implication, in other words, that literary developments are necessarily unfolding apace with the forward march of history, advancing us from the parochialism and insularity of the past towards a more exhilarating and interconnected future. *In a Strange Room* forces a confrontation with such linear notions of time and the progress narratives of subjective and literary history which they configure by reminding us that departures — both literal and figurative — are often charged by negative affect; by a desire to run away from a stultifying past, rather than towards a liberating future. By rejecting a reassuring line of teleological development, however, Galgut does not simply condemn us to a state of moribund stasis. The novel discovers its dynamic temporality not by progressing away from the past, but by incorporating it into the affective and ethical economies of a perpetually unfolding present. In so doing, it suggests that, as we theorise the 'new' and the 'now' of contemporary South African literature, we should do so in ways that are inflected as much by the regrettable pasts we would prefer to forget as they are by the promising futures we hope to embrace.

CONCLUSION

In the years since I began this study in 2009, Galgut's reputation as a noteworthy South African author has steadily grown. Regularly shortlisted for prestigious literary prizes both locally and internationally, his novels are now widely published and have been translated into most major European languages.[21] He is, by the measures of cultural capital which reception sociology offers us, a writer of significant stature and importance, yet his incorporation into the field of South African literature has been an especially uneven and uneasy process, as I have explored throughout this study. Regarded, at various points in his career, as belated, pessimistic and outmoded — or, least charitably, as the 'poor man's Coetzee' — scholars and reviewers have been, until recently, reluctant to grant him a place within our local canon, and he remains comparatively under-represented by academic criticism. While my close readings of his novels have been motivated, in part, by an interest in redressing his critical neglect, my aim has been less to 'rescue' Galgut for South African literary studies than it has been to explore what his uneven critical reception reveals about the peculiar pressures which have been brought to bear on local writing since the beginning of his novelistic career in the early 1980s. Conversely, by examining developments within the field from the perspective of a single author's contribution to it, this study has revealed, as I summarise here, some of the fault lines in hegemonic assumptions about South African literary production since the late apartheid years and the terms in which they might be qualified and revised.

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[21] Including Dutch, Swedish, Portuguese, Russian, Italian, Polish, French and German. For a full list of the editions of Galgut's works published and translated internationally, see his agent's summary at http://www.tonypeake.com/agency/clients/damon_galgut.htm

Galgut came of age during the height of the anti-apartheid struggle, when literary and cultural debates in South Africa were dominated by what Louise Bethlehem has aptly described as the 'rhetoric of urgency'. Behoved throughout the seventies and eighties to engage literature as a 'weapon of struggle' (Sachs 19), it was with intense relief that authors and cultural commentators alike anticipated the advent of democracy and the retrieval of creative autonomy which it promised. These feelings of cultural expectation were strongly fuelled by the sense that, as Coetzee had influentially claimed in his acceptance speech for the 1987 Jerusalem Prize, South African literature was a 'literature in bondage' (*Doubling the Point* 98), afflicted with the very 'stuntedness and deformity' (*Doubling the Point* 98) which characterised relations between its people. It is from this sense of shameful abnormality and, indeed, acute inferiority that South African literary culture has since fought to emerge and has fuelled a rhetoric of its own, one strongly invested in notions of artistic innovation, diversification and experimentation. 'Newness', along with 'worldliness', have become key literary values in discussions about contemporary South African writing and measures — however nebulous — of cultural development and sophistication. Their regular invocation fashions a progress narrative of South African literature in which a legacy of backwardness has been — or is, at least, in the process of being — overcome to earn the field a respectable place within cosmopolitan, globalised culture.

In the epochal distinction which is commonly asserted between apartheid and post-apartheid literature, there inheres, then, a deep commitment to the notion of cultural progress and a strong resistance towards writing, as evinced by the more vitriolic strands of Galgut's reception, which is seen to scupper its developmental trajectory. In the

context of a field striving for radical transformation, his work has rarely been considered sufficiently progressive and, from the perspective of his most strident detractors, even represents the threat of South African literature's regression into a state of shameful creative bondage. Indeed, in the intense registers which, for example, a scholar and novelist like Ken Barris argues against the legitimacy of his work in a post-apartheid context, there is evidence of a genuine cultural anxiety regarding our capacity to break decisively from the creative constraints of the past. At work, too, is a growing intellectual scepticism towards the versions of South African literature accredited by metropolitan mediation; that is, by the reviewing, publication and marketing practices of the northern anglosphere which, as Andrew van der Vlies has recently shown, have exercised considerable authority over the field since the late nineteenth century. Perceived to have moved, rather too easily, into Coetzee's place in the British and American publishing markets, Galgut has been vulnerable to charges of pandering to a conceptually narrow and aesthetically delimiting definition of South African writing. The hesitation with which local scholarly criticism of his work has followed its international approbation is arguably indicative of growing resistance from within the field against centripetal processes of cultural validation and the hierarchal relations between the metropole and its former colonies which these processes ostensibly assert.

If a progressive teleology has indeed continued to shape the reception of South African writing in the years since Galgut published *A Sinless Season*, it has done so not simply as a set of expectations externally applied to his work. As Raymond Williams reminds us in his materialist analysis of cultural processes, 'no mere training or pressure is truly hegemonic. The true condition of hegemony is effective self-identification with the

hegemonic forms' (*Marxism and Literature* 118). In my analyses of his individual novels, I have detected evidence of Galgut's internalisation — and, in some instances, intensification — of the coercive demands placed on South African literary production and have traced their internal effects on the composition of his work. *A Sinless Season*, I argued, evinced a young writer who strongly identified with an English, rather than South African, literary canon, and sought to claim for himself an authorial purview outside of the imperatives of anti-apartheid writing. His generic conflation of the British prep school novel with the conventions of metaphysical crime writing yielded a strongly anti-realist text, which attempted to displace the immediate socio-historical context of its production and insert its thematic preoccupations into much larger literary and philosophical traditions. Yet, it was with a profound sense of failure and inadequacy that Galgut would soon come to view this novel. His insistence — despite significant evidence to the the contrary — that it had been unequivocally spurned by critics for its lack of political commitment indicated his growing self-identification with hegemonic assumptions about the ethico-political responsibilities of the South African writer and the priority which they should take in shaping his literary concerns.

It was thus, significantly, less from critical condemnation than from plain disinterest that Galgut's early work suffered. While both *A Sinless Season* and *Small Circle of Beings* enjoyed many complimentary reviews in the press, these a-historical, politically disengaged texts had no purchase with scholars and cultural commentators embroiled in the heated realism debates which dominated South African literary culture in the eighties. It was to this critical neglect and the obscurity it portended which Galgut was especially attuned. In my reading of *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*, I argued that it

was with pronounced strain that Galgut internalised the demand for political realism which dominated debates about the period's most noteworthy authors and began to negotiate a degree of visibility and legitimacy within the field. That the turn to a mode of socio-politically engaged writing entailed, from Galgut's perspective, a considerable degree of aesthetic and ideological compromise was evident not only in his stated reservations about the novel, but also, I demonstrated, in the significant tonal and stylistic changes which he made to the manuscript upon its republication in 2005. In particular, the novel's more sentimental articulations of interracial reconciliation and community were significantly qualified in the pared-down prose of the revised edition, which evinces considerably less faith in the possibility of achieving intersubjectivity across the many painful divisions engendered by history.

The process of revising *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* involved, then, not only changes to what Galgut described as the 'discordant rhythms' of its prose, but also adjustments to the novel's affective bearing. The second version represents a structure of feeling, I argued, more consistent with the wearied post-apartheid scepticism for which Galgut would become known after the Man Booker shortlisting of *The Good Doctor*, but which was already evident in the pronounced dysphoria of his fourth novel, *The Quarry*. In my reading of that text, I located *The Quarry*'s striking formal departure from the earnest realism of *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs* within speculative scholarly debates about the directions which South African writing might take after the demise of apartheid. The first of his novels to be published after apartheid, *The Quarry* ostensibly cohered with critical expectations for local writers to generate forms of narrative unconstrained by the conventions of engaged realism and to embrace the avant-garde

and experimental representational modes associated with postmodernism. Yet, while it is vehemently anti-realist, I argued that the novel significantly complicated critical assumptions about the genealogical progression of South African writing towards more worldly, postmodern forms. I read the novel not as an expression of a newly discovered creative agency, but — on the contrary — of cultural exhaustion engendered by the proscriptive legacy of anti-apartheid writing. Its general disregard — by reviewers, publishers and scholars alike — could be explained, I suggested, by the problem of non-instrumentality which it presented for, on the one hand, a conservative publishing market still invested in recognisably representative modes of South African writing and, on the other, an emergent literary scholarship increasingly concerned with the dynamic reinvention of the South African novel.

As a work, then, which was not sufficiently representative of either 'old' or 'new' South African writing, *The Quarry* usefully exemplifies the slippages in Galgut's writing, which have made him poorly amenable to forms of reception structured along epochal lines. It also, conversely, evinces how our habits of periodisation and categorisation have the potential to 'falsely stabilise', to borrow from Williams again, the 'actual multiplicity of writing' (*Marxism and Literature* 145) necessarily at work in any single writer's oeuvre. Indeed, to read *The Quarry* as a work which, by virtue of its anti-realism, signalled Galgut's entry into a post-apartheid realm of representation, unconstrained by the burdens of political commitment, is precisely to miss the pronounced doubts it articulated about our capacity for aesthetic renewal and reinvention after apartheid. It is also, more broadly, to overlook the anti-representational imperatives already apparent in his earlier writing. The loss which is engendered by submitting his oeuvre to a

progressive teleology of post-apartheid writing, however, is perhaps best exemplified, as I suggested in chapter seven, by the belated approbation of *In a Strange Room*. The novel's extended publication and composition history, I argued, reveals the irony of its recent reception as a work which heralds a timely 'new direction' in Galgut's writing, away from narrow and myopic local concerns towards an immersion — apace with larger developments in contemporary South African writing — in the flux and transitivity of a globalising world. By restoring its protracted genesis to my own discussion of the novel, I suggested that *In a Strange Room* represents not the drama of discontinuity in Galgut's oeuvre, but, on the contrary, the labour of continuity; of pursuing, in other words, a fictional vision — however eccentric or seemingly irrelevant — across the vicissitudes of critical reception and the shifting versions of the literary which it accredits.

The priority which I have given to close reading in this thesis has meant a necessary confrontation with some of the stereotypes which have informed Galgut's reception, particularly in relation to his more recent and better known novels, *The Good Doctor* and *The Impostor*. Reviews of these works have tended to position Galgut, as I demonstrated in chapters five and six, as a purveyor of post-apartheid disillusionment, intent on exposing the many socio-political failures belied by the discourses of rainbow nationalism. In my analysis of both novels, I argued that neither *The Good Doctor* nor *The Impostor* enacts a reactionary retreat from the creative and ethical challenges of imagining a new South Africa, but that they subject forms of political and moral expedience which falsely smooth the trajectory towards personal and collective transformation to a pronounced degree of critical doubt. For Galgut, I argued, the task of

redressing the traumas of history is a permanently incomplete one, devoid of the consolations of narrative closure. In accounting for the emphasis he places on the ongoing labour of self-interpretation in the context of dramatic social change, I turned to the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, whose work on narrative identity, I argued, strongly resonates with the value Galgut finds in a hermeneutically examined life. Approached from this perspective, these novels evince not simply the moribund self-pity of ageing men demoted from power, but a scrupulous interrogation of the forms of vocalisation and self-fashioning available to white South Africans in the aftermath of apartheid.

The scope of this thesis has been necessarily limited and the omissions are, of course, numerous: in focusing on his career as a novelist, I have neglected Galgut's considerable output of short stories (collected in *Small Circle of Beings* and *Strategy and Siege*), as well as his work as a playwright (*Echoes of Anger*, *No 1 Utopia Lane*, 'Party for Mother', 'Alive and Kicking') and his foray into screenwriting ('The Red Dress'). These omissions were made not only because his works are too numerous to adumbrate adequately in a study of this length, but also because of the sheer thematic diversity which they represent. Nonetheless, in choosing to narrow my focus to his long works of prose, I have contributed to the dominant position which the novel seems to occupy — at the expense of poetry, drama and short stories — in South African literary studies, as scholars like de Kock have recently suggested (see 'Notes' 109). I hope that this thesis might serve, however, to generate interest in these minor works of Galgut's oeuvre, which would doubtlessly yield significant insights into his authorial development more broadly. Indeed, close attention to the visual acuity of 'The Red Dress', for example, would likely illuminate the ways in which a work like *The Quarry* achieves its cinematic

appeal. The chronology of my own study — while necessary for the interaction between creation and reception which I have been interested in tracing — has restricted the scope for this kind of productive cross-hatching amongst the diverse works which Galgut has produced and comprises one of the many alternative approaches which could have been taken to a study of his oeuvre.

In the shift which criticism — my own included — inaugurates from literary production as a creative process to a theoretical abstraction, there inheres, then, an inescapable reduction of the actual heterogeneity represented by the literary works themselves. So, too, are they constrained by the myriad other forms of reception which mediate the act of reading: by the purveyors of cultural prestige, the market interests of publishers and the cultural assumptions of reviewers. Yet, if the machinations of reception have created their own fictions about Galgut — versions of the author and his work which cohere with a pre-determined set of interests — the works themselves provide inexhaustible recourse to alternative histories of literary production; ones that do not evince a progressive line of transition or rupture from a Procrustean past, but indicate, instead, the heterogeneity and diversity which have always already constituted the field of South African writing.

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