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WHEN AESTHETICS MEETS ETHICS: THE SOUTH AFRICAN SHORT STORY IN ENGLISH, 1920-2010

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Abstract

This thesis explores the development of the short-story genre in English in South Africa from the late 1920s to the present day. I intend to close read a corpus of short stories by eight South African writers (Rolfes and Herbert Dhlomo, Peter Abrahams, Can Themba, Alex La Guma, Mtutuzeli Matshoba, Ahmed Essop, and Zoë Wicomb) with particular focus on the dialogue between ethics and aesthetics performed by these texts vis-à-vis the evolution of South Africa's socio-political situation (before, during, and after apartheid). Often considered a minor genre, the short story actually thrives in post-colonial contexts, like South Africa, where the writing and publishing conditions available to writers can be under a set of material constraints; the brevity of the short story, however, allows for swifter conditions of production and circulation than the ones required by the novel. Consequently, my analysis also focuses on the various publishing venues of these short stories, in particular local newspapers and little magazines, considered as pivotal spaces for the intersection between ethics and aesthetics, which often results in a cross-fertilization between journalism and the short story. Negotiating the different tensions of literature, politics, journalism, and commercial interests, the shifting contexts and editorial policies of newspapers and magazines represent particularly interesting case studies from which the unstable nature of the definition of the 'literary' emerges, which is never detached from a political dimension.

This study also seeks to expose the fictional and ideological nature of the 'poetics of authenticity' that frequently characterises the selected short stories, which display (and often play with) the conventions of realism to achieve a certain patina of authenticity. The poetics (and politics) of authenticity is, I believe, the most significant feature of the interdependence of ethics and aesthetics in the South African short stories in English analysed in this thesis. Between the late 1920s and the early 1980s – that is, before and during apartheid – claims to authenticity mark, albeit in different ways and through different fictional strategies, the selected short stories. This reflectionist trend, which is always a literary construct, responds to the ethical imperative of documenting the lives of the Black population under a segregationist regime, but it is also influenced by the available publishing venues (newspapers and magazines). As the South African short story in English progresses in its post-apartheid phase, essentialist, fixed notions such as 'authenticity' are exposed as a fictional construct by authors such as Zoë Wicomb. Ultimately, this study aims to foreground the impossibility of separating the literary (both the text and its materiality) from the political.

Keywords: short story; South Africa; ethics; aesthetics; literary journalism; realism.

Riassunto

La tesi investiga lo sviluppo del genere letterario del racconto breve nella letteratura sudafricana di lingua inglese dalla fine degli anni Venti alla prima decade nel nuovo millennio. Si intende esaminare un corpus di racconti brevi di otto scrittori sudafricani (Rolfes e Herbert Dhlomo, Peter Abrahams, Can Themba, Alex La Guma, Mtutuzeli Matshoba, Ahmed Essop e Zoë Wicomb), con particolare attenzione al dialogo tra etica ed estetica all'interno dei testi selezionati. La tesi si propone di esplorare il modo in cui l'evolversi del contesto sociopolitico sudafricano (prima, durante e dopo l'apartheid) ha influenzato e plasmato il genere della *short story* a livello di forma e contenuto.

Spesso considerato un genere minore, il racconto breve è in realtà molto diffuso in contesti postcoloniali come il Sudafrica, dove le condizioni materiali della produzione letteraria hanno in parte favorito lo sviluppo della forma breve, di più rapida produzione e circolazione. Di conseguenza, oltre all'analisi testuale e narratologica dei racconti brevi selezionati, la tesi esplora anche i vari contesti – in particolare quotidiani e riviste locali, considerati spazi fondamentali per l'intersezione tra etica ed estetica – in cui questi testi letterari sono stati pubblicati. La diffusione dei racconti brevi tramite la stampa locale ha spesso portato a una contaminazione reciproca con il genere del giornalismo, producendo prosa ibrida e testi di giornalismo letterario, che nella tesi viene spesso considerato antecedente del più celebre esperimento del New Journalism statunitense degli anni Settanta. Da un'analisi delle mutevoli linee editoriali di quotidiani e riviste – spazi in cui si negoziano le differenti tensioni di letteratura, politica, giornalismo e interessi commerciali – la natura instabile della definizione del 'letterario', che non è mai separato da una dimensione politica, emerge.

La ricerca intende inoltre sottolineare la natura ideologica e fittizia della 'poetica dell'autenticità' che spesso caratterizza i racconti brevi selezionati, in cui le convenzioni del realismo letterario vengono usate per ottenere un effetto di realtà. La poetica (e politica) dell'autenticità viene proposta come l'elemento più significativo dell'interdipendenza di etica ed estetica all'interno dei racconti brevi sudafricani in lingua inglese analizzati nella tesi. Tra la fine degli anni Venti e l'inizio degli anni Ottanta rivendicazioni di autenticità caratterizzano, seppur con le dovute differenze e tramite diverse strategie finzionali, i testi brevi selezionati. Questa rivendicazione di veridicità, che è sempre un costrutto letterario, risponde all'imperativo etico di documentare i soprusi commessi dal regime segregazionista in Sudafrica, ma è anche influenzata dalla stampa locale, in cui i racconti brevi vengono pubblicati. Mentre il racconto breve si sviluppa nella sua fase post-apartheid, concetti monolitici come 'autenticità' vengono mostrati per la loro natura di costrutti finzionali da autori come Zoë Wicomb. In ultima analisi, la tesi si propone di evidenziare l'impossibilità di separare il letterario (il testo e la sua materialità) da una dimensione politica.

La tesi è suddivisa in sei capitoli. Il primo capitolo analizza i racconti brevi pubblicati da Rolfes Dhlomo su due quotidiani locali, *The Sjambok* e *The Bantu World*, tra la fine degli anni Venti e la fine degli anni Trenta. Questo capitolo esamina il modo in cui le due testate giornalistiche hanno contribuito a plasmare i racconti dello scrittore in maniera diversa, a livello formale e contenutistico. Le *short stories* di Dhlomo, caratterizzate da contaminazione con il genere giornalistico e a tratti definibili come letteratura di protesta, inaugurano alcune delle principali tendenze riscontrabili nel racconto breve degli anni Cinquanta. Il primo capitolo, inoltre, esplora la posizione dello scrittore nei confronti dell'estetica realista e della lingua inglese: due questioni che si ripropongono nel secondo capitolo, che esamina una figura poco conosciuta per il suo contributo al genere della *short story*, Herbert Dhlomo. La tesi offre, per la prima volta, un'analisi testuale e narratologica di tutti i suoi dieci racconti brevi, rimasti per lo più inediti fino al 1985. La prosa breve dello scrittore presenta una struttura complessa e affronta temi estremamente contemporanei all'epoca in cui Dhlomo scrive, tra l'inizio degli anni Trenta e la fine degli anni Quaranta, appena prima dell'istituzionalizzazione dell'apartheid. Vista la scarsità di studi critici sulla prosa breve di Dhlomo, la tesi propone di utilizzare gli articoli giornalistici dello scrittore, pubblicati su quotidiani come *Ilanga Lase Natal* e *The Bantu World*, come chiavi interpretative e di commento alla sua scrittura creativa. Nonostante le difficoltà nel definire Dhlomo uno scrittore modernista, il secondo capitolo propone di rivalutare le *short stories* dell'autore come esempi di scrittura sperimentale. Il terzo capitolo, che conclude la prima parte della tesi incentrata sugli anni Trenta e Quaranta, analizza la raccolta di racconti *Dark Testament* (1942) di Peter Abrahams. Il *close reading* proposto si focalizza sulle tensioni, all'interno dell'opera, tra imperativi documentari, tendenze autobiografiche, aderenza a un'estetica realista da un lato, e tratti modernisti, intertestualità e metaletteratura dall'altro lato.

Il quarto capitolo offre un'analisi comparativa di alcuni dei racconti brevi e articoli di giornale pubblicati da Can Themba e Alex La Guma negli anni Cinquanta, due scrittori che hanno interpretato in maniera molto diversa l'intersezione di etica ed estetica nella loro prosa breve. Tramite un'analisi dettagliata della stampa locale, la ricerca esamina il significato politico delle diverse definizioni del letterario promosse dalle varie testate giornalistiche in cui i racconti brevi dei due scrittori sono stati pubblicati. Questo capitolo, inoltre, introduce i lettori alla prosa breve della scrittrice Nadine Gordimer, che inizia a pubblicare racconti negli anni Cinquanta sulla prestigiosa rivista internazionale *The New Yorker*. Un'analisi comparativa caratterizza anche il quinto capitolo, che esamina le raccolte di racconti di Mtutuzeli Matshoba e Ahmed Essop, scritte negli anni Ottanta sotto l'influenza politica del Black Consciousness Movement. Il capitolo intende mettere in discussione la ricezione polarizzata della prosa breve dei due autori, spesso considerata come 'troppo politica' o 'troppo letteraria'. In particolare, la tesi si propone di dimostrare come il genere della raccolta di racconti

brevi viene plasmato da entrambi gli scrittori per sottolineare l'autenticità (finzionale) delle comunità rappresentate, oppresse dalla politica segregazionista dell'apartheid. L'ultima parte del quinto capitolo interrompe la cronologia dell'analisi proposta per esaminare i due volumi di racconti pubblicati da Essop dopo la fine dell'apartheid nel 1994. Scritti in un contesto sociopolitico diverso, le due raccolte abbandonano progressivamente l'estetica realista a favore di uno stile decisamente allegorico. Il quinto capitolo, perciò, anticipa alcune delle caratteristiche della prosa breve di Zoë Wicomb, la scrittrice con cui la tesi si conclude. Le sue due raccolte di racconti (e i suoi saggi di critica letteraria) sono caratterizzati da intertestualità, riletture eterotopiche degli spazi, e gioco metafinzionale. Queste strategie, estetiche quanto etiche, di ripetizione e continua revisione destabilizzano le narrazioni monolitiche di 'autenticità' che hanno caratterizzato la retorica dell'apartheid e, in seguito, della nuova Nazione Arcobaleno.

Parole chiave: short story; Sudafrica; etica; estetica; giornalismo letterario; realismo.

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"Like the Flash of Fireflies": Introduction

This thesis explores the development of the South African short story in English from the late 1920s to the first decade of the new millennium. In particular, I am interested in the dialogue between ethics and aesthetics performed by these texts vis-à-vis the evolution of South Africa's socio-political situation (before, during, and after apartheid), which has shaped and informed the genre of the short story. The chapters to follow seek to track how the intertwined concepts of ethics and aesthetics have played out within and beyond the generic boundaries determined by short fiction.

In 1968, Nadine Gordimer famously compared the short story to a "flash of fireflies" to emphasise its "fragmented and restless form", its flexibility and openness to experimentation (1968: 459-460). Indeed, critical studies on the short story tend to stress the generic permeability, hybridity, and "protean variety" of the form (Patea 2012: 7).[1] For instance, Valerie Shaw states that the genre has the ability of bringing the two stylistic extremes of the journalistic and of the poetic together (1983: 6). Because of its brevity, which allows for experimentation and fragmentation, the short story has often been associated with the modern experience (see Shaw 1983: 17),[2] and indeed it became a central site for formal innovation within Western modernism, as shown by Dominic Head in his monograph *The Modernist Short Story. A Study in Theory and Practice* (1992). Inextricably linked to modernity, however, are also the colonial and post-colonial conditions, which indeed are often represented imaginatively through the short-story form, particularly popular in the literatures of so-called Third-World countries. Frank O'Connor first described the short story as "the lonely voice" of "outlawed figures wandering about the fringes of society" ([1963] 2004: 18). More recently, Jochen Achilles and Ina Bergmann remark that "the poetics of the short story […] reveals itself as a poetics of liminality" since the genre is "constitutively close to processes of transition" and "threshold situations", such as decolonisation or the emergence of new national literatures (2015: 4). Thus,

> [t]he form's potential capacity for dissidence is magnified by its ambiguous cultural position: on the one hand, a visibly commercial product residing in popular magazines and sub-literary genres, and, on the other hand, an artistic medium praised by its writers for its technical difficulty and associated with small-press, avant-garde or counter-cultural titles. Simultaneously a product of mass and minority culture, the short story defies categorization. (Awadalla and March-Russell 2012: 4)

[1] Notable theories of the short story are, among many others: Frank O'Connor's *The Lonely Voice* (1963), Valerie Shaw's *The Short Story: A Critical Introduction* (1983), Charles May's *The New Short Story Theories* (1994), Farhat Iftekharrudin's *The Postmodern Short Story. Forms and Issues* (2003), Viorica Patea's *Short Story Theories: A Twenty-First-Century Perspective* (2012), and Jochen Achilles and Ina Bergmann's *Liminality and the Short Story. Boundary Crossings in American, Canadian, and British Writing* (2015).

[2] Edgar Allan Poe, considered the first short-story theorist, developed his theories on the form in the mid-nineteenth century.

The short story, moreover, has often been considered a minor genre – not only shorter, but of less cultural prestige and importance than the novel. In particular, with the exception of a limited selection of internationally canonised short-story writers, the genre is often regarded merely as an author's apprenticeship to the novel (see, among others, Wicomb 2001: 157; Pravinchandra 2018: 197). The concept of minor literature, as defined by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1975), represents a useful theoretical frame to analyse both postcolonial literature and the short-story form (see Hunter 2007: 138-141; Awadalla and March-Russell 2012: 5).[3] Short fiction thus becomes a particularly apt genre for the representation of liminal identities and consequently of socio-political issues. As Achilles and Bergman remark, "liminality is capable of mediating between aesthetic form and existential or political content" (2015: 6). The importance of short stories in the national canons of 'peripheral' countries, however, is also directly linked to the genre's own materiality: its brevity allows for different – swifter – conditions of production and circulation than the ones required by the novel. Typically, short fiction circulates through local magazines, newspapers, and, only recently, the Internet. As Shital Pravinchandra argues, "there are some regions where the short story is more culturally necessary than other genres" (2018: 202).

On the African continent, the short story can be considered one of the most popular literary genres, as appears from the significant number of short-fiction anthologies that have been published since the middle of the twentieth century.[4] More recently, the production of short stories has also been encouraged by the establishment of the Caine Prize for African Writing in 2000, which awards a yearly cash prize to a short story published in English by an African writer. The success of the form in the continent is linked precisely to the short story's materiality and to the writing and publishing conditions available to African writers, rather than to essentialist and patronizing claims on the origin of short fiction in the African oral folktale. In her essay "Short Fiction and Orality" (2001), South African writer Zoë Wicomb, referring to her own country's literary panorama, discards this genealogy:

> In South African culture, the hierarchical relationship between the short story and the novel is seen to be reproduced in terms of black and white writers of fiction: the white giants with their linguistic and cultural capital write novels, while black writers produce short fiction. Which neatly

[3] On the relationship between the short story and postcolonialism, see the monographs *Telling Stories: Postcolonial Short Fiction in English* (2001), edited by Jacqueline Bardolph, *The Cambridge Introduction to the Short Story in English* (2007) by Adrian Hunter, and *The Postcolonial Short Story: Contemporary Essay* (2012), edited by Maggie Awadalla and Paul March-Russell.

[4] Among many others, see the 1992 *Heinemann Book of Contemporary African Short Stories* edited by Chinua Achebe and Catherine Lynette Innes, and the more recent *Granta Book of the African Short Story* edited by Helon Hebila in 2011. On the other hand, few theoretical studies on the short story in Africa can be found, such as Fidelis Odun Balogun's study *Tradition and Modernity in the African Short Story. An Introduction to a Literature in Search of Critics* (1991) and *Writing Africa in the Short Story* (2013) edited by Ernest N. Emenyonu. This gap in critical studies supports Shital Pravinchandra's point that "there is a major distinction to be made between the norms of world literature scholarship and actual world literary *practice*" (2018: 208; emphasis in original).

> links with the widely favoured theory that the short story is the natural postcolonial form to succeed a black tradition of oral story-telling.
> Who does not have an oral tradition? – a pertinent question that leads me to argue against oral storytelling's being responsible for the black writer's perverse choice of the lower-status form, not least since the theory supports the view of short fiction as an interim form. (Wicomb 2001: 157)

Wicomb further lists the material conditions of Black writers in South Africa – lack of means, geographical instability, overcrowded housing conditions, lack of publishing outlets (2001: 162) – to explain the prominence of the short-story form in South Africa, especially among Black writers.

I use the term 'Black' in an inclusive way to designate all the people that the apartheid government arbitrarily categorised as non-white through the Population Registration Act of 1950, which divided the South African population into legislated categories: Whites, Natives (later Bantu, and Black), Coloureds, and, later, Asian.[5] The changing (and contested) terms used to refer to the Black population testify to the "vulnerability of ethnic enclaves" and to "their struggle to establish or maintain a sense of identity and belonging" in the national context (Marais 2005: 19).[6] The fragmented and liminal qualities of the short-story form – as opposed to the "illusion of national unity" promoted by the novel (Driver 2010: 531) – thus make the short story the appropriate space for representing fragmented communities within a national context. In particular, the way in which racial terms have changed over the considered period testifies to the discoursive, unstable nature of identity, often misrepresented and reified as something fixed in the narratives of apartheid *and* of the liberation struggle. The short story thus becomes a particularly apt genre to tackle this identitarian discourse, since the form has been used by Black writers, as we shall see shortly, both to create "a distinct ethnic or cultural identity" (itself a fiction) to counter apartheid's demeaning narrative, and to foreground "the fictiveness of all visions/versions of South African reality/identity" in the transition and post-apartheid period (Marais 1992: 45; 1995: 33).

Starting from these considerations, I decided to focus my analysis on a corpus of short fiction by Black South African writers. The racial segregation of Black authors in South Africa directly affected their material conditions of writing *and* of publishing on a marked different level than white writers. In turn, these different conditions of production and circulation informed and shaped the

[5] When the racial terms denote the specific apartheid classification named in the Population Registration Act, they appear with an initial capital. However, I have decided to capitalize only the term 'Black' throughout the thesis, since this usage has become standard and it has been advocated by members of the Black community itself. For an insightful discussion and problematisation of the capitalisation of 'Black', see Kwame Anthony Appiah's essay for *The Atlantic*, "The Case for Capitalizing the *B* in Black" (2020). Ultimately, Appiah rightly argues that "[r]easoned arguments about linguistic usages must always reckon with the fact that language is a set of conventions, to be determined by the consensus of language users" and that "black and white are both historically created racial identities". See also Coleman 2020.

[6] See also Wicomb's comment on the shifting terms used to designate coloured South Africans (i.e. 'Coloured', 'Griqua', 'Black', etc.): "Such adoption of different names at various historical junctures shows perhaps the difficulty that the term 'coloured' has in taking on a fixed meaning, and accordingly exemplifies postmodernity in its shifting allegiances" ([2005] 2018: 116).

content and form of these writers' stories, which, I believe, enact the dialectic between ethics and aesthetics in particularly productive ways. The focus on Black short stories, moreover, aims to problematise and complicate the often-polarised readings of Black literature in South Africa, torn, as we shall see shortly, between the notions of literature, testimony, protest, and realism. Given the prominence of the short-story form among Black South African writers in the considered period (1920s-2010s), I chose to focus my analysis on a selected corpus to limit the otherwise too-broad discussion. In particular, my thesis sets out to read closely short fiction by eight different Black writers: Rolfes Dhlomo (1901-1971), his brother Herbert Dhlomo (1903-1956),[7] Peter Abrahams (1919-2017), Can Themba (1924-1967), Alex La Guma (1924-1985), Mtutuzeli Matshoba (b. 1950), Ahmed Essop (1931-2019), and Zoë Wicomb (b. 1948). At the same time, I also seek to underline continuities and differences between these writers' short fiction and selected stories by white South African authors, to avoid repeating in my thesis the trite, artificial opposition of apartheid. In particular, Nadine Gordimer's short-fiction output, spanning roughly seventy years, is given special space in my analysis. The stylistic and thematic evolution within her short stories makes her fictions particularly suitable for inclusion in a study in which chronology represents one of the main criteria.

Chronology, indeed, allows me to compare the development of South Africa's socio-political situation with the changing themes, tropes, and stylistic features of the considered short stories, but also with the evolution of the conditions of literary production and circulation in South Africa. In addition, a diachronic approach can shed light on the role played by the short story of the 1930s and 1940s – two relatively overlooked decades as far as the short story by Black writers is concerned – in the later development of the genre. This explains the focus of the first part of the thesis on Rolfes and Herbert Dhlomo and on Peter Abrahams, who all wrote short stories during this period. At the same time, I wish to problematise the notion of linear chronology in literary studies. The development of the short story in South Africa cannot be represented only in terms of a neat temporal continuum. Rather, it is also made up of gaps, discontinuities, and unexpected parallelisms that are independent of chronology, which I tried to underline in my thesis.

This study's focus on the English language represents the first, most visible connection between aesthetics and ethics in the short stories under consideration. English is inextricably linked with print culture and with the missionary Christian (mainly Protestant) 'civilising' colonialism in South Africa. As Leon de Kock reminds us in *Civilising Barbarians*, "the orthodoxy of 'English' as a dominant medium of educational discourse in South Africa, and the institutionalisation of this discourse (by which 'English literature' is privileged as an area of study), was won by blood" (1996: 29-30). The

[7] Throughout the thesis, I will refer to Rolfes and Herbert Dhlomo by their full first names, and not by their initials (R. R. R. and H. I. E., respectively).

use of English by Black writers, instead of the indigenous languages spoken within diverse communities, represents a complex and multi-faceted issue. The following chapters attempt to show how the considered writers use, shape, and modify the English language to protest segregation and colonialism, at the same time often aspiring to a (mainly Western) metropolitan literary market and to a kind of modernity/modernism that arises from the same colonial process.

Apart from a narratological analysis and close reading of selected short stories, my study also focuses on the various publishing venues of these texts, particularly newspapers, magazines, and anthologies, often the first spaces where short stories are issued before their eventual publication in collections. The inclusion and re-issue of short stories – because of their brevity – in different formats, by different publishers, and addressing different readerships, emphasises the "volatility of material *contexts* and the unpredictability of *readings*" and provides the literary critic with new insights into a text (McDonald 2003: 232; emphasis in original). The ongoing dialogue between ethics and aesthetics takes place also in the materiality of text production and circulation, particularly in South Africa, where "print culture pre-empted – one might even say largely predetermined the outcome of – pitched battles over identity and subjectivity" (Van der Vlies 2012b: 20). Until the late 1970s and early 1980s, very few publishing houses in South Africa accepted creative writing by Black authors, whose fictional works would then be published mainly through the press. For reasons of space, the short story was particularly suitable for publication in local newspapers and magazines, defined by Peter McDonald as "composite publications" that display and encourage "a detailed awareness of modes of textual presentation as forms of interpretation" (2006: 224). Thus, the ephemerality inherent in Gordimer's phrase on short fiction's "flash of fireflies" can be also applied to the short story's ephemeral contexts of publication. Indeed, McDonald emphasises the need to consider the materiality of texts *as* literature:

> The publisher's details – including the date, place of publication, and imprint, which are usually considered to be of legal or commercial interest only – also mark the edition as a particular kind of spatiotemporal event. They point, usually only after careful research, to the literary field to which it owes its existence and, in some cases, its continued survival not only as a public document but as literature, in Bourdieu's skeptical-antiessentialist sense. (McDonald 2006: 224)

In light of these considerations, my discussion explores in some detail the following South African publications, where some of the short stories from the corpus I selected first appeared: *The Sjambok*, *The Bantu World*, *Drum*, *New Age*, *Fighting Talk*, *Africa South*, *The Classic*, and, ultimately, *Staffrider*.[8] Negotiating the different tensions of literature, politics, journalism, and

[8] Several of these publications can be accessed freely thanks to the existence of open-access digital archives like Digital Innovation South Africa (https://disa.ukzn.ac.za/), Historical Papers Research Archive (http://www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za/), and the Center for Research Libraries (https://www.crl.edu/). They have been invaluable resources, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic.

commercial interests, these spaces are often situated at the crossroads of ethics and aesthetics. The shifting contexts and editorial policies of each publishing site represent particularly interesting case studies from which the unstable nature of the definition of the 'literary' emerges, which is never detached from a political dimension. The 'literary', indeed, usually occupies a privileged position within cultural hierarchies, and it tries to define itself against other forms of cultural products, such as journalism and political writings (McDonald 2006: 216).

Due to the material conditions of literary production and circulation in South Africa, and to the country's socio-political situation, the short-story genre, especially by Black writers, often finds itself on a continuum with other genres and discourses, in particular political and testimonial writings such as journalism, the essay, and the autobiography, as already noted by Horst Zander in his 1999 monograph, *Fact – Fiction – "Faction": A Study of Black South African Literature in English*. Consequently, the intersection between short stories and non-fiction represents another criterium which guided the selection of my corpus, since all the analysed authors somehow blur the boundaries between fictional and non-fictional modes in their short stories. Particular attention has been paid to the cross-fertilisation between journalism and short stories, an ongoing process until the Eighties, when new publishing houses appeared on South Africa's cultural panorama. Of the selected writers, almost all (with the exception of Zoë Wicomb) contributed regularly as journalists to local newspapers and magazines, or at least represent (and adopt the language of) the domestic press in their short stories quite extensively. Thus, a common pattern emerges among South African short stories by Black writers: the fictions are *generally* told by a first-person narrator, often an author-figure, they are quite short, they use the conventions of literary realism to different degrees, and they deal with socio-political themes. Vice versa, the newspaper articles, editorials, and investigative reports of the considered writers are often a useful interpretative tool for a close reading of their short stories, and, interestingly, they are often written with fictional strategies according to the generic conventions of literary journalism.

Indeed, the US experiment of the New Journalism has been a useful theoretical frame and term of comparison for the hybrid short stories/articles analysed in my study. The term 'New Journalism' originates from the title of an anthology of journalism edited by Tom Wolfe and E. W. Johnson in 1973. US journalists and writers of the calibre of Truman Capote, Tom Wolfe, Joan Didion, and Norman Mailer were among its most celebrated proponents. The pieces of New Journalism have been variously defined as "works of fictionalised social history", "literature of fact", "forms of narrative reportage" (Hollowell 1977: 10). These definitions all point to the experimental and hybrid nature of the journalistic works produced by the authors of New Journalism, who adopt techniques that are typical of fictional texts, thus revolutionising the objective style of traditional journalism

(Worthington 2018: 92). As a consequence of New Journalism, the cultural prestige typically associated with fictional texts began to be reclaimed by hybrid forms of non-fiction, to the point that works of literary journalism are now awarded prestigious international prizes usually reserved to works of fiction, such as the Nobel or the Windham-Campbell Prize.

South African works of literary non-fiction abound and have become particularly prominent in the post-apartheid era, as Hedley Twidle observes (2012: 8).[9] To name an example, Antjie Krog's hybrid account of the hearings of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Country of My Skull*, probably South Africa's best-known work of literary non-fiction, was published in 1998. More recently, the true-crime novels of Jonny Steinberg, such as *Midlands* (2002), deserve to be mentioned. Yet, interesting hybrid instances of journalistic texts displaying fictional features, or, on the contrary, literary texts with a curtailed fictionality, do characterise also the literary history of South Africa in its pre-apartheid and apartheid years, especially as far as Black writers are concerned. As Tim Couzens remarks, "journalism and literature were, for a long period of South African Black literary history, Siamese twins" (1976b: 98). The hybrid texts written before 1994 – for the most part by Black writers – can be considered antecedents to the theorisation of New Journalism and to the kind of work produced in South Africa in the post-apartheid period. The main locus for the intersection of the journalistic and the literary in South African English culture before 1994 is tellingly represented by the genre of the short story.

While the US New Journalism, supported by the postmodernist theorisation of the blurring of lines between the real and the invented, fact and fiction (Worthington 2018: 106),[10] has gained the prestige usually associated with the 'literary', the literariness of most South African short stories by Black writers, particularly if composed before 1994, has often been debated. Their contiguity with the sphere of journalism – in terms of publishing venues, style, and themes – and their preoccupation with socio-political issues has often led to generalisations and polarised debates around their value as social documents at the expense of the individual aesthetics of each text. This represents a "common trope in liberal humanist critiques of literature written from politically pressured" cultures, like South Africa's (Twidle 2018: 100). As Shital Pravinchandra observes (2018: 202), the expectations and assumptions of "what properly constitutes literature" are "invariably defined in the metropole", often

[9] *Safundi* published an issue in 2012 especially devoted to the discussion of the opposing – but intersecting – concepts of literature/history and fiction/non-fiction in contemporary South Africa. See also Hedley Twidle's recent monograph, *Experiments with Truth. Narrative Non-Fiction and the Coming of Democracy in South Africa* (2019). As Twidle observes, "certain strains of non-fiction", in particular literary journalism, the critical essay, and life-writing, "narrate an encounter with the past unlike that produced by dominant (and often reductive) forms of public, post-apartheid or nationalist historiography" (2019: 13). As its name (a negation of its opposite) also suggests, non-fiction, like the short story, is often considered a marginal, minor genre, notwithstanding its popularity in South Africa.

[10] Similarly, Farhat Iftekharrudin argues that postmodernist theories are behind the proliferation of hybrid, non-fictional short stories (see 2003: 23).

not taking into consideration the material conditions of production and circulation available in 'peripheral' countries. In a world-literature perspective, the theoretical frame of the minor thus proves to be particularly helpful to contextualise the South African short story in English by Black writers: it can be applied to a genre (the short story), a national literature (South Africa), its politically oppressed authors, and, ultimately, to the available local publishing outlets. At the same time, the Black short story in English in South Africa, and the local (often ephemeral) magazines which promoted and circulated it, played a major role in shaping the country's national canon.

The reception of several South African short stories by Black writers as mere documents of social protest gained momentum in the wake of Njabulo Ndebele's two critical interventions in the mid-Eighties, "Turkish Tales and Some Thoughts on South African Fiction" (1984) and "The Rediscovery of the Ordinary" (1986). In both essays, Ndebele provocatively challenges the predominant modality of Black writing at the time, homogenising and reducing it to the categories of protest and spectacular literature. According to Ndebele, Black literature up to that time had been governed by one-sidedness and merely responded to the need of representing and documenting the injustices of apartheid at the expense of formal refinement and aesthetical value. Ndebele's opinions, voiced in the most politicised and violent decade of the struggle, sparked much debate and influenced the reception of several pre-1994 works of Black literature. Considering that much Black literature in South Africa was then represented by the short-story genre, for the reasons I have previously outlined, Ndebele takes issue with most of the writers I have decided to include in this study: Rolfes Dhlomo, Can Themba, Alex La Guma, and Mtutuzeli Matshoba. While I acknowledge the relevance of the intellectual's critical interventions – his emphasis on the need for complexity and his attempts to expand the literary and cultural debate in the South African letters – I also aim to question Ndebele's somewhat reductive and generalised readings of Black literature through a close reading of the short stories of the above-mentioned writers. Among the many critical assessments of Ndebele's essays, Rob Gaylard's article "*Rediscovery* Revisited" (2009), published in a special issue of *English in Africa* devoted to the intellectual's writings, has proved particularly useful for my critical engagement with Ndebele's assumptions about the short story by Black writers.

Ndebele's critique of the aesthetics of past and coeval Black literature was, of course, in part motivated by the actual characteristics of the texts he takes issue with, particularly as far as the politics of representation is concerned. Due to South Africa's publishing scene, to its socio-political context, and to the ethical, documentary imperative of testimony of most Black writers, it is indeed possible to see a common pattern emerge among the short stories analysed in this study. Most of them display (and often play with) the conventions of realism to achieve a certain patina of authenticity – what I will repeatedly call 'the poetics of authenticity'. In fact, every writer analysed in this thesis does, to

different degrees and through different textual strategies, attend to what Dennis Walder calls the "tensions within the realist project" (1999: 57). Reviewing an anthology of South African short stories, David Medalie's edited *Encounters: An Anthology of South African Short Stories* (1998), Walder remarks that "the realist aesthetic is rarely as monolithic or straightforward as its naturalistic practitioners and their attendant commentators tend to assume" (1999: 56).[11] Walder's comment is useful to acknowledge that different literary trends can be found under the homogenising label of 'realism', and that a realist text can also display a strong metatextual awareness, for instance.

In light of these considerations, one of the aims of this study is also to discuss the different realist "tensions", to quote Walder again, in the selected short stories, which cannot always be defined merely in terms of their realism(s). In particular, I also intend to expose the fictional and ideological nature of the 'poetics of authenticity' that often characterises these texts. The claim to authenticity in the considered short stories is usually expressed through both paratextual and textual elements: the editors' or authors' prefaces, the layout of the newspapers/magazines where the short stories are published, the presence of images that accompany the text, the above-mentioned realist features, language, the narrative voice, and the story's subject matter.

The poetics (and politics) of authenticity is, I believe, the most significant feature of the interdependence of ethics and aesthetics in the South African short stories in English analysed in the ensuing chapters. Between the late 1920s and the early 1980s – that is, before and during apartheid – starting with Rolfes Dhlomo's and ending with Mtutuzeli Matshoba's writings, claims to authenticity mark, albeit in different ways and through different fictional strategies, these writers' short stories. This reflectionist trend, which is always a literary construct, responds to the ethical imperative of documenting the lives of the Black population under a segregationist regime, but it is also influenced by the available publishing venues (newspapers and magazines). Since the late Eighties, just before the transition that would lead to the end of apartheid, Ahmed Essop and, above all, Zoë Wicomb start to abandon claims to authenticity in their short stories, either through allegorical and fable-like modalities or through a playful, highly metafictional puncturing of the reality effect. They thus question the construction of ethnic identities and of nationalism that characterises the grand narrative of apartheid but also the rhetoric of the new Rainbow Nation after 1994. By explicitly exposing claims to truthfulness as fictional constructs, they also refuse any essentialism linked to the notion of authenticity. Essop's and Wicomb's short stories, moreover, no longer depend on the domestic press,

[11] Walder's comment responds to Medalie's claim in the introduction to the anthology that "most South African short fiction written in English is firmly realistic" and that realism is "undoubtedly the dominant orientation within the genre" (Medalie 1998: xvii). See also Gareth Cornwall's essay on Black literature, "Evaluating Protest Fiction" (1980), where he remarks that "much of the impact of fiction by black South Africans derives from the reader's recognition of its authenticity" through the work's "uncompromising realism" (Cornwell 1980: 56). See also Sullam (2021: 273).

which played a major role in corroborating the short story's claims to authenticity, for publication. The interdependence of politics, literature, and the material conditions of production and circulation, therefore, becomes foregrounded also through an analysis of the short stories' relationship with the notion of authenticity.

Deeply linked to essentialist claims of truthfulness is the fraught question of the origin of the short-story genre in orality, storytelling, and the folktale, which I deal with at several points throughout the thesis and which is part, as anticipated at the beginning of this introduction, of a larger debate around orality and the short story in the African continent. Those writers that foreground their stories' oral matrix, particularly Rolfes Dhlomo and Matshoba, usually incorporate proverbs in either Zulu or Xhosa and markers of orality in their narratives, and, above all, use the narrative voice in the manner of storytellers of old. Storytelling is associated with claims to authenticity, with the creation of a communal feeling, and with a strong didactic function enacted by a first-person narrator, usually an author-figure. Craig MacKenzie's monograph, *The Oral-Style South African Short Story in English: A. W. Drayson to H. C. Bosman* (1999), and Zoë Wicomb's essay "South African Short Fiction and Orality" (2001), have been particularly useful for my discussion of orality in South African short stories. They both underline the artifice of recreating an oral environment in a written text, often linked to the (essentialist) construction of precise, 'authentic' ethnic identities. As the South African short story in English progresses in its post-apartheid phase, the recreation of storytelling is exposed as a fictional construct by authors such as Zoë Wicomb, who foregrounds rather the textuality of what is, in fact, story-writing.

This thesis is divided into six chapters, which follow a chronological order. Chapter one, titled "Between *The Sjambok* and *The Bantu World*: Fiction and Journalism in Rolfes Dhlomo's Short Stories", is a close reading of the writer's short fiction and some articles published posthumously by Tim Couzens in a special issue of *English in Africa* in 1975. Dhlomo's relatively overlooked prose fiction (short stories *and* articles) was published, as I signal in the title, either in the European weekly *The Sjambok* or in the African-edited *The Bantu World* between the late Twenties and the late Thirties. By looking at the original versions of many stories before their inclusion in Couzens's anthology, this chapter explores how each publishing venue shaped Dhlomo's short fiction in very different ways, at both the level of content and form, even though his short texts generally display a strong claim to authenticity. Dhlomo's contribution to the short-story genre thus inaugurates many trends that can be found in much later South African short fiction: the texts' generic hybridity, which points to many interesting connections with journalism, the protest-writing traits of the stories published in *The Sjambok*, the storytelling quality of the fictions published in *The Bantu World*, and, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, Dhlomo's connection with African-American writing through the figure of Langston

Hughes. Ultimately, this chapter raises some questions about the ambivalent stance of the writer – a mission-educated New African intellectual – towards modernity/modernism, his adherence to a realist aesthetics, and the role of the English language.

Chapter two, "Experimentalism in Herbert Dhlomo's Ten 'Unpublished' Short Stories", explores an almost-forgotten figure in the country's history of the short story: Rolfes's younger brother. Herbert's prose fiction, which consists of only ten narratives, remained almost entirely unpublished until Nick Visser and Tim Couzens collected and edited the writer's opera omnia in 1985. The second chapter thus offers, for the first time, a close reading of all the short stories written by Herbert Dhlomo between the early Thirties and the late Forties. His fictions, often quite long, present a complex structure and tackle several coeval themes, testifying to a fascinating, albeit sometimes ambivalent, take on South Africa just before the onset of apartheid. Dhlomo's recourse to intertextuality (from a variety of different sources), his use of heterodiegetic narrators, his choice of characters, his bold engagement with science, and his often-overlooked contribution to popular fiction (science and crime fiction in particular) testify to his skills as experimental writer. Even though his short stories are less hybrid and more markedly fictional (and elaborate) than Rolfes Dhlomo's, they are nonetheless influenced by the writer's journalistic activity for *The Bantu World* and *Ilanga Lase Natal*. In particular, I consider several of his articles as key interpretative tools for a close reading of his short stories. Often regarded merely as a member of the New African generation, Dhlomo's actually foreshadows several aspects of the later *Drum* short stories and even Black Consciousness literary writings, particularly the fictions of Mtutuzeli Matshoba.

Chapter three, titled "Interlude: *Dark Testament* by Peter Abrahams", focuses on an 'outsider' figure of South Africa's literary history and functions as a link between the first and second parts of this study. The chapter explores Peter Abrahams's short-story collection *Dark Testament*, tellingly published in London in 1942 after Abrahams self-exiled from South Africa. My close reading of selected stories focuses on the tensions within the collection between deep-rooted autobiographical and documentary urges, and a desire to overcome the particular situation of South Africa and to enter the international (mainly Western) literary market. A realist aesthetics of protest writing and various claims to authenticity thus co-occur in *Dark Testament* with modernist traits, intertextuality, metafiction, and a liberal humanist tradition, in a complicated intertwining of ethics and aesthetics. Useful comparative tools for the analysis of the short stories are Abrahams's life-writings, particularly his autobiography *Tell Freedom* (1954). The chapter's focus on the autobiographical genre vis-à-vis the short story anticipates an important feature of the *Drum* generation, which retains strong links with Abrahams. Indeed, the chapter closes on the (literary and personal) connections between Abrahams and three US writers, namely William Saroyan, Pauli Murray, and Langston Hughes. The

latter, already in touch with Rolfes Dhlomo, would play a pivotal role for the *Drum* writers and their short stories. The compendium of epistolary exchanges between the *Drum* writers (included Abrahams) and Hughes, *Langston Hughes and the South African Drum Generation* (2010), edited by Shane Graham and John Walters, has proved a very helpful tool for my discussion in this chapter.

Chapter three closes the first part of this study, which thus retains a strong focus on the decades of the Thirties and Forties, when the Black short story in English first developed. Indeed, I believe that a study of both the Dhlomo brothers' and Abrahams's short fiction can shed light on some interesting formal and thematic trends that are usually taken into consideration starting from the *Drum* experience in the Fifties, generally considered the golden age for the short story in South Africa.[12] The claim to authenticity, the genre contamination with journalism and autobiography, the transatlantic connection between South African and US short-story writing, in fact, can be traced back to the Thirties and Forties. If the somewhat imbalanced focus on these two decades has allowed me to fill a research gap, I also hope that it will allow readers to better understand the development of some South African short stories described in the second part of this study.

Chapter four, "The 'Fabulous Decade': Realism and Literariness in the Short Fiction by Can Themba and Alex La Guma", is a comparative analysis of selected short stories by two authors who wrote short fiction and newspaper reports in the same years, but who interpreted the intersection of ethics and aesthetics in different ways: Can Themba and Alex La Guma. A comparative, synchronic approach allows me to question the widespread critical trend, mainly in the wake of Ndebele's interventions, that Black short fiction in the Fifties possesses the same homogenising "spectacular" qualities (Ndebele 1986). While close reading selected short stories of the two writers, I focus in particular on the political import of definitions of the literary, strictly associated with the writers' use of a realist aesthetics. The local flourishing publishing scene in the Fifties, represented by a number of different magazines such as *Drum*, *New Age*, *Fighting Talk*, and *Africa South*, to which both La Guma and Themba contributed fiction and articles, is discussed in some detail as the site where definitions of the literary vis-à-vis political writing shaped the two writers' short stories and articles. The chapter also introduces readers to Nadine Gordimer's early short fiction, mainly published for the prestigious *New Yorker* in the same years. Interestingly, the short stories of Themba, La Guma, and Gordimer are subject to almost the same (Western and metropolitan) scrutiny in relation to their (lack of) literariness.

Chapter five proceeds, like chapter four, with a comparative, synchronic analysis of the short fiction of two writers in the politicised years of the Black Consciousness Movement, Mtutuzeli Matshoba and Ahmed Essop. Titled "'*Eenheid* and *Apartheid*': Unity and Difference in Mtutuzeli

[12] Lewis Nkosi famously termed the Fifties "the fabulous decade" ([1965] 1983).

Matshoba's and Ahmed Essop's Short-Story Cycles",[13] this chapter discusses the similarities and differences between Matshoba's short-story collection *Call Me Not a Man* (1979) and Essop's *The Hajji and Other Stories* (1978) and *Noorjehan and Other Stories* (1990), with particular focus on the influence of Black Consciousness on both writers and on the role played by domestic press in their stories. My discussion seeks to challenge and complicate, without erasing the difference between their short stories, the polarised readings of the two authors, usually considered as 'too political' or 'too literary'. The new publishing scene in South Africa, in particular the birth of new independent publishing houses such as Ravan Press (which published both writers' collections) and its influential magazine *Staffrider* (where both published individual stories), are also explored in some detail. By looking at the different formats of the same text (published within a collection or in a magazine), chapter five foregrounds the importance of a text's materiality, at the same time introducing readers to a sub-genre of the short story, the short-story cycle. Drawing from Sue Marais's work on the form in South Africa, I try to show how this genre is used by both Matshoba and Essop to build the (fictional) authenticity of the Black and Indian communities they portray, in a fascinating intertwining of ethics and aesthetics.

Disrupting linear chronology, the last paragraphs of chapter five also discuss Essop's two post-apartheid short-story cycles, *The King of Hearts and Other Stories* (1997) and *Narcissus and Other Stories* (2002). Written under a changed political climate, they progressively refuse the realist aesthetics and claims to authenticity of Essop's previous works and they display a decidedly symbolical style, interestingly following the same development as Nadine Gordimer's short-story writing, whose cycles *A Soldier's Embrace* (1980) and *Jump and Other Stories* (1991) are briefly explored. The ending of chapter five thus implicitly points to the fiction of the author who closes this study, Zoë Wicomb.

Chapter six, titled "Beyond South Africa and the Politics of Authenticity: The Textuality of Reality in Zoë Wicomb's Two Short-Story Cycles", close reads a selection of stories from her two collections *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987) and *The One That Got Away* (2008). Beside her fiction, the last chapter also discusses her essays, recently edited by Andrew van der Vlies in the volume *Race, Nation, Translation: South African Essays, 1990-2013* (2018), with particular focus on the article "Setting, Intertextuality and the Resurrection of the Postcolonial Author" (2005). Indeed, this chapter's discussion of the coupling of ethics and aesthetics inherent in Wicomb's fiction is centred around the notions of setting and intertextuality, or rather setting *as* intertextuality, in her stories. Her essays thus carry out the same function as the newspaper articles of the other authors

[13] The phrase "*eenheid* and *apartheid*" referred to short-story cycles is taken from Sue Marais's essay "Ivan Vladislavic's Re-Vision of the South African Story Cycle" (1992: 55; emphasis in original).

discussed in this study. The last chapter attempts to show how, by using intertextuality, metafiction, heterotopic spatial re-readings, re-tellings, and uncanniness, Wicomb stages infinite gestures of iteration that resist any essentialist and authoritative notions of authenticity and originality in her short stories, paying attention to the narratives of minor, marginalised voices. She thus questions both the construction of ethnic identities (inherent in the rhetoric of apartheid and the new Rainbow Nation) *and* acts of generic classification (in particular, the distinction between short-story cycle/novel/autobiography).

By choosing to end my doctoral dissertation with a discussion of Zoë Wicomb's two short-story cycles, I also wish to eschew the national constraints of South Africa and to close on a more open-ended, transnational note. Indeed, Wicomb's own life and fictions are characterised by a "to-ing and fro-ing", as Driver has it (2017: 16), between South Africa and the United Kingdom. Her own intertextual practice (both in her short stories and essays), moreover, dialogues with several voices, both major and minor, from a number of different national literatures, giving special space to writings from the United Kingdom and (African) American literature. While rooted in the South African context, this study also attempts to show the pervasive and ongoing conversation between South Africa and the US, especially as far as the short story by Black writers is concerned. The modernism of the Harlem Renaissance writers, particularly in the person of Langston Hughes, influenced both the New African and *Drum* generations, who in turn re-worked the tropes of US hard-boiled writers such as Raymond Chandler and at the same time anticipated the hybrid style of the US New Journalism in their short stories and reportages. I thus hope to foreground, while exploring a very specific local context, the "intertextuality of modern culture", to use Wicomb's words (2001: 168).

This thesis is not intended to be an exhaustive history of the short story in South Africa, which would require a much greater scope than this study can possibly offer, given the country's linguistic and cultural variety,[14] and complex history. Even within the criteria for the selection of my corpus – the South African short story by Black writers in English – I am aware that several notable short-story writers have been excluded from this study, for obvious reasons of space. The writings of the eight authors I have selected offer, I believe, fascinating insights into the compelling, evasive, and protean relationship between ethics and aesthetics. This thesis is indebted to earlier studies of the

[14] The short story in Afrikaans is explored in several critical studies (see, among others, Trump 1985; Van Heerden 1997; De Vries 2005); as Abraham de Vries remarks, "[e]ver since the renewal in Afrikaans prose brought about by the works of the so-called 'Sestigers'", there has been a scholarly reappraisal of the Afrikaans short story (2005: 37). On the contrary, there seems to be a relative lack of critical studies on the genre in the African languages spoken in the country. See Albert Gérard's seminal monograph, *Four African Literatures: Xhosa, Sotho, Zulu, Amharic* (1971), which mentions the short-story genre in indigenous languages at several points; Zengethwa 2014 for a detailed discussion of the development of the Xhosa short story and of the existing studies on the subject; Mabuza 1988 for considerations on the short story in Zulu. This research gap may be partially linked to the material challenges faced by writers who want to publish in languages other than English or Afrikaans.

short story in South Africa, in particular the doctoral works of Martin Trump, "South African Short Fiction in English and Afrikaans since 1948" (1985) and, above all, Rob Gaylard's more recent "Writing Black: The South African Short Story by Black Writers" (2008). Thus, the following chapters intend to offer, through a detailed close reading and several digressions into book history, a new contribution to the study of a rather under-theorised 'minor' genre, which played and continues to play an important role in shaping South Africa's national literature. At the same time, I hope that this thesis may represent the starting point for future studies both on the hyper-contemporary short story in South Africa[15] and on forgotten figures and texts of the country's literature, such as Herbert Dhlomo, whose short stories this thesis has partially attempted to recover.

Ultimately, this study aims to foreground the impossibility of separating the literary (both the text and its materiality) from the political. It also invites readers to engage in their own re-visions of the analysis here offered, for, as Wicomb shows us through her short stories, new interpretations and versions of earlier texts/readings bring about new meanings, destabilising and exposing the fictionality of essentialist, fixed notions such as 'authenticity'.

[15] In this regard, see the monograph edited by Rebecca Fasselt and Corinne Sandwith, *The Short Story in South Africa. Contemporary Trends and Perspectives*, which will be published in March 2022. The book explores the key critical interventions on the South African short story in English since the year 2000.

1. Between *The Sjambok* and *The Bantu World*: Fiction and Journalism in Rolfes Dhlomo's Short Stories

Rob Gaylard's article "R. R. R. Dhlomo and the Early Black South African Short Story in English" (2011), which focuses on Rolfes Dhlomo's English short stories, highlights a critical gap in the debate about the beginning of the genre of the short story in English by Black South African writers. While several studies on the early short story by white writers have been published (see, for instance, MacKenzie 1999 and 2012), often with a particular focus on Herman Charles Bosman's accomplishments,[16] most criticism tends to overlook the achievements in this genre of the generation of Black authors writing, as Bosman did, during the Thirties and Forties. The reasons behind this gap are twofold. In the first place, the earliest collection of such short stories published in book form only dates back to 1942 (*Dark Testament* by Peter Abrahams, tellingly published in London), since Rolfes Dhlomo's short stories appeared only in the local press, the newspaper *The Bantu World* and the weekly magazine *The Sjambok*. The materiality of these publishing venues led to a belated discovery of Rolfes Dhlomo's short fiction, which was collected and edited by Tim J. Couzens in a special issue of *English in Africa* only in 1975.[17] Secondly, the early short story by Black writers has been overshadowed by the prose fiction of the Fifties and Sixties, embodied by the journalists and writers orbiting *Drum*, South Africa's celebrated popular magazine. According to Michael Chapman, the stories in *Drum* "mark the substantial beginning, in South Africa, of the modern black short story" (Chapman [1989] 2001: 183). Before the Fifties, Chapman continues, only a few short stories by Black South Africans existed "outside the 'anonymous' oral tradition of folk-tale" (183). He further mentions Rolfes Dhlomo's "'moral' sketches" and Peter Abrahams's "few urban evocations" as rare examples of short fiction that eschewed the tradition of the folktale before *Drum* (183).[18] The rather vague terms used by Chapman for the works of Dhlomo and Abrahams, however, shed light on the widespread assumption that short fiction prior to the Fifties cannot be fully categorised as 'short story'.[19]

[16] See MacKenzie (2012: 374), who claims that Bosman's tales are among "the best-known and best loved stories in the entire canon of South African literature".
[17] Since the publication of the special issue of *English in Africa* in 1975 by Couzens, Dhlomo's short stories have been analysed to some extent (see, among others, Skikna 1984; Zander 1999; Gaylard 2008). To my knowledge, four of his stories have also been anthologised: "Juwawa" in *Hungry Flames and Other Black South African Short Stories* (1986), "Magic in a Zulu Name" in *Under the Southern Cross: Short Stories from South Africa* (1992), "The Death of Masaba" in *The Penguin Book of Southern African Stories* (1985) and *A New Century of South African Short Stories* (2004), and "Murder on the Mine Dumps" in *Omnibus of a Century of South African Short Stories* (2011).
[18] The *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, for instance, similarly defines Rolfes Dhlomo's short stories as "sketches and moral tales" (https://www.britannica.com/biography/R-R-R-Dhlomo).
[19] See also Mphahlele 2007: 217: "By 1953, […] journalistic writing and short fiction flourished, the latter as a virtually new genre in Africa".

In the present chapter, I argue that Dhlomo's short stories deserve sustained scholarly attention, since they represent the earliest instances of the modern Black South African short story in English. As Ntongela Masilela suggests, "[t]he 1940s still await its scholars", for "it is no longer acceptable that the Sophiatown Renaissance is always appraised in isolation from rather than within the longitudinal structure of South African intellectual history in the twentieth century" (2007: 198). A diachronic approach to the study of the South African short story in English may help shed light on the "longitudinal structure" of the genre in its South African declination, particularly as far as the Thirties and Forties are concerned. Through a close reading of a selection of Rolfes Dhlomo's stories, I aim to discuss the formal and thematic traits of these texts, focusing on the ways in which they resemble and/or differ from contemporaneous short stories by white South African writers and 'conventional' Western short stories. By exploring the publishing context of these fictions in detail, this chapter also seeks to highlight the pivotal role played by the press and the influence it exerted on definitions of the 'literary' for creative writing by Black writers in the Thirties. An analysis of Dhlomo's relatively overlooked short fiction and its publishing venues can also shed light on the close-knit relationship between the genre of the short story and journalism in South Africa. Rolfes Dhlomo can thus be identified as a precursor of the literary journalism of the *Drum* writers in the Fifties, which will be discussed in chapter four. Ultimately, this discussion raises interesting questions about the writer's ambivalent stance towards modernity/modernism, his adherence to a realist aesthetics, and the role of the English language. These issues are located at the interstices between ethics and aesthetics in Dhlomo's short stories.

1.1 New African Modernity

Rolfes Robert Reginald Dhlomo (1901-1971) was born in Siyamu, Edendale, in present-day KwaZulu-Natal. Like his younger brother Herbert, he received formal education in English and later taught at Adams College, a missionary institution. It is difficult to find precise documents and sources that list the two brothers' reading habits and knowledge of world literature. Apart from the Bible, both seemed familiar with the Romantic poets, Milton, Dickens, Goldsmith, and Shakespeare, among other British authors, and with US literature, especially African American (see Couzens 1985: 49; Driver 1987: 249). Rolfes Dhlomo is best known for being the first Black South African to publish a novel in English, *An African Tragedy*, in 1928, with the printing press of the Lovedale Missionary Institute.[20] It has widely been assumed to be Dhlomo's only creative work in English, since his other

[20] *Mhudi* by Sol T. Plaatje was actually the first South African novel written by a Black author in 1920, but it was published only in 1930. *An African Tragedy*, being only forty pages long, does not fall neatly into the genre of the novel: while several critics refer to it as a novella (see, for instance, Gray 1985b: 69; Attwell 2005: 66), Dora Taylor defines it a "short story" ([1942] 2002: 68). I would rather agree with Visser, however, who claims that *An African Tragedy* possesses

major fictional texts (mainly historical novels) are written in his native language, Zulu. He also wrote a series of short stories in English, however, which Couzens brought to light in 1975. Rolfes Dhlomo, like Herbert, belonged to the elite of Black mission-educated intellectuals of the Thirties, the so-called 'New Africans'.[21] According to Leon de Kock, this generation "developed over decades of intensive realignment in which missionaries sought to inculcate altered forms of subjectivity and modified cultural practices" (De Kock 1996: 48; see also Masilela 2007). The missionary 'civilising' process in the form of book and print culture in English thus inscribed in Africans the tenets of a Protestant, Western modernity, violently erasing African subjectivities, vernaculars, and literary forms (De Kock 1996: 2).[22] New African intellectuals often adhered to the European, Christian modernity that missionary education imposed on them, at the same time embracing South Africa's history, traditions, and nationalism. These opposing forces are at play in Dhlomo's fictions and in his choice to write his first novel and short stories in English. From the mid-Thirties, however, he started writing several historical novels on Zulu kings in his native language, and in 1936 he joined the Zulu Society, whose aim was to promote Zulu customs (Skikna 1984: 65).[23] It is perhaps not a coincidence that 1936 also saw the promulgation of the notorious Hertzog Bills, which further stripped the Black population of rights.

Before Rolfes Dhlomo, few Black writers had published short stories in English. Rob Gaylard mentions, for example, A. S. Vil-Nkomo's "Mhlutshwa Comes to Johannesburg", published in the newspaper *The Bantu World* on 29 April 1933 (Gaylard 1999: 18). The story is very short and with little development of character; nonetheless, as the title signals, it serves as an early instance of the Jim-comes-to-Joburg theme. This phrase, which became quite popular in South Africa after the release of a film with the same title in 1949, has been used to describe fictional works that deal with the rural Black man's (usually unsuccessful) encounter with the white-controlled modern city (see Gray 1985b). Indeed, Vil-Nkomo's story recounts the decision of a rural Black worker to escape his hard life on the farm to go to Johannesburg and work on the mines. Albert Gérard wrote in his seminal monograph *Four African Literatures: Xhosa, Sotho, Zulu, Amharic* (1971) that, "[w]hereas in the early decades of the century the short story had been a mere adaptation of traditional tales focusing

"novelistic features as markedly episodic plot, a multiplicity of situations and events, and spatial and temporal expansiveness" (Visser 1976c: 45).

[21] For a definition of the New Africans, see Herbert Dhlomo's article "African Attitudes to the European" (1945b: online), published in *The Democrat*. He divides the "African society" into three classes, the Tribal African, the Neither-Nor African, and the New African. The latter consists mostly of "organised urban workers who are awakening to the issue at stake and to the power of organised intelligently led action and of progressively thinking African intellectuals and leaders". See also Manus 2011: 39-42.

[22] Leon de Kock's work shows the "co-implication of printing and piercing, literacy and lubricity, disinterested information and deadly inculcation" within the missionary endeavour (De Kock 2012: 52).

[23] See Nkosinathi Sithole's compelling article "At Home in Zulu and English: RRR Dhlomo's Imaginative Writing" (2021).

on historical experience and hunting adventures,[24] short stories of a *modern* type – illustrating moments of crisis in contemporary experience – began to appear" (Gérard 1971: 153; emphasis added). The short stories by Rolfes Dhlomo and, to a lesser extent, the one by Vil-Nkomo, deserve to be acknowledged as modern short stories because they depict the transition from a rural milieu to the city, thus "illustrating moments of crisis in contemporary experience". The widespread Jim-comes-to-Joburg trope, indeed, records the saga of a population who was forced to transform radically its lifestyle; it was essential to make this event be felt "imaginatively as one of the main experiences of *modern* South African life" (Gray 1985b: 62; emphasis added).

If several scholars have used the adjective 'modern' to describe Dhlomo's short stories, and fictional works by Black writers during the 1930s and 1940s more generally, the concept of modernity remains controversial and elusive. In his seminal work *Rewriting Modernity* (2005), Attwell defines it as "the currently governing concept of what it means to be a subject of history", inextricably linked to colonialism (3-4). More specifically, he identifies modernity in South Africa in the early Thirties as represented by the church, the school, and the justice system – what he defines "the mission ethos"; from the 1930s onwards, this paradigm came to be supplied by the city (Attwell 2005: 65).[25] Thus, Rolfes Dhlomo's short stories can be considered "transitional narrative[s]" between these two paradigms, carrying the mission ethos into the modern urban context (2005: 65).

The late Twenties and early Thirties in South Africa also saw the emergence of print culture venues, in the form of little magazines, that, rather than modern, might be defined as 'modernist'. English South African writers Roy Campbell and William Plomer established, with the help of Afrikaner author Laurens van der Post, the bilingual (English and Afrikaans) literary magazine *Voorslag* in 1926. They all had strong links with British modernism.[26] A few years later, in 1929, Stephen Black founded the weekly magazine *Sjambok*, where Rolfes Dhlomo would publish his first short stories (see figure 1.1).

[24] Interestingly enough, MacKenzie identifies similar traits for the early South African short story written by whites, referring specifically to Alfred W. Drayson, Frederick Boyle, and J. Forsyth Ingram: "[…] a miscellany of folk-history, frontier-lore, autobiographical anecdotes, sketches, tales and legends" (MacKenzie 1999: 17).

[25] The same correspondence between modernity and urbanity has also been signalled by Masilela (2007), who identifies the generation of New Africans as representatives of this urban modernity.

[26] Campbell knew well Vorticist writer Wyndham Lewis (Hallett 1978: 31), while Plomer's first novel *Turbott Wolfe* was published with the Hogarth Press in 1925 (Alexander 1980: 54).

Figure 1.1. Cover of the first issue of *The Sjambok* (9 April 1929).

Herman Charles Bosman and Aegidius Jean Blignaut ran *The Touleier* between 1930 and 1933. These English-language little magazines, most of them short-lived, mainly addressed a white readership and they can be considered the forerunners to the literary magazines of the Fifties and Sixties, most notably *Drum* (Heywood 2004: 130). They can be compared to coeval modernist spaces like the US literary magazines *The Little Review*, where Joyce's *Ulysses* first appeared, and W. E. B. Du Bois's *The Crisis*, where the works of the Harlem Renaissance writers were printed. South Africa's little magazines only published creative writing (especially short stories) and opinion pieces of white contributors. In fact, Rolfes Dhlomo's stories in *The Sjambok* represent an exception. In the preface to Dhlomo's first published short story, the editor Stephen Black emphasises the 'otherness' of the writer's piece, claiming that he "has written with simple and direct force because he has not copied the established models", by which he means British literary models (Black 1929). The publishing contexts available to white and Black writers in South Africa in the Thirties thus differed greatly. While authors like Plomer and Campbell could publish in their own literary magazines or in modernist European presses like Hogarth's, Rolfes Dhlomo and the New Africans could publish only through the mission presses (if they were not censored) or African newspapers.[27]

If Attwell declares that Rolfes Dhlomo "finds the *novel* – as one of modernity's great epistemological achievements – just beyond his grasp" (2005: 67; emphasis in original), I would argue that Dhlomo's modern move is represented by his short stories, different in style and tone from *An African Tragedy*. Gaylard divides Dhlomo's twenty short stories into four main groups (2008: 44). He defines the first group of mine stories as an early example of protest writing, which includes "Fateful Orders" (1929), "The Death of Masaba" (1929), "The Dog Killers" (1930), "Juwawa" (1930), "Murder on the Mine Dumps" (1930), "Special Pass" (1931), and "A Mine Tragedy" (1932). The second group deals with the perils and evils of city life, the main thematic concerns of *An African Tragedy*: "Skokiaan" (1929), "The Sins of the Fathers" (1929), "Bought and Paid For" (1930), and "The End of the Farce" (1932). These narratives and the mine fictions mainly appeared in *The Sjambok*. The stories in the third group negotiate the tension between urban modernity and rural tradition: "Zulu Christian Science" (1930), "The Herbalist" (1930), "Ukugweba" (1932), "Magic in a Zulu Name" (1933), "Death of Manembe" (1933), and "Dumela Defies Lighting" (1934); they were mainly published in *The Bantu World*. The last group consists of only three sketches published in 1938 and devoted to popular romances: "Janet and her Past", "May Plays with Love", and "Maggie's Married Life".

[27] The director of Lovedale Press, R. H. W. Shepherd, often acted as a 'censor'. Sol Plaatje's much belated publication of *Mhudi* is a telling example of the impediments a Black writer had to face. According to Leon de Kock, the Lovedale institution embodied the orthodoxy of a colonising British nationalism (2012: 69).

Couzens's edition of Dhlomo's fictions interestingly also includes six articles/short stories[28] anonymously written or composed under pseudonyms, which probably refer to Dhlomo himself.[29] Between August 1929 and February 1931, Dhlomo worked as journalist and creative writer for *The Sjambok* under the tutelage of Stephen Black; after 1931, he continued publishing short stories and articles for the multilingual (English and various African languages) newspaper *The Bantu World*, edited by Richard Victor Selope Thema. In 1942, he became editor of both *The Bantu World* and *Ilanga Lase Natal*, the country's first Zulu newspaper founded in 1903 by John Langalibalele Dube. Even though these two publishing venues were owned and funded by white magnates, they were edited by African intellectuals and addressed an African readership, unlike *The Sjambok*. Most importantly, they were not dependent on the direct mediation of missionary patronage (see De Kock 1996: 108).

About Rolfes's experience as short-story writer for the weekly *Sjambok*, Herbert Dhlomo, his younger brother, gives a fascinating account:

> Mr Stephen, a highly-strung artist and yet a cool and calculating investigator, taught Dhlomo many valuable lessons on the art and science of writing. One of these was that a writer must not project himself into the story and moralise or philosophise outside his characters...a weakness that many of our writers still have. Another was that a writer should use a language suited or natural to his characters. […] Stephen Black also believed a great deal in dialogue. (Dhlomo [1946] 1975: 9)[30]

Herbert Dhlomo's comments on his brother cannot be always endorsed. While the stories' several dialogues are indeed written in the urban argot of the mine workers, narratorial interventions can be found quite often. Nonetheless, the short stories are markedly less didactic than *An African Tragedy*. Dhlomo's fictions, which differ from the modern/ist, 'conventional' Western short story in many aspects, present divergent thematic and stylistic traits according to the publishing context. The mine stories, for instance, appeared mainly in *The Sjambok – The Bantu World* belonged to the white-owned Argus Printing and Publishing Company, controlled by the mining industry (Switzer 1988: 352). Dhlomo wrote the short stories for *The Sjambok* while he was working as a clerk at the City and Suburban Mine in Johannesburg (Gaylard 2008: 42); consequently, his depiction of the Black workers' conditions in the mines responds to his desire to portray his milieu and, therefore, it follows the conventions of realism. Rather than adhering to the naturalism of the mine novel *Germinal* (1885) by French writer Emilé Zola, or of the short story "In the Depths of a Coal Mine" (1894) by US author

[28] Among the six stories and articles in the appendix to the edition of the "Twenty Short Stories", only "A Saint", written under a pseudonym, falls neatly into the genre of the short story. However, it is not related in any way (content or style) to the twenty short stories in the main section of the edition, so that it raises doubts on Dhlomo's authorship.
[29] For the use of pseudonyms in early Black journalistic writing, see Couzens 1975a.
[30] The article, originally published in *Inkundla ya Bantu* in 1946, was first reprinted by Couzens in 1975 as a commentary to Rolfes Dhlomo's stories.

Stephen Crane, Rolfes Dhlomo's mine stories belong to the sub-genre of social realism, anticipating Peter Abrahams's novel *Mine Boy* (1946) and the protest literature of the Seventies and Eighties that would appear in the magazine *Staffrider* (see Gaylard 2008: 42; Sithole 2021: 35).[31] Conversely, the short stories in *The Bantu World* mainly describe various aspects of tribal life in a way that may remind readers of Mark Twain's realism in his frontier short stories, such as "Journalism in Tennessee" (1869), "The Facts in the Case of the Great Beef Contract" (1870), or "A True Story" (1874). Like Twain's, Dhlomo's humorous storyteller figures often insist on the veracity of the recounted tale.

Couzens himself foregrounds the supposed authenticity of Dhlomo's fictions as the only measure of their value:[32]

> The formalists of literary criticism and the purists of New Criticism will miss the point if they dismiss this material as "bad literature". We are not here primarily concerned with evaluative criticism but with literary history and with the origins and growth of a literature. […]. Many of the themes he [Dhlomo] raises are "universal" to the black South African condition and foreshadow the concerns of present-day African writers. (Couzens 1975b: 1)

Interestingly enough, the call for authenticity seems to characterise the genre of the short story in early twentieth-century South Africa across the racial divide. Craig MacKenzie's monograph, *The Oral-Style South African Short Story in English: A. W. Drayson to H. C. Bosman*, analyses the oral-style South African short story, defined as a written "recreation of an oral story-telling setting within a literary context by introduction of a storyteller figure (fictional narrator) who narrates the story" (1999: 2). Alfred Drayson, Frederick Boyle, and J. Forsyth Ingram are the first representatives of this sub-genre, which shares with Rolfes Dhlomo's short fiction a persistent claim to authenticity:

> While the stories by Drayson, Boyle, and Ingram display different facets of the generic indeterminacy of writing in the period, they will also be shown to display certain common characteristics. The most conspicuous of these is their stock claim of 'authenticity'. They all claim to present the "plain truth", and to eschew fabulation and fictionality – even when these qualities are palpably present in the tales. (MacKenzie 1999: 23)

MacKenzie explains the drift towards authenticity with the authors' desire to "impart something of the redolence and texture of African life to a largely metropolitan audience" (23). There seems to be a correlation between this ingenuous and artless claim to authenticity and the lack of 'literariness' in these tales such as the use of flat, typified characters (MacKenzie 1999: 24). MacKenzie, however, does not include into his study Dhlomo's tales as examples of the oral-style South African short story,

[31] Indeed, Dhlomo's mine story "Juwawa" was reprinted in the Black Consciousness anthology edited by Mbulelo Mzamane*, Hungry Flames and Other Black South African Short Stories* (1986).

[32] See also Couzens's introduction to the appendix: Dhlomo "was less concerned about literary sensibility and more preoccupied with concrete issues springing directly from his immediate environment" (1975b: 58).

with a fictional narrator recounting a 'true' event. According to him, Dhlomo's narrative style adheres rather to the Western convention of literary realism (186).[33] Instead, I would argue that Rolfes Dhlomo's short stories share some features with the sub-genre identified by MacKenzie, particularly as far as the claim to authenticity and the frame narrator are concerned. While the stories on the mines published by Rolfes Dhlomo in *The Sjambok* are written in a realistic mode, with a third-person external narrator, the prose fiction published in *The Bantu World*, instead, is indicative of the writer's oral matrix: apart from proverbs, the narratives are often sketchy, the 'I' of the narrator is foregrounded, and an oral narrative is often reproduced in the written form.[34] Thus, Dhlomo's short stories are written according to Western conventions *and* to the legacy of traditional storytelling. The supposed factuality of his fictions derives from three main factors: his mission education, which led him to believe in the need to educate the African masses, his traditional background in folktales, and his activity as journalist, which is inextricably linked to the material condition of publishing in South Africa.

Rolfes Dhlomo was a prolific journalist best known for his several satirical columns under the *nomes de plume* of, among others, R. Roamer, Esq., and Rolling Stone. As his younger brother Herbert admits, "[r]eportage, feature articles, etc. became grist for his literary mill" (Dhlomo [1946] 1975: 10). Journalism, together with teaching, was the most obvious career for the elite of mission-educated Blacks in the Twenties and Thirties. With the emergence of the first independent Black newspapers at the beginning of the twentieth century, such as *Ilanga Lase Natal* (1903) and *The Bantu World* (1932), socially engaged articles against the discrimination of Black people began to appear. Together with the news chronology, they were often the direct inspiration for particular works of fiction by Black journalists-writers (Couzens 1976b: 97). Black intellectuals, moreover, found in newspapers the only outlet that did not depend on missionary censorship for the publication of their creative writing; for obvious reasons of space, the genre of the short story was encouraged, and, indeed, the very brevity of Dhlomo's short stories probably depend on the medium of publication.[35] This linear connection between journalism and fiction in 1930s South Africa may explain Dhlomo's drift towards a factual style and narrative tone in his short stories.

[33] According to MacKenzie, the white South African short story is characterised by a progression from fireside tale to the modern, realist short story. Conversely, Black short fiction presents "an initial reliance on Western modernist literary models" in the late 1920s until Black writers adopt the oral tradition of storytelling in the wake of Black Consciousness (1999: 179).

[34] MacKenzie lists the structural elements of the oral-style story, which are: the presence of an "old and wise" narrator known to the audience, a congenial setting, a receptive audience, a "tall tale" to tell, and improbable incidents which form the "true story" (1999: 19-20).

[35] Two of Dhlomo's short stories ("Ukugweba" and "The End of the Farce") were serialised in *The Bantu World*.

At home, the writer also imbibed the traditional Zulu education, and his mother used to tell him and his siblings stories around the fire, according to the tradition of the fireside tales:[36]

> I can see as [if] it were on a cinema screen the scenes of the story-telling periods in the days of my youth. […]. We would gather around the fire and listen to her [Dhlomo's mother] with rapt attention. Some stories made us laugh, other[s] cry, others afraid and fidgety […]. I believe that fire fired not only the story-teller's but the listeners' imaginations. (Dhlomo 1947e: online)

Herbert Dhlomo's remembrance of his mother's role as storyteller testifies to the traditional aspects of the Dhlomos' education. Indeed, both brothers wrote several short stories on tribal traditions and beliefs (see also Skikna 1984: 165). The legacy of traditional storytelling is more visible in Rolfes's *Bantu World* short stories. Dhlomo's drift towards authenticity in his fiction thus derives from his training as journalist and from his traditional background in Zulu culture, since both allowed the writer to educate and guide his readers towards his views, as Shelley Skikna observes:

> Rolfes Dhlomo, due to nature and circumstance, was not likely to be a writer of fiction. The lack of publication facilities for […] all writing by blacks caused black writers to confine themselves to journalism or the production of school-readers. Dhlomo was accustomed to both modes of writing; the opportunity which they gave him to air his views and educate his readers was never relinquished. He seems to have adopted the role of the oral poet in traditional Zulu society […]. Dhlomo addresses his audience with the oral artist's conviction; his sense of the validity of his opinions allowed him to present them as fact, and not as fiction. (Skikna 1984: 164)[37]

However, the writer's tendency towards didacticism cannot be easily pinpointed, nor is it neatly characterised by one-sidedness. Critical reviews of the "Twenty Short Stories" may help us understand the controversial nuances in Dhlomo's writing.[38] In his seminal essay "The Rediscovery of the Ordinary", Njabulo Ndebele briefly comments on Rolfes Dhlomo's accomplishments in short-story writing, subsuming the writer's stories into his idea of the "spectacular representation" of protest writing in South African literature:

> There is very little attempt to delve into intricacies of motive or social process. People and situations are either very good or very bad. Those who are bad, invariably used as the focus of moral lesson, either come to a well-deserved bad end, or dramatically abandon their evil ways overnight. (1986: 144)

On the other hand, Vicki Manus criticizes Dhlomo's tutelage under Stephen Black:

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[36] See also Mzamane on the didacticism of traditional folktales: "The African tale dealt with a wide range of subjects, so that whenever a child wanted an explanation about anything, an appropriate tale could always be found to illustrate the point" (Mzamane 1984: 149).

[37] See also Zander (1999: 126): "The first black stories […] also demonstrate that the author did not conceive of fictional writing as a mode completely different and separated from factual writing, as fiction is understood in an orthodox Western sense".

[38] In *Rewriting Modernity*, David Attwell has defined ambiguity as "an endemic feature of the written literature of the earliest generations of black writers" (2005: 53).

> The idea of stories about Africans told by an authentic Zulu writer was no doubt seen as somewhat of a sales gimmick […]. They show a tendency to generalize the criticism of "heathen" Africans as unenlightened, stupid or downright wicked; and they are riddled with allusions expressing prejudice in the domains of race, gender, religion, or social class. […]. Was Rolfes obliged to pander racist stereotypes and Victorian cautionary tales to satisfy his editor, in line with the prejudices of the target readership, or did he not know any better? […] Whether with the intention of providing authenticity or extra spice, many of these mine stories, destined for a lowbrow white readership, are peppered with dialogue in either Zulu or Fanagalo, according to the setting. (2011: 43-44)

As a reading of these two divergent reviews suggests, Ndebele and Manus are both quite absolutist in their evaluations of Rolfes Dhlomo's short stories. The former focuses his criticism on the elements of protest, especially as far as the mine stories are concerned, where the unjust treatment of Black workers on the part of white men is poignantly represented. On the contrary, Manus's understanding of the same short stories revolves around Dhlomo's compromise with the white part of the South African society. While both scholars do grasp two contradictory aspects of Dhlomo's writing and *Weltanschauung*, they do not take into consideration the writer's complex and nuanced position within South African literary history (see also Gaylard 2008: 42-43). Like Herbert, Rolfes Dhlomo is indeed part of the elite group of the New Africans, and, as such, he is torn between the two paradigms of tradition and modernity, of tutelage and protest. A close reading of a selection of narratives may help better understand the complexities in Dhlomo's writing, and his role in the development of the Black South African short story.

1.2 Protest and 'Authenticity': The Mine Stories in *The Sjambok*

The first stories that Dhlomo wrote, while an employee for the short-lived *Sjambok*, distinguish themselves from the pieces published in *The Bantu World* because of a paratextual element: six stories out of eleven appeared with a brief editorial preface that presents the text to its (mostly white) readership.[39] Interestingly, the prefaces all point to the veracity of the recounted episode, which can be hold true *because* it is written by a "native", in the words of the editor.[40] The three-page story "The Death of Masaba", for instance, narrates the death of the mine worker and eponymous protagonist Masaba due to the dire working conditions in the mines. The introductory preface by the editor, Stephen Black, runs as follows:

[39] In addition, the story "Fateful Orders", the first one in the *Sjambok* series, appeared after an introductory article by the editor: "Literary Movement in South Africa: 'Ibsenesque' Afrikaans Plays or Simple Native Stories?" (Black 1929). The only narrative published in *The Bantu World* with a preface, instead, is "Ukugweba" (Dhlomo, R. 1975: 39), and, as we shall see, it equally plays on the thin line between fiction and non-fiction.

[40] It is worth noticing that the presence of an editorial preface hinting at the 'truth' of the recounted story is a highly common fictional device used in literature (see, for instance, *Robinson Crusoe*). The editorial preface, however, is usually an invention of the author, and, therefore, it pertains to the world of fiction. In the case of the stories published in *The Sjambok* and *The Bantu World*, instead, the prefaces are probably written by the real-life editors of the newspapers, particularly with regard to the stories in *The Sjambok*.

> The simple, sincere and pathetic story is the work of a pure-bred Zulu, at present working on the mines. It shows, better than any Negrophilistic rant, that natives have homes, mothers, hearts and maladies like ourselves. To those of our readers living away from the radius of the mines the word "lash", "lasher" and "lashing" should be explained. "To lash" is to shovel; it is a corruption of the Zulu word *lahla*, "to throw". (1975: 14)

The other prefaces by Stephen Black are written according to the same tone: phrases like "a vivid picture of Native life", "a feeling of intense verity" (19), "based on a recent episode in Johannesburg" (26), and "realistic work" (33) all point to the alleged authenticity of Dhlomo's stories. These prefaces mostly introduce the mine fictions, in which the indictment of the mining industry appears stronger. If the function of these paternalistic prefaces was that of "translating the strange goings-on of an alien world to the comfortably civilised English reader" of *The Sjambok* (Manus 2011: 46), Dhlomo's mine stories are nonetheless the first fictional representations of life on the mines in Johannesburg from the Black side.[41] Indeed, the white press and *Umteteli Wa Bantu* (Mouthpiece of the People), directed at a Black readership but established in 1920 by the Chamber of Mines, misleadingly described life on the mines (see Couzens 1976a: 69-70).

A close reading of Dhlomo's mine stories intends to show the complexity of these narratives, with a particular focus on the writer's own tendency towards a supposed authenticity. To achieve verisimilitude, Dhlomo often inserts the jargon used in the mines by the workers and their bosses.[42] The beginning of "Fateful Orders" (1929), Dhlomo's first story, is emblematic in this regard: "You black nigger! Wena tola lo sjambok, Sebenza!" (Dhlomo, R. 1975: 13).[43] This opening, *in medias res*, conveys the tone of the story, but it is also difficult to decipher: the second part of the sentence, which sets the whole action in motion, cannot be possibly understood by a white readership. The sentence in Fanagalo literally means "You want the sjambok, work!", and it represents the order that will lead to the death of the protagonist Joe: by obeying to his boss, Joe drills into a misfire that causes a devastating explosion. The story ends with the wounded Boss Jack remembering, and, most importantly, paraphrasing, the order he had given to Joe: "Joe […] had only been answered that he was a lazy nigger, fit for the sjambok!" (14). This last sentence represents the key to the narrative, for readers can understand the original, cryptic sentence in Fanagalo at the beginning only when reading the whole story. According to Manus, this stylistic device is unnecessary to understand the plot of the

[41] N. N. Canonici briefly mentions Dhlomo's mine stories in his article on the elements of protest in Zulu literature (1998: 60).

[42] The jargon used is often that of Fanagalo, or Fanakalo, a broken form of Zulu considered demeaning and created for the specific purpose of giving instructions to Black mine workers (see Sanders 2016: 22-24).

[43] The *sjambok* is an Afrikaans term that designates a long stiff whip made from rhinoceros hide. While this tool recurs often in Dhlomo's mine stories and it is associated with brutal colonialist practice, it is also paradoxically the name of the magazine where the stories were published. The name probably was intended as a satire of the little magazine *Voorslag* ("whiplash") (see Manus 2011: 43; Chapman 1996: 177-178). Dhlomo's article "Black Bolshevik Factory" mentions the "Sjambok" with capital letter both in the preface, and at the end of the reportage, and the word is used in its double meaning of 'magazine' and 'instrument of punishment' (1975: 61, 63).

narrative, and this sort of translation testifies to Dhlomo's ambiguous stance towards his implied reader (Manus 2011: 45-46). On the contrary, I would argue that the repetition of the sentence first in Fanagalo, and *then* in English, forces readers to re-read the story in function of that pivotal sentence, to which the title "Fateful Orders" refers.

"Mine Tragedy" (1932) resembles "Fateful Orders" in many aspects. It recounts the story of Sokies, a Black mine worker whose obedience to the boss's order causes his death in an explosion. The stories have a specular structure, since both open *in medias res* with the untranslated boss's order in Fanagalo. The extensive use of Fanagalo also characterises the articles attached in the appendix to Couzens's edition of the short stories, in particular "The Black Bolshevik Factory" (1930) and "The Compound Induna and Compound Interest" (1930), published in *The Sjambok*. Here Dhlomo translates almost every word of Fanagalo into English, most likely to convey his social critique in the most direct way without the artifices and ambiguity of fiction.

Apart from the insertion of Fanagalo, Dhlomo's use of English also deserves to be mentioned. The writer indeed shifts between a high register of standard, at times lyrical English and non-standard expressions. This is textual proof of his fluency in both Zulu and English. The narrator's polished sentences, such as "a naked, creaking rock rose sheer above them" (Dhlomo, R. 1975: 15), are often juxtaposed with mimetic dialogues in non-standard English. Since the protagonists of these early stories are mostly non-literate African men who "had left their kraals for the mines" (14), Dhlomo often recurs to mimetic speech, as in the opening of "The Dog Killers" (1930). The protagonist's exclamation "Are you true? Tell me, man; are you true?" (26), for instance, strikes the reader for the peculiarity of the English diction that testifies to the indigenous grounding of the story (MacKenzie 1999: 183). "The Death of Masaba" displays one narratorial intervention in particular that needs underlining, for it can also be read metafictionally as an indication of the language used by the narrative voice. The narrator comments, after a long dialogue between the miners and their boss, that "*their* language is different from *ours*" because the miners' speech "is made up of all those naked and revolting phrases that would shame the Prince of Darkness" (15; emphasis added). Through the use of the possessive pronouns, the intrusive narrator positions himself on the side of his white readership and distances himself from the violence in the mine compounds. Even when the narrator reports his characters' thoughts, as is the case with the miner Joe in "Fateful Orders", those are translated into a polished English diction (see also Manus 2011: 13). If these narratorial translations and Dhlomo's shifting registers at times bear witness to his inability to "articulate an entirely coherent perspective on contentious issues" and to side with the Black workers (MacKenzie 1999: 184), in the above-quoted sentence the narrator distances himself not only from the language used by the Black miners, but also by the white managers of the mines, to whom the adjective "their" also refers.

Another strategy on the part of Rolfes Dhlomo to enhance the supposed authenticity of his *Sjambok* short stories, and thus to document and protest against the condition of the Black miners, is the detailed representation of the mine compounds' power structures. The mining industry was based on the migrant labour system, according to which Black miners who came from the countryside had to reside in the closed compounds without their families and were forced to carry passes that controlled and restricted their movements. Migrant workers from the same ethnic group were often housed together and were assigned different types of jobs (and privileges) according to their ethnicities (Moodie 1992: 588). The most privileged labourers were the so-called indunas, who controlled the Black foremen who, in turn, acted as informants and intermediaries between the Black workers and the white manager, and they mistreated and exploited other miners, often of a different ethnicity.[44] Couzens explains:

> The tensions on the mines and in the compounds stem not only from the pay disputes, the food and health problems and the accident rate, but also from the restrictions placed on movement and activity (the prison-like nature of the compounds, the pass system) and from the repressive hierarchy created through a system of "collaborators". (Couzens 1975b: 2)

Dhlomo's story "The Dog Killers" (1930), for instance, poignantly represents the different hierarchic levels on a mine compound. The plot is straightforward. Jama, the protagonist, fears that his dog will be killed by the Black collaborators and goes to the induna Mlungu to plead for his dog's safety. The name Mlungu means 'white man' (Skikna 1984: 193);[45] not only is it indicative of the induna's duplicity, this also indicates that Mlungu is a sort of 'Everyman', and that every induna is corrupted by white power. When Jama visits the induna, he addresses him with three different forms of respect: "I have come my father, *induna*, about my dog, *nkos*'" (Dhlomo, R. 1975: 26; emphasis in original). The response of the induna is also subject to the logic of hierarchy, for he answers that "all the bloody dogs will be killed to-morrow by order of the Big One" (26). With the phrase "Big One", Mlungu is referring to the mine manager. The whole dialogue can be interpreted as a "grotesque parody" of a tribesman's obeisance to his chief since the three different terms of respect ("my father", "induna",

[44] In his mine stories and articles, Dhlomo often uses the problematic and infantilizing term 'boy' to refer to Black collaborators and go-betweens, who were usually called 'police boys' and 'boss boys'. Several Black Consciousness poems will later parody and question the use of the term 'boy', such as "A Poem" by Khaba Mkhize, published in *Staffrider* in 1978. For a recent discussion of the complex question of apartheid collaborators, see Jacob Dlamini's books *Askari: A Story of Collaboration and Betrayal in the Anti-Apartheid Struggle* (2015) and *The Terrorist Album. Apartheid's Insurgents, Collaborators, and the Security Police* (2020).

[45] A white readership could probably not understand the symbolic significance of the name; as in the case of "Fateful Orders", however, Dhlomo provides readers with an explanation later in the story: "[…] Mlungu, so named because of his foolish and sorrowful aping of the white people's ways" (Dhlomo, R. 1975: 27).

"nkosi") can be used to address a Zulu chief (Skikna 1984: 193),[46] while the phrase "Big One" could also refer to God (Gaylard 2008: 44). Rolfes Dhlomo's social critique therefore lies in the representation of a system of Black go-betweens. The portrayal of these Black collaborators, moreover, represents a *fil rouge* in Black South African short fiction and journalism, both in mine and in farm compounds: Herbert Dhlomo, Henry Nxumalo, and Mtutuzeli Matshoba have followed in Rolfes Dhlomo's footsteps.

Dhlomo's indictment of this system of authority is also to be seen in the journal articles he wrote for *The Sjambok*, in particular "The Compound Induna and Compound Interest", "Wholesale Dog Murder", and "How the 'Boys' are Robbed". In "The Compound Induna and Compound Interest", published on 25 April 1930, the writer Mayibuye (probably, one of Dhlomo's pseudonyms)[47] recounts a scene of corruption inside a mine perpetrated by indunas. The beginning of the article is written in a journalistic mode:

> In the many Native Compounds on the Reef, and elsewhere, dark acts are daily perpetrated by native Indunas (foremen) and Police "Boys". […]. The dialogue below, between Sixpence and Breakfast, will give the reader a rough idea of what generally takes place. I cannot say that the Compound Managers are aware of these irregularities, but from confidential conversations I have had with old mine hands, it would certainly appear that *some* Compound Managers know *something* […]. (Dhlomo, R. 1975: 63; emphasis in original)

This short factual introduction is followed by the expression "NOW READ" and by two pages of dialogue between Breakfast and Sixpence, two mine workers discussing the role of indunas in the compound and their exercise of bribery and robbery. The role of the journalist (or maybe we should say narrator) is here confined to some translations from Fanagalo into English and to brief indications, signalled by the parentheses, such as "(Smacks his lips)" (Dhlomo, R. 1975: 64). These indications, inserted in a long and continuous dialogue, almost resemble stage directions, and it is unusual to find them in a newspaper article.[48] Apart from the short factual introduction presenting the article, therefore, there are no intrusions or comments from the narrator. The insertion of dialogue is usually assumed to be a fictional device. In his volume on the American New Journalism, *Fact and Fiction. The New Journalism and the Nonfiction Novel*, John Hollowell lists six fictional techniques used by the New Journalists in their pieces, and among them he includes "recording dialogue fully rather than with the occasional quotations or anecdotes of conventional journalism" (Hollowell 1977: 25). Dhlomo's tendency to fictionalise in this article, however, is not limited to the mere insertion of

[46] The OED's first meaning for the word "induna" is "an officer under the king or chief of the Zulus, Matabele, and other South African peoples"; the second meaning, however, recites "a person, especially a black person, in authority" (www.oed.com/view/Entry/94821).
[47] See Couzens (1975c: 58) and Zander (1999: 248).
[48] Couzens himself probably found these indications remarkable because, at the end of the article, he specifies that "[t]he explanations are in the original text" (1975: 65).

dialogue: readers are given no hints whatsoever at the veracity of the reported conversation. There is no indication of time nor of place, the 'I' of the narrative voice only appears once at the beginning, and the names of the two protagonists seem invented.[49] Furthermore, the narrator declares in the introduction that the dialogue "will give the reader a rough idea of what *generally* takes place" (Dhlomo, R. 1975: 63; emphasis added); the adverb "generally" is a hint at the episode's exemplary status, attained through the fictional device of dialogue. Thus, Dhlomo's articles on the mines are thematically and stylistically closely related to his short stories:

> Because of these features, this text is certainly a hybrid of sorts. Though clearly fictional, simultaneously it is nevertheless a factual text, requiring instead of an interpretation, an application to specific aspects of the South African reality. On its publication in *The Sjambok*, it originally bore no label indicating its status. (Zander 1999: 248)

Dhlomo's other article in *The Sjambok*, "Wholesale Dog Murder", is more clearly written in a journalistic style, since it opens with very precise indications of the time and place of the described event: "On Sunday morning, May 25th, between seven and eight o' clock, people around the Ferreira Deep Gold Mine were awakened by the most ghastly howling […]" (Dhlomo, R. 1975: 66). The article, directly linked to the fictional short story "The Dog Killers", recounts the cruel slaughter of stray dogs in a mine compound by a group of Black men. In the introduction to the appendix, Couzens emphasises the importance of Dhlomo's articles for an understanding of his short stories (1975c: 58). Indeed, the starting point for several of Dhlomo's fictions is represented by his articles, and not vice versa. The article "Wholesale Dog Murder" was published on 6 June 1930, six weeks before the short story "The Dog Killers", which is prefaced by the usual declaration of authenticity that the "native story is of great interest because it is based on a recent episode in Johannesburg with which the writer was acquainted" (Dhlomo, R. 1975: 26). The preface, together with the six weeks separating the publication of the two pieces, is evidence of the interrelated nature of the article and story. In both pieces, the miners are awakened in the early morning by "ghastly howling" (66) and "pitiful cries" (28); the word "orgy" and the expression "to smack one's lips" are used to describe the indunas' excitement for the killing (27, 67); ultimately, both pieces make clear that it is difficult to know the name of the actual responsible, who is probably a white man.[50] The only difference between the two

[49] Actually, Dhlomo may have drawn the name Sixpence from the news chronology of *The Sjambok* itself. An article titled "Afterthoughts on the Bethal Case" was published in 1929 in the first issue of the magazine, a year before Dhlomo wrote "The Compound Induna and Compound Interest". The editorial comments on one of the first reported notorious abuses in the Bethal farms, where a Black worker, Sixpence, was killed by a white farmer (see Anon. 1929: 18). If Dhlomo actually drew the name from the 1929 editorial, he consciously linked the brutal labour system in the mines and in the farms.

[50] While the story briefly hints at this fact, the lack of a culprit represents the largest part of Dhlomo's indictment in the article.

texts lies in the fact that the short story, unlike the article, presents the events from the perspective of the miner and protagonist Jama (see Zander 1999: 246).

The last mine stories in *The Sjambok* are "Juwawa" and "Murder on the Mine Dumps", both published in 1930. Yet, unlike Dhlomo's previous *Sjambok* stories, they represent Black miners' political resistance to white authority in a seemingly unsympathetic light. The historical context in the US may have provided Dhlomo with the content for his more political stories. The first decades of the twentieth century in the United States saw a series of major labour uprisings and strikes in the country's coal mines organized by the United Mine Workers of America. The events were portrayed in several fictional works, such as Upton Sinclair's novel *King Coal* (1917). However, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), who preserved the interests of the middle class, often encouraged African American workers to become strike-breakers (Whatley 1993: 546). Rolfes Dhlomo was probably aware of (and agreed with) the NAACP's views, which were expressed in the association's magazine *The Crisis*, where the works of the Harlem Renaissance writer Langston Hughes appeared. It can be stated with certainty that Dhlomo was in contact with the American writer, for he sent a draft of an unpublished short story to Hughes by the title "The Forgotten Pass" (n. d.).[51] Perhaps, Dhlomo sent his typescript to Hughes for his anthology of short stories by African writers, *An African Treasury* (1960), which he started to plan in the second half of the Fifties – since Dhlomo died in 1971, it is a legitimate hypothesis. The influence of the United States' historical and literary context are thus far-reaching in Dhlomo's English stories.

In "Murder on the Mine Dumps", Sipepo encourages his fellow miners to react violently against white oppression. One night, he gathers his companions for a political meeting where he kills July, a Black worker who had denounced their illegal meetings to the mine's white manager and to the induna. The description of Sipepo, a man with a "bad laugh", sheds light on the narrator's dislike of the character:

> Sipepo glared at them and then spat angrily on the ground. They listened silently. Fear did not allow them to speak. They were mine workers these boys. But from some foolish meetings which they had attended they had been impressed by the idea that they should rise as one man and make the white people feel the pinch, too, as they felt it. They now hated white people. (Dhlomo, R. 1975: 33-34)

[51] This unpublished short story is to be found in the Langston Hughes papers at the Beinecke Library in Yale under the heading "'The Forgotten Pass' [Short Story], typescript, carbon, corrected, n.d.". The document is collected in the section "Writings of Others, 1913-1967", but, unfortunately, there is no indication of the date of composition or of the correspondence between Hughes and Dhlomo. The short story, whose plot is very similar to Dhlomo's own story "Special Pass", published in *The Sjambok* in 1931, is actually an episode of the novel *An African Tragedy* (1928). The first paragraphs of the unpublished short story are taken from the first chapter of *An African Tragedy*, "Evils of Town Life", but the central action corresponds almost literally to the second chapter of the novel, "The Sins of the Fathers". It is possible that the short story was composed after *An African Tragedy*, for the document presents corrections, by Langston Hughes or Rolfes Dhlomo himself, applied to phrases and words that are originally in the text of *An African Tragedy*.

Here, Rolfes Dhlomo depicts a more politicised form of resistance on the part of one Black worker who is not represented as a victim, as in the other mine stories, but as an antihero (Gaylard 2008: 46). Apparently, Dhlomo substitutes the characters of the white manager and of the indunas, usually the villains of his mine stories, with the figure of the African political agitator, while the other Black workers are portrayed in a sympathetic light. "Murder on the Mine Dumps" is introduced by the usual preface that links the fiction with the real world: "[f]or Dingaan's Day we present this powerful story by one of the most sensitive Zulu writers" (Dhlomo, R. 1975: 33). Indeed, the story is both published and set on Dingaan's Day, 16 December, a public holiday that highlighted the divisions within South Africa, particularly in the Twenties and Thirties.[52] For the Afrikaners it represented the victory of the Voortrekkers over the Zulu army led by Dingaan in 1838 during the Battle of Blood River, near the Ncome river in present-day KwaZulu-Natal, but for the African population it was a day of protests and anti-pass demonstrations, organised by the Communist Party of South Africa. Indeed, Sipepo repeats Communist slogans such as "to hell with our exploiters – the capitalists!" and wants "to spread the spirit of burning passes" in the compound on Dingaan's day (34). The narrator's comments, however, implicitly condemn Sipepo's violent resistance to white authority.

"Murder on the Mine Dumps" thus anticipates the fiction of South African writer Peter Abrahams, whose short-story collection *Dark Testament* (1942) will be discussed in chapter three. In particular, Abrahams's second novel *Mine Boy* (1946), published in the year of the African mineworkers' strike, echoes many concerns of Dhlomo's short story. It narrates the political awakening of a rural man, Xuma, who arrives in Johannesburg to work in the mines. Even though Abrahams's *Mine Boy*, and his whole oeuvre more in general, are decidedly more revolutionary and more open to Marxism than Rolfes Dhlomo's New African fictions, a liberal ideology is still at work in Abrahams's novel (Wade 1990: 98).[53] Indeed, Peter Abrahams was an active member of the Communist Party until the mid-Forties, when he embraced a more liberal ethos.

To go back to Dhlomo's mine stories, "Juwawa", written a few months before "Murder on the Mine Dumps", very much complicates the theme of active resistance on the part of Black miners. The text, which can be divided into different sections, begins with a dialogue between the two white managers of the compound, who comment on their colleague's George Garwin's habit of beating his miners, especially Juwawa. The narrative then swiftly shifts to the depiction of Garwin, who keeps on ruminating on his supervisor's warning not to beat his miners, otherwise something uncanny would

[52] See Couzens 1974b: 5: "[t]he newspaper's chronology, or news chronology, was often the direct inspiration for particular works. For instance, 'Dingaan's Day', the 16th of December, frequently inspired particular works. R. R. R Dhlomo has a short story in the magazine *Sjambok* which is a case in point". Most probably, Couzens was thinking of "Murder on the Mine Dumps".

[53] Peter Abrahams was very close to African American writers of the Harlem Renaissance and was in contact with Langston Hughes and W. E. B. Du Bois, among others.

happen to him. The next section mysteriously describes Juwawa's consultation with Keleti, a witchdoctor, while the last paragraphs indirectly recount the death of Garwin under an iron crowbar; an enquiry is held against Juwawa, the main suspect, who, however, is discharged and sacked. The story ends with the following lines: "On his way to the Railway Station he sang; the atmosphere of his song, triumphant, and in the words a singular sentiment. 'Ya, Keleti! Ya, Keleti, that was good advice!' sang Juwawa, the savage" (30).

Already at a first sight, this short story seems much more multi-faceted than the other mine stories by Dhlomo. To begin with, the main protagonist of the episode is a Black collaborator, whereas all the other stories, even "Murder on the Mine Dumps", portray ordinary Black miners, the bottom rung of the social ladder. Moreover, the clue of the action is represented by the encounter with the witchdoctor, thus foregrounding Juwawa's traditional Zulu background and complicating the otherwise straightforward plot of the mine stories. The story's narrative structure, however, represents the most interesting feature. The three main sections of the episode are separated by visual breaks, but the text changes perspective more frequently than what is visually signalled. As Christine Loflin remarks, "[e]ach scene suggests a different context for the plot – even a different understanding of what happens in the plot" (2003: 225). After a very brief introduction by an external omniscient narrator, the point of view of the white miners is foregrounded through dialogue, in which Dhlomo successfully captures their colloquial speech, such as in the use of the adjective "darned" (Dhlomo, R. 1975: 28). Interestingly, whites are here represented sympathetically in their daily acceptance of their work in the mines, "where you never can tell what may happen" (28).[54] Moreover, when the narrator briefly comments on Garwin's lack of sleep using the pronoun "we" (29), he identifies both his white readership and himself with Garwin. Raikes, the white supervisor, warns Garwin that "SOME DARNED THINGS HAPPEN UNDERGROUND!" (29). The capital letters and the final exclamation mark underline the feeling of uncanniness of Raikes, who seems to be afraid of the mines themselves. By way of creating a dichotomy between the world above ground and the world underground, Dhlomo attributes irrational thinking to the white men and exposes them as superstitious, thus reversing the cultural and racist expectations of the time (Loflin 2003: 226).

Almost as in a montage of snapshots, the next scene abruptly shifts to the description of Juwawa, who bears the marks of Garwin's beatings. While the previous section mostly consists of dialogue, the representation of Juwawa's encounter with the witchdoctor Keleti – the narrative centre of the whole story – is entirely conveyed through an external narrator. The narrative voice's point of view, however, is limited. It only describes Keleti's rite and his actions, but it never provides readers with an explanation or an insight into the role of the witchdoctor:

[54] Loflin compares Dhlomo's representation of the white miners' behaviour to D. H. Lawrence's (2003: 225, 227).

> The aged one, seated on a low boulder, was idly tossing the bones into a small circle traced in the dust before him. From the filthy folds of a piece of knotted linen which he had at last succeeded in untying, Juwawa now withdrew a gold 10s. coin. Dropping it into the circle where it lay glittering besides the bones, he stood eagerly watching the wizard. (29)

If on the one hand this narrative strategy creates suspense, on the other hand it exposes the ambiguity of Dhlomo's stance, who seems to distance himself from Juwawa's recourse to a witchdoctor (Loflin 2003: 227). Endorsing this hypothesis, the description of Juwawa, portrayed as an evil man during the ancestral rite, starkly resembles the portrait of Sipepo in "Murder on the Mine Dumps". The narrator reports that "[f]rom the lips of the boss-boy there poured, on a sudden, a torrent of language, a bitter flood of invective and hatred, born of a devouring, vicious desire for vengeance" (Dhlomo, R. 1975: 29). The three adjectives "bitter", "devouring", and "vicious" overtly hint at the narrator's judgement of Juwawa's behaviour. The world of Juwawa and of Keleti appears here as the "underground world" feared by Raikes and, at a first reading, by the narrator himself.

The last paragraph, with another twist of the plot, reports the news of the death of Garwin, and describes the events and the enquiry held against Juwawa:

> Early the following Saturday morning, Cowan, Mine Captain, No. 2 Shaft, walked hurriedly into the Survey Office and enquired for Raikes. […].
> An enquiry was held. Death, it appeared, was due to a terrific blow from an iron crowbar (jumper) which, falling from the top of a stope, had hit the deceased on the back of the skull. (Dhlomo, R. 1975: 30)

In the quoted excerpt, Dhlomo consciously switches to a journalistic tone, as the use of the word "jumper" suggests. When the miner informs Raikes of Garwin's death in direct speech, he reports that "a jumper fell on his neck!"; three lines later, however, the narrator recounts the event using the phrase "iron crowbar", followed by "(jumper)" in parentheses (30). The narrator's paraphrase of the sentence "a jumper fell on his neck" into a higher register and a journalistic tone testifies to Dhlomo's conscious shifts in narrative voice. Following suit, during the description of the enquiry and of the decision to discharge Juwawa, the narrator remains impartial. In this pivotal section of the story, readers are left alone in their judgement of the news of Garwin's death, of the enquiry on Juwawa, and of his subsequent dismissal. Thus, Dhlomo's recourse to a journalistic perspective may be explained by his refusal to provide his white readership with a simplistic, one-sided, and judgemental conclusion.[55] The presence of the narrator starkly returns in the very last lines of the short story, when

[55] It is worth underlining that Juwawa's active role in Garwin's death is never explicitly stated in the text, which remains open to other interpretations (see Loflin 2003: 228).

the Black man is defined "triumphant" and "the savage" – with which the narration poignantly and abruptly ends.[56]

This continuous interchange of scenes, perspectives, and narrative tone is deeply intertwined with the ambiguous content of the story, which remains open to multiple and contrasting interpretations. In this regard, Loflin compares the "fragmentation and playful secretiveness" of "Juwawa" to postmodernist works of writers such as Thomas Pynchon (2003: 229-231). While this comparison may be too far-fetched, still "Juwawa" represents a very interesting case study in the development of Black short fiction in South Africa. Mbulelo Mzamane's anthology of modern Black short stories, *Hungry Flames* (1986), opens with "Juwawa". According to the editor, the story depicts "the merciless exploitation of African mine workers", who "craftily resort to covert resistance, employing every physical and psychological weapon at their disposal" (1986: x-xi). Apparently, Mzamane overlooks the complexity of the tale, only focusing on the element of protest inside "Juwawa". While he rightly foregrounds Juwawa's belonging to the group of the Shangaans, a despised ethnicity even among the discriminated, at the same time Mzamane reduces the significance of "Juwawa" to a violent indictment of working conditions on the mines. In fact, the story reflects Dhlomo's ambivalent position: as a member of the New Africans he wants to criticize the unjust labour system in the mines, but without alienating his (mainly white) readers, or condoning entirely Juwawa's pursuit of revenge (Gaylard 2008: 46). Ultimately, if the narrator in "Juwawa" seems at times to endorse a negative judgment of the protagonist, the implied author that emerges from the short story calls into question the most obvious conclusions and opens up new possibilities of interpretation.

1.3 Tradition, Orality, and Hybridity: The Stories in *The Bantu World*

With its convergence of different themes, the story "Juwawa" also represents the link between the mine-related stories and the texts on traditional Zulu customs, the second most prominent group of narratives after the mine stories. The narratives on Zulu traditions are deeply interrelated, and they show, once again, Dhlomo's non-consistent position: he is torn between the two paradigms of Zulu tradition and modernity, symbolised by the conversion to Christianity. The two stories "Zulu Christian Science" and "The Herbalist", both published in 1930 in *The Sjambok*, are exemplary in this regard, and a comparative analysis of the two texts may shed light on Rolfes Dhlomo's positioning within the debate on tradition and modernity. The story by the oxymoric title "Zulu

[56] Loflin draws a parallel between this ending and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958): "it is parallel to Achebe's ending – readers are supposed to be disturbed by the word *savage* and we must reject it as a misrepresentation of the character of Juwawa" (2003: 229; emphasis in original).

Christian Science" recounts the decision of Swazi to keep praying for his sick wife instead of calling the doctor because he was sure of his faith – "all these people felt sure", the narrator ironically interposes (Dhlomo, R. 1975: 24). Swazi also calls Zulu members of the Zionist Church to pray for his wife Nkosikazi, who, however, does not recover.[57] After hearing his wife's doubts on Christianity, Swazi storms out of the room, only to find her dead upon his return.[58] The narrator's description of the rituals held in Swazi's house by Zionist members overtly hints at their religious fanaticism: "the shepherd told his followers to begin singing. This they did lustily. The shepherd was now in a religious frenzy. His right hand, which held a huge stick adorned with blue ribbons shook and trembled violently" (24). Even though the description of the prayers occupies most of the story, the key to the interpretation of the text lies in the final dialogue between Swazi and his dying wife Nkosikazi. After the shepherd's suggestion that Nkosikazi did not recover because she had not confessed her sins, Swazi "savagely" reproaches his wife, whom he denigratingly calls "woman":

> Fool! Stupid! Do not blaspheme! Did our Lord give medicine to the sick? Did he call doctors for them? He said: "Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church". Give your heart to him before it is too late. Medicines and doctors are signs of our faithlessness and rebellion to Him. (25)

Thus, Swazi and the members of the Zionist Church are represented in their irrational attitude. Dhlomo's implied criticism can be grasped through the irony of the title, which defines religious fanaticism as science. Nkosikazi, Swazi's wife, appears minimised in her role as woman by her husband's words; nonetheless, she is the only figure in the story to whom Dhlomo attributes a rational thinking. As in "Juwawa", readers are left alone in their interpretation of the fiction, and especially of the role of Christianity, for the narrator rarely resorts to didacticism.

Like Nkosikazi, the female protagonist in "The Herbalist", Fikile, is the only character in the story who believes in medicine; she repeatedly pleads with her husband Zizwe not to call Duma, the *inyanga* (witchdoctor or herbalist), to cure her little child. Her opinion is dismissed, and Zizwe calls him. From the point of view of narrative strategy, the construction of the episode is the reverse of "Zulu Christian Science": the crude debate between husband and wife, in the form of dialogue, frames the story. Both Duma's and Zizwe's attitude towards the woman is meant to alienate the readers' sympathy, for the narrator repeatedly describes Zizwe's abusive behaviour using the words "cruel" (32), "fiercely" (31), "terribly" (32). As in "Zulu Christian Science", rare narratorial interventions can be found in "The Herbalist" (see also Gaylard 2008: 51). After Duma's long and obscure rites on

[57] The Zionist Church was one of the separatist sects that took hold in South Africa, and it combined traditional and Christian rituals.

[58] As we shall see, the plot of "Zulu Christian Science" resembles Herbert Dhlomo's "Euthanasia by Prayer" in some respects.

the baby, the woman nonetheless decides to defy her husband's orders, and to take her child to the hospital, where he dies. The story ends with the line "Zizwe beat her so badly the next day that she will soon follow the boy" (33). The "fairly extraordinary" use of the future verb tense suddenly places the text and the narrator in the world of "reality" (Zander 1999: 379). According to Horst Zander, Dhlomo's use of the future responds to his conscious choice of adopting a curtailed fictionality, so that his moral message can be conveyed effortlessly to his readers without resorting to elaborate authorial interventions (379). The short story was republished in *The Bantu World* with a new title, "Duma Kills the Child" (1934), which condemns Duma's tribal rites more explicitly than the generic "The Herbalist".[59]

When comparing "Zulu Christian Science" and "The Herbalist", there is one more detail that needs underlining. In the former, the protagonist Swazi seems educated, since his diction is polished and he can quote the Bible correctly. On the contrary, Zizwe's exclamations are often uttered in Zulu, and his use of English bears traces of Zulu influences. Dhlomo thus directly links the idea of modernity and education with the Christian religion, and the lack of literacy to Zulu rites. Nonetheless – and here lies the significance of "The Herbalist" and "Zulu Christian Science" – the writer still condemns both Christian fanaticism and traditional rites quite explicitly. The two short stories also break ground in their representation of female figures, who, alone, believe in medicine and progressivism.

Dhlomo's other short stories on the theme of traditional customs were all published in *The Bantu World*, and all possess very interesting stylistic features that challenge the Western idea of 'short story', unlike "Zulu Christian Science" and "The Herbalist".[60] The several narrative layers of these stories call for a re-evaluation of Rolfes Dhlomo's short-story writing, especially as far as his oral matrix is concerned. The first of these texts, "Ukugweba" (1932), displays interesting paratextual elements.[61] Its subtitle recites "Cruel Custom of 'Ukugweba' Still Widely Practised Among the Bantu", and it immediately reminds readers of a journalistic subheading.[62] To enhance the factuality of the text, a preface by the editor precedes the story:

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[59] Dhlomo thus buys into coeval colonial propaganda on hygiene and social development in Africa. The movie *Amenu's Child*, for instance, produced by the Gold Coast Film Unit in 1950, describes the death of a sick child after his parents call a medicine man instead of going to a clinic. See the Colonial Film Catalogue: http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/6730.

[60] Apart from the peculiar use of the future tense in the conclusion of "The Herbalist", both fictions are conventionally structured as short stories. For instance, they begin *in medias res*, they are told by an omniscient third-person narrator, they present extensive dialogue and flashbacks, and end with a climactic conclusion.

[61] Through *ukugweba*, a witchdoctor removes a small amount of blood from children to protect their future moral conduct from bad influences. On their own sons, however, witchdoctors perform the rite of *ukugcaba*, that is they rub some medicinal herbs on their children's skin to influence their behaviour negatively.

[62] Dhlomo had published a series of articles on Zulu customs with a similar title/subtitle in the month preceding the publication of Ukugweba: "A Cruel Zulu Custom" (2 July 1932) and "Isihlambezo – A Cruel Custom Once Practised by the Bantu" (23 July 1932). Couzens does not mention the existence of these articles in his otherwise detailed introduction

> In a covering letter to the Editor, Mr Dhlomo, who is known to readers of *The Bantu World* as an interesting writer on Bantu Customs, states that just a few months ago he actually saw a Christian married couple putting their nine-months-old child through the rite of "Ukugweba". The grim *story* dealing with this custom which the writer starts in *articles* printed below, will be concluded in next week's issue. (in Dhlomo, R. 1975: 39; emphasis added)

This preface, like all the prefaces that we have discussed until now, stresses the documentary value of the recounted story. The use of both the words "story" and "articles" is textual evidence of the ambiguity regarding the generic classification of "Ukugweba". The piece, moreover, is printed in *The Bantu World*'s section titled "News and Special Feature Articles", together with factual news and advertising (see figure 1.2).

Dhlomo opens his text with the maxim "[s]uperstitious beliefs die hard" (1975: 40), after which the narrator explains rather factually the finality of the rite of *ukugweba* (to prevent children from becoming evil) and its difference from the rite of *ukugcaba* (when a witchdoctor performs witchcraft on his own children). After this introduction, the 'I' of the narrator/journalist appears in the story: "To prove this claim, I will quote the actual words of a modern witchdoctor which will also serve to pave the way for the grim story I am about to relate" (40); the quotation from the witchdoctor follows, with the details of the time and place of his utterance.[63] After this introductory section, the "grim story" begins, and the first-person narrator disappears to give way to a third-person omniscient narrative voice. The first lines of "Ukugweba" and its context of publication thus pose interesting challenges to the sensibility of twenty-first-century Western readers, as Zanders observes:

> Does he [Dhlomo] want to say that he is telling a fictional story to illustrate the factual issue discussed in the introduction, or does he intend to indicate that the story, however fictional it may sound, is authentic? It remains uncertain whether the text offers an exemplary story, which is representative of similar events, or whether it refers to a particular case. (Zander 1999: 410)

to the edition of Dhlomo's short stories, even though they possess the same degree of fictionality as "Ukugweba". See Zander (1999: 243-246).

[63] When Dhlomo claims that the words of the "modern witchdoctor" were uttered at a meeting in "Doornfontein, Johannesburg, one Saturday night not so long ago" (1975: 40), he is probably "referring to an actual meeting of which he had read in the newspaper" (Skikna 1984: 311).

NEWS AND SPECIAL FEATURE ARTICLES

TRAINED BANTU AND COLOURED NURSES NEEDED

Forty Non-European Nurses Are Already In Municipal Service And The Majority Of Them Give Full Satisfaction

Mid-Wives Also In Great Demand

(By Professor Edgar H. Brookes)

The South African Institute of Race Relations organised recently a most interesting and useful Conference on the subject of the training of Bantu and Coloured nurses. At this conference were represented the Union Health Department, the administration of the Bechuanaland Protectorate, the Natal Provincial Administration, the Municipalities of Johannesburg, Bloemfontein, Kimberley, Durban, East London and Port Elizabeth, five Hospital Boards, the S.A. Trained Nurses Association, the S.A. National Council for Child Welfare,, three local Child Welfare Societies, the National Council of Women and the Wayfarers. The Chair was taken by Mr. Rheinallt Jones, Adviser to the S.A. Institute of Race Relations. Mr. Rheinallt Jones had collected a great deal of valuable information in advance for the Conference, and it is chiefly due to him that so much success was attained.

A similar Conference will, it is hoped, meet in 1933 to carry on the good work thus begun; but something has already been achieved. The statistics laid before those attending showed that already forty non-European nurses (thirty-four Bantu and six Coloured) are employed by twenty-two different Municipalities. Thirty-four of these nurses were giving full satisfaction, four were doing fairly well, and only two were unsatisfactory--a remarkably good record at this stage. Many Municipalities hope to introduce non-European nurses when times improve, and some who have already been using their services hope to increase their numbers. The biggest need at the present moment is for trained midwives. It should not be the case that Cities with thousands of Bantu women living in them should have no trained Bantu midwives.

Very few African Nurses are employed as Staff Nurses in the non-European wards of Hospitals. The Conference felt that in this way and as staff Nurses in Mission Hospitals and School Nurses in Boarding Schools scope could be found for many more qualified women than are being employed at present.

An interesting experiment is being carried out at Bloemfontein, where there is a crèche for non-European babies in the Location. Crèches of this kind in the hands of capable Bantu or Coloured Nurses trained in mothercraft should be of real value to mothers and children alike.

The latest statistics show that fifty-seven non-European women are training for the General Nursing Certificate of the Medical Council, and twenty-five for the Midwifery Certificate. These Certificates are of exactly the same standard as those required for European Nurses. One hundred and twenty-five are getting a partial training at Mine, Mission and small-town Hospitals, for which they are given a "Hospital Certificate." This Certificate is of a lower standard than that required for European Nurses, and is not generally accepted, but the Conference felt that a partial training of this kind might be very useful for both men and women who might be registered as "Health Workers" and as such be extremely useful in Reserves and outlying Native areas where fully qualified Nurses would find it difficult to make a living.

The needs of the Bantu population of our towns and of the Reserves are great. Qualified nursing is definitely called for, and it is much to be wished that fuller facilities existed both for training and for employing Bantu women in this honourable and useful profession One of the most important points to be borne in mind is preventive work---the dissemination of sound ideas of hygiene, and the care of babies so as to save them from disease, deformity and death in the early months of their life. It is a great pity that (as is actually the case) some hospitals equipped for training Bantu Nurses are not actually doing so. It is a pity, too, that some Municipalities are failing in their duties in this respect.

Native leaders and workers should bear these points in mind, and should among other things study "Health" the useful magazine published at Lovedale on medical and hygienic matters. Health is not a very wonderful subject for a political address, but it is fundamentally important to the Native people.

Cruel Custom of "Ukugweba" Still Widely Practised Among The Bantu

(In a covering letter to the Editor, Mr. Dhlomo, who is known to readers of The Bantu World as an interesting writer on Bantu Customs, states that just a few months ago he actually saw a Christian married couple putting their nine-months-old child through the rite of "Ukugweba." The grim story dealing with this custom which the writer starts in articles printed below, will be concluded in next week's issue---The Editor).

(By R. R. R. Dhlomo)

Superstitious beliefs die hard. The twentieth century finds most Natives, the educated as well as the ignorant, still clinging to the rite of 'ukugweba' for their children very early in life. The 'ukugweba' is the process of 'letting out' blood from a young child's body in a way which cannot be fully described here owing to its delicate nature. Natives maintain that this custom relieves the system from storing superfluous blood which would subsequently pervert the moral tendencies of the child. Even in the grim past chiefs laid down fast rules that all children should be treated thus so as to minimise the risk of their becoming morally depraved. The witch-doctors, who knew something about the circulation of the blood, instead of conforming to this law of the land, did something else to their children.

They invariably performed this evil operation on their male offspring. They made peculiar incisions, that is, 'ukugcaba,' on their sons' backs, close to the left shoulder blade, and into these cuts rubbed some powders possessed of virulent properties. These were said to have a demoralising effect, and the purpose was to ensure that after their fathers' deaths, the sons should be witch-doctors too. To prove this claim, I will quote the actual words of a modern witch-doctor which will also serve to pave the way for the grim story I am about to relate :

"The foundation of medical science is this. You undress the patient and cut him razor and rub certain poisons into the wounds. These drugs permeate through his veins and so strengthen his physique." These words, as I have said, were uttered by one of the witch-doctors who had gathered in force at Doornfontein, Johannesburg, one Saturday night not long ago, to prove their claims to be considered "healers, seers, and diviners of events yet sealed in the womb of time."

There is more than meets the eye in this 'cutting and rubbing poisons into the wounds of a person by a witch-doctor. Behind the deed lies horror and a deadly danger if the witch-doctor in attendance means to injure the person treated.

A young Zulu man was once brought before his chief on a charge of murder. His victim was a witch-doctor. The young man's parents were regarded suspiciously by their neighbours, it being an open secret that they were practising witch-craft. Their son, Silo, however, grew up in ignorance of that fact. He soon became a full-blooded young man, nothing distinguishing him from others until he reached manhood ; when he suddenly changed and developed an uncanny fondness for going about brandishing his assegais in the faces of all who dared to question his superiority. The slightest provocation would make him grip his assegai in a very threatening attitude. His outlook in life became distorted and utterly vindictive. He showed a marked contempt for all authority ; and he was more than once heard to say that he would one day bathe his assegais in the bloods of the chief. Silo's notorious escapade were a source of terror to all who knew him. He went on and on in that mad way until the devil in his heart said :- "Murder someone!" And he obeyed...

(To be concluded next week.)

Figure 1.2. First instalment of Rolfes Dhlomo's "Ukugweba" in *The Bantu World* (13 August 1932).

The narrator then goes to great pains to tell the story of Silo, a witchdoctor's son who becomes a serial murderer. When he is sentenced for murder, he accuses his father, who put him through the wrong rite when he was a child, performing *ukugcaba* instead of *ukugweba*. As a consequence, Silo's father kills himself. The structure of the story is simple, with flat characterisation and inexistent in-depth analysis of the characters' psychology, and the description of setting is also kept to a minimum. Authorial intrusions, on the contrary, are easily detectable. When the witchdoctor approaches the village of Silo, the narrator tells readers that Silo was warned by his sixth sense; the narrative voice further adds, however, that "[i]t is remarkable that this sense did not warn the doctor too" (Dhlomo, R. 1975: 41). The underlying irony of this sentence matches the narrator's final remark that "needless to say", "Silo's father […] was gathered to the fate he so richly deserved" (43). Even though the voice of the first-person narrator/the journalist Dhlomo in the introductory part does not return in the subsequent fictional text, still the intrusive third-person narrator of the second part of "Ukugweba" endorses the opinion of the journalist Dhlomo (see Zander 1999: 409).

In this way, the maxim opening the short story/article, "superstitious beliefs die hard", is confirmed by both the factual introduction and the ensuing rather sketchy short story. It is worth noticing that the tendency of using proverbs to demonstrate a moral concept is typical of the short stories of Rolfes Dhlomo – see, for instance, "The Sins of the Fathers", "Bought and Paid For", "The End of the Farce" – but also of his brother Herbert. This strategy serves a twofold aim: on the one hand, the story represents a "master-narrative of progress and enlightenment", which can be linked to missionary discourse (Gaylard 2008: 51); on the other hand, the use of proverbs foregrounds Dhlomo's oral matrix and Zulu background (see Skikna 1984: 123-127). The publication history of "Ukugweba" supports the idea of the moral short story/article to educate readers. Indeed, the story, which was published in three instalments, presents three different prefaces for the three weekly issues. While the second editorial preface starkly resembles the first foreword, the last preface sums the story up, at the same time providing readers with subtle hints at how to interpret the story:

> The story of Silo, who grew up in an atmosphere of witchcraft and superstition, later to become a murderer, which the writer tells in connection with the evil operation of 'Ukugweba', is concluded below. Silo's first victims were all women, whose bodies he mutilated terribly.[64]

The words "witchcraft", "superstition", "evil", and "terribly" all point to the condemnation of the rite of *ukugweba*.

I would argue, however, that this short story/article is not as easy and straightforward to decode as it may appear at a first sight. Indeed, the story of Silo seems to condemn the rite of *ukugcaba*, and this is also confirmed by the concluding words of Silo's chief, who punishes Silo's father "as a

[64] Editorial preface to the third instalment of "Ukugweba", *The Bantu World*, 27 August 1932.

warning to all parents against neglecting to perform the rite of 'ukugweba' upon their children" (Dhlomo, R. 1975: 43). Thus, if read alone, the second, more fictional part of Dhlomo's story actually represents an indictment against witchdoctors and their practice of *ukugcaba*, while at the same time, according to the chief's words, it implicitly endorses the traditional rite of *ukugweba*. The presence of the paratextual elements (title, subtitle, and the three prefaces) and of the factual introduction, however, clearly state that the short story is critical of the rite of *ukugweba*, and that this should be the actual 'teaching' for readers of *The Bantu World*. This may suggest a possible difference of opinion between Dhlomo and *The Bantu World* editor, the mission-educated African intellectual R. V. Selope Thema. Dhlomo's ambivalent stance towards the traditional rite of *ukugweba*, moreover, is indicative of his progressive embrace of African traditions in the *Bantu World* stories, which would culminate in his later works in Zulu (Sithole 2021: 33).

The other short stories on Zulu customs display similar complex traits, especially as far as their generic classification and narrative layers are concerned. There is one short story in particular which bears traces of the oral tradition of Rolfes Dhlomo. "The Death of Manembe", published on 24 June 1933, begins with the following lines:

> There are many strange things which happened in this world which, if we spoke about them today, we would be called mad men, Maweni was speaking. When they took place those days we were not surprised, for we lived in troublous times.
> For instance, the strange events which took place before the death of Manembe of the clan of Gewensa, who would believe them now? (Dhlomo, R. 1975: 49)

The story is told to an audience by Maweni, who remains unknown to the readers and who tellingly uses the first-person plural pronoun and the typical markers of oral narratives. Furthermore, the story is very short, it is composed of brief, paratactic sentences, and it presents instances of left dislocations as in the last line of the quoted excerpt. Dhlomo thus transposes onto the written text the modality of oral narratives. While the fictional narrator Maweni recounts the events that led to the death of Manembe, the presence of the frame narrator can be surmised from the two framing phrases "Maweni was speaking" (49) and "concluded Maweni" (50), at the beginning and end of the narrative respectively. Thus, "The Death of Manembe" presents the formal features of the sub-genre of the oral-style short story identified by MacKenzie (1999), and it is perhaps the only short story of the edition by Couzens that re-proposes the conventions of oral narratives in a written modality.

When referring to Dhlomo's stories, both Zander's and MacKenzie's analyses use the concept of the oral matrix in South Africa – albeit their opinions are divergent. According to Zander, traditional storytelling is highly enacted in the short stories by Rolfes Dhlomo, since didacticism, formulaic phrasing and a curtailed fictional world are a typical heritage of oral narratives, where fictional and factual modes are intertwined (Zander 1999: 376-377). Thus, the critic interprets the

ambiguous literariness of Rolfes Dhlomo's texts not as a flaw, but as a marker of oral storytelling (Zander 1999: 379). Mackenzie, instead, contends that the emergent Black South African fiction of the late Twenties, including Rolfes Dhlomo, relied on Western realist/modernist models (MacKenzie 1999: 179). The main features of the oral-style short story are the presence of an internal narrator recounting an embedded tale and the literary imitation of oral speech, so that the telling, and not the event, is foregrounded (180). According to MacKenzie, Rolfes Dhlomo's short fiction often shares the subject matter with African folktales, but its narrative style relies on Western traditions (186).

The critical points of the two scholars situate themselves at two extremes of a spectrum on the role played by the oral tradition of storytelling for the development of the genre of the short story – Western in origin – in South Africa by Black writers. In her essay "South African Short Fiction and Orality", Zoë Wicomb harshly criticises the "widely favoured theory that the short story is the natural postcolonial form to succeed a Black tradition of story-telling" (Wicomb 2001: 157). According to her, the genre of the short story is emblematic of cultural fracture rather than of a linear development from the oral tradition of storytelling (2001: 170). The short stories by Rolfes Dhlomo are emblematic of this "cultural fracture" and of the material conditions of the Black writer in South Africa in the Thirties, I believe.[65] Indeed, his narratives are written according to Western conventions *and* to the legacy of traditional storytelling.

Apart from its style, "The Death of Manembe" is interesting also from the point of view of content. While it may be linked to the stories on Zulu customs because it describes the death of a witchdoctor (the eponymous Manembe), it is in fact a historical short story, depicting attested events. Manembe was indeed the witchdoctor of Cetshwayo (1826-1884), who became king of the Zulus in 1873. More specifically, the short story recounts the conflict between the two, which led to Manembe's death. When Manembe discovered that his king did not tell him of his son's death, he reacted angrily; the king's indunas, worried for the king's safety, killed Manembe, and the latter died cursing the reign of Cetshwayo. The recounted event, historically valid, is narrated with a focus on Manembe's perspective throughout the story. Rolfes Dhlomo's historical novel in Zulu, *U-Cetshwayo* (1952), indeed narrates the same episode from the same perspective (see Skikna 1984: 310; Canonici and Cele 1998: 85). Because of the parallelism with the historical novel, Couzens remarks that "The Death of Manembe" is "not strictly fiction", but, rather, "more history than fiction" (1975b: 6).

"The Death of Manembe" resembles another historical short story by Dhlomo, "The Murder of Shaka September 24, 1828", published in *The Bantu World* in the section "Special Story Page" on

[65] Wicomb draws on Raymond Williams's theories to discuss the materiality of writing in South Africa (see 2001: 158-159).

the same day, 24 September 1932.[66] Zander defines it as "the very first black South African historical short story – or not a fictional story at all" (1999: 323). Like "The Death of Manembe", "The Murder of Shaka" is also directly linked to Dhlomo's subsequent historical novel in Zulu, *U-Shaka* (1937), where he devotes a whole chapter to Shaka's death by the hands of his bodyguard Mbopha and his half-brothers Dingane and Mhlangana (see Skikna 1984: 284-286).[67] Except for its content, however, "The Murder of Shaka" does not represent a transposition from an oral narrative. The story is narrated by an external omniscient narrator in the past tense, with some instances of historical present tense at the beginning of the story and in its climax to convey a sense of immediacy to readers. Dhlomo extensively inserts dialogue to dramatize the account of the death of the great Zulu king, in particular during the representation of the murderers' conspiracy and in the conclusion. Furthermore, Shaka's dying speech is a quotation taken from Julius Caesar (Zander 1999: 323). Thus, the account of the murder of Shaka is presented through fictional techniques. External elements also enhance the fictionality of the text, for "The Murder of Shaka" appeared in the column "Special Story Page" – whereas the other pieces of short prose by Dhlomo were published under the sections "News and Special Feature Articles" or "Special Feature Articles".[68]

Hence, "The Death of Manembe" and "The Murder of Shaka", although representative of historical events, can be defined 'short stories' more than other short pieces by Dhlomo. In both narratives authorial intrusions are kept to a minimum, several strategies pertaining specifically to fiction can be identified, and, above all, no stylistic features typical of journalism are to be found. Dhlomo's often ambiguous opinions and stance, moreover, seem to be reconciled in his appreciation and re-proposal of the world of Zulu culture and history. It would be interesting to know why Couzens decided not to include "The Murder of Shaka" in his edition of Dhlomo's short stories. He may have judged the text as 'too historical' for inclusion in an anthology of short stories.[69]

The last short story belonging to the series of texts on Zulu customs is "Dumela Defies Lightning", published on 25 August 1934. As is the case with several short stories of this group, the eponymous protagonist, Dumela, is a witchdoctor, and, specifically, a lightning doctor.[70] The short story describes, in the present tense, Dumela's fight against the lightnings of the storm in front of his

[66] Under the rule of Shaka (1787-1828), the Zulu empire became extremely powerful.
[67] E. A. Ritter's volume *Shaka Zulu: The Rise of the Zulu Empire* (1955), the best-known factual historical account of the life of Shaka, is consistent with both Dhlomo's short story and novel in the depiction of the murder of Shaka (Zander 1999: 324).
[68] Zander remarks that the "Special Story Page" was newly introduced in the newspaper in the issue of 24 September 1932 (1999: 324). In fact, it is the only time in which it appears in the issues of 1932, the year of the foundation of *The Bantu World*.
[69] In the introduction to the stories, Couzens defines "The Death of Manembe" "not strictly fiction" and "more history than fiction". It is included in the anthology only to "parallel" Dhlomo's novels on Zulu kings (1975b: 6).
[70] A lightning doctor features also in "Magic in a Zulu Name", published by Dhlomo in *The Bantu World* a year before, in 1933.

kraal, where his children and wife witness the curious happening. If the opening of "Dumela Defies Lightning" is consistent with the conventions of fiction and of the short story – the text begins *in medias res* with an onomatopoeia, followed by dialogue – after less than one page the story swiftly switches to the "expository style" of an objective reportage (Gaylard 2008: 52):

> This was not the only way to fight lightning among the Zulus of old. Another, but less impressive way was that of fixing at strategic points around the hut, the "boys of the lightning". These "boys" were specially "doctored" sticks which had been treated beforehand with lightning resisting herbal preparations. […]. It was only when the assaults of the lightning proved almost restless that the "doctor" thought it expedient to challenge it himself as we've described. (Dhlomo, R. 1975: 51)

Apparently, the introductory, fictional piece only serves the aim of proving the factual claims of the second and most prominent part of the short story. There, the character of Dumela returns only once, very briefly, to illustrate a point, but the actual protagonist is the first-person narrator (journalist?) who explains to readers the various rites through which Zulu witchdoctors 'fight' lightning. "Dumela Defies Lightning" is indeed a newspaper article, with a brief fictional inset to exemplify some points, as proved also by the temporal markers in the text, such as "at this moment" (50), "now", and "to-day" (51). The concluding remark of the narrator that the piece can be "interesting in view of the approach of Summer with its lightning tragedies" (51) leaves few doubts as regards the status of the text. It addresses a specific time located in the real world, of which readers are also aware – the article was published at the end of August in South Africa, so that the phrase "the approach of Summer" can refer to the actual seasons.

Dhlomo's apparent factuality, however, is far from objective reporting. He also inserts some markers of oral narration in his story, such as "it is indeed true", "it is said" (50), "some say", "they say" (51). Far from foregrounding his traditional background, these vague phrases allow Dhlomo to implicitly distance himself from the custom he describes. The trenchant irony of the inverted commas in the following excerpt is indeed difficult to overlook:

> These modern "inyangas" are even credited with uncanny powers of destroying their enemies by lightning at anytime of the night or day. The remarkable thing about this "evil" is that these "doctors" do not have to wait until a real storm brews. No. They manufacture their own vindictive storm which lasts as long as its victim remains alive. (Dhlomo, R. 1975: 51)

Thus, several shifting perspectives and contrastive narrative styles can be found among the six stories belonging to the thematic group on traditional customs (see Gaylard 2008: 52). "Ukugweba" and "Dumela Defies Lightning" starkly call into question Couzens's categorisation of the pieces as short stories;[71] "Death of Manembe" and "Magic in a Zulu Name" are structured as frame narratives

[71] See also Zander's comment regarding "Dumela Defies Lightning": "[…] it is inevitable that an anthologist like Couzens is asking for trouble when he attempts to categorize such a text as either a fictional or factual piece. […]. On the other

and present various markers of orality. "Zulu Christian Science" and "The Herbalist", instead, are more conventional in style – even though the conclusion of the latter anticipates some trends of Dhlomo's later stories. This may not be a coincidence, for these two stories were originally published in *The Sjambok*, and not in *The Bantu World*.[72] Dhlomo's condemnation of traditional witchdoctors and religious fanaticism is expressed more explicitly in the two stories published in *The Sjambok*, while his opinion on tribal rites in the *Bantu World* stories is not as settled (see Couzens 1975b: 6; Skikna 1984: 307). At the same time, the two historical short stories are textual proof of Rolfes Dhlomo's desire to retrieve the history of the Zulus and endow it with new dignity. Ultimately, the short stories published in *The Bantu World*, which, unlike Dhlomo's fictions on mining in *The Sjambok*, "are not political in the stricter sense […] nevertheless display important political features" (Zander 1999: 243).[73]

1.4 The Jim-Comes-to-Joburg Stories

Except for "Zulu Christian Science" and "The Herbalist", female characters appear only marginally in the two groups of stories discussed in the preceding paragraphs. Their presence, however, starkly characterises the remaining short stories by Rolfes Dhlomo, which all deal with the evils of city life according to the Jim-comes-to-Joburg trope. A gendered perspective marks in particular the last three texts in Couzens's edition, all published in 1938: "Janet and her Past", "May Plays with Love", and "Maggie's Married Life". Starting from the issue of the 1 October 1932, the "Women's Section" appeared in *The Bantu World*, with articles and/or stories written by a "Lady Correspondent"; from 1935, Dhlomo became the editor of the women's page, which, according to Couzens, "was a clear symptom of the aspiration of black elite families to white middle-class status" (1975b: 4). Three years later, Rolfes Dhlomo would begin writing short stories and sketches that explore "women's issues" and that are written according to the conventions of popular romance. The fact that Dhlomo himself was editor of the women's section reflects the hegemony of men in the field of journalism, and, more generally, the patriarchal outlook of the South African society (Gaylard 2008: 48-49). "Janet and Her Past", for instance, recounts the story of damnation and redemption of Janet, who does not know how

hand, often the classification of works by an editor or an author contributes to the abolition of the distinction between the modes" (1984: 412).

[72] Both stories, however, were reprinted in *The Bantu World* in 1934: "Zulu Christian Science" reappeared as "The Shepherd of Mount Zion" (31 March 1934) and "The Herbalist" as "Duma Kills the Child" (28 April 1934). This is a significant detail, for it confirms the assumption that the editorial committee of *The Bantu World* was interested in a series of pieces on Zulu customs. None of the other short stories published by Dhlomo in *The Sjambok* has been reprinted in the Black newspaper.

[73] The stories and articles on the mines, instead, are political in the stricter sense of the word, as the repeated use of pseudonyms on the part of Dhlomo testifies – given that these short stories were almost all published in a white-owned weekly newspaper.

to escape from her aggressive lover, until her husband saves her. In the three stories published in Couzens's edition, women are represented in their stereotypical gender roles, in need of men's guidance and advice. Arguably, this group of short stories is the least interesting accomplishment in the field of prose writing by Dhlomo, especially from a formal point of view.[74]

While the three texts on women's issues are scarcely elaborate, since they are patently directed at a female readership with the mere aim of giving advice to women, Dhlomo's remaining stories on the evils of city life are more complex, even though female characters only emerge as victims. In this aspect, they may remind readers of *An African Tragedy*. Indeed, "The Sins of the Fathers" takes the title from one of the chapters of *An African Tragedy* – it was published in *The Sjambok* only one year after the novel's publication. Prefaced by the editor's claim that this short story may shed new light on the "native problem", "The Sins of the Fathers" begins with a dialogue between Milia and her mother, who discuss Milia's status of "erring woman" (Dhlomo, R. 1975: 19). After a visual pause, a flashback presents the background to the story: Milia, "like most of these dancing native girls […] had thought it too slow and childish to have one lover" (19). Thus, after marrying Mashosha, she continues to see her lover Beaver. When Mashosha discovers the affair, he punishes Milia by beating her and by bringing his new lover to their house. The end of the story is highly dramatic: Milia dies after giving birth to a dead child, and Mashosha suffers from a sexual disease.

Here, Dhlomo seems to endorse the editor's view of the Jim-comes-to-Joburg pattern, for all the Black characters of the episode seem unable to cope with the modernity of Johannesburg, and their 'unchristian' life leads them to their own ruin. Unsurprisingly, Rolfes Dhlomo harshly criticised the attractions of the 'fast life' epitomised by Johannesburg – jazz and modern music, alcohol, shebeen culture, promiscuous behaviour – in several of his articles both in *The Sjambok* and *Ilanga Lase Natal* (see Couzens 1975b: 5-6). The exemplarity of "The Sins of the Fathers", which echoes the themes of *An African Tragedy*, is upheld also by the presence of a Zulu proverb inside the story. When Milia's mother admits having had many lovers herself in her youth, the narrator intervenes with the Zulu proverb "'*Injalo impuma edunjini*' ('a child follows his parents' footsteps')" (Dhlomo, R. 1975: 21).[75] The way that marital relationships are treated in "The Sins of the Fathers", moreover,

[74] The women's section and Dhlomo's stories in *The Bantu World* may remind readers of the women's section and some short stories in *Drum*. While Gaylard (2008: 50) compares Themba's romances such as "Passionate Stranger" and "Forbidden Love" to the last three short stories by Dhlomo in Couzens's edition, I would rather relate them to short sketches such as "Baby Come Duze", also by Themba. Even if the romantic theme is very much present in "Passionate Stranger" and "Forbidden Love", their nuanced characterisation and refined style differ from Dhlomo's three moralistic sketches on women's issues.

[75] Even if the presence of the proverb and the highly moralistic aspect of "The Sins of the Fathers" may be linked to Dhlomo's oral matrix, I would oppose Zander's absolutist claim that "[t]his text obviously complies in all respects with the conventions of oral presentation" (1999: 378). As we have seen, stories such as "The Death of Manembe" attempt at transposing traditional oral narratives into a written mode far more successfully.

anticipates Can Themba's celebrated story "The Suit" (1963) (see also Gaylard 2008: 48) and, I would suggest, also Herbert Dhlomo's "He Forgave Her".

To go back to the story, Mashosha's description as a man whose "eyes shone with that wild light that springs from a man's body burnt by vicious drinks" (Dhlomo, R. 1975: 20) corresponds to the depiction of the male protagonist in "Bought and Paid For" (16 May 1930), even though the story is a reverse of the Jim-comes-to-Joburg trope. Mali, the protagonist, is a tribal man who comes back from Johannesburg to his kraal, where he marries the Christian Nanana. Mali is described as a "big, ugly looking man, with evil eyes" (21), and he despises and mistreats Nanana because she was educated in the missions and, therefore, had learnt the "ways of the white people" (22). If their marriage tragically ends with Nanana's insanity, the short story tellingly closes with "the hidden truth" of a proverb ("there is no peace for the wicked") (23). Again, Dhlomo uses proverbs to prove a moral axiom. The text suggests a causal association between the evils of Johannesburg, where Mali comes from, and the evil of the protagonist (Skikna 1984: 184). This association, however, is complicated by Dhlomo's adoption of a rural setting, which allows him to expose also the backwardness of the rural custom of *ilobolo* (bride price), which confines Nanana to the role of victim in her marriage. The conflation of themes in "Bought and Paid For" testifies to Dhlomo's stance as a New African intellectual: his Christian education leads him to criticise both the modern ways of the city, deemed as immoral, and several of the traditional customs, considered backward.

Dhlomo attempts to distance himself from Black uneducated characters in this group of stories. Nevertheless, the writer's stance may have been also influenced by the venue of publication, the white-owned *Sjambok*. Indeed, not all of his stories on the evils of city life represent an indictment towards rural uneducated Black men. For example, "The End of the Farce", tellingly published in *The Bantu World*, deals with the theme of Jim comes to Joburg from an unusual perspective, because the character of 'Jim' is white. In Johannesburg, the Reverend Blocker is "fed up with the whole farce" and "hate[s] self-conceited Natives who think they can teach us a thing or two about how they should be spoken to or treated" (Dhlomo, R. 1975: 43-44). Consequently, he denies Mlilo, one of his Black preachers, the opportunity to pursue his studies at Fort Hare, even though he had promised the contrary to the man;[76] desperate, Mlilo kills himself in the presence of the intransigent Rev. Blocker, whose surname may be thus interpreted allegorically. The first part of the story focuses on Mrs. Blocker's shame for her husband's behaviour, which she ascribes to "the corroding influences of a great city" (44). In this way, Dhlomo undermines the stereotype according to which only rural and

[76] The South African Native College, later the University of Fort Hare, was founded in 1916 near Alice, in the Eastern Cape. Western-oriented and based on the precepts of Christianity, the college was attended by the African elite throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Figures such as Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, and Can Themba graduated from Fort Hare.

uneducated Blacks could fall prey to the evils of city life. Secondly, when Reverend Blocker cannot fall asleep because he is tormented by his actions, the narrator comments that "it is true that 'there is no peace to the wicked'" (44). The same proverb was used to describe Nanana's father in "Bought and Paid For". Thus, "The End of the Farce" is textual evidence of the fact that Dhlomo's highly moralizing attitude also applies to white men, even if they are missionaries. Arguably, Dhlomo could not have possibly published "The End of the Farce", where he defines a white member of the clergy "Judas of old" (45), in *The Sjambok*, directed specifically at a middle-class white readership.

1.5 Shifting Publishing Contexts

Dhlomo's accomplishments in short fiction, and particularly his stories set on the mines or dealing with Zulu customs, epitomise the complexity and multiplicity that characterise the generation of the New Africans in general, and Dhlomo's literary oeuvre more specifically. Even though the writer's style shifts remarkably from one group of stories to the other – and even within the same group – these short texts share one characteristic: their claim to authenticity and their generic hybridity, which points to many interesting connections with journalism. The short stories on the mines all display marked fictional traits, since they are all written in the third person and in the past tense, they begin *in medias res*, and are mainly composed of dialogue (usually in Fanagalo). Some of these fictional devices, however, are also to be found in most of the articles on the mines that Couzens included in his edition of Dhlomo's short stories, where the 'I' of Dhlomo appears only once in the introduction to one of the articles, "The Compound Induna and Compound Interest". In an almost reverse pattern, Dhlomo's texts on traditional Zulu customs can rarely be categorised as short stories in the Western sense of the term, especially as far as "Ukugweba" and "Dumela Defies Lightning" are concerned.

It is arguable that the various contexts of publication played a pivotal role in shaping Dhlomo's short stories differently. While still working for *The Sjambok* under the supervision of the white editor Stephen Black, he wrote narratives that drew from a Western idea of what a short story should be. Apart from the insertion of Fanagalo, Dhlomo's mine stories do not differ so much in terms of form from the other stories published in *The Sjambok*.[77] Yet, when Dhlomo started publishing his pieces on Zulu customs in *The Bantu World*, his style changed remarkably:

> The way Dhlomo switched from a factual to a fictional treatment of the same topic indicates once more that the author regarded fictional discourse merely as another and more effective way of conveying information on his subject, not, however, as a separate mode aimed at altogether different goals. […]. Not surprisingly, in this series he presented texts which do not reveal whether they are fictional or factual but tend to abolish such a distinction and hence appear rather as "factional" pieces. (Zander 1999: 129)

[77] See, for instance, the short story "Lola" by Rosalind Spotswood Malan published on 9 August 1929 in *The Sjambok*. This narrative resembles Dhlomo's stories on the evils of city life stylistically and thematically.

When skimming the pages of the issues of *The Bantu World* of the year 1932, it is worth considering that Dhlomo's hybrid pieces did not constitute an exception but were rather the norm. Of note are the short stories/articles by A. S. Vil-Nkomo, "A Genius' Life Destroyed in Gaol" (22 and 29 October 1932) and "The Adopted Son" (3 December 1932). As in Dhlomo's texts, factual details are mixed with fictional techniques. It is also worth noticing the subtitle of a piece published on 19 November 1932 by a certain S. M. Stanley-Silwana: the title "Mteto Becomes a Criminal" is followed by the telling line "Facts in Fiction", thus confirming a widespread trend in early Black South African short prose published in newspapers (see also Zander 1999: 360-363). It was also the structure of *The Bantu World* itself, its "generic, stylistic and ideological eclecticism" (Sandwith 2018: 21), that encouraged the intermingling of articles and short stories. Indeed, the section "Special Features Articles", where these short stories were published, included articles and editorials in the strictest sense. On the same section, for example, a column titled "The History of the Bantu" made its first appearance on the issue of 10 September 1932, and continued in various instalments; these pieces, written by Veritas, are doubtlessly articles (see figure 1.3).

From the point of view of content, the stories on the mines and on Zulu customs testify to Rolfes Dhlomo's stance as regards many aspects of South African life. If it is true that his writings are ambivalent, he nonetheless strongly denounced working conditions on the mines in a weekly mostly intended for white readers, who could be more directly involved with these issues. Conversely, articles on Zulu customs, unfamiliar to a white, city-bred readership, were published on the most important Black national newspaper of the period. Not only are Dhlomo's stories germane to an understanding of early Black South African literature in English; they also display complex and varied stylistic features that challenge the Western-oriented generic classification of 'short story'.[78]

Hence, the nuances and complexities of Rolfes Dhlomo's short stories can be fully grasped only if the nature of the writer's varied contexts of publication is taken into account:

> In Dhlomo's case his fictional and journalistic writing is published through very different outlets (Lovedale Press, *Sjambok*, *Bantu World*, and *Ilanga Lase Natal*), each with rather different audiences in terms of language, class, religion, and ethnic identification, and he employs two major South African languages, one (English) which is accessible in some measure to all cultural groups in this country (but limited of course to those with some formal education), and one (isiZulu) which is regionally and culturally specific (but limited to those with some degree of literacy). (Gaylard 2008: 55)

[78] Even Couzens's apologia for his re-evaluation of Rolfes Dhlomo's short stories focuses on the sociological and historical value of the texts only, thus flattening their aesthetics: "The critic who believes that Dhlomo's 'simple' style covers a simple ideological position is wide of the mark" (1975b: 7).

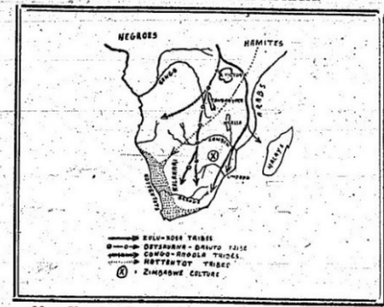
SPECIAL FEATURE ARTICLES

THE HISTORY OF THE BANTU

Readers of "The Bantu World" will do well to study carefully these series of articles dealing with the history of the Bantu people. Those who have missed the first instalments should obtain copies of The Bantu World from our local agents or from us. The first instalment was published on September 10.--Editor

(By "Veritas")

THE TREK INTO SOUTH AFRICA.



Map Showing Bantu Migration from Central Africa

Last week I gave a cursory description of the arrival of the Central Bantus (the Betshuana-Basuto group) in Southern Africa. These tribes when they settled along the eastern border of the Kalahari were constantly at war, not the terrible wars of the days of Tshaka, but in cattle raids not attended by much loss of life. They increased at a marvellous rate---every female bearing children on arriving at the age of womanhood. Each tribe lived by itself in a town of from one to ten thousand inhabitants around which extended to a great distance gardens of kaffircorn, beans, water-melons, pumpkins and sweetcane. Beyond these were the herds of cattle, sheep and goats. The towns required to be moved frequently. The tribes knew nothing about manuring or rotations and within a few years the soil would be unfertile. There were usually no sanitary arrangements and the town itself would become offensive after a few years. A new site would be selected and every body would move thither on a fixed day and erect a new town.

Bavenda Group

We have seen how the Bantus moved from the North in three streams (see map). The Western (Angola-South west) group; the Central (Betshuana-Basuto) group; and the Eastern (Zulu-Xosa) group. A later arrival was the Bavenda group who now live in Northern Transvaal. They are distantly related to the central group but must have remained behind when the Bakwena left the north. These Bavenda must first have moved west into the Congo, for they have many affinities with the Congo tribes, and from there South through Rhodesia to the Limpopo. During the 17th century a race, called the Cabires by the Portuguese, appeared in East Africa and attacked the Makaranga (Mashonas) of that country. There is a theory that these Cabires were the Bavenda, as the Bavenda claim to have ruled the Makaranga in the past.

Ancestral Worship

The Bavenda worship the ancestral spirits but they have more elaborate religious ceremonies than other Bantus and their sacrifices to the shades of the dead and the placing of food on graves show Congo affinities.

Another Bakwena tribe to move from the Congo was the Bakwebo which arrived on the Limpopo about 1750. They are peculiar as they are governed by chieftainesses the Madgadji, which they keep carefully concealed from strangers.

Towards 1750 the Betshuana began crossing the Vaal river. The Bataung being attacked by the Barolong, fled across the Vaal and settled on the Vet river in the present day Free State. Here they were again attacked when they fled eastwards to the borders of Basutoland towards the end of the 18th century. They were joined by others at a later date and from that point invaded Basutoland until then inhabited by Bushmen only.

When the Portuguese arrived on the East Coast of Africa in 1497, they found the country between Sofala and the Zambesi populated by Bantu tribes, the chief of which was the Makaranga. At a later day the Makaranga began fighting among themselves and the losing side trekked into what is now Rhodesia.

In a State of Turmoil

At the same time another tribe known as the Barotsi or Baroswi immigrated into Rhodesia from the Tanganyika region. Both these tribes quarrelled amongst themselves and accordingly fell an easy prey to the murderous attacks of the Zulus at the beginning of the last century. At that time South Africa was in a turmoil and we find many desperate tribes of adventurers marching northwards again. The first was Sebituane who with his Makololo blazed his way across the Transvaal and Rhodesia and eventually conquered the Barotsi. The Angoni and Matshangana, Zulus escaping from the tyranny of Tshaka, fled north and as they had to pass through Makaranga country treated these people with great cruelty. After 1834 the Makaranga already crushed the poor fell prey to the conquering Matabeli of Umseligazi who enslaved them and gave them the contemptuous name of Mashona (dogs). The Mashona still live in the north of Southern Rhodesia to this day.

MTETO BECOMES A CRIMINAL

FACTS IN FICTION

(By S. M. Stanley-Silwana)

Walaza had only been a few minutes at Park Station, when the Durban-Johannesburg mail pulled in. Before long he and his friend Mteto were shaking hands, talking and laughing.

"But friend," broke in Walaza, "in my last letter I strongly advised you not to come to Johannesburg this time in view of the great scarcity of work. Didn't you get the letter?" "I did friend, but couldn't do otherwise. You know I have to be married and I must have lobolo. Besides I have my taxes to pay." "Well," said Walaza, shrugging his shoulders, "come along; let's walk home."

Next day Mteto having been shown the Registration Office, opposite the Native Affairs Department, where according to Section twelve of the Urban Areas Act No. 21 of 1923, he had to report), he entered. "Yes, Jim, yini wena funa? (What do you want Jim?)" said a European officer in a stentorian voice. "Permit to seek work, 'nkosi," replied Mteto in a tremulous voice.

Scarcely had he uttered these words than a robust Zulu police savagely struck him on his face.

"You fool," he cried, "you speak cheekily to the baas, stand properly."

Mteto was given a permit to seek work in the Johannesburg area. In strong words he was told that the permit was valid for fourteen days only, and that should he fail to find work at the end of these days, he must report to the Registering Officer. The Zulu police then directed him to the Reception Depot, which adjoins the Registration Office, where he had to reside until he either got work or was transfered to another area.

For days Mteto looked for work but without success. At the end of the fourteen days, he reported at the Registration Office. His permit was extended for seven days.

"There," said the Officer, as he pushed the permit to Mteto, "if you don't find work this time, you will be transfered to another area."

Mteto left the office very much bewildered. He renewed his hunt for work, going from street to street, but work was nowhere to be found. At the end of the seven days, he again reported at the Registration Office. The officer who at once recognised him when he entered, exclaimed: "Oh you're here again you d—— loafer. Wena aikona funa sebenza?" So saying he took the old permit and issued a new one. "There's your permit," he said in a bullying manner. "You are transfered to Benoni."

"But 'nkosi," cried poor Mteto, "how am I to go there as I have no money?"

"If you are found anywhere in Johannesburg after to-day," declared the officer, "you'll be arrested. Now hamba; puma!"

Mteto hurried to see his friend Walaza, and told him of his predicament. "Well," said Walaza, "that's why I advised you not to come to Johannesburg without a definite job. There's no alternative, friend, you must go. Here's train fare. When you get to Benoni, go straight to the Location and ask for Fani ka Zwane: He is an intimate friend of mine. I am sure he'll welcome you if you don't forget to mention my name."

After the usual salutation they parted. Mteto entrained for Benoni and got there early in the afternoon. Some kind person at the station directed him to the location. His only difficulty now was to find Zwane. He was, however, fortunate in this, because Zwane's house happened to be in the first street he entered.

It was a home of typical African kindness and hospitality. Early the following day Mteto resumed his hunt in a new sphere. For several days he went from place to place, endeavouring to find a job of any kind but all his efforts were in vain.

One day as he was returning home from his usual rounds, he was arrested for not having paid his tax. He served in prison for thirty days. During his imprisonment he mixed up with criminals of all types and heard them proudly narrate some of their daring exploits. They also discussed ways and means by which Pass Laws could be evaded. He was so impressed by all this, that when his term of imprisonment expired he didn't bother himself by going to the Pass Office nor to the Registration Office for another permit. He had now learnt the trick and, like many, could play hide and seek with the police. Gradually he drifted into the world of crime. Finally he became a member of the Mgulugulu Association, a notorious body of men which aims at assaulting, robbing and even murdering other people. Of course he swore oaths.

One day Mazinyo, the president of the Association, ordered that a solitary shopkeeper should be killed so as to get his money. Mteto was chosen leader of this gang of evildoers for this occasion. During the night they fell upon the unsuspecting shop-keeper like hungry wolves and literally tore him to pieces, and then ransacked the shop.

The Government's blood-hounds "smelt" them out; the long arm of the Law stretched and they were all brought to book. In accordance with the rules of their Association Mteto as leader, had to take the guilt upon himself, and so he did. All the others were acquitted; while Mteto was convicted, sentenced to death and executed.

Figure 1.3. M. S. Stanley-Silwana's "Mteto Becomes a Criminal" in *The Bantu World* (19 November 1932).

The four groups of short stories analysed represent Dhlomo's attempt at negotiating the different traditions and different tensions perceived by a Black Western-educated South African in the Thirties through the medium of the short story, a literary genre equally imported from the Western textual practice. The different ways in which Dhlomo consciously shapes this textual genre vary according to the materiality of the context of publication, and exemplify the inextricable link between short fiction and domestic press in the Thirties, when modern short stories by Black writers first appeared in South Africa. Be it through the mine fictions, written for a white readership according to the conventions of Western realism, or through the texts on Zulu customs, fluctuating between the status of article or short story and directed at Black readers, Rolfes Dhlomo's accomplishments in short fiction always disclose the need to 'educate' his readership, hence his claim to authenticity. He thus aligns himself with the ideas of the New Africans, and his experiment of conveying his ethical stance – ambivalent as this may be – through the genre of the short story anticipates (only by a few years) Herbert Dhlomo's undertaking with the form.

2. Experimentalism in Herbert Dhlomo's Ten 'Unpublished' Short Stories

Herbert Isaac Ernest Dhlomo was a highly prolific Zulu-language writer, whose work spans multiple genres. Born in 1903 at Siyamu, near Pietermaritzburg, in present-day KwaZulu-Natal, he chose significantly to write his *opera omnia* in English, and not in Zulu, which led Nick Visser to define him as "the earliest prolific and 'professional' creative writer working in English anywhere on the continent" (Visser 1974: 4). Dhlomo wrote thirteen plays (four of which unpublished fragments), ten short stories, numerous poems, including several prose poems or "poetic and philosophical meditations" (Masilela 2007: 133), essays in literary theory, and thousands of journal articles and editorials. Unfortunately, however, he managed to publish only two literary works in book form: the play *The Girl Who Killed to Save: Nongqause the Liberator*, published by Lovedale Press in 1936, and the long epic poem *Valley of a Thousand Hills*, published in 1941 by Knox Printers and Publishers in Durban. The poetry, prose poems, articles, literary criticism, and a single short story, appeared instead in several newspapers and magazines, among others *Ilanga Lase Natal*, *Inkundla ya Bantu*, *Umteteli wa Bantu*, and *The Bantu World*. Indeed, Herbert followed in his older brother Rolfes's footsteps in becoming a prominent journalist, joining the staff of *The Bantu World* after 1935, and serving as assistant editor of *Ilanga Lase Natal* in 1943. Herbert has been described as embodying the "paradigm" of the Black South African writer as journalist-author (Visser 1976b: 43). In light of these last considerations, the fact that he published only one short story in the several newspapers in which the bulk of his work appeared represents a baffling and striking detail. Nine short stories (out of ten) thus only became available to the English reading public in 1985 thanks to Nick Visser and Tim Couzens's influential edition of Herbert Dhlomo's *Collected Works*.[79] This posthumous edition, however, does not date the short stories.[80] Furthermore, the failed publication on the part of Dhlomo complicates the problematic issue of the implied reader: which reading public had the writer in mind when he wrote these stories? As we have seen with Rolfes Dhlomo's fictions, taking into account different venues and contexts of publication can shed new light on the interpretation of the texts themselves; such details are not available in the case of Herbert Dhlomo.

Notwithstanding this material hindrance, the following pages offer a close reading of Herbert Dhlomo's ten short stories, approximately composed between the early 1930s and the late 1940s, as the content of some of the narratives suggests. Dhlomo's fictional prose remains relatively unknown,

[79] Dhlomo's literary criticism was also collected and published posthumously in 1977 by Nick Visser as a separate issue of *English in Africa* titled "Literary Theory and Criticism of H. I. E. Dhlomo".
[80] See also Gunner (1989: 58): *H. I. E. Dhlomo. Collected Works* is "frustratingly lacking in dates and it is difficult from the text to periodize the works". There is, moreover, no indication of the criteria devised by the editors to present the short stories in the order in which they appear in the volume. The editors, instead, do provide the known details of publication for the Poems section (see Visser and Couzens 1985: 290).

both within and outside South Africa; of the ten texts, to date only "The Barren Woman" has been reprinted, and Dhlomo's *Collected Works* have never been published outside South Africa. Nonetheless, I believe that a discussion of Dhlomo's narratives cannot be avoided in a diachronic study of the short-story genre in South Africa by Black writers. As we shall see, Dhlomo's short fiction shares many features with the short stories by his brother Rolfes, in particular the link with journalism and similar thematic concerns. At the same time, Herbert Dhlomo's stories appear more nuanced from a narratological point of view, sometimes anticipating the short fiction of the *Drum* generation. Before examining Herbert Dhlomo's stories in detail, I also aim to discuss his controversial modernity/modernism: although he is an unfamiliar figure outside of South African literary studies, within the field "it is commonplace to refer to him as a modernist writer", as Jade Munslow Ong observes (2018: 150).

While the scant criticism regarding Dhlomo's short stories may also depend on their belated publication, the writer himself seems to have disregarded the genre, for his thirteen essays on literary criticism only focus on drama, poetry, and the role of the South African intellectual. Thus, limited material is available to literary critics embarking on the analysis of Herbert Dhlomo's short stories. Useful information, however, can be inferred from his newspaper articles and from a comparison with Rolfes Dhlomo's "Twenty Short Stories", for Herbert's older brother "without doubt exerted a great influence" on him (Roberts 1988: 100).[81] Herbert Dhlomo's ten short stories can be roughly divided into four thematic groups, not unlike his brother's short texts. The first group reflects the evils of city life, according to the usual Jim-comes-to-Joburg trope, and it mostly deals with marital problems. "The Daughter" and "He Forgave Her" belong to this group. A second cluster is represented by those texts dealing with the dichotomy between rural life and modernity; these include "The Barren Woman" and "Euthanasia by Prayer". The most conspicuous group, however, consists of 'committed' short stories that denounce social injustices, such as "Drought", "An Experiment in Colour", "Farmer and Servant", and "Village Blacksmith Tragicomedy". Finally, two stories, "Flowers" and "Aversion to Snakes", deal with the strange and the magical – and are not far from science fiction. This subdivision notwithstanding, Herbert Dhlomo's text are not homogeneous, and may differ greatly in content and style, so that at times one short story may belong to more than one group.[82] One common feature, however, is represented by the fact that they all deal with contemporary aspects of South African life (see also Visser 1974: 5).

[81] In his doctoral dissertation on Rolfes Dhlomo, Shelley Skikna adds an appendix titled "The Short Stories of H. I. E. and R. R. R. Dhlomo", where he compares the two brothers' short fiction (1984: 356 and *passim*). See also Smith 2004.
[82] "Drought" is the only incomplete short story. Visser interestingly adds, however, that "[w]e have found all the short stories we know of, but since we have not discovered a list comparable to the list of poems and plays, we have no way of estimating how many he may have written" (Visser 1976a: 100).

2.1 A Modern/Modernist Writer?

The most substantial similarity between Rolfes Dhlomo's and his younger brother's stories is represented by their use of the English language. While for Rolfes this was an exception (he wrote mostly in Zulu), Herbert Dhlomo chose to use English as *lingua franca* throughout his oeuvre. Like Rolfes, Herbert was educated at the American Board Mission in Doornfontein, where he imbibed the values and beliefs of Christianity and progressivism that characterise the group of the New African intellectuals (see Masilela 2012). If Rolfes's progressive disillusionment with the missionary liberal humanist ethos also involved a rejection of English and a gradual embrace of Zulu, Herbert's engagement with the language was consistent with his ideological stance.[83] Writing in English allowed him at the same time to educate and unite the African people, overcoming tribalism, and to mark South Africa as a progressive, modern country. Indeed, he wrote that "[a]n African who writes successfully in English kills many birds with one stone" (Dhlomo 1953c: online). The English language could also fulfil Dhlomo's desire to participate in a global modernity that included both Europe and South Africa (Attwell 2005: 94). Unlike other African intellectuals of his time, the writer believed that modernity had to be traditionalised, which could only be done by using English and adapting it to African forms (95). Dhlomo thus appropriates and, at times, contests the English missionary colonising discourse using English in turn (see De Kock 1996: 5).[84] His choice to write in English has been considered by many as his modern gesture, which cannot be overlooked in any analysis of his writings (see, among others, Voss 2012: 341). As David Attwell observes, "[i]nevitably, the entrenchment of English – the language, its ethos, and its literary genres – was marked by the same ambivalence that was evident in the legacy of the British settlement itself" (2005: 32).

Together with Dhlomo's use of English, also some of the literary genres he adopted are considered representative of the writer's modernity. Ntongela Masilela, for instance, wrote a monograph titled *The Cultural Modernity of H. I. E. Dhlomo* (2007), where he deals extensively with Dhlomo's treatment of modernity and/or modernism:

> [O]f all the New African intellectuals, Dhlomo was the most profoundly conscious of the historical forms of modernity, its actual cultural representations, social actualizations and political manifestations. Merely theorising on modernity was insufficient, but creating the cultural forms of its representation was imperative. (Masilela 2007: 133)

[83] Dhlomo retained the English language also in his historical plays on Zulu kings, in which he celebrates pre-colonial times and criticizes white imperialism. See Iannaccaro 2021.

[84] David Attwell has extensively written on Dhlomo's stance as regards his modernity and his choice of writing in English in the article "Modernizing Tradition/Traditionalising Modernity: Reflections on the Dhlomo-Vilakazi Dispute" (2002). In the debate with the poet Benedict Wallet Vilakazi on traditional Zulu poetry, Dhlomo chose to traditionalise modernity, i. e. to write in English according to African forms.

According to Masilela, these "cultural forms" are not to be identified with poetry or drama, Dhlomo's most recognised accomplishments,[85] but rather with his prose writings – prose poems, essays in literary criticism, and articles (see Masilela 2007: 142, 151). Indeed, these pieces prove that "Dhlomo was historically aware that modernity and modernism were the products of the cosmopolitanism of the cities" (133). While Masilela's main aim, as indicated by the title of his monograph, is to explore Dhlomo's conception of modernity, the critic slips nonetheless into the use of the terms "modernism" and "modernist" at times, remarking that "if one considers his total oeuvre, one cannot fail to register that Dhlomo was a thoroughgoing modernist" (2007: 151). Masilela identifies the unresolved dialectic between tradition and modernity, and the use of irony as instrument of critique, as the main modernist traits of Dhlomo's prose poems (2007: 151). According to the critic, moreover, white writers contemporary with Dhlomo (Campbell, van der Post, and Plomer) were representative of an extension of European modernism in Africa, rather than an African modernism (2007: 143).

Masilela's view is also partially endorsed by Tony Voss, who remarks that Dhlomo, together with N. P. van Wyk Louw and Roy Campbell, is "touched by metropolitan modernism"; all three writers tried to incorporate modernity in traditional mythic systems, especially in their poetry (Voss 2012: 356). None of them, however, used the "conventional formal devices of modernism" such as free verse (339). Indeed, Voss's discussion of the three writers' modernism is mainly thematic, for he compares each poet's response to modernity to some of the main thematic concerns of the European avant-garde, such as the modernist engagement with science and religion (see 340-342). It is interesting to notice that South African modernism is here intended as a "synchronous and historical refraction" of European and Anglo-American modernism (339).

If Masilela and Voss identify Dhlomo's prose poems and his poetry as representative of his modernism, Jade Munslow Ong instead focuses on his theoretical essays, linking the writer to the modernist movement through his re-working of traditional African elements (2018: 149-153). Ong argues that Dhlomo's essay "Why Study Tribal Dramatic Forms?" (1939) can be considered, alongside the Preface to Olive Schreiner's *Story of an African Farm* (1883), an African modernist manifesto. The central thesis of Ong's monograph is the belief that "Anglophone South African literature is inaugurated and persists *as* modernism", thus denying the widespread diffusionist assumption that modernist writing from the colonies depends on European modernism (Ong 2018: 1; emphasis in original). In particular, Dhlomo's contribution to South African modernist writing lies in his union of old and new forms, through which he creates works "bicultural in form" (152).

[85] Tony Voss, for example, defines *Valley of a Thousand Hills* a poem "crucial to the modernist turn in South African writing" (2006: 450).

The rejection of the diffusionist model is also what distinguishes the recent critical category of global modernism(s), where modernism is defined as "the aesthetic dimension of any given modernity" (Stanford Friedman 2015: x; see also Hayot and Walkowitz 2016: 7). Planetary modernism, or global modernism, refuses the conventional approach to modernism as a definable aesthetic style, bound to a set of specific historical and geographical restrictions (Stanford Friedman 2015: x). If on the one hand this theoretical framework foregrounds cultural outputs that are not European or Anglo-American in origin, on the other hand it also decontextualizes the category of modernism, which can become meaningless according to Ong (2018: 4-6). The question of how to define and interpret the word 'modernism' – a historical phenomenon, a literary avant-garde, any aesthetic expression linked to the modern subject – is problematic and possibly unsolved/unsolvable.[86] However, it is important to acknowledge the various discussions of modernism and/in South Africa, which try to challenge both Eurocentric models of modernism and the decontextualization of global modernism(s) to attempt a definition of South African modernism.[87]

Masilela, Voss, and Ong all refer to Dhlomo as a modernist, each addressing different aspects and genres of the writer's oeuvre: his prose poems, his poetry, and his theoretical essays on poetry and drama. Germane to their discussions is Dhlomo's engagement with the "perennial struggle" between modernity and tradition (Masilela 2007: 150). None of them, however, mentions Dhlomo's ten short stories, even though these deal extensively with the transition from rural tradition to urban modernity, and even though the short story is usually considered one of the modernist genres *par excellence*. Voss's and Ong's theses represent an interesting point of view for a discussion of the writer's poetry and plays, where Dhlomo tries to negotiate the opposing forces of tradition and modernity from a formal point of view. However, their analyses can be hardly extended to Dhlomo's short fiction, where traditional formal elements are difficult to find.[88] At a first sight, Herbert Dhlomo could be thought to fit the definition of 'modernist': he started writing in the Twenties, he experimented with genres – notably prose poems and short stories – he wrote for newspapers and magazines, and he published several theoretical essays; furthermore, many of his writings, as we shall see, deal with the alienating modernity of the newly industrialised cities in South Africa. Dhlomo also belonged to the New African Movement, an intellectual and political group of writers, not unlike his Euro-American modernist contemporaries (see Ong 2018: 150). Nonetheless, I believe that the South African writer does not necessarily have to be forced into the 'modernist label'. As we have seen,

[86] When discussing modernism and Black South African writing, David Attwell remarks that "attempts to be categorical can be artificial and misleading" (2005: 175).
[87] In this regard, see the ongoing research project "South African Modernism 1880-2020", led by Jade Munslow Ong, Andrew van der Vlies, and Emma Barnes (https://www.southafricanmodernism.com/).
[88] See Sara Sullam's essay "An Experiment in Reading: Narrative Composition in H. I. E. Dhlomo's Short Fiction" for a discussion of Dhlomo's short stories and modernism (2021).

Dhlomo's work cannot be easily pinpointed and categorised. While his short fiction repeatedly addresses modern and contemporary issues, it does not present any particularly innovative, avant-garde formal features – which does not mean that he was not an experimental writer, as I try to argue in this chapter.

In the following pages, I seek to analyse Herbert Dhlomo's ten narratives to highlight his relatively unknown contribution to short-story writing in South Africa. The first part of the present chapter is devoted to the discussion of "The Daughter", "He Forgave Her, and "The Barren Woman", three highly melodramatic texts with female protagonists. While the first two stories deal with the evils of city life, "The Barren Woman" is set in a tribal reserve, and it thus highlights the clash between tradition and modernity. The second part of the chapter addresses the more socially committed short texts by Dhlomo, which denounce the unjust treatment of the Black South African population: "Drought", "Farmer and Servant", and "An Experiment in Colour". An analysis of these narratives sheds light on the multi-sidedness and complex structure of these short stories, thus calling into question the widespread disregard for Herbert Dhlomo as a short-story writer. Starting from the science-fiction traits of "An Experiment in Colour", the last section of this chapter takes into account those texts that clearly show Dhlomo's deep interest for and engagement with science and knowledge: "Euthanasia by Prayer", "Flowers", "Aversion to Snakes", and "Village Blacksmith Tragicomedy". Some of these stories belong to the science-fiction genre, or to the detective stories, or to both. Herbert Dhlomo's prose fiction, and his bold engagement with many contemporary issues, testify to his skills as experimental writer, who tries to negotiate opposed tensions in his fictional writing as well as in his personal life.

2.2 Tradition, Modernity, and Female Protagonists

The fact that Dhlomo's poetry and drama have been addressed by critical studies more than his short stories is also due to the alleged lack of 'literariness' in the ten narratives. The construction of Dhlomo's short stories has often been criticised for being "something of a barrier to readers", Visser and Couzens argue (1985: xiii). "His short stories especially are often crudely constructed", they observe, "shifting awkwardly from narrative to play-like presentation, mixing tenses, and lapsing too frequently into melodrama" (xiii). Herbert Dhlomo's short stories, indeed, can hardly be defined 'conventional' from the perspective of a twenty-first-century Western reader, in particular as far as characterisation and narrative voice are concerned. Unsurprisingly, the presence of the narrator is particularly strong in the two stories dealing with the evils of city life, "The Daughter" and "He Forgave Her", for which the moralising and judgemental attitude of the narrator of Rolfes Dhlomo's *An African Tragedy* may have represented a model. "The Daughter", for instance, opens with the

following lines: “Perhaps there is a hidden truth and some measure of wisdom in the African saying that a good stick is fashioned from foreign wood. If Bob Fafa had married a girl from any but his own mission reserve, the marriage would not have happened so early, perhaps” (Dhlomo 1985: 402). As we have seen, the strategy of inserting a proverb in the text to prove a moral axiom is a typical device of Rolfes Dhlomo’s, too. After this introduction, the narrator describes the marriage between Bob and Zodwa Valo, a girl whom Bob has known since childhood, even though Zodwa actually loves Maxwell Mazi. The couple continues quarrelling, which leads Bob to escape to Johannesburg. The narrative voice proceeds to describe Johannesburg:

> No undulating green hills and fertile vales. No songs of birds and the magical music of streams and waterfalls. No picturesque footpaths, pipe ditties of herd boys, the beauty of lowing, grazing cattle, and the splendour of moving fairy-like lamps that are fireflies. No soft melodious rains that come shimmering like gossamer veils of fancy. Here stood the great metropolis, naked yet magnificent, frightening yet fascinating, in the dry and dusty open veld. (402)

The elaborate rhetorical prose is functional in enacting the stark divergence between the rural countryside, represented in nostalgic, pastoral terms, and the urban reality of Johannesburg.[89] The narrator then briefly describes Bob’s successful adjustment to the city, where he enjoys his new lifestyle. “He was one of thousands of men”, the narrator comments, “who get swallowed up in the metropolis and are lost forever, not only to their dear and loved ones, but to the old ways and philosophy of life” (421). This last ‘sententious sentence’, in the present tense, closes the first part of the story generating suspense for the events to follow.

The second short chapter of “The Daughter” swiftly returns to the rural setting seen at the beginning. Readers learn that Bob and Zodwa have a daughter, Rosa, born three months after Bob’s escape to Johannesburg, and that Zodwa and Mazi are lovers again. Because of the conservative attitude of the Christian mission, their community cannot accept their union, so that the family decides to move to the slum area of Durban. Durban appears positively connoted from its very first mention: even if Rosa plays in the streets and her mother brews illicit liquor, “they were the happiest of families” (404). The moment of disruption arrives when May, one of Rose’s friends, invites her to Johannesburg, the “great metropolis” (405). After a blank space in the text, which signals the change of scene, the narration focuses on Zodwa, who is described as surrounded by “a thick fog that choked and blinded” (405). The spectral fog appears thrice in the brief passage, and it symbolises Zodwa’s premonition that something uncanny will happen if her daughter moves to Johannesburg.

The brief chapter that follows is probably one of the most interesting in the story from a narratological point of view, for it describes Rosa’s journey on the train to Johannesburg. Her fears

[89] The quoted excerpt also displays Dhlomo’s “sub-romantic diction”, as Albert Gérard has it (1971: 236). For a discussion of Dhlomo’s romanticism, see also Mphahlele 1962: 186; Canani 2021.

and doubts, however, are conveyed through an extensive use of free indirect style – albeit mediated by the higher register of the narrator:

> Ah! To get there! To get there at once! […]. Like a bullet her thoughts about the journey flashed through her mind and reminded her of her mother's and her school teacher's words about the hard, unending and blind struggle in life. Uphill struggles; periods of darkness and discomfort; forced landings and stops; pain midst beauty. (406)

While Dhlomo chooses to describe Bob's journey to Johannesburg through a narratorial intervention at the beginning of the short story, the passage depicting Rosa's route to the city foregrounds her most intimate feelings and fears. As if in a progression, the remainder of the short story is mostly narrated through dialogue, whereas the first part of the tale is dominated by the voice of the narrator. Through a dialogue between Rose and her friend May, readers learn that Rose has not been corrupted by the influences of city life until she goes to a show, which Bob Fafa is also attending. Even though a "magic link" arises between them, "both became conscious of something inexplicable yet ominous entwining them together" (408), thus anticipating again the tragic end of the narrative.

The next part of "The Daughter", which represents the climax of the story, is tellingly characterised by the return of elaborate and moralising interventions on the part of the narrator. These are interspersed by the same question, repeated three times by Rosa, and addressed to Bob: "By the way, who are you?" (408-410). This part of the story also recounts some magical and improbable happenings, as if they were warnings from heaven to the couple; Bob and Rosa, however, discard the warnings and "enjoyed themselves with the fruits of bitterness" (410), without knowing of each other's past. In the next paragraph, readers learn, through the dialogue between Rosa and Bob, that both of them will spend a month in Durban. This section concludes, rather abruptly, with the question – an obvious hint to readers – "[w]hat was this attack of nausea that had troubled her again in the morning?" (411). The short story predictably ends with the impromptu encounter in Durban between Rosa, her mother, and Bob: "The dark curtain of their lives was perforated, rent to pieces, and shrivelled up. In utter and deepest agony Zodwa wailed out thus: 'Yes! 'Tis he! My God! The curse! We die!'. She collapsed. At the door stood Maxwell Mazi" (412).

The plot of the short story is simple, and it falls neatly into the category of the stories on the evils of city life, according to the Jim-comes-to-Joburg trope. Dhlomo's narrative style follows suit – intrusive, moralising, and judgemental. The highly melodramatic conclusion thus only serves to prove the African proverb opening the narrative. Arguably, two interesting features emerge from this short story. First, Dhlomo's division of the text into small sub-chapters corresponds to the different ways in which he uses the narrative voice. Moreover, as in a *montage*, each sub-chapter refers to a specific scene, and it constitutes an autonomous narrative unity. In the second place, the choice of

foregrounding Rosa's fears through free indirect style implicitly endows her with agency – although this is again denied by the story's ending.[90]

One last consideration concerns the role played by setting in "The Daughter". While the Dwala mission reserve appears only briefly at the beginning as the background that sets the story in motion, the two cities are the real protagonists of the narrative. In particular, Johannesburg is described as the place where men "get swallowed up in the metropolis" (403).[91] The representation of the City of Gold stands in direct opposition to the depiction of Durban, which appears as a less alienating city than Johannesburg. In this regard, it is useful to analyse the seventh sub-chapter of the short story, composed of only a few lines of dialogue between Bob and an old friend of his in Durban. After Bob's remark that the "old town" did not seem to possess "much life", his friend utters the following words: "Hang you Joh'burgers! Moving fast – standing. Like factory machines. Shining – black. Much noise and smoke. Ever grinding yourselves, like the machines you are, into disuse. The old town is excellent as far as we are concerned" (411). The very brief seventh sub-chapter is not functional in any way to the development of the storyline, and may appear, at a first sight, extraneous. Through the words of Bob's friend, however, the narrator is able to expose the evils of the newly industrialised Johannesburg, the same evils that will lead to the tragic ending of "The Daughter".

The short dialogue presumably conveys Dhlomo's own views regarding the two cities. Masilela writes that "the city dearest to Dhlomo's heart naturally was Durban" (Masilela 2007: 139), and indeed Dhlomo devoted several of his writings, such as the two poems "Durban Beach – Night" and "Evening, Esplanade, Durban", and the prose poem "On Durban", to the coastal city.[92] In the latter, Dhlomo remarks that "of all the leading South African cities, Durban perhaps is the only one where one can bring the country to the city and the city to the country. This means that Durban offers a unique opportunity to study both urban and rural problems" (1947b: online). In a later article, tellingly titled "In Praise of Durban" (1954), the writer directly compares the different ways in which modernity has affected the two cities he knows the best, Durban and Johannesburg, specifically defining the inhabitants of Johannesburg as "recklessly adventurous", whereas the "Durbanites" are "calmly philosophical" (Dhlomo 1954b: online; see also Masilela 2007: 140). Bob Fafa similarly describes the inhabitants of Durban in "The Daughter", since he answers to his Durbanite friend with the sentence "I dislike philosophers and preachers" (1985: 411). Several factors may account for

[90] See also Sullam (2021: 276): the story's "formal experimentation remains in the background, or as a mere 'dissonance' within a more traditional 'didactic' tale on the nefarious consequences of incest".

[91] It is worth noticing that a similar phrase, "to be swallowed up by a city", can be found also in two postmodernist short stories in the collection *The One That Got Away* by Zoë Wicomb, "In the Botanic Gardens" and "Another Story" (Wicomb 2008: 170, 181, 185). This consideration is textual proof of the enduring significance of the world-literature trope of big cities as the sites of an alienating modernity.

[92] The three texts were all originally published in *Ilanga Lase Natal* on 12 April 1941, 29 November 1947, and 22 February 1947, respectively.

Dhlomo's positive characterization of Durban, which clearly embodies a different kind of urbanism from Johannesburg's. Durban was the largest city in present-day KwaZulu-Natal, the region were Dhlomo was born and to which he dedicated his poem *Valley of a Thousand Hills*; to Dhlomo, the coastal town possibly represented modernity without completely disrupting the past, for many of its inhabitants were Zulus like him. Furthermore, the city played a pivotal role in intellectual and cultural matters, hosting personalities such as Jordan Ngubane and John Dube (Masilela 2007: 140), but it was also the site of early modernist activity – Campbell, Plomer, and van der Post's short-lived literary magazine *Voorsplag* was published in Durban. Durban's history, demographics, and cultural life, therefore, may have contributed to Dhlomo's positive characterisation of the city.

To go back to the story, "The Daughter" ultimately reflects Dhlomo's belief, expressed in his article "The Younger Generation", that

> [m]any boys and girls born amid conditions of heathenism, ignorance, and an atmosphere distinctly "neolithic", proceed either to large cities or to our higher schools and plunge, as it were, into the core of Twentieth Century Civilisation with all its complexities, vices, virtues, intricate systems and peculiar standards of morality. The change is great and abrupt. (Dhlomo 1930: online)

This view, which may remind readers of Rolfes Dhlomo's conservative opinion on city life, also informs another short story by Herbert, namely "He Forgave Her" – which seems indeed very similar to Rolfes Dhlomo's "The Sins of the Fathers". "He Forgave Her" strikes the reader for its opening:

> A beastlike wail rent the air. The two visitors to the Thala Mission Station stood dumb and frightened. A woman, the living image of a demon, tore past them. Frightened people from the house out of which she ran stood helpless. Said one of them: 'Lord, rather kill her than torture her thus'. (1985: 483)

After this beginning *in medias res*, however, the narration stops to give way to a sort of sociological introduction on the part of the narrator to the milieu in which the story takes place. In particular, the narrative voice discusses the issue of young rural people who work and live in the city, in this case Durban, but who do not adhere "strictly neither to tribal nor to Christian morals, especially in their sex relations" (483). This explanatory excursus serves to introduce the two main characters, Cingo and Dudu, a young unmarried couple; the two protagonists work in two different places away from their mission. The narrator emphasises Cingo's commitment to his work and studies, which allow him to spend only three nights a week with Dudu.

One night, however, Cingo feels the need of visiting Dudu even if it was not planned beforehand. There, he finds his girlfriend sleeping with another man. Dhlomo carefully stages Cingo's process of discovery:

> He closed and locked the door quietly from the inside and strained his eyes to make sure that what he thought he saw was not an illusion. His mind was in a haze and his heart was a noisy hammer that, he thought, might disturb everybody's peace. At last he decided to switch on the light in the hope that it was not a… but a…. He could not mention the words even to himself. (485)

Cingo's reaction may surprise readers, for he decides to sit down and read, as if nothing had happened. When the lovers wake up, Cingo threatens the man with a gun, and orders him to leave. The protagonist then goes to bed, without speaking to Dudu. A few days afterwards, the girl receives a strange letter from her partner, stating the following: "Of course, I know. But I also understand. That is what you do not understand. We are all human, and to err is human. Perhaps we men are worse sinners. No more on that. […]. My duty is to forgive; yours, to believe and forget" (486).

After this event, the life of the couple returns to its daily routine – albeit with more kindness toward one another. A very interesting feature from a narratological point of view is represented by the fact that the text does not stage dialogue between Cingo and Dudu to represent their newly-found relationship. Instead, the narrator proceeds to report directly the two protagonists' contrasting thoughts – graphically signalled by single quotation marks. While Dudu struggles to believe in her partner's forgiveness, but, in the end, she is convinced of it, Cingo's thoughts alternate between his desire to trust Dudu and his suspicions: "Once false, always false. A woman who descends the whole flight of the dark, fearful and stinking steps that lead to damnation, and who, with her eyes open, pollutes her womanhood, can never, never be trusted again" (487). Interestingly, the narrator gives prominence to Dudu's intimate feelings, rather than to Cingo's. After a month, they decide to marry. Then, in front of everyone, Cingo disappears and has an anonymous messenger hand a note to the bride: "You destroyed my soul that night. This is the revenge of the dead soul. I will not marry a harlot" (488). The text creates several parallelisms between the night of Cingo's discovery and the day of the marriage. First of all, after the note is handed to the bride, a "tragic" pause ensues (488); similarly, Cingo uses the adjective "tragic" twice to refer to the fatal night (487). More importantly, the girl is described as "seeing and not seeing" Cingo's cruel note in the same way as he "could not believe his own eyes" (484) when he entered Dudu's room that night. Significantly, these echoes are enhanced also by the very structure of the short story, which ends in a ring composition, for Dhlomo re-writes word for word the small introductory paragraph concerning the two anonymous visitors at the mission.[93] Thus, the subtle texture of the short story repeatedly hints to readers that what happened before is about to happen again, and that Cingo is going to take his revenge, thus denying the title of the short story – which, therefore, must be read ironically.

[93] Sara Sullam lists cataphoric openings as a typical formal feature of canonical modernist short stories (Sullam 2021: 276).

Far from being a simple moralistic tale about marital infidelity, like Rolfes Dhlomo's "The Sins of the Fathers", Herbert Dhlomo's "He Forgave Her" thus represents a much more crafted endeavour with the short-story genre.[94] Above all, the in-depth exploration of the two characters' consciousnesses, with a particular focus on the female figure, discards any simplistic judgement of the episode, and calls for a more complex interpretation of the story. In this regard, it is worth lingering over the role of the narrator. While narratorial interventions and judgements are to be found in the first, general part of the story concerning young generations living in missions, when it comes to the specific situation of Dudu and Cingo the narrator never explicitly expresses his opinion. However, the repetition of the framing paragraph starkly foregrounds the figure of the woman, and invites readers to sympathise with the character: Dudu opens and closes the short story as "the living image of a demon" (483, 488), who, in the words of the villagers, is being tortured. Hence, the agency handed to Cingo by the title – "*He* Forgave Her" (emphasis added) – is denied by the ensuing story, and his action implicitly condemned.

Another text that prominently features female figures is "The Barren Woman", the first short story of the section "When Evening Falls" in Visser and Couzens' edition of Dhlomo's works.[95] Among Dhlomo's altogether overlooked ten short stories, only "The Barren Woman" has been republished. It is included in two different South African anthologies, David Medalie's 1998 *Encounters. An Anthology of South African Short Stories* and Michael Chapman's more recent *The New Century of South African Short Stories* (2004). This publication history may reveal relevant features of "The Barren Woman". Medalie's motive for including Dhlomo's story in his anthology is the following:

> As I recall, part of my thinking was that I felt it was an interesting exploration of traditional African cultural beliefs and society. It was important to me, in both anthologies,[96] to include stories that represent the lives of black people in their own cultural context – i. e. that they should not always be depicted in relation to white people.[97]

[94] Skikna's remark that "H. I. E. Dhlomo's 'He Forgave Her', like R. R. R.'s Johannesburg stories, has a cyclical pattern of action, in which the last paragraph returns to the time-period of the first" (1984: 357) is more valid if referred to the short story "The Daughter", which, as we have seen, anticipates the ensuing tragedy of the plot by means of a proverb. The framing device in "He Forgave Her", instead, allows for a more complex interpretation of the story.

[95] No indication of the criterium used to insert the stories in the order in which they appear has been given by the editors. Chronology can be excluded, however, since the only published story appears last, even though it was published quite early, in 1935.

[96] Medalie is here referring to the very recent reissue of *Encounters*, titled *Recognition* (2017). Similarly, Chapman's anthology has been reprinted in a new, expanded edition, *The Omnibus of a Century of South African Short Stories* (2007). Both reissues still include "The Barren Woman".

[97] Personal communication, 2 February 2019. Indeed, Medalie also includes Njabulo Ndebele's story "The Prophetess" from the writer's collection *Fools and Other Stories* (1983), which, like "The Barren Woman", focuses on ordinary, traditional aspects of Black culture.

Interestingly, the same reasoning appears to be behind Chapman's selection for his anthology: "'The Barren Woman', more so than other H. I. E.'s stories, exemplified his key critical insight (he is a great critical voice) that 'tradition lives'".[98] Thus, 'tradition' seems to be the keyword for the interpretation of "The Barren Woman".

Indeed, the short story describes a fundamental cultural paradigm of the rural world:

> The Bantu love of children is well known. This love is partly natural, just like that of other human beings. It is partly the result of a social system in which lobola, the demands and difficulties of labour, and a man's prestige and status in society all put a premium on the size of the family. […]. Bareness in women was a stigma and disgrace. (Dhlomo 1985: 395)[99]

This rather factual introduction provides readers with sociological explanations of a phenomenon typical of rural communities in South Africa. After the first paragraphs, the narrator comments on the story's subject matter: "The story of Mamkazi Zondi is interesting because it involves most of the elements above. It is simple, has no dramatic climax and no element of surprise" (Dhlomo 1985: 396). Subsequently, the plot unfolds: Mamkazi Zondi of Manzini village finally manages, after many attempts, to have a baby. Her trust in the educated midwife Ntombi notwithstanding, her new-born dies during her first night of life; desperate, Mamkazi exchanges her with another baby from the nursery. When the girl grows, however, she falls in love with Zidumo, in fact her twin brother; to avoid their marriage, Mamkazi reveals her secret to the village, causing "amazement, incredulity and confusion" (401).[100]

The very first paragraph of "The Barren Woman" "alerts us to the fact that this is a story in which the actions and choices of individuals cannot be considered in isolation" (Medalie 1998: xviii), since they are deeply rooted in the rural setting of the narrative. Indeed, the introduction to this short story does not differ greatly from some of Rolfes Dhlomo's fictions about tribal rites, discussed previously, in which the narrator provides readers with a factual introduction before he turns to the story to exemplify his point (see, for instance, "Ukugweba"). Compared to a story such as "Ukugweba", however, Herbert Dhlomo's "The Barren Woman" is more developed from a narratological point of view. Medalie rightly highlights the presence of a particularly authoritative narrative voice:

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[98] Personal communication, 1 February 2019. Chapman is here quoting directly from Dhlomo's essay "Zulu Folk Poetry" (1948): "Tradition lives! It lives when and because it is evolutionary. It lives when men are free to add to or reject from it. Merely to go back to the Past is not tradition. It is death" (Dhlomo 1977: 58).

[99] *Lobola* means 'bride price'.

[100] Ntombi is short for Ntombifuthi ('girl again'), Ntombizodwa ('girls only'), or Ntombizonke ('all girls'). These names are normally given if the parents were hoping for a boy. Ntombi could also be short for Ntombifikile ('the girl arrived'), which is more positive and is normally given to a first-born girl. Mamkazi, instead, could be a name given to a married woman, where the prefix 'Ma' is added to the name of the father, in this case 'Mkazi's daughter'. Dhlomo's choice of names, therefore, represents an instance of tragic irony, since it emphasises the arrival of a daughter in a story in which a new-born girl dies. I thank Nkosinathi Sithole for the explanation.

> The most extreme example of the use of this kind of narrator is perhaps Dhlomo's "The Barren Woman", where the narrator offers various elucidations of a sociological nature, generalities to do with Time and Nature, and goes to great pains to ensure that the tragic tale of Mamkazi and her barrenness, followed by the death of her child, is understood within the context of these truisms. (1998: xxviii)

Indeed, the narrator repeatedly offers his external perspective on the "backward society" he is describing (Dhlomo 1985: 396). Furthermore, the narrative voice stresses regularly the wickedness of Mamkazi, using expressions such as "demoniacal spirit", "devilish", and a "raving maniac" (397-398).

In fact, a more complicated pattern emerges from the fissures of the text. After the first introductory paragraphs, the narrator briefly presents the characters of Mamkazi Zondi, her husband, and her best friend Ntombi Mate, the "unofficial, unqualified, but useful" district midwife (Dhlomo 1985: 396). The narrator further describes the habits of the midwife: "Whether she thought and believed it was professionally necessary or she was too lazy (and had grown fat) and too snobbish (was she not above others?), she insisted that those who needed her help must come to her 'clinic', which was a large hut of four beds" (396). The narratorial indications, tellingly inserted in parentheses, are not as straightforward to interpret. Who is speaking? Arguably, this is an instance of free indirect style, and the sentences in parentheses are to be read as Ntombi's own thoughts (Sullam 2021: 272). The narrative focus on the midwife may be explained by the fact that she is the only one who suspects that Mamkazi exchanged the babies. Furthermore, "The Barren Woman" closes with a sentence from Ntombi herself, who has to complete Mamkazi's confession after the latter collapses: "'It is true. It happened long ago in my clinic…,' she began" (401). Paradoxically, the conclusion of "The Barren Woman" represents the starting point for a new narrative, from which readers are however excluded. The ending of this story in particular represents an exception in the short fiction of Herbert Dhlomo. Most of his narratives end tragically with a character either dead or collapsed ("The Daughter", "Flowers", "Farmer and Servant", "Euthanasia by Prayer", "He Forgave Her"); while Mamkazi does collapse at the end of "The Barren Woman", still this does not represent the closure of the story, for the narration starts again – the episode ends with the verb 'to begin'.[101]

Some elements of "The Barren Woman" support the widespread opinion that Dhlomo's fictions can hardly be defined conventional short stories. The highly intrusive narrator as identified by Medalie, the underlying idea in the story that Mamkazi's wrongdoing is caused by evil forces and that only God can restore the normal order of things, and the rather factual introduction, all contribute to question the literariness of this story. The introductory paragraphs in particular highlight the

[101] Dhlomo's short story "An Experiment in Colour" similarly ends with the protagonist dead but on an open-ended note with the question "[t]he end – or the beginning?" (1985: 500).

importance bestowed by rural communities on children, to the point that the love of children takes on a specific cultural resonance (Medalie 1998: xviii). The whole story, indeed, revolves around the dichotomy tradition/modernity: the tribal love of children, the habit of wrapping new-born in thick blankets, and "the old tribal superstition that giving birth to twins is bad luck" (Dhlomo 1985: 398) are described vis-à-vis Christianity, the clinic of the midwife, and her belief in "cleanliness" and "other 'modern' professional rules" (399). Tragic irony is here functional to the development of the storyline, for it is Mamkazi – a Christian, modern woman who follows the midwife's advice – who tragically loses her child, born after years of fruitless attempts at conceiving.[102]

The narrator, however, repeatedly remarks that Ntombi is not qualified enough, even though she is more educated than her fellow villagers.[103] In this regard, it could be useful to quote an article written by Dhlomo; as we have already seen, the correspondence between some of the themes in Dhlomo's short stories and his articles represents a recurring pattern. In "National Health", published in *Umteteli Wa Bantu* in 1930, he devotes a whole paragraph to the problem of infantile mortality, directly addressing the inadequate education of many midwives:

> Successfully to fight against the evils of maternal and infantile mortality, our midwives must possess qualifications that will make it possible for them to learn and recognise symptoms of approaching disease, ably handle cases of puerperal infection and fever, care for babies immediately after work, observe and treat abnormalities and complications before birth. (Dhlomo 1930b: online)

Tragedy in "The Barren Woman" seems therefore to ensue from two different causes: the stigma applied to barren women in tribal societies, which leads Mamkazi to steal a child, and the insufficient education of the midwife in the village. While the first element emerges clearly from the narrative, the second is more difficult to detect. The narrative voice clearly doubts Ntombi's professionality, but it never blames the midwife for the tragic death of the child. Yet, the instances of free indirect style concerning Ntombi, and the open end of the story suggest that the character of Ntombi has more to reveal. Could the narrator imply that the midwife might have done something more, if sufficiently qualified? The interpretation is left to readers. What is more certain is that the article "National Health" and the story "The Barren Woman" do speak to each other.

[102] The word "tragedy" and its derivatives are repeated five times in an eight-page story. Tragic irony can be found also at the very beginning of the episode, where the narrative voice declares that the story of Mamkazi "has no dramatic climax" (Dhlomo 1985: 395). This sentence is denied by the ending of the story itself, and by the use of the very same word, "climax", in the concluding paragraph (401).

[103] The narrative voice explicitly states that Ntombi is "unqualified" (396); furthermore, adjectives such as educated, hygienic, and modern are always put in inverted commas when referred to her midwifery.

2.3 Documentary Imperatives and Social Critique

"The Barren Woman", like Dhlomo's other prose pieces, endorses the idea that "a change of attitude is necessary" for tribal people to be "free […] from the tyranny of the traditional and the customary" (Dhlomo 1932b: online). "Drought", Herbert Dhlomo's second longest – albeit incomplete – story, is also set in a rural mission reserve, the Nobantu Reserve in Natal. Like "The Daughter", the story is neatly divided into sub-chapters, each offering a different scene. The introduction to the narrative strikingly resembles the first paragraphs of "The Barren Woman", for the narrator introduces readers to the rural setting of the story, whose inhabitants can be divided into Western-educated "Christian" people and tribal peasants, whose distinctive characteristic is their attachment to cattle (427).[104] The main character of the story is Zabo Kumalo, a "'Christian' man, hard-working and serious-minded" (427), friend of John Mkabela, the agricultural demonstrator appointed by the Native Commissioner of the district to introduce progressive schemes for the villagers, such as a market for the cattle, according to the "Soil Conservation and Rehabilitation Scheme" (427). Kumalo follows Mkabela's advice carefully, unlike his fellow villagers.

Dhlomo may have drawn on Edward Roux's *The Cattle of Kumalo* (1943) for the name of his protagonist and for Kumalo's friendship with a young, educated man (Couzens 1985: 287).[105] Another source of influence, however, may have been Alan Paton's liberal novel *Cry, The Beloved Country* (1948), where the main protagonist Reverend Stephen Kumalo becomes friend with a young educated agricultural demonstrator, Napoleon Letsitsi, and together they try and modernise the village's agriculture to overcome the drought and the ensuing shortage of food.[106] Compared to Herbert Dhlomo's nuanced short story, Paton's *Cry, The Beloved Country* celebrates the agricultural help from the white man James Jarvis in a naïve and non-problematic way. Dhlomo's critical

[104] The sentences "Above all they love their cattle" (427) in "Drought" and "The Bantu love of children is well known" (395) in "The Barren Woman" are equally functional to the development of the respective storylines: the elements introduced in these texts are presented by the narrator as distinctive of tribal people, and tragedy ensues in the two narratives because of these elements. The two narratorial sentences are exemplary of the didactic scope of Dhlomo's short stories.

[105] Roux's novella *The Cattle of Kumalo* (1943) tells the story of the collaboration between chief Kumalo of the Whitestone country and the young, educated George Mfuyi. The latter explains new farming methods to Kumalo and the villagers, to help them overcome the drought and the shortage of food in the village. As in Dhlomo's "Drought", his new techniques are not accepted without protests, because they go against custom. In the end, however, the villagers are satisfied with the results of Mfuyi's work. Roux's novella is replete with technical details of farming methods, including some tables and drawings.

[106] In particular, "Drought" echoes Book Three of *Cry, The Beloved Country*. For instance, Stephen Kumalo's prayer ("*Tixo*, give us rain"; Paton [1948] 2002: 190) is reproduced in "Drought" ("Lord, give us rain"; Dhlomo 1985: 436). Paton's Napoleon Letsitsi, like Dhlomo's Mkabela, is aware of his difficult task: "And hardest of all would be the custom of *lobola*, by which a man pays for his wife in cattle, for people kept too many cattle for this purpose, and counted all their wealth in cattle, so that the grass had no chance to recover" (Paton [1948] 2002: 215). The mention of Zabo Kumalo's son's "ultra-left political activities" in Durban (Dhlomo 1985: 428), moreover, is an echo of Stephen Kumalo's brother's political activism in Johannesburg.

engagement with Paton's liberal novel anticipates the re-appropriations of *Cry, The Beloved Country* by the generation of Black writers orbiting the magazine *Drum*, where Paton's text appeared in several instalments (see Van der Vlies 2006). The intertextual structure of "Drought" further enhances the complexity of the story, which also possesses a documentary value, for Couzens observes that "[t]he research on beads and cattle which seems to be part of the foundation of the story has structural similarities (e.g. the descriptive scenes) with 'Farmer and Servant'"; he posits a likely date of composition for both as late 1947 or early 1948 (1985: 335).[107] In fact, the striking similarities between *Cry, The Beloved Country* and "Drought" (Dhlomo's only incomplete story) suggest that the latter may have been written even later. Assuming this is the case, Dhlomo's story could be a conscious response to Paton's novel.[108]

In "Drought", the different viewpoints of the two 'progressive' South Africans and of the tribal people are staged through a well-structured seven-page dialogue among the villagers. Apart from the sociological introduction at the beginning of the story, the narrator in the first chapter of "Drought" is indeed a discreet figure, far removed from the intrusive narrative voice in "The Barren Woman".[109] The dialogical structure of the short story allows for a beautiful rendering of the tension between tradition and modernity, the "perennial struggle" represented in Dhlomo's work (Masilela 2007: 150). With the help of Kumalo, Mkabela tries to convert the villagers to his progressive methods, suggesting they should sell their cattle at the village market. His ideas provoke a twofold reaction in his companions. First, they do not trust him, since he is considered "a black white man" on account of his Western education (Dhlomo 1985: 431). Second, tribal people hold on to the belief that "quantity is better than quality" (432), and that selling their cattle will "destroy" their "race": "Let us perish first before we make this great race of ours, these warriors of mighty black kings, these sons of the soil, a bastard horde of black Europeans – this Africa a replica of Europe" (433).[110] These lines

[107] In the same years, Dhlomo wrote a three-part essay titled "Three Essays in Tribal Culture", in which he analyses the role of beads, the shield, and the cow as part of traditional Zulu aesthetics (see Masilela 2007: 22, 166).

[108] In an editorial for *Ilanga Lase Natal* titled "The African Artist and Society" (1949), Dhlomo takes a critical stance against Paton's novel: "Many people in one country often have no other means of knowing the thoughts and life of people in other countries except through the works of art. For instance, thousands of [people] outside South Africa (and, one fears, in South Africa itself) think of the race problem here in terms of the novel, 'Cry, The Beloved Country'" (Dhlomo 1949b: online). The date of publication of the editorial, 1949, indicates that Dhlomo had probably read Paton's novel before it was serialised in *Drum* in 1951.

[109] During the dialogue, the narrator makes his presence felt only once by commenting that "[o]ver the beer pot conversation is sweet and inevitable" (430).

[110] In colonial contexts, "millennial visions promised to restore life as it was (imagined to be) before the conquest, albeit through unprecedented, innovative means", such as the Cattle Killing Movement (Wenzel 2009: 2). In 1856, the young Xhosa prophetess Nongqawuse, claiming to report a message from the ancestors, drove the Xhosa population, whose lives depended on cattle, to destroy their cattle so that the ancestors could rise from the dead and drive the white settlers into the sea, according to the prophecy. The Cattle Killing Movement marked the end of the Xhosa nation. Dhlomo imaginatively reconstructs the Cattle Killing Movement in his play *The Girl Who Killed To Save (Nongqause the Liberator)* (1936).

may remind readers, anachronistically, of the later claims of the Black Consciousness Movement.[111] Of the ten short stories by Herbert Dhlomo, only "Drought" resembles Dhlomo's historical plays and some of his poetry in the celebration of Black South African history.

The first sub-chapter of the short story tellingly ends with the figure of the fool, who joins the conversation. Speaking with impunity, he provokes one of the villagers, who would like to beat him up. In response, the jester dispenses his share of wisdom to the group of men:

> Proceed, if you dare, you ugly lean one! […]. As for squeezing out what is in me, pluck and trample upon a flower and see if you can get rid of its perfume! As for thrashing me, try and assault the air! And as for departing from the customary and showing initiative, it is high time you did so. But you are so blind, stupid and weak that like the monkeys you cannot change. A dog is more educable than you! (434)

As we might expect, the figure of the fool speaks the truth. He agrees with Kumalo and Mkabela, harshly chiding his fellow villagers for their refusal to adopt new schemes for managing their cattle.

The third and central part of the short story is very interesting from a narratological point of view. The narrative begins with a single word, in capital letters, followed by exclamation marks: "DROUGHT!!!" (436). A long, lyrical narratorial intervention on the drought in the reserve follows, and it anticipates the prayer of the Christian villagers, which appears in the form of a poem and is introduced by a second exclamation ("DROUGHT!!").[112] Couzens remarks that this poem was issued independently, in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, on 13 August 1949.[113] Part of the poem was in fact published as early as 1946 in one of Dhlomo's commentaries in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, tellingly titled "Drought, Food". The article appears under Dhlomo's pseudonym of "Busy-Bee" and it is introduced by the following preface: "During my holidays I came across these lines written by an African […] at the height of the drought" (Dhlomo 1946a: online). In the article, Dhlomo-the-journalist endorses the same opinion voiced by Kumalo and Mkabela,[114] stating that "the policy of maintaining a tribal cattle economy alongside an acquisitive money economy" would lead to starvation (Dhlomo 1946a: online).[115]

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[111] See Iannaccaro (2021: 225-227).

[112] The intervention by the narrator mostly describes the effect of the drought on nature: "Silent now the loud and discordant, but homely and familiar, chorus of frogs. Slow and sad the movement of gaunt dogs and thirsty herds. Fewer and fewer cocks answered their neighbours' proud salutations" (Dhlomo 1985: 436). Some expressions of the narratorial description are literally reproduced in the poem, such as "gaunt dogs" (436-437).

[113] "This does not imply" – Couzens continues – "that the short story was written then", for Dhlomo might have "extracted the poem for publication after he failed to get the story published" (1985: 335). There is no evidence, however, to support Couzens's assumption that the poem was composed as part of the short story only, and not as an autonomous poem. The poem "Drought" is reprinted on page 334 in Visser and Couzens's edited *Collected Works* (1985).

[114] Voss defines Mkabela a "Dhlomo-figure" (2012: 349).

[115] See also Masilela (2007: 84): "Dhlomo was convinced that Chiefs, tribal *Indabas*, cattle and the Reserves were the pivot and essence of tribalism. Modernity in the form of education, industrialization, urbanization, soil conservation schemes and the movement of migrant labour would bring about the demise of tribalism".

Thus, "Drought" is the title of a poem, a short story, and an article, probably all composed in the late Forties. Indeed, the fight against soil erosion was an urgent issue during much of the 1940s and 1950s in South Africa, leading to a massive soil conservation campaign (Kahn 1997: 441).[116] The existence of the same lyric as a separate poem (fiction), as a prayer inside a short story (fiction), and as a poem inserted in an article on an actual drought and shortage of food (non-fiction) raises interesting considerations about genre mobility. First and foremost, it confirms the close association between fictional and factual modes in South African Black writing of the Thirties and Forties. Short-story writing and poetry, in this case, appear as genres complementary to journalism for denouncing specific aspects of South African life (Zander 1999: 127). In the opening manifesto to his edited collection of texts by Black writers, *Forced Landing* (1980), Mothobi Mutloatse introduces a new genre called "proemdra", a mixture of prose, poem, and drama: "We'll write our poems in a narrative form; we'll write journalistic pieces in poetry form; we'll dramatize our poetic experiences; we'll poeticise our historical drama" (1980: 5). While I would avoid an anachronistic definition of Dhlomo's "Drought" as proemdra,[117] the writer's experimentation with genres points in the same direction as Mutloatse's manifesto: the boundary between conventional genres, and between fictional and factual discourse, has long been far less prominent in Black South African writing than in Western literatures.

The third part of the short story closes with a short, disillusioned description of the ensuing starvation, prefaced by the third exclamation "DROUGHT!". This single word neatly divides the chapter into three different parts, and it also signals the inevitability of the situation. While the first time the word "drought" is followed by three exclamation marks, in the concluding paragraph only one exclamation mark accompanies the term, for "[t]he people no longer gave much thought to the rain" because "it was too late to save them" (Dhlomo 1985: 438). The last two chapters of "Drought" mostly consist of dialogue. Chapter four recounts the trip of Kumalo and Mkabela to the local European store, where they meet another party of people. During the journey, old Kumalo entertains the young demonstrator with "tales of ancient times":

> Here the famous battle of such-and-such between Dingane and the white people was fought. […]. The cursed land, written all over with the tragedy of drought, hunger and death, became beautiful and alive, peopled with romantic and glorious figures, picturesque scenes, fragrant herbs and plants, and song and activity as the old man told the tales. (439)

[116] Human factors such as faulty veld and stock management – not decreasing rainfall – were the main causes of soil erosion (Kahn 1997: 441). Farieda Kahn further highlights the racial exclusivity of the soil conservation campaign in 1950s South Africa (443).

[117] See also Zander (1999: 488): "[o]lder works, written long before the term 'proemdra' was coined, were later re-labelled 'proemdras'".

This is one of the few lyrical passages in Herbert Dhlomo's prose fiction in which his English diction is not "stilted, artificial", as Visser and Couzens would define it (1985: xiii), but rather flows without constraint. In addition, the mention of the Zulu King Dingane (1795-1840) foregrounds the Black history of South Africa, an exception in Dhlomo's short stories, which mostly deal with very contemporary themes of public interest – the heroic South African past, instead, plays a pivotal role in his drama and long epic poem. The focus on Kumalo's stories, moreover, bestows importance on the character's own narratives, inextricably linked to the tradition of orality and of the so-called fireside tales. Later in the story, Mkabela observes women sending envelopes containing beads to their husbands in the city; the narrator remarks that "Mkabela was learning many things. Like many an educated person or townsman, he knew very little about tribal lore and the customs of his own people" (Dhlomo 1985: 441). In "Drought", therefore, tradition enters the text not only through tribal customs and beliefs that are implicitly cast in a negative light (*lobola* or the attachment to cattle), but also through the cultural heritage of South Africa that needs preservation (the history of the Zulu kings, the tradition of beads and of the fireside tales). Herbert Dhlomo's ambivalence towards tradition in this short story echoes Rolfes's own stance in his *Bantu World* fictions.

"Drought", which is incomplete, ends in the midst of a meeting between the villagers and the Native Commissioner of the reserve. The Commissioner declares that the Government cannot help the people, who refused to adopt the new cattle schemes with the result of losing both money and cattle. The last chapter of the story is a poignant critique of South Africa's white government, voiced by a tribal man at the meeting:

> Why do the authorities refuse the young men the passes to go and seek work in the towns when we starve? (Cries of "Lethu!" from the audience.) Why do they refuse to give permits for travelling to young married women who want to go and get money and food from their husbands in the cities? ("Elethu!") Even nature has adjusted to the situation. Birds have migrated to the cities. Why are we being refused salvation? (Dhlomo 1985: 442). [118]

As Couzens remarks, Dhlomo's "Drought" is "finely balanced", for the writer beautifully stages the complexity of adaptation in his fictional text (1985: 287).[119] Modernity (Mkabela's education, new cattle schemes) is counterpointed not only by tribal customs (*lobola*, beads, the villagers' attachment to cattle), but also by South Africa's heroic past and by the oral tradition of folktales, imparted by old Kumalo to the younger demonstrator. There are no melodramatic elements in the narrative, and the narrator rarely intervenes, preferring to let characters speak through dialogue. Thus, the reader is left alone to judge the content of the story, and to grasp the nuances and difficulties of changing customs.

[118] The two exclamations in parentheses probably mean "Our land" and "This land of ours" (Visser and Couzens 1985: 500).
[119] According to Couzens, Dhlomo's more mature style in "Drought" can hint at the fact that the story is one of the writer's last works (1985: 287).

Apart from tackling the negotiation between the opposing forces of tradition and modernity, however, "Drought" is also a strong indictment of the white government of South Africa. This overt element of social protest is alien to the three stories about tradition previously discussed ("The Barren Woman", "He Forgave Her", and "The Daughter"). The multi-faceted content of "Drought" is reflected on a formal level: the insertion of the figure of the fool, the division into chapters, the presence of a poem, intertextuality, and the long dialogues all speak for the story's complex structure.

"Farmer and Servant" shares many features with "Drought". A long short story divided into seven sub-chapters, it describes the adventures of four Black immigrants from the British protectorate of Nyasaland, present-day Malawi, who try to reach the "great and glittering" Johannesburg in search of "good wages and a better kind of life" (Dhlomo 1985: 444-445). At the very beginning of the story, however, they are caught by labour recruiters and taken to a wealthy farmer's land, where they are exploited and treated as slaves by a white man and his son, Piet and Carl Rooi. After a long and detailed description of the merciless working conditions on the farm, the short story recounts the successful escape of three labourers from the yoke of the farmer. Dhlomo's accomplishment in "Farmer and Servant" deserves to be acknowledged as a "remarkable early critique of farm labour conditions" (Couzens 1985: 285).

The shift in narrative perspective is particularly interesting. The story alternates, from one sub-chapter to the other, between a solemn, highly intrusive narrator[120] and a narrative situation in which the organization of labour on the farm is described with a factual, objective tone. Dhlomo's fiction, indeed, depicts the plight of rural Blacks on white farms with striking, almost documentary, detail:

> The compound that housed the labourers consisted of two large stable-like structures with cement floors and glassless windows. Each had an open hearth in the centre, but the labourers were obliged to use braziers for various purposes. There were no beds or bunks. Some workers had managed somehow or other to get rough straw mattresses, but the rest used sacks as mattresses and blankets and sometimes even as work-clothes. (450)

Before becoming a journalist, Dhlomo taught at the Amanzimtoti Training Institute for teachers, also known as Adams College, and at Umzumbe School, in present-day KwaZulu-Natal, where he was near mission reserves and farm areas (Couzens 1985: 252). His detailed knowledge of farm labour conditions may also derive from the publication of the first reports on the notorious Bethal district in South Africa, which probably prompted Dhlomo to write "Farmer and Servant" (Couzens 1985: 285). Indeed, journalist Ruth First and Reverend Michael Scott, invited by ANC-member Gert Sibande to investigate farm labour in Bethal, published a reportage titled "Near Slavery in Bethal District" in the *Rand Daily Mail* in June 1947, followed by a story in *The Guardian* a month later, "There are More

[120] See the following comment from the narrator: "[h]ow lovely are the messengers that bring us the tidings of peace – calm sweet peace after a grim War!" (462).

Bethals – Says Rev. Scott" (Webb 2015: 14-16).[121] In the same years, Dhlomo's own articles on farm labour appeared, such as "Africans on Farms" or "Prison Labour for Farms", published in *Ilanga Lase Natal* in 1946 and 1947, where Dhlomo states that "[y]ou cannot under-pay, ill-treat and not properly feed and house labourers, and expect them to be efficient and contented servants" (1946c: online).[122] Dhlomo's activities as journalist and short-story writer thus appear deeply intertwined.

Dhlomo's short story predates the famous exposé of Black farm labour by *Drum* journalist Henry Nxumalo, who published his investigative report "The Story of Bethal" in the magazine in 1952. Nxumalo's narrative reportage, written in the style of literary journalism, strikingly matches Dhlomo's own story:

> Men […] wear sacks in which holes have been cut for head and arms, and sleep on sacks. Most of the compounds I saw look much like jails. They have high walls, they are dirty and are often so closely attached to a cattle kraal that the labourers breath the same air as the cattle at night. (Nxumalo [1952] 1981: 142)

"Farmer and Servant" also anticipates much later fictional accounts of the situation in farm compounds, such as Mtutuzeli Matshoba's short story "A Glimpse of Slavery", first published in the magazine *Staffrider* in 1979 and later included in the collection *Call Me Not a Man* (1979).[123] The narrator's detailed descriptions of the compounds' power hierarchy, moreover, echo the mine stories of Rolfes Dhlomo:

> The compound was fenced in and it was guarded by the indunas. As most of the workers in the district were Shangaan people and Rhodesian and Nyasaland Africans, the indunas appointed by Rooi were Basotho and Swazi. This was done to exploit the tribal differences of the workers, as the Basothos and the Swazis considered themselves better and more privileged than their 'foreign' fellow-men. (Dhlomo 1985: 450)

Dhlomo's short story thus situates itself at the crossroads between journalism, fiction, and social exposé, drawing from contemporary investigative reports, but also anticipating *Drum* narrative reportages and later short stories written in the period of Black Consciousness.[124]

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[121] Ruth First's early scrapbooks are available online through the Ruth First Papers Project at ruthfirstpapers.org.uk. She kept exposing farm labour conditions in the local press, as her "Bethal Case-Book", published in *Africa South* in 1958, more than ten years after the first Bethal exposé, proves (First 1958).

[122] Editorials on the issue of farm labour could be found in South African newspapers throughout the twentieth century; see, for instance, R. V. Selope Thema's article "Native Labour on the Farms" published in 1922 in *Umteteli Wa Bantu*.

[123] The similarities between "Farmer and Servant" and Matshoba's "A Glimpse of Slavery" are indeed several. In both, the bleakness of the farm compound is juxtaposed with the idyllic landscape surrounding the farm. Additionally, the two stories use the same images. As in Dhlomo's narrative, the labourers of "A Glimpse of Slavery" are flogged and harshly mistreated by Bobby, the Black collaborator of the Afrikaner farmer Koos de Wet. Matshoba's text ends with a death threat from a white man, Jan du Toits, addressing his former Black labourer. "Farmer and Servant" ends with the farmer Carl Rooi trying to shoot his former Black labourer Jack Zomba. "A Glimpse of Slavery" will be further analysed in chapter five.

[124] "Farmer and Servant", like later works of New Journalism, "reflect[s] an increasing tendency toward documentary forms, […] toward the exploration of public issues" (Hollowell 1977: 10).

The description of the inhumane system of farm labour is ironically counterpointed by the way in which the narrator presents the farm to readers in the second chapter of the story:

> An ocean of undulating grass – laden with frost in the morning and dew in the evening, in the morning and in the evening alive with the rich but muted symphony of countless insects – curtsying demurely and yet with sportive felicity and maiden coyness to the gentle winds that blow over it. […]. Here, outwardly, was a beautiful and living pastoral symphony. (Dhlomo 1985: 446)

This Edenic description prepares the readers for the appearance of the farmer Piet Rooi, "the husband and father" and "the monarch of all he surveys": "And what a great deal he surveys! There is the large family of sons and daughters […]. There is the prized herd of cattle, and where the climate is suitable, sheep. There are the black servants and the field workers" (Dhlomo 1985: 447). The description of this apparently harmonious world is obviously replete with irony. As the quotation shows, Black servants and field workers are tellingly enumerated only after the mention of family and cattle. That the two men of the Rooi family are not only farmers, but actually masters of their servants, is stated clearly and directly throughout the whole narrative, starting from the title. The conversation between father and son, taking place before the arrival of the new workers, could be associated to any slave driver, since Carl Rooi claims his right to "flog and ill-treat their kaffir labourers" with his sjambok (Dhlomo 1985: 449). As the narrator explains to the readers, Piet Rooi is a prosperous farmer with "strong individualistic tendencies" (448), who does not approve of the government and of the new agricultural unions. He blames the Union of South Africa for the drought in his land and for the shortage of labour in the farms, since Black men are drawn to the capitalist cities to work in the mines for higher wages, where the "kaffirs" are "spoilt" (449).[125]

After a gap in time, the narrator describes the bond of friendship between two labourers, Jack Zomba and John Mtetwa, who, one night, do not take part in the usual talks among labourers. The narrator in particular stops the narration to describe John's "noble features":

> Suddenly Mtetwa dashed into the centre of the dormitory and stood still and kingly, his eyes flashing around in silent command and appeal to those surrounding him. In the tense silence that followed, he broke out into a dramatic and fiery recital of the poetic praises of his ancestors and heroes, pleading with them to avenge his sufferings and those of his fellow-workers. (Dhlomo 1985: 452)

Slowly, his companions start to sing with him, so that they look like "free dauntless crusaders ready for battle, and not like the miserable workers they were" (452). John, described as a hero in the quoted

[125] Apparently, "Oom Piet" was the actual nickname of a rich Transvaal farmer and minor bureaucrat, Piet de Beer, who devised the "Farm Labour Scheme: Union" around 1948, and who "displayed enthusiasm beyond the call of duty in initiating a brutal system of forced labour" (Bradford 1990: 13). It is possible that Dhlomo drew on this figure for the name of his character.

excerpt, actually manages to escape. To cause further crisis in the Roois' household, South Africa enters the Second World War alongside Britain. While Oom Piet and his son initially oppose this political move, two factors make them decide otherwise: Christine Jappie, Carl's fiancé, joins the Red Cross Society as a nurse, and Carl joins the army after his father is offered a lucrative contract for essential supplies by the government. In the midst of these changes, the Black worker Jack Zomba manages to escape from the farm.

The next chapter is *de facto* a long narratorial intervention in the present tense on the issue of war. The language used by Dhlomo in this part of the story seems to be under a set of Romantic and Victorian influences, as is often the case for his drama and poetry, rarely for his short stories. The subject-matter of war, therefore, is directly linked to a more elevated register of formal English, which nonetheless may sound somewhat stilted to a twenty-first-century readership. The narrator underlines one of the main consequences of war, i.e. the disruption of the normal order of things. Accordingly, the narrative voice resumes the portrayal of the main characters, whose lives have changed greatly: Carl Rooi finds himself in the same camp in North Africa as his fiancé, Christine, and Jack Zomba, the worker who had escaped his yoke. While the narrator repeatedly defines Jack, now a sergeant in the Bantu Corps, "nimble in/of mind" (Dhlomo 1985: 458, 461), as if this were his epithet, Carl refers to him demeaningly as "his servant, nay, his slave" (461). At the end of the war, Jack proves his bravery and saves Christine's life, for which he is awarded a medal. Couzens's assumption that Dhlomo was possibly drawing on the historical figure of Job Masego, who won the Military Medal in the Second World War (1985: 287), may be confirmed, once again, by one of the writer's articles. In "Story of the African Soldier", published in 1945 in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, Dhlomo condemns South African censorship that hinders the circulation of news on the heroism of the "African soldier": if writers had the opportunity to read war records, "[e]pic and novels and factual stories could then be written on the matter […] by their own brother writers, fictionally or factually" (Dhlomo 1945a: online). It is interesting to notice that Dhlomo himself seems to assign the same function to fictional and factual accounts.

The next part of the chapter of "Farmer and Servant" is divided into three paragraphs with a parallel structure, where the narrator comments on the consequences of the end of the war, and on the meaning of peace. From a formal point of view, this emphatic passage, unlike the previous factual description of farm labour, is replete with archaisms, personification, rhetorical questions, exclamations, parallelisms, repetitions, and anaphora. To add to the elaborate rhetorical weaving of the excerpt, Dhlomo also inserts two biblical quotations from Proverbs and from Isaiah, without signalling them, at the end of the second and third paragraphs respectively.[126]

[126] Dhlomo considered the Bible the central book of Western civilisation (Masilela 2007: 19).

The narrator repeats the opening sentences of the paragraphs of the sixth chapter at the end of the paragraphs of the seventh and last chapter, as if to prove his point. For instance, when Jack Zomba receives his medal, he observes that Black South African men are treated with the same harshness as before the war. Hence the comment by the narrative voice: "How inspiring and depressing, sincere and deceitful are the peace orations and announcements of the great!" (464). Here Dhlomo's indictment of the unacknowledged effort of Black South Africans in the war emerges.[127] In an unnamed city, clearly Johannesburg, Christine, whom the war has taught to reject racial prejudice, Jack Zomba, and John Mtetwa all meet again at a Workers' Club, following the "new Great Trek from the country to the cities" (464). The narrator then focuses on the living conditions of Carl Rooi, who cannot find work in the city and who is now single:

> A badly lit, shabby and dirty old room in Vrededorp, the suburb of the poor. In the room are pitiful examples of uprooted and depressed humanity. These dead souls are white men and women – hobos and worse. Most of them are seated round a table drinking liquor, talking drunkenly and making promiscuous love. […]. Carl Rooi is one of those assembled in the room. (465)

Despite his changed social status, Carl still thinks himself superior to any Black man. The description of his dwellings forms a counterpoint to the initial depiction of the living conditions of the labourers on the compound. "How tragic, empty and fraught with poignant memories is the announcement of peace after a devastating war!", the narrator repeats (465).

The ending of "Farmer and Servant" is a powerful epilogue for a complex short story. When Christine and Jack Zomba speak on a raised platform during a workers' meeting, Carl sees them and is unable to stifle his hatred:

> A shot rang out, and John Mtetwa, not Christine for whom the bullet was intended, fell down mortally wounded. Then, before the crowd knew what was happening, another shot, but this bullet, intended for Zomba, went wide. Carl Rooi was quick and lucky enough to kill himself instantly with the third shot before anyone could reach him. (466)

The phrase "mortally wounded" invests John Mtetwa with the stature of a tragic hero, in the same way as the narrator depicts him on his last night at the Roois' compound.

The conclusion of the story may be linked to a historical fact. On 16 December 1929, Dingaan's Day, a white protester's gunshot intended for the speakers of an anti-pass demonstration in Potchefstroom, Transvaal, killed one civilian instead of John Beaver Marks and Edwin Thabo Mofutsanyana, two members of the South African Communist Party.[128] Like many New African

[127] The protest poem "Not For Me", originally published on 19 May 1945, shares many thematic and stylistic features with the narratorial intervention on war in the sixth chapter of "Farmer and Servant": "Not for me, / Ah! Not for me / The celebrations, / The peace orations. / Not for me, / Yes, not for me / Are victory / And liberty! / Of the Liberty I died to bring in need; / And this betrayal wounds and sears my soul. I bleed" (Dhlomo 1985: 377).

[128] See https://www.sahistory.org.za/dated-event/history-december-16. As Couzens remarks (1985: 194), this episode is also to be found in Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter* (1979): "1929, J. B. Marks declared 'Africa belongs to us', a

intellectuals' writings, Herbert Dhlomo's tackle highly coeval social issues, since "the social message of his fictional works was a milestone in his didactically-oriented literary activity, and […] it had to be stated clearly, in order to be unequivocally understood" (Iannaccaro 2019b: 405). The message of "Farmer and Servant", apart from the indictment of farm labour, is a warning against the consequences of the 'poor white problem', a recurring theme in Dhlomo's writings (Couzens 1985: 287).[129] "Farmer and Servant" clearly states that Carl's hatred originates from his inability to accept that a Black man can be more successful than he is, and that even white women admire him.[130] The ending of this short story is closely related to the ending of the only published piece of fictional prose by Dhlomo, "An Experiment in Colour".

Published in 1935 in *The African Observer*, "An Experiment in Colour" was part of a longer work: in 1938, Dhlomo submitted a novel for publication – now lost – titled *An Experiment in Colour*, but it was rejected by Reverend Robert Henry Wishart Shepherd, the director of publication at Lovedale (Couzens 1985: 181-182).[131] He rejected the novel because of its flaws from a literary point of view, though we may add that Dhlomo's politically laden plot did not please Shepherd, who writes that the story is "not only grave but tense" and that it is "not true to life".[132] "I do not dwell on the unfairness of representing the European as forever kicking and cuffing the Native", he continues (Shepherd 1939). Shepherd then criticises the sci-fi traits of the novel, especially the injection that changes a man's skin colour. According to him, the "Jekyll and Hyde episode" is "permissible in pure fantasy" and "out of place in a serious and especially in a propagandistic book" (Shepherd 1939). Shepherd's comments are echoed in the liberal white editors' statement prefacing the short story in *The African Observer*: "We publish this well-written and interesting piece of fiction by a Native author. We would, however, point out that the author's views are not necessarily those of *The African Observer*" (quoted in Couzens 1985: 182).[133]

white man shouted 'You lie' and shot Mofutsanyana dead on the platform, 700 blacks arrested" (Gordimer [1979] 2000: 107). Couzens mentions this episode in Gordimer's novel when he discusses the ending of Dhlomo's short story "An Experiment in Colour", but there may be more similarities with the ending of "Farmer and Servant".

[129] The Commission of the Poor White Problem in South Africa, funded by the Carnegie Corporation, published its report in 1932. Apparently, Herbert Dhlomo read and disapproved of the report, which aimed to improve the conditions of whites at the expense of Black South Africans to solve the 'poor white problem' (Couzens 1985: 183).

[130] See also the reaction of the Native Commissioner in "Drought" when Kumalo's son dares answer him: he "muttered curses and something about spoilt school niggers whom he would teach a lesson" (Dhlomo 1985: 428).

[131] From Shepherd's letter of rejection, it can be inferred that the short story was composed using the beginning (the graduation ceremony) and the ending (Mabaso's scientific discovery) of the novel (see Shepherd 1939).

[132] See Iannaccaro (2019b: 406): "In 1938, Shepherd had also refused to publish some plays by Dhlomo, who was trying to set up a Bantu National Dramatic Movement, or National Theatre; apart from Shepherd's literary observations […] it is also likely that the soon-to-be Principal of Lovedale objected to the social and cultural projects of the by then politically committed black writer".

[133] None of the remaining articles or stories in the white liberal *The African Observer* were prefaced by such a disclaimer (Couzens 1974b: 11).

"An Experiment in Colour" presents indeed a peculiar plot. It begins *in medias res* with a speech by the Vice-Chancellor of Fort Hare University, the most important institution for the higher education of Black South Africans in the period, on graduation day. Frank Mabaso, the protagonist and one of the graduands, listens carefully to the Vice-Chancellor's speech on the "vital subject" of race relations (Dhlomo 1985: 489). According to the speaker, the "race problem" may be solved through intermarriage, which he defines "repugnant", or through science (489). Frank Mabaso is particularly impressed by the second solution mentioned in the talk: according to the most recent results in biochemical research, racial character might be modified by manipulating glandular action by injection. The Vice-Chancellor, however, rejects the idea, because "the solution of the race problem must be a slow, gradual, methodical process" (489). Two years later, the educated Frank Mabaso,[134] now a school headmaster in Sophiatown, Johannesburg, cannot bear to be discriminated against by ignorant men. Remembering the speech by the Vice-Chancellor, he invents an injection that is able to change his skin colour to white, and he finally gains the recognition he deserves as an intellectual. When he decides to divulge his discovery, tired of leading a secret double life, he is shot dead by an Afrikaner: "Goed! Ons wil nie wit kaffirs in ons land hê nie. Waar sou ons vroumense wees? Ha, ha, ha, he, he, he!" (499). Couzens's translation, provided in the notes, reads as follows: "Good! We do not want white kaffirs in our country. Where would our women be?" (500).[135]

The ending of "An Experiment in Colour" has striking similarities with the ending of "Farmer and Servant", even though the thematic concerns of the two short stories may appear quite different at a first sight. Mabaso, like John Mtetwa, is on a platform when he divulges his discovery to an awe-struck and diverse audience, which includes his wife Mabel and his white girlfriend Clara.[136] At the end of his speech, an Afrikaner shoots Mabaso, who, "hero and victim, dropped mortally wounded" (499). As in "Farmer and Servant", a white person kills a Black, educated man who is speaking from a platform to a mixed audience, because a successful Black man represents a threat to his privilege – in both stories the two Afrikaners' concern rests upon 'their' women. Both John Mtetwa and Frank Mabaso rise to the status of tragic heroes, for the narrator uses the same phrase "mortally wounded" to describe their deaths (466, 499). The key thematic concern of both stories is the 'poor white problem'. While "Farmer and Servant" foregrounds Carl Rooi's jealousy of his former Black servants' successful life, "An Experiment in Colour" describes Frank Mabaso's perspective on the colour problem poignantly. Forced to board an over-crowded bus reserved to non-whites, and unable

[134] According to Couzens (1985: 182), the character of Frank Mabaso was probably inspired by American scientist George Washington Carver (1864-1943).
[135] The last sentence in Afrikaans could also be understood metaphorically as "what would become of our womenfolk?". I thank Andrew van der Vlies for the suggestion.
[136] Iannaccaro highlights the significance of the name Clara in a short story centred on the black-white dichotomy (Iannaccaro 2019b: 402).

to enter two different theatres because of his skin colour, Frank is also abused verbally by two police officers:

> "You bloody cheeky nigger, you think you are white because you have a collar on. Give me your damn pass before I kick you."
> "That you won't do, I tell you – here's my exemption."
> "What is your name? Where do you work?"
> "You'll find that in the exemption, if you can read." (492)

As Iannaccaro remarks (2019b: 404), both educated and uneducated Blacks were "perceived as a serious threat by white unskilled workers – mainly dispossessed, impoverished Afrikaners drawn to the gold-mining industry for subsistence", who "felt that their social status was at risk", like Carl Rooi and the anonymous police officer in "An Experiment in Colour". Indeed, colour *and* class are the major issues in Dhlomo's short story (see Couzens 1985: 182; Iannaccaro 2019b: 401).

"An Experiment in Colour" offers interesting intertextual connections. In her book on the history of skin bleach, *Beneath the Surface: A Transnational History of Skin Lighteners* (2020), Lynn M. Thomas mentions "An Experiment in Colour", an "Afrofuturist story" written a few years after the 1928 Immorality Act – Dhlomo's story "points to the intimacy of racial transgressions and sexual threats under segregationist rule" (Thomas 2020: 65).[137] Thomas observes a close similarity between Dhlomo's story and the satiric novel *Black No More* by American writer George Samuel Schuyler (1895-1977), published in 1931 (2020: 65). The title of Schuyler's novel, the name of an actual skin bleach (2020: 65), is telling of the plot of the story, where a young Black man, Max Disher, takes advantage of an invention that turns Black people white and becomes a powerful figure in the American political scene, making his way in a white supremacist organisation. Schuyler's novel is a satire of American race relations, but in the end the protagonist reveals his secret and he is accepted for who he is, in contrast to the ending of Dhlomo's short story (see Thomas 2020: 65). Nonetheless, the similarities between the two plots are hard to overlook. Max Disher changes skin colour and his name into Matthew Fisher, and is thus able, like Frank Mabaso, to meet a young white woman; *Black No More*, additionally, mentions the "ignorant white masses" and the "poor whites" as part of the "race problem" in the United States (Schuyler [1931] 1998: 45, 50).[138] It is likely that Dhlomo knew

[137] The term "Afrofuturism" was first coined by Mark Dery in his anthology *Flame Wars. The Discourse of Cyberculture* (1994), where he defines it as "[s]peculative fiction that treats African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of twentieth-century technoculture" (1994: 180). Combining elements of speculative fiction, Afrofuturism imagines alternative worlds in relation to the representation of Blackness. Notable works include the *Dark Matter* anthologies (2000; 2004) edited by Sheree Thomas. For recent discussions of Afrofuturism, see Anderson (2016) and Barber et al. (2018).

[138] The trope of the metamorphosis from black to white, and more generally of skin mutation, has continued to recent days. See A. Igoni Barrett's *Blackass* (2015), which rewrites Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (1915) in Lagos. In the US context, see Miranda July's short story "Birthmark" (2003), with clear intertextual reference to Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Birthmark" (1843), which however focuses more on gender than on race.

Schuyler's book. Given his work as Librarian-Organiser at the Carnegie Non-European Library in the years 1937-1941 and his regular visits to the Bantu Men's Social Centre in Johannesburg, he was well informed on American writing, as appears from his several quotations from African American writers.[139] In the issue of *Ilanga Lase Natal* of 3 July 1954, Langston Hughes announced a plan for an anthology of short stories by African writers, possibly *An African Treasury* (1960); since Herbert Dhlomo was the editor of the English section at the time, the two intellectuals might have been in direct contact (Couzens 1985: 123). Dhlomo, moreover, must have been aware of the existence of skin bleach products, which arrived from the United States and were advertised in the pages of *The Bantu World*, where he and his brother Rolfes worked (Thomas 2020: 65).

Another possible literary influence, perhaps more transparent, can be represented by Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) – as we have seen, Shepherd himself defined the ending of the novel *An Experiment in Colour* a "Jekyll and Hyde episode" (Shepherd 1939).[140] Frank Mabaso changes skin colour and name, but his personality remains intact, unlike what happens in Stevenson's novel (Iannaccaro 2019b: 402). Nonetheless, the similarities are several; as Iannaccaro observes (2019b: 402), Jekyll's account of his discovery, to be found in the section "Henry Jekyll's Full Statement of the Case", shares many features with the narrator's description of Frank Mabaso's transformation in "An Experiment in Colour":

> He hurried into the laboratory, locked the two doors, closed the blinds on the windows, and got out his apparatus. It was clear that he was putting the finishing touches to a certain preparation which he drew into a syringe. […]. He rose painfully, took the hypodermic needle, stood before the big mirror in the laboratory and deliberately injected himself in the left arm. (Dhlomo 1985: 494)

The mirror plays an important part in Mabaso's transformation as much as in Jekyll's turning into Hyde. Indeed, the word "mirror" is repeated thrice in the space of a single page, to emphasise that surface appearances can be "simultaneously superficial and a matter of life and death" (Thomas 2020: 65).

"An Experiment in Colour", moreover, quotes directly from a non-literary source. The speech by the Vice-Chancellor at the very beginning of the story is actually a word-for-word reproduction of an article that Dhlomo himself wrote and published in 1931 in *Umteteli Wa Bantu*, and tellingly titled

[139] In the prose poem "The Romance of Bells" (1948), for instance, Dhlomo quotes "Minstrel Man" by Langston Hughes and "Dark Tower" by Countee Cullen. Couzens refers to the Carnegie Library's branch at the BMSC when he remarks that the "American Negro books would almost certainly have been chosen by either H. I. E. Dhlomo, the Librarian, or Dr Ray Phillips" (1976a: 73). See also Couzens (1985: 106-123) and Masilela (2007: 110) for the possible influence of African American writers on South African intellectuals in general and on Dhlomo in particular.

[140] In the third issue of the *Reader's Companion*, the bulletin Dhlomo compiled as Librarian-Organiser at the Carnegie Non-European Library in the years 1937-41, the writer acknowledges the influence of Robert Louis Stevenson on his writings (1938c: 4). I am grateful to Archie Dick and Matthew Keaney, who helped me to retrieve photos of Dhlomo's *Reader's Companion*.

"Aspects of the Race Problem". The article seems to be the second in a series of pieces on the 'race problem' published in *Umteteli Wa Bantu*, for a month before the article "Psychology of the Race Problem" had appeared. In the latter, Dhlomo remarks that "mind, not the body and its pigment, is what man should be judged by" (1931a: online). This last idea is also what structures Frank Mabaso's last speech in "An Experiment in Colour", appreciated by Voss for its aesthetic quality (Voss 2012: 350):

> Certain races and nations, who believe that they are superior to others, will not consent to remove the misfit individuals of their own race and colour, and refuse to help and support fit, talented individuals of other races or colour – and that is what stands in the way of the scavenging process of evolution. The problem is not one of race and colour, but of fitness and ability; not of men, but of man. […] what really counts is the majority of capable individuals of any colour and race. (Dhlomo 1985: 498)

Mabaso's disturbing argument apparently endorses eugenist ideas as a solution to the 'colour problem' (Iannaccaro 2019b: 403).[141]

In "Aspects of the Race Problem", Dhlomo comments on the gland theory developed by British scientist Sir Arthur Keith (1866-1955), dismissing it with the same words used by the Vice-Chancellor at the end of his graduation speech: "One thing is certain: that the solution of the Race Problem must be a slow, gradual, methodic[al] process" (Dhlomo 1931b: online). From the article, Dhlomo retains the general and introductory parts discussing the 'race problem' and the consequences of glandular action, but in the short story he leaves out any reference to factual details, such as the name of Sir Keith, and the parts in which he clearly doubts the scientificity of the gland theory, which he defines "a forlorn hope" (1931b: online). If Dhlomo clearly states his opinion in the article, in the short story he uses the injection device and a fictional frame centred on the character of Frank Mabaso to prove his point. The speech at the beginning of "An Experiment in Colour" represents an extreme example of the intersection of the fictional with the factual. As Zander remarks, "in the context of the story, it is not apparent at all that this speech actually is or it exists simultaneously somewhere else as a factual text. The reader will needs conceive of it as fictional, all the more so since the science referred to here is rather reminiscent of science fiction" (Zander 1999: 390). Moreover, the article refers to highly specific scientific theories, and it was unlikely that readers could recognize the documentary value of the speech inside the short story.

"Aspects of the Race Problem" had appeared only four years before the publication of "An Experiment in Colour", so it is possible that Dhlomo was already working on his short story just after the publication of the article, if not before. Either way, the short story originates directly from the article, and the relationship between the two texts is key to interpreting "An Experiment in Colour"

[141] See also Dhlomo's article "The Colour Problem", published in *Ilanga Lase Natal* in 1946.

itself.[142] Indeed, the article clearly outlines Dhlomo's position in the gland-theory debate – "Assuming this gland theory to be true, is medical and surgical science sufficiently advanced successfully to perform such operations?" the journalist Dhlomo provocatively asks (1931b: online). If the two texts are read together, "Aspects of the Race Problem" can guide readers through an interpretation of "An Experiment in Colour", which ultimately shows that science is not a solution. It can be argued that the presence in "An Experiment in Colour" of an omniscient narrator who is less intrusive than in other stories by Dhlomo may be somehow linked to the existence of the article (Iannaccaro 2019b: 401).

"An Experiment in Colour", "Farmer and Servant", and "Drought" are arguably Dhlomo's most socially engaged short stories. Nonetheless, from a reading of "An Experiment in Colour" it emerges clearly that it was written in the early Thirties, before both "Farmer and Servant" and "Drought" (composed around 1948). As Iannaccaro remarks, "Herbert Dhlomo's ideological stance in that phase of his life, although sharply critical of the blatant contradictions of white rule, basically upholds progressivism and assimilation, to be achieved thanks to the commitment of an educated class of people, an undifferentiated élite" (Iannaccaro 2019b: 405). The other two socially committed short stories, instead, do not present such a strong distinction between the educated elite and the anonymous masses of South Africa, thus testifying to Dhlomo's growing disillusionment with progressivism and assimilation in the late Forties.

"An Experiment in Colour" enacts Dhlomo's ambiguous relationship to science and materialism, which can be traced back to his concern over the dichotomy tradition-modernity. The fact that Dhlomo considers a scientific solution to the race problem a "forlorn hope" emerges also from another detail in the story. Together with his scientific preparation, Frank Mabaso also resorts to tribal medicine to invent his injection, "wander[ing] into thick woods abounding with deadly creatures, and covered with all varieties and colours of herbs, which the tribal herbalists explained to him" (Dhlomo 1985: 493). By coupling science with tribal customs, Dhlomo shows the fallaciousness of both. Dhlomo wrote many articles on the question of science, a word he used "ambiguously" (Couzens 1985: 184). The article "Where Science Goes", for example, written in 1929 by Amicus Homini Gentis, one of Dhlomo's earliest pseudonyms, is celebratory of science. Later articles, however, such as "The Threat of Materialism" (1947) and "Materialism is the Curse" (1948), clearly doubt the potential of science that has revealed to man "a fairy-like world with unlimited possibilities" (Dhlomo 1947d: online). Dhlomo's sustained engagement with science is powerfully political and

[142] My discussion of the journalistic features of "An Experiment in Colour", "Farmer and Servant"', "Drought", and "The Barren Woman" draws from my contribution to the proceedings of the XXIX AIA Conference (Italian Association for English Studies) (Fossati 2021c).

inextricably linked to the 'race problem', especially at a time when the "association of Africans with pre-scientific and non-progressive ways of thinking" was used to assert their "ineligibility for common citizenship" (Dubow 2006: 178).

The theme of science is represented also in the short narrative "Euthanasia by Prayer", which shares the same thematic concern as Rolfes Dhlomo's "Zulu Christian Science". In "Euthanasia by Prayer", the Hume family, who condemn euthanasia, decide to pray for the death of the sick Mr Hume, to release him from his pain; Mr Hume dies a few days later. When Dr Hamilton hears the news, he decides to stop administering a drug to one of his patients, Mr Ross, who is suffering from an incurable illness; after a few days, Mr Ross dies. The case sparks heated debate among the villagers. After a scientist from London, Dr Gill, discovers a cure for Mr Ross's illness, Dr Hamilton is found dead in his room. "Heart failure, poison, or a curse from God" are the likely causes of Hamilton's death (482). The moral of the story is to be found towards the end of the narrative, when an anonymous villager talks to another person about the case – and tellingly, it is the longest line uttered by a character inside the short story: "It is science itself that rejects and condemns its own. […]. The true scientist is Dr Gill, not Dr Hamilton […] who accepts known scientific law, not as rigid and final, but as steps towards greater knowledge" (Dhlomo 1985: 482). The story is very short (like Rolfes Dhlomo's pieces), with a simple storyline functional to prove the moral of the story, that euthanasia and scientific *hybris* are to be condemned. At the same time, the title "Euthanasia by Prayer" and the narrator's humorous representation of the chaos among the villagers after Mr Hume's death are infused with irony, which probably signals Dhlomo's implicit condemnation of "poor people", like the Hume family, who "interpreted the Word in a simple literal sense" (478). From a formal point of view, "Euthanasia by Prayer" does not present the same complexity of the texts previously discussed.

2.4 Science and Crime: Dhlomo's Detective Stories

The last short story dealing with science – or, rather, science fiction – is "Flowers", a long short story divided into sub-chapters and composed towards the end of Dhlomo's career as creative writer, for it is written after the Durban Indian riots of 1949.[143] Together with "Aversion to Snakes", "Flowers" is the only short story by Dhlomo that features non-African protagonists (a white cafè owner and an Indian flower vendor, respectively), who incidentally are also criminals. The two stories thus represent an interesting attempt on Dhlomo's part to explore a group of South Africans different from

[143] The Durban racial riots (13-15 November 1949) were the result of increasing racial tensions between the African and Indian population in the city of Durban. Many Africans, included the Dhlomos, expressed their dislike of the Indian population, who sometimes exploited their privileged status in detriment of the African population.

his own ethnicity. In particular, his choice to depict non-African characters as evil criminals who commit multiple murders and who thus participate in Johannesburg's corruption significantly writes back to racist assumptions of Black persons as lawless individuals and to the colonial stereotype according to which only Black individuals, deemed tribal and uneducated, could fall prey to the perils of modern city life. At the same time, the two protagonists are not Afrikaners: even the white man is described by the narrator as "[a] short, stocky immigrant of the Latin type" (Dhlomo 1985: 471). It would have probably been too provocative to describe white Afrikaners as criminals in apartheid South Africa (see Guldimann 2019: 271).[144]

The Indian protagonist of "Flowers", Naram Sammy, is uncannily fascinated by flowers – the whole story is replete with adjectives such as "evil", "devilish", "queer", "uncanny", and "strange". In the first introductory paragraphs, the narrator refers to Naram's admiration of the Indian scientist Jagadish Chandra Bose (1858-1937) for his contribution to plant science; the mention of Bose links the story's opening to the next scene, which moves swiftly to India where an "evil" scientist succeeds in an obscure experiment (415). As is the case with the short story "An Experiment in Colour", therefore, Dhlomo builds his science fiction on real scientific theories and scientists. In an epiphanic revelation, Naram decides to go to India to visit a long-lost acquaintance. There, he meets the unnamed scientist, who explains to him his "evil schemes" and gives him the casket of deadly poisonous flowers he created:

> My knowledge would be your treasure-love. I thought I would use it, Faustus-like, to rule all Asia, not from a throne, but from a laboratory; […] not by foolish, garrulous and ignorant governments […] but by the mute, obedient and immutable laws of science. (420)[145]

When the Indian scientist suddenly dies, Naram goes back to Johannesburg and uses the flowers to commit multiple murders and become "the invisible but autocratic king of Johannesburg" (424). The final sub-chapters read like a detective story and focus on the deductive reasoning of detective Smith from the Criminal Investigation Department (CDI), who suspects Naram's implication in the murders. When he is discovered, Naram has an uncanny vision of his flowers and shoots himself:

> Suddenly the dance of flowers became a mad stampede. A storm was blowing and tearing the flowers to pieces, and the heat of the wind made them wilt and fester. The flowers were moaning. In the stampede he saw the faces of men and women he had met, cheated or killed. This strange company was coming to kill him. He wanted to run away or shout for help, but found himself

[144] Colette Guldimann identifies the same pattern in Arthur Maimane's *Drum* detective stories. In particular, "Hot Diamonds" (1953) and "You Can't Buy Me" (1953) feature coloured and Indian criminals, respectively (Guldimann 2019: 271).

[145] The emphasis on science characterises also the detective stories by Maimane: "Me, I'm smart. I know all the angles. […] I played it scientifically", Maimane's Black detective Chester Morena claims in one of the stories (Maimane [1953] 2001: 24).

> paralysed and voiceless. […]. Quick as lightning Naram Sammy produced the revolver and shot himself before the alert detective could move. (426)

From a formal point of view, "Flowers" largely consists of descriptions by the narrator or by instances of free indirect style to convey Naram's thoughts, rarely of dialogue – Naram, a sort of tragic hero, seldom interacts with other human beings. From the point of view of content, "Flowers" tackles contemporary issues. While staging Naram's tragedy, Dhlomo carefully depicts the relationship between the Indian and the African community – the narrator mentions the Asiatic Land and Tenure Act (1946) and the Durban racial riots (1949) (418).[146] Some comments by the narrator, moreover, are racially biased: the Indians "waxed louder than the Africans, the sons and daughters of the soil, about their disabilities there, and pretended not to see their many blessings" (Dhlomo 1985: 417). Dhlomo himself was ambivalent in his consideration of the Indian population, as emerges from his articles such as "How Long, O Lord!" (1949) and "Indians and Africans" (1953). In the former, written just after the riots, Dhlomo directly blames the Indians for the upheaval, stating that "many Indian business men use unfair and immoral business methods" (1949a: online). It is legitimate to argue that Naram Sammy is representative of this type of businessmen, and it is no coincidence that Dhlomo chose an Indian character as protagonist of his cautionary tale.

Dhlomo's remaining two short stories are "Aversion to Snakes" and "Village Blacksmith Tragicomedy". Like "Flowers", they fall into the genre of detective stories. Dhlomo was familiar with detective fiction: in the second and third issues of the *Reader's Companion*, the bulletin he compiled as Librarian-Organiser at the Carnegie Non-European Library in the years 1937-41, the writer recommends the detective stories by Arthur Conan Doyle and Gilbert Keith Chesterton to his readers (Dhlomo 1938b: 2; 1938c: 4). Like "Flowers", "Aversion to Snakes" presents some of the characteristics of the US hard-boiled genre (a violent and corrupt city as setting, the presence of a femme fatale, the failure of the police), which would also characterise the later and more celebrated detective stories published in *Drum*.

"Aversion to Snakes" features an anti-hero as protagonist: Jack Joseph is described as an "insensitive, steel-nerved and reckless brute", who lives in the "poor white flats" of Johannesburg, steals jewellery and hits his mistress Lily, but who is also "pathologically" afraid of snakes (Dhlomo 1985: 471-472).[147] During his break-ins, Jack also kills three women. When Lily calls the police to report the beating, Jack confesses the murders and the thefts to his startled mistress and to the police after he sees a dead snake. The presence of a female figure causing the main character's downfall –

[146] The Asiatic Land and Tenure Act (1946) aimed to restrict Indian ownership property in white areas.
[147] See Couzens (1985: 305-307) for the significance attached to snakes in Zulu culture, where the dead are thought to return to life in the shape of a snake. Dhlomo wrote an unpublished essay titled "The Snake as an Ancestor" as part of his research on tribal customs (Couzens 1985: 304-305).

the so-called 'femme fatale' – is, like the corrupt urban landscape, another convention of the hard-boiled genre, in which "[t]he representation of women as a threat to masculine mastery is one of the more lasting tropes" (Scott Ball 2018: 30). Dhlomo's short stories often stage the characters' disturbing encounter with the modern city through the representation of marital relationships and love affairs, in which women, though stereotypically represented in their domestic spheres, take centre stage.[148]

The highly intrusive narrator anticipates for readers the outcome of the events from the very first paragraph:

> If Jack Joseph had not been pathologically afraid of snakes he would not have been found out and arrested […]. Unfortunately for him his mistress, Lily, knew about this closely guarded secret of his. When the police arrested him for five murders and a number of thefts, no one was more surprised than they. (Dhlomo 1985: 471)

The opening of "Aversion to Snakes" thus completely reverses the conventions of the detective-story genre, in particular the classical 'whodunit' formula, where readers participate with the detective in the "ratiocinative process" and the mystery is solved only at the end of the story (Naidu 2013: 132). In fact, Johannesburg's Criminal Investigation Department – which features also in "Flowers" – is only fleetingly mentioned in the text, for the police are able to restore the social order by arresting Jack only thanks to his mistress and his eponymous aversion to snakes. The controlling role usually associated with the figure of the detective is actually taken on by the authoritative narrator of "Aversion to Snakes", who repeatedly intervenes in the narrative to anticipate Jack's fate and who tries to motivate Jack's downfall and to unravel the story's meaning for the reader: he comments on the "chain of factors" and on the "true and inevitable" causes (Dhlomo 1985: 471).

"Village Blacksmith Tragicomedy" follows the conventions of the detective-story genre more closely than "Aversion to Snakes", yet at the same time "race disrupts genre" in this fiction (Guldimann 2019: 269): the narrative is actually a parody of the 'whodunit' detective stories. Indeed, irony, which is rarely found in Dhlomo's fictional prose, governs the eponymous "tragicomedy". "Village Blacksmith Tragicomedy" therefore represents those "lighter touches" that Shepherd felt were missing from Dhlomo's novel *An Experiment in Colour*.[149] The presentation of setting is indicative of the tone used by the narrator throughout the narrative:

[148] A similar pattern can be identified in Maimane's detective story "Hot Diamonds", where the detective Morena is defeated by a mysterious woman (Scott Ball 2018: 30-31). For a discussion of the politics of gender in Dhlomo's stories and in *Drum*, see Sullam (2021) and Driver (1996), respectively.

[149] Shepherd's comment reads as follows: "You must have noticed how even Shakespeare's most overwhelming tragedies have their moments of quietness or even of humour" (Shepherd 1939). The insertion of the fool in the short story "Drought" is another example of the few techniques used by Dhlomo to release tension in a narrative, together with irony.

> On the dusty unmacadamised streets ox-wagons and horsemen mingle and jostle with the cars of commercial travellers and others passing through on their way to one of the bigger towns (these travellers are the dorp's chief source of revenue and excitement). In spite of its humble size, this country dorp, following the Great and Sacred Tradition of South Africa, has a segregated location for its black population. (Dhlomo 1985: 467)

In the village's blacksmith shop, tellingly called "Vaderland" ('fatherland'), the dies used to cut threads suddenly start to disappear. The two white shop owners, "Messrs" Jan Nel and Piet Kerk (467), are humorously described by the narrator in their fruitless attempts to catch the thieves – the main suspects are the Black workers. The two men humorously improvise detective skills: they "guarded all exits", "watched the movements of the employees", and "closely observed" them (467). Private investigators in detective stories, indeed, typically perform acts of surveillance; in the context of apartheid South Africa, this generic convention overlaps with the state's own surveillance of Black individuals (Guldimann 2019: 266). The trenchant irony of the narrator is apparent in the rhythmic repetition of the brief sentence "[s]till the dies disappeared" after he describes the two white owners' vain efforts to frame the Black workers (Dhlomo 1985: 467, 468), as if the disappearance of dies were a serious crime – another parody of the detective story, in which a murder is usually committed.

Reluctantly, Nel and Kerk are obliged to call the police. It is interesting to quote the narratorial description of the police's behaviour:

> Of course, to camouflage the object of the raid, all the houses were raided and many Africans were arrested for possession of liquor, failure to produce their tax receipts and other minor offences.
> During the raid the police, as usual, assaulted several Africans. One man lost his temper and stabbed to death an African constable before he in turn was shot by a white policeman. The other recalcitrant Africans who were involved in this fight were arrested and sent to Pretoria for trial as the dorp was too small to handle such a serious case. (468)

The narrative tone is factual but ironic, implicitly criticising the police's pointless harshness.[150] If read out of the context of the story, the quoted excerpt might easily be at home in a coeval journalistic piece on an actual event in South Africa: for its brevity and its clear indictment of discrimination, "Village Blacksmith Tragicomedy" is the one short story by Herbert Dhlomo that would have been most fitting for publication in a newspaper, resembling *Drum*'s hybrid pieces of narrative reportage and investigative journalism. And indeed, when a Black child solves the mystery (mice are the thieves), the narrator ends the story with the following comment:

> But Kerk, Nel and the police wished that the mystery had not been solved by this small kaffir Sherlock Holmes. A journalist passing through the dorp heard the story and published it in a

[150] Interestingly, the narrator never focuses on the figure of the detective in "Flowers" or "Aversion to Snakes", but he does emphasise that both cases "baffled" the Criminal Investigation Department (1985: 424, 471). Maimane similarly launches a critique of the police through the character of detective Morena in his stories (Guldimann 2019: 271).

> Pretoria newspaper which was circulated in the dorp. The story made the boy a hero and the others clowns. (470)

Kaffir is an insulting term for 'Black' in South Africa. The sentence on the "kaffir Sherlock Holmes" reflects a widespread fear among a significant part of the white population in South Africa that educated Blacks would replace them. The reversal of the classical 'whodunit' formula, in which the restoration of the social order often confirms the status quo and which is inextricably linked to imperial power, is particularly significant (Matze and Mühleisen 2006: 4-5). Dhlomo thus re-works, parodying them, the conventions of the detective-story genre to protest against South Africa's socio-political condition and to promote "alternative notions of justice" (2006: 5).

In the introduction to her edited volume on popular fiction, *Readings in African Popular Fiction* (2002), Stephanie Newell foregrounds the didactic scope of African popular literature, whose function is not merely to entertain: she defines popular literature as an eminently urban phenomenon that never fails to "generate debate amongst readers on moral and behavioural issues" through the introduction of "ethical figures" such as the criminal and the barren woman (2002: 5).[151] The literary formulas of the Western (European and North American) popular genre of crime fiction are thus re-worked and adapted by Dhlomo in the last three stories analysed to function in the local socio-political context of apartheid South Africa. He thus contributes to discard the racist association of Black people with criminals at a time when apartheid laws practically forced Black South Africans into an outlaw status. Detective stories and science fiction, moreover, are characterised by a claim to knowledge that, in the context of Black writing, has political implications, as Saul Dubow remarks when he talks about the "politics of knowledge" in South Africa (2006: 12). The emphasis on science is textual evidence of a claim to knowledge denied to Africans by the nationalist government – the Bantu Education Act was passed in 1953 to control Black education and keep it separate. Dhlomo's detective stories thus exceed Western models, exposing the "inadequacy of centre-periphery models of cultural transmission", and they take on experimental overtones (Newell 2002: 8). In this regard he can be considered a precursor of the *Drum* generation.[152]

Dhlomo's short stories also challenge Western conventions from the point of view of literariness vis-à-vis factual modes. As we have seen, almost every short story written by Dhlomo can be linked to one of his articles, commentaries, and editorials for newspapers such as *Ilanga Lase Natal*, *Umteteli Wa Bantu*, and *The Bantu World*. Apart from the thematic similarities, journalism enters Dhlomo's short stories also in the factual voice that his narrator at times uses, in particular in the introductions to some of the narratives (i.e. "The Barren Woman") and in the detailed descriptions

[151] Indeed, one of Dhlomo's stories is titled "The Barren Woman".
[152] I discuss this in more detail in an article published in *Il Tolomeo* in 2021, where I compare Dhlomo's crime fiction with the detective stories by *Drum* writer Arthur Maimane (Fossati 2021a).

of "Farmer and Servant" and "Drought". Moreover, a short story like "An Experiment in Colour" interestingly mixes the fictional mode with a long quotation from an article by Dhlomo himself. While Zander's monograph on the interrelation between fact and fiction in South African literature devotes only a few pages to the discussion of "An Experiment in Colour", it repeatedly addresses articles and short stories by Rolfes Dhlomo. Referring to him, Zander remarks that "[w]riting fictional stories seems to represent rather an extension of factual writing, offering the author the opportunity to treat his issues in a more attractive and effective manner; but his fictional discourse focusses just as much on particular aspects of the South African reality as the factual discourse" (Zander 1999: 127). In fact, the same can be argued for Herbert Dhlomo's short stories, which all deal with issues of public interest and tackle the same concerns as the writer's articles (see Visser 1974: 5).

The fact that Dhlomo's short stories are rooted in his milieu further complicates the unresolved question of the failed publication of his fictional prose. Each narrative, implicitly or – more often than not – explicitly, represents an indictment of the South African society at the time, and it addresses social and political issues. Even the group of texts dealing with the strange and the magical ("An Experiment in Colour", "Flowers", "Aversion to Snakes") powerfully testifies to Dhlomo's stance as *engagé* intellectual. If he assigned a didactic function of social critique to the genre (see also Iannaccaro 2019b: 405), it is not altogether clear why Dhlomo did not publish his short stories, especially if we consider his privileged access to the main newspapers of the time – publications such as *The Bantu World*, as we have seen, usually circulated short stories.[153] Compared to his brother's fictions, Herbert Dhlomo's are in fact much longer and, generally, more nuanced, heterogeneous, and formally refined. Apart from few exceptions like "Euthanasia by Prayer" and "Village Blacksmith Tragicomedy", they would have needed serialisation to appear in the coeval domestic press.

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, a proper understanding of Herbert Dhlomo's literary career has been distorted by the reception of the works published in book form, directed almost exclusively away from the cities to the tribal past and tribal heroes (Visser 1976b: 45). However, his shorter poems, many of them published in newspapers, some of his plays, and his short stories deal with contemporary, strong protest themes.[154] Consequently, the image of Dhlomo as poet that emerges from a reading of the long poem *Valley of a Thousand Hills* differs strikingly from

[153] A publication such as *Ilanga Lase Natal*, instead, apparently was not interested in fiction. When skimming the pages of the issues of the Twenties and Thirties, for instance, no sections devoted to fiction are to be found. Rolfes Dhlomo himself published fiction only in *The Bantu World* or *The Sjambok*, even though he worked as editor for *Ilanga Lase Natal*. In *Ilanga Lase Natal*, however, Herbert Dhlomo published his long commentaries on various aspects of South African life, defined by Ntongela Masilela "prose poems" for their often introspective and lyrical quality (Masilela 2007: 142-148). See Masilela (2007: 205) for a list of Dhlomo's prose poems. The full texts can be found in the second section of Herbert Dhlomo's selected writings in Masilela's website (http://pzacad.pitzer.edu/nam/index.asp).

[154] Dhlomo's drama also consists of plays dealing with protest themes, such as *The Pass*, *The Living Dead*, *Malaria*, and *The Workers*. These scripts are less known than his historical plays, the so-called "Black Bulls" (*The Girl Who Killed to Save*, *Ntsikana, Dingane, Cetshwayo,* and *Moshoeshoe*).

Dhlomo the author of his articles, his short stories, and some of his plays and shorter poems, through which he expresses different concerns altogether. Indeed, Dhlomo's "narrow" and "elitist" conception of literature as a "particular kind of elevated utterance" (Visser and Couzens 1985: xiii) is notably absent from his short stories, which actually display some of the staples of popular literature (see the highly melodramatic endings, the sci-fi plots, and the conventions of crime fiction).[155] A possible key to the understanding of Dhlomo's literary production lies precisely in the problematic issue of genre. The South African writer shifts from one genre to the other, from short prose and poetry to epic poetry and historical drama, seemingly assigning a different function to each discoursive mode.

The link between fact and fiction may serve to help re-evaluate Dhlomo's non-canonical and often disregarded short-story writing. A member of the New Africans, Dhlomo used his prose – articles *and* short stories – to convey his concerns and opinions on his social milieu, ambiguous as they may be, and to educate his readers (see also Iannaccaro 2019b: 405). On the other hand, the genre mobility found in his short stories – and those by his brother Rolfes – does inaugurate an interesting trend which would explode with the publication of the first *Drum* stories in the Fifties.[156] At the same time, some articles by Herbert Dhlomo are written using fictional techniques, so that a cross-fertilization between the two genres takes place. Vivian Bickford-Smith, for example, defines Dhlomo's article "Stopping the Bus" (1948) a "short story" (Bickford-Smith 2016: 237).[157] The assumption that the writer's essays in literary theory and criticism serve as a guide to his writing, as Voss claims (2012: 350), can be only partially endorsed: as far as Dhlomo's short stories are concerned, a very useful interpretative tool is represented by his articles instead. In such an intersection of the fictional with the factual lies both the literary and the political significance of Herbert Dhlomo's writing, whose legacy is palpable also in the short stories of the *Drum* generation. His experimentation with different genres and discursive modes represents an interesting case study, which powerfully challenges our notion of 'literariness' and our assumptions as twenty-first-century Western readers.

[155] An exception can be represented, for instance, by the long narratorial intervention on war in "Farmer and Servant", which does endorse Dhlomo's belief that "literature should be undertaken in an attitude of breathless respect" (Visser and Couzens 1985: xiii).

[156] See also Visser (1976b: 46): "The Dhlomos mark the transition from the early writers, who established the characteristic type of the black South African writer, the journalist-author, and set the precedent, to the generation which emerged in the fifties, for working in factual narrative modes".

[157] Bickford-Smith states that most readers would accept that "Stopping the Bus" "is read as 'fiction', even if based on reality" (personal communication, 10 October 2018). Masilela defines the piece a "prose poem" (2007: 205). I believe that a prose poem such as "Fire!" (1947), however, where Dhlomo recounts two episodes from his childhood linked to the presence of fire, possesses more marked fictional traits than "Stopping the Bus".

3. Interlude: *Dark Testament* by Peter Abrahams

Peter Henry Abrahams Deras (1919-2017) was born in Vrededorp, a suburb of Johannesburg, into a poor coloured family. He left South Africa in 1939, settled first in London and later moved to Jamaica, where he remained until his death in 2017. Abrahams is remembered for his novels – *Mine Boy* (1946), *The Path of Thunder* (1948), *Wild Conquest* (1950), *A Wreath for Udomo* (1956), *A Night of Their Own* (1965), *This Island Now* (1966), and *The View from Coyaba* (1985)[158] – and for his works of memoir and of non-fiction, including *Return to Goli* (1953), *Tell Freedom: Memories of Africa* (1954), *Jamaica: An Island Mosaic* (1957), and *Reflections on the Black Experience in the 20th Century: An Autobiography and Meditation* (2000). His first work of fiction published in book form, however, is a collection of short stories titled *Dark Testament*, written in the late 1930s in South Africa and published in London by the left-wing publishing house George Allen and Unwin in 1942. *Dark Testament* is, in fact, the first book-length short-story cycle by a Black South African writer.[159]

Peter Abrahams has been identified by many as the point of contact between the elite New African generation of the 1930s (including the Dhlomo brothers) and the *Drum* generation of the 1950s, the pattern of whose lives his own anticipates (Heywood 1971: 157; Masilela 2004): like many *Drum* writers, he was born into a poor family, received a Western education, went into exile, and wrote autobiographies of his lived experience in segregationist South Africa. Abrahams knew Herbert Dhlomo,[160] who wrote him a letter of encouragement after some of Abrahams's early poems were published in *The Bantu World* (Abrahams 1954: 227), but he was also friends with *Drum* journalist Henry Nxumalo, as he recounts in *Return to Goli* (1953: 46-145). As well as sending some of his works to *The Bantu World*, Abrahams started a brief collaboration with the socialist paper *The Guardian*, to which Alex La Guma would contribute many articles (see Sandwith 2013: 290-292), and with *Drum* itself, where his novel *Wild Conquest* and his autobiography *Tell Freedom* were serialised (Helgesson 2008: 43).[161] Like La Guma, Abrahams combined his literary vocation with political activism. He was a member of the Communist Party both in South Africa and, later, in the United Kingdom, where he met and shared the ideas of several Pan-Africanist intellectuals, such as

[158] In South Africa he published a booklet of poems titled *A Black Man Speaks of Freedom!* (1941). *This Island Now* and *The View from Coyaba* are set in the Caribbean, where Abrahams moved in the late Fifties. The rest of his novels, apart from *A Wreath for Udomo*, consistently deal with and are set in South Africa.

[159] See also Zander (1999: 130-131): "Peter Abrahams was to score a number of 'firsts' in the development of black writing".

[160] In *Return to Goli* Abrahams describes Herbert Dhlomo as "[t]he fine Zulu poet" who "was my companion in want" during 1938 (1953: 14). See also Couzens: "Abrahams published his little booklet of poems, *A Black Man Speaks of Freedom* in 1941, the same year as Dhlomo's *Valley*. The two earliest significant poetry books by South African blacks were thus published in the same years by two friends, and both breathe the same fire" (1985: 272).

[161] See Woeber 2001 for a discussion of the autobiographies written by Peter Abrahams and the *Drum* generation. *Tell Freedom* was banned in 1957.

George Padmore. After the Communist Party disapproved of his short-story collection *Dark Testament*, however, Abrahams broke away from the party and the London-based circle of Pan-Africanist intellectuals. Individual freedom and the search for non-racial societies became the priorities in Abrahams's life. These tensions within his personal life are reflected in his short-story collection.[162]

The aim of the present chapter is to analyse some of the aspects of Peter Abrahams's *Dark Testament*, which I believe represents a bridge between the prose fiction by the Dhlomo brothers and the short stories – modern and urban – of Can Themba and Alex La Guma, representatives of the Sophiatown and District Six groups of writers discussed in chapter four. The title of this chapter, "interlude", alludes to the structure of the short-story cycle itself, as well as to the structure of the present study. It represents an 'interlude' between the previous and succeeding sections of this thesis, since it focuses on an exilic and somehow 'outsider' figure in South Africa's literary history.[163] Almost a memoir, *Dark Testament* is a mixture of short stories and brief, semi-autobiographical 'interludes', very much like the format of Es'kia Mphahlele's more celebrated autobiography *Down Second Avenue* (1959), which indeed incorporates three short stories that Mphahlele had published previously.[164] By foregrounding the supposed autobiographical features of Abrahams's collection of short stories through a comparison with his autobiography *Tell Freedom* (1954), this chapter aims to highlight the continuous interrelationship between ethics and aesthetics in South African short-story writing by Black authors.

As Zander notes, *Dark Testament* reflects "the strong preference of black authors for factual discourse" and realism "at this fairly early stage of black writing" (1999: 412). On the other hand, the collection is not always rooted in the South African context and it can therefore not be reduced easily to the socialist realist category of protest writing, nor be interpreted only as life-writing. Accordingly, I have chosen to discuss the stories that most reflect these intersecting trajectories – Abrahams's inclination for autobiography, realism, and protest, and his aspiration to enter a Western (English)

[162] Detailed information on Abrahams's life in South Africa can be found in *Tell Freedom* (1954), while his experiences in London, Paris, and Jamaica, as well as his visits to Ghana, Kenya, and the US are recounted in *The Black Experience in the Twentieth Century: An Autobiography and Meditation* (2000). Particularly interesting are the descriptions of his relationship with George Padmore and Langston Hughes.

[163] See Gray (1990: 3): "In short, Abrahams of the 40s and 50s, the founder of dark testimony in South African literature and the country's first professional black writer, is no longer meaningful to us. But Abrahams' work is not only seminal for the variety and sustained standard of his output, but inescapable for its influence – he was the first South African modern to demonstrate the possibilities and potential of black literature in a postcolonial world". See also Thorpe (2018: 60-61).

[164] One short story, "The Woman" (1953), is reproduced almost verbatim in chapter ten of *Down Second Avenue*, "Ma Lebona" ([1959] 1990: 59-67). The events of the stories "A Winter's Tale" (1955) and "The Woman Walks Out" (1957), instead, are reworked in chapter eleven, "Ma-Bottles", and in the lyrical interlude between chapters nineteen and twenty, respectively. See Zander (1999: 390-393). It may be not a coincidence that Mphahlele chose to rewrite "The Woman Walks Out" as a lyrical interlude: originally published in Lionel Abrahams's literary magazine *The Purple Renoster*, the story is particularly refined from a formal point of view (see McDonald 2009: 122).

literary field and write in universal terms. In particular, I seek to outline Abrahams's subscription to modernism in some of his short stories. As Kgomotso Masemola remarks, "[a] singular achievement of Peter Abrahams was to have imported to South Africa the literary modernism of the Harlem Renaissance" (2004: 47). Consequently, the final section of this chapter will discuss Abrahams's personal and literary links with three US writers: William Saroyan, Pauli Murray, and Langston Hughes.

3.1 "I Remember…": Memoirs, Protest Literature, or Modernist Interludes?

When *Dark Testament* was first published, it was received relatively well. One of the first reviews of the book, tellingly titled "The Native View" and published in *The Times Literary Supplement*, reads as follows:

> Mr. Peter Abrahams is a South African native. This fact dominates whatever he writes. […]. *Dark Testamen*t is a miscellany – scenes from the author's life and two or three short stories, also largely from life […] in spite of alien influences and the author's melancholy cast of mind [it is] the most honest piece of literature that has come out of Africa for years. (Stephens 1943: 34)

As was the case with the short stories published by Rolfes Dhlomo, Abrahams's collection was appreciated mainly for its supposed 'authenticity', directly linked to the writer's categorisation as significant other, as a "South African native", rather than for its formal qualities. As Andrea Thorpe remarks, "the books written by a black South African would have a 'curiosity value' for English readers" (Thorpe 2018: 66).[165] In spite of the paternalistic tone, the reviewer is right in defining *Dark Testament* a miscellany. The volume is divided into two sections, titled "I Remember…" and "Stories", composed of fourteen and only five pieces respectively. The writer's categorisation notwithstanding, both sections contain highly hybrid texts that blur the line between fiction and autobiographical writing. While journalistic articles function as a commentary to the short stories by Herbert Dhlomo, the autobiography *Tell Freedom* is a useful tool in interpreting Abrahams's *Dark Testament*. Despite the twelve years that separate the publication of *Dark Testament* and *Tell Freedom*, both works recount the same period of the writer's life: from his early childhood in Vrededorp, Johannesburg, to his departure from South Africa in 1939. *Tell Freedom* notably leaves out Abrahams's experience of self-exile in Europe. As Michael Wade remarks, Abrahams's autobiographical books "cannot be ignored in any approach, however […] literary" to his work (Wade 1972: 98).

[165] Thorpe further discusses the editors' presentation of Abrahams as "exotic": "The dust jacket copy and design for the 1942 edition of *Dark Testament* presents Abrahams overtly as a black author. […] his lips and nose are particularly exaggerated, in a manner harking back to Victorian ethnographic illustrations of black Africans" (Thorpe 2018: 67). Dora Taylor also defined *Dark Testament* "of considerable value" because of its "sincerity" ([1943] 2002: 80).

The first section of *Dark Testament* is structured as an autonomous unit since it begins with a piece titled "I Remember…" and ends tellingly with the story "The Testament"; as the titles suggest, both address the issue of life-writing. Of the fourteen stories, all very brief, only one is narrated in the third person, and more than the half present a young writer as protagonist (and narrator). Not all of them, however, can be defined 'memories'; by looking at a selection of ten stories/recollections from the first part of the volume, the following paragraphs seek to highlight the tension between fiction and memoir inherent in *Dark Testament*. The opening piece, "I Remember…", is actually a programmatic manifesto, or a preface, to *Dark Testament* itself. The first-person narrator by the name of Peter Abrahams recounts an episode from his childhood, when at school he discovered his ambition to write stories. This recollection strikingly resembles the fifth chapter of Book One in *Tell Freedom*, in which Abrahams narrates his initiation to literature through Charles and Mary Lamb's 1807 *Tales from Shakespeare* (1954: 172-186). The parallels between the first piece of *Dark Testament* and *Tell Freedom* are indeed several.[166] For instance, the narrator of *Dark Testament* declares that he is going to tell about his good and bad times (Abrahams 1942: 10), an expression that is repeated in the later autobiography.[167] "I Remember…" ends with the following lines:

> These stories are taken from the everyday lives of some of the people I have known, whom I want to remember. They are spread over eight years, which are also the number of the years in my odyssey from darkness to light. For that reason I have chosen not to alter any of them in any way. Durban-Johannesburg-Cape Town, 1930-1938. (Abrahams 1942: 10-11)

In this "episode-cum-preface", as Zander defines it, the author/narrator clearly strives for authenticity, yet readers should be careful to take his declarations too much at face value – for instance, it is quite improbable that Abrahams did not alter in any way the stories he wrote in 1930, when he was eleven (Zander 1999: 414). The metafictional and autobiographical motif of a writer who tells stories is a recurrent refrain in the collection. The sentence "I remember", moreover, recurs throughout the first section, linking, for instance, the end of the second story to the beginning of the third (Abrahams 1942: 16-17).[168]

The next piece, "One of the Three", can likewise be interpreted as autobiography.[169] In *Tell Freedom*, readers learn about Abrahams's schoolmates Thomas and Jones (1954: 177), who probably

[166] See Gray (1990: 4-6) for a discussion of the importance of "I Remember…" for Abrahams's development of autobiographical writing, in particular *Tell Freedom*. It is worth noticing that some of the information in "I Remember…" was used to write the biography of Peter Abrahams on the website *South African History Online*, thus confirming the text's autobiographical value (see Jacobs 2012: online).

[167] The expression is inserted in a dialogue between Abrahams and a priest. "'I want to get to England.' 'And what will you do there?' 'I want to write books and tell them about life in this country.' 'Will you tell them about us? About this little place?' 'Yes, Father. I will try to tell everything; the bad as well as the good'" (Abrahams 1954: 356).

[168] Rob Gaylard suggests that the introduction to Mbulelo Mzamane's short-story collection, *Mzala and Other Stories* (1983), might be titled "I Remember" to pay homage to Abrahams's *Dark Testament* (Gaylard 2008: 316).

[169] "One of the Three" has been anthologised in *A Century of South African Short Stories* (1978) edited by Jean Marquard.

correspond to the adult protagonists of "One of the Three", Tommy and Johnny. After a reunion among the former schoolmates, Johnny commits suicide, for "everything worth while" in South Africa "was reserved for Europeans only" (Abrahams 1942: 13). "One of the Three" represents a core thematic concern of the volume of short stories, namely the meaninglessness of the colour bar and the constant search for a brotherhood of all men. As Kolawole Ogungbesan remarks, "[t]he ubiquitous phrase, *Reserved for Europeans Only*[,] which dominates the pages of his writing as much as it dominates the thinking of South Africans[,] is taken by Abrahams as a threat to both his person and his art" (1979: 12). Indeed, the phrase is repeated in the last pages of *Tell Freedom*, in *Return to Goli*, as well as in three stories in the collection: "One of the Three", "Jewish Sister", and "Lonesome". The phrase "Europeans only" will represent a common refrain in later short stories by other South African writers, such as James Matthews's "The Park" (1962), Richard Rive's "The Bench" (1963), and Ivan Vladislavić's "The WHITES ONLY Bench" (1996).[170]

Readers can also gather information on Abrahams's life from the story "Love", centred on the character of Aunt Margaret "from Vrededorp", as the first-person narrator states at the very beginning of the story. This detail should immediately alert readers to the connection with the author's life, and Margaret is indeed one of Abrahams's aunts.[171] After describing Aunt Margaret's deep love for her niece Ellen, the narrator remarks that he does not know the ending of Aunt Margaret's story, which he asks Aunt Celia to relate:

> Her words are much better than mine. I found them the other day, scribbled in pencil on a piece of faded exercise book paper:
> "…Yes, chile, and then, when all her worries and troubles were near over, God says 'Come to me Ellen, come to your Father.' […]. Well, she died, and we buried her, and we was terrible sorry".
> The old woman turned away to wipe her eyes with the apron.
> The translation from the Afrikaans of Vrededorp robs the old woman's words of their strength…
> (Abrahams 1942: 26)

"Love" may be deeply autobiographical, but its status as fiction is undeniable, as the quoted excerpt shows.[172] In particular, the last sentence's reflection on translation from Afrikaans is worth noticing, as the narrator reflects self-consciously on his responsibility as story-teller (and story-writer) and on his choice of English as a literary language, ultimately also Abrahams's choice. The fictional device of the words scribbled in an exercise book provides the quotation with authenticity, enhanced by the

[170] A similar expression is to be found in Langston Hughes's fiction, for instance in the short story "Powder-White Faces" (1952).

[171] Compare with *Tell Freedom*: "[Abrahams's mother] was alone except for an elder sister, Margaret. My mother and her two children were living with her sister, Margaret, when she met the man from Ethiopia. Margaret was the fairer of the two sisters, fair enough to 'pass'" (1954: 5). The character of Cockeye, briefly mentioned in the short story "Love" (1942: 22-23), appears also in *Tell Freedom* (1954: 126).

[172] See also Zander's quotation, which refers, among other pieces, to "Love": "[t]hese pieces markedly recur to literary strategies and create their crucial points primarily through textual techniques and thus within the work instead of merely referring to certain events or thoughts" (1999: 415).

fact that the narrator reports them in a non-standard variety of English. Abrahams spoke Afrikaans with his family members and coloured community in Vrededorp. In *Tell Freedom*, the I persona confesses to readers that his words are actually a translation from Afrikaans into English only halfway through the book.[173]

Even though the first stories in the section "I Remember…" are decidedly autobiographical in content, they increasingly display strategies typical of fictional discourse, as we have just seen. In particular, readers should notice the metafictional awareness of the first-person narrator. In his study of Abrahams's writing, Michael Wade remarks that the author was the first Black South African to write fiction in an idiom that is essentially West European, and he refers to the critical category of social realism for *Dark Testament* because of its documentary value (Wade 1972: 4, 6). By comparing *Dark Testament* to James Joyce's *Dubliners*, Kolawole Ogungbesan ascribes Abrahams's collection to Western modernism, instead. Lastly, Jane Watts argues that Abrahams "was to pursue a Western liberal literary tradition" (1989: 2). These critical evaluations of *Dark Testament* testify to the polarised reception of the volume and to what Dennis Walder defines the "tensions within the realist project" (1999: 57).[174] Mainly written according to the conventions of literary realism, *Dark Testament* nonetheless eschews monolithic, one-sided definitions, since it often shifts between social realism, through which the author's autobiographical and documentary urges are expressed, modernism, and a subtle metatextual awareness that self-consciously plays with these tensions.

"Brother Jew", the third narrative in the collection, is emblematic in this regard. The protagonist-narrator remembers an episode of his youth – the story begins with the sentence "I remember…" (1942: 17) – when a young Jewish man called Izzy gave him a story to read titled "Brother Jew". The central action of the narrative is thus actually Izzy's written story by the same title as Abrahams's piece.[175] The writing by the narrator's Jewish friend is an interior monologue of a persona who calls himself "Brother Jew" and who protests against the unjust treatment he receives from society because of his religious beliefs. The parallelism between the persecution of Jews and Black South Africans is difficult to overlook, and represents another leitmotif within *Dark Testament*. Thus, even though the protest theme is strong in "Brother Jew", it is conveyed through techniques associated with the modernist short story: metafiction, interior monologue, and open ending (since at the end of the story Izzy mysteriously disappears). As Dominic Head argues in his volume on the

[173] See also Heywood (1971: 172); Gray (1990: 14). A similar device can be found in Zoë Wicomb's "Another Story" (1991), where the narrator reports some Afrikaans sentences in English, commenting that the characters "had slipped into comfortable Afrikaans" (Wicomb 2008: 184).

[174] The above-mentioned critical comments all contain the adjective "Western". Compared to the short stories by the Dhlomo brothers, *Dark Testament* appears indeed 'more conventional' from a Western perspective. Abrahams's diasporic trajectory and the fact that the volume was published in London probably contributed to enhance this aspect.

[175] "Brother Jew", like other stories in the collection, features a first-person writer-figure who retells stories narrated/written by other characters.

modernist short story, the "foregrounding of technique – the cultivation of expression through form – accurately locates the central tendency of modernist short fiction" ([1992] 2009: 7).

The story "Mister Death" further displays the tensions that arise from a reading of Abrahams's collection and from his own distinction, at the outset of the book, between memories and short stories. The whole piece is *de facto* a long interior monologue, interspersed by anxious sentences in italics addressed by a mother to her dying daughter:[176]

> There was a beautiful little girl once. Just as beautiful as my little dear. Her eyes were just as soft and sweet. […].
> *All right honey. It'll soon pass. Mother knows the pain is bad.* (Abrahams 1942: 43; emphasis in original)

Readers can surmise from the woman's thoughts that she has already lost two other children and her husband. In her mind, she recounts a fairy tale to her daughter in which words with a positive meaning abound, such as the adjective "beautiful". The fairy tale forms a counterpoint to the paragraph that frames the story:

> The sun is shining beautifully out there. Really beautifully. Look at the light on that patch of grass…Funny thing. It's the first time I notice grass in these streets. Really funny. Huh! Wonder how that grass can live here. Nothing seems to be able to live…Look how beautiful it is. (Abrahams 1942: 42, 45)

This framing paragraph emphasises the amenity of nature, which harshly clashes with the life of the characters. The narrative ends with a short paragraph, neatly separated from the rest of the story by a blank space, in which the woman addresses the eponymous Mister Death: "I know *you*. Met you in every corner I've been. Except, of course, in the rich places. There your pal, Mister Natural Death, is the chief visitor" (45; emphasis in original). In "Mister Death", therefore, the theme of protest emerges overtly only at the end of the short story, where the death of the girl is put in direct causal relation with her social status.[177] It is important to notice that the protest theme resonates universally, since readers can infer that the setting is South Africa only through a brief sentence at the beginning of the story mentioning "coloured girls" (42).

The presence of an indefinite setting is even more evident in the story "Three Little Girls". The first-person narrator and protagonist is a writer who recalls when he and his partner Rose met three

[176] As in many stories in *Dark Testament* – "Love", "Jewish Sister", "Three Little Girls", "The Homecoming" – the motherly character in "Mister Death" plays an important role. A reading of Abrahams's autobiography *Tell Freedom* reveals the prominence of female figures in the life of the writer, who lost his father at the age of five: his mother, aunts, cousins, and sister (see also Wade 1972: 14; Woeber 2001: 316-317). The epigraph opening the autobiography indeed runs as follows: "For MY MOTHER, MY SISTER, & ZENA and all those others who, in their different ways, asked me to tell this" (1954).

[177] As in the story "Colour", not discussed here, emphasis is given to social class, and not to skin colour. "Colour" is, like "Mr Death" and "Lonesome", an introspective meditation that alternates the narration with instances of stream of consciousness.

little girls. The narrator decides to write a "story without plot" about them, and he imagines the content and the structure of his future work of fiction (40). "Three Little Girls" ends in the present tense: "[s]trange how a person gets carried away. I set out to write a story about the three little girls. But I have only written a story about the story…" (41). The analysed piece, therefore, subtly plays with metafiction: the story without plot that the narrator wanted to write is actually the text that we are reading, a text which lays bare the process of writing, and, therefore, its artifice. The plotless quality of the story foregrounds the analysis of the first-person narrator's personality, who emerges, according to the staples of modernist fiction, as a "fragmented, dehumanized self" (Head [1992] 2009: 8).

The subject matter and non-specific setting of "Three Little Girls" are worth emphasising. Black South African literature in general, and short stories specifically, are often firmly rooted in the South African context they try to represent, attempting to denounce the socio-political injustices of apartheid. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, most of Abrahams's opera omnia is set in his native land. However, stories such as "Three Little Girls" undermine the understanding and reception of *Dark Testament*, too often reduced to a document on the South African predicament and to the restrictive label of social realism, as we have seen. As David Attwell remarks in *Rewriting Modernity*,

> [h]istorical pressures have produced an image of South Africa's black writing as a literature *in extremis*. The common view is that a uniquely troubled history has brought out a literature whose necessarily *restricted* function has been to support political liberation. (Attwell 2005: 13; emphasis in original)

A close reading of a story such as "Three Little Girls" proves the wider scope of *Dark Testament*, which is not limited to narratives on the South African context in the 1940s and to protest writing.[178]

The title of the story "S'ciety", on the contrary, alerts readers to the social theme of the text. Like "Mr Death", this story defies its own label as memoir: no textual elements suggest such an interpretation (see also Zander 1999: 419). As opposed to the narratives until now analysed, "S'ciety" is mostly composed of dialogue, with the use of mimetic speech to provide the text with authenticity. The first-person narrator, an unnamed elderly coloured man, reports the words of one of his companions, ol' Art, who in turn recounts the story of Uncle Joe, a man whose life was ruined by his addiction to alcohol and by the underlying poverty surrounding him. The ultimate aim of ol' Art is to

[178] The same can be observed in "The Homecoming", a story of forgiveness centred on the consciousness of the protagonist Boy, a murderer who returns home after a period in jail. The narrator never mentions the social context and true nature of Boy's murder; even the categories of colour and class do not play a role in this story. Similarly, little attention is devoted to setting – we only know that Boy's home is in an unnamed South African town. I therefore disagree with Ogungbesan's remark that characters in *Dark Testament* are "so wooden because they are portrayed with too much regard for their social milieu" (Ogungbesan 1979: 16).

collect money to donate for the funeral of Uncle Joe, for "[t]he S'ciety will not forget its duty" (49). The main feature of the narrative is probably language: the pervasive use of urban slang characterises every person who belongs to the eponymous "s'ciety", narrator included, as the following excerpt shows:[179]

> We're too quick, us folks. We don't care 'bout the whys and the wherefores. We just says: "He's good for nothin' and he goes boozin' to hell". Just like that. But us others that knows the inside of the case are not so quick with our tongues. (46)

This linguistic aspect represents one of the main differences between the short stories by Peter Abrahams and by Rolfes or Herbert Dhlomo; in the latter, the narrator's words are always marked by the use of a polished standard English register. In Abrahams's story, language alerts readers to the working-class status of the coloured characters: speaking of the "darn cops", the narrator and his companions discuss "what's happening in Sith Africa", and how coloureds are treated "just like dogs" (Abrahams 1942: 47). As in "Mister Death", the political element emerges only subtly in the story, without didacticism (see also Mzamane 1986: xii). The pervasive use of slang, the presence of a first-person narrator who depicts his social milieu, and the recourse to dialogue are all features typical of the short stories by Abrahams's more famous transatlantic counterpart, Langston Hughes.[180] Indeed, the US appear in *Dark Testament* for the very first time through the recollection of a character in "S'ciety", who had been "in America a long time when he was still young" (Abrahams 1942: 46). The linguistic aspect of "S'ciety" foreshadows the short stories of the *Drum* generation, who often borrowed the jargon of American gangster movies, and mixed it with *tsotsitaal*.

In his anthology of Black South African short stories, *Hungry Flames* (1986), Mbulelo Mzamane inserts "S'ciety" between the prose fiction by Rolfes Dhlomo and that by the *Drum* group, thus identifying Peter Abrahams as the bridge between these two generations of writers. His comment on Abrahams's short story is worth quoting:

> "S'ciety", one of the best realised stories from *Dark Testament*, demonstrates how the traditional mode of story-telling is transplanted to the new environment of the cities. The gang gather in the evenings, as they might have done in the villages around communal fire, to spin tall yarns which serve the same purpose as the traditional tale; the "stories" impart to the group the basic facts of life necessary for survival in the hostile world of South Africa's segregated ghettos. (Mzamane 1986: xi)

[179] Zander refers to the language used in "S'ciety" as a "heavy 'Cape-Coloured' slang" (Zander 1999: 418). However, no words or expressions typical of Cape coloureds are to be found in the text. Abrahams actually writes in a general non-standard variety of English, which can be found, for instance, also in the short stories by Langston Hughes. I believe this aspect is telling of Abrahams's universalist concern in *Dark Testament*.

[180] Langston Hughes (1909-1967) has published ten books of short fiction. Donna Harper remarks that Hughes's prose fiction is replete with dialogue in the "various dialects of English" (2000: 302).

Indeed, the sense of community is emphasised throughout the story, for, as the narrator remarks, one can be "mighty lonesome with none to talk to" (Abrahams 1942: 48). The frame narrator, the story-within-a-story, the foregrounding of the telling – or the metafictional quality of the writing – are all elements that characterise Abrahams's urban narratives.[181]

The figure of the lonely and destitute writer-narrator who acts as the frame narrative voice represents a *fil rouge* in the volume, linking the first section of texts to the second. In "The Old Watchman", for instance, the young unnamed narrator stops to talk with the eponymous old watchman of the building opposite his office.[182] The two men share the feeling of utter loneliness, and this sparks their conversation in front of a cup of coffee. The old man, John, highlights the authenticity of his story, as opposed to the fictional narratives written by the young narrator: "[n]ot so good a story as perhaps you would have written, young sir, but then, true stories are never very interesting" (Abrahams 1942: 52). Metafictionally, we could read this juxtaposition as a parallel to the subdivision of *Dark Testament* into memories and stories, as if Abrahams consciously attempted to play with his readers on the thin line between fiction and reality not only in the table of contents, but in the stories themselves.

Interestingly, the reproduction of oral storytelling identified by Mzamane in "S'ciety" can be also found in "The Old Watchman", though at subtler levels. Indeed, the conversation between the narrator and John takes place in the evening, in front of an "inviting fire" and coffee, thus recreating the setting of the fireside tales (Abrahams 1942: 51). Moreover, an old man relates something to a younger person, claiming the authenticity of his narrative, as was the case with oral storytelling (see MacKenzie 1999: 2, 23). The fact that the episode foregrounds the telling, and the narrator's writing, more than the content of the tale, is confirmed by the title, which emphasises the role of the storyteller.

The story "Lonesome", which is more a first-person aside on the loneliness suffered by a young intellectual writer, introduces a new, autobiographical theme in the collection of stories: the writer's alienation from Marxist discourse. On the train to Cape Town, where he is to meet a white woman from the Communist Party, the protagonist observes the shacks of the Black workers from his coloured only compartment, and he compares them to henhouses. These observations are the starting point for his disillusioned meditation on South Africa, "the land of the white man" (Abrahams 1942: 58). The motif of travel by train, which is also present in the short story "Colour", anticipates an important theme of later short fiction by Black writers, most notably Can Themba and Mtutuzeli

[181] I therefore disagree with Mackenzie's claim that *Dark Testament* does not attempt to negotiate the "interstices of oral and written narrative modes" (1999: 186).
[182] The last story of the second section, "The Virgin", mentions the character of the old watchman.

Matshoba, whose first-person narrators similarly meditate on South Africa's situation while travelling through the country.

When the narrator meets the woman in Cape Town, he understands that she is only interested in their shared adherence to the tenets of Communism, but she does not consider him as her equal. This triggers a feeling of impotence:

> That spot. Green valley in the mountains at a siding where the train stopped.
> Years of utter loneliness.
> The Movement.
> A woman to talk to. A woman with brains who *can* talk; instead, she babbles silence.
> Jesus. Nigger body. Animal body.
> Human mind.
> (61; emphasis in original)

As the quoted excerpt shows, the external incidents during the narrator's travel to Cape Town are intertwined with his own meditations in a "dense textual fabric" that closes the story (Zander 1999: 416). The stream of consciousness in "Lonesome" significantly juxtaposes the Black body with the animal body and the human mind without syntactical links. The theme of protest in "Lonesome", therefore, emerges mainly through formal avant-garde innovation. Other Black writers before and after Abrahams have used similes from the animal realm to denounce the inhuman treatment suffered by the Black population in South Africa – for instance, Herbert Dhlomo in "Farmer and Servant" and Mtutuzeli Matshoba in several stories from *Call Me Not a Man* (1979). Abrahams, however, is the first to use a typically modernist device to voice his protest.

The piece "Lonesome" thus offers little development of plot – more like an "abbreviated fictional scene" or "prose poem", as Donna Harper defines Langston Hughes's short stories (2000: 304).[183] This notwithstanding, the theme of protest emerges quite overtly in "Lonesome". In addition to an ironic quote from Sarah Gertrude Millin's racist *God's Stepchildren* (1924), the narrator also addresses and guides readers through his meditations on injustice by repeating "see" (Abrahams 1942: 57, 58, 61). At the same time, the short story openly criticises the Communist Movement in South Africa, which offers companionship only in political terms without relieving the loneliness of the narrator, who strives to assert his right to determine what defines individual liberation (Ensor 1992: 118).[184] Like Abrahams, the narrator is a young writer alienated from the Communist Movement in South Africa, of which he is a member, and to which he must submit his first book. This can be read as an ironic, metafictional reference to *Dark Testament* itself, published without the approval of the

[183] See, for instance, "Saratoga Rain" by Langston Hughes (1963: 57-58).
[184] The narrative "Thanksgiving", in the second section of the volume, similarly denounces both the socio-political conditions of South Africa and the tenets of Marxism. The short story's naïve happy ending and one of the characters' belief that everything can be "explained away by politics" are meant to be read as an ironic critique of the Communist Party as Abrahams saw and experienced it (1942: 111).

Communist Party precisely because of stories like "Lonesome" – formally innovative and openly critical of the movement (Thorpe 2018: 71-72).[185] In *Return to Goli*, Peter Abrahams recalls his own disillusionment with the British section of the party:

> I would never submit my work for approval. And to hell! Keats was, and always will remain, more important to me than the Marxist "classics". I was beginning to feel as personally unfree as I had felt in South Africa. […] Communism and representatives of it must, of necessity, see only one side of a question, their side. (Abrahams 1953: 16-17)

The juxtaposition of formal, modernist features with strong autobiographical traits emerges also from a reading of the short story "Saturday Night". The opening provides the story with authenticity: "Saturday night in our big towns. It is something to remember. Vrededorp. Johannesburg" (Abrahams 1942: 62). What follows is a modernist montage of seven different scenes, each separated by diacritics, portraying different inhabitants of Vrededorp in their daily activities and human interactions. Each scene describes a snapshot of the common life of the poor inhabitants of Vrededorp in minute details, as the narrator pinpoints the precise location of the action, listing the real names of the streets where these episodes take place.[186] The last snapshot is the culmination of the short story: the first-person narrator describes a young coloured writer in the solitude of his room – patently an Abrahams-figure – who listens to the sounds coming from the "stream of humanity" outside (Abraham 1991: 160). Whereas the other characters of "Saturday Night" all engage in a dialogue with other human beings, the writer is portrayed alone, and the narrator only reports his thoughts: "What's the use of being alive if you can't do any bloody thing because of your colour? It's all very well to say I've got to think of the Movement only…But Jesus! […] I ask for company" (68). The last page of "Saturday Night", therefore, echoes the theme of the preceding story, "Lonesome".

Abrahams carefully builds up a set of fictional *and* autobiographical cross-references in his collection of short stories. By portraying different scenes, "Saturday Night" focuses, unlike the Communist Movement, on the divergent needs of individuals (Abraham 1991: 160). Once again, readers can grasp the poor living conditions of the Black population in South Africa through the texture of the story, without the need of an authoritative narrator who, didactically, explains the significance of such living conditions to readers. It is interesting to notice that Mphahlele's autobiographical *Down Second Avenue* similarly includes a paragraph titled "Saturday Night", followed by a brief interlude, describing a typical Saturday night in the township of Marabastad,

[185] See Corinne Sandwith's illuminating paper "'Yours for Socialism': Communist Cultural Discourse in Early Apartheid South Africa" (2013) for a discussion of the Communist Party's instrumental emphasis on documentary and testamentary writing.

[186] The character of the first scene, Dinnie, is probably a re-elaboration of the figure of Dinny, one of Abrahams's play mates. Compare with *Tell Freedom* (1954: 84-191). This character is also mentioned in "The Testament", which closes the section "I Remember…": "Dinnie was the fellow with whom I went bumming in Vrededorp when I was a kid, long ago" (1942: 75).

Pretoria, from a first-person perspective. As in *Dark Testament*, formal innovation is functional to an indictment of the living conditions in the township, particularly of the police's behaviour. The climax of the story is reached, as in Abrahams's "Saturday Night", in the last page of the interlude, in which words follow one another without syntactical links, echoing the ending of Abrahams's "Lonesome":

> But now it's Saturday night and I want sleep. Wonder if that poor man has been caught. Police, police. Mother I fear police grandmother I don't want police Aunt Dora Uncle I fear the police I hate them. (Mphahlele [1959] 1990: 46).[187]

The ten short texts discussed in the preceding paragraphs are representatives of the contrasting tensions in the first section of *Dark Testament*. In particular, the heterogeneity of the fictions in "I Remember…" – a mixture of autobiographies, self-reflexive narratives, and eye-witness accounts of the South African milieu – clashes with the neat division into stories and memories that readers encounter in the very first page of the volume. However, it seems as if the pieces in the first section of *Dark Testament* gradually move from factual claims and stark autobiographical traits ("I Remember…", "One of the Three", "Jewish Sister", and "Love") to stories with little ("Brother Jew", "The Old Watchman", "Lonesome", "Saturday Night", and "Henry and Martha") or no reference at all to Abrahams's life ("Colour", "Three Little Girls", "Mister Death", "S'ciety", and "The Testament"). In this way, the passage from recollections to short stories is smoothed by the fictional qualities of many recollections themselves. In fact, the second section of *Dark Testament* is not completely devoid of references to Peter Abrahams's life, as the following paragraphs attempt to show by discussing three short stories ("Hatred", "'From an Unfinished Novel'", and "The Virgin").

3.2 "Stories": Autobiography, Metafiction, and Universalist Concerns

The section "Stories" in the table of contents immediately strikes the reader for one detail: though composed of only five pieces, it makes up for half of the collection, meaning that the narratives in the second section are significantly longer. All of them, apart from "The Virgin", are narrated by a third-person, non-intrusive narrator, whereas the pieces in the first section, except for "Colour", are all recounted by a first-person narrator – albeit the latter at times acts only as the frame narrative voice. At a first sight, therefore, the stories in the two sections differ markedly from a formal point of view. I argue, however, that their difference at a thematic level is not as neat as the subdivision in *Dark Testament*'s table of contents indicates.

[187] Both Abrahams and Mphahlele attended the same school, St Peter's Secondary School in Rosettenville, Johannesburg. Mphahlele remembers his schooldays with Abrahams in his autobiography *Down Second Avenue* (see Mphahlele [1959] 1990: 128-129). Abrahams's *Tell Freedom* (1954) and Es'kia Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue* (1959) have often been compared (see, among many others, see Cartey 1971: 30-39; Masemola 2004). Fascinating parallelisms, however, arise also from a comparison between *Dark Testament* and *Down Second Avenue*.

The first four narratives in the section "Stories" portray very different characters in different contexts. "Hatred", set in a village near Johannesburg, recounts the story of Isaac, a Jewish man who escaped the pogroms in East Europe and settled in South Africa with his family. The first part of the narrative focuses on Isaac's nostalgia for his home country, idealised as the land of "the fire and the singing" (Abrahams 1942: 78). His past recollections, conveyed through free indirect speech, are constantly juxtaposed with the present discrimination he suffers in his village. The second part of the short story describes the brutal beating of Isaac's son by some Afrikaners from the village. The victim is ultimately saved by a white man, Jan Pretorius, who is therefore rejected by his own family and fellow villagers. The main thematic concerns of "Hatred" echo the subject matter of the whole short-story collection: Jewish characters – Isaac but also the figures in "Brother Jew" and "Jewish Sister" – are compared with Black South Africans for their sufferings. The short story, moreover, expands its South African setting: in a letter exchange between Isaac and his friend Micha, now living in New York, there are references to the United States, to the Nazis' persecution of Jews in Europe – *Dark Testament* was written in the Thirties – as well as to the man's unnamed native land in East Europe. In *Return to Goli*, Abrahams describes his own development as a writer, whose main concern is "to fit the problems of my own group into the general human scheme" and "to purge myself of hatred" (Abrahams 1953: 17). "Hatred", albeit rooted in the South African context, is thus exemplary of his universalist concerns.

Contrary to short stories by the Dhlomo brothers that explore the Jim-comes-to-Joburg trope, none of the narratives by Peter Abrahams dwells on the evils of city life. "Hatred" is emblematic in this regard. The narrator repeatedly emphasises the peripheral quality of the village, where "[n]othing big ever happened" (Abrahams 1942: 77). Indeed, the only Afrikaner in the story cast under a positive light is Jan Pretorius, who misses "the permanent hum of the big city", where he has gone to live (91). In "Hatred", therefore, big cities are synonymous with open-mindedness, whereas small "dorp[s]" with parochial attitudes (77). In this regard, the short fiction by Peter Abrahams anticipates the metropolitan outlook of the prose pieces by the *Drum* generation.[188]

Abrahams's critique of the poor social conditions of and discriminations against Blacks and coloureds is more explicit in the story "From an Unfinished Novel". A lengthy introduction by a third-person external narrator sets the episode in 1915 in the Transvaal Highveld and it dwells on the changes brought by the white man, ultimately focusing on an educational institution, the fictional Lebana College. The narrative then zooms in on two teachers, a white man, James, and a Black

[188] See also Mphahlele (2007: 218): "[…] it was Abrahams who pioneered an urban style". As opposed to the Dhlomo brothers, for instance, there is almost no reference to traditional rites in *Dark Testament* – even though Abrahams was familiar with them, as he recounts in *Return to Goli* (1953: 180).

woman, Jane, walking "intimately" near the college (121). With the false promise of marriage, James seduces the educated Jane, who feels "an outcast" among her own people because of her privileged status and education (122).[189] The news of their sexual liaison, however, soon spreads. As a result, James leaves the college and a pregnant Jane, who is disowned by her own father, a chief, and who is expelled from Lebana College. She is also forced to leave her new-born twins with the director of the college, Father John, whom James had nominated as the children's legal tutor.

The open ending of the eponymous "unfinished novel" portrays Jane leaving the college and her children. This short story denounces the ambiguous treatment of Black students and teachers by missionaries in educational institutions like the Lebana College.[190] Abrahams describes as a wrong equation the distance between the white man's belief in God and his treatment of the Black population:

> The white man believed in God. He had brought God to us. God taught: "Love thy neighbour as thyself." Christ came that we might have life and have it more abundantly. The Church taught that we were all brothers of Christ, one with another… And the whites, those who had spat on us and on others, were all Christians. The equation did not work out. (Abrahams 1954: 280)

Beneath the texture of "From an Unfinished Novel", Peter Abrahams's own experiences at Grace Dieu Training College in Pietersburg, recounted in *Tell Freedom*, emerge subtly (see also Ogungbesan 1979: 93). The fictional Lebana College near the town of Louis Trichardt is located not far from Pietersburg, the actual location of Grace Dieu. The presentation of setting in "'From an Unfinished Novel'" clearly derives from Abrahams's own experiences at the Training College, as described in chapter three of *Tell Freedom*'s Book Two (Abrahams 1954: 258 and *passim*). The natural landscape of the Transvaal Highveld is portrayed as an Edenic location in both works; more importantly, the pupils' routines in both colleges are similarly punctuated by religious rites.[191]

The different forces shaping *Dark Testament* converge in the closing narrative, "The Virgin", also quite autobiographical despite its classification as story. Hence *Dark Testament*, in a sort of ring composition, opens and ends on a strongly autobiographical and metafictional note. The speaking 'I' is a twenty-five-year-old short-story writer, David Mason, destitute and lonesome, who wants to write one last story so as to leave his "monument" behind him – as he says addressing the reader in a sort of fragmented preface to the story "The Virgin" that he is about to write (Abrahams 1942: 142). The

[189] In *Tell Freedom*, Abrahams similarly describes the barrier between him and his family when he first returned from Grace Dieu Training College: "They were happy to have me back, but behind their joy was an anxiety they could not quite keep from me. I had changed. What was to become of me? What could I do with all my learning?" (Abrahams 1954: 272).

[190] Jane's protest against Father John is explicit: "You have robbed me of my children in the name of Christ. You have helped to rob my people in the same way" (138).

[191] See, in particular, the correspondence between page 123 of "'An Unfinished Novel'" (1942) and page 162 of *Tell Freedom* (1954), in which the bells' tolling announces the beginning of the Angelus.

beginning of the story thus foregrounds the artifice of writing through a long, metafictional aside and several intertextual references, as in the following passage:

> [t]his is the story of my failure. My world, my country, has no place for me. It had no place for Vincent Van Gogh when he lived. […]. And young Arthur Sterling. He wrote "The Captive". […]. And John Keats. […]. (I stopped for a long while, and I have pulled myself together, and my mind is much clearer now. I don't know how long it's going to remain so. So I *must* write down this story while I'm calm. But I just want to tell you it's true. Every word of it). (143; emphasis in original)

The mention of Arthur Sterling, Upton Sinclair's fictional author of "The Captive" in *The Journal of Arthur Sterling* (1903), alongside Vincent Van Gogh and John Keats, further conflates the fictional level with the outside world. The narrator-author sets the story on 31 August 1939, a device that provides the text with authenticity and, at the same time, anticipates the narrative's dark atmosphere: it is the eve of the Second World War. Mason recalls that at that time six of his stories and a whole anthology had been rejected for publication.[192] The anthology "was a book of stories an old watchman had told me during the long winter evenings I spent with him round his fire." (143). The mention of stories from an old watchman immediately brings to the fore the narrative "The Old Watchman" in the collection we are reading, thus enhancing the metafictional traits of the story.

The new neighbour of David Mason is a prostitute, Rosie, whom he despises for her activity. At night, however, the protagonist faints because of deprivation,[193] and, in his sleep, Mason's mind travels along association of ideas. One of the most recurring images is the face of a motherly woman, a common pattern in *Dark Testament*. The narrator interestingly comments that "[i]t might have been true" or that "[i]t might have been just another of my selected stories" (150), playing on the thin line between the real and the fictitious world inside a fictional story. In four pages, the words "dark" and "darkness" are repeated seven times with many referents (150-153): the darkness of the night, the darkness of Mason's dreams, and, ultimately, the darkness of the milieu represented by Abrahams in *Dark Testament*. Indeed, in the first programmatic piece of the collection, the author defines the volume of short stories his "odyssey from darkness to light" (11).[194] "The Virgin", therefore, contains many metafictional references to the macro-structure of the whole short-story cycle.

When Mason wakes after eight days, he discovers that the prostitute has been taking care of him. The two find companionship in each other, until the girl dies of heart failure. At the close of the story, David Mason, like the fictional Arthur Sterling in Upton Sinclair's novel, anticipates his suicide

[192] Compare with the first story "I Remember…": "I've had stories and poems published and rejected" (1942: 10).
[193] The parallels between the last, explicitly fictional short story and the first autobiographical piece are therefore numerous: in "I Remember…", the author recounts that he fainted at school for starvation (10). The end of *Tell Freedom*, where the author's stay in Cape Town is recounted, also portrays in detail his poor physical condition (1954: 352 and *passim*). Many parallels can be drawn between "The Virgin" and the last chapters of *Tell Freedom*.
[194] The light/dark imagery is also present in *Tell Freedom* (see Gray 1990: 10).

with bitter tones addressed in Baudelairean fashion to the petite-bourgeois, "hypocrite lecteur": "You are the murderer! Your souls died long ago. I wandered through your world of civilisation and enlightenment. And found God in one of your outcasts…" (160).

Thus, "The Virgin" presents strong and easily detectable autobiographical traits. However, the narrative should not be interpreted only in terms of life-writing, but rather as a possible representation of Peter Abrahams's life had he remained in South Africa (Zander 1999: 423). The dates indicated in the preface "I Remember…" support this assumption, for the author declares that the stories refer to his memories of the years 1930-1938. "The Virgin", however, is set in 1939, precisely the year of the writer's departure for England. The closure of *Tell Freedom* indicates the departure for Europe as the only viable alternative for the writer:

> For me, personally, life in South Africa had come to an end. […] I had to go or be for ever lost. […] Perhaps life had a meaning that transcended race and colour. If it had, I could not find it in South Africa. Also, there was the need to write, to tell freedom, and for this I needed to be personally free.... (Abrahams 1954: 370)[195]

The profound and continuous dialogue between *Dark Testament* and the subsequent *Tell Freedom* testifies to the thin and blurred line that divides fiction from life-writing. While it is quite common to find autobiographical traits in fictional works, the division into recollections and stories by Abrahams himself complicates the interpretation of the short-story cycle:

> By virtue of this division, certain texts are designated as autobiographical and biographical ones and contrasted with others which are supposed to lack these features. Thus the reader is called upon here to take notice of such elements […]. With regard to some of the works, it seems that Abrahams established the categories merely in order to undermine them. (Zander 1999: 423-424)

The conscious conflation of fiction and life-writing in *Dark Testament* may depend on two factors. First, the ethical imperative always steering Abrahams's writings: by providing his stories with an explicit claim to authenticity, he is able to criticise and testify to the socio-political condition in South Africa, the ultimate cause of his self-exile (see Zander 1999: 424). Not surprisingly, the titles of Abrahams's short-story cycle and his main autobiographical work both refer to the necessity of telling a story – the word "testament" and the imperative "tell". It may be for this reason that Abrahams has often been associated with the Lukácsian category of critical realism.[196]

In the second place, however, Abrahams's subtle play between fact and fiction may be also interpreted as a conscious puncturing of the illusion of reality, in an almost post-modernist fashion: the writer constantly conflates the autobiographical, fictional, and metafictional level in *Dark*

[195] Compare with *Return to Goli*: "Life in that country had made me humourless, intense and bitter" (Abrahams 1953: 14).
[196] Nadine Gordimer considered both La Guma and Peter Abrahams as key "critical realists" (McDonald 2009: 186).

Testament. Accordingly, his paratextual subdivision in the table of contents and the preface are clearly not intended to be interpreted at face value, but rather as a challenge to readers – since, as we have seen repeatedly, the labels assigned to the texts rarely correspond to their status. In his conscious blurring of the lines between reality, fiction, and metafiction, Abrahams foreshadows Zoë Wicomb's much later textual practice, particularly as far as her first book *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987) is concerned. The autobiographical and metafictional figure of the first-person writer-narrator is interestingly given special space in both short-story collections.[197]

3.3 Beyond South Africa: US Connections and Metropolitan Aspirations

As we have seen, the main difference between the two sections in *Dark Testament* resides in their formal elements. The pieces in "I Remember…" are particularly short, with little development of plot, and very introspective. There is a deep similarity between these fictional pieces and the lyrical interludes which divide the more factual chapters of Es'kia Mphahlele's later autobiography *Down Second Avenue* (1959).[198] A likely textual influence might be seen in the work by American writer William Saroyan (1908-1981), whose short-story collection *The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze and Other Stories* (1934) established his fame as short-story writer. Peter Abrahams directly mentions this intertextual source in "The Virgin", when the protagonist David Mason faints and dreams: "[a]nd John Keats begged me to turn into a daffodil, but I could not […]. And the Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze laughed at me. He was sailing through the air with a roast chicken in his hands" (Abrahams 1942: 153). Indeed, the protagonist of "The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze" is a destitute writer who, in the end, starves to death "with the grace of the young man on a trapeze" (Saroyan [1934] 1997: 25). The influence of Saroyan's writing, however, extends beyond "The Virgin", and can be seen in the whole short-story collection *Dark Testament* (Stephens 1943: 34; Heywood 1971: 158).[199] The stories of Saroyan, a son of Armenian immigrants, are often autobiographical and focus on the diverse immigrant communities in the United States, such as Armenian, Irish, and Jewish. As in *Dark Testament*, the use of a first-person narrator predominates in the stories, and the protagonist is often a poor and lonely writer.[200] The texts, some of them very brief, are decidedly introspective, focusing on the characters' thoughts through an extensive use of

[197] Moreover, the lives of both Abrahams and Wicomb are characterised by transnationalism.
[198] Both *Down Second Avenue* and the earlier *Tell Freedom* possess fictional traits (see Ogungbesan 1979: 86-89). In *Return to Goli* (1953), too, Abrahams interestingly mixes the style of reportage with stories from his past and introspective reflections written according to fictional techniques (see, for instance, the chapter "The Blacks"; 1953: 90-145).
[199] The oeuvre of Saroyan was well known in South Africa and his drama *My Heart's in the Highlands* (1939) was performed in the 1940s in various South African theatres, such as the Pretoria People's Theater (Sandwith 2013: 300).
[200] Saroyan's story "1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8", for instance, depicts a young lonely man wanting the company of a woman, a recurrent theme in *Dark Testament* as well.

free indirect style.[201] Metafiction also plays an important role in Saroyan's collection, as exemplified by the following excerpt from "Seventy Thousand Assyrians":

> A young writer goes out to places and talks to people. He tries to find out what they remember. I am not using great material for a short story. Nothing is going to happen in this work. […]. I am merely making a record, so if I wander around a little, it is because I am in no hurry and because I do not know the rules. If I have any desire at all, it is to show the brotherhood of man. […] I do not believe in races. (Saroyan [1934] 1997: 31-32)[202]

Another silent intertextual dialogue between the United States and South Africa might take place in *Dark Testament*. In 1943, only one year after the publication of Abrahams's short-story cycle, the homonymous long epic poem "Dark Testament" was published in America by the Black writer and activist Pauli Murray (1910-1985). The poem, later the title poem of the anthology *Dark Testament and Other Poems* published in 1970, consists of twelve sections and addresses the forgotten history of African Americans. The homonymy notwithstanding, the two writers apparently did not know each other and the respective works. Indeed, the poem's composition began in the late Thirties, before the publication of Peter Abrahams's *Dark Testament*, with the title "Dark Anger", but it was published only in 1943 as "Dark Testament", right after the Harlem Riots (Peppard 2010: 33). Nonetheless, the fact that two Black writers from two different countries published fictional works with identical titles in the same years raises interesting considerations on the transatlantic connection between the United States and South Africa in the Thirties and Forties. As in Abrahams's short-story cycle, the ethical imperative of Murray's poem is deep-rooted: the "testament" of the African American population "must be told, endlessly told" to achieve a true brotherhood of men (Murray [1970] 2018: 18).

There may be another connection between the two writers. Murray knew well the intellectuals of the Harlem Renaissance (see Bell-Scott 2002: 61) – she begins the second section of *Dark Testament and Other Poems* with an epigraph by Langston Hughes. Peter Abrahams was deeply influenced by African American literature, which he first discovered in the shelves of the Bantu Men's Social Centre in Johannesburg and which had "the impact of a revelation" on him (Abrahams 1954: 225), most notably Langston Hughes (Taylor 1942: 78; Bickford-Smith 2016: 225). The two actually met in New York in 1955 and "parted as brothers", as Abrahams himself recalls in his latest autobiography *The Black Experience in the Twentieth Century: An Autobiography and Meditation* (2000: 144). The influence of Hughes's writing, in particular his prose fiction, is recognisable also in

[201] See "The Big Tree Coming", entirely written as a stream of consciousness and, therefore, with almost no punctuation (Saroyan [1934] 1997: 201-206).

[202] See also Saroyan's own statement on short-story writing: "[w]hat can we understand about short stories *away from print*? Well, to begin with, they happen daily to everybody. They are told, with form and style, by the people one to another" (Saroyan 1969: 62; emphasis in original).

Dark Testament.[203] Many short stories by Langston Hughes are very brief and introspective, "abbreviated fictional scenes" as Donna Harper defines them (2000: 304). Furthermore, they are characterised by the heterogeneity of the protagonists, who experience "loneliness, isolation, or financial distress", though the violence of the social context is only implied, and never explicitly foregrounded (Harper 2000: 302), as in *Dark Testament*. The urban modernism of the Harlem Renaissance was thus partially appropriated by Peter Abrahams in his first book, which set the example for the next generation of South African short-story writers orbiting the magazine *Drum*. As Ntongela Masilela remarks, "Abrahams's uniqueness was defined by the unstable conjunction of the literary modernism of New Negro modernity and the literary modernity of Romanticism" (2004: 34). It is worth noticing that the modernist fragmentation and stylistic devices that abound in *Dark Testament* are not present in Abrahams's social realist novels, especially *Mine Boy* (1946), *The Path of Thunder* (1948), and *Wild Conquest* (1950).[204]

Langston Hughes played a pivotal role in the development of South African short-story writing, both through his interest in *Drum* and with his edited anthology of African short prose fiction, *An African Treasury* (1960). The illuminating compendium of epistolary exchanges between the writers of *Drum* and Hughes, *Langston Hughes and the South African Drum Generation* (2010), edited by Shane Graham and John Walters, sheds new light on this transatlantic generic connection. Both Hughes (invited by Henry Nxumalo) and Abrahams acted as judges of contributions to *Drum*'s second short-story competition in 1953 (Graham 2010: 7).[205] Hughes and Abrahams's epistolary dialogue can shed new light on the latter's attitude to short-story writing. After complimenting Abrahams for *Tell Freedom*, Hughes asks the writer to contribute some short stories to his forthcoming anthology of African narratives, to which Abrahams replies that he has not written short stories "for an awfully long time", but that he would "dig up" something from his early books whose copyright he controls (2010: 29).[206] In the end, Hughes selects an excerpt from Abrahams's novel

[203] Hughes's first book of short stories, *The Ways of White Folks*, was published in 1934. Richard Rive read Hughes's first collection, but he lamented the poor availability of the American writer's works in South Africa (see Graham and Walters 2010: 38). Abrahams's writing in the Forties was also influenced by Richard Wright's anthology of short stories *Uncle Tom's Children* (1938) (Masilela 2004: 34).

[204] See also Masilela (2004: 35): "Though inspired by literary modernity, *Mine Boy* fails as a piece of literary modernity, because it ignores and obfuscates the literary devices of modernism. A more important reason for its durability is its attempt to articulate the ideologies of Marxism and Pan-Africanism as the pre-eminent political philosophies of modernity in Africa and in the African diaspora".

[205] Even though Peter Abrahams is included by Graham and Walters amongst the *Drum* generation, he was more something of a mentor to them, acting as the connective between the generation of the Dhlomos and the Sophiatown writers. Indeed, Rolfes Dhlomo himself was co-judge to Abrahams in the 1952 short-story competition. As Helgesson remarks, "Abrahams was appropriated by *Drum* as 'their' literary celebrity even though or perhaps precisely because he never belonged to the Sophiatown crowd" (Helgesson 2008: 44). See also Gray (2011: 3-4).

[206] Langston Hughes to Peter Abrahams, 01 February 1954; Peter Abrahams to Langston Hughes, 20 February 1954. In 1954, Abrahams had already published three novels and *Dark Testament*, whose copyright he does not own, as he states in his most recent autobiography (Abrahams 2000: 41). When Hughes replies to him that he thought Abrahams "already

Mine Boy, which would be published in the anthology *An African Treasury* with the title "Episode in Malay Camp", perhaps to address the fact that it was just an episode drawn from a longer work (2010: 67).[207]

The letters between Hughes and Abrahams may confirm the assumption that the latter was not proud of his volume of short stories,[208] for it is quite noteworthy that his letters do not mention even once his own *Dark Testament* – the very first short-story collection published in book form by a South African-born Black writer that went beyond South Africa's boundaries. In her essay "South African Fiction and Orality", Zoë Wicomb discusses the widespread pattern according to which the short story is considered only as the "apprenticeship" of young authors until they "progress" and "graduate" to the novel, the only "legitimate", "substantial" work of prose fiction (2001: 157-159). According to her, the "valorization of length" has been developed and endorsed by "metropolitan publishing conventions" (159). Wicomb's essay thus adds to the vast critical landscape on the short story which laments its reputation as minor genre – not only shorter, but of less cultural importance than the novel (see Shaw 1983: 2). It might be argued that Peter Abrahams's motive for "not stay[ing] long with the short story" (Mphahlele 2007: 218) derives from his status of self-exiled writer from a peripheric country wishing to reach an international, metropolitan readership through the novel. As Stefan Helgesson remarks, "the degree of Abrahams's success should be measured by his willingness to accede to the demands of the English literary field" (Helgesson 2008: 45).[209] Abrahams himself acknowledges his dependence on the international literary market: "We all, like it or not, write for white readers. […]. In the process we became interpreters, conveyors of the black reality to the world of white folk in the form most acceptable to them" (Abrahams 2000: 145).[210] Indeed, the figure of Peter Abrahams is best known for his numerous novels and, above all, for his autobiographies and reportages, but not for his first book of short stories – criticism usually refers to *Dark Testament* only briefly as Abrahams's first juvenile work.[211]

Nonetheless, I believe that a study of *Dark Testament* is pivotal to an understanding of South Africa's literary history, and short-story writing in particular. Compared to the short stories by

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had some stories previously written", he probably refers to *Dark Testament* (Langston Hughes to Peter Abrahams, 16 July 1954; 2010: 37).

[207] Langston Hughes to Peter Abrahams, 28 February 1955. Abrahams would also contribute an article to the anthology, titled "The Blacks", probably drawn from a chapter in *Return to Goli*.

[208] Abrahams himself refers to *Dark Testament* as his "first little book" in *Return to Goli* (Abrahams 1953: 16).

[209] See also Ogungbesan (1980: 188) and Thorpe (2018: 65).

[210] See also his admission in *Reflections on the Black Experience in the 20th Century*: "Allen and Unwin gave me an advance of five pounds and a ridiculous contract in which I signed away world copyright. I was so keen to be published that I accepted it anyway" (Abrahams 2000: 41).

[211] Coeval criticism and reviews on *Dark Testament*, instead, praised the book for its documentary value rather than for its literary merits. *Dark Testament* has been reprinted only once in 1970 by Kraus. Wade states that "[f]ew of the stories and sketches in *Dark Testament* transcend the category of juvenilia" (1972: 14).

Herbert Dhlomo, *Dark Testament* is notable principally for its materiality: the book form sanctions the volume's independence from journalistic venues, and, therefore, from journalistic writing. This material detail is directly linked to Abrahams's exilic condition: only outside of South Africa could he find a publisher. In his independence from journalism Abrahams differs from the *Drum* generation. In the second place, the form *and* content of the short stories in *Dark Testament* are strikingly different from the prose fiction by Herbert Dhlomo – even if, as we have seen, the two authors wrote prose fiction across almost the same years in South Africa. The narrator in the stories by both Dhlomo and Abrahams represents a strong instance, and readers may tend to interpret it in biographical terms as the author's voice. Yet, the narrative personae could not be more different: an omniscient and intrusive third-person narrator in the case of Herbert Dhlomo, and a first-person – albeit not always – highly introspective narrator in *Dark Testament*. The main reason for this neat narratological divergence between the two writers can be seen in Abrahams's deep-rooted individualism. As opposed to the generation of the New Africans, the writer from Vrededorp did not believe in didacticism as a tool to educate the masses. As he states in *Return to Goli*, he "had realised that people, individual people, would always be more important than causes" to him, and that his "business as a writer was with people, with human thoughts, conflicts, longings and strivings" (Abrahams 1953: 17). At the same time, this need for individualism traces the contours of Abrahams's aspiration to enter an international, mainly Western, literary field and market, an option not entirely available to Herbert Dhlomo.

Continuities can also be found, however, between the two generations of writers and the short fiction they produced. First of all, both Rolfes and Herbert Dhlomo, in their role at the editorial board of *Ilanga Lase Natal*, had tenuous links with African American short-story writing through the person of Langston Hughes. Peter Abrahams's connection with the writers of the Harlem Renaissance is in turn more direct and explicit – as a reading of *Dark Testament* reveals – and anticipates the relationship between African American writing and the *Drum* prose fiction. In the second place, the Dhlomos' preference for English for their short stories is echoed in Abrahams's abandonment of Afrikaans to write in the idiom of the English canon and of African American literature; the *Drum* generation would follow in their footsteps (see also Chapman [1989] 2001: 218). Ultimately, *Dark Testament* deeply enacts the intertwining of protest writing, claims of authenticity, life-writing on the one hand, and on the other the extensive recourse to metafiction and to modernist techniques, a marked aspiration to literariness and to a precise Western (English) canon. These intersecting trajectories, some of them already visible in the short fiction by Herbert Dhlomo, also inform the subsequent generation of Black South African short-story writing in English.

4. The "Fabulous Decade": Realism and Literariness in the Short Fiction by Can Themba and Alex La Guma

> For a black man to live in South Africa in the second half of the twentieth century and at the same time preserve his sanity, requires an enormous sense of humour and a surrealistic kind of brutal wit […]. It is difficult to imagine a mode of expression that would adequately describe this sense of malaise. At best an account of what a black man goes through in his daily life sounds like an exaggerated Kafka novel. (Nkosi 1961: 6)[212]

The above quoted excerpt is drawn from the essay "Apartheid: A Daily Exercise in the Absurd", published by Lewis Nkosi in 1961 in the South African monthly *Fighting Talk*. Nkosi's words well summarise the mood of the times, and simultaneously raise the questions of which mode of representation can be used to describe the feeling of Black people living under apartheid, and of what it means to produce literature under those terms. The second half of the twentieth century in South Africa was marked by the institutionalisation of apartheid after 1948, following D. F. Malan's National Party victory in the country's general elections. The decade of the Fifties in South Africa would be characterised by a surge in political activism in reaction to the government's segregationist legislation, which, to use Nkosi's words again, "ma[de] it almost illegal to live" (1961: 6).[213]

Increased resistance to the white minority rule, which reached its apogee in the Congress of the People and the Freedom Charter in 1955,[214] found a ready counterpart in the eruption of literary activity in the same years, as testified by the boom of new literary magazines and journals, some of them politically inflected. Writing retrospectively on his own experience as a young Black intellectual in Johannesburg, Nkosi defined the 1950s as "the fabulous decade" (Nkosi [1965] 1983), and the intense literary activity of the period, combined with the political demonstrations of those years, gave the illusion that apartheid could be reversed, even denied (Driver 2012: 387). This pretence was shattered by the end of the decade when, on 21 March 1960, white police opened fire on a crowd gathered in front of Sharpeville's police station to protest the pass laws. The Sharpeville massacre marks the beginning of the so-called "silent decade" (see Friedman 2017: 236-237): the Sixties would see the banning of the ANC and PAC, and the introduction of tightened state censorship.[215] As a consequence, most Black oppositional writers ended up either dead, in prison, or in exile, and several South African publications of the Fifties were banned and thus 'silenced'.

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[212] Similarly, Paul Gready defines the Fifties as an "unreal reality" (1990).

[213] The bus boycotts, strikes, anti-pass campaigns, and civil disobedience of the Fifties culminated in the Defiance Campaign of 1952, pursued jointly by the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Indian Congress (SAIC) (see Lodge 1993: 33-62).

[214] In the wake of the Defiance Campaign, ANC and Trade Union members, coloured, Indian, and white representatives gathered in Kliptown, near Johannesburg, in 1955, forming the Congress of the People. Aim of the assembly was to formulate a Freedom Charter for the future democratic South Africa.

[215] For an in-depth analysis of state censorship in South Africa, see Peter McDonald's seminal monograph *The Literature Police* (2009) and the online supplement to the volume (https://theliteraturepolice.com/).

In light of these considerations, this chapter seeks to discuss the 1950s and the early 1960s by considering the work of two authors who left an important mark on South African literary history through their activities as both short-story writers and journalists: Can Themba (1924-1967) and Alex La Guma (1924-1985). Representatives of a new, urban generation,[216] Themba and La Guma were contemporaries and both came from two cosmopolitan, multiracial melting pots that would be later destroyed by the apartheid government: Sophiatown in Johannesburg and District Six in Cape Town, respectively. These common elements notwithstanding, Themba's and La Guma's attitude to literature and politics, and their literary output, differ enormously. Can Themba, born Daniel Canadoise D'Orsay, graduated from Fort Hare with a degree in English and later worked for the Johannesburg-based magazine *Drum*, which established his fame as creative writer and journalist. Alex La Guma, instead, classified as 'coloured' by the apartheid regime, was deeply influenced by his father's socialist beliefs and was politically very active. La Guma contributed articles and short stories to, among others, *New Age*, *Fighting Talk*, and, sporadically, *Drum*. By comparing a selection of the two writers' short stories and some articles, this chapter aims to examine their different literary responses to apartheid, and particularly the ways in which each moulded and bent the short-story form to convey their experience of life under an oppressive regime.

A comparative analysis of the short stories of the two writers also aims to question Njabulo Ndebele's now well-known argument against "spectacular" and protest literature in South Africa, voiced in his essay "The Rediscovery of the Ordinary" (1986). Ndebele defines as "spectacular" much of Black literature, and short stories in particular, published in the Fifties and Sixties, when the oppression of apartheid caused the "development of a highly dramatic, highly demonstrative form of literary representation" (1986: 143). These narratives are defined as "the literature of the powerless identifying the key factor responsible for their powerlessness", and, therefore, "[n]othing beyond this can be expected" from them (1986: 150). This chapter does not intend to dispute Ndebele's definition of the spectacular, but rather the almost automatic extension of this label to "[t]he bulk of the stories of James Matthews, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Alex La Guma, Can Themba, Webster Makaza, and others" (Ndebele 1986: 145).[217] A close reading of selected short stories seeks to underline the differences in form and content between La Guma and Themba, and to problematise the notion of the literary, often a disputed concept in the South African context.[218] To provide a more comprehensive view on the

[216] The African urban population in Johannesburg increased from 136.000 in 1927 to half a million in 1946 (Rabkin 1975: 5).

[217] Ndebele's argument has sparked much debate and attracted various criticism. See, among others, Robert Gaylard's article "*Rediscovery* Revisited" (2009). Ndebele's criticism of the prose fiction by the *Drum* generation echoes Nkosi ([1965] 2005) and Mphahlele ([1959] 1990).

[218] For a discussion of the contested nature of the literary in South Africa, see McDonald (2009: 118-132) and van der Vlies (2007: 127). Some of the short stories by Can Themba and Alex La Guma have been included in Catherine Dubbeld's bibliography of South African short stories in English with "socio-political themes" published in book form

debate on literariness of the Fifties, the last paragraphs of the present chapter also take into consideration Nadine Gordimer's early short fiction.

4.1 Literariness and Politics: The Publishing Scene in the Fifties

Before discussing the short stories in detail, I would like to introduce briefly the main English-language periodicals and magazines that were founded in the Fifties in South Africa, since they were the main outlet for the publication and circulation of short stories *and* of politically engaged articles – the principal site for the intertwining of ethics and aesthetics investigated in this thesis.[219] A discussion of the main journalistic venues is also relevant to the present chapter, since both Themba and La Guma became published authors first and foremost through the magazines available in South Africa. As Walter Ehmeir suggests, there were three kinds of periodicals publishing literature in South Africa in the Fifties and Sixties: literary magazines, left-wing political magazines, and newspapers with a mass audience (Ehmeir 1995: 114). Among the latter, Jim Bailey's monthly *Drum* is without doubt the most iconic South African mass publication. It was first issued in 1951 and it appeared continuously for fourteen years until 1965, when it was banned for three years (Chapman [1989] 2001: 217).[220] At first titled *The African Drum* under the editorship of Anthony Crisp, it tried to target a supposed 'authentic' Black readership without success: the first issues focused on traditional African folklore, tribal music and rites, with a moralising editorial line (Rabkin 1975: 51), not unlike some of the short stories on Zulu rites published by Rolfes Dhlomo in *The Bantu World*. Since the magazine did not sell well,[221] Crisp was replaced with the British journalist Anthony Sampson, who employed several Black contributors: Todd Matshikiza, Arthur Maimane, Can Themba, Casey Motsisi, Es'kia Mphahlele, Blake Modisane, Lewis Nkosi, and Nat Nakasa (see Nicol 1995: 7).

Under Sampson's editorship, the magazine became extremely popular, attracting contributions from and sending issues all over the continent. *Drum* epitomised life in the South African townships in the second half of the twentieth century, providing a "social barometer" of the decade (Chapman [1989] 2001: 187). Together with love and detective stories, popular columns on jazz, sports, and

between 1960 and 1987 (see Dubbeld 1989). As we shall see, these texts are repeatedly defined according to either their political or literary traits, the one feature often excluding the other.

[219] See McDonald (2009: 118-132) for an in-depth discussion of the main local magazines and their role in the literary and political debate of the Fifties and early Sixties.

[220] *Drum* has become a well-known phenomenon, and extensive scholarship can be found on it, ranging from a literary, cultural, journalistic perspective to gender analysis. See, to name a few: Rabkin 1975; Chapman [1989] 2001; Nixon 1994; Nicol 1995; Driver 1996; Cowling 2016. See also https://www.baha.co.za/ for some of *Drum*'s archived issues and stories. Autobiographical accounts of the *Drum* experience are numerous, most notably Es'kia Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue* (1959).

[221] "Tribal music! Tribal history! Chiefs! We don't care about chiefs! Give us jazz and film stars, man! […] You just trying to keep us backward, that's what!" – Unnamed African man in conversation with *Drum*'s editor Anthony Sampson, quoted in Chapman ([1989] 2001: 187).

American movies, the Sophiatown magazine also published investigative journalism and fiction by South African and international authors who were later to enter the canon or who had already established their fame, such as Langston Hughes (see Nicol 1995: 156-157).[222] The fictional output of the *Drum* writers has been considered South Africa's literary Renaissance, not unlike the Harlem Renaissance of the Twenties in the United States (Driver 1996: 231). 1952 represented a highwater mark in *Drum*'s history: the first short-story competition was launched, inaugurating a practice that was to be imitated by other South African magazines;[223] in the same year, Henry Nxumalo wrote the first *Drum* exposé on the exploitation of Black workers on Transvaal farms, most notably near Bethal, making circulation figures increase dramatically (Chapman [1989] 2001: 186). Even though *Drum* was never explicitly militant,[224] it did denounce apartheid's injustices through its investigative reporting (see figure 4.1); likewise, the short stories published in *Drum* record life under the segregationist legislation, and often the fault line between the two genres is not that neat.[225] Indeed, several critical studies underline the seamless integration of *Drum*'s short stories and articles, often resorting to the term "literary journalism" (see Choonoo 1997; Cowling 2016). The fictional devices used by the *Drum* writers in their articles include scene-by-scene description, either first-person perspective or internal focalization, and the use of local lingo (Cowling 2016: 11).[226] Moreover, the magazines appeal to a modern, English-speaking urban Black readership represented a clear challenge to the government's attempts to force the Black population to return to a supposed 'authentic' tribal condition. It may be for this reason that *Drum* was banned for three years between 1965 and 1968, and it later adopted a more cautious editorial line (McDonald 2009: 122).

[222] Referring to the mixture of "high" and "popular" contents in *Drum*, Matshikiza declares that the magazine possessed a "split personality" (2001: x).
[223] See Chapman ([1989] 2001: 239-241) for the complete list of the 94 short stories published in *Drum*, from 1951 to 1958, when the fiction section was no longer a regular feature of *Drum*. Es'kia Mphahlele was appointed fiction editor in 1955 until he left for Nigeria in 1957 (see Mphahlele [1959] 1990: 187 and *passim*).
[224] Controversially, *Drum* was financed by Jim Bailey, who inherited his father's mining capital (Chapman [1989] 2001: 186).
[225] Chapman's anthology *The Drum Decade. Stories from the Fifties* (1989) purposefully includes both investigative reports and fictional short stories with no division between the two genres.
[226] The devices listed by Cowling remarkably echo the literary techniques used by New Journalists (see Hollowell 1977: 25-31). See Visser's interesting comparison: "Anyone familiar with American 'New Journalism' will recognize that *Drum* writers were working in the mode at least as long as their American counterparts who gave it its name" (Visser 1976b: 49).

DRUM: NOVEMBER 1957

INSIDE DUBE HOSTEL

It's the place that nobody wants

By D. C. Themba

DUBE HOSTEL is the place that nobody wants. The people who live in the bleak and forbidding buildings never wanted to go there. For many of them it is just a place to lay down a weary head, and a shelter from the dust and the rain. Lots of them are Johannesburg workers who were uprooted from their rooms in the city by the "Locations in the Sky" Act. Their employers don't like it either. They say that things worked much more smoothly when the workers were near by and didn't have long journeys to make every day.

The Advisory Board pinpoints the hostel as the cancer in an area that could have been peaceful. The Johannesburg City Council, too, believes it to be a source of the recent week-end of horror, when about 40 people were killed.

I spent a couple of nights in the hostel in the atmosphere of the riots and the fear that it has engendered—fear that paralysed men around me and communicated itself threateningly.

My first night at Dube was a Friday. The hostel was quiet. There were few people around. So many had fled away to relatives and friends in other townships; so many had gone to sleep in the city, in the very backyards from which they had been hounded.

Dube Hostel is a little colony of hall-like buildings fenced in by wire netting. The different tribes are separated. There is a building for the Sotho group, a set of

After the recent outbreak of violence in Dube, Phefeni and Meadowlands had also to be constantly patrolled by heavily armed police.

Inside Dube Hostel the men lived their grim, austere lives, filled with fear.

turn over!

Figure 4.1 Can Themba's reportage "Inside Dube Hostel" in *Drum* (November 1957).

Another Johannesburg-based publication was *Fighting Talk*, issued monthly from 1942 to 1963.[227] Steered by an anti-racialist, anti-colonialist, and global *Weltanschauung*, *Fighting Talk* engaged with political themes much more radically and explicitly than *Drum*. From 1954 onwards, covering roughly the same period as *Drum*, it also featured short stories quite regularly – but not popular romances – from various contributors across the colour line: Es'kia Mphahlele, Richard Rive, Alex La Guma, Alfred Hutchinson, Herman Charles Bosman, Arthur Maimane, and Phyllis Altman, some of whom also contributed articles to the periodical. In December 1961, two years before the ban, the magazine published an entirely literary issue titled "New Writing in South Africa", including short stories, book reviews, literary criticism, and excerpts from plays. The editors' preface to this number reads like a programmatic manifesto, and it emphasises the need for cross-cultural new writing:[228]

> Ours is the most "mixed" society on the Continent of Africa, whether the ethnic-grouping specialists can face that or not; and South Africa's cultural cross-currents are blowing up exciting new talent among all the country's population's groups. Not the least exciting aspect is the ease with which White writers grasp the authentic of African situations and the skill with which Non-Whites dissect White society. (*Fighting Talk* Committee 1961: 2)

Together with *Fighting Talk*, two other white-controlled political periodicals are worth discussing: *New Age* (previously known as *The Guardian*) and *Africa South*.[229] The former, the South African Communist Party mouthpiece, was an explicitly leftist publication active between 1954 and 1962, printed in Cape Town. *New Age* published fiction and launched short-story competitions, featuring Richard Rive and Alex La Guma among others. The lawyer Ruth First was part of the editorial committee of the Johannesburg section, and she became known for her thorough investigation of convict and farm labour in the Transvaal (Pinnock 1997: 312-317; see Webb 2015: 16). Notwithstanding their differences in style, content, and editorial policies, *New Age*, *Fighting Talk*, and *Drum* thus converged in two fundamental aspects: they encouraged the publication of short fiction; and they exposed apartheid abuses, most notably the labour scandal. The quarterly *Africa South*, instead, was edited by Ronald Segal in Cape Town from 1956 to 1961, and became *Africa South in Exile* when Segal left South Africa in 1960. It published anti-apartheid opinion pieces, often covering contemporary events, literary criticism, cartoons, book reviews, and short stories from

[227] Initially, *Fighting Talk* was the mouthpiece of the Springbok Legion, an organisation formed in 1941 to fight for the rights of soldiers in the post-war period (https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/history-springbok-legion). In March 1954, another editorial committee, supporter of the multiracial Congress movement, took over the responsibility of publishing, and Ruth First became editor in 1955 (see also Webb 2015). Some of the *Fighting Talk* issues have been digitised and can be openly accessed at the website http://www.disa.ukzn.ac.za/fi.

[228] This literary issue of *Fighting Talk* represents an exception among the political periodicals of the time, whose editorial policies were usually "eclectic rather than programmatic" since they did not advocate a "specific revolutionary aesthetic" (McDonald 2009: 119) as opposed to anthologies or to the later *Staffrider* magazine.

[229] *New Age* and *Africa South* issues have been digitised and can be openly accessed at the website https://disa.ukzn.ac.za/.

diverse contributors. Notwithstanding its political outlook, *Africa South*'s format resembles a literary magazine, with long contributions all printed one after the other with the same font and no columns, unlike *New Age* and *Fighting Talk*, where fiction, editorials, and articles were often on the same page (see figure 4.2).

Before turning to La Guma's and Themba's short stories, two of South Africa's so-called little magazines deserve mention: *The Purple Renoster* and *The Classic*.[230] These publications, entirely devoted to literature, had a restricted circulation, like most little magazines. The former, perhaps the most literary of all (McDonald 2009: 119), was founded by the white poet Lionel Abrahams in 1956 and lasted until 1972. Its main aim was the discovery of new talents and the promotion of local literature – hence the image of the *renoster*, Afrikaans for 'rhinoceros' – in the footsteps of Herman Charles Bosman's own literary magazine *Trek* (Abrahams 1980: 33-34). The idea of the literary promoted by *The Purple Renoster* was "non-instrumental, individualist, expressivist, and anti-political", even though Abrahams did protest the government's bans of the Sixties (McDonald 2009: 120; see also Abrahams 1980: 36). According to Gardiner (2004: n. p.), literature published in *The Purple Renoster* was not "afflicted" by the "coarse-grained realism" of other contemporary South African texts. Tellingly enough, neither Can Themba nor Alex La Guma published short stories in Abrahams's magazine.[231]

In the wake of *The Purple Renoster*, new literary periodicals emerged, such as Jack Cope's *Contrast* in 1960 and the Johannesburg-based quarterly *The Classic* (1963-1971). While the former followed an elitist editorial line and represented the "white literary establishment" (Gardiner 2004: n. p.), the latter embraced a more inclusive notion of literariness. It was edited by the Black writer Nat Nakasa, former *Drum* journalist, until his death in 1965, with Nadine Gordimer as editorial adviser. Guided by a multiracial stance, the magazine included many contributions by leading figures of the Fifties, and encouraged the publication of short stories through competitions.

[230] See Michael Gardiner's *South African Literary Magazines, 1956-1978* (2004) for an overview of the literary publications available in South Africa. Gardiner claims that the first South African English-language literary magazines can be found from 1956 onwards, even though he acknowledges the existence of periodicals publishing poems and short stories since the 1920s (Gardiner 2004: n. p.). See also Abrahams (1980: 33), who speaks of a "dearth" of literary outlets in the mid-50s.

[231] Following Nadine Gordimer's suggestion, *Drum* editor Es'kia Mphahlele did contribute one short story to *The Purple Renoster*, "The Woman Walks Out" (1957), which easily fitted Abrahams's definition of the literary. This story, indeed, does not possess the protest traits of the prose fiction Mphahlele published in either *Fighting Talk*, *Africa South*, or even *Drum* (McDonald 2009: 122).

THE REAL WEALTH OF THE GOLDEN CITY

By Alex La Guma

LONG ago it was all rolling land which grim, stern, bearded men guarded with long guns and narrow-minded bigotry. They guarded the land from the people from whom they had taken it. They lived in isolation, one from the other, and their minds grew stunted and warped and murky with the disease of racial prejudice, until mental anaemia saw only white and the black was to be feared as a little child fears the dark.

Then one day a man walking in the long fields came across a stone. It was soft as lead and dull yellow. This stone could be smelted, refined, processed and turned into the shiny metal which crowns were made of. And then the people knew that wealth lay beneath the brown earth.

And then men came with spades and pans and tools to tear up the land and wrench the richness from its bowels. They fought and cursed and killed for wealth below the green grass. They built shanties and sunk shafts. They poured in from all horizons. They built a roaring, roistering town, and called it Johannesburg.

A DISEASE

But greed is a disease that gnaws at the vitals and eats at the soul. It spreads like mould and its remedy is its satisfaction. Foreign men coveted the richness of the Transvaal and the stern, bearded men took their rifles down from the walls and their long columns rode out to fight the invaders. They lost because they were overpowered by superior numbers and their own bigotry. And thereafter the yellow gold was owned by strange men who sat in clamouring offices and watched long ribbons of paper winding out of clicking machines. Far across the seas, the gold became tiny numbers which increased or diminished. The owners of the gold did not dig it from the ground, they did not hear the sharp sound of a pick striking rock or hear the clatter of pneumatic drills. They did not feel the sweat dripping from the brow or the hurt of strained muscles, the hard horniness of calloused palms.

Chinese were brought to dig the gold, and when they could not do it, the black men were torn from families, wives, children and the ripe land to dig down into the darkness to find the yellow metal.

They sweated and died and created mountains where once the land had been green and virgin. And around the man-made mountains the shanties dropped away, and in their place grew a jungle of granite and steel and chromium. The mud paths became boulevards and macadam roads. The swaggering miners of old were replaced by new swarms of harassed, worried people, fenced in by stone and concrete and all forms of oppression. Alongside the mines new industries grew up and the army of workers grew in numbers and absorbed the atmosphere of strength. And the workers were dark-skinned in the main, and the rulers of them feared them, and made laws to bind and pinion their strength.

HIDEOUS BIRTHMARK

Today the mark of racialism, oppression and brutality lies like a hideous birthmark on the face of Johannesburg. It is seen in the slums and locations, the bulldozed stretches of the Western Areas, the jam-packed gaols and the police with pistols and stenguns.

It is seen in hunger and rags. Site and Service, gangsterism and rioting. You can tramp the miles of streets and see no place to quench your thirst or appease your hunger. The bright signs reflect the rule of white supremacy. Bar-B-Que, 20th Century Fox, Giacomino, Palace Beer Hall, Woodpecker Inn.

The Flying Squad hurtles past, dodging the all-white buses. At the railway stations the cops stand by to demand passes. Black men walk in fear.

But every coin has its reverse. Beauty is found even in a swamp. And the beauty is in the determination of the people. Beauty is in the long lines of bus-boycotters, the roar at a meeting of a people who no longer wish to be slaves. There is beauty in the coffee stalls where you can buy a cup of steaming hot brew and two delicious fat-cakes for a sixpence, and chat idly with the friendly man behind the counter.

There is a richness greater than gold in the penny-whistle man walking easily along Pritchard Street, playing his lively tunes. There is a wealth untold in the welcome given by a working family in Vrededorp, the cups of tea and the factory-made biscuits; the at-home in the location where the can of beer is passed from hand to hand, mouth to mouth. There is beauty, too, in the welcoming smile of the shebeen queen, for the shebeen has become a place of relaxation, the local pub where pleasantries are exchanged and the chatter is quiet and meaningless.

SONG OF LIFE

Beneath the stony facade of the City of Gold there is a song which singing cannot express. There is a cheerfulness that laughter cannot satisfy, a tragedy that tears cannot obliterate. There is a vision that freedom will make as real as the sweat and the agony and the gold which is its heart.

Racing at Kenilworth

Following are Damon's selections for Saturday, April 27:

Kenilworth Handicap, 1st Division: CONVENTIONAL. Danger, Electricity.

Kenilworth Handicap, 2nd Division: VAULTER. Danger, Filipolis.

Wynberg Stakes, 14 furlongs: DRUSILLA. Danger, Cato.

Wynberg Stakes, 9 furlongs: DESERT MAN. Danger, Red Sol.

Kenilworth Stakes: GARRETT'S SELECTED. Danger, French Knight.

Juvenile Maiden Plate: CAIQUE. Danger, Finer Finish.

Maiden Plate: QUEER CALL. Danger, Double First.

Sacpo Conference Votes For Boycott Policy

(Continued from page 1)

Goldingnites and the Non-European Unity Movement was condemned in the political report of the National Executive Committee, which declared:

"We are faced with the task of solving many of the problems facing the Coloured people and leading them to overcome the obstacles which confront them; to reduce apathy and to organise them into a mass organisation which will unite them with the Africans and other oppressed and freedom-loving people in order to achieve the common objective—liberation."

Conference passed resolutions condemning the Group Areas and Industrial Conciliation Acts, and called for the achievement of the maximum possible unity with other sections of the people in campaigns to defeat the Government's plans to implement the Acts.

The Native Laws Amendment Bill was also condemned as a "barbaric attack on the freedom of worship and association." Conference protested against any proposal to introduce a special "Coloured education," and pledged itself "to ally SACPO with all progressive organisations in the campaign to prevent any further inroads into our educational freedom, however limited."

A recommendation was made to the executive to consider the implementation of a boycott of all Nationalist products and finance houses.

Support for New Age was expressed in one resolution, which instructed all regions to make every effort to raise the circulation of the paper amongst the Coloured people.

The following officials were elected to serve on the National Executive: National President, Mr. G. Peake; Vice-President, Mr. R. September; General Secretary, Mr. Alex La Guma; Treasurer, Mr. S. Lollan; and Mr. J. Alwyn, Mr. A. Vahhed, Mr. J. La Guma, Mr. H. Naude, Mr. A. Daniels, Mr. B. Desai, Mrs. Moodley, and Mr. S. Tobias.

Verwoerd Declares War

(Continued from page 1)

the alleged complaints against the chief, admitted that he had stated his case so well that they were prepared to withdraw but that they still had to make a report to their superiors.

The tribe still awaits the official results of the commission. Meanwhile the Native Commissioner pressed the enforcement of passes on women. Chief Moiloa replied that "I have no power to force another man's wife to carry a pass." He asked the Native Commissioner to give him time to call a meeting of the women and that the Native Commissioner should himself come to address the meeting.

At a subsequent meeting the women rejected passes. Only the wives of the collaborators took out passes.

The Native Commissioner then came to announce that the Chief had been deposed and must retire to the Ventersdorp district or face deportation to Vryburg. Trouble then started. The burning of the Lutheran Church by the people was their direct reaction to the NAD tactic of using the wives of the African Ministers of religion as leader-goats in the enforcement of passes on women.

SPOTLIGHT on SPORT by Robert Resha

ARCHIE MOORE TO DEFEND HIS TITLE

ARCHIE Moore, the 43-year-old world light-heavyweight king, will defend his title in June. His opponent will be the winner of the Chuck Speiser-Tony Anthony fight.

* * *

Good News

JASON "Black Hammer" Radebe, South Africa's lightweight champion will be back into the ring on June 8. He will defend his title against the Transvaal champ, schoolboy Enoch Nhlapo, at the Indian Sports Ground, Johannesburg.

Radebe collapsed in his dressing room after beating Henry "Young" Seabela to retain the title in August last year. The brain specialist has given Radebe the O.K. to fight.

* * *

N.A.D. Enters Sport

THE Bantu Education section of the Native Affairs Department has sent out a circular letter advising schools not to hold organised games on Sundays. Children should not be allowed to play in the vicinity of the churches while the services are being held. Teachers who organise such games are warned that they will be called to account.

As a result of this circular the Lady Selborne and Vlakfontein high schools will no longer take part in Pretoria Sunday League soccer.

* * *

Is Transvaal Defying?

THIS question is being asked by many followers of the rugby game in the Transvaal today. At its annual general meeting held recently, the Transvaal Bantu Rugby Union elected Mr. Ros. Ndziba treasurer of the Union.

Mr. Ros. Ndziba was expelled from the South African Rugby Board last year and it was said that he must not take part in the affairs of provinces affiliated to the S.A. Bantu Rugby Board. Mr. Ndziba was alleged to have been responsible for the monies which were not sent to the S.A.B.R. Board from the tournament staged in the Transvaal in 1955.

In his secretarial review Mr. C. S. Mxakato criticised the clubs for failure to co-operate with the Transvaal Executive Committee. He pointed out that unless the clubs co-operate with the union, rugby in the Transvaal would surely die. Mr. Victor "Scrape" Ntshona in his presidential address praised the secretary for having succeeded in sending a team to the last inter-provincial against great odds.

The following were elected:

President, V. "Scrape" Ntshona (re-elected); Vice-President, S. Ntshepe; Secretary, V. K. Sondlo; Treasurer, Ros. Ndziba.

Published by Real Printing & Publi and printed by Pioneer Press (Pty.) I a member of the Audit Bureau of Circu Port Elizabeth: 9 Court Chambers, 1 Cape Town: Room 30, 6 Barrack St Johannesburg: 5 Progress Buildings, Durban: 6 Raydent Buildings, 472 W reet, Cape Town, his newspaper is 4825.

"Eyes of the World Focussed on S.A." —Huddleston

"THE eyes of the world are focussed on South Africa," declared Father Trevor Huddleston in a message to the annual national conference of the Congress of Democrats at the week-end. "Certainly it is true that if the whole concept of freedom is to be maintained and strengthened, all those who care for liberty must be united in pursuance of this aim. You know you have my heartfelt support."

The conference also received greetings from Chief Luturli, the Labour and Liberal Parties, the Women's Federation, SACPO, ANCYL and others.

A number of resolutions adopted opposed the current apartheid and repressive legislation and reaffirmed COD's faith in the Freedom Charter and the policy of equality. Wholehearted support was expressed for the inter-race conference as decided at the Bloemfontein conference of IDAMF last year.

The chairman Mr. Pieter Beyleveld, Vice-Chairman Mr. L. Lee-Warden, Secretary Mrs. Yetta Barenblatt—all accused in the treason trial—were unanimously returned to office. Among the new executive are also treason trialists Mr. Norman Levy, Mrs. Helen Joseph and Dr. Ronald Press.

Much of the discussion centred on the problem of broadening COD organisationally to provide a home for large numbers of Europeans who are demonstrating a turn towards a democratic solution for the crucial situation facing the country.

Figure 4.2 The typical format of *New Age* (25 April 1957).

Nakasa's preface to the first issue stands in direct opposition to Abrahams's editorial line in *The Purple Renoster*, and proves that the decision of what pertains to the category of the literary already entails a political act:

> *The Classic* is as non-political as the life of a domestic servant, the life of a Dutch Reformed Church predikant or that of an opulent Johannesburg business-man.
> If the daily lives of these people are not regulated by political decisions, that will be reflected in *The Classic*. If however, the work they do, if their sexual lives and their search for God are governed by political decrees, then that will also be reflected in the material published by *The Classic*. (Nakasa 1963: 4)

The publishing panorama in South Africa in the Fifties and Sixties, therefore, was extremely heterogeneous and complex. Popular magazines such as *Drum* also featured investigative journalism and short stories (or a mixture of both), political periodicals also published short fiction, and literary magazines, with the exception of *The Purple Renoster*, were open to the category of the political, which resonated within South Africa's divided society.[232] At the same time, each of these venues promoted its own literary standard, which often clashed with the established, mainly Western, idea of literariness (McDonald 2009: 118-119). The writing of short stories in these decades, therefore, depended on these conflicting trajectories, since periodicals were the only outlet for the publication of prose fiction.[233]

Can Themba and Alex La Guma began publishing short stories in some of these magazines. In the course of twenty years, from 1956 to 1976, Alex La Guma published 15 of his 18 short stories in South African and international periodicals: the South African *Drum* ("Battle for Honour"), *Fighting Talk* ("A Christmas Story"), *New Age* ("Etude"), *Africa South* ("Out of the Darkness"), and the international *Black Orpheus* ("A Glass of Wine", "Slipper Satin", "At the Portagee's", "Blankets", "Tattoo Marks and Nails"), *Negro Digest* ("Coffee for the Road"), *Lotus: Afro-Asian Writings* ("Come Back to Tashkent", "Exile", "Late Edition", "Thang's Bicycle"), and *Cadernos Brasileiros* ("Daltonico").[234] Some of these were collected in the multi-author volume *Quartet, New Voices from South Africa: Alex La Guma, James Matthews, Richard Rive, Alf Wannenburgh* (1963), and others in La Guma's own first book publication, *A Walk in the Night and Other Stories* (1967).[235] Both of these

[232] Evidence of the intertwining of literature and politics is an article published in *The New African* in 1966. It is titled "The 'Little Magazines' Soldier On" and describes how, despite the bans, literary magazines in South Africa continue to stand for "some aesthetic moral principle" (Povey 1966: 16).
[233] Es'kia Mphahlele represents an exception: his first collection of short stories, *Man Must Live and Other Stories*, was published in 1946 by the African Bookman (Hodge 1986: 47).
[234] To my knowledge, La Guma did not know any Portuguese and he probably wrote "Daltonico" in English. However, I was only able to get hold of the Portuguese version published in the Brazilian magazine. Field only refers to the English title of the story, "Colour Blind", in his biography of La Guma (Field 2010: 106-107).
[235] "A Glass of Wine", "Slipper Satin", "Out of Darkness", and "Nocturne" (former "Etude") have been reprinted in *Quartet* (1963), edited by fellow District Six writer Richard Rive. "Tattoo Marks and Nails", "At the Portagee's", and "Blankets" appeared in *A Walk in the Night and Other Stories* (1967), together with La Guma's eponymous novella and three previously unpublished short stories. The short story "On a Wedding Day" was published posthumously in the

volumes were published abroad. Several stories, such as "Coffee for the Road", have frequently been included in anthologies. A few stories, however, have never been published in book form. Consequently, La Guma's short fiction is scattered across various locations, some of them with extremely limited accessibility (for example the four stories published in *Lotus*, which is difficult to access today). As a result, his short fiction has been relatively overlooked by critical studies, with more attention devoted to his longer works, especially the novella *A Walk in the Night* (1962)[236] and his four novels: *And a Threefold Cord* (1964), *The Stone Country* (1967), *In the Fog of the Season's End* (1972), and *Time of the Butcherbird* (1979).

Alex La Guma's short stories can be divided according to a chronological criterium: the bulk of his prose fiction was written in South Africa between 1957 and 1966, and coincides with his activity as anti-apartheid activist and regular contributor for *New Age* and, later, *Fighting Talk*. The four remaining short stories, all published in *Lotus* in the Seventies, were written in exile in London, and only two of them present a non-South African setting.[237] According to the writer's first biographer, Cecil Abrahams, La Guma considered writing a short story or a novel two equal activities (Abrahams 1985: 21). While it is true that most of his novels further develop the themes of the short stories (see Field 2010: 113), a stronger continuity at both the level of content and form can be found between his journal articles and his short fiction. Textual evidence of this generic proximity is the critical confusion in the categorisation of some of La Guma's short pieces. For instance, Cecil Abrahams, at the end of his biography, lists "A Christmas Story", "Come Back to Tashkent", and "Exile" as "articles", not "short stories" (Abrahams 1985: 148-149).[238] Interestingly, Andre Odendaal and Roger Field, the editors of a posthumous collection of *New Age* and *Fighting Talk* newspaper articles by the writer, titled *Liberation Chabalala. The World of Alex La Guma* (1993), include two short stories in their editorial selection, "Out of the Darkness" and "A Matter of Honour", because of the "several connections worth pursuing": the main thematic concerns of the short stories by La Guma are often first expressed in his early newspaper articles (Odendaal and Field 1993: xvii).

Can Themba's short fiction has met a similar fate. Composed between 1953 and 1964, his literary output, circulated only through periodicals, can be divided into three main phases: the popular romance stories of the *Drum* phase from 1953 to 1956, when Themba's alcohol addiction started to influence his behaviour until he was fired by the new *Drum* editor Tom Hopkinson in 1959; the short

volume edited by Cecil Abrahams, *Memories of Home* (1996); its characters appear also in La Guma's novel *And a Threefold Cord*.

[236] Even though *A Walk in the Night* has been included in a collection of short stories by La Guma, I have decided not to discuss the novella in this chapter because it is more similar to La Guma's longer works than to his short fiction. Indeed, it is often analysed and grouped together with La Guma's novels. See for instance Abrahams (1985: 148).

[237] "Come Back to Tashkent" and "Thang's Bicycle" are the only short stories by La Guma with a non-South African setting.

[238] Similarly, Chandramohan considers "A Christmas Story" an article (1992 :248).

stories published in *Africa South*, *The Classic*, and *The New African*; and the more mature short fiction composed between 1960 and 1962 in South Africa, before he left his native country and settled in Swaziland, present-day eSwatini, and some of which was never published in his lifetime. To the first group belong "Passionate Stranger", "Mob Passion", "The Nice Time Girl", "Forbidden Love", "Marta". To the second group belong "The Bottom of the Bottle" and "Requiem for Sophiatown", published in *Africa South*, "The Suit", published in *The Classic*, and "The Fugitives", published in *The New African*. "The Dube Train", "The Urchin", "Crepuscule", "Kwashiorkor", "The Will to Die", and "Ten to Ten" represent Themba's more mature literary output.

Themba's short stories have then, like La Guma's, appeared in diverse publishing venues. Unlike La Guma's, they have been posthumously collected in three anthologies, making it easier for readers and scholars alike to access Themba's fictional opera omnia – Themba never tried to experiment with longer forms. The first anthology, *The Will to Die*, was edited by Donald Stuart and Roy Holland and printed in 1972 in London, but in South Africa only in 1982. *The Will to Die* is divided into stories, four of them published for the first time, reports, and miscellaneous prose writing. The 1985 anthology edited by Essop Patel, *The World of Can Themba*, offers a somewhat wider selection of the writer's works, but the volume is similarly divided into short stories, journalism, poetry, personalities, remembrances, and miscellaneous writing in the last section titled "From the House of Truth".[239] The editors of the posthumous anthologies of the prose writings by Can Themba and La Guma, as well as several scholars, have often studied the two writers' short stories and newspaper articles together because of their proximity at the level of content, form, and publishing venues. By juxtaposing the writers' stories with their articles, indeed, interesting instances of genre mobility emerge. In addition, Themba's and La Guma's articles represent key critical tools for the interpretation of the authors' fictional stories, as was the case with the Dhlomo brothers.

The latest collection of Themba's writings, *Requiem for Sophiatown*, dates from 2006, and the editor Stephen Gray has tried to distance himself from the accomplishments of the two previous anthologies:

> Two posthumous collections of Themba's work have concentrated on his prolific journalism and other pieces published mostly under the *Drum* banner. By contrast, this selection specialises in his creative work, particularly for other outlets, written over a twelve-year period, and includes many previously unavailable pieces. (Gray 2006: i)

Indeed, *Requiem for Sophiatown* includes short stories, autobiographical sketches, and meditations. It is worth noticing that the editor Stephen Gray does not seem to consider *Drum* as a site for the

[239] Themba renamed his own house in Sophiatown "The House of Truth", where he would often debate literature and politics with his friends and colleagues. See Siphiwo Mahala's doctoral thesis for detailed biographical information on Can Themba (Mahala 2017).

construction of literariness, or rather for what he deemed literary. Themba's creative works, listed in chronological order, are not explicitly divided according to their genre as in the two previous anthologies; still, a blank space separates the different clusters of stories as grouped by the editor: *Drum* fiction, autobiographical pieces, the later short stories, and miscellaneous writings.[240] Moreover, the editor Stephen Gray provides a brief, useful note on the publication history of each text. Taking the cue from Stephen Gray's above quoted sentence on the "*Drum* banner", the following paragraphs seek to examine *Drum*'s idea of the literary through a comparison of the one story that La Guma published in *Drum*, "Battle for Honour", with Can Themba's literary production for the magazine.

4.2 Between Popular Literature and Romanticism: The Short Stories in *Drum*

"Battle for Honour", published in November 1958, is one of the last short stories appearing in *Drum* due to the change in editorial policy, and the last of the 94 short stories listed in Chapman's anthology *The Drum Decade* (Chapman [1989] 2001: 216). Some of La Guma's short stories had already appeared in the 'political' magazines *Fighting Talk*, *New Age*, and *Africa South*: "A Christmas Story" in 1956, and "Etude" and "Out of the Darkness" in 1957. "Battle for Honour" is narrated in the first person by a character who is more educated than the others in the story. Set in a bar, it displays realistic dialogue with code-switching between Kaaps and standard English – three features typical of La Guma's short fiction. The plot is straightforward: the narrator and his friend Arthur enter a bar where they meet a young man called Fancy, an ex-boxer. When the latter boasts about one of his girlfriends, Lilly McDaniels, an anonymous older man suddenly insults Fancy, who starts a fight for "a matter of honour" (La Guma [1958] 2001: 164) but loses it. When Arthur asks the stranger the reason for his rage, he answers, echoing Fancy's previous comment, that "it was a matter of honour", because his name is Joseph Henry McDaniels, the ex-husband of the girl mentioned by Fancy (165). The context and theme of the short story are representative of the kind of popular fiction published by *Drum*, most notably in the description of street fights and in its sexist representation of women, or, to use the characters' term, "goosies" (165).[241]

While the general setting, the realistic style and dialogue, and the code-switching between English and Kaaps are emblematic of the writer's style, the story seems to lack both the formal

[240] As with La Guma, the categorisation of Themba's short pieces in the three anthologies is strikingly divergent and contradictory. This testifies to the hybrid quality of many of his writings, which cannot be always divided neatly into fictional short stories, journal articles, and autobiographical meditations.

[241] See Dorothy Driver's essay "*Drum* Magazine (1951-9) and the Spatial Configurations of Gender", the first analysis of *Drum* from the perspective of gender studies. Driver argues that the magazine's shift towards an urban modernity was "negotiated largely by means of belittling and damaging misrepresentations of women" (1996: 232). See also Clowes 2008.

refinement and the socio-political intention of La Guma's other short fictions. For instance, "A Glass of Wine", published in 1960 in *Black Orpheus*, similarly draws on American popular culture (see Field 2010: 67). The story is set in a shebeen and it features the same characters as "Battle for Honour": the first-person narrator and his less well-educated friend Arthur, who teases a white man and a coloured woman clearly in love. The socio-political significance of "A Glass of Wine", however, emerges clearly in the denouement of the story, when the narrator exclaims "[y]ou know that white boy can't marry the girl", since "[i]t isn't allowed" under the country's Immorality Act (La Guma [1960] 1963a: 96).[242] This fine balance between aesthetics and politics is somehow amiss in La Guma's *Drum* story, which is actually another version of the narrative "A Matter of Honour".

"A Matter of Honour" was published in 1965 in *The New African*.[243] The second version of the story is longer, more introspective and refined, with precise descriptions of the setting and characters, and it is rich in images and metaphors, two pervasive elements in La Guma's opera omnia. For instance, the beginning of the story, which in the *Drum* version merely describes the characters' entrance in the bar, confirms Wilfred Cartey's view of La Guma as a "master of atmosphere" (Cartey 1971: 132): "It was one of those autumn mornings, with the sky pale grey like cheap flannel. Up the street leading off the square, the women were hanging out the morning wash on lines strung along the pavements, hoping the rain would not come before the stuff dried" (La Guma 1965: 169). More importantly, while the emphasis in the *Drum* story is on the fight between Fancy and Joseph McDaniels, the second version focuses on (and implicitly denounces) the living conditions of the coloured population. "A Matter of Honour" is thus a cross section of life and of the "lumpenproletariat" of Cape Town's coloured areas (Field 2010: 67), which are depicted with greater attention to the realistic detail.

In an interview with Cecil Abrahams, La Guma refers to "Battle for Honour" as the story submitted to *Drum* "which they ruined" (La Guma 1996a: 19). The writer offers no explanation for his comment, but the comparison between the two variants of the same story suggests that the original version of the story might actually be the one published in *The New African*, which *Drum* modified to adapt it to its editorial line. It must be remembered that, when "Battle for Honour" was published in 1958, Mphahlele had already resigned from his position as fiction editor and that the person replacing him, Tom Hopkinson, was advised to avoid "the political kind of story" (McDonald 2009: 122). As appears from a close reading of "Battle for Honour", the literary standards promoted by

[242] The Immorality Amendment Act (1950) prohibited sexual intercourse between "Europeans" and "non-Europeans".
[243] The editors of *Liberation Chabalala* have republished the *Drum* version of the story, but with the *New African* title (La Guma [1958] 1993: 24-26). Moreover, Cecil Abrahams lists "Battle for Honour" under the section "Articles, interviews, lectures", but, notably, he classifies "A Matter of Honour" as a short story in his biography of Alex La Guma (1985: 147-148).

Drum in the late Fifties targeted a popular readership that sought a "racy, agitated, impressionistic" style and "popular" contents such as the street fight (Mphahlele quoted in Chapman [1989] 2001: 183) – an issue David Rabkin addressed with the phrase "the limitations of the *Drum* prescription" (1975: 114).

Different elements emerge from an analysis of the short fiction published by Can Themba in the same outlet: "Passionate Stranger" and "Mob Passion" in 1953, "The Nice Time Girl" in 1954, "Forbidden Love" in 1955, and "Marta" in 1956. These stories, notably omitted from Can Themba's first posthumous anthology, *The Will to Die* (1972), all share the distinctive traits of the popular romance favoured by *Drum*, as the titles also suggest; of Themba's *Drum* fictions, only one, "Forbidden Love", has been categorised by Catherine Dubbeld as "socio-political" (1989: 265), that is as dealing with conditions that result directly from apartheid, and specifically from the Population Registration Act and the Immorality Act. Stylistically, these five texts are all written in a realistic style,[244] are related in the past tense by an omniscient narrator (as in the short fiction by the Dhlomo brothers), and all begin *in medias res*. Both the narrator and the characters usually speak in a polished standard English diction, and Shakespearean references can often be found at both the level of content and form (Distiller 2005: 169).[245] Themba's use and appropriation of Shakespeare serves a two-fold aim: he invokes Shakespeare's authority in the name of humanist values to express a political agenda, but also to build an image of himself as learned (Distiller 2005: 170-173). This use of Shakespeare in fiction links Themba to the generation of the New Africans and stands in opposition to the other kind of stories published in *Drum*, such as La Guma's "Battle for Honour", which drew on American popular literature.[246]

"Passionate Stranger", Themba's first short story in *Drum*,[247] narrates the encounter between Reginald Tshayi, a Johannesburg high-school teacher, and Ellen, the daughter of a traditional man living in a rural village. Following the staples of romance, the two fall in love at first sight, and the dialogue between Reginald and Ellen is characterised by a stereotypical love diction (Gaylard 2008: 103).[248] Ellen's father, however, opposes the union, because he has already discussed his daughter's "bride-price" with a man of the village (Themba 1985: 45). The popular genre of romance, therefore, is used by Themba to enact the clash between tradition and modernity already pervasive in the short

[244] To enhance the verisimilitude of his stories, Themba usually grounds them in existing Johannesburg locations.
[245] See Johnson ([1996] 2004: 147-180) and Distiller (2005: 169-180) for a discussion of the influence of Shakespeare on Themba's early writings.
[246] See Helgesson (2008: 43): "one sees a clear tension among the published stories between, on the one hand, a post-Romantic, distinctly English notion of literature, and, on the other, a presentist infatuation with the genres of globally distributed American mass culture and the 'now' of Johannesburg".
[247] Apparently, Themba also published a short story in the late Forties in *The Fort Harian*, a student journal at Fort Hare (Mahala 2017: 3).
[248] "Love is on the wing, and whether I will it or no, I must join its flight. Whether I will it or no, I must love you" (Themba 1985: 41). Mahala describes these lines with the adjective "Shakespearian" (Mahala 2017: 37).

fiction by the Dhlomo brothers. Surprisingly, it is the female figure, at first presented by the narrator in stereotypical terms as "the most beautiful creature with a tray of tea-things" (40), who asserts her own agency and defies her father's imposition in front of the village chief, ending the narrative with a speech reminiscent of Desdemona's monologue in the first Act of *Othello* (Mahala 2017: 38).

If the tension between tradition and modernity is not explicitly resolved in "Passionate Stranger", the open-ended nature of the story allows readers to imagine a future for Ellen and Reggie – unlike the highly dramatic clear-cut endings in the short fiction by both Rolfes and Herbert Dhlomo. Reginald, the embodiment of modernity, appears in a positive light, and he can indeed be defined as a Themba-like figure: he is a Johannesburg high-school teacher, and, above all, he is described reading *Salome* (1891) by Oscar Wilde, one of Themba's favourite authors (Mahala 2017: 46). Allegedly, Themba himself felt a strong attachment to Johannesburg, so much that he characterised himself as "detribalised" and unable to speak any African languages (Mahala 2017: 90).[249] The phrase "bride-price" quoted earlier is textual evidence of Themba's inability, or rather refusal, to speak African languages, for "bride-price" is the English translation of the Xhosa and Zulu word *lobola*, which we have encountered in several of the stories by the Dhlomo brothers. Themba's stance as a modern urban author is therefore also reflected in the linguistic choices of his short stories, which discard the National Party's characterisation of Black South African citizens as 'tribal' subjects (Snyman 2003: 36).

Themba's next story, "Mob Passion", was published two months after "Passionate Stranger", as the winning entry to *Drum*'s first "Great International Short Story Contest" – judged, among others, by Peter Abrahams and Langston Hughes – and it earned Themba a position as staff writer for *Drum*. "Mob Passion" narrates the tragic love between a man and a woman belonging to two different street gangs. Notwithstanding the Shakespearian plot of the story (Gaylard 2008: 100), the described events are set against the realistic background of the gang riots of 1951-52 in the Johannesburg township of Newclare (Mahala 2017: 39). If the socio-political context of South Africa in the Fifties is only hinted at in the much-anthologised "Mob Passion", the consequences of apartheid in "Forbidden Love" (1955) are built into the very texture of the story. The narrative opens with a couple, Dora Randolph and Michael, who have to meet secretly because he is categorised as "African" by the apartheid state, whereas she and her family are "coloured" (even though her sister Louisa is "darker") (Themba 1985: 22). When their secret is exposed, Dora's brother Davie beats Michael up. With a twist of the plot, Michael's sister reveals to the petite-bourgeoise Randolph family that Davie is in fact the father of her own child. With a non-intrusive external narrator, the most poignant passages of the story can be

[249] Themba grew up in the culturally mixed area of Marabastad, Johannesburg. He spoke English, Afrikaans, and township lingo (Mahala 2017: 100-101).

identified in the several dialogues, and in particular in the words uttered by Dora to her lover at the beginning of the narrative:

> I feel trapped by a doubly guilty *shame*. I am *ashamed* that it is my people who are in the forefront of every move against your people – *ashamed* of my father whom I love, but who is violent in his hatred of Africans; *ashamed* of my sister Louisa, who ought to feel nearer your people, but hates them so unreasonably; *ashamed* of my brother's *shame* for having been classified African; ashamed of my mother's silence when I suspect (I know it!) that she disapproves of their attitudes. And then, Sweetie, sometimes when I listen to them all, I – I – I am *ashamed*, in a queer way that I hate, of this secret love of ours. (Themba 1985: 22-23; emphasis added)

This excerpt effectively sums up the complex and contradictory consequences of the Population Registration Act (1950) on the everyday life of individuals, with particular focus on the ambivalent categorisation of coloured people, who lived side by side with African and white persons in the culturally mixed district of Sophiatown, where "Forbidden Love" is set. Dora's family, and in particular her father, is reminiscent of another fictional petite-bourgeoise coloured family, that of Frieda Shenton in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987) by Zoë Wicomb. Specifically, the recurrence of the word "shame" and its derivatives allows us to draw a parallel between Dora's intimate feelings in "Forbidden Love" and Tamieta's inner thoughts in "A Clearing in the Bush", notwithstanding the divergent plots and contexts of the two stories.[250]

The notion of romantic love in the midst of the apartheid legislation of the Fifties is also the main thematic concern of the short story "Slipper Satin" by Alex La Guma, published in 1960 in the Nigeria-based magazine *Black Orpheus*, and later reprinted in the anthology *Quartet*. The protagonist, Myra, has just returned to her home in District Six from a four-month sentence for breaking the Immorality Act,[251] and has to face the prejudice of her own coloured community and especially of her mother, finding comfort only in her younger sister. The third-person narrator tells the story from Myra's perspective, allowing readers to glimpse her inner life. It is worth quoting the exchange between Myra and her elderly mother:

> "So you're back. Back with your *shame* and *disgrace*, hey? […] You brought *disgrace* on us. […] We all good and decent people, but you brought us *shame*." The face crumbled suddenly and tears seeped out of the eyes. "You brought us *shame*. You couldn't go and pick a boy of your own kind, but you had to go sleep with some white loafer. You brought us *shame* […]". (La Guma [1960] 1963b: 6; emphasis added)

The quoted excerpt, with its almost obsessive repetition of the words "shame" and "disgrace", calls to mind the passage from Themba's "Forbidden Love" discussed earlier. As is the case with Themba's

[250] Wicomb discusses the structural feeling of shame in the construction of coloured identity in her essay "Shame and Identity: The Case of the Coloured in South Africa" (1998).
[251] Even if only hinted at in this short story, the South African prison system is a frequent theme in the fiction of Alex La Guma.

short story, a parallel can be drawn between "Slipper Satin" and Zoë Wicomb's engagement with coloured characters, for example in "A Clearing in the Bush" in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987) or "Disgrace" in *The One That Got Away* (2008).[252]

Despite their similarity in style and theme, "Forbidden Love" and "Slipper Satin" display significant differences. First of all, the third-person narrator is omniscient in "Forbidden Love" – similar to the narrative voice in the short fiction by Herbert Dhlomo, albeit less intrusive – whereas "Slipper Satin" presents internal focalisation. This is a frequent difference in the short fiction by Themba and La Guma. Moreover, dialogue in "Forbidden Love" is performed in standard English, whereas La Guma's characters use slang expressions. Themba's text leaves open the possibility for a reconciliation between the two families. La Guma's bathetic ending, by contrast, is both less hopeful and more poignant: ironically, Myra seems to hint at prostitution when she thinks of a way to buy a slipper satin dress for her sister's wedding.

While Themba almost certainly drew on American movies and popular culture for the plot of his *Drum* stories, to appeal to the middle-class readership of the townships, he also wrote them in a highly polished English with intertextual allusions to Wilde, Dickens, and, above all, Shakespeare.[253] Similarly, Themba's treatment of female figures is ambivalent. On the one hand, he represents them in sexist and stereotypical terms (*Drum* mainly targeted a male readership). On the other hand, they are often the true protagonists, endowed with agency, of his early stories, as we have seen in "Passionate Stranger". Thus, the female figures in Themba's *Drum* narratives "unseat patriarchal power in its traditional forms", producing a "femininity out of control" (Samuelson 2008: 68). Themba's early short stories, therefore, are emblematic of the blurred line between popular melodrama and high-quality writing that characterised *Drum* and defined its notion of the literary (see Snyman 2003: 44). According to David Rabkin, Themba never developed into a political writer, and, apart from "Mob Passion" and "Forbidden Love", his remaining *Drum* stories – "Passionate Stranger", "The Nice Time Girl", and "Marta" – avoid the discussion of "contentious" issues (1975: 115). However, both "Forbidden Love" and "Marta", published in 1955 and 1956 respectively, seem more crafted and consistent in style, but also more concerned with the depiction of the social environment in the townships and the consequences of apartheid on the daily life of individuals.[254]

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[252] Wicomb lists Alex La Guma among her literary influences (Hunter 1993: 82).

[253] Themba belongs to the fifth and last generation of the New Africans (Mahala 2017: 95). Even though *Drum* writers sought to build a new modern, urban literature, they did not "pop out of a vacuum", as Chapman has it ([1989] 2001: 218). Themba's recourse to a certain English diction and canon, and his consistent use of the third-person narrator in his early stories can be traced back to the generation of intellectuals to which Herbert Dhlomo belonged. Ntongela Masilela's website on the New African intellectuals includes a section on the *Drum* writers of the Sophiatown Renaissance (http://pzacad.pitzer.edu/NAM/sophia/writers/sr.shtml) .

[254] It can be argued that "Forbidden Love" and "Marta" are evidence of the presence of Es'kia Mphahlele as *Drum* fiction editor, since he always strived for what he perceived a 'higher' literary standard in the short stories published by *Drum*

Hence, different considerations arise from a reading of the short fiction published by Can Themba and Alex La Guma in *Drum*. Generally, these texts fall into the category of the "wet sentimental sexy stories and tough crime stories" harshly criticised by Es'kia Mphahlele ([1959] 1990: 188)[255] – Themba's pieces are all romances on the love life of urban African characters, and the one story by La Guma deals with a street fight for a woman between working-class coloured characters who meet in a bar. If La Guma's "Battle for Honour" was edited to target *Drum*'s popular readership, both at the level of content and, especially, of style, the same cannot be inferred from an analysis of Themba's early short fiction. As we have seen, his popular romances eschew the simplistic definition of "vulgar escapist stuff" (Mphahlele [1959] 1990: 188), and his style is highly polished and literate, at the same time never departing from its realistic background.[256] Nonetheless, it is undeniable that *Drum* sought to promote a certain canon of short fiction, and a close reading of the stories published by Themba and La Guma in other outlets supports this argument.

4.3 Social Critique and Generic Hybridity: Themba's Mature Fiction

According to Gaylard (2008: 104), if Themba's short stories were to be judged merely on the basis of this group of texts, there might be "some grounds for the dismissive attitude of various critics" (Ndebele, Nkosi, Mphahlele, Rabkin, to name a few). In his later stories, however, Themba abandons the theme of romantic love, and this change in content goes parallel to a significant shift in style.[257] The only exception is represented by the short story "The Suit", published in the first issue of the magazine *The Classic* in 1963. Recounted by a third-person narrator, the text depicts the apparently perfect life of a couple, Philemon and Tilly. One day, Philemon creeps up on his wife and her lover, who escapes from the window leaving his suit behind. From that day, Philemon never mentions the episode again, but he obliges Tilly to take care of the suit as if it were their guest, to be fed and entertained. In the end, Tilly commits suicide, much to Philemon's anguish.

"The Suit" is one of the most anthologised South African short stories, it has repeatedly been adapted for the stage and for a 2016 short movie, and several contemporary South African short stories perform fascinating intertextual dialogues with it (see Mahala 2017: 11; Stobie 2017; D'Abdon

(see Mphahlele [1959] 1990: 188). Therefore, I do not agree with Gaylard's claim that "Forbidden Love" can be associated to the romances published by Rolfes Dhlomo in *The Bantu World* in the late Thirties (Gaylard 2008: 50).

[255] See also Paul Gready, who divides *Drum* stories along the two opposites of the popular spectrum: "'fantasies of ferocity' (gangsters, boxing)" and "'saccharine tenderness'" (Gready 1990: 145).

[256] However, Themba is also the author of more popular pieces, such as the short picture story of a boy courting a girl titled "Baby Come Duze", published in *Drum* in 1956 and reprinted by Chapman in his 1989 anthology.

[257] On the occasion of Can Themba's memorial lecture in 2013, Nadine Gordimer similarly observed that Themba's first stories are written according to a "rather stodgy Victorian style", whereas his later prose fiction possesses "all the liveliest and lived satire" (Gordimer 2013: 1).

2019).[258] Notably, it has been included in all three anthologies of Themba's writing. The circumstantial "psychological study" of a man's response to infidelity (Gaylard 2008: 105) is carried out through the use of an external third-person narrator who never intervenes in the narrative, but carefully reports the characters' thoughts. The representation of melodramatic love, typical of *Drum*'s "pulp modes" (Chapman 1989: 23), is absent from "The Suit", as is the stereotypical Shakespearian love diction of Themba's early texts. The difference between "The Suit" and Themba's *Drum* stories is therefore remarkable, and it may be one of the reasons why the editors of *The Will to Die* chose to include the text in their anthology, notwithstanding its romantic thematic concern and its avoidance of socio-political themes. In the case of "The Suit", consequently, the importance of magazines in defining the contours of the short-story form and of literary norms becomes transparent: *The Classic* was an explicitly literary magazine targeting a more elite readership than *Drum*.[259]

Themba's second group of stories includes "The Dube Train", "The Urchin", "Crepuscule", "Kwashiorkor", "Ten-to-Ten", and "The Will to Die". "The Dube Train" and "The Urchin" were submitted to Mphahlele in the early Sixties and later featured in his edited volumes, *Modern African Stories* (1964) and *African Writing Today* (1967), respectively.[260] Probably written in the early Sixties (Gaylard 2008: 112), the other four stories were first published posthumously in the eponymous anthology *The Will to Die* (1972) from some typescripts provided by Themba's widow. From a thematic point of view, the difference between this group of texts and the *Drum* stories is undeniable: all of them, apart from "The Will to Die", are listed in Catherine Dubbeld's bibliography of South African socio-political short stories (1989), whereas only one *Drum* piece, "Forbidden Love", is included in Dubbeld's list. Stylistically, the use of the present tense and of a homodiegetic narrator, often resembling the author, becomes more and more frequent. The polished diction of the narrator is maintained, but dialogues are usually reported in a non-standard variety of English or, more frequently, in *tsotsitaal*, the South African township creole consisting predominantly of Zulu, English, and Afrikaans. It is in this group of stories that the engaging intersection between fiction, autobiography, and journalism – ethics and aesthetics – becomes more visible.

[258] In its investigation of an individual's response to marital infidelity, "The Suit" is strikingly reminiscent of Herbert Dhlomo's "He Forgave Her", analysed in the second chapter of this thesis. The patriarchal and misogynist response to infidelity of Dhlomo's Cingo and Themba's Philemon is recreated in Siphiwo Mahala's two short stories "The Suit Continued" and "The Lost Suit" (2011). Zukiswa Wanner's "The Dress that Fed the Suit" (2011) and Makhosazana Xaba's "Behind the Suit" and "The Suit Continued: The Other Side" (2013) represent instead interesting attempts to rewrite Themba's story as a queer and feminist narrative. See D'Abdon 2019.

[259] This can be inferred also from some literary allusions inside the text, particularly when Tilly refers to her duties towards the suit as her "albatross" (Themba 1985: 95), thus quoting indirectly from Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (1798).

[260] After it was submitted to Mphahlele, "The Urchin" was actually first published in *Drum* in 1963 as a tribute from the editor Cecil Eprile to *Drum*'s former contributor (see Gray 2006: xii).

The short story "Kwashiorkor" is emblematic of this paradigm. The first-person narrator and journalist Dave accompanies his sister Eileen, a social care worker for "Non-Europeans", to one of her "case studies" in the township of Alexandra (Themba [1972] 1982: 14): a family composed of a mother and her young daughter with a three-year old child, needing urgent welfare aid. The child, who suffers from severe malnutrition, *kwashiorkor*, dies when his grandmother, unable to afford life in Johannesburg after her daughter's arrest, moves back to the countryside.

Dubbeld includes "Kwashiorkor" in her list of socio-political South African short stories since it deals with conditions that have resulted directly from South Africa's segregationist regime (1989: 24). In particular, it is worth noticing the narrator's realistic and detailed descriptions of the child's condition and of the township, in a vivid language reminiscent of Alex La Guma's District Six stories:[261]

> A deep gully ran in front of the house but the uneven street did not allow it to function effectively as a drain, and puddles of murky, noisome water and collected waste-matter stood pooled in it, still, thick, appalling, like foul soup that makes you nauseous – as if some malevolent devil bade you gulp it down. On the other side the rotting carcass of a long-dead dog was sending malodorous miasmata from its surface to befoul the air. (Themba [1972] 1982: 19)

The narrator further provides readers with a three-page excursus on the family's history, trying to give a sociological explanation for their condition.[262] This passage lends a journalistic tone to the short story (see Snyman 2003: 51). It is particularly interesting to observe the dichotomy set up by Themba between Dave's journalistic reportage, which tells a story – not unlike fiction – and Eileen's records of her case studies. Dave's excursus, as a "human-interest story", stands in direct opposition to his sister's "facts" (Themba [1972] 1982: 14-15). Themba as journalist and as imaginative writer "become completely intertwined", as Chapman argues ([1989] 2001: 209). In "Kwashiorkor", this interdependence acquires a metafictional quality, since Dave's reportage is actually the fictional short story that we are reading. The realistic reading of Themba's narrative is thus complicated by these self-reflexive moments.[263]

The mixture of fact and fiction is even more transparent in "The Dube Train", a short story that is in fact closely associated with an article Themba wrote for *Drum* in 1957, "Terror in the Trains" (see, among others, Gaylard 2008: 109-111). In November 1957, Themba investigated the inter-

[261] The narrator further describes "dark-brown cockroaches" in the family's house (Themba [1972] 1982: 20). Cockroaches serve both a realistic and a symbolic aim, since they stand for the dirt and decay of township life. Several references to the cockroach can be found also in La Guma's short story "Out of Darkness", in *A Walk in the Night*, and in *In the Fog of the Season's End* (see Carpenter 1991: 84; Field 2010: 120).

[262] Some passages of "Kwashiorkor" may remind readers of the introductory paragraphs of Herbert Dhlomo's "The Barren Woman".

[263] See also Walder's take on "Kwashiorkor". He recognises a "deliberate self-awareness of structure and manner" in Themba's narrative which "undermines or at least questions" the alleged "monolithic" and straightforward realistic aesthetics of Black South African fiction in the Fifties (1999: 56)

ethnic violence in the Dube area near Soweto, Johannesburg, which resulted in two *Drum* reports: "Terror in the Trains" and "Inside Dube Hostel".[264] Before turning to a close reading of "The Dube Train", it is useful to note a few details about its journalistic counterpart, "Terror in the Trains". The latter's publication history speaks to its hybrid nature: Donald Stuart and Roy Holland, the editors of *The Will to Die* (1972), chose to print the article cutting the first paragraph without any indication of the abridgement to make the piece 'less literary', so that they could include it in the anthology's section "Reports" (see Zander 1999: 232). Indeed, the first paragraph of the unabridged "Terror in the Trains", published in its entirety in *The World of Can Themba* (1985), is marked by the presence of an external narrator who describes Isaac Moeketsi's thoughts in the past tense – readers probably assume that the man is a fictional character:

> Friday night, and the end of the month to boot. That's why, joining the hordes that flowed into Park Station, Johannesburg, Isaac Moeketsi of Dube – and thousands like him – was scared. He had, to a more intense degree, that sinking, uneasy feeling he always got when he had to board any of these location trains. More intense because he knew that robbers would be making an extra-effort on this most special of nights. (Themba 1985: 111)

After this "fictional individualized characterization" (Zander 1999: 232), Themba-the-journalist shifts to the present tense and to the first-person to recount his experience on the trains in the Dube area. The article, moreover, often shifts in narrative perspective, and the initial heterodiegetic narrative voice alternates with the use of the plural first-person pronoun and the immediacy of the eye-witness account (Cowling 2016: 23-24). The use of the first-person perspective and the direct involvement of the journalist in the exposés he writes, a typical feature of the *Drum* articles, allow for the emergence of yet another significant parallelism with the later New Journalism:

> […] self- styled 'New Journalists' turned away from the traditional role of the objective outsider recording observations. Rather, they became famous for throwing themselves headlong into their stories by immersing themselves in the world they were investigating. […] Often (but not always) the complete submersion of the writer into his/her subject matter resulted in the inclusion of the writer's own persona within the resulting narrative. Some of these New Journalists began routinely breaking one of the cardinal rules of journalism by depicting themselves as integral parts of the story. (Worthington 2018: 93)

The narrative structure of a first-person eye-witness account characterizes also "The Dube Train", a fictional story of an anonymous worker's journey by train from Dube Station. As in "Terror in the Trains", precise indications of the day of the week and of the route of the train are given: "The

[264] Both reports end with an appeal to authorities to solve the situation. The plea to authorities for reform often concluded *Drum* exposés (Chapman [1989] 2001: 195), and this is one of the main reasons why *Drum* has been variously accused of being politically ineffective if compared to explicitly militant magazines such as *Fighting Talk* and *New Age* (see Choonoo 1997: 253-259). However, censorship and *Drum*'s dependence on white funding prevented the magazine from being completely outspoken on political issues. Moreover, some articles can be considered pertinent political pieces, such as Themba's own "Political Offenders Banned to the Bush" (1956), reprinted in *The Will to Die*, in which the writer condemns the treatment of political prisoners (see Gready 19990: 150).

Orlando train comes from the right. It crosses the Dube train overhead just before we reach New Canada" (Themba [1972] 1982: 59).[265] By contrast, the short story recounts a single episode involving the type of the *tsotsi* – a young township criminal – who boards the same train as the narrator, a device that contributes to achieve the unity of effect first theorised by Edgar Allan Poe for the short story (Gaylard 2008: 111).[266] Thus, while on the one hand the fictional story presents some traits that are closer to reportage – the structure of the eye-witness account and the precise outlining of time and setting – on the other hand the literary features of the article "Terror in the Trains" are so prominent that they needed abridgement to fit the category of reports in Stuart and Holland's 1972 anthology of Themba's writings.

4.4 Journalism, Realism, and the Ordinary: La Guma's Stories

The proximity of the spheres of ethics and aesthetics becomes even more prominent in the short fiction by Alex La Guma.[267] Indeed, almost all of his short stories are listed in Dubbeld's bibliography of socio-political texts. La Guma's family background, and in particular his father's involvement with socialism, played a fundamental role in shaping the writer's ideas on politics and literature (Field 2010: 13-24). Among his literary influences, La Guma acknowledged Shakespeare, Gorky, Steinbeck, and Hemingway (La Guma 1996a: 18).[268] His early engagement with politics in the Fifties coincides with his first published journal articles, and with his first short stories a few years later. He was active part of the South African Coloured People's Organization (SACPO), and, as such, he openly supported the Freedom Charter and he would have taken part in the Congress of the People (1955), had the police not arrested him to prevent his participation in Kliptown; as a consequence, he was taken to trial together with other 156 South Africans in the Treason Trial a year later (1956). At the same time, he began a regular collaboration with *New Age* – contributing articles, columns, and

[265] Some expressions in "The Dube Train", such as "congested trains, filled with sour-smelling humanity" (Themba [1972] 1982: 57) remind of "Terror in the Trains": "congestion on the trains […] jam-packed with gasping frightened humanity" (Themba 1985: 112). Mbulelo Mzamane, one of Themba's students in Swaziland, rewrote the short story under the title "The Dube Train Revisited" in the collection *Mzala: The Short Stories of Mbulelo Mzamane* (1980), published internationally as *My Cousin Comes to Jo'burg* (1981). The fictional representation, often in the form of the eye-witness account, of the Black experience of travelling in crowded and dangerous third-class train compartments to get to work to the city from the townships thus links the *Drum* generation to the mouthpiece of the Black Consciousness movement, the magazine *Staffrider*, which means 'those who ride trains illegally'. See also Mtutuzeli Matshoba's story "Three Days in the Land of the Dying Illusion", which will be discussed in the next chapter of the present dissertation.

[266] Edgar Allan Poe first theorised his notion of the unity of effect while reviewing Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales* in 1842.

[267] A review of the titles of critical studies on La Guma can show how this tension between ethics ad aesthetics has been highlighted repeatedly: Gareth Cornwell's "Protest in Fiction: An Approach to Alex La Guma" (1979), Jabulani Mkhize's "Alex La Guma's Politics and Aesthetics" (1998), Roger Field's *Alex La Guma. A Literal & Political Biography* (2010), and Jude Aigbe Agho's paper "Resistance, Liberation, and Aesthetics in the Early Novels of Alex La Guma" (2016), to name a few.

[268] See Field 2012 for an in-depth discussion of Hemingway's influence on La Guma's opera omnia.

one short story – and more sporadically with *Fighting Talk* (Field 2010: 48-69). As Field suggests (2010: 97), there is a "fluid" and "dynamic" relationship between La Guma's journalism and his short fiction in the second half of the Fifties, as an analysis of "Out of Darkness" can show.

Originally published as "Out of the Darkness" in 1957 in Ronald Segal's *Africa South*, this story was reprinted in 1963 in *Quartet*, the anthology edited by Richard Rive featuring stories by the District Six writers: Rive himself, La Guma, Alf Wannenburgh, and James Matthews. The *Africa South* issue in which the story was published opens with a drawing titled "The Prisoners" and includes essays on South African police and on 'miscegenation'. These themes are indirectly echoed in La Guma's "Out of Darkness". Set in prison, it narrates the story of the convict Ou Kakkelak (Old Cockroach) first from the perspective of one of his inmates, the first-person narrator, and then from his own perspective with the device of the story-within-a-story. In the first page, readers discover that Ou Kakkelak is an educated man – he discusses *Romeo and Juliet* – who committed a homicide and who sometimes talks to himself, mentioning the names of Cora and Joey (La Guma [1957] 1963b: 33). Ou Kakkelak then reveals to the narrator the reason behind his ten-year sentence: his girlfriend Cora, of a lighter complexion, could pass for white and started despising him for being a "black nigger" (La Guma [1957] 1963b: 38). His friend Joey, in turn, called her a "play-white bitch" (38), and consequently Ou Kakkelak killed him. With this twist of the plot, the tale ends.

One of the main concerns of "Out of Darkness" is the absurdity of apartheid categorisations, defined by the Population Registration Act of 1950, with particular focus on coloured characters. This represents a major theme in La Guma's short fiction: three out of the four stories in *Quartet* ("Slipper Satin", "A Glass of Wine", and "Out of Darkness"), "The Gladiators" in *A Walk in the Night and Other Stories*, and "Colour Blind" in *Cadernos Brasileiros*, all represent imaginatively either the impossible union between a white and a coloured character with implicit reference to the Immorality Act, or the racism also endemic within coloured communities, in particular with 'play-white' characters.[269] "Out of Darkness" notably resembles the plot and structure of the later "Colour Blind" (1962), in which an Italian man, Mario, in a whites-only bar, recognises a woman, who seems embarrassed. The man then recounts to the coloured waiter Charlie that he had once rescued the woman from two criminals, and later invited her for a drink in a bar reserved for Europeans. She had reacted angrily thinking that Mario was trying to use her to pass for white, since she supposed he was coloured because of his darker complexion. With an ironic twist of the plot following the story in the story, as in "Out of Darkness", Charlie reveals to Mario that the woman is embarrassed because she

[269] Field states that "[c]ountless South African authors and playwrights" have treated the Immorality Act as a "literary and dramatic subject" (see Field 2010: 105-107). Indeed, "Colour Blind" is also the title of a short story by La Guma's fellow writer James Matthews, and the internalisation of racist norms in the coloured community is widely explored by Richard Rive as well.

is his sister, and she is the one passing for white (see Field 2010: 106-107). "Colour Blind" is also typical of La Guma's fiction from a formal point of view, especially for the use of the device of the story-within-a-story and the cutting irony of the conclusion.

Apart from the racial theme, "Out of Darkness" is notable for its indirect critique of the prison system in South Africa, a problem which had been addressed by *Drum* in 1954.[270] Tellingly, La Guma's story is inserted in the section of *Quartet* titled "Without Justice", which opens with a quote from the US activist Eugene Victor Debs: "[w]hile there is a lower class, I am in it. While there is a criminal element, I am of it. While there is a soul in jail, I am not free".[271] The prison setting is described vividly by La Guma, who focuses on three elements: the heat, the noise announcing the guards' arrival, and the all-surrounding darkness – ultimately, the darkness of the title. The harshness of the language used by the guards to address the prisoners is matched by the harshness of the sounds in the words used by the narrator to describe their arrival: "[from] outside came the scrape and thumps of boots on the stone staircase. Steel gratings clanged like boilers being opened and closed" (La Guma [1957] 1963b: 35). In addition, the prison environment is depicted using metaphors relating to the animal sphere, where the most aggressive of the inmates, Smiley Abrams, becomes an "ape-man", "king of the jungle", who "growl[s]" and "snap[s]" at the weaker prisoners (35-36). Thus, the protagonist's nickname of "Cockroach", at the bottom of the animal hierarchy, acquires a symbolic significance. By taking refuge into his madness, however, Ou Kakkelak is able to escape the "darkness" of the prison (Gaylard 2008: 17).

During the months of September and October 1956, a year before the publication of "Out of Darkness" and a few months before the start of the Treason Trial in which he was a defendant, La Guma contributed three articles to *New Age*, one on the juvenile condition in District Six, and the other two on the Cape Town prison on Roeland Street.[272] The writer would be detained without trial here in 1960, 1963, and 1966, shortly before his final departure from South Africa (Abrahams 1985: 14-15). All three articles contain the deterministic idea of the jail as a "jungle", and of the prisoner as a "savage gorilla in captivity" (La Guma [1956] 1993e: 18). If "Out of Darkness", though originating from articles, is clearly a fictional short story, the article "Ten Days in Roeland Street Jail" falls into the category of literary journalism: with the aid of literary techniques – see the alliteration "*b*lue *b*ulk of Ta*b*le Mountain in the *b*ackground" at the beginning (La Guma [1956] 1993d: 14; emphasis added)

[270] Henry Nxumalo was the author and protagonist of the *Drum* exposé of prison conditions in South Africa, "Mr Drum Goes to Jail". Similarly to La Guma, Nxumalo criticises the "bestial" treatment of prisoners by both the guards and long-term prisoners (Nxumalo [1954] 2001: 46).
[271] *The Stone Country* (1967) carries the same epigraph from Eugene Debs (see Field 2010:147).
[272] The articles are "The Dead-End Kids of Hanover Street", "Ten Days in Roeland Street Jail", and "Law of the Jungle", all published in *New Age* on 20 September, 27 September, and 4 October 1956 respectively. They have been reprinted in *Liberation Chabalala. The World of Alex La Guma* (1993), where these articles are placed just before "Out of Darkness" on purpose.

– it narrates the experience in jail of a certain Willie Frazer with frequent shifts between the present and the past tense, and between reported speech and the narrator's descriptions (Odendaal and Field 1993: xix). The representation of prison conditions by the journalist-narrator in "Ten Days in Roeland Street Jail", which focuses on the same elements as in "Out of Darkness", displays figurative language and is rich in similes: "[b]ehind its walls exists a world ruled by stony-eyed guards who have become as cold as the iron bars over the windows, and long-term convicts as calloused and hard as the stones which enclose them" (La Guma [1956] 1993d: 14). If at the level of content some of La Guma's short stories have originated from his articles, at a formal level it is rather his journalistic writing that acquires fictional traits.[273]

The use of the same imagery and expressions is textual evidence of a direct connection between journalism and short-story writing, intersecting at the crossroads of politics, in La Guma's work.[274] "Out of Darkness" and its related articles, moreover, anticipate (in the story's "stone cavern", for example; La Guma [1957] 1963b: 35) the writer's own experience as prisoner, which he narrates in the short story "Tattoo Marks and Nails" (1964) and in his novel *The Stone Country* (1967).[275] In both, he reproduces the same scenario and the same prototypes of characters as in "Out of Darkness". In particular, "Tattoo Marks and Nails" reiterates the structure of the previous short story: a prisoner, Ahmed the Turk, recounts his past to the first-person narrator, while in the background the "most brutalized" of the inmates, "The Creature", an alter ego of Smiley Abrams, abuses the other prisoners (La Guma 1967: 94).[276] "The heat in the cell was solid", the narrator remarks at the beginning of "Tattoo Marks and Nails", echoing the protagonist's opening comment in "Out of Darkness" on "the heat in the cell" which "hung as thick as cotton-wool" (La Guma 1967: 92; [1957] 1963b: 33).

The documentary traits of "Out of Darkness" and "Tattoo Marks and Nails", and of the late short fiction by Themba, represent a common trend of the short stories of the period. For instance, the preface to the winning entry of the 1956 *New Age* short-story competition refers to the narrative "The Family Boy" by Fezile Mbi as a "deeply moving human document" that describes township life in a way that "will ring true" to its readers (Mbi 1956: 6; see figure 4.3).

[273] See for example La Guma's article on a government official issuing passes to African women, titled "The Machine" and published in *Fighting Talk* in 1956. Bernth Lindfors (1966: 58-59) classifies the piece as a short story – and "The Machine" is in fact published on the same page as Alfred Hutchinson's short story "No Pass…". As it often happens with the articles written by La Guma, his narrative style is "suggestive of literary design" (Cornwell 1979: 43), and, therefore, the piece is difficult to categorise. See Cornwell (1979: 91-99) and Zander (1999: 440-444).

[274] Several critical studies underline the verbatim reproduction of expressions in the three articles and in "Out of Darkness" (see, among others, Zander 1999: 259; Gaylard 2008: 170).

[275] In an interview with Cecil Abrahams, La Guma declared that *The Stone Country* was based upon his own experience and the experiences of other prisoners; as such, the novel is "completely authentic" (La Guma 1996a: 23). While we should not take La Guma's declarations at face value, still the spheres of ethics and aesthetics are closely knit in his work.

[276] Ahmed the Turk becomes Yusuf the Turk, and the Creature becomes Butcherboy in *The Stone Country* (see Field 2010: 148).

The judges in the New Age short story competition called this "an enormously vital and deeply moving human document. It brings home the tragedy of family life in a location in a way which we are sure will ring true to thousands of New Age readers." The story was awarded joint first prize.

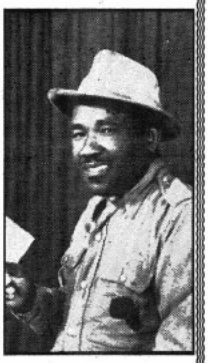
THE FAMILY BOY

By Fezile Mbi

MR. MBI is the telephone operator at a hospital near Alice, Cape. He is a married man with five children. Born in 1916 in East London's Duncan Village, he received his primary education at a mission school. In 1929 he went to Johannesburg to work on the gold mines and, after attending meetings in the location, joined his trade union and the African National Congress. He was one of the organisers of the Mineworkers' Union at the time of the 1946 strike, after which he returned to East London.

In 1947 he was refused permission to stay in East London, so he went to Port Elizabeth where he was one of the organisers of the ANC branch in New Brighton and chairman of the Youth League. He took a leading part in the 1950 day of mourning and the 1951 rent protest. In the 1952 Defiance Campaign he led three groups of volunteers into jail—and his wife Jessie and his 1½-year-old baby went to jail too!

Banned by the Minister of Justice in 1953, he left P.E. for Alice, where he now lives.



ON the morning of December 19th, 1920, when most people were getting ready for the coming Christmas, Mrs. Maria Mavuso was busy with the funeral of her husband. He had worked on a farm for 62 years without a holiday, and no Sundays off. He died when Mnyamezeli, his eldest son, was nineteen.

When the father died, his mother was left with practically no money and five children to look after. They moved from Amalinda Farms into the nearby location. His mother said, "Mnyamezeli, you are my man now. I shall depend on you."

It didn't seem to him that the man of a family should go to school. He wanted to work, as his father had, and make a living for the family. His two brothers were too young to get jobs. Fikile was eight and Lumkile five. Grace was ten and Linda three and a half years old, but they were girls. They had brought their old donkey with them from Amalinda, and Mnyamezeli was sure he could find plenty of ways to make them a living by going to the market and hauling things, or trying to do some other business. He wanted to tell his mother right then about not going to school any more, but he felt it might be better to wait.

While he was getting dressed next morning he decided to go up to see Mr. Dukashe, the shopkeeper, who had given him some jobs the summer before and paid him 1s. 6d. every Saturday. When he told his mother about his plan, she took hold of his hand and said, "My son, your father worked himself to death in the fields of the White man's farms for only ten shillings a month to take care of us, just because he never had a proper schooling. I don't want you to do the same." She swallowed and tried to smile. "That is why I have decided to come and live in this rough location. I know we are going to suffer under the pass laws of the big town, and in the unhygienic and unsanitary conditions of the location. But, my child, you will get an education here. It must be two and a half miles to New Brighton location. You would never be able to go back and forth to the market there every day, and I must have a man at home at night."

He hadn't thought of his mother needing him home at night, so he went to school, but he kept trying to figure out some sort of business he could start around the location. He was so busy thinking about it that one day he nearly got run over by a taxi.

When other boys, who did not go to school, saw Mnyamezeli on his way, they called "Come on over here, man. Where are you going to? Where is your home?" Before he could reply, another boy said, "Look, he is too big, but he goes to school."

"Why do you not come with us to the golf course? You will get two shillings," said the other.

"I'd like to," he answered, "but I can't. My mother needs a man at home. She wants me to be well educated." One of them gave him a funny look, and he saw another winking at the rest. Then he took to his heels and made for school as fast as he could, while they swore at him.

One afternoon when he got home his mother was busy talking with another old woman. As he came in they stopped talking. He knew from the look on his mother's face, that something was up.

Maria knew how to cook really good things to eat from just common groceries. One Monday when he came home after school he saw that his mother and Grace had been cooking all day. The food was all laid out, piping hot, on the table.

"Mnyamezeli, I am giving you a very responsible job," his mother said. "We've got to begin making our own living, and we must make it through things we can do at home. Do you think you could go from factory to factory with this food, and see if we could get enough orders to make it worthwhile?" He nodded, and his mother went on, "You can take it in your little box wagon and pull it up to places where the factory workers eat their food, every Saturday and school holiday. You must ask the people if they would like to try your mother's food. I will write the prices down.

"A bottle of ginger beer is 5d. A pint of marewu 2d. One fat-cake 1d. And a pint of sour milk 4d. That may sound high for a pint, but you point out to them that my pints are larger."

* * *

THE first Saturday, his mother heated a plank on the stove and put it in the bottom of his wagon to keep the fat-cakes warm. Then they loaded the food into it, and off he went. He went up to the jam factories on the other side of the Native Affairs office, and from there he went to Buffalo Street. He didn't get home till long after dark, and when he came his mother asked him if he had had any trouble. He was so angry he didn't know what he was saying.

"Yes, I had plenty," he almost shouted. "I don't like to do business with old people. They are cheaters, almost all of them. I only got £1 2s. 8d., and they ate up all the fat-cakes! That is as far as I got."

"There, there!' his mother said. "You're all tired out. You've done well for your first day. We only have to sell £1 worth a week. That will give us two shillings profit. That is all we need to live on."

She rubbed the boy up and down on the back of his neck. "Now you sit down," she said, "and let me warm up your supper before you go to sleep."

Mnyamezeli was a boy of independent mind, lonely, observant and hard-working. He was also playful and mischievous, and on occasion got into serious scrapes and sometimes led his companions into similar difficulties. His teacher—he was in standard six—was impressed with the boy's character. His desire to learn was such that he left no stone unturned to obtain education. Any book, or even a piece of paper tossed about by the wind, he would pick up and study carefully, whether it was in English or Xhosa.

The next Saturday, when he went out with some more cookies, he had a lot more luck too. He got a lot of orders. When it was nearly dark he stopped to total them up. It came to £2 1s. 4d. He was afraid that his mother would kill herself if she tried to do more cooking than that, so he ran home with the new orders and the money as fast as he could go without tipping the wagon over.

That night, the old woman took off the shelf the sugar bowl in which she always kept the money, and counted it over twice. Then she said. "Mm. mm. My, only £1 17s. 6d. I didn't realise we were quite so close, but the material for these samples took more than I had planned. And £1 12s. of this doesn't really belong to us. It won't do."

Mrs. Maria Mavuso sat pinching her lip for a moment. Then she went on, "I will have to go down and see Mr. Dukashe at his store, first thing in the morning. If I show him all these orders I am sure he will give us credit until next Saturday. But, my son, you will have to go in and pay him just as soon as you finish your deliveries. We are not going to run up any grocery bill."

So, after he had made his deliveries on the next Saturday, he went in to pay the grocery bill. Mr. Dukashe was big and fat, with a black moustache. After he had marked the bill "paid," he looked at him over the top of his glasses, and said, "You got a dog at home? I give you some scraps." He went to his bread box and brought out a package as big as his head.

After Mnyamezeli had paid there was only 19s. left. He hated to go home and tell mother. She didn't feel bad about it, though. They were all standing by the table where he had poured out the money that was left. The old woman stooped down and put her arms around all five of her children, the way a hen puts her wings round her chickens when it starts to rain.

"Don't you see?" she said, "All our groceries for the week are paid for, and we have money left over."

Then she opened the scraps Mr. Dukashe had given for the dog.

"Why, Mnyamezeli," she said. "You have picked up someone else's parcel."

"No," he told her. "He put it right into my hands."

"But it is all pieces of good bread," said the old woman. "He didn't intend it for the dog at all. Oh, everybody is so good to us!"

* * *

THE younger children were all at school. But Mnyamezeli was no longer a schoolboy. He had passed standard six. Not that his brain was incapable of further study; his mother didn't have the money to send him to high school. She went next door, and said to her friend, Mrs. Dhlamini, "Tell me, what can I do about Mnyamezeli?"

"Why, Mam Tshawe?"

"He has passed his standard six. I cannot send him to Welsh High School. I have no money. What can I do to get a pass for him?"

"Go to Mr. Mbola at Duncan Village. If you have £3 he will make out a pass for your son. He is working at the pass office. He is a very good man."

The people of this location were used to poverty. They accepted it and resigned themselves to it. There was about their poverty, however, none of the clean, spick-and-span abstemiousness, the clever calculation, and the cheerfully making the best of things, that one reads of in novels and ingenious stories of poverty-stricken childhood. With them, poverty had long since crushed them, weighed them down like a heavy load. They had forgotten the meaning, if indeed they had ever known it, of good food and clothes, of noble uses of the body and mind. They had to live crowded together in small rooms.

What should have been kitchens were bedrooms and living rooms, or bed-living rooms. Beds that would have been comfortable for one person slept two or three.

That February was really hot. It was bad when Mnyamezeli worked on the garden of Mr. Dukashe, but while he was weeding he could at least get a whiff of fresh air. It was Linda and his mother who really got the worst of it. The house was hot as the inside of an oven. And the hotter it got the bigger the cookery orders grew. Sometimes when his mother straightened up from the oven she put both hands on her back, and she looked much older. Her face and shoulders were much thinner, but she looked saggy round the middle as though she had somehow melted and run down.

"I am afraid you are going to kill yourself working so hard over that hot stove," he said to his mother. The old woman dropped her hands from her back, pulled up straight, and said, "No, no, I am perfectly all right my boy." Then she pulled her apron down, and said, "My, my, I have become so careless about myself since your father died. I must get a new dress, Mine are getting all out of shape."

Mnyamezeli had some money he had earned from his weeding for Mr. Dukashe. He took it to the store and told Mrs. Dukashe he wanted to buy a dress for his mother, the kind they had in the window for 12s. 6d.

"Your mother has been getting rather thinner lately, hasn't she?" asked Mrs. Dukashe.

"No she hasn't," he told her. "It is just that she has been so busy since my father died."

When he came home with the new dress, his mother's eyes filled with tears. She put the dress away to wear as her Sunday best, and said it was exactly what she would have bought for herself.

* * *

JUST before her nineteenth birthday, Linda decided it was time for her to see the world. She packed her bags, said goodbye to her family, and left for Johannesburg. Her mother cried.

Lumkile was not at the station. He was busy, as usual, stealing money in houses while the owners had their backs turned, pick-pocketing, drinking and smoking dagga.

One day he was caught by the police and sentenced to a long period at the reformatory.

Linda and Fekile were both sent to Alice, to the Macvicia T.B. Hospital.

Mnyamezeli, now a grown man, was left alone with his old mother.

* * *

ONE Saturday in May, 1952, his mother said, "I am now going to take a little rest, my son." She stayed in her bed for the next two days. The next morning she didn't eat a bit of breakfast, and her face was pale, but there was a little smile on her face. He tip-toed up to the bed. His mother turned the sheet back and said, "This is your new sister."

He felt rather foolish. He had guessed what was the trouble with his mother. The next day, Mrs. Maria Mavuso died peacefully in her little house.

* * *

MNYAMEZELI was now working in town. The idea of joining the Church came to him on the day of his mother's funeral, and he joined the Bantu Presbytery Church.

Thembile, a leader of the A.N.C., who was working with him, tried hard to win his support, but Mnyamezeli did not believe in the Congress' method of fighting for freedom. For this he was the object of the bitterest criticism at the firm.

* * *

ONE day there was a disturbance in the location. The people were fighting with the police.

Mr. Mnyamezeli Mavuso was walking along Ntaba Street, coming from work. The poor man was shot dead.

On the second day after that there was a funeral service for the six people who were killed by the police.

Mavuso was one of these.

Figure 4.3 Fezile Mbi's "The Family Boy" in *New Age* (18 October 1956).

This kind of prefaces, with an emphasis on the supposed authenticity of the presented narrative, is reminiscent of the editor's note introducing Rolfes Dhlomo's prose fiction in *The Bantu World* and *The Sjambok* in the early Thirties. The poetics of authenticity, supported by the texts' realistic style and by their proximity to the sphere of journalism, thus represents an element of continuity in Black South African short fiction from the 1930s to the literature of the Eighties, which will be discussed in the next chapter.[277] The authors' claim to authenticity in their short stories is not necessarily linked to the sphere of journalism, but it can also be achieved through autobiographical writing – or through a combination of both.[278]

Emblematic in this regard is Can Themba's short prose work "Crepuscule". Published for the first time in *The Will to Die*, it can be defined a short story, an autobiographical account, an eye-witness report, a discursive essay (Gaylard 2008: 115), or a mixture of all these genres. Reminiscent of some of the stories in Peter Abrahams's *Dark Testament*, "Crepuscule" is told by a first-person narrator by the name of Can Themba who once lived in Sophiatown. The plot of the narrative is quite straightforward: the narrator recalls an episode of his past, when he had a romantic affair with an English girl called Janet, thus breaking the law. Ironically, it was one of his jealous ex-girlfriends who reported Themba to the police. The sexist representation of Janet (Hooper 2017: 7) and the light tone of the story would suggest that "Crepuscule" is no different from Themba's first *Drum*'s texts.

Two aspects of the short story, however, are particularly interesting. First, the overt autobiographical quality of the text: Janet is the fictional version of Jean Hart, an Englishwoman who went to Johannesburg in the Fifties, associated herself with the *Drum* staff, and had a brief affair with Can Themba (Hooper 2017: 8).[279] More importantly, the narratorial interventions are so frequent that they make up half of the story, the other half being the sheer narration. Uttered in the present tense, these digressions from the main plot are a comment on the coeval socio-political situation in South Africa, with particular focus on the Immorality Act, even if this is never explicitly mentioned, and on the demolition of Sophiatown following the government's Native Resettlement Act (1954). The

[277] I discuss this aspect in detail in an article published in *Cadernos de Literatura Comparada* in 2021, where I explore the contamination of journalism in the short fiction of Rolfes Dhlomo, Can Themba, Alex La Guma, and Miriam Tlali (Fossati 2021b).

[278] For instance, Themba's fictional short story "Ten-to-Ten" ([1972] 1982: 46-57) was probably inspired by Es'kia Mphahlele's renowned interlude on the curfew in his township, recounted in his autobiography *Down Second Avenue* ([959] 1990: 44-45). See also Gaylard (2008: 107) on the likely filiation of "Ten-to-Ten" from Mphahlele's autobiography. At the same time, *Down Second Avenue* incorporates three short stories by Mphahlele, "The Woman" (1953), "A Winter's Tale" (1955), and "The Woman Walks Out" (1957) (Zander 1999: 390-393).

[279] Apart from "Kwashiorkor" and "Crepuscule", also "The Will to Die" is autobiographical. "Crepuscule", however, carries the blurring of the line between fiction and fact to extremes, resembling rather Themba's nostalgic and meditative autobiographical essays such as "The Bottom of the Bottle" and "Requiem for Sophiatown". The 'factional' status of the piece is probably the reason why Donald Stuart and Roy Holland inserted "Crepuscule" in the stories' section, but separate from the other fictional texts of the anthology (see Zander 1999: 428-432). Stephen Gray in *Requiem for Sophiatown* similarly incorporates "Crepuscule" with "Requiem for Sophiatown" and "The Bottom of the Bottle", but leaves a blank space between this section, the *Drum* stories, and Themba's later short fiction.

narrating 'I' thus serves the function of enhancing the authenticity of the recounted story.[280] Differently from the short stories by La Guma, whose narrator never intervenes in the text to expose apartheid's consequences directly, the narrator Can Themba profusely comments on "the law in all its horrificiency" (Themba [1972] 1982: 2):[281]

> It is a crepuscular, shadow-life in which we wander as spectres seeking meaning for ourselves. And even the local, little legalities we invent are frowned upon. The whole atmosphere is charged with the whiteman's general disapproval, and where he does not have a law for it, he certainly has a grimace that cows you. (8)

At the same time, the narrator's interventions in "Crepuscule" are often devoted to creating a certain image of himself, for instance when he quotes the renowned opening paragraph of *The Tale of Two Cities* (1859) by Dickens to describe (and romanticise) the "fabulous decade" in Sophiatown, portrayed as "the best of times" and "the worst of times" (Themba [1972] 1982: 5). As Hooper states, the writer Can Themba uses this narratorial perspective both to "bear social witness" and to "investigate and define himself" through the figure of Can Themba, the township intellectual (2017: 11). Readers, however, should be wary to take the text's claim to authenticity at face value.[282]

Even though political involvement shaped Alex La Guma's life to a greater extent than Can Themba's (because of his lifelong loyalty to the ANC he experienced house arrest, banning, imprisonment without trial, and an assassination attempt), the District Six author tends to write his short stories and articles with a less pronounced autobiographical I persona and at the same time with less reference to coeval events than Themba,[283] even if both his imaginative texts and journalistic articles do come to terms with South Africa's socio-political situation. *De facto*, Alex La Guma never uses the word 'apartheid' in his short stories. As Nadine Gordimer observes, "La Guma's […] short stories set in prison, backyards, and cheap cafés, present men and women who don't talk about apartheid; they bear its weals, so that its flesh-and-blood meaning becomes a shocking, sensuous impact" (1976: 141).

La Guma's narrative choices, therefore, rarely acquire didactic traits, and, as opposed to Themba, he seldom resorts to an explicitly autobiographical narrative persona to comment on politics, even though many of his short stories (and articles) do expose the harshness of apartheid, particularly from a coloured perspective – Gaylard speaks of a "subtle" and "muted kind of protest" (2008: 168).

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[280] See Zander (1999: 348-349) for a discussion of the first-person perspective in several Black South African short stories.
[281] The neologism "horrificiency" testifies to Themba's subversive and creative use of English in his later short stories (Trump 1990: 70-71), which deviate from the polished standard English of his earlier *Drum* stories.
[282] Commenting on African realist texts, Stephanie Newell rightfully notes that "[c]aution should be exercised, however, to ensure that texts are not viewed as mirrors held up to society, reflecting the 'real' world in an unmediated form" (Newell 2002: 9)
[283] As Gaylard (2008: 164) rightly suggests, "[o]ne might therefore expect to find these commitments reflected" in Alex La Guma's literary work.

"Coffee for the Road" (1963) and "The Lemon Orchard" (1967)[284] are the two short stories that protest against the brutality of apartheid more explicitly – "Coffee for the Road" was notably chosen by Njabulo Ndebele to exemplify his argument on the limits of Black South African protest writing (Ndebele 1986: 145-149), and it is the only story by La Guma that would be reprinted in *Staffrider* in 1986,[285] two years after Ndebele's speech and one year after La Guma's death in Cuba. "Coffee for the Road" originally appeared in the *Negro Digest*, a Chicago-based magazine, in 1963. It recounts how an anonymous Indian woman throws her flask at a white woman after she is refused coffee because of her skin colour. The overt tone of protest in this short story, the barrenness of the unspecified landscape (probably the Karoo), and the anonymity and exemplarity of the characters, partly justify Ndebele's claims, but "Coffee for the Road" is far from typically La Gumaesque (see Gaylard 2008: 175). In fact, the publishing venue may have played a role in the style and theme of La Guma's narrative, since the *Negro Digest* targeted an international readership, mostly African-American, who wanted to be informed on South Africa's oppressive regime.[286]

As we have seen, one of the main strengths of Alex La Guma's short stories is in fact his ability to portray the daily lives of South Africa's lower classes: workers, shebeen queens, pub regulars, boxers, common criminals, and prisoners amidst apartheid's absurd laws. As he himself wrote in an article on Johannesburg for *New Age*, "[t]here is a richness greater than gold in the penny-whistle man walking easily along Pritchard Street" and "[t]here is beauty, too, in the welcome smile of the shebeen queen" (La Guma [1957] 1993b: 50). In "The Gladiators" (1967), for instance, the first-person narrator comments on a boxing match between "his" coloured "boy" and a Black man, the Panther. Even though the underlying theme of the story is race, the text focuses on an ordinary boxing match, which is foregrounded by La Guma's formal choices. Indeed, the narrative voice makes the rhythm of the match perceivable through words, which seamlessly follow one another with almost no punctuation:

[284] In "The Lemon Orchard", symbols of the Black men's oppression such as the *sjambok*, which often recurred in the short fiction by the Dhlomo brothers, return to the fore (La Guma 1967: 126). See Field (2010: 140) for a comparison of "Coffee for the Road" and "The Lemon Orchard".

[285] Apart from the protest story published in *Staffrider*, there is one other element that links Alex La Guma's writerly activism with the Black Consciousness's magazine: his reappropriation of traditional storytelling techniques to express a political agenda. Among the various reports that La Guma wrote during the Treason Trial, mostly for *Fighting Talk*, a regular contribution was the so-called "Treason Trial profile", a brief presentation of one of the 156 accused. In March 1957, La Guma wrote about Wilton Zimasile Mkwayi, titling his piece "A Son of the People". The oral matrix of the piece and its resemblance to traditional storytelling are evident. In particular, the word concluding Mkwayi's profile, "Ncincilili", 'I disappear', is a common concluding formula of Xhosa oral poetry and storytelling (Opland 1983: 242). La Guma's profile was inserted in the same page where Alfred Hutchinson's story (a fictionalised eye-witness account) on the 1957 bus boycott was published. The intersection between fiction, journalism, politics, and aesthetics thus becomes extremely fluid in the late Fifties.

[286] Indeed, in the same *Negro Digest* issue readers could also find an eye-witness account of the "Kafkaesque nightmare" of pass regulations in South Africa (Brickman 1963: 66). La Guma himself stated that he hoped that "the international audience" could "learn something" from his works (1996a: 22).

> That surprise Kenny and you can see it on his face and the Panther hit him again, and man, this time you can hear it down by the railway station, and then the blerry Panther dance away, like this, bobbing and dancing and waiting for Kenny to come after him and Kenny the blerry fool, go after him and the Panther hit him one two three and there's big red patches on all sides of him, under his ribs, and he look plenty shaken. (La Guma 1967: 112)

From a thematic point of view, therefore, La Guma's short stories actually portray the ordinariness of his (mainly coloured) South African characters. At the same time, his prose fiction is quite heterogeneous. La Guma's extensive journalistic output, moreover, enriches the discussion of his short fiction. From a formal point of view, Alex La Guma's detailed realistic descriptions,[287] his use of vivid imagery and of irony, the balanced voice of his narrators, – both internal and external – the dialogues in a non-standard variety of English, and the code-switching between English and Afrikaans are evidence of his mastering of the short-story form, through which he expresses his socio-political commitment without resorting to didacticism.[288] Unlike Themba in his more mature and autobiographical short stories, therefore, La Guma "documents and 'shows'" without letting "his voice be heard" (Mphahlele 1972: 194).

The heterogeneity of the short fiction by Alex La Guma can be found also in the short stories (and articles) by Can Themba, which can be divided quite neatly along the *Drum* divide. As we have seen, his *Drum* stories are characterised by a romantic plot, formal diction, and an omniscient third-person narrator. By contrast, the texts published later often present a first-person narrator, at times resembling the author himself; apart from "The Suit" they deal with socio-political themes and display generic hybridity; finally, many dialogues are written in slang or with words in *tsotsitaal*.[289] In the case of Themba's short fiction, therefore, the relationship between ethics and aesthetics appears quite straightforward: the stories that deal with themes more directly related to apartheid often adopt a homodiegetic narrator and present journalistic or autobiographical traits from a formal point of view. His articles, mainly written for *Drum*, on the other hand, often blur the line between eye-witness account and journalistic reportage, with narrative strategies associated with fiction – anticipating the New Journalism school in the United States in the Seventies.[290]

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[287] See Coetzee's discussion on the realistic style used by La Guma in *A Walk in the Night*. Coetzee's interpretation sparked an interesting debate around what he perceives to be "excesses" of literariness on the part of La Guma (Coetzee [1974] 1992: 358). The use of realism in La Guma's oeuvre, therefore, has either be interpreted as 'too literary', in the wake of Roland Barthes' theorisations on realism, or 'too documentary', after Ndebele's critique of protest literature. See also Van der Vlies (2007: 126-127).

[288] Adrian Roscoe affirms that La Guma's best accomplishments can be identified in his short stories, and that even his novels could be defined "magnified" short stories because of their episodic quality (1977: 233, 247). Lewis Nkosi identifies La Guma's handling of dialogue as his main strength ([1965] 2005: 263).

[289] Noteworthy in this regard is the short story "The Fugitives", published in *The New African* in 1964 and re-issued in *Requiem for Sophiatown* (2006: 141-148). One of the last short narratives written by Themba, it consists entirely of an eight-page long dialogue in a mixture of English and slang between some township dwellers.

[290] See also Gaylard (2008: 108).

4.5 'Too Political': Nadine Gordimer and *The New Yorker*

The accomplishments of both La Guma and Themba have been placed under scrutiny for their supposed lack of literariness – because of their "spectacular" quality, in Themba's case, or because of their "dramatic politicization" as far as La Guma is concerned (Ndebele 1986: 145). Another harsh critique of Black literature in the decade of the Fifties comes from Lewis Nkosi, who provocatively declares that

> [w]hat we do get from South Africa, therefore – and what we get most frequently – is the journalistic fact parading outrageously as imaginative literature. We find here a type of fiction which exploits the ready-made plots of racial violence, social apartheid, interracial love affairs which are doomed from the beginning, without any attempt to transcend or transmute these given 'social facts' into artistically persuasive works of fiction. (Nkosi [1965] 2005: 246)

Somehow unexpectedly, similar objections on literariness were raised to the short fiction of Nadine Gordimer, undoubtedly South Africa's most famous short-story writer, who made her literary debut in the period under discussion in the present chapter, and more precisely in 1949 with the short-story collection *Face to Face*.[291] As is the case with many short-story writers, she started a regular contribution of short stories for a magazine, the prestigious *New Yorker*, in 1951 until 2007. It is precisely the *New Yorker*, in the person of its fiction editor Roger Angell, who rejected three of Gordimer's stories in the Fifties and early Sixties on the grounds of their lack of literariness (McDonald 2009: 117). In particular, the narrative "Not for Publication", which describes a young Black boy's education under the tutelage of white liberal benefactors, was rejected by Angell because of an alleged flaw in characterisation: Gordimer's characters in "Not for Publication" are not portrayed as individuals, but rather as "representatives of a group or social class", "figures in a sociological report", as Angell remarks in a letter to Gordimer dating from 1964 (quoted in Roberts 2005: 272).[292] The *New Yorker* thus deemed Gordimer's early stories 'too political', similarly to the critiques by Ndebele and Nkosi towards Black fiction of the same period.[293]

In fact, Gordimer's early stories, and especially the bulk of short fiction she published in the *New Yorker* in the decade of the Fifties, can be rarely considered socio-political in theme. Of the fourteen stories that appeared in the *New Yorker* between 1951 and 1959, only six are directly linked

[291] "Is There Nowhere Else Where We Can Meet?" and "The Train from Rhodesia" were actually published in 1947 in *Common Sense* and *Trek*, respectively. Both were republished in *The Soft Voice of the Serpent* (1952).
[292] In a review on the *New York Times*, Gordimer's politics of representation in "Not for Publication" is also described as "documentary-like" (O'Connor 1985: 14).
[293] See also Twidle (2018: 100): "Angell expresses a common trope in liberal humanist critiques of literature written from politically pressured cultural systems like that of 1960s South Africa: the supposed richness and idiosyncrasy of individual character has been sublimated or traduced by the demands of the political moment".

to race relations and South Africa's socio-political context.[294] Hence, while Black South African short fiction in English boomed in local magazines, often imbibing the political struggle carried out by South African periodicals, in the same period Nadine Gordimer's short stories experienced great success abroad, in a prestigious American literary magazine abiding by metropolitan publishing conventions. As Martin Trump remarks, it is quite transparent that Gordimer does address "a highly literate, sophisticated, and therefore privileged readership", "an overseas elite", in her fiction (Trump 1986: 342).[295] Indeed, Gordimer's Fifties *New Yorker* stories mostly cast back to her childhood in the East Rand, or they portray in a straightforward realistic style wealthy white people in South Africa, such as the narrative "Out of Season" (1954) (see also Trump 1986: 343-344). As far as the first group of stories is concerned, many of them, recounted by a first-person narrator, resemble autobiographical recollections, but their fictional status is not questionable.[296] In addition, Gordimer herself admitted that the central episode of her early autobiographical essay for the *New Yorker* "A South African Childhood. Allusions in a Landscape" (1954) is actually a self-construction and never happened (Twidle 2018: 104).

Thus, the thin distinction between short stories, fiction, and autobiography appears blurred in Gordimer's early oeuvre, similarly to the case of Peter Abrahams, Can Themba, Es'kia Mphahlele, and the *Drum* generation more in general, but without their documentary imperative. Towards the Sixties, however, Gordimer's stories increasingly resort to a third-person narrator and to themes directly linked to apartheid;[297] at the same time, her contributions to the American magazine become markedly less frequent (see also Collett 2011: 345). Indeed, despite the *New Yorker*'s norms concerning the category of the literary, Gordimer's short stories, spanning sixty years, do "articulate political content in specifically literary ways" that have evolved over time (Riach 2016: 1078). As is the case with Peter Abrahams and Alex La Guma, the category of realism, or social realism, has often been used to describe Nadine Gordimer as a committed writer (Louvel 2019: 39; McCann and Wallart 2019: 6). In particular, her early "masters and servants" short stories (Clingman 2019: 14) – fictions such as "Ah, Woe Is Me" (1952) and "Six Feet of the Country" (1953) – explore the racialised (and gendered) domestic settings of South Africa with which Gordimer, growing up in a goldmining town

[294] These stories are "Six Feet of the Country" (1953), "The Smell of Death and Flowers" (1954), "Which New Era Would That Be?" (1955), "Little Willy" (1957), "A Christmas in Johannesburg" (1958), and "The Bridegroom" (1959). See also Dubbeld (1989: 174). The short stories published by Gordimer in the *New Yorker* can be accessed via the newspaper's digitised archive (https://www.newyorker.com/contributors/nadine-gordimer).

[295] According to Driver (2012: 391), Gordimer's "earliest aspirations" were indeed to "set herself on a modernist world stage" rather than to define herself as a "specifically South African writer". See also Anne Collett's discussion of the relationship between Gordimer and the *New Yorker* (Collett 2011: 341-352).

[296] The *New Yorker*, perhaps somewhat mistakenly, lists as autobiographical "A Watcher of the Dead", "Clowns in Clover" (1953), "The Pretender" (1956), "Our Bovary" (1957). The names of the narrator's relatives, for instance, change between "A Watcher of the Dead" and "Clowns in Clover".

[297] Trump defines this group of stories as the "most important" in Gordimer's oeuvre (Trump 1986: 344).

as a member of a white minority, was familiar (see Gordimer [1975] 1987: 11). Other early narratives, such as "The Smell of Death and Flowers" (1954) and "Which New Era Would That Be?" (1955), describe the alienation of white female figures in Johannesburg who try to cross the colour bar or get involved with politics, as is the case of Joyce McCoy's adherence to the Defiance Campaign in "The Smell of Death and Flowers". The location of "Which New Era Would That Be?", instead, echoes the typical setting of several short stories by Themba and La Guma: a back room, transformed in a shebeen, embodying the thriving inter-racial world of Johannesburg in the Fifties that also Gordimer experienced (see Clingman 1984: 164).[298] The white woman of the narrative, however, is described in an unflattering light by Jack, the coloured owner of the back room, whose thoughts are registered by an external narrator:

> […] he knew the type well, had seen it over and over again at meetings of the Congress of Democrats, and other organizations where progressive whites met progressive blacks. These were the white women who, Jack knew, persisted in regarding themselves as your equal. […]. Yes, breathless with stout sensitivity, they insisted on walking the whole teeter-totter of the colour line. (Gordimer 1955: 25)

This excerpt is emblematic of Gordimer's attempt to represent South Africa's "fractured society" (Clingman 1984).

Yet, Gordimer's "split position" (Clingman 1984: 172) – the fact that she was legally cut off from the Black world she strives to represent in her fiction – produced interesting results in her oeuvre at the level of form, especially in her short stories. Nadine Gordimer's theorisation of the short-story form is to be found in an essay she wrote for the *Kenyon Review* (1968)[299] famously comparing short-story writing to a "flash of fireflies" (1968: 459), and in the preface to her *Selected Stories* (1975). In the former, the writer distances herself from the "dreariness of conventional 'social realism'" (1968: 461) while at the same time affirming that the short-story genre is better equipped than the novel to capture "ultimate reality" (459). This she defines more precisely in her later preface as "the consciousness" of a writer's era (Gordimer [1975] 1987: 15):[300]

> The changes in social attitudes unconsciously reflected in the stories represents both that of the people in my society – that is to say, history – and my apprehension of it; in the writing, I am

[298] In the Fifties, Gordimer was closely associated with the *Drum* circle and she later collaborated with Nat Nakasa as editorial adviser for *The Classic*. In 1967, she edited, in collaboration with Lionel Abrahams, the anthology *South African Writing Today*. The volume comprises contributions across genres (short stories, testimonies, drama, and poetry) and across the racial divide. The prose fiction section includes, among others, "Some Monday for Sure" by Gordimer herself, "The Suit" by Can Themba, and an excerpt from Alex La Guma's novella *A Walk in the Night*. The anthology was immediately banned (McDonald 2009: 48).

[299] Es'kia Mphahlele and Jack Cope have also written on the South African short story for the magazine, in 1969 and 1970, respectively.

[300] See also Haggan (1994: 61-64) for a discussion of Gordimer's theory of the short story.

> acting upon my society, and in the manner of my apprehension, all the time history is acting upon me. (13)[301]

Even if Nadine Gordimer's early short stories are mostly written in a conventional realist fashion with a linear temporality, thus differing from the more sophisticated "late style" of her subsequent short fiction (Riach 2016: 1079), still some of her short prose from the Fifties and Sixties does provide a sort of "genetic blueprint", as Stephen Clingman has it (2019: 14), for much of her short-story writing. This "genetic blueprint" can be identified in her conscious albeit discrete puncturing of the illusion of reality, or the "illusion of completeness", starting from the early short stories of the Fifties (Haggan 1994: 64).[302] In "Six Feet of the Country" (1953), for instance, the dominant narrative voice of the anonymous white male protagonist is subtly undermined, through ellipsis and irony, by the oppressed voices of both his wife Lerice and their Black servant Petrus (see Haggan 1994: 64-67; Clingman 2019: 16). As Trump remarks (1986: 342), the narrators in Gordimer's stories are often white and wealthy characters, or a polished third-person narrative voice; yet early narratives such as "Is There Nowhere Else Where We Can Meet?", "The Train From Rhodesia", "Six Feet of the Country", and "The Smell of Death and Flowers" suggest an interesting identification between white women and Black people (Trump 1986: 347).

The puncturing of the illusion of reality is also to be found in "Not For Publication", rejected by the *New Yorker* because too directly political. The story begins with the following lines: "It is not generally known – and it is never mentioned in the official biographies – that the Prime Minister spent the first eleven years of his life […] leading his uncle about the streets" (Gordimer [1975] 1987: 247). The narrative voice then recounts the boy's formal education until, in the last page of the story, he goes missing and readers are left with no further access to the character's biography (Twidle 2018: 98). The textuality of the narrative, already suggested by the title, is thus revealed to readers. The main character disappears, in the same way as the body of Petrus' brother is never recovered in "Six Feet of the Country". These absences, these gaps in the narrative flow, complicate the category of realism often used to describe Gordimer's fictional aesthetics, and particularly her early short stories (see McCann and Wallart 2019: 6).

It is quite obvious that Gordimer's early prose fiction and the short stories by Themba and La Guma are strikingly different because of the conditions of apartheid itself, starting from the material circumstances in which Black writers had to work. Moreover, the later short stories by Themba and La Guma were not available in South Africa until the Eighties and Nineties. As Gordimer remarked

[301] See also Gordimer's influential essay "The Essential Gesture" on the writer's dual commitments: to society and to writing ([1984] 1988: 285-300).
[302] See also the 2019 issue of *Commonwealth Essays and Studies* (Vol. 41, No. 2) titled "Nadine Gordimer: De-Linking, Interrupting, Severing", which focuses on interruptions and gaps in Gordimer's narrative flow.

more than once, the South African writers' attempt to grasp the "totality of human experience" in their country was denied by a "compartmentalized" society (Gordimer 1976: 148). To cite one example, the underground world of the *tsotsi* and the shebeens, typical of the short fiction of her two countrymen, is hardly a setting in the short fiction by Gordimer. Yet, some common formal aspects and themes can be recognised between white and Black short fiction in the decade of the Fifties. First of all, the focus on personal relationships, in particular family and marital ties, within the context of apartheid. Gordimer's "Something for the Time Being" (1960), La Guma's "Slipper Satin" (1960), and Themba's "The Suit" (1963) are emblematic in this regard.[303] Both Gordimer's early short fiction published in the *New Yorker* and Themba's mature stories play with the autobiographical genre. Most importantly, the debate centred around the staple thematic concerns of literariness, literary realism, documentary form, and political discourse, ethics and aesthetics, informs equally the short stories by Themba, La Guma, and (if to a lesser extent) Gordimer.

At the same time, South African and a few international magazines, responsible for the circulation of South African short stories within and outside the national borders, played a fundamental role in shaping this debate in the Fifties and Sixties. As far as Black South African fiction is concerned, however, this debate has often led to an understatement of literature's formal qualities in favour of an evaluation of its documentary status.[304] "The contingency of *literariness* itself" is constantly contested in these texts, but their political quality "triumphs" "almost inevitably", as Andrew van der Vlies notes of the work of Alex La Guma (2007: 127; emphasis in the original). A similar fate for Black fiction is lamented by David Attwell in his seminal monography *Rewriting Modernity*: "[h]istorical pressures have produced an image of South Africa's black writing as a literature *in extremis*. The common view is that a uniquely troubled history has brought out a literature whose necessarily *restricted* function has been to support political liberation" (2005: 13; emphasis in the original). These considerations inform especially the short-story genre, often regarded as a 'minor' genre – not only shorter, but of less importance than the novel (Pravinchandra 2018: 197-198) – and therefore less literary. Moreover, the short stories' circulation through local, not always literary, and thus 'minor' newspapers, definitely contributes to lessen a certain metropolitan and Western conception of the literary for South African (mainly Black) short fiction written in the first two decades of apartheid.

[303] Trump praises Gordimer's "Something for the Time Being" for its exploration of intimate relationships (1986: 356). Gordimer, in turn, expresses the same approval of Themba's "The Suit" because it "look[s] deep into relationships" (Mahala 2017b: 277).

[304] In her essay "Living in the Interregnum", Gordimer remarks that in the Fifties foreign reviewers started to add "their 'courageous' as a criterion for literary value for South African writers" ([1982] 1988: 273).

An analysis of the short fiction by Themba and La Guma may contribute to a re-evaluation of the scope and heterogeneity of their literary output. It also suggests that the political and literary traits of the selected texts are interdependent. The generic hybridity of Themba's more mature stories, the ironic twists closing several of La Guma's narratives, the latter's realistic – and contested – attention to detail, the anecdotal quality of the two writers' reportages, are some of the distinctive formal features of the considered texts, which are emblematic of a kind of experimental writing – in Attwell's sense (2005: 169) – that is never detached from the socio-political context from which it originates. As Twidle rightly suggests, "this productive clustering of fiction, life-writing, microhistory and journalism suggests how accounting for the literary" in South Africa asks for "a method of cross-reading" that avoids binary interpretative categories and "tired oppositions" (Twidle 2012: 24-25).

5. "*Eenheid* and *Apartheid*": Unity and Difference in Mtutuzeli Matshoba's and Ahmed Essop's Short-Story Cycles

> In a race-obsessed country like South Africa the part the black writer has to play is rather demanding – but nevertheless worth it. It seems to me that he is expected to be a jack of all trades – and a master of all! He has to be tradesman, docker, psychologist, nurse, miner, *matshigilane*, *tshotsa*, teacher, athlete, toddler, mother, musician, father, visionary, *imbongi* and – above all – oral historian. (Mutloatse 1980: 1)

The above quoted excerpt is drawn from the introduction to Muthobi Mutloatse's first anthology of Black writing published by Ravan Press as part of the Staffrider-Series initiative, *Forced Landing. Africa South: Contemporary Writings* (1980). In just five lines, Mutloatse encapsulates key issues relevant to the discussion in the present chapter. First and foremost, the adjective 'Black'. At the end of the Sixties, Black students from South Africa's ethnically segregated universities, led by Steve Biko (1946-1977), decided to found a Blacks-only association to react against systemic racism in both the universities and government of South Africa. The South African Students' Organisation (SASO) held its inaugural conference in 1969, laying the foundations for the Black Consciousness Movement (Lodge 1983: 323). One of the aims of Black Consciousness was the elevation of 'Blackness' as a positive identity concept that included also the Indian and coloured population of South Africa (Karis and Gerhart 1997: 98). Mutloatse's own anthology of Black writing comprises Black, coloured, and Indian authors – among the former and the latter, Mtutuzeli Matshoba and Ahmed Essop.

The inclusive connotation of the term 'Black' in the Seventies and early Eighties under the Black-Consciousness banner can explain certain homogeneous trends in style and content of Black fiction, inextricably linked to the political developments of South Africa in the period under consideration – the late 1970s and 1980s. The year 1976 represents a watershed in the country's history: on 16 June, the white police fired into a crowd of 15.000 schoolchildren who were demonstrating in front of Orlando West Junior Secondary School in Soweto, Johannesburg, against the introduction of Afrikaans – instead of English – as the language of teaching. Education as a theme, and schools as a setting, are often imaginatively figured in the literature that follows the events of the Soweto uprising – it is not a coincidence that Mutloatse mentions the category of the teacher in his introduction on the responsibilities of the Black writer. At the same time, the role of the teacher is intertwined with the figure deemed most important by Mutloatse: the oral historian who revisits and recounts the history of South Africa, the history of the people, in a manner reminiscent of traditional storytellers. Thus, the works of literature related to the Black Consciousness Movement are often didactic in tone, with the (in most cases) homodiegetic narrator acting like a 'bard' – storyteller, teacher, and historian at once – for a community of readers.

Starting from these premises, the ensuing discussion aims to underline the main similarities in the short fiction of Mtutuzeli Matshoba (b. 1950) and Ahmed Essop (1931-2019), representatives of Johannesburg's Black and Indian communities, respectively.[305] To this end, Matshoba's short-story collection *Call Me Not a Man* (1979) and his narrative "The Return of Nxele" (1992) will be considered alongside Ahmed Essop's two collections of short fiction, *The Hajji and Other Stories* (1978) and *Noorjehan and Other Stories* (1990).[306] Matshoba and Essop are apparently at the two opposites of the spectrum of South African Black literature of the late Seventies and early Eighties – Matshoba is considered part of the so-called "ghetto writing" school, while Essop belongs to the "more privileged" style of writing together with Nadine Gordimer (Trump 1986: 343). After an initial positive reception, Matshoba's short fiction has been generally considered as excessively didactic, political, and formally not refined enough – particularly after Ndebele's critique, voiced in his essay "Turkish Tales and Some Thoughts on South African Fiction", in 1984 (see Sole 2001: 105-107). Many reviewers also noticed Matshoba's distance from "conventional" (Western) short-story writing and literary techniques (Sole 1993: 201).[307] Essop's literary output, by contrast, has usually been considered an exception among 1980s English-language Black literature in South Africa, since critical studies have often interpreted his short stories as "non-political" (see Rastogi 2008a: 48). One reviewer, Norman Hodge, evaluated Essop's *The Hajji* positively because it follows Poe's definition of the genre of the short story and because it avoids the "pitfalls" of "unsophisticated polemics" (Hodge 1978: 81).[308] My discussion seeks to challenge and complicate these polarised readings of the two authors without erasing the difference between their short stories. Ultimately, this chapter also aims to outline the main features of the short fiction by Nadine Gordimer in the Eighties with particular focus on her collection *A Soldier's Embrace* (1980), whose narratives share some significant features with the stories by the two writers.

Matshoba's and Essop's literary debuts are shaped similarly by the traumatic events of 16 June 1976 and by the political climate following the Soweto uprising. Both their oeuvres apparently fall into the category of 'Black literature'[309] – the Indian narrator in Essop's story "Gerty's Brother" opens

[305] In particular, Essop represents the Muslim Indian community of South Africa, who sometimes clashes with Indians of Hindu religion, as the story "Hajji Musa and the Hindu Fire-Walker" in *The Hajji* shows.
[306] The stories in *The Hajji* have been republished in 1988 in London in a new edition, *The Hajji Musa and the Hindu Fire-Walker*, comprehensive of Essop's novella "The Visitation".
[307] See Williams (1991: 10-13) for an overview of the coeval reception of Matshoba's short stories.
[308] *The Hajji and Other Stories* won the Olive Schreiner Prize from the English Academy of Southern Africa. The evaluation of Essop's short stories as 'more literary' can be inferred also from the fact that Lionel Abrahams wrote the forewords to *The Hajji and Other Stories* (1978) and to *Hajji Musa and the Hindu Fire-Walker* (1988). Jenny Williams underlines how Matshoba's *Call Me Not a Man* does not satisfy Edgar Allan Poe's unity of impression (Williams 1991: 16).
[309] See, for instance, Martin Trump's discussion of post-Soweto Black short fiction, which includes both Matshoba and Essop (Trump 1988a).

the narrative with the distinction between "us blacks" and "whites" (Essop [1978] 2004: 98). Indeed, both Essop and Matshoba published some of their short stories in *Staffrider*, the unofficial mouthpiece of the Black Consciousness Movement. One aim of this chapter is also to analyse the coeval local publishing contexts, with particular focus on the representation of print media in the short stories by Matshoba and Essop, and on the magazine *Staffrider* and its promotion of the short-story genre. I will focus particularly on the first period of *Staffrider* (1978-1988) because it corresponds to the years in which Matshoba and Essop contributed regularly to the magazine.[310] Such an approach may shed light on the different interpretations of a short story when published in the context of a print magazine or within a short-story collection.[311]

Notwithstanding the several similarities and correspondences between Mtutuzeli Matshoba's and Ahmed Essop's writing, the assimilation of the Indian population into the Black community was not unproblematic, as exposed by Essop in his two post-apartheid short-story collections, *The King of Hearts and Other Stories* (1997) and *Narcissus and Other Stories* (2002). A brief discussion of the shift in style and content from Essop's early narratives to his more mature short-story collections can shed light on the unresolved tensions hidden behind the homogeneous umbrella-term 'Black'. At the same time, a comparative analysis between Matshoba and Essop also aims to outline some of the characteristics specific of South African Indian writing and to explore the differences between the two writers' short fiction.

5.1 At the Crossroads of Literature and Politics: Print Media and *Staffrider*

Before focusing on the selected corpus, I would like to discuss briefly the role of print media and their representation in literature in 1970s and 1980s South Africa. As we have seen repeatedly, South Africa's domestic press has played an instrumental role in the country's socio-political, cultural, and literary development. After a phase of repression in the Sixties, Black journalism returned to the fore in the Seventies, also due to the rise of Black Consciousness.[312] While the nationalist government controlled the main domestic media and often used them for propaganda – as evidence of the existence of a 'free' press in 'democratic' South Africa – some local English-language newspapers such as *The World*, *The Star*, *The Rand Daily Mail*, and *Sunday Times* tried to oppose the official and often

[310] Moreover, *Staffrider*'s editorial policy became more conventional after the first years, and increasingly less space was given to the short story. Digitised issues of *Staffrider* can be accessed at https://www.sahistory.org.za/more-archive-sources/120977 or http://disa.ukzn.ac.za/st.
[311] See Maughan-Brown (1989).
[312] The Union of Black Journalists (UBJ), formed in 1971 and closely associated with SASO, started publishing a regular *Bulletin*. Its first president, Harry Mashabela, was an ex-*Drum* writer (Sanders 2000: 174).

misleading narrative of South Africa built by the government (Sanders 2000: 6; 174-175).[313] Black journalists' 'authentic' coverage of the Soweto uprising was given special space in international media, which were unable to find accounts of the protest in the local white press (177). Censorship against many African English-language newspapers, however, became harsher after Soweto and the assassination of Steve Biko in 1977.[314]

The above-delineated "struggle for representation" in 1970s and 1980s South Africa, to quote James Sanders (2000), is often reflected in creative writing, especially but not exclusively by Black writers. Not only do literary works try to represent the country's socio-political realities 'authentically', but many of them also depict the importance of print media in South African society, both thematically and stylistically, by incorporating fictional *and* factual newspaper reports, headings, and quotations into the literary text (see Sole 1988: 73-74). This is especially true for works of Black literature depicting life in the townships, where both oral and printed media served to forge a sense of community, to convey the main news, and to politicize the people: the printed word became another "constituent" of the struggle in Soweto (74). Speaking of the episode "The Children of Soweto" from his eponymous novel, Mbulelo Mzamane comments on his own fictional devices regarding the role of media:

> Although I don't use passages straight out of newspapers, (except for the occasional statement by a real character), my simulated reports come from real newspapers. I try to convey, in a way that the several accounts by the White reporters do not, what it felt *like* to be one of those involved, and to convey how life in the townships was transformed in its response to the call of students. (Mzamane 1984: 159; emphasis in original)

The short-story genre, as we have already seen, is particularly open to contamination by the discourses of journalism. The increased politicization of South African society, in particular at the universities and in the townships, magnified the presence of print media in Black South African short stories in the period under consideration, as a close reading of the work by Matshoba and Essop shows. Yet, this trend does not pertain to Black short fiction exclusively, but is an interesting common feature of South African short fiction across the colour-line – as we shall see, Gordimer used this strategy in her collection *A Soldier's Embrace* (1980). The all-pervasive role played by newspapers in 1980s South Africa is also to be found in the Afrikaans short fiction of the same period, in particular among the so-called 'border literature'.[315] Collections of short stories such as Etienne van Heerden's

[313] South Africa's 'Propaganda War' began in 1972 and culminated in the so-called Information Scandal, when the Department of Information bribed part of the English press, most notably the daily *The Citizen*, to counter the negative image of South Africa as represented in other media (Paterson and Malila 2013 :3).
[314] The UBJ's *Bulletin* was banned in August 1976 and Harry Shabela was arrested in the same year (Sanders 2000: 175-177).
[315] By 'border literature' are meant the works representing South Africa's involvement in the Angolan civil war. They often focus on the marginalised figure of the soldier (see de Vries 2005: 41-44).

My Kubaan (1983) present significant documentary traits to the point that they resemble news reports or "reports of resistance", to quote the title of an explicitly factional collection of short stories by Afrikaner writer Emma Huisman, *Berigte van weerstand* (1990) (de Vries 2005: 42-43).[316]

The common traits of Black and white South African short fiction in the late Seventies and early Eighties, the growing importance of print media, and the resulting generic hybridity of many texts are all elements that can be also found in the main literary magazine of the period under consideration, *Staffrider*, a non-racial, non-conventional, and structurally eclectic publishing outlet. Indeed, new literary magazines re-emerged in the Seventies after the 'silent decade' of the Sixties (see McDonald 2009: 129). Yet, while many of them remained short-lived experiments – among the most important, *Bolt* (1970-1975), *The New Classic* (1975-1978), and *Donga* (1976-1978)[317] – *Staffrider* became a phenomenon. It was founded in 1978 by Mike Kirkwood, who worked for the newly established Ravan Press, as the literary magazine of the publishing house. Like *Donga* before it, *Staffrider* was multiracial, inclusive, and non-elitist, benefiting from the collaboration with various groups of writers; it did not promote any definite literary standard, since the editorial choices were taken collectively, and the magazine's issues were distributed by hand in the townships, thus establishing a close association between writers and their readership. This was declared in the programmatic manifesto of the first issue:[318]

> The new writing has altered the scope and function of literature in South Africa in ways we have still to discover. The aim of this magazine is not to impose "standards" but to provide a regular meeting place for the new writers and their readers, a forum which will help to shape the future of our literature. A feature of much of the new writing is its "direct line" to the community in which the writer lives. This is a two-way line. […] Community drama, "say" poetry, an oral literature backed and often inspired by music: this is the heart of the new writing, and the signs are that prose forms are re-emerging in a new mould. (*Staffrider* Committee 1978: 1)

Hence, *Staffrider* is placed outside the institutional framework of culture and it has often been interpreted as a popular publishing venue (Kirkwood 1980: 26).[319]

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[316] Martin Trump further lists some stories by the Afrikaner writers P. J. Haasbroek ("Die Aardrykskundeles" [The Geography Lesson], "Die anatomieles" [The Anatomy Lesson]) and Welma Odendaal ("LM", "Vryheidsvegter" [The Freedom Fighter]) among the works of fiction originating from historical facts (mainly the wars surrounding South Africa) and written in a documentary style (Trump 1986: 360).

[317] Jack Cope's Cape-based literary magazine *Contrast* never ceased publishing, yet it targeted an elite readership, similarly to Lionel Abrahams's *Purple Renoster*. South Africa lacked a magazine that "serve[d] as a vehicle for all younger South African writers who saw themselves as one way or another in opposition to the State" in the mid-Seventies (Odendaal 1980: 69). Even though short-lived, Welma Odendaal and Rosa Keet's non-racial and multi-lingual *Donga* paved the way for magazines such as *Staffrider*. See Odendaal 1980; McDonald 2009: 129-132.

[318] Evidence of this grassroots nature is also the invitation to readers in the first issue of *Staffrider* to write book reviews for the magazine that should be "short and 'relevant' rather than learned and long" (*Staffrider* Committee 1978: 59).

[319] For a discussion of *Staffrider* as a magazine promoting popular literature, see Chapman 1999 and Manase 2005.

The communal quality of the magazine calls to mind almost automatically another hugely popular print endeavour of South Africa, namely *Drum*.[320] In his interview with Mike Kirkwood, Nick Visser highlights the continuity between the *Drum* generation and the writers orbiting *Staffrider* (Kirkwood 1980: 23). Not surprisingly, the *Drum* experience is commemorated and discussed more than once in various *Staffrider* issues.[321] Matshoba himself lists Alex La Guma, Nat Nakasa,[322] and especially Can Themba, among his literary influences (Munnik and Davis 1994: 130). The latter's short stories "Forbidden Love" and "Martha" are thematically similar to Matshoba's "Son of the First Generation". Even though *Staffrider* was more racially inclusive than *Drum*, both magazines targeted a primarily urban, Black, male readership, and both juxtaposed texts with visual material (photographs, images, sketches).[323] More importantly for the present investigation, English-language short fiction by Black writers thrived in these local publishing venues, and generic hybridity represents a strong feature of the literature published in both magazines.

Yet, as Kirkwood himself emphasizes (1980: 24), *Drum* and *Staffrider* differed greatly: *Staffrider* established itself as an exclusively literary magazine from the start. A typical issue would include, for example, interviews with township dwellers or artists, workshops, book reviews, literary criticism, sketches from the Creative Youth Association of Diepkloof or other writers' groups, photographs, excerpts from plays, and, most notably, poems and short stories. According to the editors of the anthology commemorating ten years of *Staffrider*, Andries Oliphant and Ivan Vladislavić, the magazine "exerted pressures on the institutionalised notions of writing" and "on the rigid demarcations between genres and modes" (1988: n. p.). Indeed, different literary genres and discourses are placed one next to the other in the magazine in a "mosaic-like layout", where the only criteria of organisation of the published material is region and not genre (Vaughan 1984: 200).[324] This structural eclecticism thus characterises Black South African print magazines from *The Bantu World* to *Drum* to *Staffrider* (see Sandwith 2018: 21). Even though *Staffrider* emphasises the aesthetic and the literary – in contrast to *The Bantu World* and *Drum*, no commercial advertising appears in its

[320] In her edited volume on African popular fiction, *Readings in African Popular Fiction* (2002), Stephanie Newell has reprinted Driver's essay on *Drum* (1996) and Chapman's essay on *Staffrider* (1999) among the articles on South African popular literature.
[321] See, for instance, Mphahlele 1980; van Dyk 1992. As Andries Oliphant and Ivan Vladislavić note, *Staffrider* strove to restore the writings of earlier generations and to create a tradition of resistance literature in South Africa (1988: n. p.).
[322] Nat Nakasa's authority is repeatedly invoked in Matshoba's "A Pilgrimage to the Isle of Makana" (Matshoba 1979c: 122-126).
[323] Kirkwood claims that ninety per cent of *Staffrider*'s readership was Black (Kirkwood 1980: 27). For a discussion of gender in *Staffrider*, see Mofokeng 1989; Gqola 2001.
[324] The table of contents of the first issue of 1978, for instance, lists the published material under the headings "Rockville, Soweto", "Diepkloof, Soweto", "Cape Town", and "Durban". The magazine thus translates into an "alternative map" of South Africa that gives prominence to the townships (Helgesson 2018: 180).

pages (Helgesson 2018: 180) – it still provides a productive forum for the seamless integration of the documentary and the literary.

Together with poetry, revitalised by Black Consciousness, *Staffrider* published many short stories, both from established authors like Miriam Tlali and Njabulo Ndebele and from a younger and lesser-known generation of writers. That the production of short fiction was encouraged by the magazine is testified by a workshop in three instalments on short-story writing written by Mphahlele for *Staffrider* between 1978 and 1979. Mphahlele lists some of the main techniques of short-story writing; he comments on excerpts of short stories by Can Themba, Alex La Guma, Nadine Gordimer, and Ama Ato Aidoo, emphasises the importance of reading world literature (Hemingway, Chekov, etc.), and, tellingly, often draws attention to the role played by newspapers in the composition of works of literature, especially if the form is brief such as in the short story: "[n]ews items in the papers yield an abundant supply of incidents worth exploring in a story" (Mphahlele 1978: 58). Mphahlele's sentence is supported by a close reading of Matshoba's and Essop's short stories, which are shaped by *Staffrider*'s editorial line, by the underlying Black Consciousness philosophy, and by South Africa's political climate to different degrees.

5.2 Communal Place and Storytelling: The Short-Story Cycle

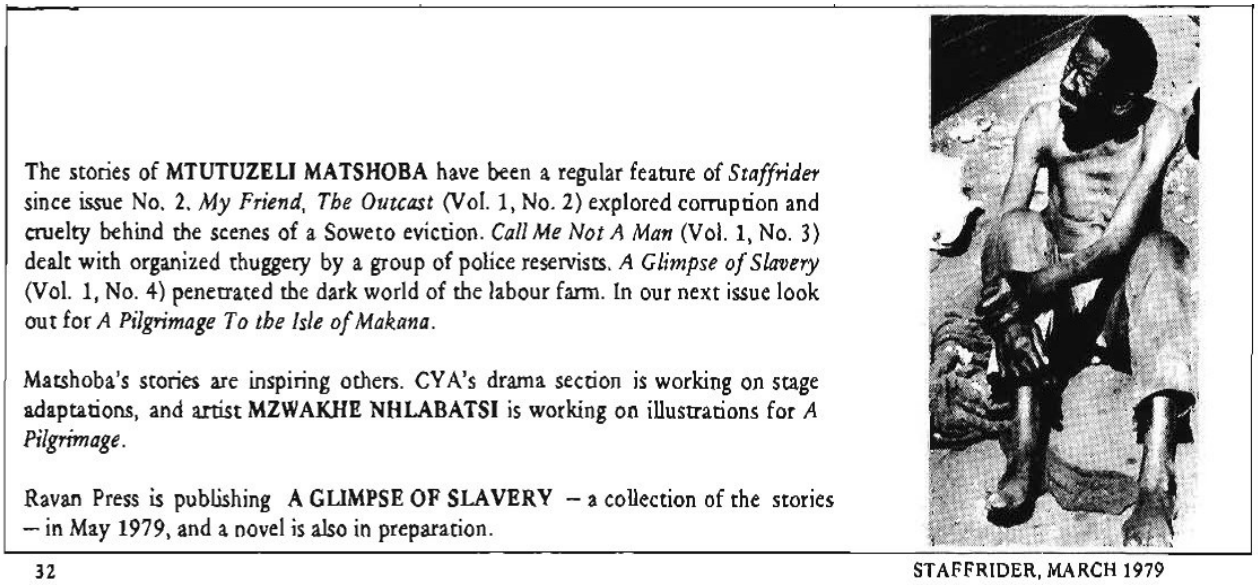
The first and most visible point of contact between the short fiction of Mtutuzeli Matshoba and Ahmed Essop is represented by genre: after publishing their short stories in *Staffrider* and various other magazines,[325] both authors collected some of their narratives in short-story cycles. Matshoba published *Call Me Not a Man* with Ravan Press in 1979; Essop issued *The Hajji and Other Stories* with the same press in 1978, and twelve years later they also published *Noorjehan and Other Stories* (1990).[326] I believe it is worth emphasising the almost revolutionary import of short-story cycles published in South Africa by Black writers at the end of the Seventies. Prior to Essop's and Matshoba's short-story collections, one must go back to 1946 to find an English-language short-story cycle published by a Black writer in South Africa – Mphahlele's *A Man Must Live*. The publication of Essop's and Matshoba's stories in book form is made possible by the new publishing scene in South Africa in the Seventies:[327] Renoster Books, Ravan Press, and David Philip were founded in

[325] Matshoba contributed to *The Voice* (Sole 2001: 102), but published most of his stories in *Staffrider*. Essop, on the other hand, published his short fiction also in *Contrast*, *Izwi*, *The English Academy Review, New Internationalist*, and *Outlook*. The difference in the publishing venues used by the two writers also speaks to the contrasting conceptions of 'literariness' attached to their short stories.

[326] Even though published in the Nineties, *Noorjehan* collects many narratives that appeared in *Staffrider* a decade earlier, and the stories reflect the political climate of the late Seventies and early Eighties.

[327] See also Ahmed Essop's interview: "I was very fortunate in that I appeared in a time when there were a number of literary journals such as *Contrast*, *Sesame*, *Staffrider*, and other journals which published my writings and there were publishing houses like Ravan Press who were fearless in publishing protest works" (Chetty 1999: 274).

1971, followed by Ad Donker in 1973. As the latter remarked, in one decade more was published than in "all the years since *The Story of an African Farm* appeared" in 1883 (Ad Donker 1983: 32). Thus, periodicals ceased to be the "focal point" of the "internal interventionist publishing tradition" (McDonald 2009: 132). Ravan Press, whose director from 1977 to 1987 was Mike Kirkwood, earned the reputation of radical publisher of experimental writing that went against the liberal tradition (McDonald 2009: 135). In particular, Kirkwood promoted Black writing, collaborated closely with Mothobi Mutloatse, and encouraged a collective editorial approach at Ravan Press: he tried to reduce his own position as "guardian of the literary", as McDonald observes (2009: 143). This change in the book industry influenced the production and circulation of literature, making it possible, for instance, to read short stories by Black writers also as short-story cycles and not only as individual texts.[328] Indeed, Sue Marais lists both Essop's *The Hajji and Other Stories* (1978) and Matshoba's *Call Me Not a Man* (1979) among notable South African short-story collections. Matshoba's narratives, in particular, appeared in six issues of *Staffrider* consecutively between 1978 and 1979. From the start, the magazine repeatedly advertised his work in view of the publication of *Call Me Not a Man*, thus emphasising the value of each story in the macro-economy of the collection even before its publication (see figure 5.1).


The stories of **MTUTUZELI MATSHOBA** have been a regular feature of *Staffrider* since issue No. 2. *My Friend, The Outcast* (Vol. 1, No. 2) explored corruption and cruelty behind the scenes of a Soweto eviction. *Call Me Not A Man* (Vol. 1, No. 3) dealt with organized thuggery by a group of police reservists. *A Glimpse of Slavery* (Vol. 1, No. 4) penetrated the dark world of the labour farm. In our next issue look out for *A Pilgrimage To the Isle of Makana*.

Matshoba's stories are inspiring others. CYA's drama section is working on stage adaptations, and artist **MZWAKHE NHLABATSI** is working on illustrations for *A Pilgrimage*.

Ravan Press is publishing **A GLIMPSE OF SLAVERY** – a collection of the stories – in May 1979, and a novel is also in preparation.

Figure 5.1 *Staffrider*'s advertisement for Mtutuzeli Matshoba's collection (March 1979).

[328] For a definition of the genre of the short-story cycle, see Ingram (1971) and Dunn and Morris (1995), who name the genre "composite novel". See Adendorff 1985 and Marais 2005 for an overview of the genre in South Africa.

It is worth mentioning some of the specificities of the short-story cycle genre that might be useful for a discussion of these collections. First of all, they are often written in a realistic style to depict local communities with verisimilitude:

> The modern short story cycle, it appears, has been employed to represent, in realistic mode, largely (though not exclusively) rural/regional communities in which social cohesiveness is at an early stage, and/or communities vulnerable to disruption by internal and/or external forces such as marginalization, industrialization, deracination and urbanization. […]. The same principle, it might be added, also motivates the form's ability to convey the vulnerability of ethnic enclaves, minorities and immigrant groups, and their struggle to establish or maintain a sense of identity and belonging. (Marais 2005: 19)[329]

The choice of genre thus further foregrounds the 'poetics of authenticity' that we have been encountering in the South African short-story genre since the late 1920s with the prose fiction of Rolfes Dhlomo. The importance of regionalism emphasised through the short-story cycle interestingly reflects *Staffrider*'s own foregrounding of local communities. Secondly, short-story cycles are governed by so-called "organizing principles", recurrent elements that link the individual stories of a collection into a coherent whole (Dunn and Morris 1995: 2). In addition to their own internal linking patterns,[330] Matshoba's *Call Me Not a Man* and Essop's *The Hajji* share two main unifying criteria: place and storytelling, two of the organizing principles identified by Dunn and Morris (see 1995: 30-46; 88-99). As far as the former is concerned, the two volumes are deeply rooted in the local, urban context they strive to represent: the Black township of Soweto and the Indian area of Fordsburg, Johannesburg. Both writers depict realistically their milieu through the recurrent recourse to mimetic speech and by referring to actual name streets and train stations.

The setting of the stories in *Call Me Not a Man*, apart from the three narratives "A Glimpse of Slavery", "Pilgrimage to the Isle of Makana" and "Three Days in the Land of the Dying Illusion", is the Black township of Soweto. Even in the three stories with an alternative setting (a farm in the Transvaal and two voyages across South Africa), the Johannesburg location is always the starting point and it is pervasive even in its absence (Williams 1991: 18). The motif of travel by bus or train, which we have first encountered in short stories by Peter Abrahams and Can Themba, represents a pivotal aspect of Matshoba's collection *Call Me Not a Man* and, generally speaking, of coeval Black fiction – Miriam Tlali's "'Fud-u-u-a!'" from *Soweto Stories* (1989) and "In the Train" from Essop's *The Hajji* are other notable examples.[331] The same trope recurs interestingly in Zoë Wicomb's

[329] Short-story cycles further negotiate the opposing forces of collectivity vis-a-vis specificity as a "complex dialectic" rather than simply opposing binaries, and are therefore particularly suited to the discussion of communal belonging and identity (Rastogi 2008a: 26-27).
[330] See Vaughan (1988: 310) for a list of the organising principles in *Call Me Not a Man*.
[331] For a discussion of the motif of journey in Essop's *The Hajji*, see Adendorff (1985: 74-99).

collection *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987), for example when Frieda listens to the conversation of two women on the bus in the title story. As Martin Trump rightly remarks,

> [a] noticeable feature of the black short fiction that is directly related to communalism and the prominence of the storytelling tradition is that a significantly large number of these stories are set in communal or public places, such as in trains, buses, yards, shebeens, and even prison cells where there are a number of onlookers, some of whom are drawn into the story's action. (Trump 1988a: 44)

The specificity of the locale's depiction in *Call Me Not a Man* thus represents a precise setting and a community living there: "[s]eeing an official van and whites coming out of it into the house brought the neighbourhood out to watch […] mothers left their chores unfinished to stand in their small yards with folded arms and a curious expression on their plump faces" (Matshoba 1979c: 11).

The communal, neighbourly aspect of place is even more discernible in Essop's *The Hajji*, set in the downtown enclave of Fordsburg.[332] Only some of the stories in the second half of the collection are set at the border of Soweto in the segregated location of Lenasia, the designated area for the Indian community after the latter's forcible removal from Fordsburg in the Fifties as a consequence of the Group Areas Act.[333] As the author himself declared in an interview, his stories are "linked geographically" by means of "their particular locality"; he further adds that, having lived in Fordsburg for some fifteen years, he knows "the names of the streets, the names of the buildings" and he uses them in his fiction (Chetty 1999: 272). For instance, the closing paragraphs of Essop's much anthologised title story "The Hajji" describe the protagonist's route from Johannesburg's outskirts to Fordsburg with striking detail: "He reached Lovers' Walk, where cars growled around him angrily; he passed Broadway cinema, rushed towards Orient House, turned the corner at Jamal's fruit shop" (Essop [1978] 2004: 13-15).

As far as the prose narrative by Essop is concerned, the act of reading the individual stories as a coherent whole makes it possible for the reader to grasp the interdependence of place and community. Indeed, several narratives feature recurrent characters – not only in the single short-story cycle, but also among *The Hajji and Other Stories* and *Noorjehan and Other Stories*, not to mention that some of them return in Essop's novella *The Visitation* (1980), his novel *The Emperor* (1984), and his two later short-story collections. Some narratives, especially in *The Hajji*, are in fact structured as episodes or chapters of the same story: "Father and Son", for instance, seamlessly continues the narration of the previous story, "Two Sisters". These recurrent characters, all South

[332] Even though Essop portrays the Muslim and Hindu Indian population often in conflict, the sense of community that transpires from the pages of *The Hajji and Other Stories* is indisputable. This fictional community starts to shatter in *Noorjehan* and, more definitively, in *King of Hearts* and *Narcissus* (see Rastogi 2008a: 138-160).

[333] The nationalist government at first proposed to Indians a free passage back to India instead of offering them the forced choice of re-housing, but very few accepted (https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/indian-community-lenasia). Lenasia is the setting of most of the stories in *Noorjehan*.

African Indians, are inextricably linked to the place they inhabit, which is often described by the narrative voice in *The Hajji* as "the yard" around which the action in the short-story cycle revolves (Essop [1978] 2004: 32).[334] Essop's celebration of local life actually functions as a sort of "requiem" for a lost condition, because the Indian community had already been removed from Fordsburg to Lenasia when he wrote *The Hajji* (Adendorff 1985: 96): the suburbs "lacked the noise – the raucous voice of vendors, the eternal voices of children in streets and backyards – the variety of people, the spicy odours of Oriental foods, the bonhomie of communal life in Fordsburg", the narrator of "In Two Worlds" says (Essop [1978] 2004: 109-110).[335] The result is a vivid portrait of a "microcosm" of the larger South African-Indian community, similarly to what V. S. Naipaul does in his short-story cycle *Miguel Street* (1959) to depict the Indian diasporic community of Trinidad (Abrahams 1988: viii):[336] the creation of a locale becomes the "determinant" of the specific identities of the narrators and the individuals living there (Davis 2001: 325).

In this regard, Black short fiction differs greatly from contemporary white short-story collections, such as those by Nadine Gordimer or Maureen Isaacson. If short-story cycles by Black writers generally emphasise communality and a sense of belonging through a focus on space, those by white writers establish a pattern of "unrealized or failed community" (Marais 2005: 28). In "The Termitary" from Gordimer's *A Soldier's Embrace*, for instance, the space of home is disrupted by the arrival of two different intruders: a team of exterminators and the termite colony underneath the narrator's house that they need to annihilate. The space of home is indeed described from the very first lines as "uninhabitable" (Gordimer [1980] 1982: 114).[337] The sense of "failed community" is further confirmed by the ending of the narrative, when the narrator recounts that all the family members left the house or died, like his mother: "[n]ow she is dead and although I suppose someone lives in her house, the secret passages, the inner chamber in which she was our queen and our prisoner are sealed up, empty" (120). In Maureen Isaacson's collection of short stories *Holding Back Midnight and Other Stories* (1992), the white protagonist similarly laments the lack of communal feeling within her family. In the story "Foreigners", for instance, the narrator envies a Black man for "not having grown up in a void" like hers (Isaacson 1992: 35), while in "I Could Have Loved Gold" the protagonist contrasts the emptiness of her rich parents' mansion with the liveliness of the shebeens in the tales of her Aunt Sal: "[w]hen I think about the mansion now, maid-polished and ordered, it

[334] The "yard" is always referred to with the definite article even though it is never described, thus implying that the reader participates in the community depicted in the stories.
[335] Such nostalgic and mythic recreations of a lost sense of community, erased by apartheid's forced removals, characterise also the short stories by Can Themba, most notably "Requiem for Sophiatown".
[336] Essop lists Naipaul among his literary influences (Chetty 1999: 274). One character in *Noorjehan and Other Stories* claims that Naipaul is one of his favourite writers (Essop 1990: 88).
[337] Rita Barnard compares Gordimer's rendering of home to the *unheimlich* (2007: 54). See also Johan Jacob's discussion of the idea of home in Gordimer's *Jump and Other Stories* (1991) (Jacobs 2001).

echoes with drab silence. Into the odourless shine, Aunt Sal sped; alive with the fumes and stains and conversation of nights in the shebeens" (55).

Together with place, Essop's short-story cycles are also shaped by the unifying principle of "emerging protagonists" or "collective protagonist", defined as "a group that functions as a central character" (Dunn and Morris 1995: 59): the returning characters of the gangster Gool, the Yogi, Aziz Kahn, Hafez Effendi, and the Hajji, and the individual protagonists of each story who embody the Indian South African community. Indeed, the narrators in *The Hajji* and *Noorjehan* give ample space to the depiction of other characters: they are either unnamed first-person narrators who belong to the Fordsburg community and who merely report the events and the stories of "the yard", or external non-intrusive third-person narrators.[338]

Matshoba's *Call Me Not a Man* is instead governed by the two principles of place and protagonist (Dunn and Morris 1995: 48-49): the voice of the first-person narrator, often the main character of the stories, is the fundamental connective element in Matshoba's collection. Indeed, even when the narrative voice is a frame narrator and only reports the accounts related by other characters through the device of the story-within-a-story, he nonetheless intervenes in the narrative with comments, digressions, and he addresses the reader directly: he is a "co-ordinator", a "principle of relationship and unity" (Vaughan 1988: 314). The narratorial instance thus represents the greatest difference between Matshoba's and Essop's short fiction. In the story "A Son of the First Generation", for example, the homodiegetic narrator almost disappears after the first introductory part to give space to the story of the character Monde, but his voice returns persistently in the morally didactic epilogue to the narrative, explicitly dedicated to "my 'Coloured' brothers and sisters" (Matshoba 1979c: 91). The narrative persona(s) are clearly shaped on the author himself – the narrator and protagonist of "Three Days in the Land of a Dying Illusion" is tellingly called Mtu, short for Mtutuzeli (Matshoba 1979c: 146).[339] The intentional identification of the narrator with the author is also suggested by the autobiographical note that opens the collection and that underlines the importance of locale: "I was born in 1950 in the early Soweto of Orlando (East and West), Shantytown, White City Jabavu, Pimville and Moroka" (Matshoba 1979c: vii).[340] Matshoba's communal narrator thus acquires

[338] See Voss 1979: 20: Essop usually adopts a "shadowy, almost anonymous persona as narrator". Essop's narrative personas may remind readers of the narrators in La Guma's short fiction, who similarly alternates between third-person and first-person narrators who often report other characters' stories.
[339] "To Kill a Man's Pride", published in *Forced Landing* (1980), could be thought of as belonging to *Call Me Not a Man*: it is the story of Mtutu, the first-person narrator, who describes the degradation of the hostels in Soweto.
[340] *Staffrider* also presented Matshoba according to his geographical origin: "Mtutuzeli Matshoba (Orlando West)" (see Matshoba 1979a: 11). Matshoba thus follows in the footsteps of writers such as Peter Abrahams and Can Themba, discussed in chapter three and four, respectively. The writer wrote a fictional autobiography, *Beyond the Minedumps*, which was never published (see Williams 1991: 60-89).

authenticity and emerges as the spokesperson of the Black population in South Africa: a "partnership" of author-narrator-reader thus governs the short-story cycle (Sole 1993: 229).

Even though Essop claimed that he does not write autobiographically (Chetty 1999: 275), his collections are semi-autobiographical as well, even if less explicitly so: set in the communities where he himself lived for many years, the stories often represent English high-school teachers in conflict with authorities, especially in Essop's second collection *Noorjehan*. Essop himself taught in various high schools from 1963 to 1975, when he was dismissed by the Department of Indian Education (Naicker 2022: 10-11). *The Hajji* was banned as a school text in 1984 (Chetty 1999: 277). In the story "The Hajji Musa and the Hindu Fire-Walker", for example, readers fleetingly learn that the first-person narrator is called "Ahmed" (see Essop [1978] 2004: 44).

Notwithstanding the great difference in the prominence given to the narrative voice in Matshoba's and Essop's short fiction, both writers narrate their community in detail – Matshoba has been referred to as the "storyteller" (Vaughan 1988) and Essop as the "community bard" (Chetty 1999). Textual evidence of this is also the frequent slippage of the narrators' singular first-person pronoun to the plural form[341] and the reproduction of each community's speech patterns, as in the opening sentence of Essop's "Two Sisters" in *The Hajji*, uttered by a resident of the yard: "When I want to baat den dey want to baat, when I want to go to lava-try den dey want to go also" (Essop [1978] 2004: 32).[342] Essop, however, never departs from English and the narrator reports the characters' sentences in Gujarati (the vernacular language of the Muslim Indian community) directly in English.[343] Matshoba, instead, very frequently inserts *tsotsitaal*, slang expressions, and words in Afrikaans and in African languages in his stories, mainly Xhosa – the latter, however, are always signalled by italics and translated in parentheses.[344] Other markers of orality are conversational addressing formulae such as "awu, my child" (Matshoba 1979c: 5) or "my brother" (67), uttered either by characters or by the narrator towards other characters or to address the reader. According to Stefan Helgesson, this "strategic vernacularism" derives also from *Staffrider*'s editorial policy of creating local bonds between the magazine, its writers, and its readers (Helgesson 2018: 180). Hence Matshoba, influenced by Black Consciousness, does not share Themba's reluctance to intersperse his English with African expressions.

Call Me Not a Man and *The Hajji and Other Stories* thus reproduce certain speech patterns, feature first-person narrators, and foreground the device of the story-within-a-story and the communal

[341] See Sole (1993: 244) for the narrators' use of pronouns in *Call Me Not a Man*.
[342] "When I want to bath, then they want to bath, when I want to go to the lavatory, then they want to go also".
[343] See this excerpt from "The Commandment": "Then I heard him telling Hussein that he was going to organize a dance at his place on the following Saturday evening […]. All this he said in Gujarati" (Essop [1978] 2004: 98).
[344] Miriam Tlali similarly intersperses her *Soweto Stories* with African expressions and sentences with the English translation in parentheses. See Tlali (1989: 3).

aspect of space. Apart from place, the other unifying principle shared by the two collections is indeed storytelling (see Dunn and Morris 1995: 88-99). Textual evidence of this is also the "oral-style" quality of many of the short stories by Matshoba and Essop (MacKenzie 1999). The latter frequently resorts to expressions indicating that the narrator is reporting stories or thoughts from members of the community, such as "many people said" (1978: 22), "[w]hat happened to Hajji Musa was long spoken afterwards" (53), or "[t]here were 'tears, tantrums and hysterics' (according to Omar)" (34). These 'asides' imply a form of narrative that is "transmitted from person to person by word of mouth" and foreground the community, both audience and storyteller (MacKenzie 1999: 211). Unsurprisingly, Essop has been repeatedly juxtaposed with Herman Charles Bosman (see Abrahams 1978: x; Voss 1979: 20), who is often considered the most significant representative of the English oral-style short story in South Africa (see MacKenzie 1999: 138-178).[345]

The role played by orality in *Call Me Not a Man* is of a different kind altogether and depends largely on the prominence of the narrative voice: the pervasive tone of the narrator is reminiscent of the authority of traditional storytellers (MacKenzie 2002: 352). As Jenny Williams rightly observes, Matshoba's own life in the semi-illiterate context of the township of Soweto has been characterised by an "oral residue" (1991: 22). The most visible traces of Matshoba's "oral residue" are the several riddles and proverbs he inserts in the narrative in vernacular languages and that he translates, such as the following from "A Glimpse of Slavery": "We all know that the two extremes of life are birth and death, the beginning and the end, hence the African adage: '*Into engapheli iyahlola*' (that which does not terminate is an omen)" (Matshoba 1979c: 46). As is the case with the short fiction by the two Dhlomo brothers, proverbs are functional to the demonstration of a general truth or a moral axiom. The narrator's claims to the authenticity of his tale, by invoking witnesses or by way of direct experience, are also typical of oral culture and serve the same end of proverbs (Williams 1991: 24): they endow the narrator with authority and assure the listener (and reader) of the veracity of a message.[346] For instance, the declaration of authenticity from the narrator in "My Friend, the Outcast" runs as follows:

> Roughly, here is the story of my friend. Mind you, I was not there when it all started to happen, but I can just imagine what took place; what with such things being part of life for us darkies. We read about them in the papers […] But when you read about it or hear about it, it is never as real as when it happens to someone who is close to you. (Matshoba 1979c: 1-2)

[345] See Marais (2005: 23-24): Bosman's *Mafeking Road* (1947) is widely recognised as one of "the most prominent examples of the particular affinity displayed by the cycle form for region, community and realism in English literature in South Africa".
[346] An oral frame is also functional to the story's claim to authenticity (see Kiguru 2020: 43).

As Kelwyn Sole reminds us, however, in his poignant critique of the claims to authenticity in some Black Consciousness texts, "assumptions of expressive 'authenticity'" are always "ideologically laden": realist literature never reflects reality neutrally (Sole 1993: 5). Indeed, Matshoba's narrator uses the verb 'to imagine' in the above-quoted passage, thus exposing the fictionality of his 'real' story.

The several flashbacks that govern Matshoba's stories are also typical of oral narratives, which rarely present a linear structure (Williams 1991: 30). Apart from these formal features, orality in *Call Me Not a Man* is also thematised: like a storyteller of old, the narrator offers counsel and represents exemplary situations out of which a morale can be drawn (Vaughan 1988: 312). While Essop's collection *The Hajji* emphasises the "oral-style" communal quality of life in the yard – by reproducing conversational speech patterns, foregrounding dialogue, and by reporting other characters' stories and opinions – Matshoba's short-story cycle goes one step further. The Soweto-born writer actually tries to reinscribe the figure of the traditional storyteller on his urban narrator(s) inside a written work, a storyteller strikingly similar to Matshoba, who thus conflates the figures of the author-narrator-storyteller (Mackenzie 1999: 180).

The publication of *Call Me Not a Man* in 1979 sparked a debate – literary as well as ideological – around the definition of Matshoba as a 'storyteller' (see Thackwray 2014). On the one hand, Njabulo Ndebele, in his well-known engagement with Yashar Kemal's *Turkish Tales* and South African storytelling fiction, rejects the idea that Matshoba belongs to such a category. Published in *Staffrider* in 1984, Ndebele's essay criticises the amount of authorial intervention in coeval Black South African fiction such as Matshoba's, lamenting the documentary and "sloganeering" traits of literature (Ndebele 1984: 45).[347] On the other hand, we find Mike Kirkwood and Michael Vaughan, who see in Matshoba the "story-teller come to life" (Kirkwood quoted in McDonald 2009: 325). The narrator's frequent social and historical digressions, his appeals to the reader, and his authoritative judgements all point to a "non-fictional narrative voice", which corresponds to that of the oral storyteller according to Kirkwood and Vaughan (Thackwray 2014: 43) Thus, two opposite interpretations of the meaning and role of the 'storyteller' polarised the literary debate on Black fiction in the Eighties, a debate that appeared on the pages of *Staffrider*, where Matshoba first published his work, and that had the same theoretical underpinning: Walter Benjamin's essay "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov" ([1936] 1968).[348]

[347] Therefore, Ndebele's definition of 'storyteller' would probably suit Essop better.
[348] Mike Kirkwood wrote a *Staffrider* feature titled "Talking Story" (1985) where he discusses storytelling through an analysis of Isaac Babel's *The Life and Adventures of Matthew Pavlichenko*. Kirkwood mentions both Benjamin's and Ndebele's essays in his discussion. See also Vaughan's essay "Can the Writer Become the Storyteller? A Critique of the Stories of Mtutuzeli Matshoba" published in *Staffrider* in 1988.

The debate about Matshoba's stories in fact speaks to the broader and fraught issue of the relationship between journalism and fiction in South African literature. In his 1984 essay, Ndebele ascribes the increasingly documentary style of domestic (mainly Black) literature to the lack of control of the processes of "information gathering, interpretation, and dissemination" for Black people under apartheid (Ndebele 1984: 45). As a consequence, Black fiction in the 1970s and 1980s often presents an overlap of the discourses of literature and journalism. Indeed, both Matshoba and Essop depict the increasingly important role of print media in the liberation struggle through a number of different literary devices and strategies.

5.3 Print Media in/as Literature: 'Authenticity' and Metafiction

Essop's two pre-1994 collections are both retrospective: *The Hajji*, published in 1978, depicts the Indian community of the Fifties and Sixties, while *Noorjehan*, published in the year of the transition (1990), represents the more politicised decades of the Seventies and Eighties.[349] The emphasis on the Indian 'yard community' of *The Hajji*, therefore, fades away in *Noorjehan*, which focuses more prominently on political upheavals, the oppression of apartheid bureaucracy, and the effects of politics in school and university settings – with various allusions to Soweto, which is alluded to or mentioned in "The Metamorphosis", "Penelope", "The Fossil", and "The Nightingale and the Dove".[350] As a consequence, newspapers feature more prominently in this later collection, and are the main means through which characters assert their political collaboration and resistance (Rastogi 2008a: 57).

In the four-page story "Fossil", for instance, the word "newspapers" is repeated six times. The protagonist Jason is a lecturer in English literature at the University of the Witwatersrand and he belongs to the liberal establishment. When Soweto erupts, the newspapers "crackl[e] with reports of arson, teargas, gunfire, explosions", which disturb his "liberal conscience" (Essop 1990: 101). Jason buys a newspaper on his way to the university but refuses to open it after reading the headline "'Unrest Continues'", preferring to read *The Times Literary Supplement* instead (102). He thus takes refuge in the ivory tower of *the* literary magazine par excellence to avoid reading the disturbing news. The climax of the story is represented by the protagonist's refusal to let one of his students write a dissertation on Peter Abrahams by exclaiming "Are you also in revolt…?" (104). Jason juxtaposes the South African canon, represented by Peter Abrahams, with D. H. Lawrence and Jane Austen,

[349] The political side of many of the stories in *Noorjehan* may account for the fact that seven of them were published in *Staffrider*, while only two in *The Hajji* previously appeared in the magazine.
[350] Neither Essop nor Matshoba, however, recreate the events of 1976 directly. In his autobiographical note opening *Call Me Not a Man*, Matshoba marks the 16 June as the main inspirational force behind his writings, yet the episodes in the collection never take issue with the revolt in Soweto. Martin Trump has rightly highlighted the lack of representation of the students' revolt in Black short fiction as compared to novels of the same period (Trump 1988a: 34).

writers of the English canon; the text further mentions or quotes from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Austen's *Emma*, and Conrad's *Victory*.[351] "The Fossil" thus enacts, on a metafictional level and through the use of intertextuality, the opposition between journalism and politics (on the one hand) and metropolitan literature (on the other). At the same time, it lays bare the intrinsic political value in the decision of what constitutes the literary, and therefore, of what is taught at an institutional level.[352] The anonymous Black student's attempt to decolonise the canon is met with hostility by Jason, who considers Peter Abrahams's writings as 'too political' and therefore on an equal footing with the newspapers that trouble him.

"The Metamorphosis", as the title suggests, represents a counterpoint to "The Fossil". It is the story of an elderly Jewish woman, Naomi Rosenberg, who decides, after reading two reports in the daily *The Star*, to abandon her suburban quiet life to commit herself completely to the liberation struggle. The first report denounces the killing of a man suspected of belonging to an underground political organisation by the police who let loose an Alsatian dog on him, while the second describes a group of women devoted to social justice, whom Naomi then decides to join. Essop uses two strategies to represent the news in his short story. As far as the first article is concerned, the third-person narrator briefly summarises the report but then focuses on Naomi's recreation of the news: Naomi turns away from the report with "horror" and "her imagination re-enact[s] the event with brutal realism" (24). When it comes to the second report, instead, the omniscient narrator quotes directly from *The Star*'s (fictional) article. Essop thus inverts the literary strategy typical of Black fiction since the Thirties, which is the insertion of factual occurrences and quotations into fiction,[353] instead incorporating "interjections that *appear* to be nonfiction into fiction", so that fiction "masquerades as fact" and not vice versa (Rastogi 2008a: 57; emphasis in original). In this way, the writer lends authenticity to his short fiction – as do the quotations from Gandhi's volume *Passive Resistance in South Africa* and from Naomi's protest placards (Essop 1990: 32-33).[354] Following a sort of ring composition, newspapers are again foregrounded at the end of "The Metamorphosis", when Naomi's

[351] Essop's stories often perform intertextual dialogue with Shakespeare – see also "Redemption" and "The Veil" in *King of Hearts and Other Stories* (1997) and, above all, "The Ides of March" in *Narcissus and Other Stories* (2002). *Noorjehan* is interspersed with Shakespearean references, especially to *Hamlet*. See the short story "Shakespeare's Image" (Essop 1990: 90). McDonald notices a similar pattern in Matshoba's "A Glimpse of Slavery", which mentions canonical English literature and Shakespeare in particular (2009: 336). When the narrator sees three Black women cutting strips of sacks on the farm, for instance, he compares them to the three witches from *Macbeth* because of their "gaunt set faces" (Matshoba 1979c: 57).

[352] Similar considerations arise from a reading of "The Nightingale and the Dove", tellingly placed right after "The Fossil" in *Noorjehan*. The overlapping of the British context evoked by canonical works of English literature with the politicised South African setting of the story is also echoed in Zoë Wicomb's short narrative "A Clearing in the Bush" in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987). See Highman 2019.

[353] See for instance the discussion of "An Experiment in Colour" by Herbert Dhlomo in the second chapter of this thesis.

[354] Essop often mentions Eastern philosophy and particular Gandhi in his fiction, thus imbuing the text with local yet cosmopolitan colour. Tolstoy Farm recurs often as a remainder of the active role played by Indians in the liberation struggle.

activism reaches its heights. As a consequence, "her photograph appeared on the front page of newspapers and she was interviewed by journalists" from all over the country, until she gets arrested at the end of the story (35). Print media, then, are the true protagonists of the narrative, bringing about the "metamorphosis" of the title. Printed news media, and particularly the so-called "alternative press", were indeed difficult to censor for their 'mobile' and ephemeral – albeit subversive – traits. They often appeared irregularly and avoided the national, official channels of distribution, preferring door-to-door delivery instead (Tomaselli 1991: 165-166).[355]

Newspapers and the press are mentioned in almost every 'socio-political' story of Essop's collection,[356] but *Noorjehan* never blurs the boundaries between fact and fiction, journalism and storytelling: its fictional status cannot be questioned. Different considerations arise from a close reading of Matshoba's *Call Me Not a Man*. The importance of print media in the daily lives of South Africans in the Eighties can be inferred from the story opening the collection, "My Friend, The Outcast". The narrator relates the misadventures of a family in Soweto who is evicted from their building because the offices administering the houses in Soweto, the West Rand Administrative Buildings, have found a young man who can pay a higher rent. The latter, unaware that the house he has paid for is already occupied by a family, threatens to report to the press the inefficiency of the administration when he discovers that the building is not available yet.[357] It is worth quoting the white superintendent's reaction to the mention of newspapers: "'the damn English papers that are busy agitating the kaffirs to demand rights […]. They should have been banned too. I don't know why they were left out because they endanger our security and therefore that of the state too'" (Matshoba 1979c: 8). Newspapers feature again at the end of the story, when the narrator's friend Vusi goes to *The Star* offices to recount the unjust eviction. The narrative's open ending and Vusi's future thus hinge on the outcome of the indictment published by the press.[358]

A similar concern with print media is evident in Nadine Gordimer's 1980 short-story collection *A Soldier's Embrace*. The title story, for example, describes the moments following the liberation of an African country and the reconciliation between the white party and the Black guerrilla fighters. Its heterodiegetic narrator repeatedly relates the story from the point of view of the press or using the

[355] An example of South Africa's alternative press is the Cape-based *Grassroots*. Started in 1980, it defined itself as a "community newsletter" and not as a newspaper, so that it could avoid official registering and thus the possibility of banning (Johnson 1991: 205). See also Switzer (2000) for a discussion of South Africa's alternative press in the last decades of apartheid.

[356] See also the narrative "The Concrete Fountain", through which Essop criticises the apartheid-controlled press by inventing a tabloid called *The Criterion* (Essop 1990: 92-95).

[357] The Kafkaesque nature of apartheid's administration and bureaucracy is the main thematic concern of Essop's "The Trial" and "The Burial" in *Noorjehan and Other Stories*.

[358] *The Star* belonged to the English anti-apartheid conservative liberal press, linked to mining capital (Louw and Tomaselli 1991: 5). Its materiality as printed news and its close association with the mining industry might be the reasons why *The Star* was not banned.

newspapers' phrasing: "[m]any ordinary white people who had lived contentedly […] under the colonial government, now expressed an enthusiastic intention to help build a nation, as the newspapers put it"; a few lines later, the narrator uses the word "incidents" and then adds in parentheses "(newspaper euphemism again)" (Gordimer [1980] 1982: 12-13). It is also worth quoting the closing paragraph of the first part of the story "Town and Country Lovers" in the same collection. The narrative describes the affair between an Austrian geologist working in South Africa and his coloured domestic servant; the police eventually discover their relationship and they spend a night in prison. At this point, the heterodiegetic narrator assumes the objective tone of reportage – reflected also graphically – and the woman's and man's declarations to the press are quoted, closing the narrative:

> A statement made by the girl to the police was handed in to Court when she and the man appeared to meet charges of contravening the Immorality Act in a Johannesburg flat on the night of – December, 19 –. *I lived with the white man in his flat. He had intercourse with me sometimes. He gave me tablets to take to prevent me becoming pregnant*.
> Interviewed by the Sunday papers, the girl said, 'I'm sorry for the sadness brought to my mother'. (Gordimer [1980] 1982: 84)[359]

As Martin Trump notes, the style of *A Soldier's Embrace* echoes the writings of New Journalism and draws inspiration from historical and socio-political facts (1986: 360). Maureen Isaacson's short-story cycle *Holding Back Midnight and Other Stories* (1992) also presents some passages written in a New-Journalistic style. Isaacson is a journalist, she worked for *The Star* among other local newspapers, and was the recipient of the South African Literary Journalism Award in 2009. Her style consequently shifts between "popular journalism" and "conventional literariness" in a postmodernist fashion, as Zoë Wicomb rightly remarks (2001: 163). In "The Logic of Bleeding", for instance, the first-person narrator describes the affair between her uncle George and an Indian woman as follows: "I bought the newspaper. 'Schoolteacher flees with tailor's daughter', was the headline. The subhead read, 'First they crossed the colourline, then the border'" (Isaacson 1992: 120).

The "media-specific awareness" (Helgesson 2008: 114) of many short stories of the late Seventies and Eighties thus unites short fiction across the racial divide and it serves two aims. First and foremost, it lends authenticity to realist narratives such as the ones by Essop, Matshoba, and Gordimer, and it emphasises their socio-political import. At the same time, this device works as metafiction: by quoting from real and invented newspaper reports, these works of literature foreground their textuality, in an almost postmodernist fashion.[360] The activism of and in print

[359] See also the role of the international press in Gordimer's story "The Moment Before the Gun Went Off" (1988), later included in *Jump and Other Stories* (1991).
[360] In this regard, see Stefan Helgesson's fascinating comment on the material presence of newspaper cuttings in Nadine Gordimer's novel *A World of Strangers* (1958): the "narrative indexing of printed matter" throughout the literary text "borders on a *mise en abyme*" (Helgesson 2008: 114).

journalism, which reached its heights with the alternative press of the Eighties, has a long history in South Africa, since the first resistance press dates back to the 1880s.[361] Apart from newspaper reports and headlines, the short-story cycles by Essop – and, to a much lesser extent, Matshoba – also incorporate quotations from pamphlets, manifestoes, books and letters. The action in the title story of *Noorjehan*, for instance, unfolds primarily through letter writing. Although coated in a traditional oral matrix, even Matshoba's "A Pilgrimage to the Isle of Makana" begins with the arrival of a letter (see Williams 1991: 30).[362]

5.4 *Call Me Not a Man*: Short Stories or 'Proemdra'?

The mixture of fact and fiction and generic hybridity are also at the basis of the US New Journalism, as we have seen in chapter three, and they derive primarily from poststructuralist and postmodernist theories (Worthington 2018: 112-113). Yet, when it comes to the experimentation and generic hybridisation of the South African literature of the Eighties, the theorisation behind the literary practice appears more dictated by a precise political agenda and less informed by postmodernism and poststructuralism. As we have seen, the textual practice of mixing factual and fictional discourse can be identified in South African writing starting from the late Twenties. Yet, the first sustained theorisations on it and the explicit link with American New Journalism – Tom Wolfe's seminal anthology *The New Journalism* dates back to 1973 – are to be found only sixty years later. In the Eighties, anthologies were published to archive Black writing, most notably Mothobi Mutloatse's *Forced Landing* (1980) and *Reconstruction* (1981). These anthologies collect different genres, including both journalism and short stories among other texts, similarly to what we have seen in the anthologies of Can Themba, Alex La Guma, and Tim Couzens' edition of Rolfes Dhlomo's works. Moreover, many of the collected literary texts display features of generic indeterminacy. In the programmatic manifesto opening *Forced Landing* (1980), Mothobi Mutloatse introduces a new genre called "proemdra", a portmanteau word for prose, poem, and drama: "We'll write our poems in a narrative form; we'll write journalistic pieces in poetry form; we'll dramatize our poetic experiences; we'll poeticise our historical drama" (1980: 5). Mutloatse thus outlines a precise Black aesthetics in which the domains of politics and literature are inseparable.

[361] See the two volumes *South Africa's Alternative Press: Voices of Protest and Resistance, 1880-1960* (1997) and *South Africa's Resistance Press: Alternative Voices in the Last Generation under Apartheid* (2000), edited by Les Switzer and Mohammed Adhikari.

[362] As opposed to Essop, Matshoba does not quote from the fictional letter, however. He has the narrator recount the content of the letter to readers, instead, so as to maintain the narrator's role as storyteller. It is worth noting that Matshoba uses the verb "to tell" when he refers to the letter: "[n]ow the letter in the brown envelope told me when my pilgrimage had been set for" (Matshoba 1979c: 93).

In 1984, Miriam Tlali (1933-2017), regular contributor to *Staffrider*, published a volume titled *Mihloti*. Echoing Mutloatse's anthologies and the eclectic structure of *Staffrider* itself, the book is divided into four sections: interviews, one short story, travelogues and, tellingly, "New Journalism". The latter consists of one testimony titled "Detour into Detention", which narrates how the police arrested Miriam Tlali and other 92 people to prevent them from attending the funeral of Black Consciousness leader Steve Biko in 1977. The very same text had appeared six years before in the first issue of *Staffrider* as a short story under the title "Soweto Hijack! A story of our times" (Tlali 1978: 12). While it can be assumed that the *Staffrider* editorial committee wanted to avoid censorship (unsuccessfully, as it happened) by labelling Tlali's piece as fiction (Zander 1999: 265), "Soweto Hijack"/"Detour into Detention" still possesses a marked literary flavour (see Androne 2013: 28). Tlali, author and first-person narrator – referred to in the text as "Miriam" (Tlali 1978: 18) – recounts a real event with precise indications of time and place. However, the narrative structure of the piece is far from straightforward: the narrator starts her account reporting a conversation she had with her neighbour after her release; one of her neighbour's questions prompts the narrator's tale of the event. Tlali thus adopts the fictional device of the story-within-a-story. The author-narrator's personal reflections alternate with precise descriptions and tight dialogue, but also with lyrical passages. "Soweto Hijack"/"Detour into Detention" thus puts into practice the theories expressed in Mutloatse's manifesto, at the same time referring explicitly to American literary journalism.

Matshoba's narratives similarly respond to this new Black aesthetics. While the realist short-story collections by writers like Gordimer, Isaacson, and even Essop are often inspired by contemporary South African political life and consistently incorporate newspaper cuttings and quotations, they nonetheless never raise doubts about their generic categorisation: they are conventional fictional short stories. Instead, Matshoba's literary output, more influenced by Black Consciousness,[363] is less 'conventional' in a Western sense and it often blurs the lines between genres and discourses. In 1981, Matshoba published an excerpt in *Staffrider* titled "Mhalba's Journey", which would be published later by Ravan Press as the monograph *Seeds of War* (1981).[364] The magazine explicitly labelled the piece a "proemdra", and the graphic layout of the text signals its hybrid nature: the narrator's present-tense long explanations and comments, which sometimes sound

[363] For an interesting comparison between the short fiction of Tlali and Matshoba, see Gaylard (2008: 257-271).
[364] Matshoba also published two excerpts in *Staffrider*: "Towards Limbo" (1979) and "The Betrayal" (1980). The former, which was published as part of a novel, may be an excerpt from his unpublished autobiographical novel *Beyond the Minedumps* or from the unpublished novel *Villains, Victims and Heroes* on which he was working in the Nineties (Munnik and Davis 1994: 123).

like stage directions, are written in italics and are interspersed with the characters' dialogue as if it were a play.[365]

S*eeds of War* bears the blueprint of Matshoba's whole oeuvre, since it narrates the journey of a Black man from his migrant hostel to his rural village, whose inhabitants are going to face a forced removal. Although not as explicitly hybrid as *Seeds of War*, the short stories in *Call Me Not a Man* do strike the sensitivity of twenty-first-century readers, both at the level of form and content. First of all, they are remarkably long short stories – "A Pilgrimage to the Isle of Makana" and "Son of the First Generation" are indeed divided into sub-chapters, not unlike the longer narratives by Herbert Dhlomo.[366] Moreover, with the exception of "A Pilgrimage to the Isle of Makana", all incorporate poems by Matshoba himself, signalled graphically through italics, either at the start of the text or in the middle of the narrative. These lyrical interludes overlap with the plethora of African proverbs, riddles, and maxims that characterise Matshoba's fiction – again, one is reminded of similar literary strategies in the short stories by Herbert Dhlomo discussed in chapter two, such as "Drought". At the level of content, some of Matshoba's short stories may well be defined travelogues, in particular "A Pilgrimage to the Isle of Makana" and "Three Days in the Land of a Dying Illusion", or socio-historical commentary.[367] His narratives, indeed, bridge the gap between fiction, journalism, and history, moving back and forth between short-story writing and what David Bunn calls the "mini-essay mode" (quoted in Sole 1993: 202).

Matshoba's narrative persona comments on his frequent digressions: "Please pardon the interpositions, dear reader", the narrator apologises in "Three Days in the Land of a Dying Illusion" (Matshoba 1979c: 151). The latter is particularly ridden with deviations from the main storyline, such as the following:

> In terms of Representative Government the dispossessed could vote, provided they were twenty-one years of age, could read and write, earned a minimum of fifty pounds a year or owned landed property worth no less than twenty-five pounds. Few could read and write, many had been dispossessed of their land, a handful, if any, earned fifty pounds. In other words the vote of the dispossessed was insignificant. Even if it had not been, all that it could have achieved was the "election" of a white representative to parliament. (184)

[365] The songs of the villagers – the chorus – represent the lyrical part inside the work. The described facts probably refer to the removal of the Batlokwa and Makgato people of the Northern Transvaal, an event Matshoba knew well due to his collaboration with the Institute of Race Relations (Davis 2003: 149). For a discussion of *Seeds of War*, see Davis (2003: 126-156); Williams (1991: 90 and *passim*).

[366] When they were first published in *Staffrider*, some of the longer narratives appeared abridged, like "A Pilgrimage to the Isle of Makana", "Three Days in the Land of the Dying Illusion", and also "To Kill a Man's Pride" (see Matshoba 1979a: 21; 1979b: 18; 1980b: 6).

[367] Tlali's anthology *Mihloti* (1984) contains one section of travelogues. For a comparison between Tlali's factual travelogue "Setsumi's Qoqolosi" and Matshoba's fictional travelogue "A Pilgrimage to the Isle of Makana", particularly the section "A Journey Through South African life", see Zander (1999: 259).

It is difficult to overlook the similarity in the authority and tone of the narrative voice during these socio-historical excursus between the short fiction of Matshoba and Herbert Dhlomo – notwithstanding the different stances of Matshoba's first-person and Dhlomo's third-person narrators. The parallels in both content and form are indeed several, as the comparative analysis of the two short stories "Farmer and Servant" by Dhlomo and "A Glimpse of Slavery" by Matshoba in chapter two of the present dissertation has attempted to show. The short fiction by the two writers could be read under the critical lens of popular African literature. In the introduction to her edited volume *Readings in African Popular Fiction* (2002), Stephanie Newell defines popular fiction in Africa as realist narratives that "never fail to generate debate amongst readers on moral and behavioural issues", often by way of "ubiquitous character types" such as the barren woman or the traveller, who act as ethical figures that the readers can recognise and judge (2002: 5). The widespread use of proverbs and maxims in the short fiction of Dhlomo and Matshoba further supports the interpretation of their texts as "problem-solving" fictions (2002: 3). Usually understood in isolation from each other as representatives of the New African movement and of Black Consciousness-influenced protest writing respectively, a comparative analysis of the short stories of Dhlomo and Matshoba may shed light on an often-overlooked genealogy in Black South African fiction.[368]

"Three Days in the Land of a Dying Illusion", together with "A Pilgrimage to the Isle of Makana", have been often singled out as examples of imaginative narratives that somewhat counter the established reception of Matshoba's *Call Me Not a Man* as "documentary and didactic" rather than "literary and imaginative" (Iannaccaro 2014: 191). In particular, the narrative "A Glimpse of Slavery", has often been either hailed or harshly criticized for its "populist realism" in its depiction of the plight of farm labour.[369] Michael Chapman ([1989] 2001: 196) favourably compared Matshoba's story to the famous *Drum* reportage on Bethal farms by Henry Nxumalo (1952), tellingly reprinted in one of Mutloatse's anthologies of Black writing in 1981. The first readers who noticed the narrative's documentary value, however, were the censors of the security committee. According to their evaluation, "A Glimpse of Slavery" was not sufficiently literary and it was rather more similar to a piece of reportage, even though it described "improbable" events (McDonald 2009: 334). As a consequence, the piece was considered seditious and the whole collection was banned.

[368] Giuliana Iannaccaro uses the terms "teacher" and "bard" to refer to Herbert Dhlomo in the title of her paper on Dhlomo's historical drama (2021), similarly to Matshoba's reception by Vaughan and Kirkwood as "storyteller". Iannaccaro, moreover, begins her paper by building an interesting analogy between Dhlomo's 1930s South Africa and the later Black Consciousness period (see 2021: 225-227).

[369] I borrow the term "populist realism" from Michael Vaughan's essay "Literature and Politics: Currents in South African Writing in the Seventies" (1982a: 122). Vaughan discusses the work of Matshoba as representative of the new literary trend of "populist realism" as opposed to the liberal realism of the previous decades, pursued by writers such as Alan Paton (1982a: 120). Popular realism is defined as "an aesthetic movement which reflects the emergence of new social and political forces within the dimension of literary culture" and which involves the adoption of "collectivist" concepts together with "petty bourgeois individualist aspirations" (133; 137).

ANOTHER GLIMPSE OF SLAVERY

A Lawyer's View

Last year Mtutuzeli Matshoba's collection of short stories *Call Me Not A Man* was declared undesirable by the Publications Control Board in that it was 'prejudicial to safety of the state, the general welfare or the peace and good order'. In their reasons for the banning the Board, while conceding that there was 'not inconsiderable merit in much of the writing', took exception to the story entitled *A Glimpse of Slavery*; a story dealing with the parole labour system. The Board stated that 'even if all these situations had occurred, which is improbable, and had occurred in this accumulated context in which they are set in the story, the presentation of these scenes in a popular medium would be undesirable. The presentation is calculated to exacerbate race feelings between the black and white races reciprocally; it is calculated to promote a sense of grievance without sufficient particular grounds to justify the grievance feelings in the minds of African readers.'

In the story, the narrator is sentenced to three months imprisonment for an assault and finds himself paroled from Modderbee to a farm where he suffers various indignities. He is forced to wear a sack, he is sworn at and assaulted; in the end he escapes and returns to Johannesburg.

The parole labour system is, of course, not the creation of Matshoba's imagination. Thousands of short-term prisoners (unable to pay their fines) find themselves labouring for little reward on farms throughout the country. Since September last year the minimum wage for such parolees has been 60 cents per day; prior to that it was 45 cents.

The precise extent of the parole labour system is difficult to gauge. In 1973 the Minister of Prisons was asked on two occasions how many prisoners are made available daily to work on land or premises other than those of the Prisons Department. On the first occasion he was unable to give an answer, saying that the only statistics were those kept by the individual prisons, on the second occasion he said that 24 000 prisoners were made available daily.

Since that date the Prisons Act has been altered to make a substantially larger number of prisoners available for the parole labour system. Prior to 1979 prisoners whose total sentence was less than four months could be paroled; now prisoners whose total sentence is less than two years can be paroled. Reservations have been expressed about the possibility of policing such a system. In 1979, after the Minister of Prisons had been unable to give an answer to her question about the number of parolees, Mrs Suzman questioned whether adequate checks were made to ensure that parolees received their wages, adequate food and lodging. She also said that she found it difficult to believe that an adequate check could be kept on persons working throughout the country as farm labourers. The system was one which lent itself to abuse, especially if careful supervision was not maintained.

A recent case in the Transvaal Supreme Court in Pretoria throws both the parole labour system and the banning of *Call Me Not A Man* into sharp relief. In this case a former parolee Petrus Mofokeng (the Plaintiff) sued a farming partnership, L.A. Becker (Jnr.) for R4 000 damages for an assault he alleged had been perpetrated on him while working on their

'There we go Majita, let the hammers pound!'

Mzwakhe's illustration for 'A Glimpse of Slavery'.
Acknowledgement: *Learning Post.*

farm. As the case concluded in an out-of-Court settlement, all that was said in the Court remains at the level of allegations, as the Court was not required to make any finding on them.

In his evidence, Mr Mofokeng said that on 16 November 1978 he was convicted of a failure to pay General Tax and sentenced to a R100 fine or 100 days in prison. Unable to pay the fine, he was taken to Modderbee Prison from which he was fetched by Becker (Snr.) and taken to the farm in the Bronkhorstspruit district. At this stage Mofokeng had no idea that he was being paroled; in prison he had signed a form with his thumb-print but had not been allowed to read it, although he can both read and write.

On their arrival at the farm, according to Mofokeng, Mr Becker (Snr.) told the new parolees that they would be beaten if they did not work because his son 'hou om 'n kaffir te slaan'. After their arrival they were taken to work in the fields. That evening they were taken to a large room with barred windows which the parolees referred to as the 'cell'.

Mr Mofokeng then alleged that that evening Mr Becker (Jnr.) had entered the cell with five of his black employees. He stated in Court that the new parolees had been ordered to one side and told to strip. Becker and his employees then hit all the new parolees on their backs with sticks. No reason was given for this beating although Mr Mofokeng said that he later found out that it was to stop the parolees running away from the farm. The next morning, he said, his back was smeared with blood and he felt pain for two weeks. It was this particular assault which formed the basis of Mr Mofokeng's claim for damages.

While cross-examining Mofokeng, the Beckers' counsel put it to him that these beatings in the cell were, in fact, carried out by old parolees on the new arrivals, carrying out an initiation ritual. The counsel then said that Becker would give evidence to the effect that he had the parolees locked up at night because he feared for the safety of his wife and

Figure 5.2 "Another Glimpse of Slavery" in *Staffrider* (September/October 1980).

It is worth quoting a response to the Publications Control Board published in *Staffrider* a year later by an anonymous lawyer under the title "Another Glimpse of Slavery. A Lawyer's View" (1980).The author states that the parole labour system is not "the creation of Matshoba's imagination", and he lists the facts of a recent case in the Transvaal Supreme Court of a former parolee suing a farm (Anon. 1980: 36).[370] Even though this anonymous declaration goes in the opposite direction of the censors' report, at the same time it equally contributes to the reception of "A Glimpse of Slavery" – and of the whole collection more in general – as a linear realist narrative in the tradition of protest writing with few noteworthy formal elements apart from the use of realism and the narratorial intrusions.[371] The presence of the caption "illustration for 'A Glimpse of Slavery'" under a picture depicting two Black men, clothed with jute sacks, tearing down a wall with hammers, on the same page as the lawyer's statement, further contributes to establish an explicit link between the 'real' facts of the parole labour system and Matshoba's fictional representation of it (see figure 5.2).[372]

Yet, the formal elements of the story are also worth considering, even though they are less explicitly innovative than "Three Days". In particular, the narrative structure is far from linear and tries to embody Mutloatse's theorisation of the proemdra. The beginning of "A Glimpse of Slavery" strikes the reader for its unconventional and uneven layout. The narrative opens with an epigraph in italics from Plato's *Gorgias*, followed by a brief "dramatic dialogue" reproducing a court proceeding and by the subsequent narratorial intervention, in italics, to provide readers with context (Sole 2001: 104):

> *Magistrate*: Have you anything to say for yourself before sentence is passed? […] Is that all?
> *Myself*: Yes, your honour.
> *Magistrate*: […]. The court sentences you to twelve months' imprisonment of which nine months is conditionally suspended for three years…
> *The condition was that I should not be found guilty of assault during those three years. I turned and grinned to my people in the gallery. They smiled back at me triumphantly. Although I had deserved a discharge, we all welcomed the three months.* (Matshoba 1979c: 27)

The author then resorts to Roman script again to describe the events that brought to the court proceeding with a flashback; the narrator finally returns to the present of the story to depict with

[370] When "A Glimpse of Slavery" was first published in *Staffrider*, the Department of Prisons issued a formal complaint against the magazine and Matshoba was obliged to produce a statement. There, Matshoba claimed that the story had been inspired by a local newspaper report and by the ensuing discussion among some of his friends who had personally witnessed the treatment of farm labourers (McDonald 2009: 335).
[371] This substantially coincides with Ndebele's later evaluation of Matshoba's literary output.
[372] Michael Vaughan's claim that *Staffrider*'s main quality is its visual imagery is critically to the point (Vaughan 1984: 197). The publication of Matshoba's stories in *Staffrider* usually emphasises the documentary value of his fiction, notwithstanding the explicit 'literary' nature of the magazine. Next to "My Friend, The Outcast", for instance, were published three photographs of the "matchbox" houses in Soweto by Ralph Ndawo, a clear reference to the house from where the protagonist of the story is evicted (see Matshoba 1978: 15). The illustrations accompanying the publication of the excerpt from "A Pilgrimage to the Isle of Makana" and "Three Days in the Land of the Dying Illusion" serve the same function.

striking realistic detail the main plotline, that is the oppression of the Black man, represented by the narrator's own experience, in farm labour reserves in the Transvaal area.

The most interesting text from a formal and narratorial point of view is Matshoba's "Three Days in the Land of a Dying Illusion". This incorporates lengthy dialogical passages, various proverbs, several historical digressions (conveyed in a semi-factual mode), a riddle, three narrative poems or prose poems, and a story-within-a-story in which the I of the narrator disappears.[373] As Giuliana Iannaccaro suggests, the text's title is already more evocative than the other narratives' titles (2014: 205). The action of the story is actually a voyage: the first-person narrator sets out to reach Umtata, the capital of the former Republic of the Transkei,[374] from Soweto. While travelling, he re-interprets two historical events, thus discarding the official, colonial version of history:[375] he reimagines the Mfecane,[376] through the device of lyrical compositions, and the Cattle Killing prophecy,[377] through a story-within-a-story. His two historical visions are functional to a critique of coeval South Africa, and in particular of the ethnic fragmentation encouraged by apartheid's creation of homelands. He thus links the events of the 1820s and 1850s to post-Soweto South Africa with a "remarkable temporal finesse" (Wenzel 2008: 148). The structure of the short story, therefore, is far from linear and straightforward since it encompasses various re-tellings of South African history, expressed through a mixture of different genres and prose styles.

At this point, it may be worth quoting a passage from Benjamin's essay on storytelling, upon which Ndebele, Kirkwood, and Vaughan all based their critical responses to Matshoba's short fiction in the pages of *Staffrider*. Benjamin explicitly distinguishes the "craftmanship" of oral narration from the modern genre of the short story:

> We have witnessed the evolution of the "short story", which has removed itself from oral tradition and no longer permits that slow piling one on top of the other of thin, transparent layers which constitutes the most appropriate picture of the way in which the perfect narrative is revealed through the layers of a variety of retellings. (Benjamin [1936] 1968: 92)

[373] The excerpt published in *Staffrider* from "Three Days in the Land of the Dying Illusion" reports only the narrator's voyage by train and the conversation between his fellow travellers and a Xhosa woman, while the most experimental literary passages are tellingly left out (see Matshoba 1979b: 17-20).
[374] The first (and the largest) of the 'bantustans' or 'homelands' to be granted 'independence' in 1976, the Republic of the Transkei was incorporated into the present-day Eastern Cape Province in 1994.
[375] The narrator sets out to correct the "instructional voices" of Bantu Education by telling his own version of Nongqawuse's story (Matshoba 1979c: 164). The critique of Bantu Education and of the school and university system under apartheid thus represents a *fil rouge* linking Matshoba's oeuvre to Essop's.
[376] The Mfecane names the pattern of migrations of multiple ethnic groups in the decades following the expansion of the Zulu kingdom under Shaka after 1820. See Davis (1997: 101).
[377] In 1856, the young Xhosa prophetess Nongqawuse, claiming to report a message from the ancestors, drove the Xhosa population to destroy their cattle so that the ancestors could rise from the dead and drive the white settlers into the sea, according to the prophecy. Herbert Dhlomo also imaginatively reconstructs the Cattle Killing Movement in his play *The Girl Who Killed To Save (Nongqause the Liberator)* (1936). See Giuliana Iannaccaro's paper, "The Story of Nongqawuse in South African Twentieth-Century Fiction" (2014), which discusses in detail the fictional treatment of Nongqawuse's story by Mda, Magona, and Matshoba. See also Davis 1997; Wenzel 2008.

Benjamin's essay "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov" was first published in 1936 in the magazine *Orient und Okzident*, but translated into English only in 1968. Its belated circulation in the anglophone world, together with the historicist, Marxist perspective adopted by several South African universities in the wake of the first History Workshop at the University of the Witwatersrand in 1977, may account for the fact that Ndebele, Kirkwood, and Vaughan all lean on Benjamin for their readings of Matshoba's *Call Me Not a Man* between 1984 and 1988.[378] The popularisation of South African history interested both the Wits History Workshop and Ravan press, led by Kirkwood, who repeatedly foregrounded the importance of collective editorial decisions (Le Roux 2020: 41). The collective dimension of experience appears also in the essay by Benjamin, who laments the loss of oral storytelling, which has evolved into the short story, as the source of collective wisdom in modern age (see also White 2017: 8). Ultimately, "The Storyteller" probably represented, for scholars like Ndebele, Kirkwood, and Vaughan, a Marxist sophisticated interpretative lens for a non-anthropological reading of Matshoba's oral-style stories, in the sense that it does not link orality with essentialist views of Africa (see Kiguru 2020: 42-43).[379]

Benjamin's image of the "slow piling" of various layers of retellings can be certainly applied to the narrative structure of "Three Days in the Land of a Dying Illusion". It would be more correct, however, to speak of Matshoba's stories as "an interpenetration of individually written short fictional and communal storytelling modes", which inhabit a "generic space somewhere between the two" (Sole 2011: 104). It is worth pointing out that Matshoba's re-interpretation of historical events to comment on coeval South Africa using the modern, written genre of the short story within the frame of orality did not abandon him after the publication of *Call Me Not a Man* in 1979. More than a decade later, in 1992, Matshoba wrote a short story for the ANC-mouthpiece magazine *Mayibuye* that used the same stylistic devices.[380] He re-writes and re-imagines the very historical myth he elaborates on in "A Pilgrimage to the Isle of Makana" and, to a lesser extent, "Three Days in the Days of the Dying Illusion". As the title suggests, the short story "The Return of Nxele" focuses on the historical figure of Makhanda, or Nxele, a Xhosa diviner who led the Battle of Grahamstown (recently renamed Makhanda) in 1819 and was subsequently imprisoned on Robben Island – the Isle of Makana.[381] He drowned while trying to escape, but, according to the legend, promised to come back and lead the

[378] The Wits History Workshop followed in the footsteps of the Oxford History Workshop launched a year earlier in 1976 (Bonner 1994: 978). An article published in the *History Workshop Journal* in 1987, for instance, repeatedly refers to Benjamin's concepts and to his essay "The Storyteller" (see Taussig 1987).

[379] It is interesting to notice that also Wicomb discusses the above-quoted passage from Benjamin's "The Storyteller" in her essay "South African Short Fiction and Orality" (2001).

[380] For a discussion of "The Return of Nxele", see Wenzel (2009: 158-160).

[381] The first voice heard by Nongqawuse during the vision of the narrator in "Three Days" claims that two decades have passed since the ancestors spoke to the Xhosa people through Makhanda and that "two decades they have waited for Nxele to return from the island of banishment to lead them once more against the usurpers of the land" (Matshoba 1979c: 168).

Black people against the colonial usurpers.[382] Matshoba re-reads these past events against the backdrop of Mandela's release from his twenty-seven-year imprisonment, including for a long stretch on Robben Island: Makhanda becomes Mandela, in an equation that Matshoba had already prefigured in "A Pilgrimage to the Isle of Makana".[383]

Matshoba's post-1990 narrative typically begins with a proverb, functional to the explanation of the core message of the story: "[the] Xhosa saying, 'Ukuza kukaNxele', which means 'the return of Nxele', as well as something that will never happen, is directly linked to the imprisonment of black leaders on Robben Island" (Matshoba 1992: 42). The third-person narrator then shifts to an oral storytelling mode to recount the life of the Xhosa leader – the text is replete with oral markers such as "it is said that", "the elders say" (42). Towards the end of the narrative, the first-person communal narrator makes his appearance to establish covert links between Makhanda's exemplary story and Mandela's release from Robben Island:

> That is why there was joy and ululation among the maidens of Africa, when the voices of our leaders rose above the persecution and the sorrow, saying, "*Mayibu-u-ye*!".
> For, indeed, their call shall be fulfilled. Before they precede us to take their places in Makhanda's council, we shall have won. (Matshoba 1992: 43)

The narrator thus adopts a rather formal register and prophetic tone, similarly to certain passages in "Three Days in the Land of the Dying Illusion" (see Iannaccaro 2014: 208). As is evident from the above-quoted passage, the first-person narrator never resorts to the singular pronoun, but rather uses the collective form 'we', thus establishing a direct link between Makhanda, Mandela, and the whole Black South African community.

5.5 Fables of Fragmentation: Essop's Two Post-Apartheid Collections

Matshoba's short-story writing style, which serves his mythical "reconstruction of history", remains thus consistent throughout the late Seventies and the early Nineties (Davis 2003: 102). The same cannot be said for Essop's short-fiction oeuvre, which shows significant changes from his apartheid-era collections to his later ones.[384] Essop's works ascribe to the category of South African Indian writing and partially try to reconstruct the history of the Indian community in South Africa (see Chetty 1999: 277). This endeavour also characterises the fictional works of South African Indian authors

[382] As is the case with *Staffrider*, Matshoba's story is accompanied by an illustration that clearly shows Makhanda as he "clung to a rock" amidst the sea and "waved them on to tell the people that he would return to lead them in battle", as Matshoba has it (1992: 43).
[383] This equation is anticipated and made clear by the short story's subtitle: "a tale of how Makhanda has at last come back from Robben Island" (Matshoba 1992: 42).
[384] Essop's "value system" and "aesthetic approach" change so much from his apartheid to his post-1994 fiction that it could be considered as if written by two different authors, according to Rastogi (2008a: 246).

such as Achmat Dangor, Ronnie Govender, and Sam Agnes. For instance, at the beginning of the introduction to her collection of short stories *Jesus is Indian and Other Stories* (1989), Sam Agnes states that "the history of Indians in South Africa was suppressed", before devolving the remaining ten pages of the introduction to a detailed, factual discussion of the history of the Indian South African community (Agnes [1989] 1994: 1). As we have seen in the first part of this chapter, Essop's stories function as "mirrors on the life of the Indian community" (Chetty 1999: 277), a trait inextricably linked with the genre of the short-story cycle. While *The Hajji and Other Stories* imaginatively represents a 'South African Indian identity' that is often aligned with the Black community, this sense of belonging starts to fade away in *Noorjehan* and is wholly deconstructed in *The King of Hearts and Other Stories* (1997) and *Narcissus and Other Stories* (2002). In fact, the short-story cycle genre is intrinsically built upon two opposing principles: cohesion and fragmentation (Davis 2001: 324). As Sue Marais reminds us, the sense of community conveyed by certain short-story collections – such as *Call Me Not a Man* and *The Hajji and Other Stories* – is itself a "fictional construct": "the ostensible reality to which such a regionalism refers is premised not only or innocently upon a clearly defined sense of place and period, but frequently also upon a distinct ethnic or cultural identity, a creation of apartheid – itself based on an elaborate fiction" (Marais 1992: 45).[385] As a result, short-story collections can also convey a sense of fragmentation and un-belonging, all the more if they deal with a diasporic community that is situated in the interstices of the black-and-white dichotomy of apartheid such as the Indian South African community.

In fact, Ahmed Essop had already included a tale of unbelonging in *The Hajji and Other Stories*, a collection that otherwise underlines the communal aspect of life both among Hindi and Muslim Indians and in Indian-African relationships, as we have seen. In "The Commandment", Essop writes the story of the ironically named Moses, a Black man doing all sorts of odd jobs in the Indian yard in Fordsburg (Adendorff 1985: 92). The man seems completely integrated in the community to the point that he speaks Gujarati fluently. When the police order him to relocate to the Transkei, the Indian community helps him until a week before his relocation:

> During the final week Moses no longer slept but paced all night in the yard, talking, talking, and sometimes banging on a tin drum until our nerves became brittle. And then a queer thing happened to us. We began to hate him. Vague fears were aroused in us, as though he were exposing us to somebody or something, involving us in a conspiracy – he spoke our language – threatening our existence. […]. We wanted to get rid of him as of some unclean thing. (Essop [1978] 2004: 77-78)

[385] Apart from a constant indictment of the behaviour of Black policemen – a thematic *fil rouge* in South African Black fiction – *Call Me Not a Man* apparently presents the Black community as an integrated whole to which the narrator also belongs. Yet, such a representation of a unified Black community of which the narrator is the spokesperson is itself a fictional device, as Kelwyn Sole reminds us in a poignant critique of the claim to authenticity in Matshoba's *Call Me Not a Man* (see Sole 1993: 235-258).

After this rather uncanny turning point, the narrative ends with the discovery of Moses's corpse hanging from a door in the yard. Such a story is textual evidence of the "palpable political anger" that fuels some of Essop's narratives and enacts the complexity of identity negotiations in apartheid South Africa (Rastogi 2008a: 48). Within the macro-economy of the whole short-story cycle, the narrative strikes the reader also because it is positioned right after the story "Black and White", where "Black" actually signifies the Indian community (narrator included) living in the same yard as in "The Commandment". Essop's writing thus foregrounds a "South African manifestation of Indianness" that "disturbs the polarized racial categories of apartheid" and that changes according to the political circumstances (Rastogi 2008a: 50).

The deterioration of Indian-African relationships and the representation of the implosion of the two communities' united front is further thematised in Essop's transition-period collection *Noorjehan*, where the thematic shift goes hand in hand with a stylistic shift that prevails in Essop's two post-apartheid short-story cycles, *The King of Hearts* (1997) and *Narcissus* (2002). Indeed, the genre of the short-story cycle in South Africa tends to convey a sense of displacement and "anti-community" especially in the transition and post-apartheid periods (Marais 1992: 45).[386] Interestingly, the homodiegetic first-person narrator gradually disappears in Essop's short fiction, another signal of the growing sense of unbelonging in his short-story cycles. Positioned almost at the end of *Noorjehan*, "Full Circle", for instance, is set in the thinly fictionalised locations of Wetonia and Elysia, probably referring to the actual suburb of Rivonia and to the location of Lenasia in Johannesburg respectively.[387] The third-person narrator recounts the misadventures of two Indian activists who are persecuted twice, once for distributing a political pamphlet against the white government, and then, after "the revolution occurred" (Essop 1990: 115), for inciting the white population to rebel against the new, tyrannical Black government.[388] The invented names of the locations and characters contribute to a reading of the story as a fairy tale, an interpretation supported by the narrative's opening sentence: "Once there was a man named Captain Mason and he was in charge of State Security headquarters" (113).[389]

Essop's critique of the new power structures after the demise of apartheid further dominates his two short-story collections *The King of Hearts and Other Stories* (1997) and *Narcissus and Other*

[386] Sue Marais mentions for instance Ivan Vladislavić's *Missing Persons* (1989) and Zoë Wicomb's *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987), which will be discussed in the next chapter (see Marais 1992: 45).
[387] The name of the fictionalised version of Lenasia, Elysia, reverberates with the mythological connotations of the Elysian Fields.
[388] The short story "Home-Coming", which follows "Full Circle", similarly describes with disillusionment the end of apartheid.
[389] We have already encountered the use of the fairy-tale conventions in South African short stories in Peter Abrahams's "Mister Death" in *Dark Testament*.

Stories (2002).[390] The failure of the rainbow nation is thus thematised first and foremost as xenophobia from the new government against the Indian community, in particular the Muslim community, and more in general against those inhabiting "in-between states" (Rastogi 2008a: 139). At the same time, Essop takes issue with the general corruption of the new nation, often representing corrupt Indian officials. While some of the characters from his earlier narratives recur in the new short-story cycles, the aesthetics of the two post-1994 volumes changes significantly and signals new-found ethical concerns. In particular, Essop gradually abandons the detailed realism – linked to the representation of regional communities, as we have seen – and poignant irony of his earlier fiction and moves to a gloomier mood and to a symbolical and allegorical style, often adopting the "genre of fantasy" and the literary conventions of fairy tales as anticipated in "Full Circle" from *Noorjehan* (Rastogi 2008a: 143). The opening of the title story "The King of Hearts" of the 1997 collection, for instance, reads as follows:

> It is related that there was once, in the antiquity of time and the passage of the age and the moment, a surgeon whose name was Alexander King. He was the most compassionate surgeon of his time. […]. Flowers and perfumes he loved and he surrounded himself with their loveliness at all times. Dr King was the principal heart surgeon at the Starlight Hospital in the port city of Tarsis at the southern end of the state of Saturnia. (Essop 1997: 1)

The fairy-tale style is the most visible formal quality of the short story, set in the fictional nation of Saturnia and built on a metaphor (Rastogi 2008a: 142): the country needs a heart transplant to heal from the ethnic division between the settlers in power, the Saturnians, and the colonised Sircons.[391] "The Pagans" in *Narcissus* similarly stages South Africa's ethnic divisions through the means of a political allegory.

It is interesting to notice that the post-1990 short fiction by Nadine Gordimer equally abandons the stark realism of her earlier collections and gives way to moral fables and political allegories, such as "Once Upon a Time", published in *Jump and Other Stories* (1991), and the eponymous "Loot" of *Loot and Other Stories* (2003), whose opening sentence famously begins by adhering to the generic conventions of fairy tales: "Once upon our time, there was an earthquake" (Gordimer 1999: 104).[392] As Vivek Santayana notices (2019: 91-93), the stories in Gordimer's most recent collections, *Loot* (2003) and *Beethoven Was One Sixteenth Black* (2007), blend different narrative modes within a single short-story cycle, including realism, moral fable, political allegory, and postmodern

[390] Essop's most recent short-story cycles also testify to the changed publishing scene in South Africa: only three of the stories were previously published in a magazine ("Wisteria, "The Silk Scarf", and "The Banquet" from *The King of Hearts*, all published in *New Contrast*). Essop's most recent narratives are indeed much longer than his previous stories.
[391] The historical reference is obviously to the first-ever heart transplant performed by South African Dr Christiaan Barnard in 1967.
[392] The first version of "Once Upon a Time" originally appeared in 1989 in the South African magazine *Weekly Mail*, while "Loot" was first published in *The New Yorker* in 1999.

metafiction, as is the case with Ahmed Essop. Next to moral fables like "The King of Hearts" in *King of Hearts and Other Stories*, for instance, readers encounter realist short stories like "The Banquet" *and* metafictional narratives that blur the line between the real and the invented, such as "The Novel", where the first-person narrator Ahmed has to persuade a local gangster that he is not the character of the gangster Gool from the narrator's (and Essop's) novella *The Visitation*. The dialogue between the two characters is centred around literature, realism, and the politics of representation:

> 'You should know my novel is not about real people. I don't use their names.'
> 'They are real. You are writing about this place, our place. We all live here.' (Essop 1997: 72)

The self-reflexive concern of "The Novel" and the above quoted excerpt are highly reminiscent of a short story by another South African-born writer: Zoë Wicomb's "A Trip to the Gifberge" from *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987), published a decade before *The King of Hearts*.[393] In his later short-story collections, therefore, Essop goes beyond the realistic representation of cross sections of the life of the Indian community in Fordsburg (mainly in *The Hajji and Other Stories*) and Lenasia (in *Noorjehan and Other Stories*). Indeed, his style and narrative choices embrace a closer attention to the textuality of reality, symbolism, and the fairy tale – which in turn reflect a new-found preoccupation towards the post-apartheid rainbow nation and a dismemberment of a communal feeling, both in general terms and in the particular declination of Indianness. In the use of the genre of the short-story cycle and in the aesthetic and ethical concerns of his most recent collections, Essop draws closer to writers such as Ivan Vladislavić and Zoë Wicomb (see also Rastogi 2008a: 141). The protean quality of his short fiction thus sheds light, through the formal characteristics of the short-story cycle and its intrinsic duality, on the "conflicting tendencies in South African society towards community and separateness, or *eenheid* and *apartheid*" (Marais 1992: 55).

By focussing on the formal traits of the short-story genre, and particularly on its intrinsic duality, the present chapter has compared the short fiction by Mtutuzeli Matshoba and Ahmed Essop to consider how their aesthetic choices try to come to terms with their ethical concerns. A discussion of the common centripetal forces in *Call Me Not a Man* on the one hand, and *The Hajji and Other Stories* and *Noorjehan and Other Stories* on the other has highlighted several thematic and formal macro-similarities between the short-story collections of the two writers, first of all the shared choice of genre – similarities that might be overlooked in the polarised debate around 'protest' vis-à-vis 'imaginative' literature in South Africa. Thus, the presence of first-person communal narrators, the thematic and formal representation of local print media, a certain storytelling patina, the claim to

[393] Compare the above-quoted excerpt from "The Novel" with the dialogue between Frieda Shenton, narrator and fictional author, and her mother in "A Trip to the Gifberge": "'But they're only stories. Made up. Everyone knows it's not real, not the truth.' 'But you've used the real. If I can recognise places and people, so can others […]'" (Wicomb [1987] 2000: 172).

authenticity, and the importance of locale and communities are significant aesthetic and ethical concerns of the collections by both Matshoba and Essop (though declined in different ways in *The Hajji* and *Noorjehan*). At the same time, the difference at both the level of content and form between the two writers' short fiction is undeniable, since each collection has its own specificities and its own interplay and balance of centripetal and centrifugal forces.

As far as Matshoba is concerned, the role of the first-person protagonist(s)-narrator(s) dominates the whole collection, whose oral matrix and seemingly factual texture depend directly on Matshoba's narratorial choices – which have sparked a critical debate on the pages of *Staffrider* based on Benjamin's notion of the storyteller. Yet, narratives such as "Three Days in the Land of the Dying Illusion" or even the allegedly arch-realist short story "A Glimpse of Slavery" testify to Matshoba's stylistic traits and imaginative vein. His stories are a direct response to Black Consciousness and to the socio-political events of the late Seventies and Eighties in South Africa, but should not necessarily be dismissed as such. In fact, Matshoba's authoritative narrative voice, his proverbs and didacticism, the tendency to write long short stories, the use of realism, and the incorporation of different genres within a short story, following Mutloatse's notion of the proemdra, all suggest a continuity between the short fiction by Herbert Dhlomo and Matshoba's short stories, which cannot be read and interpreted merely as a response to Black Consciousness. The highly autobiographical construction of the narrative persona further links Matshoba with a tradition of Black autobiographical writing in South Africa, first developed by Peter Abrahams and Es'kia Mphahlele, and later by Can Themba.

The short-story cycles *The Hajji and Other Stories* and *Noorjehan and Other Stories* by Essop each present interesting common traits with *Call Me Not a Man*. Yet, both collections also try to articulate the complicated negotiations of 'Indianness' in South Africa, and they anticipate subtly Essop's later style, as a close reading of "The Commandment" from *The Hajji* and "Full Circle" from *Noorjehan* has attempted to show. Indeed, Essop's post-apartheid short-story writing partially abandons former claims to authenticity and plays closer attention to the textuality of reality, whereas Matshoba's own typical style remains stable, as a close reading of "The Return of Nxele" has suggested. Interestingly, the protean quality of Essop's short fiction partially follows the same trajectory as Gordimer's: from the realist politicised content and the (sometimes metafictional) incorporation of newspaper articles in both *Noorjehan* and *A Soldier's Embrace* to the fable-like quality of many stories in *The King of Hearts and Other Stories* and *Loot and Other Stories*. It is worth noticing Essop's refusal of claims to authenticity, which have marked in different ways the short stories encountered to this point: Rolfes and Herbert Dhlomo, Peter Abrahams, Can Themba, Mtutuzeli Matshoba, and, perhaps less explicitly so, Alex La Guma. In his more mature phase, Essop

thus aligns himself with writers such as Ivan Vladislavić and Zoë Wicomb, whose oeuvre always foregrounds the gaps and fissures of reality and of realist writing.

6. Beyond South Africa and the Politics of Authenticity: The Textuality of Reality in Zoë Wicomb's Two Short-Story Cycles

One year after the publication of Njabulo Ndebele's essay on the "rediscovery of the ordinary" and the proclamation of the state of emergency by South Africa's then State President, P. W. Botha in 1986, Zoë Wicomb's first book of fiction, *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, appeared in print – with Virago Press in London and Pantheon in the United States. That year, 1987, also saw J. M. Coetzee deliver his famous, provocative speech on the discourses of history and fiction in South Africa, "The Novel Today", at the Weekly Mail Book Fair in Cape Town.[394] The late 1980s thus saw the last, violent blows of the apartheid state on the one hand, and a surge of innovative theoretical discussions of literature – and of experimental literary works – by South African writers on the other. Among these, works such as Wicomb's *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* and Ivan Vladislavić's *Missing Persons* (1989) put into practice the new critical debate in South African letters and anticipated South Africa's transition to democracy, which began publicly in 1990.

The literary debate in 1980s South Africa is built on the intertwining concepts of ethics and aesthetics. Ndebele, imagining "the way in which South African literature might possibly develop", reminds his audience that "the problems of the South African social formation are complex and all embracing" insomuch that they cannot be reduced to the single formulation of the "spectacular" that characterised Black fiction up to that time (1986: 156). He famously calls for a "rediscovery of the ordinary", by which he means "a range of complex ethical issues […] destined to find their way into our literature, making it more complex and richer" (156). Ndebele laments the "danger of a single story", to quote Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009), and draws attention to the complexity of human experience. Ndebele's intervention envisages a new scenario for South Africa, where a "new literature" becomes functional to the formation of a "new society" (156-157). Coetzee's "The Novel Today", similarly provocative, asserts the right of fiction to "rival" the mainstream discourse of history to represent reality, even in the highly politicised 1980s South Africa (1988: 3). By exposing the discursive nature of history, he, like Ndebele, foregrounds the need for fiction to avoid one-sidedness and to address the complexity of human experience instead. "The Rediscovery of the Ordinary" and "The Novel Today" partially anticipate the concerns of former ANC member Albie Sachs, voiced in his much-debated transition-era essay "Preparing Ourselves for Freedom" (1990). Here, Sachs states the limitations of so-called 'protest literature', which reproduces the "spectacle" of apartheid and the discourse of history, to invoke Ndebele and Coetzee:

[394] Andrew van der Vlies points out another interesting coincidence: the final chapter or story from Wicomb's *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, "A Trip to the Gifberge", was reprinted in the Cape Town little magazine *Upstream: A Magazine of the Arts* in the same 1988 issue in which Coetzee's "The Novel Today" was published (Van der Vlies 2012a: 21-22).

> Instead of getting real criticism, we get solidarity criticism. […]. The range of themes is narrowed down so much that all that is funny or curious or genuinely tragic in the world is extruded. Ambiguity and contradiction are completely shut out, and the only conflict permitted is that between the old and the new, as if there were only bad in the past and only good in the future. (Sachs [1990] 1991: 187).

The first part of the present chapter aims to discuss Zoë Wicomb's collection of short stories, *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987), in light of these considerations and with a particular focus on its generic features. It enacts – and partially anticipates – the need for complexity, ambiguity, and contradiction envisaged by Ndebele, Coetzee, and Sachs (see also van der Vlies 2018b: 19).[395] In one of the very first interviews that she gave (in 1990 with Eva Hunter), Wicomb herself spoke of the non-linearity of her first collection of short stories:

> If I *am* grasping around for something fixed and orderly, the gaps *between* the stories at the same time undermine coherence. I think it's important to have chaos on the page, an alternative to the camouflage of coherence that socio-political structures are about. (Hunter 1993: 92; emphasis in original)

Wicomb's oeuvre, indeed, plays host to a whimsical, carefully built "rivalry" between the discourses of history and of fiction (Coetzee 1988: 3). In particular, *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* (to quote Wicomb again) "flirt[s]" with the autobiographical genre (Hunter 1993: 93). The writer thus positions herself in a tradition of Black fictional autobiographical writing in South Africa, exemplified in the works of Peter Abrahams, Can Themba, and Mtutuzeli Matshoba, to name a few, only to disrupt it.[396] As the title of this chapter suggest, I intend to foreground the literary strategies through which Wicomb questions and refuses the notion of authenticity, pervasive in Black South African short stories until the Eighties, in her short fiction.[397] In her later interview with Stephan Meyer and Thomas Olver, she would invoke the power of fiction to destabilise notions of truth-telling, for "it's narrative fiction itself that lends itself to questioning the notion of the truth, and has the capacity for showing truth as a complex, many-sided, contingent thing" (Meyer and Olver 2002: 194).

The second part of this chapter aims to analyse Wicomb's most recent collection of short stories, *The One That Got Away*. Published in 2008 with the South African Random House imprint Umuzi,

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[395] Wicomb's work has been repeatedly approached referring to Ndebele's "Rediscovery of the Ordinary". See, for instance, Driver (2017: 16-18).

[396] As Gaylard suggests, Wicomb's writing "echoes certain trends in black South African fiction" while at the same time "it marks a point of departure" (Gaylard 2008: 297). See also Oliphant (1996) and Fasselt et al. (2020: 11-14) for continuities in South African short fiction that go against the rhetoric of post-apartheid rupture. See for instance the dialogue reported by Frieda between two women on the bus in "You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town", which echoes certain passages of *Call Me Not a Man*, or the storytelling quality of the first part of "A Fair Exchange". Both stories, however, need to be re-read as Frieda's own literary output.

[397] In her interview with Hunter, Wicomb directly addresses the issue of the expectations of authenticity in fictional writings by Black women: "It's as if all that is expected of us is the authentic experience. […] women, it is felt, have something to complain about, they're going to tell us about their authentic grievances, and that's where its value lies, which of course is very irritating and links up with solidarity criticism" (Hunter 1993: 93-94). Wicomb's disapproval of solidarity criticism echoes Sachs's ([1990] 1991: 187).

it also incorporates three stories Wicomb had published individually in the Nineties.[398] *The One That Got Away* therefore deals not only with post-apartheid and post-2000 concerns: the past and present keep informing each other. Indeed, *The One That Got Away* presents relatively new themes such as the negotiation of queer identities – which seems to confirm a pattern in much post-apartheid short fiction since it destabilises the rhetoric of national family (see Van der Vlies 2019: 195; Fasselt et al. 2020).[399] Yet, Wicomb's most recent collection also reiterates some of the main thematic concerns of the earlier work. Through a close reading of a selection of stories from *The One That Got Away*, I aim to pinpoint some formal and thematic characteristics of post-apartheid South African short fiction, and discuss the literary strategies through which Wicomb shapes the relationship between ethics and aesthetics in her most recent short-story cycle. Ultimately, an analysis of her short stories allows for interesting comparisons with past and contemporary South African short-story writers, but at the same time it invites readers to question the idea of a national canon and to eschew the constraints of South Africa, following Wicomb's own transnational writing practice.

Wicomb's fiction is always stirred by an ethical imperative. Nonetheless, or better because of that, her texts are also highly enjoyable from an aesthetic point of view.[400] Evidence of the entangled relationship between ethics and aesthetics in Wicomb's oeuvre are also the many critical essays she wrote on literature (other writers' and, rarely, her own), culture, and politics, with particular (albeit non-exclusive) focus on the 'coloured condition' in South Africa. In the introduction to his edited collection of Wicomb's essays, *Race, Nation, Translation: South African Essays, 1990-2013* (2018), Andrew van der Vlies remarks that

> her critical work since 1990 offers brave and unstinting critique of the dangers of the hegemonic discourses of a new postapartheid nationalism – one not necessarily black African but occasionally uncompromising in its unwillingness to countenance the subtleties of a culturally, racially, and linguistically heterogeneous country, one whose complexities Wicomb charts so strikingly in her own fiction. (2018b: 4)

Wicomb's essays, therefore, complement her fiction, and vice versa, in the same way as Herbert Dhlomo's newspaper articles enrich the reading of his creative works.[401] Wicomb's "illuminating"

[398] "In the Botanic Gardens" appeared in *Landfall* in 1990 and was later included in *The End of a Regime: An Anthology of Scottish-South African Writing Against Apartheid* edited by Brian Filling and Susan Stuart (1991); "Another Story" was published in the anthology *Colours of a New Day* edited by Sarah Lefanu and Stephen Hayward in 1991; "N2" appeared in *Stand* in 1999.

[399] See for instance the several contemporary queer rewritings of Can Themba's "The Suit" discussed in chapter four. Wicomb published a short story in *Wasafiri* in 2009, "In Search for Tommie", which features a queer protagonist. See Van der Vlies 2011.

[400] See one of the first domestic reviews of *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, published by Annamarié van Niekerk in *Staffrider* in 1990: "This combination of relations is in complex interaction, generating stories which are not only aesthetically pleasing, but also socially and historically sensitive" (van Niekerk 1990: 95).

[401] Van der Vlies further reminds readers that Wicomb's engagement is not unique among South African authors: writers like Mphahlele, Nkosi, Gordimer, Coetzee, and Ndebele have also published collections of essays alongside their fiction (2018b: 4).

essay (to quote Driver [2017: 18]) "Setting, Intertextuality and the Resurrection of the Postcolonial Author" (2005) will be particularly useful for the ensuing discussion of the stories. Indeed, this essay is an invaluable interpretative tool for a reading of her whole fictional oeuvre, but especially of her short stories. As the title suggests, it analyses the role of setting and intertextuality, or rather setting *as* intertextuality, in other postcolonial writers' and Wicomb's own fiction. Unsurprisingly, both place and intertextuality are indeed two of the main internal linking patterns around which *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* and *The One That Got Away* revolve. Wicomb bends the short-story form, experimenting with its generic boundaries, in similar yet slightly different ways in the two collections – "repeated, refashioned", the narrator from the short story "There's the Bird That Never Flew" might say (2008: 76). She thus refuses any notion of a monolithic 'truth' and engages readers in a challenging yet extremely rewarding act of reading.

6.1 Ethical and Aesthetical Concerns: The Importance of Setting

Born in 1948, the year apartheid was institutionalised, in Little Namaqualand in the Northern Cape, Zoë Wicomb, categorised by the nationalist regime as 'coloured', grew up in an Afrikaans-speaking Griqua community. She studied English literature at the coloured University of the Western Cape, but left for the United Kingdom in 1973, where she continued her education, started teaching, and joined the anti-apartheid movement. After a brief return to the Cape in 1991, she settled permanently in Glasgow (Sichermann 2000: 193-194). Her fictional works include, in chronological order, *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987), the novels *David's Story* (2000) and *Playing in the Light* (2006), *The One That Got Away* (2008), and the novels *October* (2014) and *Still Life* (2020).

Wicomb, who thus joins the multitude of South African émigré intellectuals who write about South Africa from an 'outsider' perspective, is acutely aware of her position. This awareness, in fact, constitutes the starting point of her essay "Setting, Intertextuality and the Resurrection of the Postcolonial Author", where Wicomb turns to her own situation as a "writer living in Scotland whose fictions are set in South Africa" (Wicomb [2005] 2018: 238). Wicomb's fictional works are mostly set in her native country, yet increasingly more space is given to the representation of the United Kingdom, and particularly Scotland. The "compulsion" to write about her birthplace constitutes for Wicomb a "tyranny of place", a phrase she borrows from her fellow countryman Es'kia Mphahlele ([2005] 2018: 230). She resorts to this same expression in at least two other instances, thus bearing witness to the centrality that she bestows on the idea of place in fiction (see Hunter 1993: 87; Meyer and Olver 2002: 182). In "Setting, Intertextuality and the Resurrection of the Postcolonial Author", Wicomb adopts Kaja Silverman's concept of "proprioceptivity", defined as the body's sensation of occupying a point in space, the subject's sense of being in an "imagined spatial envelope" (Wicomb

[2005] 2018: 239). Also due to her personal experience, Wicomb is able to examine and question the key concept of belonging, thoroughly linked to one's proprioceptivity or perception of place. The representation of her characters, who for the most part also have to deal with movements between South Africa and Great Britain, invites readers to reflect on the instability of the notions of identity and belonging (Attridge 2017: 14).[402] These issues, which are never resolved and always complicated by the author, echo her essay "Shame and Identity: The Case of the Coloured in South Africa" (1998), where she criticises the idea of location linked to the construction of coloured identity. At the end of this 1998 essay, she advocates an engagement with the "multiple belongings" of each individual, rather than to a single sense of belonging (Wicomb [1998] 2018: 127).[403] Through her use of setting in fiction she tries to encourage the reader to the same engagement.

The pivotal aspect of place in Wicomb's fiction is confirmed also by a volume of critical essays published in 2017 and edited by Kai Easton and Derek Attridge, *Zoë Wicomb and the Translocal. Writing Scotland and South Africa*. It focuses on another aspect of place in her oeuvre which is worth underlying, the "trans-local" – "trans" meaning 'across' and 'beyond'. Even when setting appears to be a symbol of centrality or cosmopolitanism, such as Glasgow's city centre, it is still rendered through a local perspective that denies or revises its centrality. Wicomb is not only mainly concerned with the local, however, but with the "translocal", defined as "spatial interactions within and across spaces that reveal, generate, confirm and disturb relations between character and place, saturating spaces with meanings brought into being by different perspectives, discourses, events and behaviour" (Driver 2017: 17).[404] Through this concept of the translocal, of spaces overlapping and separating, the reader is offered glimpses of the history of exploitation and emigration, such as the colonisation of South Africa by Scottish missionaries and settlers (2017: 14). Here the concept of setting conceived of as intertextuality returns, showing how places themselves are relational and how this in turn renders them productive in terms of new meanings.

Indeed, according to Wicomb, the role of the *mise en scène* goes beyond enhancing the verisimilitude of the narration or supplementing character description, since setting is "crucially bound up with a culture and its dominant ideologies". Therefore, "setting functions much like intertextuality", and both provide the text with a further layer of interpretation (Wicomb [2005] 2018: 229). The peculiarities of certain settings offer "ready-made, recognisable meanings" that are

[402] "Why do I find it so hard to speak to those who claim me as their own?", the protagonist of *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* asks herself (Wicomb [1987] 2000: 94).
[403] Wicomb takes issue with Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity and inbetweenness in both "Shame and Identity" ([1998] 2018: 124) and "Setting, Intertextuality and the Resurrection of the Postcolonial Author" ([2005] 2018: 240).
[404] A similar concern with place is to be found in what Katie Gramich calls the "politics of location" in Gordimer's oeuvre: "Nadine Gordimer's fiction has revealed a constant preoccupation with the politics of location, with the meaning of landscape and belonging, with the intersections of race, gender and identity, and with the utopian possibility of a shared place" (Gramich 2005: 74).

challenged by the postcolonial text (231); the reader is asked to engage with new meanings in what Wicomb calls the "transformative effect of intertextuality" (231). It is at this point that the South African-born writer reverses one of Roland Barthes's most incisive theories: intertextuality, "far from implying a Barthesian death" of the author, is the *sine qua non* of the postcolonial author's "resurrection", Wicomb argues (238). If postcolonial writers ironically and subversively depart from certain settings' dominant colonial ideology, a fissure, a gap is created; it is precisely in these fissures that the author finds his/her place in fiction again, in a "symbiotic" rather than hierarchical relationship with the reader (236). Wicomb's intertextual strategy follows her translocal practice: alongside a number of South African intertexts, she also inserts into her works direct and indirect quotations from canonical and lesser known British and American, especially African American, writers.[405] Wicomb's "wide range of allusive and intertextual conversation" is thus functional to a foregrounding of the "hybrid nature of culture" (Van der Vlies 2018b: 17). Wicomb's own translocal position as a South African writer living in Scotland, ultimately, provides her with a unique perspective.[406] By closing my dissertation with an 'outsider' and transnational writer such as Wicomb, I also seek to move beyond the 'national box' that delimits the scope of my thesis and to invite readers to question, as she does, any kind of hegemonic discourse and orthodoxy.

If setting and intertextuality represent two major concerns throughout the writer's oeuvre, they become magnified in her two collections of short stories, since both are formed by semi-autonomous narratives that defy the unity of the novel and thus allow for the representation of different settings, different proprioceptivities, and different intertexts within a single work. As we have seen in the previous chapter on the short-story cycles of Matshoba and Essop, place is one of the main elements of the genre. In the context of the segregated space of apartheid South Africa, moreover, setting acquires a further layer of meaning. Wicomb, however, transforms the function of location in her two short-story cycles: it becomes the place, metaphorically speaking, for the negotiation of the tension between unity and difference inherent to short-story cycles.

You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town is composed of ten interconnected stories, set between Namaqualand and Cape Town, which narrate the coming of age and the artistic development of the coloured protagonist and narrator Frieda Shenton. Published twenty-one years later, *The One That Got Away* presents twelve loosely connected narratives, recounted by various heterodiegetic narrators, that take place between South Africa and Scotland and sometimes feature recurring

[405] The transatlantic, intertextual connection between African American and non-white South African writers represents an element of continuity in South African literary history. Wicomb often refers to the work of Toni Morrison, particularly in her novels *Playing in the Light* and *October*.

[406] Several critical studies discuss the issue of cosmopolitanism when analysing Wicomb's literary texts. See, for instance, the articles in the special issue of *Safundi* titled "Zoë Wicomb, the Cape & the Cosmopolitan" (2011); Driver 2011; Samuelson 2017.

characters. While *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* seems to reinforce the illusion of national unity through its novel-like structure,[407] *The One That Got Away*, published in the year of the resignation of South Africa's then-president Thabo Mbeki, apparently refuses any notion of coherence and cohesion. Yet, these polarised readings fail to account for the subtle and nuanced ways in which Wicomb re-works the conventions of the short story cycle and defies the readers' horizon of expectations in both collections. Thus, the protagonist of *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* reveals in the last story, "A Trip to the Gifberge", that she is actually the author of the stories we are reading, while patterns of cohesion can be identified even in *The One That Got Away*: the tension between unity and difference can be found in both short-story cycles.

Place, in particular, has been often considered as a possible unifying criterium of the two collections. If Julika Griem sees the "main pattern" of *The One That Got Away* in "the bipolar organization of a diegetic space oscillating between South Africa and Glasgow" (2011: 394), Dorothy Driver identifies the small change in locations of the 1987 collection as a unifying continuity (2010: 531). Indeed, unity of place, together with the chronological time sequence and the presence of a single main character, has been described as one of the main centripetal forces in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* (Marais 1995: 34). Since the plot mainly follows Frieda's development, the setting complies with the temporal sequence: Frieda's movements to and from her home settlement respond to the chronological progression of events home-Cape Town-self-exile-home. As Cóilín Parsons observes, little critical notice has been taken of the spatial elements in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, since the setting of the narrative is always South Africa, and Frieda's years of exile have been left out of the collection (Parsons 2017: 63). It appears, therefore, that place functions in this book more-or-less as if the collection was a novel, merely as a frame providing a context for the character's actions – in this case, South Africa during the apartheid years.

The ten short stories can be divided into two main groups according to place: seven of them, including the first three and the last one, are set in Namaqualand; the other three take place in Cape Town. These ten episodes, therefore, are structured along a dichotomy that opposes the rural setting to the urban one (here it may be argued that Wicomb writes back to the somewhat paternalistic 'Jim-comes-to-Joburg' trope). Sue Marais points out that these apparent continuities in the book may account for the "critical confusion" with which many short-story cycles are met (1995: 42): "the above-mentioned internal linking devices, then, provide a structural cohesion which creates the impression of a continuous narrative and of a secure identity and place, an impression apparently

[407] The stories in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* present a single protagonist-narrator, are narrated chronologically, and are all set in South Africa. André Viola defined the volume a *Künstlerroman* (1989), while Eva Hunter refers to the book as a novel (1993: 80).

reinforced by the title of the collection" (34). The first feature that catches the reader's attention in a book is indeed the title, which here emphasises the experience (or the proprioceptivity) of a single place, Cape Town in South Africa. In a recent interview with Derek Attridge, however, Wicomb revealed that the collection should have been given the title of the opening story, and that the actual one was a result of her publisher's choice (Wicomb and Attridge 2017: 131).[408] This is an illuminating hint on the importance played by England, since the title of the opening story "Bowl Like Howl", as much as the entire episode, is a word play on the role of the English language in Frieda's life, who is encouraged by her parents to speak English instead of Afrikaans to acquire a higher social status.

In fact, England is never represented in the book, even though Frieda leaves South Africa for a twelve-year exile there. The omission is remarkable, particularly when one compares the apparent narrow scope of Wicomb's first collection with the extra-national, broader concerns of *The One That Got Away* (see Griem 2011: 390). When asked about her choice of leaving Britain out of the collection, Wicomb herself admitted of having deliberately avoided the years of exile, linking this choice to her biography: "my experience there [England] was about being silent. I was certainly not going to give my heroine any voice in Britain" (Hunter 1993: 87). The concept of proprioceptivity thus returns and accounts for an aesthetic choice (Parsons 2017: 58). Indeed England's presence is covertly pervasive throughout the collection and appears in almost every story through subtle references that collectively form a pattern.[409] In "Jan Klinkies", the second story of the volume, for instance, Frieda visits her father's cousin, the eponymous character, who offers a curious example of resistance against apartheid. Any overt reference to England seems to find no place here. Yet there is a passage in the text, the only one written in the present tense and with an almost lyrical style, that can be linked to Britain. When Frieda is asked by her father to clean the floor with fresh dung, she describes the whole process with several positively connoted adverbs and adjectives: "freshly", "lush", "sweet", "luxuriously", "playful", and "idle" (Wicomb [1987] 2000: 18). "The door left ajar, the freshly smeared room, just dried, suggests such lush green meadows as the cows have never seen", the narrator concludes (Wicomb [1987] 2000: 19). The "lush green meadows", impossible to find in the arid landscape of Namaqualand, have no significance in the story, but they prefigure Frieda's departure for England. It is a difficult hint to catch, especially for a reader who is not familiar with the following stories. Wicomb employs a twofold strategy when referring to Britain in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*: either England is linked to the colonial history of South Africa, as in "Bowl Like

[408] Marais (1995: 34) and Driver (2017: 19) believe the title to be misleading, because the stories focus on the rural Namaqualand community, and not on Cape Town.

[409] By using the word "pattern", I draw from Forest Ingram's seminal study on the short-story cycle, defined as a "book of short stories so linked to each other that the reader's successive experience on various levels of the pattern of the whole significantly modifies his experience of each of its component parts" (Ingram 1971:19).

Howl", or it is portrayed through a romantic, idyllic stereotype. In the next short story, "When the Train Comes", for example, the adolescent Frieda imagines the eyes of "Anglican boys, remote princes leaning from their carriages, penetrate the pumpkin-yellow of my flesh" (Wicomb [1987] 2000: 33).

It is only in "You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town" that this utopian view of England breaks, since the wished-for (and illegal, according to the Immorality Act) relationship with a white English boy, Michael, results in Frieda's unwanted pregnancy and subsequent abortion. When Michael proposes to marry in the "idyll of an English landscape", Frieda recognises the artificial quality of his stereotyped vision of "lettuce-luscious skirts crisp on a camomile lawn" (Wicomb [1987] 2000: 74). From the story "Behind the Bougainvillea" onwards, England comes to the fore only as a memory since Frieda's voyage to Britain already happened in the chronology of the fiction. The most explicit references to the years of self-exile are to be found in two flashbacks in "Behind the Bougainvillea", in which Frieda comes back to Namaqualand to visit her family. The two retrospective narrations, both tellingly set in winter, bear evidence of Frieda's negative experience of self-exile. When, back in the South African setting, her former school friend Henry asks her about the "green and peaceful" England, Frieda answers that her views are those of a "Martian":

> A crisp winter's morning cracks open to reveal a uniform world encased in fire-white frost. I pick a sprig of parsley and twirl it between my fingers. Shit, shit, shit, I shout, I have come to expect parsley to survive the English winter. I kick the stems of the plants into the frozen ground, angry as a child. (Wicomb [1987] 2000: 122)

In the last story, "A Trip to the Gifberge", England returns through a paradigmatic example of the key concepts of the translocal and of setting as intertextuality when Frieda recalls smelling beans and samp, a typical South African dish, in London:

> funny, but I could actually smell beans and samp hovering just above the petrol fumes in the streets of London. I thought of how you walk along worrying about being late, or early, or wondering where to have lunch, when your nose twitches with a teasing smell and you're transported to a place so specific and the power of the smell summons the light of that day […]. (Wicomb [1987] 2000: 168)

In this passage, Britain does not appear as opposed to South Africa; rather, the two countries overlap in Frieda's sensory experience (or proprioceptivity), in a procedure that Wicomb will repeat in the short story "Nothing Like the Wind" in *The One That Got Away*.

Setting functions like intertextuality in the sense that it is represented by Wicomb according to her character's proprioceptivity – in this case, according to Frieda's movement between the poles of exile and homecoming, in an incessant interrogation and negotiation of the notion of home. In addition, England, though never described as actual setting in which the action takes place, appears

in nine stories out of ten. As shown above, it becomes prominent first as a stereotyped, romantic construction, and then as a land in which the main character's imagined life shatters, making her feel estranged. The references to England, especially in the first stories, are almost never overtly recognisable, but they become meaningful only in the macro-economy of the whole cycle. England as setting thus creates new spaces and serves an epistemological function even in its absence, paradoxically (see Gaylard 1996: 178; Flockemann 2001: 125). This allows for a re-interpretation of setting as one of the unifying principles of *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, whose supposed unity of place is continuously undermined, and ultimately denied, by the anticipations and flashbacks of England, and by the several re-readings of the same location (be it Cape Town or Namaqualand) that Wicomb carries out in each story. As David Callenberger remarks, drawing on Michel Foucault's notion of heterotopia, both the city and the country cause Frieda's dislocation, "suggesting that all landscape is heterotopic" (Callenberger 2006: 91).[410] Setting, therefore, does allow for continuities within the collection. These, however, are not defined by the fact that action takes place in South Africa only, but rather by the more dynamic unifying principles described above, which, if more complex to detect, bring *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* closer to *The One That Got Away*, at least as far as setting is concerned.

6.2 Between South Africa and England: Intertextuality in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*

In the same way as it negates the unity of setting, *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* alerts readers to the presence of several intertexts – Driver speaks of "heteroglossia" (2010: 531) – that counter Frida's authority as narrator. By placing three epigraphs by the South African poet Arthur Nortje and by the English writer George Eliot at the beginning of the collection, Wicomb signals the role played by the two locations in her fiction, at the same time playfully hinting at her own life. The George Eliot's quotation is taken from her novel *The Mill on the Floss* (1860). The English writer is representative of the realist movement of the Victorian era. Wicomb may be suggesting her affinity with George Eliot in her adherence to the conventions of literary realism – only to deny them at the end of the book, in what Nicholas Robinette calls "experimental realism" (2014: 51). Furthermore, the fact that

[410] Heterotopia is the property of certain sites to be "in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invent the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect. […]. Heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (Foucault and Miskowiec 1986: 24-25). It is interesting to observe that Wicomb uses the same heterotopic principle when analysing the 2009 novel *Harare North* by Zimbabwean writer Brian Chikwava (Wicomb 2015). The shifting quality of locations in Gordimer's short stories has been also compared to heterotopia (see Gramich 2005: 83).

Eliot had to struggle to achieve the recognition as a woman writer in a patriarchal society, to the point of adopting a male pseudonym, anticipates Frieda's difficulties as a woman and as a writer.

The other two epigraphs belong to the South African poet Arthur Nortje, who went into exile first in Canada and then to Oxford, where he committed suicide aged twenty-seven, in 1970. His poetry gives voice to the experience of exile from the point of view of a coloured South African, and it sheds light on Frieda's own experience, too. Wicomb herself explicitly acknowledges the influence of Nortje on her work (see Hunter 1993: 82). The strongest connections between the two authors' writings come to the fore through a close reading of the lines of the epigraphs, which are drawn from the poems "Waiting" and "Immigrant". Both written in 1967, they were published in Nortje's posthumous volume of poetry *Dead Roots* (1973), and both are concerned with the experience of exile. "Don't travel beyond / Acton at noon in the intimate summer light / of England", the warning of the epigraph from "Immigrant" tellingly warns, prefiguring the collection's major thematic concerns of exile, home, and belonging (Nortje 1973: 92).

The very same lines of the epigraph from "Immigrant" are mentioned also in Wicomb's memorial lecture for Arthur Nortje, "My Name is HannaH", presented at Stellenbosch University in 2005 and published in the *English Academy Review* in the same year, in an issue devoted to the exploration of "fact bordering fiction" (Klopper 2005: v).[411] Wicomb's contribution appears in the "autobiographical fictions" subsection, and is worth discussing at some length. First of all, it follows in the more famous footsteps of J. M. Coetzee in using a non-conventional, fictional voice for an academic discourse (the text does mention the Coetzeean character of Elizabeth Costello).[412] The lecture is the fictional account in the first person of the eponymous Hannah. Prompted by the event of her graduation in English Literature from an unnamed university in the Midlands, Hannah reflects on her own experience as a coloured South African "immigrant" in the "green and pleasant island" by retracing the life and work of Nortje (Wicomb [2005] 2017: 122-123).[413] The narrator's choice of writing her name as a perfect palindrome, with the final capitalised H, denies the possibility of a surname, and thus liberates her from the identity of daughter and from her father's authority.[414] Metafictionally, it also liberates Hannah-the-author from autobiographical readings of her story. Hannah discusses Nortje's and her own writing practice in a highly intertextual and metafictional fashion. At the same time, Wicomb plays with autobiography (Hannah is her daughter's name) and constantly refers to her own writing practice, as in the poignant passage below:

[411] An article by Roger Field discussing Alex La Guma's "fictional route" to reality and his relationship to facts in fiction appeared in the same issue (see Field 2005).
[412] Wicomb defined Coetzee's speech/short story for the 1996 PEN International in London, "What is Realism?", a "superbly postmodern gesture" (Wicomb 2001: 164).
[413] The stereotyped image of England from *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* thus returns.
[414] Hannah calls her father "Daddy", implicitly referring to Sylvia Plath's poem by the same title.

> Besides, your metropolitan death of the author and birth of the reader is itself a regrettable binary, and you would of course not have noticed how for some time now the postcolonial writer has busily been resurrecting the authorial subject, has quietly insisted on ethical responsibility. (123)

The indirect quotation here is obviously from her essay "Setting, Intertextuality and the Resurrection of the Postcolonial Author", published in the same year as "My Name is HannaH". Hannah, like Wicomb, repeatedly returns to the authority of the speaking voice in Nortje's poems and in her own account of Nortje's life and ancestors.[415] "My Name is HannaH" thus encapsulates Wicomb's main critical concerns, which she expresses using the same literary strategies of her fiction. In fact, the piece could be considered a short story for all intents and purposes were it not for its label as "memorial lecture". It is easy to imagine it at home within *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* for its content – a young, coloured South African woman writer studying English Literature in England and trying to lend her voice to the fictions of others – and style, and its intertextual architecture revolving around the exiled South African poet. Apart from Nortje, the text dialogues with the Bible, with Afrikaner writer Adam Small, Caribbean poet John Agard, American Sylvia Plath, South African Bessie Head, and Bulgarian-French literary theorist Julia Kristeva.[416]

Returning to *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, the other, longer epigraph is drawn from the second and last stanzas of Nortje's poem "Waiting": "Origins trouble the voyager much, those roots / that have sipped the waters of another continent […] / it is solitude that mutilates, / the night bulb that reveals ash on my sleeve" (Nortje 1973: 90-91). The first two lines find a prosaic counterpart in a sentence uttered by Oom Dawid to Frieda in "Home Sweet Home": "it can't be very nice roaming across the cold water where you don't belong" (Wicomb [1987] 2000: 94). The next stanza of "Waiting", although not explicitly invoked by Wicomb, nevertheless invites comparison with *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*. It thematises again the utter isolation of exile, which is however transferred to the South African landscape: "[n]ow there is the loneliness of lost / beauties at Cabo de Esperancia, Table Mountain" (Nortje 1973: 90). Table Mountain appears as *the* distinctive landmark of South Africa both in Nortje's poem and in Wicomb's cycle.[417] Furthermore, it is remarkable that in both cases Table Mountain should be associated with the adjective "lost". The second part of the

[415] The lecture ends with a brief third-person account of Nortje's parents, a coloured domestic servant and the son of her English employers.

[416] Tellingly, the lecture has been reprinted in the volume *Zoë Wicomb and the Translocal. Writing Scotland and South Africa* (2017), probably for its translocal intertextual frame and for its thematic concerns of home and belonging. The text also presents several thematic similarities to Wicomb's short story "Nothing Like the Wind" (2004), published only a year earlier.

[417] When Frieda goes to the abortionist, her boyfriend Michael states that she "can't get lost in Cape Town". Her proprioceptivity, however, denies Michael's statement, in one of Wicomb's most lyrical passages: "but I am lost, hopelessly lost, and as my mind gropes for recognition I feel a feathery flutter in my womb […]" (Wicomb [1987] 2000: 67).

epigraph in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* ("it is solitude that mutilates, / the night bulb that reveals ash on my sleeve") is drawn from the last stanza of "Waiting":

> I suffer the radiation burns of silence.
> It is not cosmic immensity or catastrophe
> that terrifies me:
> it is solitude that mutilates,
> the night bulb that reveals ash on my sleeve. (1973: 91)

Solitude is the existential condition of exile, which results in the presence of "ash" on the speaker's sleeve caused by the "burns of silence". Frieda addresses her exilic condition in similar terms in "A Trip to the Gifberge", when she speaks of a "tugging condition of loneliness" (Wicomb [1987] 2000: 177). It is remarkable that Wicomb should choose a poem fully centred on the issue of exile for her first collection, which apparently tackles the question only indirectly. Nortje's poem, therefore, is to be interpreted as further evidence of the significance played by England in the short-story cycle, and of the intertwined function of setting and intertextuality.

The title of Nortje's poem, "Waiting", addresses a significant theme of South African literary production. The *leitmotiv* of waiting, most notably, takes centre stage in J. M. Coetzee's novel *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980). Coetzee himself would later review the monograph *Waiting. The Whites of South Africa* (1985) by US anthropologist Vincent Crapanzano for *The New York Times* in 1985, writing that the "keenest pages" of the book address the "malaise of waiting" of the white population of South Africa (Coetzee 1985: 3). Crapanzano interviewed the white inhabitants of a small South African rural town in the Eighties and concluded that "[w]ittingly or unwittingly, the whites wait for something, anything, to happen" and that they are "caught in the peculiar, the paralytic, time of waiting" under apartheid (Crapanzano 1985: 42). This negative feeling translates in "dread, angst, guilt or […] overwhelm[ingness]" (1985: 43). Varieties of the experience of waiting also characterise fictions by both white and Black writers of the transition (see Hallemeier 2019) and post-apartheid period, when the disillusionment with democratic rule sets in (see Akujobi 2016; Van der Vlies 2017: 152-172).

The conclusion of the poem "Waiting" is particularly significant for an understanding of the dialogue between Nortje and Wicomb, since its last line corresponds to the title of the penultimate story of the cycle, namely "Ash on My Sleeve".[418] This story is one of the least analysed by critics even though it displays a strong use of intertextuality. The episode describes Frieda's visit to her university friend Moira, who lives in one of the new coloured suburbs of Cape Town.[419] The

[418] The relevance of Nortje's poem for the collection can also be inferred from the title of the Italian edition of *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, C*enere sulla mia manica* (1993), which is the Italian translation of the phrase "ash on my sleeve".
[419] The Group Areas Act forced the coloured community out of the central areas of Cape Town and relocated them in the peripheral area of the Cape Flats. Many of the so-called Cape Flats suburbs are actually townships.

encounter, however, is fraught with misunderstandings and difficulties in communication, due to Frieda's long absence from South Africa. Nortje's claim that "[o]rigins trouble the voyager much" is thus echoed in the story, which is "everywhere concerned with the tensions between *here* and *elsewhere*, home and abroad, and also with the demands and costs of hospitality" (Easton and Van der Vlies 2011: 249; emphasis in original). The most direct connection with the title of the story, and thus with Nortje's poem, is entailed in a brief sentence towards the end of the story. While she is preparing dinner, Moira touches Frieda lightly on the shoulder to acknowledge their newfound friendship, a gesture Frieda describes in the following terms: "[h]er hand burns for a moment on my shoulder" (157). The verb "burns" directly echoes Nortje's "radiation burns of silence" (1973: 91).[420]

"Ash on My Sleeve" further echoes Nortje's "Waiting" by depicting characters constantly waiting for something to happen.[421] As the story progresses, the *leitmotiv* of waiting, even when referred to prosaic matters, hints at a hidden meaning, as becomes clear by reading the unsettling, typically Wicombesque, ending of the short story. Frieda is described in one of Moira's children's bedrooms while she tries to read before going to bed, a "grotesque" figure "in the Lilliputian world of the child" (162).[422] The short, subsequent sentences and the fast-paced rhythm of the conclusion build a surreal atmosphere:

> The words dance and my eyes sting under heavy lids. But I wait. I stretch my eyes wide open and follow a mad moth circling the rabbit-shaped lamp by the side of the bed.[423] I start to the mesmerising scent of crushed gardenia when the book slips and slips from under my fingers. In this diminutive world it does not fall with a thud. But I am awake once more. I wait. [424] (162)

The realistic detail of the bedside lamp in the children's room can refer to Nortje's "night bulb" that "reveals ash on my sleeve" (Marais 1995: 38). Hence, here Frieda appears more than ever as a

[420] Interestingly, the only other mention of the word "ash" in the collection also refers to an obstacle in a relationship, that between Freida and Michael; in "You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town", Frieda imagines Michael's vision of their marriage in England as "a slow shower of ashes over yards of diaphanous tulle" (75).

[421] See the following examples: "my friend's here, all the way from England, she's waiting…" (Wicomb [1987] 2000: 146); "[y]oung trees grow in bonsai uniformity, promising a dense hedge all around for those who are prepared to wait" (148); they "wait and wait until she explains" (149); "I wait awkwardly in the kitchen" (152). Note that the verb 'to wait' is never used with its prepositional object.

[422] An allusion to Swift's work, another English canonical writer, is also evident in "Behind the Bougainvillea", where Frieda defines herself an "awe-struck Gulliver" (111). The same story entails a further subtle intertextual allusion to a British canonical author. Frieda is depicted while she is reading a book in Dr van Zyl's waiting room. Andrew van der Vlies identifies this "silent quotation" as belonging to William Golding's *Darkness Visible* (1979) (2012a: 16). The title of Golding's novel already contains an intertextual allusion, since it is taken from Milton's *Paradise Lost* (Book I, line 63).

[423] Could the mention of the "mad moth" be an allusion to Virginia Woolf's mini-essay "The Death of the Moth" (1942)? Wicomb's cryptic excerpt echoes the piece's symbolism. In addition, the adjective "diminutive" is used also by Woolf (see [1942] 2012: online). Paolo Bugliani interestingly argues that Woolf's piece could be read as a short story (Bugliani 2016).

[424] According to Harold Schweizer, "[t]he objects the waiter perceives have been plucked out of their quotidian context that would have given them purpose and made them invisible". The narrators who wait, like Frieda, make the reader "see the objects they name in their grotesque particularity" (Schweizer 2005: 783-784).

revenant of the speaker in Nortje's poem, who self-reflects on his/her alienation caused by the exile and waits for a newly established contact with a lost friend and a lost country. The "verbal motif" of waiting appears also in other episodes, albeit less overtly (Marais 1995: 38).[425] Saikat Majumdar pinpoints the significance of this trope in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*:

> At several key points throughout Wicomb's book, waiting defines the temporality of these stories, shaping and drawing out the oppressive, iterative quality of time that hangs heavy as characters wait for something to happen, even for something as seemingly private and apolitical as the train's arrival or one's turn with the doctor. (Majumdar 2013: 21)

The experience of paralysis associated with the act of waiting is thoroughly linked with the symbolism of dust in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*. Functioning as a sort of refrain, dust permeates the entire collection, suggesting a further possibility of interpretation apart from being a realistic topographical element of South African rural areas. Its effect on the inhabitants of Namaqualand is paralysing, and it is important to read it in the historical context of apartheid. In the use of dust as a powerful signifier of immobility, Wicomb echoes Joyce, who employs the same device in the renowned short story opening in *Dubliners* (1914), "Eveline".[426] In "Home Sweet Home", the last story before Frieda's departure for England, the word recurs fourteen times.[427] This is telling for the text is everywhere concerned with ideas of home and belonging, two main concerns of "Eveline", too. Even though she never uses allegory or the fable as Gordimer and Essop do in their later collections, Wicomb's playful use of the conventions of realism and of realistic details such as dust, colours, and flowers is thus laden with (and complicated by) symbolical meaning, creating a literary, ethical-oriented strategy that Driver calls "reconstructive realism" (Driver 2010: 530).[428]

As mentioned before, the trope of waiting seems to characterise much "South African writing in transition", to borrow the phrase from the title of a volume edited by Rita Barnard and Andrew van der Vlies (2019). Nadine Gordimer's "Amnesty" (1990), for instance, published three years after *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* and included as the final story of the collection *Jump and Other Stories*

[425] In "You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town", for instance, the word "wait" is repeated five times in relation to the abortion (Wicomb [1987] 2000: 78, 80, 81). Most notably, the verb recurs when Frieda registers the "discomfort of waiting" at the white doctor's waiting room in "Behind the Bougainvillea" (106).

[426] The metaphor of dust and the trope of waiting are pervasive also in J. M. Coetzee's novel *In the Heart of the Country* (1976), which has been adapted into a movie tellingly titled *Dust* (1985) by film director Marion Hänsel (Iannaccaro 2009: 45-62, 256-257). The presence of a female protagonist and narrator who kills and resuscitates her father (like Frieda with her mother), and the metaphorical use of dust to signify immobility, point to an interesting intertextual dialogue between Coetzee's novel and *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*. I thank Giuliana Iannaccaro for the suggestion.

[427] See the following lines from "Home Sweet Home": Frieda's aunt Nettie "dusts well, with a practised hand – that is, if the criteria for dusting are indeed speed and agility. Her right wrist flicks the duster of dyed ostrich feathers across surfaces, the left hand moving simultaneously, lifting, before the duster flicks […]. She removes dust just as she has removed from her memory the early years as a servant when she learned to dust with speed ([1987] 2000: 102).

[428] Another author whose realistic fictions are laden with symbolic meaning, particularly in relation to locale, is Alex La Guma. Wicomb acknowledges La Guma among her literary influences (Hunter 1993: 82). See also Wicomb's interview during Lindsay Johns' BBC feature on La Guma (2018: 11:38-14:06).

(1991), recounts the narrator's ongoing wait for the return of her partner, and anti-apartheid activist, even after his release from Robben Island.[429] The story, and the whole collection, closes with the following lines:[430]

> […] and I'm waiting. Waiting for him to come back.
> Waiting.
> I'm waiting to come back home. (Gordimer 1991: 257)

Space, and particularly the idea of home, is thus intrinsically linked to the temporal dimension of waiting in both "Amnesty" and "Ash on My Sleeve".[431] Frieda, back in Cape Town in her best friend's house, does not feel at home in the same way as the narrator from "Amnesty" feels estranged from her partner, even after his release from prison. They both wait, an attitude "imbricated in the anticipation of apartheid's end" (Hallemeier 2019: 79). The narrative strategies used by Wicomb and Gordimer to represent the imminency of democratic freedom thus differ greatly from a writer such as Matshoba, whose "Return of Nxele" (1992), as we have seen in the previous chapter, explicitly endorses the "teleology of democratic transition" (Barnard 2019: 2). According to Matshoba, South Africans' long wait for the return of Makhanda is fulfilled by Mandela's return – Matshoba's story follows the ANC's rallying cry of 'Mayibuye', where the idea of 'return' is pivotal.[432] Frieda's constant waiting instead represents, on the one hand, the experience (the proprioceptivity) of "stasis" under apartheid (Hallemeier 2019: 79), and on the other questions the national narrative of a linear history of progress from injustice to freedom (see Barnard 2019: 4). Indeed, it is never stated what is the object of Frieda's waiting, and her eventual return to South Africa is only hinted at and left out from the narrative.[433] The trope of waiting in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* thus functions like a chronotope, through which Wicomb is able to express her spatial (the concepts of exile and home) *and* temporal concerns (the experience of paralysis under apartheid).[434] The profound intertextual dialogue with Nortje's own "Waiting" further complicates and enriches an interpretation of this *leitmotiv*.

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[429] Ahmed Essop's "Home-Coming" from *Noorjehan and Other Stories* (1990) similarly recounts the return of an activist from Robben Island and his subsequent unhomeliness. Njabulo Ndebele's novel, *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* (2003), describes the hardships of women who wait for their husbands' return (see Akujobi 2016). For a discussion of the temporality of waiting in "Amnesty", see Hallemeier 2019.

[430] See also Riach (2016: 1083): "*Jump* responds to this state of transition through a thematic and stylistic processing of the past's immediacy to the present, leading to a state of suspension that persists until the collection's last words".

[431] The idea of the (un)homely pervades *Jump*, which includes short stories like "Once Upon a Time", "My Father Leaves Home", "Home", and "Safe Houses". Compare with "Home Sweet Home" from *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*.

[432] The speaker in Nortje's "Waiting" also exclaims, albeit in vain, "mayibuye Afrika" (1973: 90).

[433] The cycle's "heavy emphasis on return" remains unfulfilled: 'home' does not resonate with the completeness celebrated in writings that claim collective identity, like Matshoba's "Return of Nxele" (Lewis 2001: 147, 156). An unfulfilled feeling of expectation is manifest also in the story "N2" (1999) from *The One That Got Away*.

[434] Sue Marais speaks of "spatial and temporal dislocation" in her paper on *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* (Marais 1995).

Apart from Nortje's and Eliot's epigraphs, Wicomb overtly recurs to intertextuality in the fourth story of the collection, "A Clearing in the Bush". Frieda, an English student at the University of the Western Cape, is depicted while she struggles to write an essay titled "Fate in Tess", a clear reference to Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Ubervilles* (1891).[435] This intertext, in which the heroine is seduced by her lover, deceives her husband, kills her lover, and is ultimately sentenced to death, resonates with many thematic concerns of Wicomb's collection. Frieda is not sure of what actually happens in The Chase, the place where Tess is seduced, which sets the plot in motion that will lead to her death:

> Wessex spreads like a well-used map before me, worn and dim along the fold-lines, the lush Frome Valley and the hills so picture-green where Persephone skips sprinkling daisies and buttercups from her clutched apron, caring not two hoots about the ones that fall face down destined to die. The scuffed green strip is The Chase where God knows what happened. Seduced, my notes say. […]. I do, of course, not know of these matters, but shudder for Tess. (Wicomb [1987] 2000: 41)

This lyrical passage bears witness to Frieda's empathic response to Tess's tragedy. The idyll of England is shaped according to a naïve reading of *Tess*, so that Wessex becomes a literary cliché. Again, adjectives and nouns are drawn from the same semantic field of the sentence previously quoted from "Jan Klinkies". The intertextual dialogue between Hardy and Wicomb is complicated by the topical events of South African history, since Frieda has to write an essay on the murder committed by Tess on the same day of the funeral of assassinated South African prime minister and 'architect' of apartheid Hendrik Verwoerd (killed in Parliament by Dimitri Tsafendas) in 1966. When Frieda fails to hand in her paper on *Tess* the day before the fiction takes place, "a pet abdominal tapeworm hissed persuasively into the ear of its Greek host", Tsafendas, "whose trembling hand grew still for a second to aim a fatal shot at the Prime Minister" (39). In this story, therefore, two intertexts are at work: *Tess of the D'Ubervilles* and South Africa in the year of Verwoerd's murder.[436] "A Clearing in the Bush" powerfully puts into textual practice the theoretical tenets expressed by Wicomb in "Setting, Intertextuality and the Resurrection of the Postcolonial Author". The presence of *Tess* in this story, moreover, has a larger resonance in the entire collection. On the one hand it portrays an idyllic image of England, preparing readers for Frieda's exile, while on the other hand it anticipates

[435] Interestingly, Wicomb uses this intertext also in her short story "In Search of Tommie" (2009). See Van der Vlies (2011: 428-429).

[436] Other brief references to coeval political events are the fleeting mentions of the Group Areas Act in "Jan Klinkies", the demolition of District Six in "Home Sweet Home", the guerrilla in "Behind the Bougainvillea", Soweto, the Tricameral Parliament, and the United Democratic Front in "Ash on My Sleeve", and the racial riots in London in "A Trip to the Gifberge".

the next story, "You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town", which presents the unintended consequences of a seduction, and the moral implications linked to abortion in a patriarchal society.[437]

Dimitri Tsafendas, of Greek and Mozambiquan origins, was a revolutionary who spent several years of his life abroad. Determined to kill Verwoerd for his racist policies, he returned to South Africa and was hired as a parliamentary messenger. On 6 September 1966, he stabbed Verwoerd to death ("a fatal shot" in the fiction of *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*) but escaped the death sentence by pleading insanity at his trial, declaring that he killed the Prime Minister because a tapeworm in his stomach needed constant feeding – a congenial narrative to the apartheid state as well, which would otherwise had to admit they had been defeated.[438] The historical event is imaginatively represented in several transition and post-apartheid fictions, particularly in short-story cycles (see Thurman 2011: 46; Twidle 2019: 31-35). One significant example is in Ivan Vladislavić's *Missing Persons* (1989), most notably the short stories "The Prime Minister is Dead" and "Tsafendas's Diary". The latter is a cryptic, dark story, whose preoccupation with mysteries echoes Frieda's own concern with semiotics and obscure meanings in "A Clearing in the Bush" (see Van der Vlies 2012a: 16).[439] Nadine Gordimer's last short-story cycle *Beethoven Was One-Sixteenth Black* (2007) similarly includes the story "Tape Measure", which is a first-person narrative of a tapeworm inside an unnamed male South African host before its evacuation. Though the story entails no reference whatsoever to Tsafendas, Verwoerd, or South African politics, readers attentive to the country's history cannot overlook the obvious reference to Verwoerd's killing.[440]

The act of Tsafendas – a coloured person who could pass for white and was deemed insane – is not part of the national narrative of the liberation struggle; it represents rather a gap in official historiography (Twidle 2019: 23). Wicomb's work has always been concerned with gaps, the "cracks and fissures" within monolithic narratives (Wicomb [1990] 2018: 83).[441] She thus gives voice to a forgotten, often non-linear narrative of a historical event in the same story in which a character different from and less privileged than Frieda, Tamieta, is foregrounded through free indirect style and a heterodiegetic narrative focus – Frieda's own narratorial choice, according to the metafictional

[437] Indeed, "You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town" repeats the symbol of the tapeworm: "Desire is a Tsafendas tapeworm in my belly that cannot be satisfied and as I pop the first fig into my mouth I feel the danger fountain with jets of saliva. Will I stop at one death?" (77).

[438] A full detailed account of Tsafendas's life and trial can be found at https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/dimitri-tsafendas.

[439] "Tsafendas's Diary" was first published in *Staffrider* in 1988. "Tsafendas's Diary is the key to all mysteries. The mysteries of meat and the imagination", the narrator's Granny utters in "Tsafendas's Diary" (1989: 92). When Tamieta, the woman working at the cafeteria at the University of the Western Cape and the co-protagonist of "A Clearing in the Bush", feels "the rebellious flesh" of her back itching, she thinks it "must mean something ominous" and "she muses on its meaning" (Wicomb [1987] 2000: 37).

[440] Graham Riach defines "Tape Measure" as a political allegory/fable (2016: 1086).

[441] In "Home Sweet Home", the first narrative in which Frieda-the-writer explicitly opposes her own stories to her relatives' accounts, the words "crack" and "fissure" acquire symbolical meaning (88, 103).

twist at the end of the book. As Dorothy Driver remarks, by representing the Griqua community, which has "seldom entered fictional representation", *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* gives "centre stage and a strong vocal presence both to those and to others who have hitherto been marginalised and ignored in the political construction of the white nation as well as in Black Consciousness" (Driver 2010: 530). Wicomb indeed complicates and questions the clear-cut simplistic ethnic categorisations of apartheid and of Black Consciousness alike. The reference to Tsafendas, Hardy's intertext, and the centrality of Tamieta displace the focus from Frieda and incorporate other narratives along her own in "A Clearing in the Bush".[442] Thus, the struggle of Frieda, as "incipient writer-narrator", with her essay on *Tess* on the day of Verwoerd's murder suggests that "writing […] is never separated from political implications" (Van der Vlies 2012a: 14).

Intertextuality is thus pervasive in the cycle and it interacts deeply with setting, as a reading of "A Clearing in the Bush" shows. Unsurprisingly, the quotations in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* are all drawn from British or South African authors, the two poles of 'home' in the book. Intertextual dialogues, moreover, are never confined to single episodes, but resonate throughout the macro-structure of the cycle. Thus, if intertextuality enhances the number of voices inside the collection, it also highlights some common concerns among different short stories. Wicomb's mastery lies also in the fact that intertextuality and metafiction are always intertwined – Andrew van der Vlies speaks of "inter/textuality" (2012a: 15) – for she manages to represent an author who writes about herself in the act of writing the stories that we are reading, and who uses intertextuality extensively. If the revelation at the end of the book is to be believed, the decision to include Nortje, Swift, Hardy, and Golding in the text is (also) Frieda's.

Place and intertextuality, with a focus on England and South Africa, are inextricably intertwined in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*. While place constitutes a unifying principle in short-story cycles like *Call Me Not a Man* and *The Hajji and Other Stories*, it invites and at the same time refuses cohesion in Wicomb's first cycle through the intrusion of England and through the notion of heterotopia, notwithstanding the only apparent linearity of locale. In a similar fashion, the profusion of intertextual dialogues disrupts and complicates the hegemony and authority of the narrative voice (*You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* stands in a dichotomic relationship to *Call Me Not a Man* in this regard).[443] The "wholeness" of the novel or *Künstlerroman*, which gestures towards national unity,

[442] The form of the short-story cycle allows for the emergence of minor protagonists. Other notable stories for their focus on liminal and marginalised individuals are "Jan Klinkies" and "A Fair Exchange". If "A Clearing in the Bush" is read as Frieda's own creation, the third-person passages with a focus on Tamieta's opinion of Frieda could be defined as an attempt at a Coetzeean "*autre*biography" (in the realm of fiction, of course).

[443] In particular, compare Frieda's self-aware attempts as amanuensis to give a written form to illiterate Skitterboud's storytelling accounts in "A Fair Exchange" with Matshoba's poetics of authenticity in representing his narrators (and himself) as storytellers of old. Frieda's role in "A Fair Exchange" foreshadows the amanuensis-figure in *David's Story* and in the more recent *Still Life*.

is thus questioned by the very genre of *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* (Driver 2010: 531).[444] As Frieda reflects metafictionally on the stories that she is writing (which, possibly, we are reading), she opposes her narratives to the homogenising stories of her relatives:

> They cut their stories from the gigantic watermelon that cannot be finished by the family in one sitting. They savour as if for the first time the pip-studded slices of the bright fruit and read the possibilities of konfyt in the tasteless flesh beneath the green. Their stories, whole as the watermelon that grows out of this arid earth, have come to replace the world.
> I would like to bring down my fist on that wholeness and watch the crack choose its wayward path across the melon, slowly exposing the icy pink of the slit. (Wicomb [1987] 2000: 89)

By having Frieda write that "their stories […] have come to replace the world", Wicomb is also implicitly criticizing the assumption of authenticity within conventional realist narratives, thereby complicating the notion of literature as documentary (see also Handlarski 2007: 56). Her work thus goes in the same direction as her fellow countryman Ivan Vladislavić's, whose short story "The WHITES ONLY Bench" (1996) playfully ridicules essentialist notions of authenticity and of realism in the context of post-apartheid museal installations.[445]

By resurrecting Frieda's apparently dead mother in the last narrative and by interspersing the short stories with subtle allusions to the act of writing and the role of language,[446] up to the last metafictional revelation in "A Trip to the Gifberge", Wicomb also refuses the easy equation of Frieda's path towards adulthood in South Africa with her own life. She thus discards the critical trend in Western cultures of interpreting a Black woman's literary output as autobiography, or "social documents that speak of personal experiences and grievances, and that therefore are primarily of social and anthropological value" (Wicomb [1990] 2018: 89).[447] At the same time, a strong autobiographical trend was also encouraged by Black Consciousness aesthetics, as we have seen in the previous chapter – Tlali's first novel *Muriel at Metropolitan* is exemplary in this regard (1975). Readers may recall the case of Peter Abrahams' autobiographical collection of short stories *Dark Testament* (1942), discussed in the second chapter of this thesis. While he himself both stressed and played with the notion of autobiography, the first English reviewers of the volume linked the

[444] See also Griem (2011) for the politics of genre in Wicomb's two short-story cycles.
[445] See the following lines from Vladislavić's story: "we have a duty after all to tell the truth. This is a museum, not a paperback novel. […] we would have the real thing or nothing at all" (Vladislavić [1996] 2007: 730).
[446] This aspect can be noted from the very first story, "Bowl Like Howl". The adult Frieda thus comments on her father's translation from English into Afrikaans for the miners: "[d]istanced by the translation, the winged words fluttered; he was moved to a poetic comparison. A maddening rhythm as the picks swung with a bulge of biceps in unison, up, cutting the air […]. And so midst all that making of poetry, two prosaic mounds rose on either side of the deepening pit" (Wicomb [1987] 2000: 7).
[447] It must be remembered that Ellen Kuzwayo's autobiography *Call Me Woman* was published in 1985, only two years before *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*. See Andrew van der Vlies's account of the publishing history of Wicomb's book, in particular how the Virago and Pantheon editions contributed to an autobiographical reading of the volume (2012a: 18-20). Critical reviews of the short-story collection did conflate Frieda's life with Wicomb's own (see Mukherjee 1987: 7).

autobiographical coating of the collection to his ethnicity. In her essay "Identity, Writing, and Autobiography: The Case of Bessie Head's *The Cardinals*", first given as an address at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London in 1994, Wicomb comments on Head's textual practice of "writing and not-writing about the self" as a "discourse of liberation" (2018b: 217). By close reading Head's inscription of her biography into her novels *Maru* (1971) and *The Cardinals* (1993), Wicomb liberates Head's fiction from both mere poststructuralist deconstruction of identitarian discourse on the one hand and documentary assumptions based on the author's ethnicity and gender on the other.[448] The simultaneous presence of autobiography and what Wicomb calls "*not*-autobiography" in Head's fictions is a "transformative strategy" that allows her to foreground the discoursive nature of identity in the face of apartheid's fixed racial categorisations (220-221). It is difficult to overlook the similarities between Head's and Wicomb's textual practice in relation to the autobiographical genre – when Wicomb speaks of a "resurrection" and a "new identity" for the protagonist of *The Cardinals*, attentive readers may think of Frieda's mother's own resurrection in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*. Wicomb's emphasis on Head's creative and iterative refashioning of her own biography into her fiction – Wicomb uses the terms "repeated", "reworded", "rewriting", and "translation" (224-225) – is textual evidence of the importance she bestows on the device of repetition with difference, as we shall see through a close reading of *The One That Got Away*.

It may be for Wicomb's subtle and playful parody of the forms of the realistic novel and of autobiography, two major genres in 1980s South Africa, that she managed to publish *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* in her native country only in 2008 with Umuzi.[449] Catherine Dubbeld's bibliography of South African short stories with socio-political themes ends precisely with Wicomb's first short-story cycle in 1987 (when the state of emergency was renovated for one year). Interestingly, however, Dubbeld only includes six stories in her list, leaving out "Home Sweet Home", "A Fair Exchange", "Ash on My Sleeve", and "A Trip to the Gifberge". These are indeed the narratives less overtly concerned with public, official histories and with the direct effects of apartheid on the collectivity – less conventionally 'political', even though they are set in the Eighties. Yet, they are also deeply concerned with the themes of home and belonging, the politics of representation, the authority and responsibility of the narrative voice, which are staged through intertextual dialogue and metafictional allusions, as we have seen. Wicomb's ethical imperative in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* thus requires an attentive engagement on the part of readers, since she "explores political

[448] For instance, a picture of Wicomb was used, without her permission, on the cover to the Heinemann edition of Head's *Maru* (Van der Vlies 2018b: 30).
[449] Even progressive publishers such as David Philip showed no interest in her first creative work (see Van der Vlies 2012a: 19).

agency in ways that consistently disavow conventional collectivism and the hallmark of much black South African writing" (Lewis 2001: 153).[450]

6.3 Uncanny Repetitions in *The One That Got Away*

Even though *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* continuously disrupts the wholeness and linearity of certain narratives, the volume is still undeniably "shadowed" by the form of the novel, which "gestures towards another kind of dreamed-of nation", as it appears clear also from the open ending of the book, hinting at Frieda's return to South Africa (Driver 2010: 531). In this regard, it truly is a fiction that prefigures South Africa's transition towards democratic rule. The fact that the form of the novel silently hovers over *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* is further confirmed by the volume's publishing history. No narrative appeared independently before the publication of the book, in contrast to *The One That Got Away*, which represents in fact a less hybrid, less novel-like example of short-story cycle.

According to Sue Marais, *The One That Got Away* (2008) "takes over where *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* left off", particularly in relation to the "ambiguities of expatriate experience" (Marais 2014: 253). The figure of the expatriate poet Arthur Nortje, indeed, reappears in this later collection as well, as the son of the protagonist of "In the Botanic Gardens". Inherent to the expatriate experience are the concepts of belonging, home, and the unhomely within the familiar, usually associated with the evocation of nostalgia in literary texts, as Wicomb herself remarks (2018a: 203). In this regard, Erica Lombard argues that nostalgia, intertwined with the condition of the émigré, is an "ambivalent post-transitional mode in South African literature" (Lombard 2019: 143-144).[451] We will return shortly to the discussion of nostalgia. *The One That Got Away* indeed finds itself at the crossroads of several 'post-': post-transition, post-apartheid, post-TRC, and, ultimately, post-2000.[452] As such, it addresses and questions some of the core thematic concerns of the new South African predicament. At the same time, Wicomb's *The One That Got Away* exceeds the label of 'post-' South African literature. The book explores *also* the felt experience of Scottish expatriates in South Africa: many stories are set in Scotland and allude to a pre-apartheid era (the colonisation of parts of South Africa by nineteenth-century Scottish missionaries and settlers) notwithstanding the volume's "more

[450] On Wicomb's complex textual practice and on her focus on minor narratives, or "microhistories", see Iannaccaro (2019a: 134-135).
[451] Lombard further argues that "the story of the émigré who returns to South Africa some time after the end of apartheid […] has become so widespread in South African fiction since the early 2000s that it is productive to consider it an important period subgenre" (143-144). See also Twidle (2019: 71-96) and van der Vlies (2017: 99-124) for critical discussions of nostalgia in the post-apartheid non-fictional and fictional panorama, respectively.
[452] For an exploration of post-2000 short stories in South Africa, see Fasselt et al. (2020). For a discussion of the terms "post-protest", "post-apartheid", and "post-anti-apartheid" applied to Wicomb's writing, see van der Vlies (2018b: 5).

recent, post-apartheid and post-millennial scenario" (Marais 2014: 254).[453] The more transnational scope of *The One That Got Away*, and of Wicomb's 'outsider' perspective more broadly, can be inferred also from the volume's publishing history. Apart from "Another Story", originally printed in an international anthology dedicated to Mandela, the other individually published narratives from *The One That Got Away* first appeared in little magazines from the United Kingdom (*Stand*), New Zealand (*Landfall*), and Canada (*The Antigonish Review*).

Of the fourteen stories, seven are set in Cape Town (with a rather long flashback in Italy) and five in Glasgow and, apart from "Mrs Pringle's Bed" and the last three stories set in the Eighties/Nineties, they all portray an indefinite twenty-first-century milieu. Every story focuses on different protagonists, but certain characters fleetingly recur in more than one episode, so that one could speak of a "collective protagonist" (Dunn and Morris 1995: 59).[454] In addition, Wicomb's focus embraces also white protagonists in this later collection – albeit most main characters are still coloured. The narrators are all heterodiegetic with internal focalization, perhaps the single, most visible difference between *The One That Got Away* and *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*. The recourse to a third-person narrative voice throughout the cycle is significant, since a first-person perspective has been dominating non-white South African short stories since Peter Abrahams's *Dark Testament* (1942) and the *Drum* generation.[455] The narratorial difference between the two collections is reflected in their titles. While the title of Wicomb's first work contains a specific deictic reference ("you"), her latest collection hints at a generic character ("the one"). Hence, there is an apparent lack of stable, easily identifiable gathering spots in this later collection, similarly to what happens with the last two short-story cycles by Nadine Gordimer, *Loot* (2003) and *Beethoven Was One-Sixteenth Black* (2007), published five and one year before *The One That Got Away*, respectively.[456] *Loot*, in particular, eschews the South African borders, like *The One That Got Away*, to enter a more cosmopolitan *Weltanschauung*.[457] Readers of post-2000 short stories by Wicomb and Gordimer may thus feel the need for a *leitmotiv* connecting the various stories that could make the reading more

[453] Wicomb's concern over Scottish-South African colonial relations was already prefigured by Mr Shenton's pride in his supposed "Scots blood" in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* (Wicomb [1987] 2000: 29).
[454] A collective protagonist is defined as a group functioning as central character, both by sharing certain features and by working as a cumulative metaphor (Dunn and Morris 1995: 59). See Driver (2010: 536) for a precise list of the returning characters inside the volume.
[455] Of the writers analysed in this dissertation, only Herbert Dhlomo consistently used heterodiegetic narrators. The other selected authors either privileged a homodiegetic perspective or had recourse to both. Wicomb chose the same narratorial perspective of *The One That Got Away* for the individually published story "In Search of Tommie" (2009). She herself suggested that the narrative would have been at home in *The One That Got Away* (see Van der Vlies 2011: 425).
[456] See Riach (2016: 1077): "Towards the end of her writing life, Nadine Gordimer's style became increasingly marked by […] syntactic and interpretational difficulty, structural fracture, and a heightened degree of self-reflexivity".
[457] Ileana Dimitriu observes several new trends in Gordimer's *Loot*: "What are new are her excursions beyond the national question, her aspiration to step out of cultural isolation and enter the larger, post-ideological, world scene" (Dimitriu 2005: 95).

flowing, especially readers used to markedly coherent short-story cycles of the South African canon like Bosman's or Matshoba's (see Dimitru 2005: 93).

To add to the fragmented structure of *The One That Got Away*, the last four short stories, and particularly "N2" and "Another Story" where Scotland is never mentioned, are not linked to the rest of the cycle, apparently. This strategy "highlights the absence of familiarity which has gradually built up in the preceding stories" and thus questions any coherent notion of national community (McCann 2010: 57). Wicomb thereby bends the genre of the short-story cycle and proves, once again, the political value of formal features.

While reading the volume for the first time, readers may feel the same alienation as the protagonist of the first of the non-linked stories, the South African expatriate Elsie from "Nothing Like the Wind", while she observes the traffic on the Great Western Road in Glasgow:

> But she does not want to know why the sound of traffic translates itself into the moan of the wind through that distant landscape. Only sometimes, no doubt to throw her off the track, another world engulfs her, a vague distant one where things remain out of focus, and then it is the sound of waves that roars in her ears, high as houses, that is, like these tall sandstone Glasgow tenements – houses stacked on top of each other […]. The sound of waves allows her to fill in the scene with anything at all. Nothing like the wind, where the place is fixed, the Karoo scene of stones and quiver trees, the outbuildings and, of course, the farmhouse itself. (Wicomb 2008: 135-136)

Elsie's felt experience of Glasgow, rendered by Wicomb through a deft use of free indirect style, incessantly overlaps with her memories of "another world", of her farmhouse in South Africa's Karoo. For its poignant representation of an individual's proprioceptivity and experience of 'home', "Nothing Like the Wind" could be thought of as the sequel to "Home Sweet Home" and Elsie as a revenant of Frieda.[458] In both stories, the protagonist experiences displacement "occasioned by the breakdown of the unacknowledged fictions by which characters persist in making sense of their lives", signalled by sound interferences such as buzzing and roaring (Van der Vlies 2017: 136). This "breakdown" is closely linked to setting and to the Freudian concept of the uncanny. Frieda is struck by the permanence of the unfamiliar in her familiar, native Namaqualand in "Home Sweet Home" (she "barely recognised the place", Wicomb [1987] 2000: 100), while Elsie keeps superimposing topographical features of South Africa onto the unfamiliar Glasgow. And the uncanny, Wicomb writes via Julia Kristeva in her essay "'Good Reliable Fictions': Nostalgia, Narration, and the Literary Narrative" (2018), is a "typical element in the *narration* of nostalgia" (Wicomb 2018a: 205; emphasis in original). Literary texts are thus able to assert that "in the inescapable knowledge of where home is, the unheimlich itself is revealed" (2018a: 215). In this way, the concepts of authenticity and

[458] Another echo of Wicomb's first work is entailed in "Trompe L'Oeil": the protagonist Bev "managed to get lost in Cape Town in spite of Table Mountain" (Wicomb 2008: 124). The trope of getting lost in Cape Town despite Table Mountain forms a refrain within Wicomb's writings, and it can be found also in her latest novel *Still Life* (2020: 197).

nationhood, usually linked to the discourse around nostalgia, are discarded through aesthetic practice;[459] readers' active cooperation is required and, ultimately, "the ethical is invoked" (216). Wicomb's sophisticated reading of Ivan Vladislavić's *Double Negative* (2010) in her essay on nostalgia serves as a critical tool for interpreting her own fictions as well, in particular the role of the uncanny and its ethical implications. In *The One That Got Away*, the uncanniness of home and the deconstruction of national narratives are equally applied to the dual setting of South Africa and Scotland, as a reading of "Nothing Like the Wind" shows. As Maria Paola Guarducci remarks,

> A network of connections more or less visible between Scotland and South Africa explored in these stories testifies to the slippery ground the notion of 'home' is supposed to derive from. Accustomed to both South Africa and Scotland, Wicomb represents the two countries in familiar and unfamiliar fashions at the same time; as homely and un-homely, dissociating herself from their patronizing, clear cut and auto-referential rhetoric of nation and identity. (Guarducci 2015: 31)

The continuous evocation of the *heimlich* and the *unheimlich* also structures the experience of readers, who have to grapple with the interplay between unity and difference inherent in short-story cycles. The fictions in *The One That Got Away* evoke and simultaneously dismiss, only to evoke it again, a feeling of familiarity in the readerly experience. Julika Griem's take on Wicomb's most recent collection is worth quoting at length:

> [T]he genre of the short story sequence is particularly suited to stimulate a reading process working through the possibilities and impossibilities of linking the individual texts of a collection. Our cognitive ability to establish such a potential structure of resonances is very much triggered by processes of repetition in different guises: whenever we sense that a character or a place, an image, a motif or a topic returns, or can be recognised as recurrent, we are willing to acknowledge a pattern potentially providing coherence. (Griem 2011: 395)

Gestures of iteration can be defined as the main pattern shaping the collection. Repetition, however, does not function as an act of mimesis, reproducing colonial power. Rather, Wicomb employs this device in a defamiliarizing way, disclosing the postcolonial potential of the technique of iteration (Griem 2011: 395). Griem rightly starts from the short story "There's the Bird That Never Flew" to present her theory on the role of repetition inside *The One That Got Away*.[460] Indeed, this narrative showcases a complex use of the strategy of repetition. Not only does it reiterate the representation of the Doulton Fountain, a pivotal monument of Glasgow's colonial history, which first appears in "Boy in a Jute-Sack Hood", but the fountain itself is built according to an aesthetic principle of mimesis, which is another instance of repetition.[461] In addition, Jane, a coloured South African woman

[459] Ironic distancing is one of the literary strategies that undermine nostalgia, as in the highly ironical "Home Sweet Home" (see Wicomb 2018a: 208).
[460] The word "repetition" and its derivatives recur five times in this short story (Wicomb 2008: 75, 76, 77, 78).
[461] See Palladino and Miller (2011) for a discussion of the role of the Doulton Fountain in *The One That Got Away*.

spending her honeymoon in Glasgow, revises the fountain by repeatedly observing it, for "the trick lies in repetition" (2008: 75). The very same elements of the monument, from Jane's point of view, seem to enact a pattern of repetition with a difference: "[i]t is the plumage of the ostrich that is repeated, refashioned in that crown of tight curls" (Wicomb 2008: 76). Jane's recurrent glances undermine the colonial ideology of mimesis (and thus realism) inherent in the fountain, offering "a different kind of knowledge" (71). These cumulative, repetitive gestures metafictionally hint at the structure of the short-story cycle itself and activate the reading process.

Wicomb applies repetition with difference to (returning) characters and places. In particular, Glaswegian symbols of colonial power such as the Kibble Palace at the Botanic Gardens, the Great Western Road, and the Doulton Fountain, but also South African exhibitions like the South African Cultural History Museum in Cape Town, undergo processes of heterotopic re-readings, usually performed by coloured South African women.[462] The same concern informs the writings of Ivan Vladislavić, and particularly his short-story collection tellingly titled *Propaganda by Monuments* (1996) (see Kossew 2010).[463] Both writers question the essentialist discourses of authenticity and of 'the original' often attached to certain settings such as colonial buildings, monuments, or museums.

Perhaps a more subtle and less detectable device used by Wicomb to stage the tension between unity and difference, *heimlich* and *unheimlich*, is the reiteration of phrases and sentences from one story to the other. The phrases repeated in the book cannot be a mere coincidence, since their meaning inside the single short stories can be obscure at times. For instance, the simile "straight as a die" is repeated at the end of the sixth and eighth narrative of the collection, "Neighbours" and "Trompe L'Oeil" respectively – two stories that are also linked via the minor character of Roddy. The phrase is polysemous: it can mean "absolutely straight" as well as "entirely open and honest".[464] The second metaphorical meaning resonates within *The One That Got Away*, which grapples continuously with notions of authenticity and with the interplay of the fictive and the real, particularly pregnant in the story "Trompe L'Oeil". Other expressions, like "airs and graces" or the "loose end", build an elusive structure of cross-references, of unity *through* difference (Wicomb 2008: 26, 36, 10, 86) – what Julika Griem calls a "a multi-layered staging of gestures of iteration" (2011: 395).

[462] Compare Fiona's memory of the Botanic Gardens in "Disgrace" with Dorothy's representation of them in "In the Botanic Gardens". The Capetonian museum also appears in *'Buckingham Palace', District Six* by Richard Rive (1986). For Wicomb's discussion of it, see Wicomb ([1998] 2018: 118). Ordinary locations like the bedroom or the neighbourhood garden also undergo processes of new spatial signification, as in "Mrs Pringle's Bed" and "Neighbours" (see Driver 2017: 23).

[463] The two writers further share a pervasive intertextual practice. *Propaganda by Monuments* opens with the acknowledgements where Vladislavić also lists a sort of bibliography for his numerous intertexts.

[464] https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/die.

Wicomb herself speaks of the "postcolonial writer's echolalic condition" in her interview with Stephan Meyer and Thomas Olver (2002: 190)[465] and in her essay "Setting, Intertextuality, and the Resurrection of the Postcolonial Author". There, she describes intertextuality as an echolalic strategy since "repetition re-presents, reverses or revises, or simply asks the reader to reflect on indeterminate meanings produced by citations, meanings that destabilize received views" (Wicomb [2005] 2018: 231). Intertextuality does shape *The One That Got Away* to a greater extent than *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, reinforcing and at the same time broadening the dialogue between South Africa and Scotland.[466] Similarly, metafiction, which is based on the idea of repetition with difference, dominates the macro-structure of the cycle. The coda of the title story, "The One That Got Away", exposes the author of the story, an unnamed first-person narrator. She/he comments on the repetitive, generative nature of texts with the following rhetorical question: "[a]ll Chinese boxes hey, where will it all end?" (Wicomb 2008: 50). The following paragraphs will close read some of the stories in which these strategies of iteration are used by Wicomb in their diverse manifestations.

The One That Got Away does not revolve around a single fictional author who has written all the stories like *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*. Nonetheless, it presents a great number of characters who are involved in some way or another in the act of writing or in artistic representations (see also Driver 2010: 538). The first overt metafictional element is to be found in the title story, "The One That Got Away". The narrative begins in a cryptic way with the mention of a secret project of the protagonist, the South African Drew. His activity concerns a book of fiction, *The One That Got Away* (1945) by Scottish author Helen McCloy, which he found in the Cape Town City Library among books on the history of mining in South Africa (the book was displaced because of the colour of its cover). Inside the flyleaf he finds a lending sheet from Glasgow City Libraries, and the stamped date on it reports "16 JUN 1976", the day of the Soweto uprising (Wicomb 2008: 44).[467] This is a typical Wicombesque strategy, whereby political events come to the fore only through a fleeting mention. Drew decides to take the book to his honeymoon in Glasgow, in order to restore it to its right place. To conclude his project, Drew adds a new cover to the book with a misleading title – *Gold Mining on the Rand*, a book by his former history teacher Gavin Wilton – and he places the volume in the Glaswegian library "in the fiction section between Wickham and Witworth" (2008: 49), ironically just the place that the book by Wilton, but also by Wicomb (with the same title as McCloy's), would occupy (see Driver 2010: 149). The first part of the story, therefore, already presents a dense

[465] "[l]ike all repetition, echolalia too repeats with difference" (Meyer and Olver 2002: 190).
[466] The collection resonates so much with (possible) intertexts that the potential for intertextual connections among the stories remains to be explored (Hoegberg 2017: 67).
[467] "The One That Got Away" interestingly foregrounds the materiality of the books considered, a self-awareness also identifiable in "A Trip to the Gifberge" in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*. See Van der Vlies 2012a.

cumulative texture of intertextual and metafictional allusions.[468] The discourses of the real and the fictional, of history and literature, are conflated and blurred, since Wilton's documentary volume on mining only exists in the fiction we are reading, while McCloy's mystery novel has a real-world referent.[469] Acts of generic classification, moreover, resonate with political import in the context of post-apartheid South Africa.

The self-reflexivity of the text comes to the fore also through the foregrounding of the authorial I. The point of view in this short story alternates between Drew and Jane. Yet, halfway through the narrative, the I of the fictional author appears:

> After the coffee she [Jane] will browse in the shops, so that I have no compunction leaving her in Princess Square. […]. Should she get bored, I could wheel in a juggler or a clown since the terraced space on the ground floor is large enough to accommodate a number of municipal activities […]. And so back to Drew whose story this is: he is forced into dissembling. (Wicomb 2008: 41)

The coda of the narrative features the unnamed author and Drew commenting together the story we are reading, while they observe "Table Mountain on fire" (49). The reference is to a historical event: on 26 January 2006, a British tourist started a fire on Table Mountain by throwing away a cigarette (Hoegberg 2017: 66). Thus, Wicomb powerfully and repeatedly conflates the real and the fictional in the narrative space of a single short story, complicating the notion of the documentary.

If "There's the Bird That Never Flew" might be regarded as the sequel and "companion piece" to "The One That Got Away" (Driver 2010: 149), the eighth short story of the cycle, "Trompe L'Oeil", could be called as its prequel, even though the associations between the two stories are more difficult to grasp. The narrative focuses on a white South African couple in Cape Town, Gavin Wilton, Drew's former history teacher, and his wife, Bev. Apart from characters, the two stories are linked by more subtle traits: a self-reflexive awareness of the texts' materiality, their highly metafictional qualities, the presence of art, and the blurring of the line between reality and fiction, history and literature. "Trompe L'Oeil" describes Gavin's reaction while he reads a short story by Roddy, a Scottish man with South African origins (his mother, whom readers encounter in "Neighbours", was an anti-apartheid fighter). The couple met Roddy during their stay at the Bogliasco Study Centre in Liguria, Italy, and the story moves swiftly from the present of the narrative to that past experience. The title of the story is quite telling: the trompe l'oeil is a pictorial technique whereby the illusion of a three-dimensional space is achieved, and it is typical of the Italian region of Liguria. To add a further

[468] For a detailed discussion of the intertextual dialogue between McCloy's and Wicomb's *The One That Got Away*, see Hoegberg 2017.
[469] In turn, Wicomb was inspired by real-life artist Roger Palmer, who is also her partner, for Drew's project, as she claims in the acknowledgements.

diegetic level, Wicomb herself sojourned at the Bogliasco Study Centre while writing *The One That Got Away*, as she states in the book's acknowledgements.

The main storyline is framed by Roddy's short story about X, Y, and Z, which Gavin is reading in the present of the narration. Though the characters have no names, Gavin assumes that they represent himself, Bev, and Roddy at the Bogliasco Centre. The story is graphically signalled by the italic font, which marks it distinctively as fiction. It is printed in the South African weekly magazine *Mail & Guardian* as the winning entry to *The Guardian*'s short-story competition. While Gavin, a successful historian, thinks poorly of fiction, and particularly of realistic narratives such as Roddy's, Bev "expected the story to be about something real, in fact, to be connected with Roddy's mother. Would that not have been why it was printed in the Mail & Guardian?" (Wicomb 2008: 131). Thus, Bev, unlike Gavin, is able to distinguish between realism and the real (see Van der Vlies 2010: 597). Bev's sentence on short stories "about something real" printed in newspapers, moreover, speaks to the literary and political history of South Africa in powerful ways; at the same time, it foregrounds the materiality of the literary work. It is interesting to notice that Bev expects Roddy's story to be about his revolutionary mother, similarly to the critical expectations around Wicomb's work as documentary and autobiographical (like Roddy's mother, Wicomb is a coloured woman from South Africa). Roddy-the-author does employ mimesis to represent Gavin, but he also ironically emulates Wicomb's metatextual practice: "*[he] finds himself inventing a dialogue around which to weave a story*" (2008: 130; emphasis in original).

Roddy's story progressively discloses a crisis between the couple, and it depicts the male figure in an unflattering light. As Gavin gradually arrives at the end of the narrative, his fastidiousness towards fiction is transformed into a "morbid fascination" that compels him to keep on reading "spellbound" (129-130):

> But something niggles, a sense of something unspeakable woven into these sentences that Gavin can't bring himself to draw out into the light. And a monstrous sense of shame creeps up vividly from the open neck of his shirt to his very brow where it settles in the luxuriant hair […]. Gavin sits bolt upright in his chair as the monstrous thing claws its way out of the print, and hisses. (2008: 130)

When he reaches the last page of the story, readers have come to the last page of "Trompe L'Oeil". The conclusion is what Driver calls the "coda to the plot": an indented paragraph, not italicised (2010: 539).[470] The coda features a generic "she" and "he", who *could* be Bev and Gavin, but there is no textual evidence of it. The last scene, which echoes some elements of previous parts of "Trompe

[470] Again, the publishing venue and the materiality of the text play an important role in the interpretation of the story. Driver draws attention to the fact that, while the South African edition of *The One That Got Away* presents the paragraph indented, both the US and UK editions make it start on a new page, so that the indentation is not visible (Driver 2010: 539).

L'Oeil" (the words "luxuriant" and "spellbound", for instance), could be the conclusion to Roddy' story, to Wicomb's, or it could be Bev's own literary output. This last reading is particularly interesting, because it provides the story with a set of new meanings. Early in the fiction Bev's literary aspirations are indeed encouraged by Roddy, but stifled by Gavin, so that she keeps "her labour with words" a secret (Wicomb 2008: 128). The cryptic coda thus defies any attempt at a definitive interpretation:

> The lovely hair tumbles in luxuriant waves in the lamplight that pools above her head. Her eyes are half-closed as she listens to the Moonlight Sonata. […]. As the music moves into a crescendo he watches, spellbound, her left hand rise slowly as if in a trance, watches it move mechanically to the coffee table by her side where it falls precisely upon the glass paper-weight. Her arm is raised, stretched well above her head when she leans back and […] aims for the centre of the French window, drawn across into a double pane. It shatters into a million pieces as the glass eye crashes into reinforced glass, the mosaic spreading and cracking eerily, and beyond it a full trompe l'oeil moon disperses into a million fragments before it skids away across the sky. (133)

The unnamed female figure breaks the glass that divides the outside from the inside, thus destroying the distinction between the real and fiction, while the male figure needs to find some air for his "choked lungs" (133).

It is interesting to compare "Trompe L'Oeil" with Gordimer's short story "Beethoven Was One-Sixteenth Black", published only one year earlier. Graham Riach defines Gordimer's eponymous last collection as "more resistant to understanding" than her previous short-story cycles (2016: 1089). Gordimer's narrative features a white academic like Gavin, Frederick Morris, who tries to find Black ancestors after hearing that "Beethoven was one-sixteenth black" at the radio. Notwithstanding the visible differences in terms of the rather shallow plots of the two stories, both share significant formal features. Riach's evaluation of "Beethoven Was One-Sixteenth Black" – "The story is elliptic, the plot almost non-existent, and the narrative shuttles back and forth between present and past, often in the space of a single paragraph" (Riach 2016: 1090) – can also be applied to "Trompe L'Oeil". Moreover, the beginning and the coda of the story are indented in a way that raises doubts on the interpretation of the text (1091), similarly to the coda to "Trompe L'Oeil". Perhaps a coincidence, but both short stories also invoke Beethoven: Wicomb's text refers to the Moonlight Sonata (1810), while Gordimer's to the late String Quartets (between 1825 and 1826). If the Quartets are known for their idiosyncratic style, which may stand for Gordimer's own late style in her last short-story collection (Riach 2016: 1092), the Moonlight Sonata's opening movement, more similar to a funeral march than to a romantic sonata, echoes the disruptive and disturbing ending of "Trompe L'Oeil". It is fascinating to notice these (perhaps fortuitous) similarities in two almost-concurrent post-apartheid short stories. This intertextual dialogue becomes even more playful when one considers that "Trompe

L'Oeil" itself invokes Gordimer when the narrator states that "it was not as if Bev imagined herself a Virginia Woolf or a Nadine Gordimer" (Wicomb 2008: 128).[471]

The metafictional element inside Wicomb's collection reaches its heights in "Trompe L'Oeil"; not surprisingly, the narrative closes the group of recent stories. At the same time, Wicomb addresses her ethical concerns over race and gender through her use of textualism, in what Driver calls the "mutuality of history and text" (2010: 540). Like Frieda in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* and other female figures in *The One That Got Away*,[472] Bev is accorded the possibility of reaffirming her agency at the end of "Trompe L'Oeil". Obscure as the coda may be, its relevance lies in the potentially disruptive ending it suggests. Dorothy Driver interprets the final paragraph of "Trompe L'Oeil" as a way of thinking of the "female figure as gathering into herself the history of women, and fulfilling their desire to cast their own blow", comparing Bev to Roddy's mother or to the figure of Dulcie, the revolutionary from Wicomb's *David's Story* (Driver 2010: 540).[473] Hence, a pattern can be identified, linking the agency of the female figures of the cycle across the colour line. Wicomb thus writes back to the fact that "gender was seen as a distraction from national liberation" and undermines the male, nationalist rhetoric of the struggle (Wicomb [1994] 2018: 102).[474] As Andrew van der Vlies remarks,

> Wicomb's texts – or, more significantly, the texts within her texts – are thus mothered, not fathered: their affiliation and genealogy is gynocentric. That is to say that they presume to displace the patriarchal male author and, implicitly, the authority of patriarchy, or the patriarchal authority presumed by the author of the kind of realism that Wicomb's postmodern, metafictional work constantly undermines. (Van der Vlies 2011: 430)

Before drawing to a conclusion, I believe it is pivotal to discuss "Another Story", the last narrative of *The One That Got Away*, because it gathers in itself several important aspects that shape the whole macro-structure of the short-story cycle, first of all, intertextuality. Intertextual dialogue in *The One That Got Away* can be found in every short story, and it reflects the translocal scope of the cycle and Wicomb's ethical drive. Indeed, intertextual echoes rarely announce themselves in an "authoritative manner", thus opening the narrative perspective to other voices and other(s') stories (De Villiers 2008: online). Unlike *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, *The One That Got Away* engages

[471] Bev would like to achieve a "momentary deception of the eye" and to "brighten up a street corner" through her writing "for a brief, illusionary moment" (Wicomb 2008: 128). These expressions precede and succeed the sentence on Nadine Gordimer. It is difficult to overlook the semantic proximity between Gordimer's famous remark that short-story writers see "by the light of the flash" of "fireflies" and Bev's thoughts on writing (Gordimer 1968: 459).

[472] Liminal yet transformative acts of resistance are carried out, for instance, by Jane and Polly Pringle, protagonists of "There's the Bird That Never Flew" and "Mrs Pringle's Bed" respectively.

[473] See Bev's thoughts: "[h]ow often she wished that she could ask about the woman, the revolutionary mother, but it would have been too difficult" (Wicomb 2008: 122).

[474] Miriam Tlali first foregrounded the gendered nature of the struggle in South Africa and the material obstacles of women writers. Wicomb comments on Tlali's short story "Fud-u-u-a!", where Tlali stages the sexual abuse of women in trains, in her essay "To Hear the Variety of Discourses" ([1990] 2018: 88). Frieda's experience in the train taking her home in "Home Sweet Home", alone in the women's compartment with a guard and a drunk man, speaks imaginatively to "Fud-u-u-a!".

also with minor and non-canonical works, especially from twentieth-century Scottish writers or nineteenth-century Scottish settlers in South Africa: Kathleen Jamie's "The Queen of Sheba" (1994) in "Boy in a Jute-Sack Hood" and "The One That Got Away"; Helen McCloy's *The One That Got Away* (1945) in "The One That Got Away" and in the whole cycle; Andrew Geddes Bain's racist play *Kaatje Kekkelbek, or Life Among the Hottentots* (1835) in "There's the Bird That Never Flew" and "Friends and Goffels"; lastly, Thomas Pringle's poetry in "Disgrace", "Mrs Pringle's Bed", and "There's the Bird That Never Flew". The intertextual dialogue with Geddes Bain and Pringle is further complicated by the fact that *Kaatje Kekkelbek* is probably a pastiche of a slave narrative, *The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave* (1831), edited by Pringle himself (see Shaw 2009). Wicomb thus tackles obliquely, through intertextuality, the complicated history of colonisation and of colonial representation between Scotland and South Africa.[475]

The presence of other intertexts, however, does not limit the cumulative texture of *The One That Got Away* to the relationship between South Africa and Scotland, but rather confirms its transnational and inclusive scope. Wicomb's intertextuality refuses "to cede the revolutionary potential of the transition to monolithic constructions of nation or family" and "to a restrictive sense of what it is proper for a 'South African' text to engage" (Van der Vlies 2017: 128). When Jeff's dementia sets in at the end of "Neighbours", he climbs into his bed and says "Thank you, ladies. Thank you for your time. Thank you and good afternoon", in a manner highly reminiscent of Ophelia's last words in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (Wicomb 2008: 99). In "N2", one of the least analysed short stories of the collection, Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" (1819) is invoked in the covert quotation of "beaded bubbles *something* at the brim" (149), while a close reading of "Nothing Like the Wind" invites a comparison with James Joyce's "Eveline" (104).[476] Wicomb also engages with South African intertexts: the revenant of Arthur Nortje in "In the Botanic Gardens", echoes of William Plomer's *Turbott Wolfe* (1925) and of Gordimer's *A World of Strangers* (1958) in "Boy in a Jute-Sack Hood" (Van der Vlies 2011: 435; 2017: 127), and of J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999) in "Disgrace". Most importantly, however, *The One That Got Away* confronts Sarah Gertrude Millin's racist novel *God's Stepchildren* (1924) in "Another Story".[477]

The narrative, which was originally published in 1991 in Sarah Lefanu and Stephen Hayward's anthology *Colours of a New Day*,[478] is functional to a discussion of the strategies of intertextuality,

[475] See Driver (2010: 536) for a discussion of "The Queen of Sheba" and Attwell (2017) for a discussion of Pringle's presence in *The One That Got Away*. Wicomb's latest novel *Still Life* is a tentative fictional biography of Thomas Pringle, in which Geddes Bain's *Kaatje Kekkelbek* and Mary Prince's slave narrative play a pivotal role.
[476] I have written on the intertextual dialogue between Wicomb and Joyce in an article for the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* (Fossati 2020).
[477] Peter Abrahams also writes back to Millin's eugenist work in his short story "Lonesome" from *Dark Testament* (1942).
[478] Compare Driver's two different takes on the story, before and after its inclusion in *The One That Got Away* (Driver 1999; 2010: 526).

metafiction, and repetition within *The One That Got Away*. The story recounts the visit of an elderly coloured woman, Deborah Kleinhans, to her niece, the history professor Sarah Lindse, in Cape Town. Readers acquainted with the literary history of South Africa should recognise the surnames "Kleinhans" and "Lindse" as belonging to the descendants of Millin's Andrew Flood, the white missionary who initiated a generation of coloured individuals after his sexual union with a Khoikhoi woman. Millin narrates that the signs of 'miscegenation' can never be entirely hidden (even though the skin colour of Flood's progeny becomes fairer and fairer), to the point that Berry Lindsell, Flood's last descendent, vows to have no children in order to put an end to the 'original sin' (according to Millin). Wicomb had already re-elaborated this arch-racist work in *David's Story* (2000) and discussed it in her essay "Shame and Identity: The Case of the Coloured in South Africa", where she identifies it as the literary origin of the "shame-bearing coloured" (Wicomb [1998] 2018: 122). Indeed, she explicitly admits having "an enduring obsession with Sarah Gertrude Millin", for *God's Stepchildren* "infuriates" her (Wicomb and Willemse 2002: 147). Millin's racist concern over 'miscegenation', moreover, is echoed in other stories of *The One That Got Away*, such as in Marie and Jeff's stereotypical description of a South African woman in "Neighbours" as a "funny patchwork […] of dark brown skin with darker stains here and there, and unnatural green eyes" (92).

In "Another Story", Deborah mentions the name of her sister Elmira, who is Barry's mother in *God's Stepchildren*, while Sarah is probably Barry Lindsell's granddaughter – the name of Sarah a clear reference to the author, Sarah Gertrude Millin (Driver 1999: 96). Thus, several criss-cross references come to the fore merely by looking at the names of characters. By choosing to narrate Barry Lindsell's progeny, Wicomb is already freeing 'miscegenation' from its shameful connotation.[479] Wicomb has written elsewhere that genealogy is a theme "traditionally employed to inscribe and examine ethnicity" (Wicomb 2001: 166). Indeed, Sarah's real motive for inviting Deborah to Cape Town is her desire to rewrite the story of her family, thus displacing Millin's racist account of it, but Deborah seems reluctant to talk about the past. Sarah, therefore, tries to describe her great-aunt's native place, Bravklei, quoting directly from Millin's text. Using a "preacher's voice" and switching into English, she speaks of "nothing but an untidiness on God's earth…a mixture of degenerate brown peoples, rotten with sickness, an affront against Nature…So that was the farm" (Wicomb 2008: 184). Even though the sentence is not signalled as a quotation, readers can grasp the swift change of register. Sarah's insistence speaks for the "excitement of an academic with a new

[479] See also Jane's re-interpretation of the female figure in the Doulton Fountain in "There's the Bird That Never Flew": "her face speaks unashamedly of miscegenation" (Wicomb 2008: 76).

project" (Raiskin 1996: 208).[480] Her eagerness to rewrite the account of her family, however, is put into question by Deborah's response:

> She just could not understand about this sickness and death, and so she felt a great weariness, a cloud settling around her head. The girl was surely mad. Everybody gets sick and dies, but Brakvlei was never rotten. Oh no, theirs was the cleanest of farmyards […]. Cleanliness is next to godliness, that's what my mother always said. (184-185)

Deborah's insistence on the cleanliness of her family's farm and her belief that "[a]ll coloured people have the same old story", in fact, testifies to her internalisation of racist thought, which associates coloured individuals to a rhetoric of impurity (Driver 1996: 97). Readers may be reminded here of the trite maxims of Frieda's family or of the Afrikaner woman's sentence in "A Fair Exchange", a fiction that shares many features with "Another Story", that "cleanliness was next to godliness" (Wicomb [1987] 2000: 132).

Hence, Wicomb's re-elaboration of the original source seemingly recontextualizes it without a real transformative effect: Deborah buys into apartheid's racist views, and Sarah's attempt to rewrite the story fails. Intertextuality, however, works with far-reaching effects in "Another Story". The ineffectual questions posed by Sarah to her aunt remain unanswered not to support Millin's text, but to raise doubts on the broader issues of authority and readership. Deborah recognises in her niece "the passion for probing deep into other people's affairs" (Wicomb 2008: 186). In fact, she prefers to talk about "good stories that seem to be about real life, but, well, when you think about it, you won't recognise anyone you know" (2008: 186). This sentence should alert Wicomb's readers, for it resembles Mrs Shenton's longing for stories with neat endings in the last narrative of *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*. In her desire to put into written form a story recounted by a rural woman, moreover, Sarah seems a revenant of Frieda, who tries to give a written form to the oral account of the uneducated and reluctant Skitterboud in "A Fair Exchange".[481] Sarah is convinced of the authorial responsibility when transposing an oral account into the written discourse, since "[i]t depends surely on who tells the story" (2008: 186). If one the one hand Wicomb poignantly shows the dangers behind this "fair exchange", to use her own words, on the other hand she presents Sarah as the author-narrator who tries to give voice to Deborah's untold and repressed memory.[482]

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[480] Compare it for instance with Gavin's self-conceit in "Trompe L'Oeil" or with Grant's feeling of being at a loose end because he has ended his academic project in "Boy in a Jute-Sack Hood".

[481] The relationship between Deborah and Sarah can also be defined in terms of exchange: the old woman is offered hospitality in Cape Town in exchange for the story of her family.

[482] See Deborah's thoughts: "How unreliable words were, lodging themselves comfortably in the memory where they pretended to have a rightful place" (Wicomb 2008: 185). Andrew van der Vlies compares Sarah's attempts to record Deborah's story with Brenda's engagement with John Campbell in Wicomb's *Playing in the Light* (2006). Both Sarah and Brenda serve Wicomb's ethical imperative and try to elicit forgotten or untold stories of others (Van der Vlies 2010: 597).

In the second part story, Deborah is awakened in the middle of the night by the security police who have come for her anti-apartheid activist niece (the story is set in the Eighties). With a temporal gap, we find Deborah, back home, telling her neighbour, Mr Lategan, about her stay in Cape Town. Deborah tells of her encounter with the policemen, who were "very polite", and of her visit to a museum, where she saw "Hottentots in a glass box, squatting around an unlit fire" (2008: 188-189). However, she says nothing of the "large protruding buttocks and the shameful loincloths of animal skin" (189).[483] The woman's inability to narrate this event reflects her shame as a coloured woman when confronted with the colonial construction of identity, thus alluding to a direct link with Dorothy Brink, the protagonist of the preceding short story, "In the Botanic Gardens", who likewise flushes with shame when she notices the image of a Black naked woman on a banknote.[484] When Dollie, Mr Lategan's wife, arrives, Deborah re-tells the story "slightly different[ly]" (190), until, when Mr Lategan leaves, she adds a coda to her second story (Driver 1999: 95). After telling that she poured coffee to the policemen – since "she was brought up decently" (Wicomb 2008: 89) – Deborah recalls the sergeant's voice:

> And Deborah paused in an attempt to trace the moment when things became muddled, but all she recalled was the unmistakable smell of marigold, a weariness, and the precise timbre of the sergeant's voice as she finished pouring the coffee: Milk and sugar for the other two, but just black and bitter for me. Then, without thinking, without anticipating the violence of the act, Deborah Kleinhans took each cup in turn and before his very eyes poured the coffee into the sink. Together they watched the liquid splash, a curiously transparent brown against the shiny stainless steel. (90)

Instead of defying Millin's racist ideas through a new written account of the Kleinhans family history, "Another Story" undermines the authority of *God's Stepchildren* through Deborah's oral retelling of the police raid in Cape Town. Her act is the more rebellious since it goes against her rural, conservative logic of order and propriety, exemplified by her motto, "tidiness is next to godliness" (Wicomb 2008: 185).[485] Deborah thus participates in a "conversational community more important

[483] The reference here is, of course, to the figure of Saartjie Baartman. Wicomb takes issue with her history in the essay "Shame and Identity: The Case of the Coloured in South Africa (1995–98)": "Miscegenation […] continues to be bound up with shame, a pervasive shame exploited in apartheid's strategy of naming of a Coloured race, and recurring in the current attempts by coloureds to establish brownness as a pure category, which is to say a denial of shame. We do not speak about miscegenation […]. What the case of Baartman shows is how shame, cross-eyed and shy, stalks the postcolonial world broken mirror in hand, reproducing itself in puzzling distortions" ([2005] 2018: 115).

[484] "In the Botanic Gardens" was published one year before "Another Story" in the magazine *Landfall*, but it was reprinted in 1991 in *The End of a Regime: An Anthology of Scottish-South African Writing Against Apartheid*, an explicitly anti-apartheid anthology (see Van der Vlies 2018a: 262). "Another Story" was similarly published in 1991 in an international anthology opposing South Africa's government.

[485] Compare Deborah's coffee-throwing gesture with Tamieta's internalisation of racism in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* when she becomes aware that she is the only coloured woman at the service commemorating Verwoerd: "If she could pull out of her plastic bag a starched cap and apron and whip around smilingly […] with a tray of coffee, perhaps then she could sit through the service in comfort" (Wicomb [1987] 2000: 59).

than any construction of nation", a conversational community joined by other (female) characters in the cycle who perform "small revolutionary moments of fictive self-actualization" (Driver 2010: 527-528).[486] The story's pervasive concern with re-tellings – and, ultimately, rewritings – speaks to the intertextual and self-reflexive nature of the narrative, which is markedly based on the device of repetition with difference. These formal strategies serve Wicomb's ethical imperative, since "Another Story" is everywhere concerned with otherness, as the title suggests (Driver 1999: 97).[487] The open ending of "Another Story", moreover, metafictionally denies closure to the short-story cycle and testifies to the "generative nature of narration", in Wicomb's own words (2018a: 212).

"Another Story", indeed, resonates with many themes that are common to the whole collection. The final, disturbing image of the brown coffee against the "shiny stainless steel" of the sink (190), for example, is an uncanny manifestation of the domestic space turned unfamiliar (see Driver 1999: 95). This dynamic alternation of *heimlich-unheimlich* settings is reflected in the macro-structure of the short-story cycle, which closes with a story published seventeen years earlier that nonetheless invites readers to find continuities with the other narratives notwithstanding its unfamiliar features. "Another Story" was originally published during the transition, in 1991, in an international anthology prefaced by Nelson Mandela with the aim of raising money for the ANC (see Nuttall 1991: 570). Its inclusion in a transnational short-story cycle testifies to the continuous dialogue between past and present, a typical feature of much post-apartheid writing.[488] Indeed, the narrative is replete with expressions such as "the past" and "the old days". "Another Story" revisits a part of South Africa's literary past, as Driver observes (1999: 93); its new publishing context, however, suggests that this transition-era story can offer new readings in its post-apartheid frame. Thus, Wicomb herself, like her characters, engages in acts of retelling/rewriting (Griem 2011: 400).[489] This strategy allows her to deny any authoritative, fixed interpretation of the text and to foreground rather the "loose end" that opens the short-story cycle – the fluid, discursive, and interdependent nature of the text and of the real. Wicomb's textual practice in *The One That Got Away*, as exemplified by a close reading of "Another Story", ultimately wants to "resist origins, and originals" (Coetzee 2010: 563).

[486] Griem compares the figure of Deborah to that of Polly in "Mrs Pringle's Bed" and that of Grace in "Disgrace", since the three elderly coloured women rethink their "sense of propriety in the face of political and social injustice" (Griem 2011: 402).
[487] Similarly, "A Fair Exchange" foregrounds orality and the religious cosmology of the Nama people (Driver 2011: 104).
[488] Speaking of Gordimer's *Beethoven Was One-Sixteenth Black*, Rim Makni-Bejar remarks how the "past" and the "post" inform each other (Makni-Bejar 2010: 2). Incidentally, the short story "Beethoven Was One-Sixteenth Black" is concerned, like "Another Story", with the themes of ancestry and race.
[489] In the acknowledgements at the end of the volume published by Umuzi, Wicomb warns readers that the last four stories had already appeared elsewhere in "slightly different versions", echoing Deborah's sentence in the preceding page that "if things were slightly different the second time round, well, she was telling it to someone different" (Wicomb 2008: 190).

6.4 "Repeated, Refashioned": Concluding Remarks

In *The One That Got Away*, Wicomb plays with the conventions and the form of the short-story cycle to engage readers in powerful acts of meaning-making. In his study of the short-story cycle, Forest Ingram argues that

> the dynamics of the cycle itself poses a major challenge to the critic. Like the moving parts of a mobile, the interconnected parts of some story cycles seem to shift their positions with relation to the other parts, as the cycle moves forward in its typical pattern of recurrent development. Shifting internal relationships, of course, continually alter the originally perceived pattern of the whole cycle. (1971: 13)

By using pervasively intertextuality, metafiction, heterotopic spatial re-readings, re-tellings, and uncanniness, Wicomb stages infinite and productive gestures of iteration that challenge readers to interpret several patterns of "recurrent development". Readers are required to engage actively and attentively with her fictions to grasp their ethical import and, in turn, forge new interpretations.[490] Wicomb's refusal of monolithic, univocal interpretations is thus achieved through a variety of aesthetical choices that bear witness to her craft as a writer. Lyrical and alliterative passages of free indirect style like the following from "Nothing Like the Wind" contribute to an emphatic reading of Elsie's felt experience of displacement, for instance:

> [T]here is the business of changing gear, of vehicles revved up and whining towards Byres Road, so that the wind whooshes with a whistle across the veld, across the yard, through the outbuildings and the workers' shacks, the rickety deal-wood of doors with cracks and gaps through which it weeps like an orphan. (Wicomb 2008: 137)

Irony and playful disregard of the reader's horizon of expectations also make up for an extremely rewarding and pleasing reading experience, in which the ethical and aesthetical dimensions are deeply intertwined.

While *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* plays on the generic boundary between the novel and the short-story collection, *The One That Got Away* stretches the intrinsic duality of short-story cycles between unity and difference, *heimlich* and *unheimlich*, to its extremes. If both collections gather around the two organising principles of place and storytelling, among others, these however come to the fore in rather different ways than in the short-story cycles of Matshoba and Essop (at least the latter's early fiction), which are shaped by the same gathering spots. Unity of place and local flavour in Matshoba and Essop are linked to the construction of precise ethnic identities – Black and Indian,

[490] See Wicomb's take on the pedagogical value of complexity: "[m]ost students start off believing that a text is difficult, but they also discover that such works are only accessible to those who are prepared to grapple with strangeness and complexity. That is the role, the value of education" (Van der Vlies 2018a: 268).

respectively.[491] Wicomb complicates the role of setting as a gathering spot of her short-story cycles. In her two fictions, place undergoes constant re-fashioning; its discursive nature, and the relational nature of identity, are foregrounded through the uncanny, intertextuality, heterotopic re-readings, and a deft use of free indirect style. Wicomb similarly re-interprets the unifying principle of storytelling, which, particularly in relation to Matshoba, is associated with claims to authenticity, with the creation of a communal feeling, and with a strong didactic function enacted by the usually first-person narrator. Though both *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* and *The One That Got Away* are everywhere concerned with stories and acts of storytelling, these are often staged as re-tellings, and their written status is foregrounded metafictionally. In her essay "South African Short Fiction and Orality", which incidentally discusses also Matshoba's stories, Wicomb claims that Benjamin's "layers of a variety of retellings" (Benjamin [1936] 1968: 92) are not inherent to orality, but can also be represented through writing given the "intertextuality of modern culture" (Wicomb 2001: 168).[492] She thus questions the claims to authenticity often attached to a "normative instrumentalization of orality", as in *Call Me Not a Man* for example (Griem 2011: 404). Her focus on storytelling, moreover, serves the opposite aim of the storyteller envisaged by Black Consciousness, since it actually displaces the authority of the narrative voice and creates space for other(s') stories to be told, and, ultimately, written, in an infinite pattern of repetition with difference.

Her essays similarly play host to the fictional practice of other South African and international writers, whose literary works she analyses to discuss relevant theoretical points. As she stated repeatedly in an interview with Andrew van der Vlies, she is "reluctant" to comment on her own work (2018a: 277). Intertextuality thus permeates also her non-fictional writings. The close-knit relationship between ethics and aesthetics in Wicomb's oeuvre, therefore, operates at the level of her fictional works *and* in the intersection between the latter and her significant body of critical theory. She thus joins in a rich and productive trend of non-fiction in the South African literary culture. The changing political context in South Africa impacted directly on the publishing scene of the country. The pivotal political and cultural role of the domestic press and little magazines in South Africa began to fade away in the Eighties, as we have seen in the previous chapter. This element, together with the fact that Wicomb left permanently South Africa in the Seventies, partly explains why she has few, if

[491] See Wicomb's essay "Shame and Identity" on this issue: "[t]he assumption of District Six as ethnic homeland illustrates not only the fictional nature of identity construction but also the postcolonial relationship with the politics of location. Since its earliest representation in fiction by writers like Alex La Guma and Richard Rive, it became a ready-made southern counterpart to the loaded signifier of Soweto" (Wicomb [1998] 2018: 117).

[492] Wicomb's representation of storytelling through writing reflects a wide-spread trend in contemporary South African short-story writing, probably also encouraged by the institution of the Caine Prize for African Writing in 2000 (see Attree 2013: 43). See also the very recent LongStorySHORT initiative, established in 2015, where short stories are inserted in community reading projects and later made available through podcasts, in an interesting intersection of writing, orality, and the digital space (see Sandwith et al. 2020: 123).

none, links with journalism, unlike most writers analysed in this thesis.[493] Her non-fictional output, however, stands in the same dialogical relationship to her creative works as Herbert Dhlomo's newspaper articles to his prose fiction. Continuity can thus be established at a diachronic and synchronic level between her textual practice and that of other South African writers, given the prominence of non-fictional writings also in the post-apartheid period.[494]

At the same time, Wicomb's textual practice more in general, and her short stories specifically, break new ground on many levels, as we have seen. If it is possible to talk of a "struggle over representation" for writers like Dhlomo or Matshoba, to quote James Sanders (2000), Wicomb performs in her texts what Dorothy Driver calls "the struggle over the sign", whereby "the presented world has the status of textuality rather than being representational" (2010: 523). Where most writers before her stressed, through an often authoritative narrative voice and the conventions of realism, the authenticity of the world they were representing, Wicomb emphasises rather the need for a multiplicity of interpretations, as signalled by the importance the suffix "re-" holds in her writings (revise, re-write, re-tell, refashioned, repeat…). She thus refuses any essentialism both in her aesthetic practice and in her ethical concerns, questioning the construction of ethnic identities and of nationalism that characterises the grand narrative of apartheid *and* the rhetoric of the new Rainbow Nation. This is mirrored in her pervasive use of free indirect style and intertextuality, particularly evident in her short-story cycles, in her refusal to set her fictions only in South Africa, and perhaps in her own "biographical to-ing and fro-ing", as Driver has it (2017: 16). Rita Barnard underlines the need to question "our ultimately politically motivated critical project of viewing works by South African-born writers as contributing to an (only theoretically and tenuously unified) national canon", given that post-apartheid fiction is "so far beyond the national concerns of the struggle years" (Barnard 2012: 670-671). By choosing to end my doctoral dissertation with a discussion of Zoë Wicomb's two short-story cycles, I also wish to eschew the national constraints of South Africa[495] and to close on a more open-ended, transnational note, which leaves some space open for "another story" to be told.

[493] For instance, Ivan Vladislavić, though belonging to a younger generation of South African writers, still had some links with *Staffrider*, where he published his first short stories. He also edited the anthology to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the magazine with Andries Oliphant in 1988.

[494] See, for instance, the 2012 issue of *Safundi* titled "Beyond Rivalry: Literature/History, Fiction/Non-Fiction" and Hedley Twidle's monograph *Experiments with Truth. Narrative Non-Fiction and the Coming of Democracy in South Africa* (2019). Wicomb's memorial lecture "My Name is HannaH" (2005), moreover, crosses the boundary between fictional (short story) and non-fictional discourse (lecture). See also the anthology *Twist: Short Stories Inspired by Tabloid Headlines*, edited by Ceridwen Morris and Helen Moffett and published in Cape Town in 2006.

[495] In this regard, see Andrew van der Vlies and Zoë Wicomb's discussion of "South African exceptionalism" (Van der Vlies 2018a: 281).

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