

*South African Crime Fiction and the Narration of the  
Post-apartheid.*

**Elizabeth Fletcher**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the  
degree of Magister Artium, in the Department of English  
Studies, University of the Western Cape.



**Supervisor**

Professor Duncan Brown

October 2013

## Key words

### *South African Crime Fiction and the Narration of the Post-apartheid.*

Crime fiction

South Africa

Post-apartheid

Narrative

Genre

Status quo

UNIVERSITY of the  
WESTERN CAPE

Disruption

Resolution

Catharsis

Representation

Popular culture

## Abstract

South African Crime Fiction and the Narration of the Post-apartheid.

Elizabeth Fletcher

Master's Thesis, Department of English Studies, University of the Western Cape.

In this dissertation, I consider how South African crime fiction, which draws on a long international literary history, engages with the conventions and boundaries of the genre, and how it has adapted to the specific geographical, social, political and historical settings of South Africa. A key aspect of this research is the work's temporal setting. I will focus on local crime fiction which is set in contemporary South Africa as this enables me to engage with current perceptions of South Africa, depicted by contemporary local writers. My concern is to explore how contemporary South African crime fiction narrates post-apartheid South Africa. Discussing Margie Orford's *Daddy's Girl* and the possibilities of South African feminist crime fiction, my argument shows how Orford narrates post-apartheid through the lens of the oppression and abuse of women. The next chapter looks at Roger Smith's thriller *Mixed Blood*. Smith presents the bleakest outlook for South Africa and I show how, even though much of his approach may appear to be 'radical', the nihilism in his novel shows a deep conservatism. The third South African crime novel I examine is Diale Thlolwe's *Ancient Rites* and I discuss it in the light of his use of the conventions of 'hardboiled' crime fiction as well as rural/urban collocations. In this case, the author's representation of post-apartheid South Africa appears to reveal more about the author's personal views than the country he attempts to describe. The fourth and final novel I discuss is *Devil's Peak* by Deon Meyer. My discussion here focuses on the notion of justice in post-apartheid South Africa and Meyer's ambiguous treatment of the subject. This discussion of contemporary South African crime fiction reveals what the genre might offer readers in the way they understand post-apartheid South Africa, and how it might be seen as more than simple 'entertainment'.

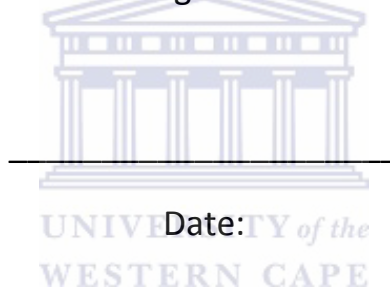
## Declaration

I declare that “South African Crime Fiction and the Narration of the Post-apartheid” is my own work, that is has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Name: Elizabeth Alice Fletcher

Student number: 3008611

Signed:



## Acknowledgements

For unfailing patience, gentle guidance and wise supervision,  
thank you to Professor Duncan Brown.

For a supportive community and open ears, my thanks go to  
the University of the Western Cape Department of English  
Studies.

For financial support, I thank the Mellon Foundation.



Thank you to my family for the constant support and all the  
laughs.

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	1
Background to Study.....	1
Research Questions and Aims.....	21
Methodology.....	25
Literature Review.....	30
Chapter Plan.....	32
<b>Chapter One</b>	
<b>Margie Orford's <i>Daddy's Girl</i> and the Possibilities of Feminist Crime Fiction</b> .....	34
Clare Hart.....	37
Riedwaan Faizal.....	42
Status quo.....	46
The Body.....	51
Resolution.....	54
Conclusion.....	56
<b>Chapter Two</b>	
<b>Roger Smith's <i>Mixed Blood</i>, the Radical and the Thriller</b> .....	61
The Possibilities of the Thriller Form in <i>Mixed Blood</i> .....	63
Form.....	65
Characterisation.....	68
Setting.....	72
Structure: <i>Status Quo</i> , Disruption, Resolution.....	74
Limitations of the Thriller Genre in <i>Mixed Blood</i> .....	80
Setting.....	81
Characterisation.....	82
Violence.....	87
Nihilism.....	89
<b>Chapter Three</b>	
<b>Diale Tlholwe's <i>Ancient Rites</i>: The 'Hardboiled' Genre and Rural/Urban Collocations</b> .....	93
A Challenge to Conventions.....	99
A Connection to the Past.....	102
From Suspicion and Alienation to Understanding and Connection.....	105
A Reflection on Responses to Knowledge.....	108
Structure: <i>Status Quo</i> , Disruption and Resolution.....	112
Limitations of Tlholwe's Narrative.....	116
<b>Chapter Four</b>	
<b>Deon Meyer's <i>Devil's Peak</i> and the Notion of Justice in Post-Apartheid South Africa</b> .....	124
Institutional Justice.....	128

Failed Justice.....	131
Vigilante Justice.....	134
Revenge.....	141
Pre-emptive Justice.....	142
Structure: <i>Status Quo</i> , Disruption and Resolution.....	144
Griessel and Mpayipheli: Fathers, Killers, Heroes.....	147
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>151</b>
<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>161</b>



## Introduction

### Background to Study

South African crime fiction has soared in popularity, both locally and abroad, in the last two decades. Currently, about 700 000 copies of South African crime fiction novels are sold locally every year – the most popular type of literature after general literary fiction – and our particular flavour of the genre is gaining popularity abroad.<sup>1</sup> While there has historically been a tendency in academia to undertake studies of ‘high-brow’ or canonical literature rather than popular work, the fact that this genre is being read so widely demands academic attention and, to my knowledge, until now, there has been no formal academic study of this work in South Africa. One of the most respected literary critics in the field of crime fiction, Stephen Knight, believes that “[l]iterary criticism has shied away from commercial success as a ground for treating a book seriously. Literary critical skills have not been used to study the interests and needs of mass society” (1980:2). He goes on to comment that “[a] good literary critic should be able to say why a best-seller works, and how it works. The dismissive certainties of most comments on popular culture do not satisfy those requirements” (1980:2). While these comments were published in 1980 and academic interest has certainly broadened over the last thirty years, I believe that the sentiment holds true today and that popular fiction is deserving of wider critical attention.

In this dissertation, I want to consider how South African crime fiction, which draws on a long international literary history, engages with the conventions and boundaries of the genre, and how it has adapted to the specific geographical, social, political and historical settings of South Africa. A key aspect of this research is the work’s temporal setting. I will focus on local crime fiction which is set in contemporary South Africa as this enables me to engage with current perceptions of South Africa, depicted by contemporary local writers. My concern is to explore how contemporary South African crime fiction narrates post-apartheid South Africa.

---

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Fred van Wyk at SAPnet for this information.



The fact that South Africans are drawn to read and write crime fiction is intriguing in the light of the fact that this society is already saturated with crime in reality: South Africa has some of the highest murder, rape and robbery statistics in the world. In an article titled “South Africa’s Crime Wave – in Bookstores” in *Time* magazine online, Karen Rutter suggests that “writers trying to make sense of that violent social landscape are turning increasingly to the crime genre” (Rutter, 2008: para 2). When this violence dominates our shared fears, why would so many people choose to read about these subjects in their spare time? This relationship between a country obsessed with and traumatised by crime and some of its most popular literature is worth examining. What is it about the genre’s treatment of crime and violence that keeps South African readers coming back for more?

Ian Rankin, an award-winning Scottish crime fiction writer, suggests, in an article entitled “Why Crime Fiction is Good for You”, that for many people the attraction of crime fiction is its capacity to allow readers to conduct their own investigations into themselves: “What interests me is the soul of the crime novel – what it tells us about humanity, what it is capable of discussing. [...] We are all inquisitive and curious animals – crime fiction touches this deep need to both ask questions to get answers” (Rankin, 1999: 9). This deep human need to question within the reader can be related to the structure of the crime novel. Crime fiction critic, Dennis Porter, suggests that crime fiction “is a genre committed to an act of recovery, moving forward to move back” (1981: 29). Fellow crime fiction expert, John Scaggs, picks up on this idea of the form and the content of the crime narrative, the return to the crime and the reader’s need to question in order to understand him - or herself, and suggests that Porter’s quotation has a twofold application:

It can be applied to the narrative structure of the whodunit, in which the narrative moves forward towards its conclusion and resolution as the detective moves back into the past in an attempt to uncover what occurred there. Porter’s observation, however, can also be applied to the ideological motivation to recover, or return to, a previous period characterized by stability and order. (Scaggs, 1980: 47)

While this dissertation will not focus specifically on ‘whodunits’, all crime novels engage with the puzzle in investigating a crime, and this has both epistemological and ontological consequences. The use of the word ‘recovery’, in Porter’s phrase, as Scaggs points out, relates to both the return to the crime for clues to understand what happened, and to the return to the way life was before the disruption of the crime. This need to understand the past and the desire to return to some resemblance of it are succinctly coupled in Knight’s remark that order is “the overt method and covert purpose of the analysis” (1980: 110). In other words, ordering facts and clues is the apparent way that the crime is investigated, while the drive behind this need to investigate is the desire to return to a time when life was seemingly in order before the disruption in the form of a crime.

The need to question and to better understand ourselves as well as the wish to return to ‘the way life was before’ after a disruption are possibly universal desires; however, I would like to focus specifically on the South African experience and our historical context as, perhaps, a way to understand the sudden popularity of this genre. Local crime writer, Jassy Mackenzie, believes that the apartheid regime has had a major impact on contemporary South African fiction. She argues that:

The influence of apartheid on South African writing can be compared to the influence that Hitler and the Nazi regime had on Germany. This had the same lasting repercussions on the culture and society it affected, and the way that everybody involved ended up perceiving themselves. The same thing is happening here in South Africa. Some crime fiction villains have their roots buried in the rotting carcass of apartheid, and some of today’s books are still set in that era. (2010: 14)

Crime fiction is one way in which South Africans are trying to understand their collective past to shed light on the present and how or whether they may be a part of this present. What makes this investigation particularly interesting is that it occurs in popular fiction, which is easily accessible and is often regarded as ‘superficial’ literature, the purpose of which is merely to entertain. This question will be examined further in this dissertation. But first it is necessary to clarify the terms of discussion and to outline the history of international and local forms of the genre.

The task of defining the boundaries of any genre is a complex one, and the case of crime fiction is especially difficult because of its long and varied literary history. One could offer as a starting point the following definition: crime fiction or detective stories are fictional narratives in which there is a crime.

P.D. James, the iconic British crime writer, describes the breadth of this perspective:

When we talk of the crime novel we can be discussing a literary spectrum which is extraordinarily wide and diverse, extending as it does from the modern novels of fast action and espionage, through to Wilkie Collins, Anthony Trollope and Graham Greene and the genius of Charles Dickens and Dostoyevsky, embracing some of the greatest achievements of the human spirit. (1993: 2)

This perspective is clearly too broad for my purposes here, yet I have been employing the term 'crime fiction' up to this point. Why is it that I choose this term over other generic terms such as 'detective fiction', 'police procedural', 'thriller' and 'whodunit'? In this case I would have to agree with critic John Scaggs and his reasons for utilising the term in the title of his book, *Crime Fiction* (2005): "it is the centrality of crime to a genre that otherwise, in its sheer diversity, defies any simple classification that has led me to adopt the title 'Crime Fiction' for this volume" (2005: 1). However, for my study, this lack of specific details is not useful either. Heta Pyrhönen, whose book *Murder from an Academic Angle* (1994) outlines the history of the criticism of crime fiction, suggests that "[c]ritics generally agree that detective fiction deals with the process of solving a crime, working backwards from its visible effects to its hidden causes and the concealed identity of the culprit" (1994: 9). Here, Pyrhönen uses the term 'detective fiction' which is exclusive in its focus on a particular protagonist, whereas I prefer the term 'crime fiction' which allows for a broader range of characters. However, aside from terminology, this comment, with a focus on the process of solving a crime, reflects the shift in crime fiction over the last two centuries. What began as reporting crime from the incident to its investigation to eventual punishment, such as the *Newgate Calendar* which was popular in eighteenth-century England, has become a very specific narrative form which depicts the explanation of a crime and the circumstances surrounding the event, including the culprit and his or her motives, as well as the process of the investigation which we read in the present. This emphasis is echoed by P.D James in her comment,

“[t]he interest is [currently] less in mystery than in motive, less in surprise than in the psychology of the murderer and in the effect of the crime both on the killer and society” (1993:2). However James’s perspective on the form of the puzzle and the identity of the culprit contradicts that of Pyrhönen. Rather than the exposing of the culprit being at the heart of the crime story, James believes that “[t]he crime novel is, of course, primarily concerned with crime, usually murder, but there is frequently no detective, amateur or professional, and no clues since we may know from the beginning of the book who is or will be responsible for the crime and why” (1993: 2). Having taken these perspectives into account and having to define the genre for myself in this discussion, my view is that the term ‘crime fiction’ may be used to refer to a narrative in which a fictional world is disrupted by a crime. The narrative then follows the investigation of this crime and offers some kind of resolution. The spectrum of emphasis in this definition can stretch from the crime to the detective, and I see ‘crime fiction’ as a broad term under which sub-genres with more specific emphases such as espionage stories, historical crime fiction, and thrillers can be housed.

It is necessary to be mindful of the organic boundaries of genre, and in a genre that is growing as quickly as crime fiction, one must be wary of steadfast rules. Even the definition I am going to employ could be challenged by the above comments from James and Pyrhönen. These contested boundaries are the result of a genre growing and developing for over two hundred years. In order to understand how contemporary South African crime fiction differs from other crime fiction, it is crucial to have an understanding of the history of the genre internationally.

In terms of literary lineage, almost all critics agree that the crime fiction genre grew out of Gothic and adventure story roots. It is not the purpose of this dissertation to detail these origins in the development of the genre, but it is worth giving a short description of their influence which shapes the fundamental structures of the crime novel. The influence of both the adventure story and the Gothic is clear in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s early work “The Sign of Four” (1890). The story employs a split

structure alternating between Holmes' investigations which disrupt the present with the unsettling details of the past (an element of the Gothic), while an adventure story set in Utah which provides the background to his investigations. The influence of the adventure story grew to be reflected in a heroic protagonist, racy plot and dramatic action which differentiate crime fiction from the Gothic novel. The title of one of the early collections of the genre, *Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery, and Horror* (1928) by Dorothy L. Sayers, highlights the close link between crime fiction and the Gothic. Scaggs describes this influence in crime fiction:

The Gothic novel is characterized by the disruptive return of the past into the present, particularly in the form of hidden family secrets and ghosts, and the narrative tension between the past and the present [...] There is also a clear parallel here with the 'hauntings' of later crime narratives, in which some crime in the past threatens the social order in the present, which the detective attempts to maintain and preserve. (2005: 15)

The ideas of 'social order' and 'attempts to maintain' it have been touched on already and will be discussed further in a consideration of my methodology. They are strongly related to broader concerns such as crime and transgression, investigation and punishment, which are fundamental parts of human nature and play a major role in our social interactions. As societies have developed discourses, beliefs and ways of engaging with these concepts, so the genre has matured to reflect these developments. For example, crime fiction reflects the evolution of police services, prisons, criminal psychology, forensic analysis, social views on crime and the changes in the types of crimes evident in society. While formal criminal investigation was developing in reality, the emergence of the first detective stories reflected these developments, as Scaggs suggests: "[d]uring the same period that science was first being pressed into the service of crime-solving, the first detective stories, in which the analytical and rational deductive ability of a single, isolated individual provides the solution to an apparently inexplicable crime, were being published" (2005: 19).

This relationship between literature and social responses to crime is truly fascinating and offers a wealth of opportunity for research which is somewhat beyond my purpose here. I wish, now, to give a very

brief overview of the genre internationally through four major sub-genres, namely mystery stories, 'whodunits', 'hardboiled' detective fiction and police procedurals, to enable us better to engage with the question of the flourishing of South African crime fiction today.

It is generally accepted that the first generic formulations of crime fiction in English are Edgar Allan Poe's short story "Murder in the Rue Morgue" (1841) and, later, Wilkie Collins' novel *Moonstone* (1868) (Scaggs, 2005; Pyrhönen, 1994; Knight, 1980; Porter, 1981). It is also worth mentioning the work of French writer, Emile Gaboriau, published in 1866. His loosely linked novels featuring the amateur detective, Tabaret, and the police detective, Lecoq, heavily influenced the shaping of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's iconic detective Sherlock Holmes and his associate, Watson. Thus the genre of detective fiction, in its recognisable form, was emerging simultaneously across Europe and America during this time.

What makes Poe's work identifiable as the first detective story? Dennis Porter believes that it is the structure of the work, "the order and causality of the events narrated" (1981: 24), that distinguishes Poe's as the first generic formulation of crime fiction. He suggests that crime fiction "prefigures at the outset the form of its *dénouement* by virtue of the highly visible question mark hung over its opening" (1981: 86). Poe's own description of his method supports Porter's comments and illustrates how he attunes the reader to the final unravelling of the mystery:

It is only with the *dénouement* constantly in view that we can give a plot the indispensable air of consequence, or causation, by making the incidents, and especially the tone at all points, tend to the developments of the intention. (Quoted in Porter, 1981: 26)

At this early stage, there is little ideological complexity to the crime story and the resolution offers few ideological implications for the reader and little comfort about society. Knight asserts that, in Poe's early work, "[n]o presentation or analysis of the social causes of disorder is offered, it is merely suggested that strange and terrible things can happen and a clever man will be able to explain them" (1980: 34). This 'analysis of the social causes of disorder' is, today, a key aspect of the reader's expectation of a crime novel, and some form of resolution is the answer to our state of questioning through the novel.

In 1887, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle published *A Study in Scarlet*, and the sheer popularity of his work hereafter secured crime fiction's future as a growing and enduring genre. It is at this point that the genre clearly began to reflect ideological imperatives. Scaggs suggests that the genre was beginning to protect the ideology of its readership: "Doyle endorsed conservative, middle-class attitudes" (2005: 25). Beyond this, however, Doyle's protagonist, Holmes, espouses reason to explain events and crimes which strongly appealed to his reading public:

The succession of incidents in explained and necessary relationship to each other expresses the ideas of material causation and linear history so important to the Victorian world-view. The perception of these patterns by the heroic individual manages to balance those essentially deterministic attitudes with the basically contradictory idea of the individual as noble and free, untrammelled by the laws of material causation. (Knight, 1980: 74)

This intriguing balance gave comfort to the Victorian reader with the belief that all mysteries could, through concentrated mental exertion and the use of science and reason by a gifted hero, be illuminated and explained. The power to understand these mysteries may have rested with the extraordinary mind of the detective, but it was possible. This belief in rationality had significant epistemological implications. Knight asserts that "[t]he importance of science – more exactly, of the aura of science – in Holmes's methods is well-known; it mobilises for the audience's fictional protection the contemporary idea that dispassionate science was steadily comprehending and so controlling the world" (1980: 79). Doyle's stories also brought crimes and their disruptions into the local and familiar realm of the reader. Knight describes this immediacy which readers had never before encountered: "[d]isturbing events are not now caused by past and foreign-based immorality, but represent dangers present in contemporary London and so are both credible and fearful" (1980: 87).

However, as Knight goes on to describe, these readers also felt a sense of security in this imagined proximity; they lived in a world where Holmes and Watson had been shown to operate through the

stories they were so familiar with: “[t]he consolations were great, and the wit and verve of Doyle’s writing give those comforts the illusory vitality of a living system” (Knight, 1980: 103).

While Doyle’s work became monumental in the crime fiction genre, it did not relate to or satisfy a large proportion of the reading public, particularly women (Knight, 1980: 108), and so the genre advanced into what is referred to as ‘The Golden Age’ which was led by female writers, and offered new ways of approaching the narration of stories about crime, prioritising the ‘puzzle’ of solving a mystery.

British crime writer, Agatha Christie, dubbed the ‘Queen of Crime’, and other female writers including Dorothy L. Sayers, Margery Allingham, and Ngaio Marsh, dominated the ‘Golden Age’, which is considered to have run roughly from 1920, when Christie published her first novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, through to the wake of the Second World War. The country-house murder mystery and the ‘whodunit’ are icons of this literary era. Another defining aspect was the development of the rules of ‘fair play’ which set the boundaries of how writers were to engage with their readers in the ‘game’ or ‘puzzle’ of the detective story. Scaggs suggests that “[t]he idea of fair play is grounded in the notion that the reader should, at least in theory, be able to solve the crime at the heart of the story of detection, and for this reason should have access to the same information as the fictional detective” (2005: 27). This emphasis on the ‘puzzle’ of the detective story characterised crime fiction in the Golden Age and this basis, whether adhered to or defied, remains fundamental to all crime fiction.

Christie’s stories moved the genre into a new era of ideological concerns. Her work is dramatically different from Doyle’s patriarchal word-view, however space dictates that I can only briefly comment on the hero/heroine, the readership and the resolution. The first feature of her work that strikes the reader is that “Christie neither finds nor offers comfort in an active, heroic, male stereotype” (Knight 1980: 109). Her detectives, Monsieur Poirot, a pedantic foreigner, and Miss Marple, a wily spinster, although marginal figures, are protagonists more easy for a general readership to relate to than the mysterious and volatile Sherlock Holmes. Indeed, the setting of Christie’s work is mostly domestic,



moving the reader from the grimy, dangerous streets of London to the sophisticated country home. This relocation in setting reflects the shift in readership and, as Knight outlines, a shift in the way the reader saw him- or herself: “Christie’s central audience was leisured, relatively unskilled but also competitive and self-conscious – the classic anxious bourgeois class. For them she fashioned a form that ratified conservatism, the duty others owe the self” (1980: 133). In addition to moving away from a familiarly masculine detective, Christie’s work moves away from one individualised hero altogether. Knight believes that Christie gave this bourgeois class a form that ultimately sanctioned the “ability of very ordinary powers to cope with the disorder people faced, in the world and in themselves” (1980: 133). Through the empowerment of the ordinary individual in solving the puzzles of her stories, Christie affirms the whole modern community. Instead of one mysterious hero detective, we find a growing sense of awareness within a social grouping, and it is often a joint effort of individuals within the domestic space pooling small clues that solves the crime with the guidance of the detective. This change in the method of detection has epistemological and ontological implications. Knight suggests that:

[Christie’s] urge to generalise detection presumably arose from her class’s sense that it was in control, with no need for heroes; partly from her feminine distrust of masculine narcissism and its associated individualistic heroics. Her attitude meshes extraordinarily well with the overall clue-puzzle structure, suggesting that the individual reader may equal the enquiring agent; Christie shapes an imitable method, not a comforting élite personality. (1980: 109)

This communal or generalised detection supports not only the idea of a stable and dominant bourgeois class, but also a capable and self-sufficient individual reader. The resolution is almost always satisfying, returning the conservative society to the apparent harmony of its world before the disruption of the crime through its own, protective detection. Knight shows how, while this relationship bore no resemblance to reality, it was an important way for the readership to imagine themselves:

The wished for resolution requires only patient and minimally testing thinking in the agent and, potentially, in the reader. The illusion of effective self-help and self-sufficiency is a crucial part of the story’s meaning, and the exclusion of detailed police-like activity is a major step in shaping the ideology. (1908: 111)

Soon, however, with the disillusionment of the Second World War, the 'whodunit', with its emphasis on puzzle and lack of complexity in its characters, was seen to be irrelevant, insubstantial and inappropriate in the wake of the human devastation of the period. Hardboiled crime novels, made popular in America and characterised by gritty realism and masculine swagger, appealed to a shattered society and came to the fore internationally after the war.

The subgenre initially emerged in the *Black Mask* magazine under the editorship of Joseph T. Shaw in the 1930s. Two greats of the school, Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, published hardboiled crime stories in the magazine during this era before going on to write novels in the genre (Scaggs, 2005: 29). Similarly to the way crime fiction grew from Doyle's mystery stories into the 'whodunit', the shift from 'cosy' crime stories to the hardboiled mode was equally dramatic. The modern reader demanded a deeper engagement with an urban setting, a hero and the attempt to make sense of post-war society. From the stories of the 'Golden Age', written mostly by British females, the genre moved to being predominantly written by American men with an entirely different approach. Scaggs points out that "hard-boiled fiction placed the laconic, self-reliant hero of the Western genre into this urban world to create something entirely new" (2005: 29). This new literary base of the Western changed the focus of this subgenre from one seeking to solve a puzzle to one exploring the inner dynamics of the detective, now referred to as a 'Private Eye', an individual, almost without exception a tough man, faced with the almost overwhelming task of making sense of the corrupt, incomprehensible and threatening urban world around him. Scaggs suggests that:

[i]t was Hammett, more than any other author, who set the foundation for a type of fiction that was characterised, among other things, by the 'hard-boiled' and 'pig headed' figure of the private investigator around which the subgenre developed, a threatening and alien urban setting, frequent violence, and fast-paced dialogue that attempted to capture the language of 'the streets'. (2005: 55)

These novels had enormous appeal and made a major impact internationally because their characters were cool, edgy and dangerous. In addition to this, people were reading and buying literature in a new

way with the development of 'pulp fiction' in the publishing industry. Inexpensive fiction books and magazines published on cheap paper made the genre inexpensive and easily available to a mass public.

The ideological implications of the hardboiled mode are more unsettling than the crime fiction genre had ever offered before. Resolutions offer small triumphs in a fundamentally hostile world. Scaggs identifies the isolation and alienation of the Private Eye as the centre of the subgenre: "[i]t is the figure of the tough loner on a crusade against social corruption, above all else, that characterises the hard-boiled mode" (2005: 64). Ralph Willet acknowledges the sense of futility in the genre as he sees the Private Eye's quest as having to "temporarily check the enfolding chaos" (1992: 5). Ernst Mandel takes this notion of futility further in suggesting that "[t]here is a certain naivety in the idea of a tough 'hard-boiled' individual fighting single-handedly against gangsterism, organised crime, and political and police corruption" (1984: 36). Despite his tough exterior, the hardboiled protagonist is on an unexpectedly earnest quest, alone, attempting to restore some kind of order to society and search for a sense of meaning for himself. Scaggs suggests that the protagonist's incorruptibility in a setting of urban decay features strongly in the hardboiled crime story:

The image of the modern city as a polluted wasteland emphasises the notion of a more general corruption in modern society that threatens to poison and corrupt even the private eye, and such a threat explains Chandler's insistence, in 'The Simple Art of Murder', that down these streets a man must go 'who is not himself mean'. (2005: 70)

In terms of the subgenre's resolutions and ideological consequences, it is this noble quest of the individual in a culture of fundamental uncertainty and corruption that holds weight and offers the reader some meaning.

In an ironic twist, John Scaggs suggests that the hardboiled form, "of all the sub-generic modes [...] is the most often, and easily, appropriated" for other purposes (2005: 4). He goes on to describe how "the most truculently misogynistic and often racist sub-genre of crime fiction is the one that has

been most frequently and successfully appropriated for ethnic, cultural, feminist, and gay and lesbian reformulations” (2005: 4).

This is clearly visible in the work of Sara Paretsky and Sue Grafton who both began publishing feminist revisions of the hardboiled mode in 1982, as well as Walter Mosley’s work emerging in the 1990s which interrogates race in the genre. These novels consciously use the form in new ways to question its ideological implications. Focussing on a black or a female PI offers very different possibilities from those of the traditional white male. The conscious reformation of subgenres is not exclusively an American phenomenon: Diale Tlolwe’s *Ancient Rites* (2008), a contemporary South African crime novel, employs the conventions of the hardboiled mode and will be examined in this dissertation. In terms of the development of the crime novel, however, the genre moved on from focussing on the rogue individual PI in the hardboiled subgenre to the teamwork of the social institution of the police force in the Police Procedural.

The first recognisable version of this subgenre was published in America in the 1950s and 1960s in Ed McBain’s 87th Street Precinct series. The author begins each novel with the following disclaimer: “The city in these pages is imaginary. The people, the places are all fictitious. Only the police routine is based on established investigatory technique”. As the series name and this repeated disclaimer suggest, the genre shifted to focus on realistic procedures of the police force. Knight argues that “[t]he detective has become a policeman, acting with institutional support, conducting more or less accurately reported police business” (1980: 168). Scaggs points out that, while the *Private Eye* represents “questionable vigilante justice [which is] often self-serving, personal, small scale” (2005: 88), the police detective can be seen as “part of the police force who safeguards society through vigilant and unceasing surveillance” (2005: 88). This subgenre depends on the assumption that “[t]he reader can trust the police to be credible operatives against crime” (Scaggs, 2005: 97). This fundamental trust in the law enforcement establishment contradicts the profound cynicism and distrust of the hardboiled mode. However, at this

point in its development, even as it might seem to move into the greater conservatism of institutional policing, crime fiction is becoming less prescriptive in its ideological implications and more interrogative. While the genre does present certain assumptions such as the police force being a united, vigilant and protective presence, the form's realism offers the space to reflect on society and prompt questions. Scaggs describes how "[c]rime happens to ordinary people, and although plots are often based on personal crises, it is the inherent realism of the subgenre of which this is a part that makes it the ideal vehicle for interrogating both the social order and the structures that support it" (2005: 97). In terms of the subgenre's resolutions, the reader is comforted by the protection of the fictional police force. Deviant criminals and what is believed to be an honourable police force are represented as opposing forces. Good nearly always triumphs over evil: "[t]he expulsion of the threat returns society to the *status quo* courtesy of the police force" (Scaggs, 2005: 99).

From this point in crime fiction's development, authors started working with the major subgenres in new ways. Further subgenres developed such as thrillers and historical crime fiction as well as particular national flavours of crime fiction. Australia, Scotland, Sweden and South Africa are examples of countries that produce internationally acclaimed crime fiction. At this point, having outlined the development of international crime fiction, I wish to move to a discussion of South African crime fiction and its growth.

One of the first clearly-identifiable South African crime stories appeared in the May edition of *Drum* magazine in 1953 and was penned by a young journalist called Arthur Maimane. The story, written under the pseudonym Arthur Mogale, features an investigator, 'the Chief', who emulates the Private Eye of early American hardboiled crime fiction. Barbara Erasmus, a local crime writer, describes 'the Chief' in her article, "Who's who in South African Crime Fiction: Arthur Maimane" as "the epitome of the hardboiled private dick, part Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe, part Peter Cheyney's fast-talking Slim Callaghan" (2007: para.3). Four years later, June Drummond published the first South African crime

novel called *The Black Unicorn* (1957) which featured an amateur sleuth. Also at this time, Afrikaans crime fiction, which is now a major part of South African crime fiction, began to emerge. Local Afrikaans crime writer and journalist, Dirk Jordaan, asserts that early Afrikaans crime writing lacked complexity and sophistication: “[i]nitially, during the middle part of the previous century, cheaply printed novels featured steak-loving, hat-wearing detectives [...] investigating single murders in small towns. But they were more pulp fiction than noir” (2008: para.2). These early South African detective stories, in both English and Afrikaans, drew elements directly from American hardboiled crime fiction; indeed, it would be a long time before local crime fiction dealt more directly with South Africa itself and developed its own recognisably South African character. Local crime writer, blogger and critic, Mike Nicol suggests that, for writers like Maimane and Drummond, engaging with crime in South Africa through fiction was nearly impossible because of the deeply politicised nature of crime and policing at this time. Nicol asserts that during most of the twentieth century when crime fiction flourished in Britain and America, , for South African writers, crime fiction was an ethical and political minefield: “[c]ertainly, come the apartheid state in the late 1940s no self-respecting writer was going to set up with a cop as the main protagonist of a series. It was akin to sleeping with the enemy” (2009a: para.1).

In addition to this deep politicisation, crime fiction relies on a sense of right and wrong and, whether shared or contested, at this time, all sense of justice was skewed by life under the apartheid regime. In this respect it is telling that both early authors chose protagonists independent of the police, and drew heavily on American and thriller conventions in a very broadly South African context thereby circumventing these issues. This era in South African crime writing is a particularly stifled one but it is worth mentioning those prominent figures who published locally and abroad before exploring the explosion of South African crime writers at the turn of the twenty-first century.

James McClure’s first novel, *The Steam Pig*, published in 1971, won the *Crime Writers’ Golden Dagger* for the best crime story of its year. The cover of the Gollancz Thriller edition declares, “A first

thriller set in urban South Africa by an author who is in the unique position of being able to show *verismo* police procedure in that country” (Pronzini & Muller, 2006). McClure was born in South Africa but lived most of his life in Britain. Unlike his predecessors, McClure began to engage with the social, cultural and political realities of South Africa at this time and his ‘unique position’ is presumably his distance from South Africa, his protection in Britain. The author dives into the aforementioned ‘minefield’ and employs the Police Procedural mode with an inter-racial detective duo: Afrikaner Lieutenant Tromp Kramer and Zulu Detective Sergeant Mickey Zondi. This pair would feature in a series that spanned the 1970s, disappeared for the duration of the 1980s, and finally ended with a prequel in 1993.<sup>2</sup>

Wessel Ebersohn was one of the first writers in the country seriously to engage the crime fiction genre, especially in his work which featured prison psychologist, Yudel Gordon, as the protagonist. Ebersohn’s first title, *A Lonely Place to Die*, was published in 1979 and his latest works, *The October Killings* (2009), *Those Who Love the Night* (2010) and *The Classifier* (2011) appeared after a nineteen year hiatus. Much of his recent work is historical crime fiction, returning to the era when several of his thrillers were banned. In the introduction to the article, “A Chat with Wessel Ebersohn”, Nicol describes this political battle and Ebersohn’s lasting influence:

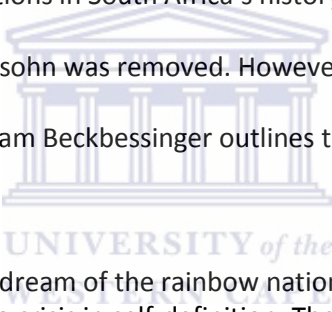
*The Centurion* was published by Ravan and Kirkwood also published a later Yudel Gordon *Divide the Night*. This novel and another stand-alone, *Store up the Anger*, were published in the UK first and immediately banned in South Africa before the Ravan editions were even printed. However the banning orders were opposed and overturned. In the case of *Store up the Anger*, the censors then banned the cover and its replacement, and the novel finally appeared in a plain dust jacket that carried only the title, Ebersohn’s name and that of Ravan Press. Ebersohn is one of the big names in our crime fiction and his intensely socially and politically aware novels have done much to influence the way we write crime fiction today. (2009c: para.1)

---

<sup>2</sup>Using a pair of police detectives of differing races became something of a trope in later South African crime fiction, and there is a fascinating discussion of this in the Crime Beat article, “The Rainbow Duo in the SA Krimi”, by Mike Nicol with contributions from Louis Greenberg, Margie Orford, Jassy Mackenzie, Sarah Lotz and Helen Moffet.

In the realm of Afrikaans crime fiction, Chris Moolman and Harry Kalmer featured in the 1990s, but the undeniably exceptional author of this time, in both English and Afrikaans, is Deon Meyer. His novels first appeared in Afrikaans and made it to the top of Afrikaans best-seller lists. They were then translated by his loyal translator, K.L. Seegers, for an English-speaking audience and today his work is published internationally, translated into 25 languages. Nicol describes Meyer's impact: "For the first time here were novels on a par with international crime fiction as far as plot sophistication and literary prowess were concerned" (2009a: para.6). In Meyer, it seems that the genre has grown to maturity in South Africa, and in the years since he started publishing in 1994, that precious year in South African history, there has been an explosion of South African crime writing across sub genres and languages.

With the first democratic elections in South Africa's history, the threat or reality of banning experienced by crime writers like Ebersohn was removed. However new and challenging crime fiction was slow to appear. Writing in 2010, Sam Beckbessinger outlines this moment in South Africa's social and literary history:



It has been fifteen years since the dream of the rainbow nation became a working blueprint. In that time, South Africa has undergone a crisis in self-definition. The protest novel, which had been the only really acceptable form for so long, was suddenly made redundant. Many have said that the first decade after 1994 was a generally sterile period for South African writers, as we sat in bewilderment, waiting to see whether this new democracy we had given birth to would be living or stillborn. (2010: 26)

She suggests that this was a time of anticipation; writers were not only waiting to see what became of their country but also what would come of South African literature now that protest or resistance literature had apparently become redundant. Beckbessinger goes on to describe the current atmosphere in the South African writing scene:

[O]ver the past few years, South African publishers have seen what began as a trickle turn into a flood of local books as our writers finally felt free again to write about subjects other than race. We are witnessing a re-humanising of our writers: they are remembering about love, about family, about greed and sex, and about the dark parts of the human mind. (2010: 26)

Jassy Mackenzie echoes this sense of freedom from the perspective of the writer:



One of the most enjoyable aspects of writing post-apartheid crime fiction is that South Africa is back on the world stage. This means that crime fiction writers can write a compelling story for an international audience as well as a local one without having to turn our books into struggle literature. (2010: 15)

Moving more deeply into this idea that “our writers finally felt free again to write about subjects other than race” and “without having to turn our books into struggle literature”, I would like to focus on a phrase that struck me in Nicol’s useful article, “A Short History of South African Crime Fiction”.

Nicol sees the re-emergence of South African crime fiction slightly differently to Beckbessinger. He suggests that “it takes some time for a country to mature and give itself permission to write and read escapist books, especially as we’d been used to writing and reading as an act of protest” (2009a: para.5).

While I agree that it has possibly taken South Africans time to adjust to a new democracy, as Beckbessinger has described, and feel that they can ‘indulge’ in crime literature, or any work other than struggle literature for that matter, I feel it is necessary to interrogate the idea of crime fiction as ‘escapist’ literature.

The definition of ‘escapism’ in the *Collins English Dictionary* is, “[a]n inclination to or habit of retreating from unpleasant reality, as through diversion or fantasy” (2003). If we consider this term in the context of South Africa, where, as Karen Rutter described above, crime is most South Africans’ ‘unpleasant reality’, it seems impossible to see crime fiction as an escape. A look at the words, ‘diversion’, “[s]omething that distracts from business, e.g.; amusement “ (*Collins English Dictionary*, 2003), and ‘fantasy’, “imagination unrestricted by reality”, “a series of pleasing mental images, usually serving to fulfil a need not gratified in reality” and finally, “a whimsical or far-fetched notion” (*Collins English Dictionary*, 2003) only emphasises this incongruity. Very simply, the idea that South Africa, a country with the highest crime rate in the world, chooses to ‘escape’ through crime literature seems very problematic. There are two ways of looking at this suggestion that South African crime fiction can be described as ‘escapist’ which I do not necessarily feel are mutually exclusive. First, South African crime fiction, because of its subject matter, inherently engages with social and political issues in South

Africa. This kind of work is unpleasantly familiar and almost too close for comfort for most South Africans as Beckbessinger points out: “[i]f the past fifteen years of South African literature has been about coming to terms with our past, then it seems that we are finally starting to coming to terms with our present. And our present, as we all know, is defined by crime” (2010: 26). Local crime fiction, which is deeply rooted in South Africa’s traumatic past and its threatening and violent present, cannot be described as ‘escapist’ literature. The second aspect of the ‘escapism’ debate is that while this literature is extremely close to home, the way in which it handles the themes of crime and violence, especially in terms of resolution, allows the reader some form of escape through devices which emulate catharsis. This fascinating tension formed the kernel of my interest in writing about South African crime fiction and I will return to it when I discuss my aims and concerns for this dissertation. From this early emergence of South African crime fiction, there are several key factors which have encouraged the writing and reading of crime fiction in South Africa in last fifteen years or so.

At several of the literary events I have attended, Deon Meyer has been asked what factors he believes explain the rapid growth in popularity of South African crime fiction. One reason he gives is that crime fiction has grown in popularity globally and so, with the ease of acquiring international titles, it follows that the genre should grow in South Africa and that local work would come into favour. Another reason he gives is that the public are more comfortable than ever in the space of criminal investigation, having been informed by ever-popular television series and documentaries on the subjects of detection (*Inspector Morse, The Mentalist*), forensics (*CSI*), police procedure (*NYPD Blue, Hawaii Five - O*) and courtroom proceedings (*Law and Order*). A familiarity with this range of subjects relating to crime and its investigation could certainly account for an increased readership, but what about an increased trend of writing?

Building on Beckbessinger’s suggestion that the climax of 1994 left many writers feeling bewildered because protest and resistance literature had been made redundant, I would argue that

after South Africa settled into its new identity, writers began to engage with the world around them critically once more and saw problems that still needed writing about. Instead of writing crime fiction which centred on crimes of deviancy such as serial killers, they began to focus on recent and relevant issues as Nicol illustrates:

Social and political concerns are back on the agenda and the bad guys are now as likely to be politicians, business moguls, and figures of authority as perverts, drug dealers, serial killers and gangsters. And their crimes are as likely to be crimes of deviancy as trade in blood diamonds, abalone poaching, the international drugs trade, arms dealing, political corruption, business scams, scandals and fraud, private security, and the hijacking of buildings. (2009a: para.7)

Jassy Mackenzie finds the influence of the apartheid past pervasive and, in some ways, she feels constricted by our historical context when writing fiction. She asserts that:

[W]e post-apartheid writers have to take into account when creating our characters, whether they are good or bad. We don't have complete *carte blanche*; we are bound by a set of rules that dictate that each character must be a plausible product of the society they come from, with a background and a set of belief systems that will not seem out of place. (2010:14)

Yet, while she feels that writers do not have free rein in depicting South African characters, Mackenzie does not see this as a disadvantage. Instead, she sees this challenge as one of the aspects that makes South African crime fiction some of the best in the world: "South Africa's apartheid history has allowed us to create more complex characters that combine elements of good and evil in a way that everybody can now understand better" (Mackenzie, 2010: 14).

To date, crime fiction has been written by English, Afrikaans, isiZulu, isiXhosa and isiPedi-speaking authors. Writers draw from the full gamut of crime genres, from 'cosy' crime fiction such as Zimbabwean-born Alexander McCall Smith's *No 1 Ladies Detective Agency* series, to the hardboiled mode in Diale Thlolwe's novels. There are also feminist detective stories by Margie Orford and Jassy Mackenzie, police procedurals by Deon Meyer and Michael Stanley, courtroom dramas by Sarah Lotz, thrillers by Richard Kunzmann and Roger Smith, true crime police novels by Andrew Brown, and crime 'blooks' (blog books) by Barbara Erasmus, to name just a few. This work is clearly making waves, as many of these authors are published internationally in many different languages. My project in this

dissertation is to attempt to understand why South African crime fiction is popular, a popularity which I believe is rooted in our country's dramatic history and complex present, and what narration of post-apartheid South Africa the genre makes possible. Much of South Africa's contemporary crime fiction deliberately complicates the notions of right and wrong and the lines between them in order to delve more deeply into South Africa's current national, political, social and cultural identity. I would argue that this literary genre, more than most, allows for this kind of interrogation through the delicate balance of escapism and realism which I have touched on.

### **Research Questions and Aims**

The aim of this dissertation is to explore these questions: how does South Africa's crime fiction relate to the genre internationally?; how does the genre operate in South Africa?; and what might be the ideological implications of the genre for readers? I will give a background to these questions, and then explain how I intend to answer them in the following chapters.

Regarding my first question, South African work developed at a relatively late stage in comparison with developments in the genre elsewhere, as has been outlined in my discussion of the history of crime fiction. Thus, South African work has inherited the conventions of each stage of its growth. From this base, local work builds a sense of place, culture and history unique to South Africa. Also inherited from international work are factors which attract readers in common to all crime fiction: a fundamental belief in order and goodness over chaos and evil, as well as a fascination with human nature, the 'other', transgression and resolution. Though South African crime fiction is a relatively 'young' genre, local crime writer and journalist, Margie Orford, believes that our local crime fiction, "like American, British or Scandinavian crime fiction – has begun to develop its own powerful sense of place" (Beckbessinger, 2010: 29). She suggests South Africa's fertile history and current complex socio-political circumstances make this place an ideal setting for a crime novel. She puts it simply: "I didn't set out wanting to write a

crime novel. I just wanted to write about the cities I know” (Beckbessinger, 2010: 27). Beckbessinger describes Orford’s idea further:

In Orford’s fiction, the cities of Cape Town and Walvis Bay are major characters in their own right. She describes both places – having lived significant portions of her life in both – with meticulous attention to detail: not only of the physical places, but also of the social histories that are written into them. Whether it is the marginalisation of the Herero and the impact of the South African army in Namibia or the ghettoisation of Coloured communities in Cape Town under apartheid, Orford’s awareness of history pervades her fictionalised cities. A dead body or two, it sometimes seems, is simply an excuse to explore a place: its past, its people, its politics. This potent combination is one she labels “psycho-geography”. (2010: 27)

Orford goes on to suggest that it is this depth that makes South African crime fiction so appealing.

Beckbessinger relates that “Orford argues that it is precisely this parochialism – this unique ability to delve into the social web that creates a place – that allows crime fiction to be so internationally successful” (2010: 29).

The second question I will examine is how does South African crime fiction operate in South Africa? The very act of setting any novel in South Africa requires the author to represent the country in some way, as the author selects and constructs ideas to narrate. The novels I will explore in this dissertation all offer differing representations of South Africa, and these will be discussed in the context of how they offer new insights into discourses around South African identity. Using a slightly different approach, one can read the narration of contemporary South Africa in terms of the structural elements of a crime novel. In terms of the conventional structure of a crime story, the *status quo* is generally disrupted by a crime and the investigation then provides a resolution to this disruption. In the context of South Africa, however, where crime has become part of everyday life, an incident of a criminal nature is often part of the norm in a crime novel and the trigger of a disruption might be something else entirely. I will examine the author’s *status quo* and disruption as a way of describing South Africa.

As well as its narration of contemporary South Africa, the crime genre and its Gothic roots allow the author to delve into the dark history of a place and its people: revealing secrets, ancient and current

pain, and hidden stories. South Africa's turbulent history and its consequences inevitably surface in some way in our local crime fiction.

My third and final question is: what are the ideological implications of South African crime fiction? This question will draw on the findings from the other two questions, as well as feeding into the discussion about discourse. My response will comprise an examination of the resolutions of the novels under discussion, and a consideration of whether these novels are part of an 'escapist' genre as Mike Nicol suggests above, providing simple diversion and entertainment, or whether they can be seen as challenging social commentary.

I will discuss the term 'resolution' and how it relates to the ending of a novel in the next section which will detail my methodology. Here, I think it is worth offering some key comments by several literary critics along with several crime fiction authors which depict their perspective on crime fiction as 'escapist' literature. Dorothy Jenson is quoted, in *Exploring Genre: Crime Fiction* (2007), as seeing crime fiction as primarily cathartic with little relation to reality: "[d]etective fiction is entertainment. The reader, from a position of safety... can vicariously witness the worst that humans can inflict on each other and then identify strongly with the do-gooder who sets out to solve the crime and put the world to right" (Stanners, 2007: 6). From the perspective of the author, Margie Orford suggests the genre offers some representation of reality and then offers something similar to Jenson's catharsis "[c]rime fiction is a comforting genre. You explain, and order, and eliminate the bad. You recognise your world, and then this nice writer comes along and *bliksems*<sup>3</sup> all the baddies and puts things to right" (Beckbessinger, 2010: 27). These comments suggest that the genre allows the reader to reflect on the world around him or her from a safe place, and that the genre offers no challenge and no development through the story. In contrast, Michael Connolly, an award-winning and extremely successful Canadian crime fiction writer, describes the appeal of crime fiction as a popular genre for authors to interrogate

---

<sup>3</sup>Afrikaans slang: to beat up.

society: “[w]riters are realizing the power of the crime novel... if you write a crime novel, you’re going to reach a wide audience. But they’re also realizing the crime novel can be a mirror on society, and it can be a form of reflection and ask questions about where we’re going” (quoted in Stanners, 2007: 6).

Nicholas Freeling, a prolific British crime writer from the 1960s until his death in 2003, sees this genre as a tool to access the dark underbelly of our common human nature:

Murder, and any other crime, is not part of entertainment, but an integral part of life. We are all murderers, we are all spies, we are all criminals, and to choose a crime as the mainspring of a book’s action is only to find one of the simplest ways of focussing our eyes on our life and our world. (Quoted in Stanners, 2007: 6)

This perspective directly opposes that of Jenson and Orford, and shows the breadth of opinion on this subject. The perspective I find most useful is that of Australian crime writer, Claire Carmichael, who writes under the pseudonym Claire McNab: “[c]rime fiction, devoured by so many readers, is a means not only to entertain, but to question given certainties, to present alternatives, to create positive role models, to explore the where, when, how, who – and, most importantly the *why*” (quoted in Stanners, 2007: 6). This perspective recognises the popular view by both readers and many writers that crime fiction is a genre read for entertainment, but it also allows for the genre’s potential to question – an opportunity many writers are increasingly taking advantage of. The genre offers the space to unsettle and challenge a vast readership, and I believe this is the most interesting aspect of many works that make up contemporary South African crime fiction. The growth and development of any genre is never uniform, and literary critic, Stephen Knight, makes a valuable point about the consoling nature of crime fiction as a cultural product:

Social function has been a recurrent theme in recent discussion of cultural products. A crucial notion has been that stories, myth, books, rituals are not so much an answer about the world, but a set of questions shaped to provide a consoling result for the anxieties of those who share in the cultural activity – the audience. Culture productions appear to deal with real problems but are in fact both conceived and resolvable in terms of the ideology of the culture group dominant in society. (1980: 4)

I would suggest that contemporary crime fiction embodies parts of all of these perspectives in one way or another. While some works challenge the notion of crime fiction as 'escapist' literature and bring the reader face to face with topical social and political issues, there is a long history of crime writing with 'safe' conclusions and so there is always the choice for writers to provide a consoling resolution to these stories and give the reader a cathartic reading experience. The four contemporary South African crime novels I have chosen to examine in this dissertation will be discussed in the light of this topic, and critically examined in terms of their specific resolutions and their ideological implications.

## Methodology

My approach to writing this dissertation is similar to that of a detective. I will employ a set of skills to analyse what is evident in the novels I will be discussing as well as what is not being said (which often reveals as much as what has been said). Analysis will include elements of psychology, criminology, close reading, genre analysis, social sciences, popular culture, history, political science and current affairs. I will examine a range of contemporary South African crime novels with differing authors, styles and settings in order to discuss specific elements in sections of close reading such as the crime, criminal, detective, investigation and setting as well as the attitudes and norms of the novel.

In terms of my critical methodology, I would suggest that this work most closely emulates Stephen Knight's highly regarded work *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction* (1980). Of his approach, Knight asserts that his analysis isolates certain key examples to discuss in detail and relates them to social causes as opposed to providing a more general literary history, such as is found in John Scaggs'

*Crime Fiction* (2005). Knight says:

Given that the texts studied here are popular examples of crime fiction, the reason for treating them in a somewhat isolated way is not only to provide space for close analysis; it is also to avoid the common fallacy of presenting a steady historical progress from work to work, and rather to concentrate on the nature and function of the texts themselves. This method helps to make criticism consider a work in terms of its social relations rather than only in terms of its relations with other works. Literary historicism very easily becomes a discussion of the world of



literature alone: it talks of genres developing as if they grew autonomously, without social and historical causes. (1980: 2)

I also agree with the ideological importance Knight places on crime fiction's relation to its audience and, therefore, to its social realities:

I will argue that major examples of crime fiction not only create an idea (or a hope, or a dream) about controlling crime, but both realize and validate a whole view of the world, one shared by the people who become the central audience to buy, read and find comfort in a particular variety of crime fiction. (1980: 2)

This relationship is clearly depicted through Knight's work and my aim is to build on this discussion within the context of South African crime fiction. My argument will differ slightly from Knight's, however, in that I will argue that the most progressive South African crime fiction does not, in fact, offer the 'comfort' which Knight suggests the genre offers because it challenges the world view that the reader holds.

One of my favourite comments about crime fiction comes from the prolific and award-winning British icon of crime fiction, Ruth Rendell. She asserts that "[m]urder itself is not interesting, it is the impetus to murder, the passions and terrors which bring it to pass, and the varieties of feeling surrounding the act that make of a sordid or a revolting event compulsive fascination" (quoted in Stanners, 2007: 7). We, as readers, are fascinated with crime fiction and especially the culprit and his or her motives because we share our humanity with the culprit; he or she could easily have been us if we were put in that position. My approach to the close reading of these novels resonates with Rendell's comment in that I, too, am less interested in the murder itself. I will discuss the ideological implications of the novels through their structure, which has been shaped by the Gothic influence on the genre. Very simply, as I described in my definition of the genre, I will talk about the structure of a crime story as opening with a *status quo* which is then disrupted by a crime (most often a murder) which is investigated and leads to a resolution. In this structure we have four main elements: *status quo*, disruption, investigation and resolution.

The importance of examining the *status quo* lies in the fact that it is bound up with the novel's discourse about South Africa. The term *status quo*, literally translated from the Latin as "the state in which", is defined in the *Collins English Dictionary* as "the existing state of affairs" (2003). It is important to stress that, when discussing these novels, the term refers to the norm into which we enter at the beginning of a story, the story's reality; not our own reality. Thus the *status quo* is a representation of the world of the story, and so the *status quo* of each story is different from that of another. Given that the *status quo* is an entire state of affairs, it may seem an overwhelmingly difficult thing to describe and examine, however the *status quo* comes into sharp focus when one sees the world of the novel through the lens of the disruption. The *status quo* is what the crime disrupts. My task will be to analyse what values and ideological implications the author presents in the *status quo*. In other words, the social 'norm' that the author sets out in the beginning of the novel and what that says about today's South Africa.

The disruption, in the form of a crime, provides a catalyst within the story but, as Rendell suggests, the least interest from the critic, author or reader. It is a key structural element as it triggers the investigation which interrogates the circumstances of the crime, however, in terms of the Gothic influence of the genre, the disruption reveals the violent and extreme parts of our common human nature that lurk just below the surface of society as well. I will also examine what type of crime is committed and its social implications. The investigation of the disruption forms the bulk of the plot of a crime novel and follows the Gothic trope of a return to the past to understand the present. My examination will focus on what is permissible, realistic and acceptable for the story.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I will focus on the story's resolution. It is crucial to define the term 'resolution' and my sense of the word for the purposes of this discussion. The *Collins English Dictionary* offers a wide range of definitions for its root, 'resolve': however, the most relevant ones for this argument are "to find an answer or solution to; solve" (2003), "to explain away or dispel" (2003)

and “to bring to an end” (2003). These definitions draw attention to the fact that there are, in fact, generally, two resolutions in every crime novel: first, the conclusion to the investigation of the crime; and secondly, the wrapping up of the characters’ story in which we are immersed.<sup>4</sup> The first kind of resolution is most easily identified, for example, the killer is found out by the detective moments before he or she kills again and is brought to justice. The second kind of resolution is often less easy to identify yet has just as much of an ideological impression on the reader. Knight uses Agatha Christie’s work as an example:

Many of her stories end not with the solution to the problem but a final linking of two lonely lovers. It asserts that a new family order can rise from the family disturbed by murder; it has a healing, renovating effect similar, in its often bathetic way, to the final sequence in a Shakespearean tragedy when the emergent controller of the wounded state speaks in calm, ordered tones. (Knight, 1980: 116)

Here, the reader experiences a resolution which is not directly related to the investigation of the crime, but rather to the characters within the novel. I will examine both types of resolution as well as how they interrelate in my discussion of four South African crime novels.

My interest in the resolution of the crime story stems from the fact that it is what the author leaves the reader with; it is the lasting impression of the novel and it speaks to the ideological implications of the narrative. Knight suggests that the resolution of a crime story is particularly important because the genre ends the story with a particular conclusion rather than describing the full extension of the investigation including the prosecution which takes place in reality: “The nature of the resolutions themselves is an important part of the ideology of the stories. Only rarely does the legal system operate at the end of a case” (Knight, 1980: 93). Thus, the resolution of the crime story is the reader’s only touchstone of justice.

---

<sup>4</sup>Credit must be given here to Mike Nicol for these comments during a conversation with me at the Franschhoek Literary Festival on 23 May 2011.

Knight takes this point further in suggesting so eloquently that investigation is “the overt method and covert purpose of the analysis” (1980: 110). The resolution is significant because, from the moment the *status quo* has been disrupted, the drive of the novel is to find a resolution and restore order. What I find so interesting about this point in the novel is to examine what parts of the *status quo* have been restored and what parts have been changed. In terms of the novel as a whole, what parts of the *status quo* have been challenged and shifted by the author?

These shifts are significant because it is here where we see how the crime novel is challenging *our* set of norms, *our status quo*. Examining the notion of ideology in popular fiction, Heta Pyrhönen asserts that Antonio Gramsci:

[e]mphasized that ideology is a permanently *contested* matter. For him, cultural power cannot be maintained unless allowances are made for opposing interests: popular culture is, simultaneously, both dominated *and* oppositional, both regressive *and* progressive. It is an *area of negotiation* between dominant and oppositional discourses where ‘dominant, subordinate and oppositional cultural ideological values and elements are ‘mixed’ in different permutations’ (quoted in Turner 1990, 213). (1994: 104)

If, as Gramsci suggests, the arena of cultural power is a truly fluid space, the significance for crime fiction is that when one looks at the kinds of resolutions the reader is offered, their shifting interrogates the very nature of the genre of crime fiction. Here one returns to the question of whether crime fiction is ‘escapist’ literature or perhaps something more challenging. Pyrhönen describes how John G. Cawelti sees crime fiction as an inherently conservative genre: “[Cawelti] locates one cultural function of detective fiction in its affirmation of enduring interests and attitudes and in its confirmation of conventional definitions of the world. This function is achieved by presenting imaginary worlds aligned with these interests, attitudes and definitions” (1994: 88). She goes on to describe Cawelti’s view that the cultural function of the crime genre is to assist in the smooth transition between social and ideological *status quos*:

As cultures are perpetually changing, and as the interests of different subgroups often clash, however, detective narratives are also assigned the function of resolving tensions and ambiguities that result from such conflicting interests or from ambiguous attitudes towards

changing values. In this way, they assist in the process of assimilating value changes to traditional imaginative constructs. Their capacity to integrate new meanings eases the transition between old and new, thus contributing continuity and unity in modern discontinuous, pluralistic societies. (Pyrhönen, 1994: 88)

Leaving aside what seems to be Cawelti's curiously instrumental view of literary production, I find this idea of the inherent conservatism of the genre difficult to marry with contemporary South African crime fiction. Of course Cawelti published these thoughts in 1976 in an era when South African crime fiction had not yet flourished and international crime fiction was at a very different stage in its development. These thoughts may well have been true then, but I intend to interrogate whether contemporary South African work is conservative and reductive, or whether its resolutions are challenging our status quo.

## Literature Review

Before I embark on this study, it is necessary to locate this work within the context of what has already been written about South African crime fiction. At this stage, very little formal academic study of this work has been undertaken and, to my knowledge, this is one of the first academic studies of contemporary South African crime fiction. This new offering will consider four recent works of South African crime fiction and will draw on both international and local criticism of the genre. Because the genre has a much longer history in countries like Britain and America, there is a far more established body of criticism from these countries. I will draw on what has been acknowledged as essential reading on the genre and employ what is appropriate to these South African works.

John Scaggs' *Crime Fiction* (2005) offers a thorough account of the genre's history and its development. This work also offers some significant discussion of cultural appropriations of crime fiction and its subgenres. Julian Symons's *Bloody Murder: From the Detective Story to the Crime Novel* (1993) shifts critical focus from general introduction to specific criticism that is relevant to my discussion of the narrative capacity of the genre in South Africa. In terms of informing a discussion of ideology and form in the crime novel, two major texts stand out: Stephen Knight's *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction* (1980);

and Denis Porter's *The Pursuit of Crime: Art and Ideology in Detective Fiction* (1981). These works offer detailed discussions about specific crime literature as well as broad observations about form and ideology in the genre. International criticism of the genre has developed to such an extent that its own history can be discussed, and Heta Pyrhönen's *Murder from an Academic Angle: An Introduction to the Study of the Detective Narrative* (1994) has proved extremely useful in this regard. This work maps and discusses the various ways that the genre has been critiqued, from early criticism which took the form of crime writers offering comments on their fellow writers' work in the preface to their own publications, to the structuralist approach and, finally, on to moral, epistemological, and psychological interpretations of the works.

While these works form a base of critical knowledge about the genre, I have read further into specific areas on which my study will focus. My discussion of feminist crime fiction is informed by Sally Munt's *Murder by the Book? Feminism and the Crime Novel* (1994) and Gill Plain's *Twentieth Century Crime Fiction: Gender, Sexuality and the Body* (2001). These provide a strong theoretical base on which to build a discussion of female characters, particularly in relation to Margie Orford's *Daddy's Girl* which features a female protagonist and depicts socially-ingrained violence against women.

This considerable body of international criticism will inform a critical discussion of South African crime fiction. Currently, there is a remarkable lack of formal academic criticism about South African crime literature. The main reason for this, I would suggest, is that the genre itself has only recently flourished. The criticism that is available today is primarily the work of other South African crime writers and, in this way, it reflects the early criticism of international crime fiction. This dissertation will then critically engage with the articles, columns and interviews by South African crime writers about their own work, their contemporaries' work and the genre as a whole in South Africa and internationally

By far, the most useful tool I have found so far has been *Crime Beat*<sup>5</sup>, a South African crime fiction blog edited by Mike Nicol and managed by BooksLive SA. While the website is edited by one person, there is a wide range of contributors and the site has proved very useful for my purposes, as articles are often commented on by authors, and those commentaries develop into discussions in their own right. In addition to this, I also draw on articles in newspapers and magazines. The South African literary journal, *Words etc*, has been a source of valuable interviews. The journal devoted its entire issue of the first quarter of 2010 to South African crime fiction.

## Chapter Plan

This dissertation will examine four South African crime novels. The first is Margie Orford's *Daddy's Girl* (2009) which is the third novel in a crime series featuring criminal profiler, Clare Hart. This chapter examines Orford's representations of female characters, with particular focus on the figures of the female detective and the female victim in the context of South African gang crime. I consider how Orford questions stereotypes and experiments with the genre's conventions in doing so.

Roger Smith's *Mixed Blood* (2009) is the second novel I discuss. This wire-taut thriller takes the genre's conventions to the extreme, providing the reader with an exhilarating experience. Set in the contrasting areas of affluent Camps Bay and the desperate Cape Flats, the novel confronts South African contemporary society head-on through the stories of a corrupt cop, an American couple fleeing the law, and a security guard determined to leave his gang life behind. I discuss the novel in the light of its thriller form and how this affects characterisation and the narrative's capacity to engage with social issues.

The third novel I discuss is *Ancient Rites* (2008) by Diale Tlholwe, in which the author takes 'city slicker', private investigator Thabang Maje, out of Johannesburg and into the heart of 'traditional' values and spirituality in the rural village of Marakong-a-Badimo. In this chapter, I examine the author's creation of a unique intersection between the conventions of the originally urban, American form of the

---

<sup>5</sup><http://crimebeat.book.co.za/>

hardboiled detective story and the exploration of African traditions in a narrative set in a rural South African village. I pay particular attention to Thlolwe's narrative strategy and how his authorial attitudes appear to emerge and influence the novel in rather troubling ways.

The fourth and final novel that I examine is *Devil's Peak* (2007) by Deon Meyer. The novel is a complex crime thriller which focuses on a vigilante killer, a struggling alcoholic police detective and a sex worker who would do anything to protect her child. Meyer draws into question the notions of justice and redemption in the context of political transition in South Africa.

This choice of works presents some of the most critically-acclaimed and popular contemporary South African crime fiction. The focus throughout my discussion of these novels will be the narration of post-apartheid South Africa.





## Chapter One

### **Margie Orford's *Daddy's Girl* and the Possibilities of Feminist Crime Fiction**

Margie Orford's *Daddy's Girl* (2009) is the third novel published by the author involving the protagonist, Clare Hart. Within the chronology of the series, however, this is the earliest investigation and is set before Hart investigates the deaths of Herero street children in Walvis Bay in *Blood Rose* (2007) and a serial killer in Cape Town in *Like Clockwork* (2006). Orford's latest novel is about a cold case: the murder of an artist in *Gallows Hill* (2011) with *Water Music* due in 2013.

The Clare Hart series are amongst the very few contemporary South African crime novels with a female protagonist. Others worth mentioning are Jassy Mackenzie's Jade de Jong series (2008-2011), in which Jade appears in three novels to date as a private investigator, Sarah Lotz's pair of novels featuring the lawyer Georgie Allen, *Exhibit A* (2009) and *Tooth and Nailed* (2010), as well as Wessel Ebersohn's *The October Killings* (2009) and *Those Who Love the Night* (2010) which feature Abigail Bukula, a lawyer who teams up with Yudel Gordon, the veteran criminologist of Ebersohn's oeuvre. Angela Makholwa's *Red Ink* (2007) features Lucy Khambule who is a journalist cum PR consultant, and Hawa Golakai's investigative journalist, Vee Johnson, features in her debut novel, *The Lazarus Effect* (2011). Despite comprising only a small proportion of a big industry, these novels are extremely popular, particularly in book clubs and franchise book stores. Orford was a featured writer at the inaugural Greyton Book Club Festival in September 2011, she is a regular panellist at the Franschhoek Literary Festival, and her work is regularly reviewed in women's magazines and websites such as the Women24's Book Club page. Orford's reach is not limited to women or South Africa, however, and her work is also published in the UK, Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, France, Romania and Russia.

In *Daddy's Girl*, Clare Hart, an investigative journalist, is introduced to the role of detective through being asked to assist the police in profiling the recent murders of young girls because of a widely-viewed documentary she had produced on missing girls in Cape Town. She is also approached by

police detective, Riedwaan Faizal, to help him find his missing daughter, Yasmin, who was abducted outside her ballet school while waiting to go home. Detective Faizal's superiors suspect him of foul play after previous incidents where he collected his daughter from school and spent time with her outside of agreed arrangements between himself and his estranged wife, Shazia.

Margie Orford's personal history appears to exert a strong influence on her writing and gives insight into the feminist concerns of her work. Born in London and brought up in Namibia and South Africa, Orford was detained and interrogated in Pollsmoor maximum security prison in 1985 after participating in an anti-apartheid protest as a student. She ended up being charged with treason, and wrote her final Philosophy exam for her degree in prison. The charges were soon thrown out of court, but the experience had a profound and traumatising effect on the idealistic young student. In the article "Once Upon a Life: Margie Orford", published in *The Guardian*, Orford describes the lasting effect of a night of interrogation: "[w]e are alone, two men and a girl in the middle of the night. No one will open the door, whatever they might hear. My fear of them – a sexual terror – slips under my skin, heading towards the bone like a filleting knife. It gets into the marrow; it lives there still" (2011: para.4). These experiences as a political activist clearly shaped Orford into a writer who is acutely sensitive to the dynamics of power and injustice in society. Today, she employs the medium of crime writing to explore these tensions in post-apartheid southern Africa and especially how they relate to women. This chapter will consider to what extent and how *Daddy's Girl* can be read as a feminist text.

To begin this examination, a definition of feminist writing is required. In her book, *The Woman Detective: Gender and Genre* (1988), Kathleen Gregory Klein employs Marty S. Knepper's suggestion that feminist writing shows:

as a norm and not as freaks, women capable of intelligence, moral responsibility, competence, and independent action, [...] reveals the economic, social, political and psychological problems women face as part of a patriarchal society; [...] explores female consciousness and female perceptions of the world; [...] creates women who have psychological complexity and rejects sexist stereotypes. (Klein, 1988: 201)

To this literary definition, Klein adds several fundamental elements of feminism:

[F]eminism rejects the glorification of violence, the objectification of sex, and the patronization of the oppressed. It values female bonding, awareness of women without continual reference to or affiliation with men, and the self-knowledge which prompts women to independent judgement on both public and personal issues. (1988: 201)

I will discuss *Daddy's Girl* in the light of these definitions and argue that Orford depicts feminist concerns in both form and content in three major ways. Firstly, in terms of characterisation, Orford uses the tough police captain, Riedwaan Faizal, to fulfil the hardboiled expectations of the genre which allows her female protagonist, Clare Hart, to infiltrate the mode and draw focus to the experience of being a woman in our society. Secondly, in terms of the world of the novel, Orford depicts a relentless *status quo* of violence against women and children and oppression of the poor. Thirdly, in terms of the form of the novel, instead of working with the cerebral approach traditionally associated with the protagonist of detective fiction, Orford writes through the site of the body, employing physical experience as a lens onto this world.

Crime fiction, as a genre internationally, has a long history of feminist variants which Sally Munt discusses in *Murder by the Book? Feminism and the Crime Novel* (1994). Munt explores the history of feminism in the crime genre and analyses examples of such texts within categories of liberal, social and radical feminism. The major difference between these sub-categories is that:

[w]hereas radical or socialist feminism demands sweeping social re-creation, liberal and revisionist feminism suggest that although the current, patriarchal organization of society is flawed, women should work through existing systems to effect change and to expand women's opportunities. (Klein, 1988: 200)

Within these categories, I would suggest that Orford's crime writing falls into the category of liberal feminism because she works within the established and popular form of the crime novel to depict the feminist concerns which will be outlined in this chapter. Gill Plain suggests in *Twentieth Century Crime Fiction: Gender, Sexuality and the Body* (2001) that, "under the comfortable cover of genre, writers can display narratives that would not otherwise see the light of day, and, indeed, reach audiences who

would not otherwise be reached” (2001: 94). The purpose of this chapter is not to analyse the various categories of feminism, which are themselves complex and contested, but rather to discuss ways in which *Daddy’s Girl* can be seen as a feminist text.

## Clare Hart

First, I will discuss the novel’s female protagonist, Clare Hart. The very decision to place a woman at the centre of a crime novel can be seen as a feminist act. As outlined in my introduction, the genre’s long history has tended to be dominated by conservative ideology and male protagonists. Kathleen Klein’s book, mentioned above, traces the history of female detectives as well as their literary depiction through history. She argues convincingly that “[m]odelling the female protagonist on a male prototype establishes the conditions for her failure as either an investigator or a woman – or both” (Klein, 1988: 162). She goes on to assert that, in crime fiction:

[a]s the protagonist is not simply a man but the glorification of masculine traits, the substitution of a woman with her own feminine virtues or incompletely assumed masculine ones, leaves the novel without its centre. But, it is not the decentred genre which is mocked. Rather, it is the deficient hero/ine. A conflation of literary, economic and political motives has led authors to reduce her to less heroic, more manageable and familiar terms. (Klein, 1988: 162)

While Klein makes a valid point about the tendency for crime fiction to be dependent on a masculine centre, her work was first published in 1988 and I would argue that contemporary crime fiction is no longer as conservative as she claims. This dissertation will show that, certainly in the South African crime fiction scene, there is far more work that is progressive, if not radical, in its social implications, than ever before. I would agree with Gill Plain that “[a]lthough superficially conservative in its reliance upon resolution and the restoration of the *status quo*, implicit in the [crime] genre is a considerable degree of resistance to reductive gender categories” (2001: 6). At some points Klein’s argument, quoted above, verges on the conspiratorial, and I prefer Plain’s more exploratory way of expressing a similar point:

Whether the detective is male or female, straight or gay, she or he always exists in negotiation with a series of long-established masculine codes. The extent to which the detective conforms to or challenges these models is thus essential to understanding of crime fiction and the changing role of the investigator within the genre. (Plain, 2001: 11)

So how do Orford and her female protagonist, Dr Clare Hart, 'negotiate' these 'masculine codes'?

Orford's approach is captured in a brief conversation between fellow woman detective, Rita Mkhize, and the protagonist, Clare Hart. Mkhize is Faizal's new police partner, and she is battling to be taken seriously by her macho department. She complains:

'All I have is feminine intuition. And how am I going to table that as a point on the agenda?'  
'Call it "gut feel", said Clare 'That's what they call it.' (Orford, 2009: 221)

This exchange shows how Orford does not attempt to make her protagonist fulfil the hardboiled expectations of the genre. Hart is a woman who is most definitely not trying to be 'one of the guys' which is the fate of many female protagonists before her. Rather, she is represented as a capable woman who is physically, mentally and emotionally up to the task of investigator.

Hart is a white, middle-class investigative documentary maker with a PhD on the subject of rape and femicide. These factors alone within the *status quo* of the novel give this protagonist access to places and people not generally granted to the majority in South Africa. Beyond these, Hart is street-wise, and she has an incisive intellect which is served by both her intuition and scientific expertise. She uses her attractiveness and the assumptions made about her blonde hair and slim physique to her advantage, even assuming a disguise with them to investigate a strip club. Hart is disciplined and exerts herself by running regularly. She drives a sporty green Mini Cooper and has knowledge of how to handle a gun from growing up on a farm. While Hart is physically adept and capable of defending herself with violence, she is never depicted within a scene of gratuitous violence or in a way that allows her physical actions to trump her thoughts and ideas. In her personal life, Hart is seemingly tied down by little other than her pompous cat, Fritz. She is well-off financially, has no ostensible dreams of family, and does not take to domesticity as the contents of her fridge demonstrate: "a punnet of strawberries, a jar of mayonnaise, whiskey" (Orford, 2009: 33). At the beginning of the novel, Hart is single with a history of several casual partners. Both of her parents died when she was a student, but she has two sisters who

live nearby. Her twin, Constance, who features in *Blood Rose*, was raped and beaten during a gang initiation and lives on an isolated farm outside Cape Town in a community of violated people and carers. Hart's elder sister, Julia, is a vision of domesticity with a husband and two young daughters who adore Hart.

Many of these attributes such as toughness, independence and sardonic dialogue are inherited from the hardboiled genre. But that is where the similarities end. As mentioned above, Klein argues that women detectives in fiction have been compromised as characters:

[a]ttempts to raise the "detective" script to a paramount position by abjuring the conventional image of women and creating a woman detective who followed the male pattern failed as the inevitably conflicting script for women intervened; the unity of the novel's formula was then destroyed. Similarly, attempts to raise the "woman" script undercut the necessary elements of the detective formula. To succeed commercially, authors decided that their character was either not a proper detective or not a proper woman. Occasionally, they drew both conclusions. (1988: 4)

While many of Klein's ideas still hold, I believe Orford's uniquely crafted position for her protagonist as an independent criminal profiler hired by the police for complex cases highlights the development of the genre since Klein drew these conclusions.

Hart's position allows her to navigate her way inside as well as outside the law enforcement establishment. Her job as a criminal profiler means that her methodology differs from that of a private eye or police detective. Her role is not only to decipher clues to solve the crime but, more importantly, to predict the next move of the criminal to assist the police's detective team, as opposed to confront the culprit with violence as is common in the hardboiled mode. Hart's background as a documentary-maker as well as her moral code and integrity allow her to get close to the community of the crime. She gains valuable information from sources often overlooked by others by giving her time to really listen. Her method is inclusive, as opposed to the lone quest of the hardboiled hero. To solve the case in *Daddy's Girl*, Hart works with police Captain Riedwaan Faizal, his partner Rita Mkhize, as well as Arno Pretorius in the city's surveillance hub, the Cyclops Centre, and Senior Superintendent Phiri in the law enforcement

establishment. She also works closely with her own contacts: Charlie Wang, an IT whizz kid, Danny Roman, a sound expert, and Pearl, a young woman interviewed in Hart's documentary. Her compassion and thoroughness are rewarded in the novel when Hart receives an anonymous tip-off from the kidnapper's daughter, Calvaleen, because she is seen as a trustworthy aide.

The person who sacrifices the most to help find Yasmin, the missing girl, and the true heroine of the story is Pearl, featured in Hart's documentary through her story of gang abuse and rape as the daughter of a gang leader. Orford subtly glorifies Pearl through the narrative, from her brave appearance in Hart's film and her insightful hunches about the case (which often turn out to be correct), to her final sacrifice of sending a text message to Hart telling her where the missing girl is during a vicious attack by her father seeking revenge for his incarceration as a result of her cooperation with the police. The fact that 'Pearl' is the woman's screen name, a false identity given to her to protect her from the gangs she talks about, as well as the fact that we never learn her real name, have an impact on the significance of this character. She is not represented as an individual but rather, one could argue, Pearl becomes a symbol of the many thousands of women like her in South Africa, who live in a world where male control and violence are the norm and who are unseen and unheard. I will address this *status quo* a little later in this chapter.

A final defining feature of the protagonist is Hart's financial status. It seems that she can afford to be independent and is able to pursue her own agenda because of her apparently affluent financial position. While it is never stated, one must assume that Hart is paid by the police for her assistance, but it seems as though she does not depend on this income and so could reject the case if she objected to it or if it did not interest her. In fact, money is never represented as an issue for Hart, and so her investigation is not primarily driven by economic motives, but rather her desire to protect vulnerable women and children.

In terms of her character, Hart has emotional intelligence and integrity which make those she questions able to trust her. While she might occasionally act outside the law, Hart's moral judgement is infallible and her drive in the series is always directed towards helping the victim. This almost always guarantees her the reader's sympathy and support. This wholesomeness is echoed in her very name: Clare, from the French adjective, "claire", which, according to the *Oxford-Hachette French Dictionary*, means "clear or bright" (2007: 278), and evokes the personal qualities of transparency and purity. Her surname, Hart, suggests the heart and the qualities of love, warmth and compassion.

While Hart is depicted as fully committed to her investigations, when she is not immersed in them a sense of alienation pervades her personal life. The reader is offered little of Hart's background, and this sense of disconnection runs through her life like a thread. The reader only really encounters Hart in the present, but the little information one can glean about her past reveals much about her motivations as an investigator. We learn that Hart's investigations carry heavy emotional significance for the young woman. Her work to protect women and children through her investigations and documentaries is something of a quest to achieve salvation. A conversation with friend and pathologist, Ruth Lyndall, reveals Hart's desperation:

'You're running on empty, Clare.'  
'I'm just running.'  
'It won't fix things.'  
'It might fix me.' (Orford, 2009: 40)

Hart's motivation is perhaps her guilt and anger associated with her twin sister's brutal attack. One could go so far as to suggest that Constance is a distorted reflection of Hart herself, maimed, traumatised and reclusive. Looking over a map depicting the locations of where the bodies of murdered girls had been found in Cape Town that she created as part of her research, Hart considers her work and her life. She thinks, "[t]his work is what her life had become. Work she was good at, maybe the only thing she was good at. She didn't seem to be good at life" (Orford, 2009: 83). In contrast, Hart's other



sister Julia, a seemingly content wife and mother, can be seen as what she denies herself in her quest for salvation.

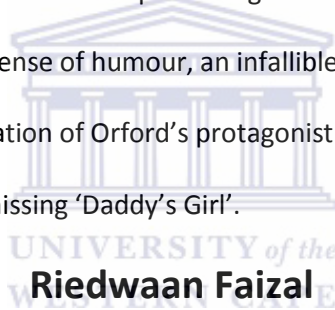
Hart also reveals moments of vulnerability which are closely linked to her compassion. When she is about to examine the body of recent victim, Ruth Lyndall checks on her:

'You ready, Clare?'

'I'm ready.'

She wasn't. The gurney was too big. And the body on the steel tray too small. (Orford, 2009: 42)

Dr Clare Hart is something of an intriguing contradiction: down-to-earth fantasy woman whose work is the only way she knows how to battle her personal demons. Her strengths lie in her sharp mind, physical aptitude, confidence, drive and attractiveness, and her weaknesses such as her isolation and rejection of a balanced or family life are directly linked to the pain and guilt she feels for her sister and those whom she has failed to save. She has a wry sense of humour, an infallible moral compass and, on top of it all, she always gets her culprit. An exploration of Orford's protagonist would be incomplete without her male counterpart, and father of the missing 'Daddy's Girl'.



Captain Riedwaan Faizal implores Hart to help him find his daughter, Yasmin, because the case is being derailed by suspicion that Faizal himself has kidnapped her. Faizal has a history of disregarding rules and has once before taken Yasmin out of school, which led to a much-publicised search for her. Special Director Salomé Ndlovu is under pressure to improve the public image of the police service in the light of recent cases of policemen using their firearms on their families and themselves. A thread of the thriller genre develops through *Daddy's Girl* in the interaction between Faizal and Ndlovu as she throws the weight of her department behind containing what she believes is a volatile and damaged cop, while Faizal is desperately working against the clock to find his missing daughter despite the suspicions of those around him. Hart keeps the investigation and plot moving forward while Faizal is questioned,

chased, shot at, beaten up and suspended. By the close of the novel, the two have developed a romantic interest in one another.

Faizal's character brings an interesting contrast to that of Hart. He is Muslim, Coloured and grew up in a working-class family. This romantic partnership of mixed races also appears in Jassy Mackenzie's Jade de Jong series with the protagonist being a white, middle-class private eye and her love interest, David Patel, being older, of working-class background and Indian descent. As outlined in my introduction, this mixed race pairing has a long history in South African crime literature.<sup>6</sup>

The reader's introduction to Faizal as he enters his office gives us insight into his character and the effect of his job on himself and his family:

Climbing a flight of stairs, Riedwaan turned where the sign said Organised Crime and Drug Unit in bright orange letters. The younger cops doing correspondence courses in criminal psychology called them the OCDs. Thought their joke was hilarious. Fuck them. Though only an obsessive compulsive would stick with gangsters long enough to bust them. The work was dirty and dangerous and it had broken up his family. (Orford, 2009: 45)

Immediately, Orford identifies Faizal as a hardboiled figure; he is tough talking, jaded, independent and driven. He also endures the hardships of the job in a way that harks back to the trope of the gallant knight in the roots of the hardboiled hero.

Orford points with self-reflexive irony to these traits of the hardboiled hero in a humorous exchange between Faizal and a journalist at a press conference. In this extract, Faizal is identified as a hero for his work in the Organised Crime and Drug Unit and posed questions about a new case:

'This linked to your one-man crusade against gangsters, Captain Faizal?' The journalist flipped open his notebook, pen poised.

'I'm a Muslim,' said Riedwaan. 'Crusades are not my thing.' (Orford, 2009: 31)

---

<sup>6</sup> Orford herself has commented about this pairing in a response to an article entitled "The Rainbow Duo in the SA Krimi" by Mike Nicol. I would suggest that this is the first authentically South African trope to emerge out of local crime writing.

Faizal's response provides humour, but also signals to the reader that Orford is knowingly locating her work outside of many of the traditional Western assumptions of the genre and introducing those of a specific location and society.

In his constant battle to find his daughter despite the suspicion laid thickly upon him by his superiors, Faizal is depicted as being trapped in the bureaucracy of the law enforcement establishment. He is supported by his new partner, Mkhize, who helps to get the reader on Faizal's side by recognising and highlighting a quality that Faizal shares with Hart: an infallible moral compass. Mkhize comments that "Riedwaan doesn't break the rules just because he doesn't like them" (Orford, 2009: 118). The most significant aspect of Faizal's character is that he is Hart's love interest both in this novel and throughout the series. This relationship has interesting implications for a reading of *Daddy's Girl* as a feminist text.

Romance has a long and varied history within the crime fiction genre. John Scaggs points out that during the 'Golden Age' of classical detective fiction, "[m]any of the novels end[ed], not with a final solution to the problem, but with the final union of two lovers" (2005: 47). Here, romance forms an important part of resolution. The family unit is preserved and the wealth of the aristocracy is protected in the continuation of the family line. In contrast,

no romantic resolution is offered in hard-boiled fiction. Rather, the impossibility of romantic resolution parallels the impossibility of resolving the criminal problem and restoring social order, and it is for this reason that the tough-guy detective, despite his (and more recently her) well-concealed romanticism, is invariably single. (Scaggs, 2005: 47)

In the Clare Hart series, Orford moves away from hardboiled conventions and offers some semblance of hope and positivity which is generally eschewed by that genre. While relationships often signify stability, Hart and Faizal's romance is far from tame or conventional. In fact, I would suggest that their dynamic throughout *Daddy's Girl* is characterised by the intimate tensions of both violence and the erotic.

The pair's first meeting is an intense mix of threat and intimacy. Faizal waits for Hart outside her apartment and frightens her when he confronts her. Her measures to protect herself by readying her car key to stab him are contrasted with affectionate elements in her narration such as, "He handed her an

open ID. Captain Riedwaan Faizal. It felt warm from being against his body” (Orford, 2009: 74). Later interactions in the scene of their first meeting illustrate how the relationship enables certain feminist aspects of the text. Though many men in the novel are portrayed as violent, greedy benefactors of a patriarchal society, the relationship between Hart and Faizal allows for his very tough and masculine characteristics to interact with Hart’s feminine traits in a positive way. During their first encounter Faizal traps Hart against a wall in an effort to sustain her attention and to convince her to help him. Again, the body language and narration of their rapport depict a mix of passion combining violence and the erotic. This scene, however, shows Hart’s aversion to violence and preference for communication and understanding.

Clare had her back to the wall. His fingers were around her wrist. His other hand was against the wall next to her face, his feet were planted either side of hers, trapping her knees between his. She could feel the heat of his body, his arm close to her face. Her alternatives: knee him quick and fast or jab a key into his eye.

‘Why don’t you let me go?’ There was sometimes a third way. ‘And we can talk about it.’ (Orford, 2009: 75)

A later scene in the novel shows the positive influence of Hart’s feminine qualities on Faizal. Hart tells a distraught Faizal that a message from his daughter has been left on his answering machine:

Riedwaan smashed his fist into the wall, blood welling on his knuckles as he drew it back again. Clare slipped her body between him and the wall. Catching his fist in both palms, she slowed the punch, and directed it onto her breastbone. Riedwaan held his hand against her chest, his blood staining her white shirt. Feeling the rage in him, she pulled him closer until his forehead rested against hers. (Orford, 2009: 180-181)

Orford depicts Hart as infiltrating Faizal’s life, both physically and emotionally, to temper his self-destructive tendencies with compassion, emotional intelligence and strength.

There are also practical ways in which this relationship suggests *Daddy’s Girl* can be read as a feminist text; Faizal allows Hart access to the resources and authority of the law enforcement establishment without her having to be a permanent agent of it. Their work together satisfies Klein’s definition of a partnership, which “connotes shared responsibilities; it implies equivalent if not equal

participation; it presupposes mutual respect and trust; it suggests an equality between partners” (Klein, 1988: 186). In this way, Hart is granted an equal position to Faizal in the investigation; they do not compete or conflict in their work. The structure of the novel is such that each of them investigates their own leads, communicating their findings to each other in meetings and by phone. The pair only actually works together in four chapters, from chapter 44 onwards, to investigate the missing docket which were mysteriously dropped off at Hart’s apartment, and then again in five of the remaining nine chapters of the book, from chapter 59, where the pair find a clue to Yasmin’s location in a video clip sent to Faizal by her abductors.

This structure allows the reader to become acquainted with each character separately through their focalisation in different chapters. We get to know their personalities, methods and morals intimately in isolation from the other which makes the reader’s experience of their romance all the richer.

To return to Klein’s line of argument that “[m]odelling the female protagonist on a male prototype establishes the conditions for her failure as either an investigator or a woman – or both” (1988: 162), I would suggest that Orford circumvents this problem with this pairing of Faizal and Hart. One could argue that Faizal’s main role within the novel is to fulfil the hardboiled expectations of the genre and allow Hart her agency as a feminist without stretching the conventions to breaking point.

## **Status Quo**

When looking at the ideological implications of a crime novel, one’s instinct is often to skip to the ending of the story to find out who got caught and received their just deserts as an indication of the morality and dominant ideology of the novel. Gill Plain, points out, however, that:

these texts cannot be reduced to the sum of their resolutions; they must also be considered in the light of the conflicts and tensions they mobilise en route, and, in exploring these tensions, the possibility must be considered that crime, like its counterpart respectability, is seldom quite what it seems. (2001: 6)

In addition to *what* the text 'mobilises en route', it is also important to examine *how* the author mobilises these 'conflicts and tensions'. The narration of *Daddy's Girl* is located in the conventions of realism. Orford's novel is based in contemporary Cape Town and makes reference to specific places and landmarks such as Faizal being based at Caledon Square, Cape Town's major police station. Every detail in terms of setting points to the 'real' and so Orford is able to suture the content of the novel onto this believability to create a sense of authenticity and urgency. The effect of this realism is that the reader feels a sense of collusion with the story and the appalling crimes that are depicted within it. In this way, Orford uses the world of the novel, the *status quo*, located in realism, effectively to communicate the major themes and concerns of the novel. For this reason, it is important to examine the *status quo* of *Daddy's Girl* to identify its representation of post-apartheid South Africa, its norms, assumptions and implications.

The crimes that Orford chooses to portray are very specifically committed against women and children. In fact, *Daddy's Girl* depicts not only the kidnapping of a young girl, the shooting of two sisters and the brutal stabbing of a gang leader's daughter, but a *status quo* of violence against women and children.<sup>7</sup> Rather than being the exception, an event which disrupts the norm, this violence is depicted as the normal state of affairs in this society. The story's world is one of disillusionment with the dream of the Rainbow Nation, one where politicians and police are as dangerous as criminals and where control of society lies in the hands of men in organised crime. But above all this, it is a world of mistreatment of women and children.

Chapter two is central in establishing this *status quo*. It is the first chapter focalised by the protagonist, Clare Hart, and the first time the reader feels as if s/he is firmly beginning the story. It

---

<sup>7</sup>This representation of a *status quo* of violence against women and children is not unique to Orford and can be seen in other international crime fiction such as the late Stieg Larsson's extremely popular *Millennium Series* which is comprised of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (literally translated from Swedish as *Men Who Hate Women*) (2005), *The Girl Who Played with Fire* (2006) and *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornets' Nest* (2007).

follows an opening chapter focalised by a character we are unfamiliar with, and which gives the reader little orientation other than a foreboding sense of the character's return later in the novel. In the second chapter, however, Orford shows the economic and cultural areas of the novel's concerns, literally placing Hart in the impoverished Cape Flats and then describing the journey home and a contrasting scene of privilege in a wealthy area of Cape Town.

The chapter in question opens with Hart sitting in traffic on her way to see Mrs Adams, the mother of a missing child, who had seen one of Hart's documentaries the previous evening and requested her help. The tone is set for the depiction of the Flats, with crows with black eyes feeding on a dog's carcass (Orford, 2009: 15). This feeling of decay reaches the very buildings which are "pockmarked [...] three-storeyed walk-ups that baked in summer and froze in winter" (Orford, 2009: 15), whose inhabitants wait for the next "convulsion of violence" (Orford, 2009: 16).

A sense of degradation and menace extends to the very people Orford describes. The scene of a group of boys abusing a schoolgirl in their playground as Hart drives past serves as a clear metaphor for the novel's areas of concern:

In a corner, a little girl stood alone under a bullet-riddled sign.  
*Your Neighbourhood Watch watches out for you.*

The child was clutching a lunchbox. Her eyes, large and dark, were on Clare as she drove past. A group of older boys appeared out of nowhere, swarming round the little girl, knocking her sandwiches from her hands, jerking her between them. The child did nothing to protect herself. One boy pushed a rough probing hand up her skirt. (Orford, 2009: 16)

This introduction to the world of *Daddy's Girl* includes some of the least nuanced descriptions of the novel. The chapter maps out Cape Town in direct contrasts between the poor and the rich, and through two dimensional characters who serve as easily recognisable stereotypes. For example, whilst making her way to see Mrs Adams, Hart first meets her son who is depicted as threatening, and when he is joined by his friends, monstrous:

Clare was in his territory and he knew it; knew that she knew it. Smiled. [...] Another youth, mongrel-thin, materialised at the corner. Two more peeled themselves off the wall, joining the

others. Grouped together, their bodies coalesced into a multi-limbed creature. (Orford, 2009: 17)

The menace and dominance are soon articulated by the boy himself:

'You can relax. You're with Lemmetjie.' Thin as the blade that had given him the scar on his neck and his nickname, Lemmetjie raised both arms in a circular motion, possessing her, the street. 'No one will touch you.' (Orford, 2009: 17)

The innocent girl in the playground and the menacing Lemmetjie and friends are stereotypes of helpless victims and teen gangsters on the Cape Flats. While the term 'stereotype' is often seen in a negative light, I use it here, not in the sense of a cliché, but rather in the sense of a recognisable image that represents a generalised community. These descriptions are perhaps Orford's way of quickly demarcating the social dynamics and political concerns of the novel, a method often used in crime fiction to establish the setting before moving on to the novel's plot.

When examining a chapter like this one which carries such ideological weight, it is crucial to consider exactly who is narrating qualities such as the ones described above. The novel is written in the third person with shifting focalisation between the characters and an omniscient narrator. Who places the quality of innocence and fear on the abused schoolgirl through her "large and dark" eyes? Who bestows the connotations of disease, violence and savagery on the "mongrel-thin" boys? I would argue that while Hart is the focaliser of the scene, these descriptions seem to exceed her, as the omniscient narrator heaps on metaphors to describe the scene through Hart. Whether or not Hart remains the focaliser, the perspective is that of an outsider to the impoverished area of the Cape Flats who is looking in at the society and identifying injustice and inequality. This lens of the novel suggests that Orford is employing a liberal feminist perspective.

To return to the representation of the *status quo* in chapter two, Mrs Adams gives voice to the disappointment of post-apartheid South Africa. She tells Hart about how gangs control the low-income area: "'Harry Oppenheimer has gold mines. Voëltjie Ahrend and his gangsters have this.'" She waved her



hand at the warren of matchbox houses and backyard shacks” (Orford, 2009: 19). Mrs Adams goes on to describe corruption across the board: she believes that everybody is “[b]uying, selling. Gangsters, police, politicians” (Orford, 2009: 19):

‘The cops are owned by those gangsters – and it’s us’, she stabbed her finger into her chest, ‘the women, our little girls, who pay the men’s price.’ (Orford, 2009: 20)

Orford uses the character of Mrs Adams to express a powerful message – the cry of marginalised and helpless mothers whose children have been abused and killed in a society in which this is the norm. To conclude their conversation, she asks, “‘Tell me Doctor.’ Mrs Adams faced Clare’s camera. ‘What does one more little girl mean, in a war?’” (Orford, 2009: 20)

Returning from this interview, Hart’s journey home presents a politicisation of space which gives the reader a clear sense of the lasting impact of the apartheid regime and the continuing economic inequality in South Africa:

As she got closer to town, the pavements became less cracked, then they sprouted trees, and the houses were set further and further back from the road. There were walls instead of wire fences, and soon she was back in the oak-lined avenues of suburbs that sheltered in the grey skirts of Table Mountain. (Orford, 2009: 21)

Within this *status quo*, Hart is placed firmly in the affluent ranks of this society:

Clare opened the sliding doors that led onto the balcony overlooking the Sea Point Promenade [...] The sea beyond sparkled in the afternoon sunlight. On the lawn near Clare’s house, a young woman was pushing her daughter in a yellow swing. ‘Higher, Mummy, higher!’ the child as calling, her hair flying in the wind. ‘I’m flying! Look at me, like a bird.’ (Orford, 2009: 21)

This final moment offers the reader a sharp contrast with the abused schoolgirl we encountered just a few pages before. Chapter two stands alone in the novel as a section that evokes simple, powerful metaphors, dramatic scenes and dialogue and invites direct comparisons between the affluent and poor of Cape Town and between the power of gangs on the Flats and the suffering of women and children. Our perspective on the Cape Flats is that of an outsider; this world is exotic to Hart and, I would argue,

to that of the omniscient narrator as well as the majority of the novel's readers. Orford is revealing the abuse of women and children and other social problems in this area. She is taking the reader into this *status quo* and showing the reader what is generally ignored in favour of the more attractive city. However, the novel offers no suggestion of ways to alter the norm; no suggestion of radical change. For these reasons, I would argue that an analysis of chapter two shows that *Daddy's Girl* is a work of liberal feminism.

## The Body

Throughout the novel there is an emphasis on the body in both form and content. In part, this can be explained in terms of the genre's conventions. The body has always been privileged in crime fiction, from the corpse being a decipherable clue, to the violence the detective's body must endure in his or her quest for the truth. However, Orford's treatment of the body suggests something more than the conventions of the genre and I would argue that this 'something' is a form of feminist resistance to conventional literary modes.

*Daddy's Girl* explores a range of different bodies: Faizal, the tough, hardened body; Yasmin, the absent body; Clinton van Rensburg, Faizal's former partner who relies on crutches after a shooting at a drug bust, the emasculated male body; Pearl, the subject of Hart's documentary, the violated body; Graveyard de Wet, Pearl's father and General within the number gang who faked his own death to escape from prison to exact gang justice, the returning dead body; Julie and Constance, Clare's alternative bodies. In Hart's documentary, Pearl, described as a "daughter of violence" (Orford, 2009: 37), steps out of the literary form saying, "This is where my story is written [...] On my body. Maybe I should start here. It's not the beginning but it is all part of the same book" (Orford, 2009: 37). This 'book' is a life of rape and abuse by her father, a general in the 27s gang. I have shown how this *status quo* of violence and oppression of women is demarcated by Orford in chapter two, and I will now focus on the ideological implications of Orford's emphasis on the body as an aspect of the novel's form.

A narrative focus on the body draws the reader intimately into the representation of characters. In terms of Hart and Faizal's relationship, this intimacy gives the reader access to their attraction for one another. The italicised chapters narrated by Yasmin in captivity scattered throughout the book interrupt the form of the novel and focus on her physical experience. But what is the effect when describing the vulnerable, such as the young sisters shot in Maitland in the beginning of the novel?

Their shoes and grey skirts were streaked with mud. The younger girl's bobby socks had slipped below the plaster on her left shin. They had known what was coming. The older girl's arms were wrapped around the younger one. The bullets that ripped through her back had exploded through the smaller one's slender body, just below the badge of her maroon school jersey. Puberty had just settled, light as a butterfly, on the child's body – glossing and thickening her hair, swelling the exposed nipple. (Orford, 2009: 28)

This description brings the private experience of an intimate death into the public sphere, as well as overlaying the scene with contradicting qualities. At first, the reader's attention is drawn to the innocence of the younger girl through the plaster on her knee. However, in closing, the description of a peeping nipple gestures towards the forbidden and the erotic. By writing through the body, Orford forces the reader to navigate a fine line between collusion and voyeurism. But who forces this uncomfortable position and why?

While Orford could have intentionally had Faizal focalise and describe this scene, I would argue that this particular description is visualised by the omniscient narrator and not by Faizal himself. This description does not read comfortably alongside what we know of Faizal's character and his usual internal monologue. He would react to the site of a young corpse with shame and protectiveness, rather than touching on a lingering, voyeuristic eroticism. It is clear that, similarly to Hart's description of the Cape Flats in chapter two, although the scene is apparently focalised through Faizal, this impression is offered by the omniscient narrator. If the description can be attributed to the omniscient narrator, it can then be assumed that the uncomfortable position it puts the reader in may be a deliberate part of the novel's overt strategy.

Why is Orford combining the innocent as well as the erotic into the vision of the reader in this description? The reader's sympathy for the little girls would have been achieved without this hint at the erotic. What function does this description of the conventional dualities of the feminine, namely the innocent and erotic, play in terms of the ideology of the novel? Firstly, I would suggest that the 'exposed nipple' of the description is consciously offered as a symbol by Orford. The jarring combination of the innocence of the bobby socks and the forbidden eroticism of the young girl's nipple, together with the fact that it is the last and therefore a lingering image of the description, place it at the forefront of the reader's mind. The symbol of the nipple within the context of the young girl growing into a woman, shot publicly in terror, gestures to the *status quo* which all young girls will have to face when growing into womanhood. It is a symbol of the everyday violence, helplessness and sexual abuse depicted in Orford's narrative.

Secondly, the description conjures the perspective on women shared by many damaged men in the novel which echoes the tropes of female characters in much crime fiction, particularly the hardboiled variety. Graveyard de Wet gives the reader some insight at the very beginning of the novel where he describes the yearning for attention from his mother which then develops into a bitter mistrust and rejection of women seen in his tattoo: "*vrou is gif*" or woman is poison. These stock images of women, the contrasting role of the angelic and innocent mother or daughter and the *femme fatale*, the sexual 'bad' woman, are combined unsettlingly to confront the reader. Orford uses a description of the body, an image of two little girls, to confront the reader with different perspectives of females and to force the reader to consider these perspectives in his or her reading of the scene.

Instead of focussing on the cerebral processing of clues, the mysterious unravelling of details to find a path to the cause and effect of a conundrum in the vein of Sherlock Holmes, Orford focuses on the body to evoke the experience and the consequences of abuse. Rather than reacting to encounters through physicality and nosing forward to find an answer like Raymond Chandler's PI, Marlowe, Orford

shows the devastation of a *status quo* of control over women, but her narrative finally triumphs with intellectual and emotional intelligence over violence. In this way, Orford's treatment of the body is a key aspect of her negotiation of the masculine codes of the genre.

## Resolution

The resolution of every crime novel has, arguably, the most significance for the reader. It generally unravels all the mysteries of the story and reveals the culprit behind the crime. In the light of the realism of much of our local crime fiction and the reality of South Africa's high crime statistics, this resolution, the satisfying closure of an understood and contained crime, is a key aspect of what keeps readers coming back for more. The desire for a sense of resolution is echoed within Orford's novel. Ruth Lyndall tries to comfort Hart when the protagonist is frustrated by a clue that does not fit her hypodissertation: "There is no pattern, Clare. But I know why you look for one. To give some coherence, some sense of order" (Orford, 2009: 200).

It is not only the solving of the crime that is important to the resolution of the story. Learning the fate of the characters who have intimately led the reader through the investigation is another form of resolution for the reader. This form of closure is even more important in the case of serial protagonists where the reader develops a relationship with the investigator.

In terms of the resolution of the crime in *Daddy's Girl*, Yasmin is found by Hart and her desperate request for help from Superintendent Phiri in a text message proves successful as backup in the form of armed support on foot as well as police helicopters comes to the rescue. It is revealed that Clinton van Rensburg betrayed Faizal and facilitated the kidnapping of Yasmin in order to lure Faizal to an isolated place and blackmail him into killing Voëltjie Ahrend. For van Rensburg, this would serve as revenge for the loss of the use of his legs in the drug bust on Ahrend as well as Ahrend's targeting of his daughter, Calvaleen. Forcing Faizal to carry out the murder would allow the killing to appear to be part

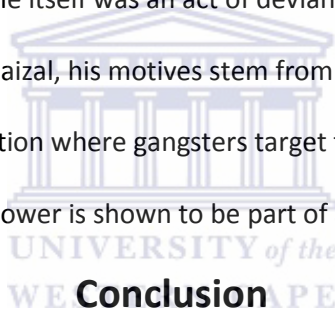
of police work, and so would absolve both Faizal and van Rensburg and allow the latter to maintain his pension and medical aid which have become a priority for the crippled man and his recovering drug addict daughter. Despite this seemingly understandable motive and plan explained in chapter 65, in a conversation between Faizal and van Rensburg, the culprit is punished within the story by being shot in the neck during a scuffle with Voeltjie Ahrend. The full responsibility of the kidnapping is placed squarely on the shoulders of van Rensburg, as his accomplices from Malmesbury and the man with the snake tattoo on his arm are never identified or held accountable. One accomplice is shot before anything can be explained and the others are absent from the crime scene.

Regarding the peripheral characters involved in the crime, Graveyard de Wet exacts his revenge on Voeltjie Ahrend by slitting his throat and thereby restoring the strict laws of the number gang. Immediately after this he moves to attack Hart and Yasmin. Hart shoots and kills him as Faizal arrives to be reunited with his daughter. Hart defeats the most threatening figure of the novel in order to protect the most innocent. She is forced to use violence and does not fail though it is not in her nature to resort to bloodshed.

In most crime fiction, once the cause and culprit of the crime are revealed and the reader satisfied with a resolution, the plot ends. This holds true in *Daddy's Girl*, where the authority of the police backup sent by Phiri is enough to suggest that the wrongdoers were arrested, tried, found guilty and punished, although none of this is detailed in the novel.

The most satisfying aspect of the resolution of the main characters is the romance between Hart and Faizal which flourishes towards the end of the story and closes the novel. There are some aspects of the resolution which are not as 'feel-good', however. Faizal's nuclear family unit is broken apart by distance as it becomes clear that Faizal and Shazia cannot make their relationship work. Faizal relinquishes his fight to remain close to his daughter and signs the papers to allow Shazia to take his daughter to Canada where he hopes she will have a better life. While this is depicted as a difficult

decision for Faizal and a painful situation for him as a father, it clears the path for his relationship with Hart. Finally, the last the reader hears of Pearl, she is fighting for her life in ICU but no indication is given as to whether she survives or not, or whether her lot in life improves or not. This uncertainty extends to the other minor characters encountered in the novel. The reader knows that, despite the triumph in rescuing Yasmin, the *status quo* of the novel remains. The world in which little girls are shot for a gang to signal its claim to territory remains; the world in which young girls are sexually abused and murdered remains; and this is one of the most powerful ideological implications of the novel. Orford's project of revealing the *status quo* of abuse of women and children is a success in that the appalling attitudes and conditions described in the novel haunt the reader and outweigh the satisfying resolution of the crime in Yasmin's rescue. Even though the crime itself was an act of deviance, a personal betrayal by van Rensburg in an attempt to blackmail Faizal, his motives stem from the economic and social problems rife in South Africa which allow for a situation where gangsters target those who work in the police force and their families. This imbalance of power is shown to be part of a greater South African *status quo*.



## Conclusion

In conclusion, I would argue that Orford successfully uses the established crime genre and its popularity to explore feminist concerns in post-apartheid South Africa. In working with a traditionally masculine genre, Orford employs a revisionist approach to introduce a strong female protagonist, draw attention to feminist concerns, and challenge traditional conventions of the genre. Orford's crafting of Clare Hart as a female protagonist, as well as the representation of other female characters and their relation to society, fulfil both Knepper and Klein's requirements for feminist writing outlined in the introduction to this chapter. Hart is presented as a capable and competent investigator and a rounded and complex woman. As well as being tough and independent, she is celebrated for her emotional intelligence, infallible moral code and her compassion. Orford does not attempt to force Hart to fulfil the hardboiled expectations of the genre, but rather uses Faizal's character to embody these aspects of the genre. Their

romance highlights Hart's admirable (and stereotypically) feminine qualities of communication and tenderness in relation to Faizal's tough hardboiled persona.

Female consciousness is explored through the focalisation of much of the story by Hart, and female perspectives are offered through other female characters such as Pearl, Mrs Adams, Ruth Lyndall, Salomé Ndlovu, Rita Mkhize and Latisha van Rensburg. In fact, something of a community of women involved in law enforcement grows from several of these relationships. Ruth Lyndall can be seen as a mentor for Hart, while our female protagonist fulfils a similar role for Rita Mkhize and Pearl. This sense of inclusiveness and community is an aspect often celebrated in Sarah Paretsky's work. These women certainly come across as psychologically complex and are presented as interesting and worthwhile aside from their connections to men in the novel. The work rejects sexist stereotypes, often going as far as to blur the lines along which gender is read such as when Calvaleen is mistaken for a man.

The setting of contemporary Cape Town provides the characters with a highly politicised sense of place. The novel highlights the socio-economic divide between the wealthy areas occupied by Hart and her colleagues and the poverty-stricken and violent Cape Flats visited in chapter two. Orford's most successful aspect of the novel is creating a realistic and haunting *status quo* of violence against and oppression of women and children. The author shows how power lies, for the most part, in the hands of men in this society – particularly men in corrupt government structures and organised crime. There are, however, hopeful elements in the resolution of the novel such as the much needed support of the police backup in the crucial stages of Hart and Faizal's dangerous mission, the successful rescue of Yasmin, and the closing of the novel with the romance between Hart and Faizal. These factors suggest that, while Orford wants to draw attention to serious social problems, her position on them is not entirely nihilistic; society has a chance to improve.

The novel's narration through the site of the body can be seen as an experiential approach as opposed to cerebral clue deciphering. I would suggest that while the author does not glorify violence,



Orford is attempting an act of resistance by relentlessly drawing the reader's focus to the body and the abject as opposed to maintaining a distance through matter-of-fact description. Despite this strong feminist approach, Orford is not universally sympathetic to women or hostile to men. The novel is heavily critical of the blind procedure applied to Faizal by Special Director Ndlovu. The Director's unswerving suspicion of Faizal is painted in a negative light by her reliance on stereotype. She believes that Faizal kidnapped his daughter and that his motive is "[r]evenge on the mother for asserting her independence. It's always the same" (Orford, 2009: 164). In contrast, Faizal is portrayed as a complex, sensitive and moral man, and the reader is inevitably drawn to him along with Hart.

One aspect of the novel which I think does not quite live up to these expectations is that while Orford certainly avoids stereotypes for women, she perhaps does not achieve this authenticity in terms of representing social difference. The depiction of the Cape Flats and its inhabitants is often reduced to a stereotype of disease, degradation and menace as I have discussed in my analysis of chapter two. The characters who live there are rendered as gangsters or helpless victims. The only exception is perhaps Pearl who is explored more deeply through her relationship with Clare. Two important male figures, Voeltjie Ahrend and Graveyard de Wet, are given little depth and appear almost to be caricatures of Cape Flats gangsters. While Orford's approach might have been to divest these murderous men of their individuality and humanity to make them all the more disturbing, the ideological implication is that the wealthier, more sophisticated characters are given depth while those based in the outer reaches of the poorer Flats are represented as simpler, less interesting, and less capable of growth. This reliance on these stereotypes perpetuates negative assumptions about the Flats being a black hole of drug abuse and gangsterism and the people who live there exclusively being a part of this lifestyle. It is worth comparing the representation of the Cape Flats in *Daddy's Girl* to that of the same area in Roger Smith's *Mixed Blood* (2009) which will also be discussed in this dissertation.

While Orford's novel fulfils most of the requirements outlined in Knepper and Klein's definition of a feminist text, there are several aspects which undercut the novel's feminist position, in particular its engagement with issues of authority and justice. As a civilian film maker, Hart has no authority in and of herself, and is validated by Faizal's request for her help in *Daddy's Girl* and, later, in his contracting her as a profiler in complex cases. Therefore, it is only through Faizal that Hart holds any authority. In addition to this, the fruits of the pair's labour must be taken into consideration. While Hart solves crimes she is passionate about, she does this ultimately within the structures of the law enforcement establishment and the state. Klein asserts that:

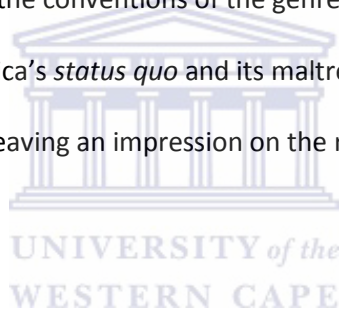
[t]he feminist detective who restores order to a disordered world by investigating murder may be serving justice, but although the justice *may* be personal, it is also public. Consequently, the feminist detective winds up supporting the existing system which oppresses women when she re-establishes the ordered *status quo*. (1988: 201)

And the *status quo* is exactly what Orford is so critical of throughout the novel. This return to the state and the ultimate conservatism of the novel draw into question the effectiveness of its feminist ideology. Munt goes further in this questioning, focusing on the aspect of the novel which I have described as Orford's most successful, that of the depiction of violence against women and children as the norm. She suggests that:

[t]hese novels perform a double operation – a primary, political gesture of making visible abuse in a non-sensationalist way, and a secondary one of reassuring readers and victims of abuse that resolution and recovery is possible. But this gestalt operates on a fantasy level only, its relief is transitory, hence the need to repeat the illusion of safety it represents. (Munt, 1994: 149)

Here, Munt outlines the complex relationship between the novel and reader on the subject of abuse, initially unsettling the reader with a depiction of the *status quo* and then providing an illusory and fleeting comfort in the resolution of the story only to leave the reader wanting more to return to that sense of comfort. This relationship is certainly a major factor in attempting to account for crime fiction's popularity in South Africa and abroad. Munt asserts further: "The peculiar attraction of a crime novel is its ability to appease sometimes contradictory desires, which presumably can placate the feminine and

provoke the feminist in all of us" (1994: 207). Though she does not elaborate on these terms, I would agree that a novel like *Daddy's Girl* holds in tension the escapist generic elements of romance, adventure and suspense along with the more political project of a focus on the oppression and abuse of women and children in South Africa, and an assertion of (some) women's agency. Orford marries these disparate elements through the narration of the novel, specifically through the use of both a male and a female protagonist and the realism of the setting of the novel. In terms of the protagonists, Faizal fulfils the hardboiled expectations of the novel, allowing Hart to infiltrate feminist concerns. The realism of the genre draws the reader into a state of collusion with the *status quo* and thus a sense of responsibility. While the realism of the narration intrudes into the escapism of the text, the conservative resolution maintains the novel's position within the conventions of the genre. Despite this, however, the powerful and unsettling evocation of South Africa's *status quo* and its maltreatment of women and children is the most successful aspect of the novel, leaving an impression on the reader long after a satisfying resolution.



## Chapter Two

### Roger Smith's *Mixed Blood*, the Radical and the Thriller

*Mixed Blood* (2009) is Roger Smith's first novel; since then, he has published *Wake Up Dead* (2010), *Dust Devils* (2011), and *Capture* (2012). His work has been received particularly well overseas, especially in Germany, where *Mixed Blood* was the number one crime novel of 2009, and in the USA, where it is being developed into a feature film. Both *Mixed Blood* and *Wake Up Dead* were nominated for the *Spinetinger* Best Novel Award in 2010 and 2011 respectively. The author was born in Johannesburg and had a successful career in the film industry where he worked as a screenwriter, director, and producer before trying his hand at writing crime fiction. Smith's personal life has clearly had an impact on his writing and the way he sees contemporary South Africa. In a recent interview, he commented that "[f]or a couple of years I lived quite happily inside a Cape Town bubble of sun and sea. Then I fell in love with (and later married) a woman who grew up in the Cape Flats ghetto and my vision of Cape Town had to expand dramatically" (Musiitwa 2011:para.4). Smith has set his first two novels in this 'expanded' perspective of Cape Town which includes some of the most troubled parts of the impoverished Cape Flats. In this chapter, I look at what the novel accomplishes by using the thriller form; how the genre allows Smith to talk about post-apartheid South Africa; and what the genre cannot satisfy – how the genre may limit Smith.

Smith's thriller narrative follows the havoc that erupts in the lives of several characters after they become entwined by crime and violence. The Burn family come to Cape Town to hide out after Jack, husband to the heavily pregnant Susan and father to four-year-old Matt, is involved in a botched bank robbery in their native USA. One evening, two gangsters from the Cape Flats, Rikki and Faried, break into and attempt to rob the Burn family and rape Susan in their home in a wealthy suburb of the city. Jack kills both intruders and then dumps their bodies in the Flats. Benny Mongrel, a general in the

infamous number gang,<sup>8</sup> who has recently been released from prison and works as a security guard at a building site opposite the Burn house with the only thing he cares about in the world, an old Alsatian called Bessie, his watchdog on the job, sees the attackers enter the house. The officer investigating the killings, Rudi Barnard or 'Gatsby', is an obese, racist, corrupt Afrikaner cop who is also devoutly Christian. Barnard discovers that Rikki is dead after looking for his regular pay-out from the drug dealer, whose wife, Carmen, is unaware of his whereabouts.

Matters come to a head in chapter ten when a task force, headed up by Special Investigator Disaster Zondi, is deployed to the Cape Town area to investigate corruption within the police force. Also in this chapter, Mongrel discovers Bessie is going to be euthanized and decides to steal her from his employer, and Barnard begins to investigate the Burns after he finds Rikki's car abandoned outside their house. Barnard then goes on the run after Zondi closes in on his corrupt deals, and Susan checks into a hospital to induce her baby as she struggles to forgive her husband. To extort money from the Americans to enable him flee the impending investigation, Barnard abducts their young son, Matt. He then attacks Mongrel, who has witnessed it all from the building site across the street. Barnard shoots at Mongrel but he is protected by his dog, Bessie, who dies after the cop flees.

Barnard takes Matt to Carmen's flat while he gets in touch with Burn to demand a ransom. Mongrel decides to team up with Burn so that he can avenge the death of Bessie. They plan to kidnap and torture Barnard when he meets them to collect the ransom. The final escalation of the novel begins when the pair takes Barnard to Burn's home and Mongrel begins to torture him slowly to ascertain Matt's whereabouts. The trio later go to Carmen's flat where she has just murdered her alcoholic Uncle Fatty after discovering him preparing to sexually abuse Matt. She has left and taken the boy to Social Services. Mongrel, Burn and Barnard arrive to an empty flat where Barnard is recognised by people in

---

<sup>8</sup> The same gang to which Orford's character from *Daddy's Girl*, Graveyard de Wet, belongs.

the street as the corrupt cop who terrorised their neighbourhood. The mob attacks the tortured Barnard and burns him to death by 'necklacing' him with a flaming tyre.

As this plot summary suggests, this novel is an unforgettable read for many reasons: it is intense, often grotesque, deeply disturbing and thrilling. In many ways, *Mixed Blood* can be seen as radical in both form and content. 'Radical' is a difficult term to define because it is a relative and subjective term and, with South African crime fiction growing in complexity and depth all the time, it is difficult to describe these novels on a scale from 'radical' to 'conservative'. Taking a closer look at the term, the *Collins English Dictionary* defines 'radical' as "favouring or tending to produce extreme or fundamental changes in political, economic, or social conditions, institutions, habits of mind, etc". (2003:1336). In relation to *Mixed Blood*, some aspects of the thriller are inherently radical such as how the genre gives the reader an extreme experience, however, I also see Smith's work as radical in several aspects of its representation of post-apartheid South Africa.

### **The Possibilities of the Thriller Form in *Mixed Blood***

In terms of genre, *Mixed Blood* is a thriller, a subgenre on the outer edge of crime fiction in the way that it consciously strives to give the reader an extreme experience. David Glover comments in *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction* (2003) that the thriller is "marked by the way in which it persistently seeks to raise the stakes of the narrative, heightening or exaggerating the experience of events by transforming them into a rising curve of danger, violence or shock" (Glover, 2003:137). While form is a defining feature of the thriller subgenre, it is distinctive in terms of content too. The thriller is "concerned with the battle of wills between hero and villain, rather than the process of detecting that villain" (Plain, 2009:130) which differentiates *Mixed Blood* from a detection-based crime novel like Margie Orford's *Daddy's Girl* (2009).

Smith explains that the appeal of thrillers is not in the puzzle, but rather seeing how the characters battle to escape difficult circumstances: "[t]he reader knows it all [...] the reader is ahead of

the bad guy, and the intrigue is really about how the complications will unravel and afford satisfaction” (Hichens, 2009:para.10). In *Mixed Blood*, the reader knows who attacked the Burn family, who killed Faried and Rikki and who kidnapped young Matt; the satisfaction in the story comes from the characters trying to flee suspicion, find redemption, exact revenge, and put the world to rights.

This extreme experience and satisfaction, delivered in both form and content, are promised to the reader in comments on the outer cover of thrillers. Glover believes that these ‘blurbs’ “make a virtual contract with potential purchasers, offering an irresistible reading experience that will stretch them to the limit” (Glover, 2003:135). Authors strive for the extreme consistently, making the radical or excessive part of the genre’s nature. In the case of *Mixed Blood* (the 2009 *Serpent’s Tail* edition), the reader is promised “One hectic ride you don’t want to miss”, “unrelenting action” and “blood and vengeance”. So how does *Mixed Blood* deliver this extreme experience? I will begin with how Smith works with the thriller genre and how he fulfils or challenges its conventions.

The central aspect which differentiates the thriller from other crime fiction is that its plot is concerned with how the characters experience the present rather than how they decipher the past. Martin Priestman argues that the thriller “emphasizes present danger rather than reflecting on, or investigating, past action. [...]To create this danger in the present the protagonist of the crime thriller must be threatened, by powerful external forces of some form or another” (Priestman, 1990:43). John Scaggs, informed by Julian Symons work, suggests in *Crime Fiction* (2005) that the main features of the thriller genre include the fact that “there is often no detective. When there is, s/he is secondary” (2005:107). This is evident in *Mixed Blood* in the fact that Zondi, the closest thing to a detective figure in the novel, is one of four equally major characters along with Burn, Barnard and Mongrel. Scaggs also highlights a focus on “the psychology of characters – what stresses make A want to kill B? – or an intolerable situation that must end in violence” (2005:107). This is certainly the drive in *Mixed Blood* where the stresses and intolerable situations include the Burn family fleeing America, the attempted

rape of Susan, Barnard killing Mongrel's dog, Bessie, and Zondi seeking to arrest Barnard on charges of corruption (among others). Another feature of the thriller is that the setting is "often central to the atmosphere and tone of the story, and is frequently inextricably bound up with the nature of the crime itself" (Scaggs, 2005:107-8). The novel is set across Cape Town, from a wealthy suburb on Signal Hill to one of the most troubled areas of the Cape Flats, Paradise Park, and the histories, socio-economic factors and ways of life in these areas are integral to the plot. Finally, Scaggs suggests that "the social perspective of the story is often radical, and questions some aspect of society, law or justice" (2005: 108). This, for me, is the most interesting aspect of *Mixed Blood* as a thriller and I will discuss how and to what end the novel is radical throughout this chapter. Part of the radical nature of the thriller is inherent. Glover suggests that:

[t]he world that the thriller attempts to realise is one that is radically uncertain in at least two major senses. On the one hand, the *scale* of the threat may appear to be vast, its ramifications immeasurable and boundless. [...] On the other hand, the thriller unsettles the reader less by the magnitude of the terrors it imagines than by the *intensity* of the experience it delivers: assaults upon the fictional body, a constant awareness of the physicality of danger, sado-masochistic scenarios of torture or persecution, a descent into pathological extremes of consciousness, the inner world of the psychopath or monster. (2003: 136-7)

These aspects will be discussed in the light of how the thriller genre serves Smith in his storytelling and his narration of post-apartheid South Africa.

## Form

The form of the thriller is one way in which *Mixed Blood* can be seen as radical; the experience for the reader is extreme. Glover points out that "the thriller is unusual in its reliance upon, or subordination to, the single-minded drive to deliver a starkly intense literary effect" (2003: 135). A sense of believability is one of the most important aspects of the delivery of this 'starkly intense literary effect' because it helps anchor the reader in the kind of outlandish plot described by Glover above and helps to communicate a sense of urgency to the reader. Believability must not be mistaken for realism, however. Smith employs verisimilitude masterfully as I will show and this is an important part of depicting setting within the



realist mode, however realism also demands plausibility and ordinary logic alongside verisimilitude. While Smith achieves detailed verisimilitude, this distinction is crucial because there are elements which undermine the novel's claim to realism which I will discuss later in this chapter. My focus at this point, however, is on how Smith creates an extreme experience for the reader in the way that he weaves together fundamental parts of the thriller genre: verisimilitude, narrative devices, style, plot strategy and motifs.

The first aspect I will discuss is verisimilitude, "the achievement of an illusion of reality" (Abrahams: 1999, 320). *Mixed Blood* is set in contemporary Cape Town and the author skilfully describes the city in meticulous detail, making reference to real historical events. Smith boasts that "[r]eaders from the Cape Flats are very positive about my books and say that they accurately reflect life on the Flats. I often get comments that, if anything, I have down-played how brutal the Cape Flats environment is" (Musiitwa, 20011: para.33). In terms of dialogue and internal monologue, Smith uses the vernacular and naturalistic rhythms which entail short sentences, swearing, slang, omitting the subject in a sentence and the incorrect conjugation of verbs. For example, Rikki says to Faried: "I fukken had enough of this, man" (Smith, 2009: 6) and later, "Quick, in and out. Those places is full of stuff. Maybe we have some fun, too" (Smith, 2009: 7). Mongrel frequently uses the gang slang euphemisms to "see your mother" or to "say goodnight" when talking about death and killing.

Smith's pared-down writing style combines punchy dialogue, gritty descriptions, highly-tuned tension and pace to create a cinematic effect which is the second aspect of how he creates an extreme reading experience. The sense that you are 'reading a movie' is amplified by several narrative strategies. For example, Smith employs overlaps in the first chapter by describing one moment three times through different focalisers: the sound of the gangsters' car skidding is heard and described by Burn on page one, by Mongrel on page four and by Faried and Rikki on page six. Smith uses flashbacks to give context in this fast pace. One example of this is where the narration goes back and describes Faried and Rikki's

evening and their breaking into the Burn household. To give background and depth to the characters, Smith gives short narrative asides such as the story of Mongrel's birth (pp 30-31) and the tale of Barnard's short and devastating marriage (pp 194-195).

The third device that Smith uses to build tension includes a plot strategy in which several characters must work within time limits: Burn is given three days by Susan until she contacts the consulate to turn him in (Smith, 2009: 75); Mongrel has to wait two days to get his pay before he can abscond with Bessie before she is put down (Smith, 2009: 95); and Barnard must work as quickly as possible, knowing that Zondi is in Cape Town conducting an investigation into his corrupt deals and extortion.

The fourth and final way that the author creates an extreme experience for the reader is through the use of motifs. Throughout the novel, Smith uses the motifs of fire and wind to build tension, and create the ambiance of a warzone and a sense of immensity and threat. In the first paragraph of the novel, Burn describes the wind that "made a furnace of the night, set nerves jangling, and got the cops and emergency teams caught up in people's bad choices" (Smith, 2009: 1). This motif gives the opening of the novel an unsettling quality which is later developed into a sense of threat and violence: "The hot wind roared with a ferocity that got the nerves screaming like tight banjo strings. And the fires had started. A carelessly flicked cigarette, a spark, a shard of broken glass concentrating the sun onto the dry scrub – any of these was enough to get the mountain blazing" (Smith, 2009: 117). Burn's helplessness and isolation are expressed in the metaphor of the chaos of the wind when he realises Matt has been kidnapped: "whoever has taken his son would already have lost themselves in the sprawl of the city by now. They were in the wind" (Smith, 2009: 174).

At the climax of the action Barnard, nearly dead after being tortured for the greater part of a day, leaps through a second storey window and Smith's description takes on epic proportions and a cinematic feel:

The roars blasted his eyes open, and he saw the half-breeds before him, explosions of red reaching from their gaping mouths. Reaching toward him, trying to take him with them to join the legion of the damned.

Barnard found some last reserve of energy. He sprang from the sofa and hurtled headlong toward the living room window, and in an explosion of blood, glass, and fat he burst into that bright, terrible light. (Smith, 2009: 273)

The result of these elements of form is a relentless and gripping reading experience – what Glover describes as “a starkly intense literary effect” (2003: 135).

## Characterisation

The characters in *Mixed Blood* are compelling figures in extreme situations. Smith makes it clear that he is not interested in writing about ordinary people and their everyday lives but focuses on radical figures: “I make a conscious choice to take inspiration from people existing not only on the fringes of society, but at the extremes of society” (Hichens, 2009: para.9). He says that he likes “characters who are up against it” (Nicol 2009(d): para.16); ‘it’ referring to an extreme edge of stress, challenge and pressure. The reader becomes acquainted with an ensemble of desperate characters who, while they show some vulnerability, generally remain unlikeable and irredeemable. One senses that all of these characters are on a quest for redemption and, through the story, we witness their journey, though none attain the desired outcome. The reader is invested in how things unravel for each character, whether it be overcoming their circumstances or succumbing to them. In the context of this thriller, each outcome is equally entertaining because of Smith’s characterisation.

The most central character, Jack Burn, is a foreigner in his own home as well as in a society fraught with tension and violence. His previous crimes and the reason his family fled the USA alienate Burn emotionally from his wife, Susan, who “seemed to be in constant communion with her unborn child. That’s how she referred to it, as her child. Her daughter. As if Burn and Matt were another species, outside of this exclusive club of two” (Smith, 2009: 2). In addition to this, Burn is unable to rely on any

form of official law enforcement; he cannot go to the police and must consciously evade the law to protect himself and his family. Burn draws the reader into a complex moral problem when, after they threaten to rape his wife, he shoots one intruder on instinct when he is momentarily distracted but then makes the conscious choice to slit the throat of the second intruder. In this way, he becomes complicit with the violence which the intruders were about to inflict on his family. When he tries to apologise to his wife, Susan, she points out this complicity:

He stood. "I'm sorry."

"Sorry for what? That we're not at home? That you brought us to a place where animals like that..." She stopped, shaking her head, her eyes pinning him. "Or are you sorry that you've become one of them?" (Smith, 2009: 12)

Thus the story's initial victims become part of its world of violence and the line between right and wrong, innocent and guilty, is blurred from the start.

The rest of the characters are South African, and Smith chooses to foreground the Cape Flats and its community who are relatively under-represented in South African literature. Carmen, the wife of one of the intruders into the Burn house, was sexually abused by her father as a child and is now a victim of domestic abuse at the hand of her husband, Rikki. She is addicted to 'tik', or crystal meth, and relies on the state grant she receives for her physically and mentally disabled child to support this habit. Carmen's response to Child Welfare's taking away her child, Sheldon, because of her neglect leaves the reader with little sympathy for her: "Carmen sat down. She felt like puking. If Sheldon went, so did his grant. And her tik money with it" (Smith, 2009: 45). Yet by the end of the novel, the reader gains new respect for her as she protects the kidnapped young Matt from Uncle Fatty, and confronts her parents about her abuse as a child. While these acts do not necessarily endear Carmen to the reader, we witness her making decisions for herself and others rather than focussing on her drug addiction. Through the characters of Carmen, Rikki, Faried and Benny Mongrel, and their brief life stories, Smith gives insight into life on the Cape Flats and highlights the socio-economic tensions of post-apartheid South Africa in this area.

Benny Mongrel, often referred to as ‘the watchman’, not only works as a security guard but plays the role of an observer for the first part of the novel; a witness to the fact that the intruders never made it out of Burn’s home, as well as Barnard’s kidnapping of Burn’s son. Mongrel has led a violent life of gangsterism and crime, but we encounter him attempting to avoid returning to this life: “[h]e had been in and out of jail since he was fourteen. He wasn’t sure, but he guessed he was turning forty. That’s what his ID said, anyway. When he was paroled from Pollsmoor Prison last year after serving a sixteen year stretch, he swore he wasn’t going back. No matter what” (Smith, 2009: 3). Mongrel’s vulnerability and redemptive potential are evinced in his tender relationship with his guard dog, Bessie, “the only thing that Benny Mongrel had ever loved” (Smith 3) with whom he works at night:

Somehow he knew that a different sort of life was possible outside prison, even though he wasn’t sure exactly what that was. The only clue was Bessie. He missed the old dog during the empty, endless days. (Smith, 2009: 35)

This relationship allows Mongrel to grow and he discovers that, “[t]o his surprise, he had found his still-point, a place of peace, with the old dog” (Smith, 2009: 116). When Barnard kicks, and then later shoots and kills Bessie when she tries to protect Mongrel, Smith establishes an enmity which unleashes the worst in the watchman: “[w]hen she died, so did the tiny voice of hope and faith that had unexpectedly spoken from his heart. Now his heart was cold” (Smith, 2009: 196). Mongrel’s loss leads him to team up with Burn to find Matt in exchange for exacting his violent revenge on Barnard:

He wanted that fat cop. He was going to cut him open like a pig from his balls to his throat and let his guts fall out, let the fat bastard try to hold himself together while Benny Mongrel watched him die. (Smith, 2009: 176)

Smith successfully creates a compelling character in Mongrel who, even though he has led a thoroughly dislikeable past, finds a measure of support from the reader in his bloody revenge. In this way, we are drawn out of conventional perceptions of right and wrong and into the complex moral world of the novel. This shift is further precipitated by the absolute repulsiveness of the cop Rudi Barnard, better known as Gatsby.

The corrupt cop is introduced with humour: “Rudi Barnard loves Jesus Christ, gatsbys,<sup>9</sup> and killing people. And out here on the Flats he could feel that love the most” (Smith 15). Barnard is physically repulsive, a “wall of stinking fat” (Smith, 2009: 120), often described in terms of a festering wound: “[t]here was a phlegmy sound from deep in Gatsby’s lungs, like a chest wound sucking. He was laughing” (Smith, 2009: 86); and “yellow teeth like bone fragments in an open wound” (Smith, 2009: 101). In terms of the plot, Barnard is a threat to Burn, attempting to extort money from him by kidnapping his son, but what puts Barnard himself in this extreme position is an investigation by Disaster Zondi into his illegal operations on the Flats: dealing in police-confiscated guns, extorting bribes and murder. Smith places the two policemen in direct opposition:

Rudi Barnard and Disaster Zondi were perfect opposites, bookends in the struggle of good versus evil. Barnard was obese. Zondi was trim and athletic. Barnard believed in the power of God. Zondi believed in the power of Justice. Barnard was a glutton, a junk-food junkie. Zondi ate sparingly and was fastidious about what he consumed. Barnard had little interest in sex. Zondi was the owner of roiling passions that continually threatened to upset his equilibrium, but he suppressed and controlled them through sheer force of will. (Smith, 2009: 114)

The author carefully creates an ever-increasing tension between the pair through Zondi’s drive to bring Barnard to justice and Barnard’s desperation to flee. What gives this chase added charge is the narrative thread that the pair shares of Barnard being one of a group of men in the security forces who tortured Zondi and his best friend for their involvement in the anti-apartheid movement in the 1970s. Barnard and his Security Branch colleagues killed and then burned Zondi’s best friend on an open fire while they enjoyed a barbecue a little way away. In *Barnard and Zondi*, Smith draws strong ties to South Africa’s history of apartheid and its transition and adaptation to democracy in the years after 1994.

In contrast to Barnard, Zondi is depicted as a cold and precise detective figure in the tradition of a noble knight and sees himself as “an inquisitor, riding out through the battlefields of corruption in

---

<sup>9</sup> Smith asserts that “[t]he gatsby is to Cape Town what a hot dog is to New York”. He describes Barnard’s favorite gatsby as “a football-sized French loaf stuffed with chunks of steak, eggs, melted cheese, and fries, all drenched in mayonnaise and industrial strength chili” (Smith, 2009: 21).

contemporary South Africa” (Smith, 2009: 114); determined to “weed out the bad cops merrily enriching themselves off the back of South Africa’s miracle of transformation” (Smith, 2009: 114). Of all the characters in *Mixed Blood*, Zondi is perhaps the only one who remains untarnished and morally upstanding by the end of the novel. Apart from his ascetic drive to exterminate corruption and his snobbish lifestyle, we learn relatively little about him.

Through this mix of desperate characters in a harsh environment, the reader is drawn out of the crime genre’s conventional paradigm of a clear sense of right and wrong and into a complex relationship with each of the damaged characters and their moral choices.

## Setting

In order fully to understand *Mixed Blood*’s characters, it is important also to consider the novel’s setting and its influence on them. Smith’s representation of Cape Town is radical in the way in which the novel overturns popular perceptions of the city of Cape Town, highlights the apathy of the wealthy and shifts focus to the impoverished and under-represented area of the Cape Flats. This shift clearly originates from Smith’s understanding of perceptions of the city. He argues that “[p]rivileged Cape Town quite often has a blinkered view of the city and often doesn’t look beyond its own suntanned navel” and that “the geography of the layout insulates the wealthy who aren’t forced to see what’s happening on the windswept Flats. The privileged are shielded in many ways from the hellish sort of life that happens there. I wanted to portray this as clearly as I could” (Hitchens, 2009: para. 3). The tone is set for this overturning from the outset of the novel where Jack Burn stands “on the deck of the house high above Cape Town watching the sun drown itself in the ocean” (Smith, 2009: 1). This violent description of a beautiful scene appears to be focalised by an omniscient narrator but this forceful overturning of the image of Cape Town as a picturesque city is echoed by Burn himself who describes Cape Town as a “candy castle built on a septic tank” (Smith, 2009: 88) and Zondi who sees it as a “bloody painted tart of

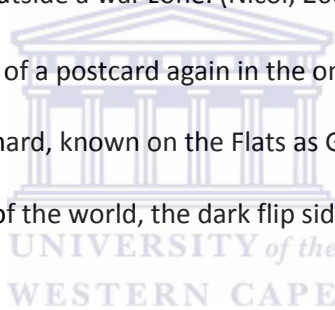
a city” (Smith, 2009: 182). Zondi goes on to articulate the superficial privilege and apathy suggested by these images:

Cape Town offended Zondi. Its languid slowness and devotion to sun worship, wine tasting, and the deification of its natural beauty struck him as decadent and fatuous. Like a woman obsessed with nothing but her appearance. This place didn’t even look like Africa. It was like a bit of Europe transplanted onto a mountainous peninsula that stuck out toward the South Pole like it was giving it the finger. Even the climate was Mediterranean. (Smith, 2009: 123)

In an interview with fellow crime writer Mike Nicol, Smith confronts the popular perception of Cape Town as a civilised paradise head-on stating that:

No matter what the “shoowah” brigade may say, Cape Town is not a mellow, temperate spot. It bakes and blows and burns in summer. The sea rages and the city floods in winter. And two thirds of the population live on the flipside of the Cape Town picture postcard, which is about as violent a place as you’ll find outside a war zone. (Nicol, 2009(d): para.7)

Smith uses this image of the ‘flip side’ of a postcard again in the omniscient narrator’s description of the Cape Flats where “Inspector Rudi Barnard, known on the Flats as Gatsby, drives his white Toyota through the rape and murder capital of the world, the dark flip side of the Cape Town tourist postcard” (Smith, 2009: 15).



The author achieves a heightened sense of tension by consistently depicting Cape Town and the Cape Flats in stark contrast. This tension between the wealthy city and the impoverished and violent Flats is exacerbated by the politicisation of these spaces through their history. For the omniscient narrator of *Mixed Blood*, the origins of the Flats and the area’s hopelessness are inextricably linked to the apartheid regime: “[t]he Flats were where anybody who wasn’t white got dumped back in the days of apartheid, far from the privileged suburbs slung like jewels around Table Mountain. A desolate, bleak sheet of land persecuted by wind and dust” (Smith, 2009: 15). Smith’s treatment of setting is integral to building up a tension between the privilege of the Burn family and the desperation of Barnard, Mongrel and Carmen. Smith uses setting as a narrative device for demarcating these factions, and the confrontation between these factions is what leads to the ensuing tensions and pressures of the thriller.



For Burn, even the privilege and infrastructure of Cape Town become a wilderness when he kills Faried and Rikki, and the sense of alienation and tension is only heightened when he enters the Cape Flats which are consistently described as a hellish warzone.

### **Structure: *Status Quo*, Disruption, Resolution**

To see how characterisation and setting come together in a representation of post-apartheid South Africa, one must examine the norms of the world of Smith's novel. Like Orford in *Daddy's Girl*, Smith depicts a disturbing *status quo* of violence and social degradation that is not set to improve with the resolution of the story. In an interview, the author seeks to foreground the startling statistics of crime in South Africa when he argues that:

homicide statistics are off the charts and one in three South African women will be raped in her lifetime. Nearly 1 500 children were murdered in South Africa last year. Most of these children were also sexually violated. South Africans have much to be proud of, but we dare not ignore the social ills in our country. (Musiitwa, 2009: para.24)

Smith's *status quo* foregrounds chaos and violence as the norm of post-apartheid South Africa, and this approach is a radical one.

Crime and violence are depicted as a part of everyday life in the Cape Flats in *Mixed Blood*, alongside physical and sexual abuse, poverty, corruption, and drug abuse. As Carmen makes her way home, she hears "[s]natches of Cape Flats life [...] as she walked: shouts, curses, the low keening of a crying woman, a drunken man laughing" (Smith, 2009: 125). In this world, the hope of a Rainbow Nation is laughable and post-apartheid South Africa is a place of little hope.

In the novel, the living conditions of the poor are overlooked and avoided by the wealthy who occupy Cape Town, in their "sanctuary of privilege" (Smith, 2009: 57). This wealthy set is described with derision, and the beauty of the city is associated with the apathy and narcissism of the rich: "[a] cappuccino froth of white cloud floated on top of Table Mountain, and cars carrying tanned bodies and surfboards streamed down to the beaches" (Smith, 2009: 37). When questioned about the cynicism

pervading *Mixed Blood*, Smith agreed that there is “a certain amount of anger” (Hichens 2009: para.13). He goes on to explain that his approach is rooted in “anger at the city’s artifice, the gloss of the city, and at broader frustrations of how we accept crime and corruption as a way of life” (Hichens 2009: para.13). Smith’s description of life on the Cape Flats is disturbing because of this extreme violence and hopelessness:

Mean houses and shacks sprawled on either side of the freeway as Burn left Table Mountain behind. The Cape Flats. Where more people died of violence every day than your average warzone. Where children disappeared and their violated bodies were found in boxes under neighbor’s beds. Where the dispossessed had their hungry eyes fixed on the rich man’s playground around the mountain. (Smith, 2009: 28)

Smith’s depiction of the *status quo* of the novel is radical in that the everyday norms of life in the narrative *Mixed Blood* are extreme: society is rotten; power relations, history, poverty are all against these characters; and the daily experience is that of a warzone. While this world-view is radical in its assumptions, it may also be deeply conservative, a point I return to later in the chapter. These extremes reveal a potentially very conservative world view. Continuing to examine the structural stages of *Mixed Blood*, I will look at the events which mark the disruptions in this *status quo*.

In mystery or detective fiction, the crime is generally a disruption to the *status quo* which, after the investigation is resolved and the culprit identified, is (often partially) reinstated with the resolution of the narrative. In the thriller, however, the disruption is not one event which affects all the characters, but rather many small disruptions which place characters in extreme situations, often forcing them consciously to act outside the law. Where the investigation is the drive of a detective novel, the chase and the extreme events which characters are drawn into because of these relatively minor disruptions form the drive of a thriller.

In *Mixed Blood*, one could identify the attack on the Burn family by Rikki and Faried as the major disruption. However, it is through a series of smaller, personal disruptions, that the rest of the characters are thrust into the broiling plot of redemption and retribution. These events are exacerbated

by the moral choices of the characters and trigger the complications which lead to the seemingly predetermined fates of characters.

The disruption to Mongrel's world is not, in fact, bearing witness to the break-in and the fact that the intruders never returned, but rather that his boss, Ismail Isaacs, plans to euthanize Mongrel's old guard dog, Bessie. Mongrel does not immediately take action when Barnard questions him about the break-in but after the cop shoots and kills Bessie, Mongrel sacrifices his last pay-check and his ardent attempt to lead a peaceful life and embarks on a mission to kill Barnard. For the corrupt cop, the major disruption in his world is that he discovers that he is under investigation by Zondi and that his usual methods of bribery and coercion will not save him this time. In Zondi poses a profound challenge to his typical way of operating in the world; the way he makes money, ensures protection and dominates the people of Paradise Park. Carmen's world is partly disrupted by the death of Rikki in that she finds herself free of his control and abuse, however, in terms of the plot, she is drawn into the narrative when Barnard brings her the kidnapped American boy, Matt.

These disruptions highlight the radical nature of *Mixed Blood's status quo* in that they are often violent crimes which are presented as not particularly spectacular because the characters live in a world of violent crime. The crimes of the novel are hardly disruptions at all; the real disruption in this novel is the collision of the world of the wealthy in Cape Town and the world of violence and abuse of the Cape Flats. The very title of the novel points to this mixing of identities and hints at the almost chemical reaction we witness between characters. Zondi's investigation of Barnard is not the narrative arc that returns the characters of the novel to their former *status quo*; there is no such resolution in the thriller, rather the reader witnesses the playing out of the characters' fates.

Because the action of *Mixed Blood* focuses on each character reacting to the extreme events presented to him/her, the most significant stage of the thriller is the resolution because it concludes each character's narrative thread – whether that be their downfall or their (very partial) redemption.

The resolutions of *Mixed Blood* are clearly indicated through both the form and content of the novel. After the peak of action where Barnard dives out of a second-storey window and is then burned alive by an angry mob in Paradise Park, the motif of the wind helps to still the tension: “the wind had died, and hung in the air as heavy as a blanket on the Flats” (Smith, 2009: 286). After the death of the most-despised character in the novel, we begin to discover what became of each of the other characters, starting with the birth of Susan and Jack Burn’s daughter.

After the birth, Susan is able to cry for the first time since she fled the USA with her family, and this moment gestures towards the beginning of her and her family’s healing. However, this relief comes at the cost of luring back and turning in her husband, Jack, to the South African police for the crimes he committed in America (Smith, 2009: 296-7). In the broadest view of the novel and its resolutions, the kidnapped boy, Matt Burn, is returned safely to his parents which provides neat and positive closure for Susan.

Burn finds himself lost and alone in the hostile and dangerous Cape Flats (Smith, 2009:291) after failing to find his son and then being abandoned by his guide, Mongrel. Having managed to find his way to Cape Town, Burn decides to hand himself over so that he can involve the local police in the search for Matt. Directly after making this decision, he receives a call from his wife with the news that Matt is safe and that she has given birth to a healthy daughter. When she asks him to join them at the clinic, Burn realises that his wife is turning him in: [h]e’d allowed himself a minute to feel relief that Matt was safe, to register that his daughter had been born; then he had turned Barnard’s battered Ford north and driven through the night” (Smith, 2009: 303). Burn has effectively lost his family and faces a life of attempting to evade the police, however the end to his narrative is a fatal car accident caused by a burst tyre: a random accident (Smith 304). Despite making the decision to turn himself in, despite having lost everything dear to him, Burn’s resolution is death through a random accident. Perhaps this is Barnard’s

parting shot as Burn is driving the cop's old Ford; perhaps it is Burn's karmic reward for failing to make good on his decision to turn himself in.

One of the few characters who finds something positive at the end of the narrative is Rikki's wife, Carmen. She seems to make some positive choices in the novel: she protects Matt from the sexual abuse of Uncle Fatty and ensures his safety by taking him to Social Services despite Barnard's very real threats. These good deeds must be qualified by the fact that Carmen killed her uncle, grabbing a statue and cracking his skull open when she discovered him preparing to abuse Matt.

Despite this, there is a sense that, with the death of Rikki and, perhaps, a new perspective on her life, Carmen receives a new start in her life at the end of *Mixed Blood*. Returning to her apartment after rescuing Matt, she discovers the debris and corpses left in the wake of Burn, Mongrel and Barnard's visit and the subsequent shoot-out with Fingers Morkel and his gang. Carmen simply walks back out of her apartment, commenting that "[t]here was nothing in that place that she needed anymore" (Smith, 2009: 287). She then goes to her parents' house where her father is dying and confronts her parents about the sexual abuse she suffered as a child. Believing Carmen's visit to be an answered prayer, her father rejoices in her visit. She responds:

"Drop this God bullshit, you bastard. You think raping your own child for years, making her pregnant twice, and throwing her out of your house is something God is going to forgive?" [...] "We both know you're going to rot in fucken hell for what you did to me. " Carmen laughed and pushed past her mother. "And you'll get yours, you bitch." [...] When she walked away, the sky seemed bluer. (Smith, 2009: 300)

Carmen clearly feels positive, but this is only a small part of a broader picture. We never find out if she gets her son, Sheldon, back after he was confiscated and we do not know if she overcomes her drug addiction. Having just abandoned her apartment and the only possible support structure that the reader is aware of, her parents, it is likely that Carmen will again have to prostitute herself for money and drugs, a choice she already made once in the novel.

Disaster Zondi has, perhaps, the most positive resolution in the novel, although he is also the most morally upstanding of all the main characters. After successfully reuniting Matt and Susan Burn and issuing a warrant for Barnard's arrest, Zondi arrives at the scene where the corrupt cop was burned to death. Because Barnard had tortured Zondi and his best friend, a prominent political activist in the 1970s, then killed and informally cremated him on a fire outside, Zondi admits that the 'necklacing' "had a certain poetry to it" (Smith, 2009: 288).

Leaving the crime scene and heading to the airport to head home, Zondi considers his feelings at the end of the investigation and chase:

He felt lighter, he had to admit, but at the same time there was an inescapable sense of anticlimax. Was he still yearning for something more acute? [...] What he did hear was the creak of the karmic wheel as it turned. (Smith, 2009: 300)

Reflecting on the retribution achieved on his behalf by the mob that 'necklaced' Barnard, Zondi experiences an unexpected shift deep inside himself.

And as for Rudolphus Arnoldus Barnard getting sent off to the big barbecue in the sky, the punch line of that cosmic joke was irresistible.

Zondi laughed [...]

He was experiencing an unexpected feeling, a sensation that he was unfamiliar with. It took Zondi a minute of intense reflection before he decided that, quite possibly, it was happiness. (Smith, 2009: 301)

This is the last word that the reader is left with from the investigator, a hint that Zondi has achieved some personal growth. This sense of satisfaction at his revenge must be questioned, however. While the reader is encouraged to feel satisfaction in the death of Gatsby, a most despicable figure, how does the reader engage with his prolonged and agonising torture and his gruesome death, being burned alive at the hands of a mob? A sense of culpability is placed on the reader because we witness the group taking his life; we are complicit.

Despite his life as a cold-blooded killer and gangster, the reader sympathises with Benny Mongrel because of his attempts to make a better life for himself and the tenderness we witness in his

relationship with his dog, Bessie. It is clear that Mongrel feels as though he has exacted his retribution as he watches the crowd beating Barnard before they burn him: “[e]very blow that rained down on that fat body smashed the desire for revenge out of his own” (Smith, 2009: 281).

A deep need to leave violence and killing behind is revealed to the reader and the character himself as Mongrel kills his old foe:

Benny Mongrel looked down into the eyes of Fingers Morkel and realised that a great tiredness had enveloped him. It was all he could do to hold the knife in his hand. But he knew, one last time, that there was something he must do. (Smith, 2009: 274)

Again, the reader feels a sense of satisfaction with this outcome for Mongrel, but an awareness of our culpability in the acts that brought this satisfaction.

*Mixed Blood* gives the reader an extreme experience through carefully crafted tension, cinematic description, finely tuned pace and verisimilitude. Denying the reader comfort in the orderly investigation and resolution of a detective novel, Smith’s thriller creates a palpable sense of immense and immediate danger that feels real, and is narrated by compelling characters, whether likeable or repulsive, who draw reader into morally complex situations. This is heightened by the setting of the novel between two easily recognisable worlds at odds – the wealthy Cape Town and the warzone of the Cape Flats – and about to give way to anarchy. Having explored what Smith achieves with the thriller genre, I now wish to examine how the genre limits Smith, and what the novel cannot achieve.

### **Limitations of the Thriller Genre in *Mixed Blood***

Because of its drive to deliver an extreme reading experience, the thriller cannot engage with the ordinary or work deeply with subtle concepts. While it foregrounds verisimilitude, *Mixed Blood* cannot hold up to Smith’s claims of realism because of the deeply problematic aspects I wish to outline.

## Setting

When discussing the setting of *Mixed Blood*, Smith explains his desire to foreground the Cape Flats and his concerns in depicting this place: “I was interested in showing the contrast between privileged Cape Town and the Cape Flats, and wanted to capture the **reality** of many people’s lives, without sentimentalizing that reality, even if it’s uncomfortable” (Musiitwa, 2011: para.31) (emphasis added). Smith sets most of the action which takes place on the Flats in Paradise Park, one particular area which is infamous for its drug addiction and gang-related violence. While in reality this is an area where there is a range of different types of people living ordinary lives, nothing of ordinary life is depicted in this novel; their lives are depicted like those in an action movie. So while Smith is attempting to give an unsentimental look at the gritty reality of the lives of people who live here, he depicts an inescapable warzone or hell and so exoticises the people and the area. Instead of depicting what the reader might have in common with this marginalised community, Smith isolates the Flats and its inhabitants as an irredeemable hell.

The author crafts a stark contrast between the wealthy city and the poverty-stricken Flats, and reduces Cape Town and Paradise Park to single representations of crime and violence. This simplified view is articulated by several characters and can therefore be seen as a conscious strategy by Smith. Witnessing Faried and Rikki break into the American family’s home, Mongrel mutters, “Welcome to Cape Town” (Smith, 2009: 4), and later Carmen says “[s]he was going to take some of Gatsby’s money and go and score a globe. Then Uncle Fatty would get pissed, and she could get high, while the American kid watched cartoons. Life on the Flats” (Smith, 2009: 188). Even Burn, the foreigner, makes this assumption as he dumps the corpses of Faried and Rikki out on the Flats: “He knew that dead bodies out on the Flats were commonplace, not even rating a mention in the newspapers [...] Just another night in Cape Town”(Smith, 2009: 28).



## Characterisation

Discussing his approach to characterisation, Smith stresses his attempts toward realism:

I could have taken a more conventional (maybe even more commercial) route and written about some sweet, white bread American family who come to Cape Town and are gobbled up by the horrors of the city. Instead I purposely created a cast of characters who are nearly all compromised. This to me is more interesting. And more **realistic**" (Nicol, 2009d: para.16) (emphasis added)

There are three areas that I feel hinder this attempt and need to be considered: firstly, Smith's use of animal characteristics in describing people and the various ideological implications of this; secondly, the way that Smith depicts his characters' decision-making; and thirdly, the resolution of the story of possibly the most morally complex character, Benny Mongrel.

Firstly, Smith uses the device of bestowing animalistic qualities on characters throughout the novel for differing effect. Barnard is described as "panting like a midnight donkey" (Smith, 2009: 59), "chewing like a hippo on a riverbank" (Smith, 2009: 66) and, when he is trying to climb out of a car boot, he is "like a side of beef coming out of a freezer truck" (Smith, 2009: 245). There is particular emphasis on Barnard's small eyes which are described as "piggy eyes peering out at him from within the folds of fat" (Smith, 2009: 65) and "dead pig eyes" (Smith, 2009: 179). This comparison to a pig is used in other descriptions: his hand is described as a "pink paw" (Smith, 2009: 23) and when he is kicked by Mongrel, he is depicted as making "a sound like a pig fucking [uttering] whining grunts" (Smith, 2009: 245). The use of animal descriptions in this case is a narrative tool to communicate repulsiveness in Barnard's character. Smith describes him in animal terms to dehumanise him and reflect this moral dearth.

Animal descriptions are also used to describe Coloured characters from the Flats. Barnard uses animal descriptions in his focalisation to communicate his dislike of Coloured people. This attitude is evident from his repeated use of the derogatory term "half-breed". In the novel, he watches teenagers break-dance to "animal music" (Smith, 2009: 45):

The half-breed spun on his head like a top [...] He thrust his hips back and forth into the face of a teenage girl who laughed like a bitch in heat. There was a group of them, dancing like monkeys in the yard of a faded blue house. (Smith, 2009: 45)

Later in the novel, Barnard describes Faried and Rikki as “predators” who are “always on the hunt” (Smith, 2009: 65): “Animals like that, half out of their minds on drugs, never made plans. They acted on impulse. Raped. Murdered. Took what they wanted without thought” (Smith, 2009: 65). This use of animal descriptions communicates Barnard’s disdain for the community and his perception of their lack of civilised conduct, their lack of human decorum.

Animal descriptions are also used by other characters. Faried says that his wife, Carmen, “moans like a pig about everything” (Smith, 2009: 5) and in prison, Mongrel “had lain alone in his bunk and tuned out the animal sounds of rape and lust” (Smith, 2009:116). Upon discovering Uncle Fatty’s corpse, Burn describes the body, “old and wrinkled as a tortoise ... [and] naked except for a pair of stained briefs” (Smith, 2009: 269). These instances of animal description are deeply dehumanising. To Faried, Carmen’s grievances have little substance or importance; to Mongrel, the sounds of prison make a feral and wild impression; and for Burn, there is little left of the human being before him.

In the climax of the novel, Smith uses the device of animalistic descriptions to describe Barnard’s beaten body, and the dehumanised character of the mob that killed him as well as preventing Burn from acting at the scene. Barnard is described as “a beached and bloodied whale” (Smith, 2009: 268) as he and his torturers, Mongrel and Burn, arrive at Carmen’s apartment block in Paradise Park looking for Matt. After jumping out the window in an attempt to flee, Barnard runs down the road and is followed by people in the neighbourhood. They are described as “trailing in his wake like pilot fish feeding off a harpooned whale” (Smith, 2009: 277). A lack of individuality is communicated in this image, and this trend continues in Smith’s description of the mob which beats and burns Barnard, save for the mention of Donovan, the big brother of the innocent boy whom Barnard had recently shot and burned in a cover up. Donovan strikes the fatal blows with a hammer but the real authority in the scene lies with the mob

who respond with a “low animal roar of bloodlust” (Smith, 2009: 279) and their intention is made clear: “[t]he crowd was roaring its approval, calling for revenge” (Smith, 2009: 279).

The mob’s actions are ascribed to the whole as it collectively removes Burn’s gun as he tries to prevent Donovan from killing Barnard. Burn loses his authority with the gun and is then removed from the action as if by vegetation with agency:

Burn tried to level the Mossberg at the boy, but hands in the crowd, like tendrils, took the gun from him. He was jostled, sworn at, and he felt a fist connect with his jaw. Then a rock hit him above the left ear and he dropped to the ground. The crowd became a single organism that lifted him off his feet and moved him to its perimeter, where it dumped him onto the sand. (Smith, 2009: 280)

What is dangerous about these descriptions is that, in dehumanising the crowd that kills Barnard, Smith also shifts the weight of responsibility away from them. Barnard’s death, the climax of the novel, is therefore ascribed to the revenge of a community; it is generalised and there is no engagement with the individual choices made in that process. Afterward, the crowd disperses and there is no accounting for what just took place. This way of describing the scene flattens these characters; the text either cannot or will not explore the complexities of the climax of the novel.

The second problematic aspect of the novel which I would like to explore also ‘flattens’ and simplifies the characterisation of Smith’s narrators through their impulsive decision-making. The thread of characters making important decisions based on intuition runs through *Mixed Blood*. These characters are in extreme situations and these decisions prove to be reactive rather than proactive or considered in a balanced way. The result is short-sighted actions which give rise to a constant crisis or survival mode which only leads to more conflict. This trend of making decisions based on intuition is not limited to any one type of character, but is evident in nearly all the characters in the novel.

Jack Burn, having defused the threat of the intruders in his home, makes a decision on intuition which foreshadows the violence later in the story:

He had kept the tall man's weapon: a snub-nosed Colt. He knew it was a risk, keeping the gun, hiding it in a closet in the bedroom, but it made him feel secure somehow. Like he would be able to fight back.

Against what, he didn't know. (Smith, 2009: 38)

The same gun and impulsive decision-making return when Burn hears Barnard interviewing his wife, Susan: "[r]eflex moved Burn from the bed. He pulled on shorts and a T-shirt. Before he knew it, he'd opened the closet and the Colt was in his hand". (Smith, 2009: 99)

Mongrel senses a certain inevitability when he considers what he saw at the Burn house:

What had happened last night wouldn't just end there. No. He could sense invisible lines reaching out to the Flats, connecting to that house on the mountain. And to him, a Mongrel, a 28, who guarded the next-door house, just trying to lead a peaceful life.

Shit. (Smith, 2009: 37)

Barnard, investigating Rikki's car, feels something that makes him investigate the Burns further, leading both parties into the violence later in the novel:

No, something was wrong here.

That morning Barnard had woken with a nameless sense of foreboding. He couldn't shake the feeling that trouble was coming his way. (Smith, 2009: 57)

This suspicion extends to the Burn family, "There was something that worried him about the man, something he couldn't name, something that nagged him worse than the rash on his thighs" (Smith, 2009: 66), and becomes even stronger when Barnard finds the bodies of Faried and Rikki:

Something had spoken to him the moment he saw those bodies. Call it intuition. Call it a hunch. Call it what you wanted, but Rudi Barnard knew that the other American, the one from the US of fucken A, was involved. (Smith, 2009: 96)

This leads Barnard to return to the Burn house and begin to dig deeper into the family, which results in his uncovering their crimes in the USA: "[h]e couldn't explain rationally why he was parked up the street from the American's house, but he didn't question the impulse. His hunches were usually right" (Smith, 2009: 117).

Susan is also acutely aware of feelings of foreboding, however, she interprets them as 'karmic debt' from her involvement in Burn's robbery the previous year:

She'd always known, of course, that after what Jack had done back in the States, retribution was inevitable. But she had gone along with his plans. Allowed him, as always, to convince her.

It was as if she had been waiting for those men to step into their lives, with their guns and their rapists' eyes. When they'd appeared, she had recognised them even though she'd never seen them before. She had known who they were and why they were there. They had been sent to even a score, to settle a karmic debt. And it would not end with them. She knew that with absolute certainty. (Smith, 2009: 48)

She is jolted into action by a disturbing dream which leads her to uncover the fact that her husband had been unable to protect their son from a kidnapping while she waits to give birth in hospital:

Then she realized that the dream, the nightmare, had not been about her unborn child. It had been about Matt. And a feeling of nameless dread grabbed Susan by the throat. There was something wrong with her son. (Smith, 2009: 217)

Ultimately, this leads Susan to turn her husband over to the police. Another mother, Bernice, discovers the corpse of her son through intuition. When asked why she wanted to go to the place that her son had found a pair of sneakers on a dead body, she responds, "[s]he couldn't answer the question. Just knew that she had to be taken to the bodies" (Smith, 2009: 111).

This push and pull of impulse and intuition is also evinced by Zondi in his investigation of Barnard. The narrator comments that, "[t]here might be no connection, but Zondi's hunch was that it was too much of a coincidence" (Smith 247) and again, when Zondi is questioning Leila Dollie about the Burn family and she asks if it had to do with the death of her mother (their housekeeper), he responds, "[d]eep in his gut Zondi knew that it did. He just didn't know what" (Smith, 2009: 264).

This influence of intuition and emphasis on taking action on impulse is present in all the major characters. This is a defining aspect of the ideology of the novel since all of the major characters act not on ordinary, balanced decision-making, but reactive, impulse-based intuition. This leads to me to ask,

where is the authority in the novel, if everyone is making rash decisions? Can anything be learnt; can anyone grow when they are always acting out of reaction and survival instinct?

The third problematic aspect of Smith's use of the thriller mode is Mongrel's final moments in the novel which, for me, jar with the tone of the novel and his characterization to this point. Having taken to living in a cave on Table Mountain and surviving by his wits, Mongrel sees a disturbance in the bush which he approaches, thinking it to be a rabbit he can hunt:

The bush parted, and a puppy with a thick golden coat scampered out [...] He knelt down and scooped up the puppy into his hands. The puppy licked him and wiggled like an uncoiling spring, pawing at him, trying to get his face with his tongue. The paws were large, and Benny Mongrel knew that this puppy would grow up to be a big dog. The size of Bessie. He stroked the puppy, feeling the smooth fur on its back. And feeling something that scared him: the thawing of his stone-cold heart. (Smith, 2009: 302)

At this point the genre loses its former unity and cohesion. After a high-octane chase of threat and violence, Smith's resolution of this central character seems melodramatic and contrived. I would suggest this point marks an instance where the genre has not served Smith well. The reader is looking for closure about this particularly interesting character and this scene is odd and unconvincing.

I argued in the previous chapter that Smith's Coloured characters were more believable than Orford's. Nevertheless these characters are also restricted and less realistic because of their reliance on impulse and, as discussed above, their sometimes problematic dehumanising through animal imagery, both of which limit these characters and Smith's characterisation of them. One must also wonder why foreign, particularly American, protagonists are integral to the author's work. All of Smith's novels feature Americans in South Africa. Why? The book only represents a group of people in extreme situations; there is nothing ordinary or measured, little exploration of humanity.

## Violence

The amount of 'on-screen' violence in *Mixed Blood* needs to be discussed. This is by far the most violent novel of the four I analyse in this dissertation, and it is important to consider why Smith includes

violence in a way that is ubiquitous and finely detailed. The first violent act in the novel is Burn's murder of the intruders, Faried and Rikki. It is clear that the pair plan to rape his wife: "Burn watched as the man slid his hand under Susan's dress, grabbing at her crotch and squeezing. He saw her eyes close" (Smith, 2009: 5). When his four year-old son enters the room, Burn takes the moment of distraction as an opportunity to attack the intruders despite being held at gun point "[s] he twisted in his chair, he grabbed the carving knife from the table and buried it to its haft in the tall man's chest. Blood geysered from his ruptured heart. Burn stood, grabbed him before he fell, and used his body as a shield. He felt the lanky one take the bullet fired by the short one" (Smith, 2009: 7-8). The description is cinematic: the words 'buried', 'geysered' and 'ruptured' heighten Burn's act and glorify the gore that represents his attack. This scene of violence is an impulsive response embedded in Burn's army training instincts.

However, we later witness the slow and gruelling torture of Barnard at the hands of Benny Mongrel:

Benny Mongrel was a connoisseur of pain. As others in the Cape could roll a glass of wine over their tongue and wax lyrical about its provenance and subtlety, so he knew exactly how to appreciate the effects of the pain he was administering.

And he knew that he had caused the fat man more pain than any of his other victims. Even if the results, initially at least, were less dire than some of his previous exercises. The fat cop's limbs were still connected to his torso, his tongue still lay in his mouth, and his organs were still encased by muscle, fat and skin. But the relentless insertion of the wrapped blade, piercing each layer of epidermis, moving through subcutaneous fat and flesh, finding nerve ends and connective tissue, had built to a greater symphony of pain than he had ever inflicted on any one body. (Smith, 2009: 266-7)

There is a perverse pleasure afforded the reader in both of these situations. Partly, perhaps, because of a sense of retribution, but more so because of the reader's expectations being fulfilled. The reader expects some kind of violent satisfaction and a certain degree of vicarious pleasure associated with the voyeurism of violence. This is promised to the reader in the contract implicit in the 'blurbs' on the covers of thrillers that I discussed above with reference to Glover. That being said, readers differ in the amount and degree of violence that they like to read about and this review suggests that, for some, Smith went too far:

*Mixed Blood* by Roger Smith (Henry Holt/Macmillan) is a typical Cape Town thriller: you slosh around in so much gore the plot is practically submerged. Bank robber Jack Burn is on the run; some luckless hoods who try to rob his rented home on the slopes of Signal Hill don't know who they're dealing with; and after killing them, Burn goes on the run again.

Why write this stuff? The answer is clear: Smith has found an American publisher, and apparently there's an option for a film — Samuel L Jackson has been mentioned. (Ludman, 2009: para.10)

In addition to this question of taste and integrity, the sheer amount of violence in the novel suggests that crime is a dominant part of everyday life; which, even in dangerous places, is not true. Smith does not depict characters doing ordinary things, making ordinary decisions in an ordinary way. His treatment of setting and characterisation as well as the use of violence work to create a spectacle which cannot represent the realism of post-apartheid South Africa which Smith apparently strives for.

## Nihilism

This spectacle must come to an end, and it is in the resolution that one can find much of the ideological implications of the work. Leon de Kock comments on a common thread in the author's work "[t]he resolutions to Smith's novels are a kind of karmic inevitability of mutual self-destruction, the mildly corrupt going down alongside the hyper-corrupt in an orgy of revenge and counter-revenge.

Lawlessness rules. The only use for the law is to aid one's passage to the pig-trough" (De Kock, 2012: para.2). In *Mixed Blood*, the reader encounters desperate people acting on impulse in a world fraught with tension and violence. Their stories end with little or no hope. This is evident in the dramatic moment when Barnard, dying, expecting to meet his creator, realises that his ardent belief in God is a lie:

This is when he would be granted salvation, the gift of voices, when he would emerge from the fire cleansed of mortal sin and find his reward. [...] The burning water held him back. The limbs of the damned enfolded him and pulled him deeper and deeper into the inferno. [...] Then, when the light at last was dimmed forever, Rudi Barnard finally had his answer. His god was dead (Smith, 2009: 282)



This kind of hopelessness is evident in smaller, every-day moments for Carmen. Looking at her severely disabled son, Sheldon, she considers her life: “[w]hat the fuck, she was already in hell. Could it, honest to God, get worse?” (Smith, 2009: 10). And later in the novel, it becomes clear that she believes there is little opportunity to change her life: “[s]he had lived within a couple of blocks of here her whole life, and she would die here, probably” (Smith, 2009: 206).

This bleakness is emphasised by the way Carmen’s positive choices are undercut in her interior monologue. Having saved Matt from Uncle Fatty’s sexual abuse, Carmen takes him to the social worker who took her own child into protective custody. She knows she runs the risk of enraging Barnard but thinks, “she had done good. For once she had done the right thing” (Smith, 2009: 278). Carmen then exacts some revenge by insulting and embarrassing the pompous social worker, Belinda Titus. As she leaves the offices, she considers her lot: “[s]he slammed the door and walked back through the down-trodden and oppressed, and she had felt better than she had in a long time. She knew it wouldn’t last, but what the fuck, she’d enjoy it while it did” (Smith, 2009: 279). De Kock feels that this nihilism is a defining feature of Smith’s work. He asserts that:

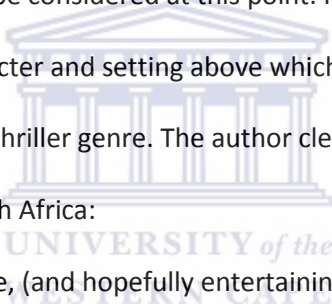
Roger Smith’s third novel, *Dust Devils*, is similar to his previous two, *Wake Up Dead* and *Mixed Blood*, in one important respect: there are no “good guys”. There are almost good guys, but they are “good” only in a sense that is relative to the degrees of venality elsewhere. Everyone is rotten. The system is rotten. No one who works inside the system can escape it. And there’s no action outside the system. So the “good” guys are the corruptibles who eventually take out the rotten cops, the township gang-thugs and the law-unto-themselves types in a blaze of self-destruction. No one survives intact. Smith’s social analysis – if one dare call it that – is that nothing and no one is “clean” anymore. (De Kock, 2012: para.2)

While I have highlighted some glimmers of happiness and growth in *Mixed Blood*, I would agree that the overall tone and perspective of the work are those of nihilism. This aspect of Smith’s work has very important ideological implications in terms of his representations of post-apartheid South Africa.

The thriller form, although an excellent tool for giving the reader an extreme and entertaining experience, is limited in its possibilities for engagement with more complex facets of the story, such as the examination of character and social circumstance. In the case of *Mixed Blood*, this is largely because

the characters remain largely unredeemed and the *status quo* of a warzone or action movie is presented. While characters may achieve some form of revenge, as in the cases of Mongrel, Carmen and Zondi, do they learn anything from the experiences we have witnessed in the novel? Do they grow and become something more than the people they were in the beginning of the novel? Has any aspect of the society they live in been fully addressed and an alternative way of seeing the world offered? I believe that Smith does not offer this kind of growth in the novel. Instead, the reader witnesses the spectacle of a chemical reaction between opposing forces: rich and poor, powerful and powerless, white and Coloured, local and foreign. None are innocent and none are left unscathed by the story because it focuses on the hyper-dysfunctional and the highly spectacular.

The issue of realism needs to be considered at this point. I have praised Smith's use of verisimilitude in his depiction of character and setting above which contribute to the 'believability' that I discuss above that is so crucial to the thriller genre. The author clearly has a desire to offer a 'real' representation of post-apartheid South Africa:



My books are fiction, of course, (and hopefully entertaining fiction) but they are my attempt to convey the reality of South Africa – the stuff that most tourists don't get to see. I believe a crime writer working in a country like South Africa has an obligation to present an **honest picture of the realities**. Crime fiction is more than entertainment. (Musiitwa, 2011:para.24) (emphasis added)

The picture that Smith presents, however, is a very specific and spectacular selection of reality. He achieves the tension in the novel by combining verisimilitude and artifice; a very specific representation of the real which serves the purpose of the thriller form. Here, the genre inhibits Smith in his representation of post-apartheid South Africa in that it does not engage with the ordinary, it does not concern itself with 'normal' people and their daily moral decisions. Characters are 'flattened' into devices to build tension because they do not inhabit a moral universe where human and moral decisions are made. One must consider the question, where is the authority in the novel, what drives events, actions, choices? The only suggestion Smith makes is that of the senselessness and suffering of life:

nihilism. But the real world is more complex than this; Smith's world view offers no room to grow or change. So despite my suggestion that the novel is radical in many ways, this nihilism renders the novel conservative in that it offers no way out; there is no complexity in his society, which is in fact not realistic at all. Denying any possibility for change or agency is a very dangerous political position.

One might argue that the thriller form is not trying deeply or subtly to engage with socio-political issues. The genre is only beholden to the contract the cover makes with the reader for an extreme reading experience. However, as I have shown above several times, Smith makes a claim to representing 'the realities' of South Africa and I have shown how the genre limits his ability to do so. De Kock remarks on this fissure between the genre and Smith's project. He asserts that "Smith's fiction, taken as political allegory [...] sees the country as an apocalyptic hell, surely an exaggeration for the sake of genre" (De Kock, 2012: para.19). Here, De Kock points to Smith's nihilism as a device of the genre which inhibits real engagement with Smith's subject matter.

*Mixed Blood* is a master-class in providing the reader with an extreme experience through Smith's crafting of tension, violence and pace, however the thriller genre limits Smith in his attempt to depict any form of realism because of the sensationalism and nihilism which pervade the novel's world view. When one considers how appropriate this form is in discussing post-apartheid South Africa, I found this remark from De Kock particularly illuminating:

If novels like *Dust Devils*, (or *Mixed Blood*) [...] get it "wrong" in some critics' view, they also get it "right" by compelling such critics to make their claims about what's accurate and what's not. (De Kock, 2012: para.20)

Smith has entertained his readers in *Mixed Blood* through the thriller form and he has also driven many of us to consider his representation of post-apartheid South Africa. As De Kock says, even if we disagree with what Smith depicts, it is important that it sparks our own thinking about what is accurate and perhaps even stimulates debate.

## Chapter Three

### Diale Tlholwe's *Ancient Rites*: The 'Hardboiled' Genre and Rural/Urban Collocations

Diale Tlholwe received the South African Literary Award debut prize for *Ancient Rites* (2008) in 2010, and went on to publish *Counting the Coffins* in 2011. According to the biographical note in his novel, Tlholwe was born in 1961 and grew up in Soweto. The author was deeply affected by the tumult of apartheid and was actively involved in the struggle against the regime, which led to his attending different high schools in the North West and Gauteng because of expulsions, being briefly detained, and being forced to abandon his law studies at the University of Fort Hare after one of the mass expulsions at the University in the early 1980s. Tlholwe then took up teaching and later turned to journalism.

*Ancient Rites* is Tlholwe's first novel and, in an interesting narrative strategy, the author uses the quintessentially American 'hardboiled' crime genre's conventions to tell a story about a rural South African village, its traditional rituals and its values. The tough private eye, a conventionally urban figure, usually a loner on a thankless quest to improve society, finds himself in an entirely new and particularly South African setting. What Tlholwe appears to be saying about post-apartheid South Africa with this unusual technique will be the focus of this chapter.

The novel follows the story of Thabang Maje, former school teacher turned private eye, into an investigation centring on an old flame, Mamorena Marumo. The woman he grew up with, now a teacher in Marakong-a-Badimo, has disappeared from the small village near the Botswana border, and an anonymous client has hired Maje to go undercover as a locum teacher at the village school and investigate. Maje leaves his sassy fiancée, Lesego, and the pace of Johannesburg for the assignment, and is introduced to the village and the case by R.E.D Tiro, a pompous Regional Director of Education. He gets to know the other teachers at the school, Motaung and Mogae, neither of whom live in the village itself, but prefer to stay outside it, a short drive away.

Through the village elders, Maje learns that the helpful school girl in his class, Pono, is in fact Mamorena's and R.E.D. Tiro's unacknowledged daughter. Mamorena's family is from Marakong-a-Badimo, which is an ancient and persecuted refuge for 'witches' and other undesirables. Maje stumbles upon a secret meeting where he discovers that Mamorena is, in fact, alive and the following evening he is brought to the initiation ceremony for Pono who is in training to become a traditional healer. Motaung interrupts the proceedings to warn the group when fellow teacher, Mogae, and a group of armed men approach the scene. Mamorena accuses Mogae of murdering prostitutes on the Botswana road to cover up the fact that he had murdered his wayward sister. It is revealed that Mamorena chose to go into hiding after discovering Mogae stalking around her cottage at night. Motaung's band of men turns on him upon hearing this, but he is quick to escape in the chaos before returning to strike down Mamorena with a fatal blow. Maje reacts and shoots him.

Told in the first person, a convention of the hardboiled sub-genre, through an outsider to the village and exploring its secrets and values, Tlholwe's narrative is both intimately personal and offers insightful social commentary. To my mind the novel is uneven in its achievements, and I wish to consider those aspects which succeed, before proceeding to what I believe to be problematic aspects.

Elements of this novel that work well are: building a sense of intrigue and mystery; establishing a reliable and likeable protagonist; using interesting narrative devices and contexts outside the norms of most South African crime fiction; and creating an intimate connection to different parts of South Africa's history.

The novel's opening lines, uttered by the narrator and protagonist, Maje, suggest a poetic and philosophical voice, and draw the reader into his world: "[a] cold day, a cold journey and a cold voice in the vast emptiness between the mind and the place and the moment" (Tlholwe, 2008: 15). The author opens *Ancient Rites* with sophisticated internal monologue. The repetition of 'cold' and the

identification of a 'vast emptiness' suggest feelings of isolation and alienation; the progression from 'mind' to 'place' to 'moment' gestures towards an idea of self-awareness.

Early on in chapter one, the reader learns that the missing woman was, in fact, a former love of Maje's which piques the reader's interest in the case:

Mamorena Marumo had had many faces. I had known one, maybe two, or none at all. It is very difficult to love someone and never be sure if the feeling is mutual, to always be a stranger to the workings of their mind. And now, from out of the blue, there she was, demanding my attention again. (Tlholwe, 2008: 17)

We become privy to their relationship, his sense of loss, and his personal experience in trying to establish what happened to her.

Tlholwe creates a sense of alienation and mystery around Maje's presence in Marakong-a-Badimo. The cottage he stays in is half way between school and village in a hollow, and was previously Mamorena's home. Maje comments that "[t]he whole cottage looked austere and forbidding" (Tlholwe, 2008: 31), and he notices that the school children preferred to take the significantly longer of the two paths from the village to the school, skirting around the cottage (Tlholwe, 2008: 37). Maje feels considerably isolated when he discovers that his cell phone, his one connection to his employers, police backup and his fiancée, does not pick up any signal in his cottage and is therefore useless (Tlholwe, 2008: 34).

Maje's stay in Marakong-a-Badimo is plagued by unease, which serves to heighten the tension the reader senses in the novel. The detective is haunted by unsettling dreams, (Tlholwe, 2008:34;56) and is disturbed by a presence outside his cottage:

At some point during the long night imagined I heard someone walking around outside the cottage. I rushed to each of the windows in turn, but was met only by the solid, unbroken night. (Tlholwe, 2008: 77-8)

The next morning, Maje's suspicions are confirmed in evidence: "I was now sure that I had not imagined the prowler in the middle of the night. I could see faint, half-obliterated footprints in the sand near the bedroom window" (Tlholwe, 2008: 108).

This sense of unease pervades the relationships Maje witnesses, and becomes a part of life in the small village. While being shown around his cottage by the school headmaster, Mokoka, Maje notices an odd interaction between his host and an old woman who brings the detective his evening meal. Even though it seemed like a very tight-knit community, the detective notices that Mokoka and MaMolefe "behaved like strangers and I knew something wasn't right" (Tlholwe, 2008:31). The school headmaster goes on to unsettle Thabang even further with some advice:

"Don't bother them and they won't bother you."

He looked past me into the bedroom as he said this, and I could have sworn that he was speaking not to me, but reassuring someone he was seeing there, somebody who scared him. (Tlholwe, 2008: 32)

As Maje gets to know members of the village better, the mystery is only heightened. When he asks to meet the woman who cooks his food to thank her, he is overwhelmed by her resemblance to the missing Mamorena:

I felt disorientated. The woman sitting across from me, with her hands hidden politely in her lap, was Mamorena. An older Mamo, true, but as I looked at Ausi Thato across the dining-room table I was stunned by the resemblance. (Tlholwe, 2008: 66)

Maje's sense of confusion and intrigue is heightened by Thato's discouraging response to his investigation, "I will tell you what you need to know if you stop acting dumb and promise to go away and forget about her" (Tlholwe, 2008: 68). What she tells him is that Mamorena is dead and buried in the Kalagadi desert. When Thabang asks young Pono, known to him then as a helpful young student, about Mamorena's missing red car, her controlled reaction heightens his suspicions:

Pono's eyes lit up and then slid away from my face. When she looked back at me her eyes had become noncommittal. The childish joy had changed into a disconcerting attempt at adulthood. (Tlholwe, 2008: 50)

This strange behaviour by villagers is compounded by the rumours of a serial killer on the road to Botswana (Tlholwe, 2008: 75) who has killed, but not raped 13 prostitutes (Tlholwe, 2008: 100).

The mystery of the story ascends to new heights when the protagonist is caught eavesdropping on a suspicious meeting at the school during one of his first nights in the village:

“That’s enough,” the lone figure said, stepping forward. And, as she did so, I felt my true defeat. I would have known that voice anywhere. I had found Mamorena, or more accurately, she had found me. (Tlholwe, 2008: 114)

Mamorena being alive nullifies the narrator’s previous quest to find out what has happened to her, and opens another world to the protagonist and to the reader. The flow of the story then shifts towards Pono’s training as a traditional healer and Maje’s introduction to these rituals. A sense of unease remains with the detective, however, and the beating of drums throughout the day drives Maje to protect himself:

I went into the bedroom, retrieved my backstreet gun from its box and pushed it deep into my hip pocket. I drew comfort from it. A gnawing uneasiness had been growing in me. An unreasonable panic fluttering constantly at the edges of my mind. (Tlholwe, 2008: 134)

This panic leads the detective to take his gun into the climactic valley scene and has a direct impact on the culmination of the novel.

While this mystery builds, the reader feels ‘safe’ in the hands of Tlholwe’s narrator, and I wish now to examine how the author establishes the protagonist, detective Maje, as a reliable and likeable navigator for the audience. Thabang Maje is depicted as a man as comfortable in a minibus taxi to a rural village as he is in his own car in the middle of Johannesburg. He is perceptive and analytical but also accessible, fluent in the local languages and at ease with most social situations he finds himself in. He describes his journey to Marakong-a-Badimo with this delicate mix of sensibilities.

Four hours later I had arrived in Mafikeng in one of the Johannesburg-Mafikeng minibus taxis to be met by Tiro. It had been four hours of uproarious slander, scandal, sport, religion and, inevitably, politics as the ten other passengers battled it out between them, the driver acting as a stern referee. (Tlholwe, 2008: 19)



With dry humour and insightful, often incisive commentary, Tlholwe sets up Maje as a voice the reader trusts. As an outsider, the detective explores the village and its history along with the reader. In the opening chapter, Maje sizes up the middleman of the investigation, the Regional Education Director who has arranged his undercover role as a locum teacher in Marakong-a-Badimo:

R.E.D Tiro wanted to prepare me for the situation I was faced with. He did not want me, he said, to arrive with preconceived ideas or to make any hasty judgements. He, on the other hand, was ready to make those judgements for me in a tiresomely oblique manner. (Tlholwe, 2008: 15)

Along with his sharp perceptiveness, it is clear that Maje has other admirable personal qualities. He was a passionate teacher before South Africa's transition to democracy took its toll on him. Maje relates the moment of his retirement to the reader, burdened with his experience of the struggle for democracy in his country and the difficult time of transition:

At the time of my retirement I was only thirty, but I was burnt out. The educational field had become too complex. Old certainties had been overturned and washed away. New truths had been proclaimed. But when we had prophesied a new type of education, like countless other in all revolutions the world has ever seen, we had failed to foresee our own demise, our inevitable irrelevance in the new order. (Tlholwe, 2008: 26)

This reflection shows Maje's contemplative demeanour, and we can see a clear parallel between Tlholwe's detective and the generic hardboiled P.I. on a crusade to clean up the 'mean streets'. Like a hardboiled P.I., Maje gave of himself, often bewildered by the world around him, on a thankless quest where he eventually found his efforts redundant in the new systems. It is not a hardboiled toughness that characterises Maje, however, but insightfulness and connection which are evident in his love for and skill in teaching children. His experience is clear in his understanding of learners:

Generally, young children like getting their sums right. They love the clear, verifiable steps and certainty of the solution. There are none of the ambiguities of some of the other more opaque subjects, subjects that seem to reflect the randomness of their own lives. (Tlholwe, 2008: 60)

Maje considers the world around him and the people in it with a warm curiosity even though he often seems bewildered by it. Early in the novel, he reflects on a conversation with his fiancée, Lesego, a strong, driven and independent woman who is his equal and partner in every way (Tlholwe, 2008: 33).

Her character reflects well on Maje as the reader sympathises with her after he relates the story of Lesego leaving a high-profile job after sexual advances from her boss (Tlholwe, 2008: 33). In this conversation, Maje is not defensive but generously contemplative of her obscure criticism of him:

“You are out of the mainstream,” she likes to say when she is in one of her fault-finding moods. I don’t know what she means by this. The shallow, alien stream transplanted from another continent? Or the stream of people who carry the old ways with them? Whichever she means, I had a feeling that this time she would have been right. (Tlholwe, 2008: 32)

This approach of calm respect is also evident in Maje’s discovery of a world which is alien to him, characterised by myths, mystical beliefs, and traditional rituals, and his narration of it. With a reliable and likeable protagonist and narrator, the readership is anchored and will happily follow the story into mystical and bizarre territory.

### **A Challenge to Conventions**

While there are certain expectations of the hardboiled genre that Tlholwe has made use of in the novel, there are several areas that contradict the conventions of both the hardboiled genre and more mainstream South African crime novels. These make the book a refreshing read and a particularly interesting text to analyse in a dissertation like this.

The rural setting of *Ancient Rites* is an exceptional feature of the novel. Marakong-a-Badimo and its community define the story and change the very character of the novel from the mystery of a missing woman to a journey of cultural and self-discovery. This change has an influence on the form of the story, and Jonathan Amid draws attention to a lack of violence in the novel despite its genre’s conventions:

“[r]ather than adopt the ultra-violent, no-holds-barred thriller character of these texts, Tlholwe chooses to write a limited yet memorable number of high-impact set pieces in which the skill of the writing instead of violent content grabs the reader” (Amid, 2011: para.27). He goes on to point out how this serves Tlholwe in his crafting of the characters and atmosphere of the novel, “[w]hile the writing is consistently tight, the story and characters have plenty of room to breathe. This lets the reader soak up

the adamantine atmosphere, the lacerating descriptions of the state of the nation, the slowly accumulative sense of menace and foreboding” (Amid, 2011: para.27). In this way Tlholwe crafts a space of his own to narrate a specific perspective on post-apartheid South Africa, often outside of the expectations of hardboiled and conventional South African crime fiction.

Looking at *Ancient Rites* in the light of other South African crime fiction, it is clear that the novel undermines the conventional economic, cultural and geographical features of this genre; there are no white characters, it is not located in an urban setting and there is no police connection to the detective, all of which have become common characteristics of our local crime fiction.

Another aspect of this novel which contradicts many crime fiction conventions is the relationships that Maje builds in the village. It is clear that, even before he has agreed to be her guardian or discovered who her parents are, the detective has real affection for Mamorena’s daughter: “Pono burst into bubbling laughter, grabbed my arm and squeezed it. I was suddenly glad that I was alive and here as I looked down into that happy child’s face” (Tlholwe, 2008: 65). Lesego, Maje’s partner, also meets the villagers at Mamorena’s funeral and the couple maintain these familial ties after the case; the village characters are mentioned in Tlholwe’s follow-up novel, *Counting the Coffins* (2011). While detectives often form strong bonds with other characters during the course of an investigation, these relationships are rarely developed or maintained unless that character becomes a recurring one. Tlholwe’s characters seem committed to making the community of Marakong-a-Badimo an extended family and their village a place to return to.

Probably the most striking aspect of *Ancient Rites* is Tlholwe’s treatment of language: his use and centralising of Tswana and his decentralising treatment of English; along with a consideration of the language’s impact in rural South Africa. The novel is peppered with Tswana courtesy titles such as ‘Rre’ meaning Sir, ‘Mmê’ meaning Madam, ‘Tichere’ meaning teacher, as well as Tswana phrases which are explained through the narration such as “‘Ke tlisitse dijo!’ she said, announcing the banquet” (Tlholwe,

2008: 48). Communicating in English has a particular significance for the narrator. The use of the language denotes bureaucratic formality and, more broadly, a certain idea of financial success associated with the middle class which, in terms of South Africa's social and political history, has, until recently, been previously dominated by the white demographic. In this narrative, English is the language of the city, and this adds an interesting dimension of social and cultural critique to the novel.

The first mention of language in relation to culture is a comment made by the narrator about his middleman and driver to the village, J.M.B Tiro: “[h]e had been on this same subject since we had left Mafikeng two hours earlier. Not an invigorating, cobweb-clearing conversation for a cold Monday morning, especially when held in English – the language that Regional Director J.M.B. Tiro insisted on speaking” (Tlholwe, 2008: 15). Maje is pointing to Tiro's pretentiousness, as if speaking in English confirms his authority, his position of power, his modern and urban lifestyle. The use of English is seen as a mark of colonialism and saddens Maje when he hears the language spoken in amongst, and therefore diluting, Setswana: “The girl was speaking again. In that unhappy mixture of Setswana and English that is now common even in the deep rural areas” (Tlholwe, 2008: 40).

The most poignant commentary on the use of English comes at the climax of the novel. Mamorena has revealed her suspicions that Mogae had held back Khoesan learners, and murdered his sister as well as the prostitutes on the Botswana road. Maje has witnessed Mogae deliver a fatal blow to Mamorena with a machete and now the detective pins him to a cave wall, his street gun aimed squarely at Mogae:

I held my gun in both hands and positioned my feet firmly on the ground. “Why, Mogae?” I asked him. “She let you go.”  
“She...was...always...a lying...proud bitch.”  
That was all I really needed. Even as I raised the gun I wondered why his last words sounded so much worse in English. Maybe if he had said it in Setswana I might have let him take his chances with a judge. Maybe. (Tlholwe, 2008: 157)

Mogae's utterance in English moves Maje from handing the culprit over to the law enforcement establishment and towards taking justice into his own hands. Why does it incense him in this way? I

would suggest that the narrator was just beginning to come to grips with Mamorena's secret life as a spiritual healer. He had just earned the trust of this secretive, mystical and persecuted community and hearing Mamorena insulted in this way so filled him with hate for Mogae's self-seeking violence that it urged him to seek vengeance for the people of Marakong-a-Badimo himself.

### **A Connection to the Past**

The very title of the novel, *Ancient Rites*, points to a culturally significant past which combines the gothic roots of the crime genre and Tlholwe's particular focus on traditional culture. The sense of connection to the past pervades the novel right from its centre, the protagonist and narrator. Maje's prior relationship with the missing woman has a major impact on this case and, as he searches the cottage where the missing Mamorena used to live, he immerses himself in what she must have experienced very recently, as well as what they shared in the past:

Mamorena must have stood many times where I was standing watching the same scene I was watching now. But it was not the present I was seeing when I looked through that window. It was the yesterdays I had thought were lost and irreclaimable. I was not seeing the tiny figures of the village children playing some innocent ball game on a distant field. I was watching Mamorena come down the steep slope towards me. Only it wasn't the teacher's cottage she was approaching, but my room at the back of parents' home in KwaThema, Springs. (Tlholwe, 2008: 46)

This very personal attachment to the past is reflected through the life experiences of several characters: from the shared understanding of what it means to have lived as a black person under apartheid, to the more specific knowledge of the village's history which Maje comes to discover.

South Africa's recent past under the apartheid regime is clearly part of the setting of the novel. Maje's troubled time as a teacher in the midst of the upheaval of establishing a new democracy has already been touched on, and this sense of futility is echoed again when he meets the school principal, T.B. Mokoka: "[a]nother grand old-timer who faced the world with only his initials as his spear and

shield, I thought as he shook my hand limply” (Tlholwe, 2008:24). As the detective considers his new acquaintance, he explores Mokoka’s pride and critiques it within a specific historical context:

Mokoka, like the rest of us, was not immune to some vanity. He had graduated from the dusty villages to a town, probably to the formerly whites-only part of it too. It was his due and he had earned it. Of what good was a long career, dedicated service, liberation and so on if Mokoka could not enjoy some of the rewards? If that is what he really equated freedom with. (Tlholwe, 2008: 28)

Maje’s exploration of the nearest town, Bullsdrift, clearly shows an understanding of the presence of South Africa’s apartheid past lingering in the present:

Going over a side street I saw a large white church set back from the main street. The church stood like a sentinel at what seemed to be the beginning of the white suburb. Had Mokoka infiltrated that citadel? I wondered to myself [...] A hotel and a kroeg<sup>10</sup> – The Bullsdrift, the white social hub and thus the antidissertation of the Black Bull Bar and Restaurant – stood sedately on my side of the street. (Tlholwe, 2008: 92)

Maje’s understanding of these old structures and his approach towards this lingering division and subordination are clear in his appraisal of the police station: “[t]he police station was a long, low building hiding behind a barracks built a long time ago to intimidate and impress the natives. I went over and entered, neither impressed nor intimidated” (Tlholwe, 2008: 93). A conversation with the police officer in charge of Mamorena’s case, Inspector Goitsewang Moleko, reveals that, while the effects of apartheid seem to have lingered only in town planning and class segregation, they have very deep personal implications for many people: “[e]ventually, I tried what I thought to be a neutral topic. ‘Were you born in Bullsdrift?’ I asked. ‘Yes, but my people were evicted from the farms around here many years ago.’ No safe subject under the sun, not in this country” (Tlholwe, 2008: 103). More than in any of the other novels I have examined in this dissertation, Tlholwe integrates the complex influence of the lived experience of apartheid in the lives of his characters. For the people of Marakong-a-Badimo, the history of their village also has a major impact on their lives and not only plays a major role in shaping their identities but also comes to shape the plot of *Ancient Rites*.

---

<sup>10</sup> Afrikaans for pub.

Chapter nine depicts Thato, Mamorena's sister, telling Maje the story of the history of their village, which she describes as "a sacred place, but also a place of exiles and outcasts. A refuge for the persecuted and the shamed. And witches" (Tlholwe, 2008: 70). Their village's close social connections to the Khoesan of the Kalagadi foster suspicion and alienation among other villages in the area. It becomes evident that the village's history still has a direct impact on characters' lives as evinced by the attack on Thato and her children.

The final piece of history which is shown to have influence on the present is the traditional African story of the creation of the world featuring the Supreme Being, Tladi, the God of Thunder, and O'Esi, the Goddess of Wisdom. In the story, which the villagers see as the oldest chapter in their history, the male spirits held meetings and conducted their tasks without O'Esi but failed because they did not see that she "could control the potent forces that [...] roamed the face of the earth" (Tlholwe, 2008:145-6). The conclusion of the story reflects tellingly on the village's treatment of women:

Then the Supreme Being told them to go back and ask O'Esi's forgiveness and to give her whatever she asked for. They relented and when O'Esi asked that they give her the same initiation that was kept for men, they initiated her into the secret knowledge and their plans succeeded [...] That is how women also became healers, sages and rulers in the days of peace, progress and prosperity. (Tlholwe, 2008: 146)

Respect for women and the need for balance in society are depicted as crucial factors in maintaining this 'peace, progress and prosperity'. The influence of outside factors, most probably the colonial presence, is described as upsetting this balance and being the cause of the village's undoing: "[t]hen the potent forces of immoderation were let loose again. Our decline soon followed, and strangers with strange customs became our overlords. The forgetting began and we have been forgetting ever since" (Tlholwe, 2008:146). In these ways Tlholwe weaves several aspects of the village's history into the narrative and thereby creates an historical setting or landscape alongside the physical one of rural South Africa.

## From Suspicion and Alienation to Understanding and Connection

The prologue of the novel opens with the line, “From this place...” (Tlholwe, 2008: 9), and the penultimate chapter opens with the line, “To this place...” (Tlholwe, 2008: 161). What has moved from one place to another? I would suggest that these ‘places’ are ideological positions and *Ancient Rites* depicts the shift or transition from suspicion and alienation to compassion and understanding.

The sense of unease, described above in relation to the heightening mystery of the story, is amplified by the suspicion sensed by characters towards each other. On meeting his fellow teacher, Maje comments: “[f]or no reason at all, at that moment, Tankie Motaung struck me as having that indefinable quality of a sneak” (Tlholwe, 2008: 43). The detective is also sensitive to the alienation between individuals in the village:

J.B.M. Tiro drew himself up and straightened his tie. We did the same. Three African men standing in the cold in a barren school yard on the edge of the new South Africa, trying to look dignified. Two short, stout middle-aged men and a tall, slim, younger one, who could barely understand one another’s worlds. Three Batswana men alienated from one another by education, status, background, age, history and a language that was not their own. (Tlholwe, 2008: 24)

Here, the narrator picks up on differing backgrounds and Tiro’s insistence on speaking English as factors which alienate these men from each other.

There is also a feeling of something more than isolation in the village; it seems to be plagued by a sense of mistrust. A leader in the village, Molefe, encourages Maje to hear the facts of their story to combat rumours from outside Marakong-a-Badimo: “Tichere Maje, listen to her and go. Otherwise you will hear lies from bad people and believe them” (Tlholwe, 2008:69). Inspector Moleko gives an outsider’s perspective on the village’s uneasy relationship with the external world: “‘Marakong-a-Badimo is a problem,’ she said as she slowed down. ‘They don’t talk a lot about their affairs. We only get information second-hand if we’re lucky. And it’s mostly inaccurate’” (Tlholwe, 2008: 104). This sense of mistrust on the part of the villagers is not only felt towards their immediate neighbours but to the



greater modern or urban world. Explaining the cruelty that her village had suffered, MaMolefe exclaims: “Do you think that because men fly in machines in the air that people have changed?’ [...] and snorted derisively. I shook my head lest I be counted amongst the contemptible backward rabble MaMolefe was so set against” (Tlholwe, 2008: 72). The school principal, Mokoka, talks about the older children whom the school teaches despite their being far too old for the school grade:

“Age is their problem, and a fast-changing world that seems to be leaving them behind. The old inspectors turned a blind eye, and some even encouraged them to stay as long as possible in the school system, but one never knows with these new ideas people.” He shrugged. “I always wonder how they turn out after they go to the big cities. Especially the poor girls. One always hears such terrible stories...” (Tlholwe, 2008: 41-2)

The ability to protect the village children is an advantage for a marginal, rural school. However, Mogae’s unchallenged racism towards Khoesan schoolboy, Jan-Jan, is an instance where it is a great disadvantage. Here, the suspicion is turned inwards into the village community and is based on deep-seeded prejudice: “‘I don’t see the point of educating *you* people,’ Mogae growled at him as I closed the door behind me. ‘You should be out there chasing ostriches like all the Basarwa’” (Tlholwe, 2008: 61). This cultural suspicion and alienation has affected the Khoesan for a long time according to Thato as she tells the story of her village’s history: “[t]he problem in the old days was our close relations with the Khoesan of Kgalahadi. They were feared and despised. They were said to possess great supernatural powers and secret knowledge of all kinds. Unhealthy powers that were denied honest people” (Tlholwe, 2008: 71). The above sense of suspicion does not dominate the novel, however. Maje’s response to it gradually leads him to a greater understanding of the village and its community. A turning point can be clearly seen after he learns about the village’s history from the villagers themselves.

After the detective hears the story of the hate attack on Thato and her children where the police wrote off the incident as an accidental shack fire and the villagers did not demand a proper investigation (Tlholwe, 2008: 74), an atmosphere of isolation and fear pervades the room where the detective sits with many of the village’s prominent figures. At the end of the story, Maje describes how “[a] stillness

that lacked the serenity of hope or peace slouched in and crouched in the cold, empty spaces between us” (Tlholwe, 2008: 73). Later that day, his frustration nearly overwhelms him: “[i]n bed that night I groaned and cursed. The fatalism of the villagers infuriated me beyond expression. This is how the land was taken and we were beaten down. I railed, wept and cursed them again” (Tlholwe, 2008: 77). The next day, when he discovers a secret meeting at the school, Maje’s frustration, suspicion and desire for knowledge propel him to interrupt it: “[a] silence fell and I took a step back and considered my position. I decided to withdraw to the deeper shadows, but my hand was reaching for the door knob. I let it. I was tired of not knowing” (Tlholwe, 2008: 111). This moment marks the end of Maje’s blind searching in a mysterious village, and the beginning of his (and our) journey towards understanding the village’s traditions and spiritual practices as well as its battle to protect itself from the outside world.

The crucial factor in Maje’s trajectory from suspicion to connection is discovering that Mamorena is alive, and her explanation of growing up as the child of traditional healers and the impact this had on her identity. She describes to the detective how this affected her first romance: “I met Tiro at the University of Fort Hare and we clicked. He still believed in the traditions then, and supported me when I maintained that there was nothing wrong with them. I thought I had found my soul mate. An educated African who was not ashamed of his heritage” (Tlholwe, 2008: 117). Mamorena also reveals how Tiro had cast her aside in favour of his political career after she had given birth to Pono and become very ill:

What he has is fear. Fear that someday I might embarrass him. You see, he wants to be the next Provincial Minister of Education. Then, with luck, he’ll get a national position. That will lead to a fat directorship in some private company looking for a high-profile black face... My disappearance shocked him. He wants to know for certain that I am dead and safely buried. And that nothing negative will find its way back to him. So he hires you, Thabang. (Tlholwe, 2008: 119)

Mamorena asks the detective if he would take care of her daughter, Pono, if the situation ever arose.

Once he agrees, Maje feels a profound bond with the woman: “[s]he was smiling a secret smile I couldn’t read, but for the first time I really felt that we had connected” (Tlholwe, 2008: 120).

As Maje enters the sacred valley, the plot reflects what we have already read in the dreamscape of the prologue, although this time, at the climax of the story, the reader identifies that it is Molefe who is carrying Maje, Jan Jan carrying the torch, and it is Pono's face on the wooden barrier. With Maje, the reader has moved from confusion and disorientation in the prologue to understanding and empathy in the closing chapters. With this understanding of what is going on around him, Maje's compassionate insight returns:

I wondered how a baby like Pono could speak about such things. It was plain that she was exhausted by the proceedings. Then, in one stunningly clear moment I saw why Mamorena wanted her to go away for a while – to be a child a little longer. (Tlholwe, 2008: 147)

While the form of *Ancient Rites* moves from alienation and suspicion to understanding and connection, the greater project of the novel can be seen as a reflection on the effects of this fear and this compassion. And most often in this novel, these attitudes are formed around knowledge.

### **A Reflection on Responses to Knowledge**

Several ways of knowing or understanding are depicted in this story. Maje, the detective, (as well as the police Inspector Moleko) are searching for evidence to understand what happened in the past to solve crimes. That is also the task of a crime novel. Alongside this plot, and eventually overtaking it, is a reflection on different types of knowledge and the effects of our responses to these types of knowledge.

In an interview, the author highlights spiritual ways of knowing as the central theme of *Ancient Rites*:

The supernatural is always with us in this country. It does not matter what the particular religion someone professes, in many situations one is often confronted with this 'slip'. Between the 'real' world and the world of 'spirits'. I suppose the person who once said that sometimes the theme of your novel chooses you was right. I have been deeply interested in traditional belief systems for some time now – but not in a sustained or systematic way. (Nicol, 2009(e): para.7)

To introduce this theme, Tlholwe foregrounds one particular type of knowledge in the preface to this novel, that of myth. He quotes from Doris Lessing's novel, *African Laughter* (1993):

Myth does not mean something untrue,  
But a concentration of truth. (Tlholwe, 2009: ii)

This quotation seems to suggest that 'truth' exists, is distilled, in myth even though it is not apparent in empirical terms. This way of understanding through myth highlights the ability to hold the unknown in a myth and accept it as such.

Immediately after the preface, the reader encounters a dreamscape prologue which serves as a foretelling of what is to come. Like the dreamer or narrator, we do not understand the significance of the dream, but later in the novel it becomes clear as it is revealed to be the approach to the sacred valley: the climax of the story. In the prologue, and again in the climactic scene in the mountains, Pono utters a prophecy:

All those who assume that all things are settled [...] all questions answered, all truths revealed, all histories recorded, all mysteries explained, all secrets unearthed, all wounds healed, all quests ended, for all time, are deluded. Their undoing is assured. (Tlholwe, 2008: 11)



The fact that the prophecy is repeated signifies its importance in the novel. It is a deeply unsettling prophecy; it suggests that nothing is reliable and there are no grand narratives which help us understand our lives. It demands an acceptance of the ambiguous and the incomplete. Directly after this prophecy is quoted in the prologue, the narrator responds: "I agreed with everything she said" (Tlholwe, 2008: 11). It is unclear whether Maje utters his agreement in the dream or whether, reflecting on the prophecy as he narrates it, he agrees with it. This ambiguity unsettles the reader further.

This is not the only prophecy in the novel, however. Just before Mamorena's dramatic murder in the cave scene, she utters a prophecy about Maje. She says that he will do "a great thing" (Tlholwe, 2008: 143): "it will be so great that it will renew you and you will live forever in the memories of those who will witness it... I have known it for as long as I have known you. Just don't run and hide this time" (Tlholwe, 2008: 143-4). This prophecy singles out Maje for greatness.

Tlholwe succeeds in describing the effects of fear and suspicion around mysticism and traditional spirituality. In chapter nine, Maje learns of the horrific attack on Thato and her children by people from their neighbouring village, Majaneng (Tlholwe, 2008: 73). Thato explains that: “[t]he stigma of witchcraft is forgotten for long periods, for generations, and then it is revived. A fever enters the hearts of our neighbours and new refugees are created. I am one of the most recent ones” (Tlholwe, 2008: 70). When Maje questions why the police paid such little attention to the case, MaMolefe responds: “[t]hey always do that when we are involved, [...] [w]e, however, look to the older truths for solutions. Wrongs, however old, have a way of righting themselves in the end” (Tlholwe, 2008: 74). This belief in myth and mysticism becomes the form through which the village elders of Marakong-a-Badimo tell Maje about their history. In this way, Tlholwe evokes a whole new type of knowledge and way of understanding through which Maje (and the reader) begin to gain some real insight into the village and its people.

As Thato tells the painful story, she appears to transcend her individuality and take the form of a presence sharing the community’s most recent attack. Maje comments that: “[s]he was fading away; no longer occupying any single point in the room but, seemingly, all of it” (Tlholwe, 2008: 71). Without summons, several prominent community members join Maje and Thato, giving the story-telling the form of a community ritual:

The room had taken on a new aspect as she had been talking. Low lights had appeared as various people had come into the house and settled themselves on the floor around the walls. Their blinking eyes were the strange scattered lights I could see. Once again their ability to move with extreme stealth impressed me. But it was not a quality I found comforting. (Tlholwe, 2008: 71)

The participation of these community members in the storytelling is evident through exclamations, chanting, partaking in snuff tobacco and sharing the role of storyteller (Tlholwe, 2008: 71-72). In this way, the community offers their history to Maje without individuality, and he weighs the effect of this for himself: “[a]n old, old voice took over the tale. It could have been that of a very old man or woman.

Age had finally achieved what the progressives can only dream about; it had robbed the speaker of any gender. The dark did the rest” (Tlholwe, 2008: 71). In this scene, the effects of the suspicion outlined above are made clear in the death of Thato’s children, and the deep sense of mysticism is highlighted as a prominent way of knowing or understanding for the village. The role of mysticism is highlighted again in the climax of the novel where Maje is led to the secret valley where Pono is undergoing her ritual training to become a traditional healer.

What is significant about this scene is that there are instances of connection and understanding which play a pivotal role in the novel’s ideological implications. Maje remarks on the wide range of African communities present: “[f]rom their eclectic traditional garb it appeared that it was not only made up of Batswana, but a beautiful and heady mixture of people from every African nation” (Tlholwe, 2008: 137). In this case, I think Tlholwe’s attempt at narrating a sense of rural and spiritual African community goes too far. The assertion that there are people from all 57 African nations present seems highly fanciful to me. Why would such a large body of representatives be necessary for Pono’s rituals? This hyperbolic narrative vision is part of a glorification of a generic African spirituality that I will discuss shortly. What is important about this detail in terms of the scene is Tlholwe’s attempt at inclusiveness.

Once Pono has intoned her prophecy, Maje embraces the ritual’s conventions and addresses Mamorena, asking for her permission to address Pono. She responds that he must be cleansed through ritual before he can talk to her, and Maje shows great courage, as an outsider, when he agrees to undertake the necessary rituals (Tlholwe, 2008:138). It is clear that Maje is not comfortable in the situation:

I stood, mortified by my nakedness, in front of Mamorena. She examined me from head to toe, without expression, before pointing to a blanket, which I wrapped around me like an initiate. (Tlholwe, 2008: 139)

But his willingness to explore these mystical rituals pays off as he reconnects with Mamorena:

She looked into my eyes and locked onto the tiny, sunny place in my brain that still sheltered the fragile remnants of the dreams of a hopeful young man.

“It was good back then, some of it, was it not, Thabang?” she whispered.

“It was good, Mamo. All of it.”

“No, some of it.”

“Don’t forget the good parts.”

“I won’t.” (Tlholwe, 2008: 139-40)

Maje is welcomed into the sacred gathering and initiated through several rituals. Mamorena reassures him: “[y]ou don’t have to participate in everything, just sit down and try and learn something about your own people” (Tlholwe, 2008: 143). This newly rekindled connection is so profound that Mamorena entrusts Maje to look after Pono in the city before she returns to the village to resume her training as a traditional healer. Mamorena explains that:

She doesn’t want to go, but I want her to see a bit of the outside world before she becomes a full-time healer. She has taken to you and has agreed to go with you. When she turns fourteen bring her back to Marakong, and if she wants to be a healer we will decide then what to do [...] It is important that you know that to us she is a fulfilment of an ancient prophecy. (Tlholwe, 2008: 141)

These instances show how the novel treats different ways of knowing, moving from the familiar empirical understanding of evidence to which Maje is accustomed as a detective, to the village’s belief in myth and their reliance on mysticism and ritual. Through Maje, Tlholwe treats these new, and less familiar, ways of knowing with respect and wonder. Having discussed these particularly interesting aspects of the novel, an examination of *Ancient Rites* as a crime novel through its structural elements gives another perspective on Tlholwe’s narration of post-apartheid South Africa.

### ***Structure: Status Quo, Disruption and Resolution***

The *status quo*, or the norms of the novel, give the reader much insight into the author’s representation of the setting, in this case, a rural village in post-apartheid South Africa. The depiction of the Molefe household shows both the protagonist’s urban worldview and the way that the traditional and the modern co-exist in rural Marakong-a-Badimo:

We followed a path into the first yard on the left, where a cluster of round African huts stood behind a rectangular brick house. The yard was so large that it could have accommodated two

hundred good-sized city shacks, and behind it more land had been fenced in to make stockades for farm animals and fowls. (Tlholwe, 2008: 64)

The broader representation of South Africa is that of a country battling to come to terms with its long-awaited democracy. Seeing the impoverished school in Marakong-a-Badimo, Maje considers his time as a school teacher:

I had taught in a township high school for several years and had lived to tell my war stories to disbelieving novices. I didn't see how these children's circumstances could be that different to those of thousands of other children throughout the country. (Tlholwe, 2008: 26)

Inspector Moleko's character seems defeated, as she relates a desperate lack of funds and personnel:

"[s]he pointed at a pile of files on the floor next to the wall. 'All unsolved cases involving suspected sexual crimes. And I am the Sexual Offenses Unit in this town'" (Tlholwe, 2008: 97). Moleko gives an interesting, although jaded, perspective of the village. Like Maje, she has spent time in a modern, urban environment but has returned to her home in rural Bullsdrift. When she describes the increase in prostitution in the area, her sadness is evident and Maje sympathises: "I knew what she was struggling with. She was helplessly watching her community sliding towards dissolution" (Tlholwe, 2008: 98). Like Moleko, Mamorena is able to see her home within a particular historical, social and political context.

She talks to Maje about the men in her village:

'You know what's missing for them in this promised land of ours? They have been to heaven and come back crying, they were not expected.'

She shook her head again.

'We have given them all the fine words: democracy, nonracialism, non-this and non-that. To our credit we sometimes mention ubuntu, but even that now sounds alien and perverted when spoken by people who have long abandoned the culture that gave birth to it. But all of this is just one meaningless gesture after another, and we must have meaning, Thabang, above everything else.' (Tlholwe, 2008: 121)

This vacuum of meaning and personal values emerging from the political tumult of the end of apartheid seems to be a key concern of the author's and, I would argue, the central 'idea' of the novel. Moleko articulates this concern most clearly:



We, as a young nation, are abolishing all the old social and cultural values, but we have nothing to replace them with. And into this empty space, ugly things are creeping. (Tlholwe, 2008: 99)

The question, now, is to look at the author's treatment of this *status quo* through the disruption and the resolution, and to identify any changes to these norms or ways in which they have been addressed.

The most obvious disruption is the cause of Maje's investigation, that is Mamorena's disappearance, but looking more closely, there are three other factors which can be seen as disturbances to the apparent equilibrium of the story's society. The first is the fact that Mamorena and Thato were raised as daughters of traditional healers. Mamorena remarks on how difficult it was for her to reconcile this private fact and her public personality: "I [...]wanted to escape and be one of you. Be just a normal township girl. But some people wouldn't let me forget who I was. A young savage whose parents practised a barbaric religion" (Tlholwe, 2008: 117). Secondly, the incident of Thato's children being burned to death in a hate attack on Thato is a consequence of this upbringing and a result of suspicion and intolerance. This incident serves as a catalyst in the conflict between the people of Marakong-a-Badimo, and those of Majaneng, their neighbouring village. The third and final disruption is when Maje stumbles upon a private meeting where he discovers that Mamorena is alive and the truth behind her disappearance is revealed (Tlholwe, 2008: 114). These disturbances share the common factor of the village's secret of being a refuge for outcasts. The revelation of this secret and the consequent responses to it comprise the major disturbances in the novel. How the narrative resolves these disturbances sheds light on the ideological position of the novel.

As there are several disruptions to this narrative's *status quo*, not only the principal crime which has sparked an investigation, there must too be several resolutions which relate to the characters and their community. The height of the action in the valley scene is interspersed with small resolutions. When Mogae attempts to stop the proceedings, he and Mamorena confront each other in front of their respective followers and Mamorena reveals that Mogae had murdered his sister and then killed several prostitutes in the area to cover it up. This causes the group of armed vigilantes with him to turn on their

leader. While he attempts to flee, Mamorena articulates what revealing Mogae's crimes will mean for her village: "Better times are beckoning,' Mamorena said softly.'"By nightfall everyone in both villages will know the truth. It will now be possible for the elders of the villages to meet. And there will be no more Thatos in the...'" (Tlholwe, 2008: 156). Before she can finish her sentence, Mogae strikes her down with a fatal blow. Reacting immediately, Maje kills Mogae, and these deaths are another key resolution in the story.

Tiro, who fathered Pono with Mamorena, is ridiculed and shown up by Maje when the detective calls to close the case and hints that he knows that Tiro is the client in this case and not just the middleman (Tlholwe, 2008: 127). This resolution also has philosophical implications. After the climax of the action of the novel, Maje explains to Molefe how he handled reporting back to his employer: "I have already told him that there are no answers. That sometimes we have to live without answers" (Tlholwe, 2008: 135). This acceptance of the lack of a straightforward answer is an unconventional resolution for a detective story and reflects Tlholwe's acknowledgement of myth and mysticism.

A fundamental aspect of a resolution is the restoration of order. While much in this story cannot be restored, permanent changes have taken place because of events such as the deaths of several characters. However, through the revealing of information such as Mogae's crimes, the peace that Marakong-a-Badimo had once known has been partially restored. Maje observes that Mamorena will also find some balance in her death through her ritual burial:

Mamorena would be buried among her people at dawn the next day without any fuss. The authorities were not actively looking for her and no one would be interested in a traditional ceremony in an obscure African village in a country where hundreds of people are still born unrecorded and die unscrutinised in the countryside. The ancient last rites would be observed and balance partly restored. (Tlholwe, 2008:160)

Finally, the resolution within this story for Maje and Lesego closes with a positive turn. MaMolefe hints at the fact that she senses that Lesego is pregnant (Tlholwe, 2008:169). This new life is a positive resolution and counteracts the sadder resolutions of the deaths in the novel.

## Limitations of Tlholwe's Narrative

The aspects I have discussed so far suggest that this novel is an original and interesting narrative set in a rural village told through the hardboiled mode, however, there are several aspects of the narrative which render the novel disjointed and inconsistent at times and limit Tlholwe's success in this experiment.

While the novel builds in mystery as I have shown, it is not, overall, a gripping read. The book seems caught between being an intriguing mystery, a meditation on values in our society, and a consideration of how post-apartheid South African culture is adapting to its new world. The protagonist's musings are scattered throughout the plot and his narration is often stiff and philosophical, as evinced here: "[e]ven in our democratic times certain things can still determine whether you find someone or not: race, age, gender, ethnicity and language. In my old age I intend to write a very politically incorrect treatise on this subject (under an assumed name of course)" (Tlholwe, 2008: 45-6). Considering broad and fundamental social and political issues, the narrator seems to act bravely as a member of a democratic society in planning to write a 'politically incorrect' treatise, but this step is then immediately undone by the reassurance that it will be written under an assumed name. On the one hand, in this day and age when access to politicians has never been greater and protest takes multiple forms – when one can tweet national leaders – this failed stand seems pompous and ineffectual. On the other hand, if Tlholwe is consciously creating this impression as part of Maje's character, it sits uncomfortably with the passionate teacher we have learned worked so hard in South Africa's transition that he burned himself out, as well as the figure of the P.I. on a crusade. On the same page as the quotation above, Tlholwe gives the impression of an old-fashioned detective, out of touch with modern life: "I don't know much about forensics except what I have read or seen on television. I am all for science and technology, but DNA, like the Sphinx, has yet to speak to me, so I was not looking for fingerprints and old bloodstains. No. I was looking for the real person who inhabited this cottage"

(Tlholwe, 2008: 45). Here the detective, while representing the modern and the urban in the narrative in contrast to the traditional and the rural, hints disparaging at the use of technology in favour of discovering the 'real person'. On top of this, his mention of the Sphinx gives the whole statement an archaic and outdated feeling. Other major problems in the novel are concerned with Tlholwe's crafting of his protagonist, which gives rise to a sense of fractured characterisation.

There are hints that Maje has had a history of drinking and making bad decisions, and he himself comments: "[T]he mirror was a silent witness to my hard drinking and other foolish, angry indulgences" (Tlholwe, 2008: 115). Mamorena contributes her opinion as an outsider: "If I ever need a father figure in my daughter's life, I would choose you, Thabang. You are a wreck, but a good wreck, and you could show her a bit of the world" (Tlholwe, 2008: 120). These character traits are consistent with the hardboiled genre that Tlholwe has consciously used in *Ancient Rites*, however, usually in crime fiction these traits are the manifestation of an inner struggle within the protagonist of which there is little or no evidence in Maje: he is in a stable relationship with his fiancée, Lesego; he seems to lead a life of sober habits; and he thrives in his new job as a detective. He shows no battle within himself to act with honour despite his weaknesses and circumstances as seen in the other protagonists I have examined. Margie Orford's Clare Hart struggles with her guilt about the traumatising attack on her sister and her unease with domesticity and a long-term relationship with Riedwaan Faizal; Roger Smith's Benny Mongrel attempts to make a better life for himself after prison, but becomes drawn into the story through his desire for revenge; and, possibly the most relevant case here, Deon Meyer's Benny Griessel must battle his alcoholism to retain his family. Throughout *Ancient Rites*, Maje shows no such inner struggle after having made reference to it. This, for me, is a major inconsistency in Tlholwe's characterisation of the protagonist.

Aside from problems of characterisation, Tlholwe's approach feels to me outdated and archaic at points. This is most evident in his narration and references made by Maje: "[I]ittle wonder then that

Mokoka's face had been pinched in sour disapproval as he drove off. The unsavoury types and their scantily dressed female companions loitering outside these establishments were enough to turn anybody into a Mrs Grundy" (Tlholwe, 2008: 88). Rather than being a detective comfortable with the streets and those who spend their time on them, Maje is depicted sharing the judgement of the primary school principal, Mokoka, and the reference to 'a Mrs Grundy' seems at odds with the fast-talking man of the South African city that Tlholwe is attempting to portray. This sense that the narrator is out of touch reappears later in the novel in the description of Maje's fist-fight with Molefe:

Molefe was huge, and that had probably served him well in the past, but he was no fighter, at least not with a rabbit like myself. I had been taught my survival skills by township brawlers who had never heard of the Queensberry rules.

I jiggled, I jived, I jeered – driving him insane with frustration and leading him into a hundred blunders and wrong moves. (Tlholwe, 2008: 113)

The scene seems to describe an old-fashioned boxing match and the alliteration of 'I jiggled, I jived, I jeered' renders the violence contrived. One may argue that these turns of phrase echo the dialect that the hardboiled genre appeared in, however, if this was Tlholwe's intent, it is not carried through the novel strongly enough and gives rise to an uncomfortable jarring in the linguistic references of the narration. This is exacerbated by the fact that, while the novel is set in contemporary South Africa, its narration is somewhat stentorian or out of date and feels disconnected from its temporal and geographical setting. Reasons for this include little verisimilitude in the narrative strategy and fractured characterisation of the narrator which I have discussed above. But more importantly, I would suggest that it lies in Tlholwe's problematic treatment of black identity and rural culture.

The first sign that alerts one to these problematic aspects is Tlholwe's repeated use of the term 'rural folk' and the condescending assumptions and generalisations associated with it. The term 'folk' is defined by the *Collins English Dictionary* as, "a people or tribe. Relating to, originating from, or traditional to the common people of a country" (2003: 632) and, in this case, has antiquated and condescending connotations. Beyond this, Tlholwe uses the term to assume a certain identity across

geographical, cultural and racial specifics without describing or exploring those specifics. The author asserts the identity of his Marakong-a-Badimo characters as the universal experience among rural people in South Africa.

The repeated generalisations in Tlholwe's use of the term 'rural folk' reveal the assumption that the culture associated with this identity is static. This can clearly be seen in the narrator's description of his class of learners:

Nothing was uniform about them, and, as in many rural schools, I expected to find a seven-year-old happily sharing a desk with a fourteen-year-old. This is against all progressive notions of education, yet it happens every day away from the beady eyes of the officials. The rural folk have a charming way of breaking the rules with such a disarming lack of consciousness of any wrongdoing that it is often very difficult to challenge them. (Tlholwe, 2008: 41)

The narrator assumes a universal identity for all of the villagers in Marakong-a-Badimo as well as all other rural people, along with the assumptions that these people are always unconscious of rule-breaking and are always charming. These assumptions feed into an essentialism with which the narrator describes the villagers: "[r]ural folk have good eyes. Even in the dark they will notice minor irregularities in a landscape they know as well as they know themselves [...] But they also go to bed conveniently early unlike their decadent city cousins" (Tlholwe, 2008: 108). Here, the narrator presents the assumption that all people who live in rural areas have good eyesight and that they all have frugal living habits including going to bed early which are clearly not universally true. In fact, much of Maje's interaction with the villagers takes place at night.

This perspective of the narrator, his assumptions and generalisations, is never rendered ironic or misguided and thus seems to be the author's position. This is a disappointing and incongruous point as, of all the authors I have chosen to discuss in this dissertation, Tlholwe seems to be the author most avidly seeking to explore black identity in post-apartheid South Africa. His journey is described in a biography about him on his publisher's website: "[i]n reading literature, he identified a lack of black people who were not represented as stereotypes, and he became concerned that these stereotypes

[are] perpetuated in other media too. Where were the dramas and confusions of real black people in books?" (Kwêla Books: para 2). The condescending treatment of and vast generalisations made about rural South Africans make Tlholwe's treatment of black identity and rural culture a problematic aspect of *Ancient Rites*. Another area that weakens the novel's treatment of these characters is its depiction of spirituality and religion.

While the rites and rituals in the novel take centre stage in the title of the novel as well as during the climactic scene in the valley, spirituality and religion in *Ancient Rites* are largely indistinct and gestured at, rather than narrated or explained. Aside from 'traditional', even stereotypical, African imagery in the prologue of the novel such as drums, stamping feet, loincloth, sacred pool, throne, wild animal hides, and the mention that, because of its proximity to Botswana and the Kalagadi, there are several Batswana and Khoesan characters, little or no specific spiritual or cultural identity is given to the story. Rather, the author offers a generalised African rural spirituality, and relies on assumptions made by the reader to evoke the details. Tlholwe gives no exploration of these specifics of what spirituality means to the residents of Marakong-a-Badimo. Rather than exploring specifically who and what the villagers commune with in their rites, the author simplifies and generalises African spiritual identity and uses the term 'ancient' which has connotations of timelessness and stasis to cover himself.

Another significantly problematic aspect of Tlholwe's treatment of black identity is his treatment of Khoesan culture. Jan-Jan Mothibi, a young Khoesan boy in Maje's class, is described as a ghost, evoking the rapid disintegration of his race and culture. Maje's first remarks about the boy depict more of an absence than the presence of a person: "[a] tiny shadow of a boy – and apparently able to move just as silently as a shadow – he had the delicate features of the Khoesan" (Tlholwe, 2008: 38). The protagonists's understanding of the boy's culture and its position in South African culture is also revealed through metaphor:

As I watched him float away and join his friends in a scuffle about a ragged football, it came to me that he was possessed of that terrible fragility of a people staring into the abyss, with cold

shadows gathering around their kind as their numbers diminished with every turning of the earth. I have seen that haunted, far-away look before [...] The look of a people who sense that when humanity finally gathered around the last fire, they may be absent, their tongues long stilled and their last prayer unheard. (Tlholwe, 2008: 38-9)

The problem with this treatment of Khoesan culture is that the narrator is describing this cultural identity as something closer to the extinction of a species than the changes in a complex, dynamic culture.

The final problematic aspect of Tlholwe's treatment of black identity and rural context that I wish to discuss is the ideological implication of the village within the narrative. The author comments that: "[I]ike many urban people who are rootless the rural areas are attractive and tempting [sic]. Many urban people have this yearning for them and look at them maybe too romantically as places that may renew them" (Nicol, 2009(e): para. 3). Marakong-a-Badimo is, at first, something of an enigma to Maje. However, as he comes to understand the history of the village and its inhabitants, it becomes a significant touchstone of social values for him and, later, also Lesego. The wisdom and maternal care of MaMolefe, the earnestness and modesty of Molefe, and the memory of Mamorena's moral fortitude are celebrated values within the novel. The implications of Thabang and Lesego's promise to return and take care of Pono locate the wholesomeness of the village as a refuge from the chaos of their urban lives. Combined with the generalisations and assumptions that the author makes about rural people discussed above, Tlholwe locates all rural villages, not just Marakong-a-Badimo, as originators and protectors of wholesome social values. The author's comments on the dynamic between the urban and the rural highlight his problematic perspective, which gives rise to these difficulties in the novel:

The way most people have one foot in one culture and another foot in a different culture I think leads to interesting possibilities in writing crime fiction. I thought Thabang fitted this picture perfectly of the typical urbanized person who is however not sure of the truth of these matters. While he often ridicules them he does not dismiss them altogether. The setting is also unchanging while the city-bred Thabang is a product of the ever changing city. The patience of the rural folk is also indicative of the ancient landscape that has remained almost unchanged



over a very long time. On the other hand Thabang is filled with the city impatience to get things done. (Nicol, 2009(e): para. 5)

What is a 'typical urbanized person'? How can a place be unchanging? Do all of the rural characters show patience? Increasingly, it has become obvious to me that the author's collapsing of identities and reliance upon assumption is the root of the novel's problematic treatment of black identity and rural context. This last quotation from the author in which he describes the contrast between Maje, as a city slicker, and the rural village highlights the fundamental lack of subtlety and complexity in the author's treatment of different people and settings:

I wanted this contrast because it brings out clearly the contrast between the old and the modern. It also challenges Thabang's own preconceptions and prejudices about this illogical world. He slowly appreciates that he has got to look at this *illogical world* according to its own terms instead of imposing his own points of reference on it. The rural folk have also got to realize that they also have to face the outside world eventually. **The question is how to harmonize the two worlds or even if this is possible and desirable. The arguments are still raging on these things.** (Nicol, 2009e: para. 11)(Emphasis added)

In these comments Tlholwe assumes that urban and rural cultures are fixed within themselves and that the people who identify with these cultures stay in their locations and embody that fixed identity. He also asserts that the rural village's way of perceiving the world is old and illogical. These problematic aspects of the work give *Ancient Rites* a sterile, outsider's perspective that relies on troubling, essentialised assumptions.

Of the novels I have examined in this dissertation, *Ancient Rites* comes to mind as the least successfully integrated whole. However it is an award-winning crime novel and needs to be considered alongside the best in the genre. Tlholwe has succeeded in several important areas such as establishing a likeable and reliable protagonist and crafting a sense of mystery and intrigue in his story. He has stretched the genre in very interesting ways by challenging many conventions and setting his crime story in a traditional rural village. This particularly South African context is made richer with a deep awareness of the area's local and political history. The novel also successfully explores the complexities and

subtleties of different ways of understanding the world around us, introducing myth and mysticism as valuable tools for grappling with an often bewildering world. The novel's strongest ideological current, however, is the journey from alienation and isolation to understanding and connection: a positive navigation of post-apartheid South Africa.

Having said this, there are fundamental problems in the novel which inhibit these aspects from working successfully in an integrated fashion. One of these is Tlholwe's fractured and jarring characterisation of his narrator and detective, Maje. Another is a sense that the novel is not anchored in contemporary South Africa but is plagued by outdated attitudes and a feeling of sterility. I feel that the country we live in is so much more complex and shifting than Tlholwe's depiction. As a whole, the project is troubled and puzzling; the hardboiled frame that the author has chosen has not been successfully integrated with the complex ideological issues he has attempted to explore. There is such scope and possibility in Maje's narration which is not accessed because of the author's problematic assumptions and generalisations.

To conclude, Tlholwe has attempted to write a story relevant to South Africa's growth as a country. He has tried to evoke a touching story of connection and light a way to navigate often bewildering circumstances. The author understands how fundamental connection is to our society: "[w]hether it's an old lady sitting in her front room or a prisoner holding on to the bars of a high, narrow window, people want to see other people" (Tlholwe, 2008: 46). And this is a useful story in a genre through which many people read to try and understand their surroundings. Compared to Roger Smith's nihilism, discussed in the previous chapter, which is static and closed, this ideological position offers hope and allows for complexity as part of moving forward. Whether these successful aspects can outweigh the author's problematic assumptions and their manifestations in the novel is something the individual reader must judge. For this reader they unfortunately do not.

## Chapter Four

### Deon Meyer's *Devil's Peak* and the Notion of Justice in Post-apartheid South Africa

Deon Meyer is probably South Africa's best-known crime writer and one of our one of our most popular writing exports. He has published seven novels in English which have been translated into 25 languages and distributed around the world. Meyer writes in Afrikaans and his work is translated into English by his trusted translator, K.L. Seegers. His work has won numerous international awards, the most prestigious of which is perhaps the Barry Award at Bouchercon for *Thirteen Hours* (2010). The author is equally highly regarded at home, in South Africa, and has won several local awards including the Boeke Prize Fanatics' Choice Award for 2011 which recognises Afrikaans fiction. *Devil's Peak* (2004), the subject of this chapter, won South Africa's ATKV prose prize in 2004, as well as the Martin Beck Award from the Swedish Academy of Crime Writers in 2010 and the Readers' Award from the French site CritiquesLibres.com for Best Crime Novel or Thriller in 2010. Known for his modesty, sense of humour and love of motorbikes, Meyer has become a firm favourite for many South African and international readers. His narration of post-apartheid South Africa travels well internationally and this popularity has led to a trilogy movie deal of *Devil's Peak*, *13 Hours* and *7 Days* (2012) starring Hollywood actor Shaun Bean. The trilogy features Benny Griessel as a recurring protagonist, and it is in *Devil's Peak* that the detective first takes a leading role in Meyer's narration.

*Devil's Peak* is difficult to categorise in terms of genre because, while it follows an investigation characteristic of a crime novel, it develops increasingly into a thriller the conventions of which have been discussed in detail in the previous chapter on Roger Smith's *Mixed Blood*. These two novels differ in their use of the thriller genre's conventions but they do have a common aspect which Martin Priestman argues is a fundamental element of the genre. He asserts that the thriller "emphasizes present danger rather than reflecting on, or investigating, past action. [...]To create this danger in the

present the protagonist of the crime thriller must be threatened, by powerful external forces of some form or another” (Priestman, 1990: 43). Like Smith, Meyer works with a drive to give the reader an extreme experience. These novels share an aspect of form which David Glover believes defines the genre. He argues that the thriller is “marked by the way in which it persistently seeks to raise the stakes of the narrative, heightening or exaggerating the experience of events by transforming them into a rising curve of danger, violence or shock” (Glover, 2003: 137).

What sets *Devil's Peak* apart from Smith's work, however, is Meyer's approach of balancing detailed and insightful background and characterisation with a taut thriller form. This book is noticeably longer in word count than the others I have discussed, which gives the author the space to explore his characters' psychologies and choices deeply as well as social and cultural backgrounds in the South African context. He achieves this is all without sacrificing the drive and tension of the thriller form. This background gives greater satisfaction to the thrilling plot, and engages with some of the complexities of post-apartheid South Africa. Meyer's writing style is clear even in the quotations used to substantiate my argument in this chapter: they are longer than any of the quotations of the previous chapters of this dissertation because of the way Meyer layers detailed information and builds up his narration of characters, setting and action.

In *Devil's Peak*, Meyer explores the fine line between the perpetration of a crime and seeing justice done. Through three main characters who each consciously act outside the law in different ways, Meyer explores the notion of justice in post-apartheid South Africa. In the *Collins English Dictionary*, the term 'justice' is defined as “the quality or fact of being just” (2003: 882). Already, we can see the term's subjective foundations are evident. Who decides what is 'just'? In the context of ethics, one is provided with two more relevant definitions of the word 'justice':

- b) a particular distribution of benefits and burdens fairly in accordance with a particular conception of what are to count as like cases.
- c) the principle that punishment should be proportionate to the offence. (*Collins English Dictionary* , 2003:882)

And finally, in terms of the justice system, 'just' is defined as "the administration of law according to prescribed and accepted principles". These definitions show a fissure between the notions of justice as the execution of the law and justice as a subjective dealing out of consequences for actions. This fissure is highlighted in *Devil's Peak* through different types of justice, such as institutional justice, personal justice and vigilante justice. Before exploring these particular conceptions of the 'just', however, I want to make some brief comments on the history of justice within the South African context.

The very idea of South Africa as a nation stems from a deep and painful history of injustice running from slavery and colonial rule through to apartheid and its institution of deep-seated inequality. South Africa did not have a national democratic government until 1994, and our turbulent national history has been plagued by injustice and conflict along racial, cultural, political, economic and gender lines. South African is still getting to grips with this history of injustice while, today, the face of injustice has changed from that of an identifiable political regime to problems more difficult to tackle: desperate economic inequality, debilitating corruption and one of the highest crime rates in the world. As a nation, we are unfortunately all too familiar with injustice. Conversations about crime often turn to discussions of justice, vengeance and the lengths one will go to in order to protect one's kin in a society of violent crime when the law enforcement establishment fails. By writing a narrative exploring these themes, Meyer taps into a common state of anxiety and frustration shared by many of his readers.

*Devil's Peak* is divided into four sections of varying length. Their titles – Christine, Thobela, Benny, Carla, each the name of a prominent character – reflect the emphasis of each book. The story is narrated in three threads which eventually weave into each other as the novel comes to a climax from chapter 31. First, Christine, a young prostitute, tells her life story to a minister over the course of an afternoon. As the events of the story become more recent, they shed light onto the contents of a mysterious box that she has placed on the minister's desk. From the beginning part of the novel, this scene is narrated in the third person with reported speech, however from chapter 18, roughly a quarter

of the way through the novel, the narrative includes Christine's focalisation without direct speech to the minister. The second thread concerns the bereft ex-*uMkhonto weSizwe* and KGB-trained assassin, Thobela Mpayipheli, whose adopted son, Pakamile, is shot and killed when the pair unwittingly stumbles upon an armed robbery at a service station. This thread is narrated in the third person and focalised through Mpayipheli who, after his son's killers' escape from jail, turns to vigilante justice and murders child abusers he learns of in the news with a traditional Zulu spear. The third thread is focalised through Benny Griessel, a once-great detective whose wife has finally left him after his years of alcohol abuse. As he battles to remain sober and regain a grip on his life, he must work on several gruelling cases, including the assegai killer nicknamed 'Artemis'.

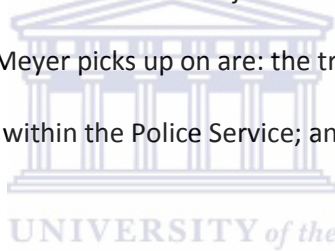
There is a shift from equal emphasis on these three threads in the earlier stages of the novel, all of which contain segues of background information on each of the main characters, to the thriller form where Griessel investigates the cases of Christine and Mpayipheli under significant time constraints and personal pressures. The intrigue shifts from psychology to the playing out of the narrative tension of a thriller. Meyer works with generic conventions of the thriller genre by using a narrative strategy in which the main characters consciously choose to exceed the law, in achieving what they perceive to be a sense of justice.

Firstly, and most obviously, Mpayipheli becomes a vigilante killer, targeting child abusers in an attempt to discourage future perpetrators and protect children. Second, Christine frames client and drug lord, Carlos Sangrenegra, for the kidnapping of her three-year old daughter after he sees Sonia by chance one day and Christine fears her safety. Carlos is killed by Mpayipheli in a set-up by the police in an attempt to catch the widely-publicised 'Artemis' or 'assegai killer'. The third act taken outside the law is by César Sangrenegra, Carlos's brother, who demands '*justicia*', or revenge, for the death of this brother. César kidnaps Griessel's eighteen-year old daughter, Carla, and to get his daughter back, Griessel must commit the fourth, capturing Mpayipheli and not turning him over to the police, but

rather holding him hostage and taking him to César Sangrenegra. In the fifth and final act outside the law, Griessel is complicit in faking Mpayipheli's death and aiding his escape after he helps Griessel rescue his daughter. The author employs the highly effective generic conventions of the thriller to explore several manifestations of the notion of justice.

### **Institutional justice**

The first of these is institutional justice which, in this case, refers to the institutions upholding justice in a society. In *Devil's Peak*, institutional justice is represented by the law enforcement establishment, including detective Benny Griessel, his fellow policemen and superiors, and the court of law. This type of justice, which regulates society, is common to both Meyer's fictional world and the reader's reality, and is therefore one of the author's key tools to comment on justice within the context of post-apartheid South Africa. Some of the chief ideas Meyer picks up on are: the transformation of the Police Service since 1994; corruption and in-fighting within the Police Service; and the detrimental effects of the pressures of police work.



The primary figure of institutional justice is the novel's protagonist, Benny Griessel, who drives the investigation of those who have disregarded the law in the novel. The first mention of the detective is in Christine's narrative, and points to Griessel's honourable and perceptive nature: "Griessel. He had tousled hair. And soft eyes, but they looked right through you" (Meyer, 2007: 22). In the very next chapter, Griessel's focalisation commences as he wakes up, hung-over and bewildered, about to be asked to leave their home by his wife. He utters his protestations after he sees the bruises he has left on her body, "Anna, I ... it was the drink, you know I didn't mean it. Please, Anna, you know that's not *me*" (Meyer, 2007: 25) (emphasis in the text). From the very beginning, Griessel battles with conflicting parts of himself: the great cop and the floundering alcoholic.

The lost detective's close friend and colleague, Matt Joubert, attempts to intervene in Griessel's lifestyle after he hears about Anna kicking him out:

Just Booze, Benny, that's all you think about. And yourself. What the fuck is going on inside your head? What has happened to your brains?'

For an instant he wanted to respond, to scream: 'I don't know, I don't know, I don't want to be like this, I don't know how I got here, leave me alone!' (Meyer, 2007: 42-3)

Angry and scared in his personal life, Griessel also no longer recognises the police service which has been like a family to him for his whole adult life:

Even though he and the other dinosaurs like Matt Joubert talked about the Force, it was the Service now. The politically correct, criminal-procedures-regulated, emasculated and disempowered Service, where an alcoholic could not be the leader of a task team. Don't even talk about the fucking constitutional protection of criminals' rights. (Meyer, 2007: 291)

Griessel has been deeply affected by his work, and his disillusionment and frustration come to the fore when he lashes out at Joubert, reflecting on the man he was when he started his career as a policeman:

He thought he could make a difference. He believed that if he worked long enough and hard enough, we would win, some time or other, to hell with rank and to hell with promotion; justice would triumph and that is all that mattered because we are the white hats. The guy from Parow is dead, Matt. Dead as a doornail. And why? What happened? What's happening now? We are outnumbered. We aren't winning; we are losing. There are more and more of them and there are less of us. What's the use? What help is all the overtime and the hardship? Are we rewarded? Are we thanked? The harder we work, the more we get shat upon. Look here. This is a white skin. What does it mean? Twenty-six years in the Force and it means fuck-all. It's not the booze – I'm not stuck in the rank of inspector because of the booze. You know that. It's affirmative action. Gave my whole fucking life, took all that shit and along came affirmative action. (Meyer, 2007: 45-6)

In his anger, Griessel displaces the cause of his hardships from his alcoholism to the rising crime rate and the police service's inability to combat crime effectively, as well as the political issue of affirmative action, a system introduced after 1994 actively to address the (predominantly) racial imbalances in the demographics of South Africa's institutions. Whether these factors really have the impact Griessel claims they do or not, we see clearly how Meyer has based his protagonist on the 'hardboiled' detective, the loner who doggedly believes he can eliminate crime and who is often associated with the gallant knight.

What differentiates Griessel from the other characters in the novel is that, while fighting a battle against crime, he must also fight a battle within himself. This tension, which the reader is given access to through his narrative, is common in 'hardboiled' heroes. Between these two conflicts, the reader gets to



know the protagonist intimately as Griessel rediscovers himself as a detective and as a man through his sobriety. Griessel's focalisation is particularly self-reflexive, which helps Meyer to create sympathy for a protagonist who, on the surface of things (an alcoholic who beats his wife), initially seems almost unredeemable. He is clearly aware of his weaknesses and this passage shows his reflections on how he has changed as a person:

What he was and the way he thought, wasn't how it had been in the beginning. In the beginning he had operated in terms of 'us' and 'them', two opposites, two separate groups on either side of the law, sure in his belief that there was a definite difference, a dividing line. For whatever reason. Genetic, perhaps, or psychological, but that was how it was; some people were criminals and some were not and it was his job to purify society of the former group. Not an impossible task, just a huge one. But straightforward mostly. Identify, arrest and remove.

Now, on this end of the alcohol tunnel, in his rediscovered sobriety, he realised he no longer believed in that. He now knew everyone had it in them. Crime lay quiescent in everyone, a hibernating serpent in the subconscious. In the heat of avarice, jealousy, hatred, revenge, fear, it reared up and struck. (Meyer, 2007: 203-4)

Griessel later becomes painfully aware that he, too, is vulnerable to the forces that make people commit crimes:

He was a good policeman because he understood others through self-knowledge. He could understand his own weaknesses, his own fears and instincts, because he knew them. He could magnify them like turning up an imaginary volume control to the level where they made other people commit murder or rape, lie or steal. As he sat there he realised it was one of the things that made him start drinking. The slow realisation that he was like them and they were like him, that he was not a better man. (Meyer, 2007: 308)

This proximity to the criminal and victim, the constant work with the intimate psychology behind killing and death, takes a toll on the detective. Whenever Griessel sees a corpse at a crime scene, he feels a scream emanating from the victim, imagining his/her last cry as he or she clings to life:

Griessel knew he would hear the sound. [...] [He] saw Davids fall backwards, mouth stretched wide, the filling in his teeth rusty brown. The scream, at first thick as molasses, a tongue slowly sticking out, and the scream growing thin, thinner than blood. (Meyer, 2007: 75)

From the hardboiled detective inspired by the figure of the gallant knight, purifying society on his own, Griessel develops through his journey of alcoholism and sobriety to more complex psychological realisation that everyone is capable of crime, even himself. His honour is evinced in his commitment to

the case even through his profound personal challenges, and they only enrich his insights as a detective where his strengths lie in listening acutely to people, having insight into behaviour and relying on his instincts.

Outside pressures deepen our interest in Griessel through time constraints placed on him.

Initially, in chapter five, Griessel's wife gives him an ultimatum on their marriage:

You have six months, Benny – that is what we are giving you. Six months to choose between us and the booze. If you can stay dry you can come back, but this is your last chance. You can see the children on Sundays, if you want. You can knock on the door and if you smell of drink I will slam it in your face. If you are drunk you needn't bother coming back. (Meyer, 2007: 26)

Later, Griessel is under pressure to solve the case of the assegai murderer to save his job. While examining a crime scene, the narrator utters: "He had better make it work, because it was all he had" (Meyer, 2007: 240). Deeper in the investigation, he pleads for time to use Carlos Sangrenegra, believed to have kidnapped Christine's daughter, as bait for the assegai killer before he considers fleeing the country. Griessel is given four days to capture the killer in this way, but he is given a warning by Joubert which places significant pressure on him:

'Jesus, Benny, I don't like it. The risks are too high. If it goes bad... If you want to get the assegai man you will have to use the media. Organised crime is highly pissed. The child is still missing. There's just too much –'  
'Matt, I will make it work.'  
They looked each other in the eyes.  
'I will make it work.' (Meyer, 2007: 283)

The impetus of institutional justice is thus embodied by detective Benny Griessel who, while battling his own psychological and emotional challenges, fundamentally believes that society needs the order and protection of institutional justice.

## **Failed Justice**

The frustration and anger at the failure of justice are depicted in *Devil's Peak* through the murder of Thobela Mpayipheli's adopted son, Pakamile, during a robbery at a petrol station, then through the verbal attack on Mpayipheli's moral fibre during the trial of the murderers and, finally, through the

escape of the murderers from police custody and the seeming apathy and helplessness of the law enforcement establishment to recapture them.

We are introduced to Mpayipheli and Pakamile on their drive home from an off-road motorbike course. As they pull up at the petrol station, Mpayipheli offers his son a drink and the boy's modest and kind nature shows in his response: "No thanks," said the boy and lifted up the 500-ml Coca Cola bottle that had been lying at his feet. It was not yet empty" (Meyer, 2007: 6). In this moment, Mpayipheli reflects on the child's blossoming, even after his mother's death: "He had seen the boy's self-confidence grow with every hour, the enthusiasm that glowed in him like an ember with every 'Look, Thobela, watch me!'" (Meyer, 2007: 6). Pakamile's strength in coping bravely with the loss of his mother garners the character great sympathy from the reader. We too feel Mpayipheli's concern and tenderness towards the bright little boy:

Occasionally he would try to talk about it, but carefully, because he did not want to open the old wound. So he would ask: 'How are things with you, Pakamile?', 'Is something worrying you?' or 'Are you happy?' And the boy would answer with his natural cheerfulness that things were good, he was so very happy, because he had him, Thobela, and the farm and the cattle and everything. But there was always the suspicion that that was not the whole truth, that the child kept a secret place in his head where he would visit his loss alone. (Meyer, 2007: 30)

As a child, Pakamile represents the future, what South Africa could be like, and his gentle, innocent, earnest nature paints a bright picture. His senseless murder, a common feature of the violent crime which plagues South Africa, sharply counterpoints this hopeful picture.

The failure of justice to protect the innocent and punish the guilty begins during the trial of Pakamile's murderers. Mpayipheli's past as a KGB-trained assassin, traded by *uMkhonto weSizwe* to the East Germans for several missions, is revealed by the defendants' lawyer. His return to South Africa after 1994 and his subsequent work as a bodyguard are turned against him to insinuate that he attacked the men first and that they shot at him in self-defence. This attack reshapes the image of Mpayipheli from a caring father into a dangerous and volatile force:

'The war was over ten years ago. I was not there to fight, I was there to fill up...'  
'The war was not over for you ten years ago, Mr Mpayipheli. You took the war to the Cape Flats with your training in death and injury.' (Meyer, 2007: 17)

Here, the failure of justice lies in the justice system: the defence attacks Mpayipheli rather than seeing the guilty punished.

This failure, however, is only the beginning as we discover with Mpayipheli that the accused murderers have escaped from police custody. His reaction of anger is contrasted with his lawyer's helplessness and apathy:

The rage inside him took on another face that he did not wish her to see. 'Where would they go?'  
She shrugged once more, as if she was beyond caring. 'Who knows?' (Meyer, 2007: 21)

This response is a reflection of the desperate state of the South African justice system and police service which are stretched beyond their means. When Mpayipheli meets the case detective to find out how they will recapture the culprits, he discovers that escapes are so frequent that there is an entire database for escapees. In this conversation the urgency and immediacy of his case are put into the context of a broader *status quo*. When Mpayipheli asks what action will be taken, he is again met with the overwhelming helplessness of a system unable to cope:

'Someone will go and ask, My Mpayipheli, if [their families have] heard anything from him.'  
'And they say "no" and then nothing happens?'  
Another sigh, deeper this time. 'There are realities you and I cannot change.'  
'That is what black people used to say about Apartheid.' (Meyer, 2007: 27)

It is at this point that Mpayipheli takes the first step towards the vigilante justice he comes to embody in the novel by consciously contravening the law and bribing the detective for a copy of the case file. With this act, Mpayipheli takes justice into his own hands.

What makes this thread in the novel so powerful is that Pakamile's death is directly associated with violent crime and a deep frustration with the judicial system: two major concerns for many South Africans in reality. Meyer goes on to explore vigilante justice as a response to these concerns through the character of Mpayipheli.

## Vigilante Justice

The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines 'vigilante' as, "a self-appointed doer of justice" (Merriam-Webster, 2011 ) and goes on to explain that vigilante justice is taken up "when the processes of law are viewed as inadequate" (Merriam-Webster, 2011). Mpayipheli's killing of five alleged child abusers clearly matches this definition. While the crime genre depends on a sense of right and wrong to celebrate heroes and punish wrong-doers, these divisions are not necessarily made along the same lines as the law. Barbara Stanners explains how, often, in the context of the failure of justice, the reader's sympathy can shift to a character who consciously acts outside the law:

Typically, we endorse the work of the investigation for they represent law and order and moral authority. Increasingly, however, as with the Horror genre, there seems to be a growing identification and empathy with the criminal antagonist. As social outlooks become more cynical in the face of what is perceived as growing fragility of judicial control, our sympathy with the perceived scoundrel grows. (Stanners, 2007: 8)

Meyer creates a context where this shift can happen, but not without questioning this form of justice. By depicting this scenario, by allowing the playing out of vigilante justice in a narrative, Meyer explores its possibilities and limitations.

From the very beginning, the loss of Pakamile has been associated with violence for Mpayipheli. On the day that Pakamile is buried, Mpayipheli consoles himself by cleaning his guns, preparing them for use when he awakens to his desire for revenge:

Later he unlocked the safe and placed the document carefully on the topmost shelf. Then he reached for his firearms, three of them: Pakamile's airgun, the .22 and the hunting rifle. He took the longest one and walked to the kitchen.

As he cleaned it with methodical concentration he slowly became aware that guilt and loss were not all that lay within him. (Meyer, 2007: 9)

Before examining Mpayipheli's attacks in the novel, it is imperative to understand his past and how it informs his understanding of justice and his sense of belonging. Ten years of Mpayipheli's early adult life were spent serving the struggle against Apartheid as an assassin. His vocation was founded on the basis

that acting outside the law was condoned and that he was fighting for all those oppressed by the injustices of South Africa's apartheid government. The difficulty of marrying this past with the present in post-apartheid South Africa is clear as the narrator depicts a key moment in Mpayipheli's development as a character:

How did you describe to a child the strange, lost world you lived in – explained about Apartheid and oppression and revolution and unrest? About East and West, walls and strange alliances?

He sat down with his back to a rock and he tried. At the end he said you must only take up a weapon against injustice; you must only point it at people as a very last resort. When all other forms of defence and persuasion were exhausted.

As now.

That is what he would like to tell Pakamile now. The end justifies the means. He could not allow the injustice of his murder to go unpunished; he could not meekly accept it. In a country where the System had failed them, it was now the last resort, even if this world was just as hard to explain, just as complicated to understand. Somebody had to take a stand. Somebody had to say, 'This far, and no further.' (Meyer, 2007: 54)

Increasingly, as Mpayipheli's old soldier instincts revive, vigilante killings and righteousness blend together for him. Hours after killing his first victim, Mpayipheli walks along a beach and ponders his task:

It was like twenty years ago when he could feel the absolute rightness of the Struggle – that his origins, his instincts, his very nature had been honed for that moment, the total recognition of his vocation.

Someone had to say, 'This far.' [...] He was a warrior and there was still a war in this land. (Meyer, 2007: 80)

Even his lifestyle begins to imitate that of his years as an assassin:

It was déjà vu, all this, this existence. A hotel room somewhere with his suitcase half unpacked, long days to struggle through, time to wait out before the next assignment. [...] Here he was again. Back in the harness. (Meyer, 2007: 110)

The difference between his work as an assassin and his vigilante killings of alleged child abusers lies in his personal conviction. This time the motivation is personal, burning clean of politics:

His seventeen targets for the KGB...mostly he was detached, mechanical, even reluctant if it was some pallid pen-pusher with stooping shoulders and colourless eyes. But not this time. This time was different. When the assegai pierced the man's heart, he had a feeling of euphoria. Of absolute rightness. Perhaps he had, at last, found his true vocation. (Meyer, 2007: 126)

The narrator uses the term 'vocation' here because what Mpayipheli hopes to achieve is not simply revenge. He aims to be a deterrent force and thereby protect all children, not just to seek revenge for the loss of his son:

How could he achieve it? How would he be able to protect the children by his action? How would people know: you cannot lay a finger on a child. There must be no doubt – the sentence of death had been reinstated. (Meyer, 2007: 137-8)

Through Mpayipheli's investigations, Meyer presents meticulous research on child abuse statistics in contemporary South Africa (2007: 96-8). Reading newspapers and news websites, Mpayipheli discovers "[o]ne report after another, a never-ending stream of crime against children. Murder, rape, maltreatment, harassment, assault, abuse" (Meyer, 2007: 97). The shocking figures of child abuse and murder will come as a surprise to many readers who might then perhaps begin to sympathise with Mpayipheli's cause. This conclusion of one article concisely articulates a situation common to the novel's setting and contemporary South Africa:

*The facts and figures clearly indicate that society is already failing our children. And now the machinery of the state is proving inadequate to bring the perpetrators of these heinous crimes to justice. If the children can't depend on the justice system to protect them, to whom can they turn?* (Meyer, 2007: 80)

This research makes a compelling case for Mpayipheli's actions. In addition to this, it is a cause to which all readers will be as sympathetic as child abuse is considered one of the most heinous crimes and is universally condemned across race, culture and class. The suggestion that "even after an extended prison sentence, there is no guarantee that they won't commit the same crime again" (Meyer, 2007: 110) can be seen to justify the murder of the guilty. Describing the profound disappointment and frustration with an overstretched justice system, shocking statistics of child abuse and the suggestion that perpetrators cannot be rehabilitated, Meyer seems to court the reader into siding with Mpayipheli's actions. The topic is discussed in depth during the novel and echoes the conversations many South African readers would have held with friends, family and colleagues.

Mpayipheli's vigilante killings are first mentioned in the narrative by Christine. She articulates the power of taking action in a society where citizens often feel paralysed by fear:

'I think he believed he could make things right. [...] That is the thing that I admired most. That somebody stood up and did something that the rest of us were too afraid to do, even if we wanted to. I never had the guts. I was too scared to fight back. And then I read about him in the papers and I began to wonder: maybe I could also...' (Meyer, 2007: 19)

Detective Bushy Bezuidenhout, Griessel's colleague, also supports Mpayipheli's vigilante killings, describing the profound anger of those affected by child abuse:

Benny says he's like a serial killer. I don't see it like that. This guy is doing what we should have done a long time ago. And that is to take these evil fuckers who do things to children and hang them by the neck. Christ, Sup, I worked on the original Davids case. Lester Mtetwa and I stood and cried over that baby's body. When we arrested Davids, I had to hold Lester back, because he wanted to blow that fucking animal's head away, he was that upset. (Meyer, 2007: 232)

Griessel and Professor Pagel, a state pathologist who has fondly given Griessel the nickname 'Nikita' in honour of his Slavic features, discuss the killings in depth. Pagel acknowledges the deterrent power of the vigilante killings:

Much as I believe in the justice system, it is not perfect, Nikita. And he fills an interesting gap. Or gaps. Don't you think there are a few people out there who will think twice before they hurt their children? (Meyer, 2007: 201)

Griessel counters with the danger of letting individuals decide the fate of suspects and the necessity of a justice system, no matter how flawed in may seem:

Prof, child abusers are lower than lobster shit. And every one I ever arrested I felt like killing with a blunt instrument. But that's not the point. The point is, where do you draw the line? Do you kill everyone that can't be rehabilitated? Psychopaths? Drug addicts who steal cell phones? A Seven-Eleven owner who grabs his forty-four Magnum because a manic-depressive kleptomaniac steals a tin of sardines? Does his cause have merit too? Shit, Prof, not even the psychiatrists can agree on who can be rehabilitated or not; every one has a different story in court. And now we want every Tom, Dick and Harry with an assegai to make that call? [...] Chaos, Prof. If we allow bush justice. It's just the first step to chaos. (Meyer, 2007: 201-2)



Through these characters, Meyer depicts various arguments around the idea of taking justice into one's own hands. By letting the situation play out, the author reflects on the complexities of the debates around the notion of vigilante justice.

While hearing outsiders' perspectives, the reader also has access to Mpayipheli's narration of the killings and his emotional reactions to them. Mpayipheli's first vigilante killing comes upon him unexpectedly. While he is looking for Khoza, one of Pakamile's murderers, he gets talking to the bar owner and man about town, Madikiza. A drunken man falls off the table behind them and the bar owner explains who he is:

Enver Davids. Yesterday he walked away from a baby rape charge. On a technicality. Fucking police misplaced his file, can you believe it – a genuine administrative fuck-up; you don't buy your way out of that one. He's more bad news than the *Financial Mail*. General of the Twenty-Sevens. He got Aids in jail from a *wyfie*<sup>11</sup>. More cell time than Vodacom, and they parole him and he goes and rapes a baby, supposed to cure his Aids... Now he comes and drinks here because his own people will string him up, the fucking filthy shit. (Meyer, 2007: 69)

Seeing this guilty rapist in the flesh and knowing the justice system has failed to punish him because of a simple blunder triggers Mpayipheli's impulse to take action. Looking at Davids, he thinks, "Something was beginning to make sense. He could see a way forward" (Meyer, 2007: 69).

Mpayipheli's second victim is discovered through his research into child abuse in the Western Cape. He learns of an abused boy who "revealed the molestation over a period of three months by Pretorius, owner of a crèche" (Meyer, 2007: 119). This time, Mpayipheli exacts his vigilante justice the night before the court is due to deliver its verdict and the victim's reaction is very different to that of the drunk and bewildered Davids:

He fell. Thobela was on him, knee to chest and assegai to his throat.  
'I am here for the children,' he said loudly over the racket of the alarm, calm now.  
Eyes blinked at the assegai. There was no fear. Something else. Expectation. A certain fatalism.  
'Yes,' said Pretorius.  
He jammed the long blade through the man's breastbone. (Meyer, 2007: 124)

---

<sup>11</sup> A male sexual partner in prison, usually effeminate and part of a gang hierarchy.

Unlike the Davids murder, in this case Mpayipheli is able to announce his vocation, and Meyer's depiction of the victim, acknowledging his guilt and accepting his punishment, appears to condone the act.

Mpayipheli's certainty wavers when he is faced with a female child abuser as his third victim. Despite the fact that Bernadette Laurens has confessed to killing her partner, Elise Bothma's, child by hitting him on the head with a billiard cue (Meyer, 2007: 186), Mpayipheli has doubts about his commitment to killing a woman:

His war was against men, always had been. In the name of the Struggle, seventeen times. Sixteen in the cities of Europe, one in Chicago: men, traitors, assassins, enemies, condemned to death in the committee rooms of the Cold War, and he was the one sent to carry out the sentence. Now two in the name of the New War. Animals. But male.

Was there honour in the execution of a woman? (Meyer, 2007: 216)

He does, however, go through with it and his doubt and guilt are manifested in a deep restlessness when Mpayipheli reflects on the previous night's killing "[h]e was doing the right thing, but he wanted to get away. He was feeling claustrophobic here. Why? He hadn't made a mistake yet. He knew that. But something was wrong. The place was too small" (Meyer, 2007: 216). The 'assegai killer' learns of his fourth target, the Scholtzes, through his reading, and discovers that "their two-year-old son had died in hospital in Oudtshoorn two weeks ago from a brain haemorrhage" (Meyer, 2007: 276). The report shows evidence that the couple inflicted long-term, sustained abuse on their child: "[t]he district surgeon had found lesions on the tiny organs and thin fragile ribs and ulna, cheekbones and skull. From them he had reconstructed a jigsaw of abuse. 'The worst I have seen in fifteen years as a coroner,' the Sunday paper had quoted his testimony" (Meyer, 2007: 276). Despite the fact that both Mr and Mrs Scholtz are vulnerable when he breaks into their home Mpayipheli shies away from killing the woman and rather locks her up in a bedroom while he attacks and kills her husband: "[h]e didn't want to execute the woman [...] A war against women was not a war. Not *his* war, not a Struggle he wanted to be involved in. He knew that now, after Laurens. Let the courts, imperfect as they were, take

responsibility for the women” (Meyer, 2007: 276-7). This reluctance shows a deep inconsistency in Mpayipheli’s resolve regarding his vigilante killings and highlights some of the problems in his moral schema.

Mpayipheli’s fifth and final victim is Carlos Sangrenegra, a Columbian drug lord and client of prostitute, Christine. She fakes the kidnapping of her daughter, Sonia, to get Sangrenegra arrested and hopefully detained on drug charges in order to protect her daughter and herself after she feels threatened by him. While the police (led by Griessel) are investigating the kidnapping, they decide to use Sangrenegra, the main suspect, as bait to lure and catch the ‘assegai killer’. The plan works as Mpayipheli hears about the kidnapping on the radio and hunts down Sangrenegra, but the police fail to catch him before he kills the drug lord and departs. This incident unsettles Mpayipheli because of the unexpected reaction from his victim: “he kept coming back to the possibility that Carlos was innocent. His protestations. His face. The big difference between Carlos and the rest, who welcomed the blade as an escape. Or justice. Lord. If the Columbian was innocent, Thobela Mpayipheli was a murderer rather than an executioner” (Meyer, 2007: 355). As it turns out, this is indeed the case. Mpayipheli kills two innocent people. First, Bernadette Laurens, who confessed to protect her guilty partner, Elise Bothma, and second, Sangrenegra, who, although a leader in organised crime, was innocent of the abduction of Sonia which is the crime that Mpayipheli attacked him for. When Griessel reveals this mistake to Mpayipheli the shock is plain and Griessel’s belief in the justice system seems to trump the vigilante killer’s actions: “The unexpectedness of it left Thobela dumb. ‘That’s why we have a justice system. A process. That is why we can’t take the law into our own hands,’ said Griessel” (Meyer, 2007: 364). Meyer examines vigilante justice by allowing it to play out, and through revealing the faults in the moral schema, most obviously the problematic nature of letting an individual decide the fate of another, draws this type of justice into question. Mpayipheli’s faltering attitude towards killing women is a major inconsistency in his stance and further highlights the problems associated with this notion of the ‘just’.

## Revenge

Another variation of justice depicted in *Devil's Peak* is that of revenge. The term 'revenge' is defined in the *Collins English Dictionary* as: "the act of retaliating for wrongs or injury received; vengeance", and "to inflict equivalent injury or damage for (injury received)" (2003: 1384). Revenge is also founded in a vigilante stance since an individual or group takes justice into their own hands, however, in this case, action is taken on guilty parties in direct response to a personal wrong-doing already perpetrated.

The idea of revenge is first introduced by DEA agent, Chris Lombardi, who has been working with the Organised Crime Unit for several months to capture Sangrenegra. He describes '*justicia*', or revenge, as part of the moral code of the Columbian drug cartel, known as the *Guajira*, of which Carlos Sangrenegra and his brother, César, are a part. Lombardi explains to Griessel the consequences of his involvement in Sangrenegra's death:

'You see, there is a simple code in the Guajira,' said Lombardi. 'When someone takes from you – money, possessions, or whatever – it is said that he walks with *culebras* on his back. It means "snakes". He walks with a snake on his back, a poisonous thing that can strike at any time, which keeps him looking over his shoulder in fear. The *guajiro* unconditionally believe in *justicia*. Justice. Revenge.'

'So what are you saying?' asked Griessel.

'I am saying that you, Inspector Griessel, will be held responsible for Carlos's death. You, the spearman and the prostitute. You are all walking with *culebras* on your backs.' (Meyer, 2007: 343)

Carlos Sangrenegra's brother, César, kidnaps Griessel's daughter, Carla, to force the detective to bring him his brother's killer. When Griessel manages to track down Mpayipheli and bring him to Sangrenegra, the two South Africans, detective and murder suspect, end up working together to kill Sangrenegra and his Columbian henchmen and to protect themselves. It is at this point that the one act of revenge in the story takes place.

In the meeting where Griessel is due to hand over Mpayipheli, the sexual abuse of Carla Griessel is suggested by one of César Sangrenegra's henchmen (Meyer, 2007:383) and once Griessel and

Mpayipheli gain the upper hand and the Columbians are left without weapons, Griessel confirms which henchmen raped his daughter and shoots them, execution style:

Griessel stood there, with the Z88, and his daughter, hand in hand.  
They all looked at Griessel. He shuffled up to the first henchman.  
'Did he?' he asked his daughter.  
She nodded. Griessel raised the pistol and fired. The man flew over backwards.  
Father and daughter approached the next one. 'And he?'  
She nodded. He aimed at the man's head and pulled the trigger. (Meyer, 2007: 394)

These men are killed for the sexual abuse they have inflicted on Carla, and Griessel takes justice into his own hands by shooting them. One could argue that, since his daughter identified the rapists, Griessel's actions hold more weight than those of Mpayipheli's vigilante killings. However, the author is presenting an ambiguous stance toward these types of justice which exceed the law by seemingly undercutting Mpayipheli's vigilante justice with his killing of innocent people and seemingly condoning Griessel's revenge where he kills his daughter's rapists.



### **Pre-emptive Justice**

The third form of justice operating outside the law is that of the prostitute, Christine, framing Carlos Sangrenegra for the kidnapping of her daughter, Sonia. While this is not a retributive form of justice and more a pre-emptive attack, Christine acts outside the law to protect her interests, in a way similar to that of Griessel taking revenge for his the rape of his daughter and Mpayipheli's vigilante killings in response to the death of his son.

Christine's narration is the primary story in *Devil's Peak* into which Mpayipheli's and Griessel's stories eventually feed. She sits in a church minister's office and tells him the story of how she came to be in possession of a box which holds much mystery for the reader: "[i]n the moment before he lifted the flaps, she tried to see herself as he saw her – evaluate the impression she was trying to create[...] Nothing to betray her. Apart from her eyes and her voice" (Meyer, 2007:3). This narration clearly alludes

to the impression Christine is trying to make, hinting to the reader that she might, perhaps, be an unreliable narrator. The minister also picks up on this performance:

He observed her mannerisms, the hair she used with such expertise, the fingers that punctuated her words with tiny movements and the limbs that spoke in an unbroken and sometimes deliberate body language. He placed it alongside the words and the content, the hurt and the sincerity and the obvious intelligence, and he learned something about her: she was enjoying this. (Meyer, 2007:51)

Later in the story, however, the narration switches from reported speech, uttered by Christine in the presence of the minister, to internal monologue, focalised by her character.

The anger and frustration Christine feels when Carlos beats up one of her clients are almost palpable:

She wanted to get in her car and drive to his house. She wanted to hit him, smash his skull with a pick handle. He didn't have the right. He couldn't do this. She wanted to go to the police, she wanted to blow him off the earth. Rage consumed her. She looked for her telephone book and got the number of the police.

No. Too many complications.

She wept, but from frustration. Hate. (Meyer, 2007: 174)

Her profession and her history with Sangrenegra prevent Christine from using official channels like the police to protect herself. She feels she needs to take the protection of herself and her daughter into her own hands and she frames Sangrenegra through reporting her daughter missing, drugging the gang leader, enticing him to beat her and planting Sonia's blood and personal items in his house and car.

This situation begs the question, is what Christine did, which led to Sangrenegra's death at the hands of Mpayipheli, acceptable because he is a dangerous criminal? Sangrenegra is killed for kidnapping Sonia, a crime that he did not commit. In fact nobody kidnapped Sonia; Christine placed her in the care of a friend. Before analysing the ideological implications of these forms of justice, it is important to examine Meyer's narration of post-apartheid South Africa in terms of *Devil's Peak's* structure, namely: the *status quo*, disruption and resolution.

## Structure: *Status Quo*, Disruption and Resolution

In terms of the world of the story, or its *status quo*, *Devil's Peak* is the richest and most complex of the novels I have examined in this dissertation. Meyer works with characters from a broad range of racial, cultural, and economic backgrounds, and what makes his work so satisfying for the reader is how he accurately captures the modes of speech and attitudes of his characters. This meticulous verisimilitude paints recognisable and believable South African characters, but does not alienate foreign readers from the novel. This is, perhaps, what makes Meyer's writing so appealing and successful. Beyond the notion of a young democracy coming to terms with itself, the destruction of a thriving drug trade, and child abuse rising to epidemic proportions described directly in the story, Meyer subtly shows how all of these problems stem from the vast economic inequality which has come to characterise post-apartheid South Africa. When driving through the country, Mpayipheli considers this divide in an historical context:

He saw the mountains and the forests and wondered, as always, how it had looked a thousand years ago, when there were only Khoi and San and the elephants trumpeted in the dense bush. Beyond George the houses of the wealthy sat like fat ticks against the dunes, silently competing for a better sea view. Big houses, empty all year, to be filled perhaps for a month in December. He thought of Mrs Ramphele's corrugated iron shack on the sunburnt flats outside Umtata, five people in two room, and he knew the contrasts in this country were too great. (Meyer, 2007: 39)

Later in the novel Griessel sees this divide on a very practical level, "[t]he dramatic difference between the crime scene at Bishop Lavis and Camps Bay was immediately apparent. In the wealthy neighbourhood there were practically no onlookers, but at least twice as many police vehicles" (Meyer, 2007: 262). Mpayipheli's planning and precautions during his vigilante killing spree reveal assumptions and ways of life in different areas. While tracking down Colin Pretorius in a part of Parow with mostly white residents, Mpayipheli thinks:

He would have to park somewhere else and walk in, but it was still risky. Every second house had a private security company's sign on the wall. There would be patrol vehicles, there would be wary eyes ready to call an emergency number. 'There's a black man in our street.'

Chances were better by day – he might be a gardener on his way to work – but at night the risks multiplied. (Meyer, 2007: 119)

Later, when Mpayipheli visits Uniondale to exact punishment on the Scholtzes, he feels the suspicion of the Coloured residents:

Thobela knew he had only one chance to find the house. He wouldn't be able to look around; he wouldn't be able to drive up and down. Because here everyone knew about the Scholtz scandal and they would remember a black man driving a pick-up – a strange black man in a place where everyone knew everybody. (Meyer, 2007: 259)

Because of the form of the novel which follows the stories of three main characters, Christine, Griessel and Mpayipheli, the disruptions occur in the story of each of the main characters to develop their individual threads. These threads ultimately weave together in the climax of the novel.

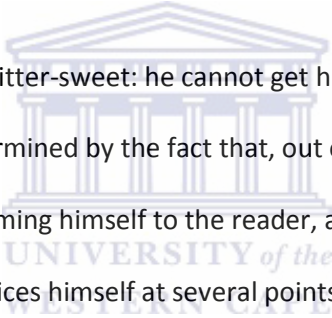
For Mpayipheli, the major disruption in his life and the trigger which begins his thread in this story is the death of his adopted son, Pakamile, and the escape of Khoza and Ramphele, the men who killed the boy. Background factors such as already having lost his wife and his training as an assassin also need to be considered as he reverts to his training in his vigilante killing to cope with his profound loss.

Griessel's life is at a cross-road. His disruptions range from the personal to the professional. The first major disruption is that Griessel's wife kicks him out of their house and excludes him from his family when he is given an ultimatum of six months to stop drinking. He must also prove himself to his police department with the 'assegai murderer' case after the blundered ambush of a suspect has resulted in a colleague being seriously injured. These factors have a clear impact on Griessel as a character, but what triggers action is the disruption of César Sangrenegra kidnapping his daughter, Carla, and Sangrenegra giving Griessel three days to capture Mpayipheli (Meyer, 2007: 347).

Like the way she takes action outside the law, Christine's disruptions are not as direct as those of Griessel and Mpayipheli. It is clear that she suffers from deep emotional disturbances. The moment that makes Christine take action is when her client, Carlos Sangrenegra, sees her daughter, Sonia, and becomes increasingly possessive and threatening. This is what makes her frame the Columbian drug



lord. Another disruption is that of Organised Crime detective, Boef Beukes, insinuating that he knows that Christine framed Carlos. This disruption leads her to escape the safe house where she is being protected from the drug cartel. She then takes Sonia and moves to a new town where her narration begins, confessing her story to the local minister.

The resolutions to each character's thread in the story are a crucial aspect of the novel because they shed some light on the ideological implications of the lead characters exceeding the law. The resolutions go some way to answering the question, "was it worth it?". In addition to this, they give some perspective on the author's position and the question that, I believe, the novel begs, 'is justice achievable in post-apartheid South Africa?', or perhaps 'what kind of justice is appropriate in such a context?'.  


Mpayipheli's resolutions are bitter-sweet: he cannot get his wife and son back, and his killings in the name of vigilante justice are undermined by the fact that, out of five victims, two were innocent. He does, however, go some way in redeeming himself to the reader, and perhaps to himself, when he helps Griessel rescue his daughter. He sacrifices himself at several points during the encounter which will be explored below. The last we hear of Mpayipheli is that, despite being seriously wounded in the knife fight with César Sangrenegra, he survives and goes free to start a new life. He returns to the place where he grew up and the implication is that he will find some peace there.

Griessel's resolutions are more uniformly positive: he saves his daughter; he is on a positive path in battling his alcoholism; and he enjoys a much improved relationship with his children and improved standing in his police department. Some questions remain, however, the most glaring of them being that of his killing of his daughter's rapists and his not turning in Mpayipheli when he first captured him. The question of whether he will be charged with murder or manage to make it look like self defence is left unanswered, along with Griessel's unresolved relationship with his wife, until the next novel, *Thirteen Hours*.

Christine appears to get away with her actions outside the law. Her daughter is safe, she seems to have bought a house with the money she stole from Sangrenegra, and she appears to have enough money left over to provide for herself and her daughter. The reader's relationship with her character is, however, undercut by the revelation that the life-story she shares with the minister is full of lies, a fact that Griessel and Carla reveal when they go to find out the truth about Christine from an old school teacher, Mr Losper, when they visit her home town (Meyer, 2007: 402).

These resolutions offer some complex ideological implications. Despite lying about her life, framing a man and stealing his money, Christine comes out on top. It appears that Mpayipheli's vigilante killings are found unacceptable, while Griessel's exacting of immediate revenge for his daughter's rape is celebrated as a father's love and protection. The relationship between Griessel and Mpayipheli requires further examination as it raises some complex questions.

### **Griessel and Mpayipheli: Fathers, Killers, Heroes**

These two characters meet in chapter 42, while they are both taking action outside the law: Mpayipheli on a vigilante killing spree and Griessel working to capture him and deliver him to César Sangrenegra to rescue his kidnapped daughter. The pair comes to share a mutual respect on their drive from Mpayipheli's farm to where they meet the Columbians near the Breede River. We quickly realise that this police detective and this trained assassin are not so very different after all – both having done things for the love of their children.

Both characters have different sides to their personalities which they attempt to balance through the novel. Griessel is, on the one hand, a violent alcoholic and, on the other, a caring father and an exceptional policeman. Mpayipheli is, on the one hand, a cold-blooded killer, previously a part of the Flats gang scene and a trained assassin and, on the other, a caring father and sensitive soul.

These two men of vastly different backgrounds and circumstances share parts of themselves on their journey to meet the Columbians. Mpayipheli tells Griessel the story of Nxele, a Xhosa chief who led a battle against the British in Grahamstown with just 10 000 Xhosa warriors. He shares his perspective, a story unfamiliar to Griessel, and comments, "White people didn't know this history" (Meyer, 2007:368).

Mpayipheli goes on to explain what the story means to him:

All my life I wanted to be a part of them. I wanted to be there at the front. I wanted to throw my spears and keep the short assegai for last. I wanted to smell the gunpowder and the blood. They said the stream in town ran red with blood that day. I wanted to look an English man in the eyes and he must lift his bayonet and we must oppose each other as soldiers, each fighting for his cause. I wanted to make war with honour. If his blade was faster than mine, if his strength was greater, then so be it. Then I would die like a man. Like a warrior. (Meyer, 2007: 370)

In turn, Griessel shares the beauty of police work and how it resonates with him:

You have to pay your dues, you have to learn, make your own mistakes. But one day you sit with a case file that makes no sense to any other fucker, and you read the statement and the notes and the reports and it all comes together. And you feel this thing inside. You hear the music of it, you pick up its rhythm deep inside you and you know this is what you were made for.'  
Thobela heard the white man sigh. He wanted to tell him he understood. (Meyer, 2007: 373)

After Mpayipheli discovers that Griessel is not a corrupt cop and that he is taking him to the Columbians to rescue his kidnapped daughter, he sympathises with Griessel as a father and commits to helping him:

"[h]e realised the white man had hope, and he knew he would have, too, if he were in the same position. Because here was nothing else you could do. 'I will help you,' he said (Meyer, 2007: 376).

Mpayipheli's willingness to partner with Griessel earns the policeman's trust:

'They have your daughter because I killed Sangrenegra. It's my responsibility to fix it.' [...] Seventy kilometres on, on the long sweeping curves the N2 makes between George and Mossel Bay, something dropped onto the front seat beside Thobela. When he looked down, the assegai lay there. (Meyer, 2007: 379)

Griessel goes on to commit himself to seeing justice done in the case of Pakamile's killers:

'I want you to know we got Khoza and Ramphele,' said Griessel.  
'Where?'  
'They were arrested yesterday evening in Midrand.'  
'Why are you telling me this?'

'Because no matter what happens tonight, I will make sure they don't get away again.' (Meyer, 2007: 391)

During the encounter with César Sangrenegra and his Columbian henchmen, Mpayipheli tries to sacrifice himself for Griessel and Carla:

'You can have me. Let the girl and the policeman go.'  
'No. We will have *justicia*.' (Meyer, 2007: 387)

Directly after this, Mpayipheli attacks Sangrenegra but is at a great disadvantage in trying to protect Carla:

Thobela knew he was in trouble; the big man with the long hair was skilled. Faster than him. Lighter, younger. And he had another great advantage – he could kill, Thobela could not. Carla Griessel's life depended on him not killing César. (Meyer, 2007: 390)

The friendship between Griessel and Mpayipheli is confirmed after a darkly humorous close to the novel where it becomes clear that Griessel has let Mpayipheli go free and helped him fake his death to avoid punishment. A phone call from a baffled Inspector Johnson Mtetwa in Alice to Griessel reveals that Mpayipheli survived and returned to the valley where he grew up:

'He said he saw a man walking, from the Kat River hills to near the manse. He went out to see who it might be. When he came close, the man turned away. But he could swear it was Mpayipheli, because he knew him. In the old days. You see, Mpayipheli's father was also a missionary. (Meyer, 2007: 405)

Griessel feigns ignorance and thereby protects Mpayipheli and closes the novel on a heart-warming note.

*Devil's Peak* explores forms of personal justice rather than social justice. In terms of Meyer's depiction of post-apartheid South Africa, the *status quo* depicted in the story remains after the novel's resolution; there is no shift in society and, similarly to Orford and Smith's work, this is one of the most powerful aspects of story. Although the transformation of South Africa is discussed in depth and Mpayipheli played a role in the struggle against apartheid, justice in this form is located in the individual. I would suggest that Meyer's exploration of justice is somewhat ambiguous. After the novel has shown the terrifying folly of vigilante justice, it celebrates the revenge that Griessel takes on his daughters'

rapists and condones Mpayipheli's spree through Griessel faking his death and allowing him to return to his homeland. While the mutual regard Griessel and Mpayipheli find in each other is heart-warming, these two characters come out apparently unscathed by their killings. Griessel and Mpayipheli, both killers, become examples of failed justice as they are not investigated and do not stand trial for their crimes during the story. In fact, they kill more people than those who are perceived as wrong-doers and who inspired them to act beyond the law. Institutional justice in the form of the law enforcement establishment is undermined by its ineffectiveness and the corruption that touches Griessel. Only his skills as a detective are celebrated, whereas the police service is fractured into unreliable and corrupt 'old-timers' and a system desperately ineffective to manage South Africa's crime.



## Conclusion

Having discussed these four South African crime novels in depth, I will conclude this analysis by addressing the broader questions that I posed as my research aims. Firstly, what has local crime fiction drawn from international work in the genre? The fundamental Gothic origins of the crime genre resonate in local work. Aspects of this can be seen in the novels I have discussed here in a return to the past, occasional sympathy for the villain, and a sense of horror which feeds particularly into the thriller subgenre. South African authors draw on conventions of the international crime genre from across its historical development. The whodunit bears influence through its essence, the puzzle, which takes the shape of the investigation in a crime novel. We can see an emphasis on the investigation in the novels of Orford, Meyer, and Tlholwe as opposed to Smith's novel which places more emphasis on the thriller form. The 'hardboiled' hero can be clearly identified in Meyer's flawed police detective, Benny Griessel, and in Clare Hart's partner, Riedwaan Faizal, created by Orford. More broadly, Tlholwe's work embodies key aspects of the hardboiled subgenre's conventions by focussing on a Private Eye protagonist as opposed to a police detective, narrating in the first person, and the fact that the case becomes a personal journey for Maje. Local authors also draw strongly from the thriller subgenre which we can clearly see in Smith's harrowing work and, with a stronger element of investigation, in Meyer's novel. Because crime fiction only really became popular relatively recently, South African authors have the luxury of picking and choosing generic elements from its long and varied history. However, it is the very specific socio-political context which gives local crime fiction its particular flavour. South Africa's turbulent history of a whole range of wrongs from political oppression to violent crime makes the genre an ideal form to examine the society. Currently, crime is at the front of readers' minds; it is a highly topical issue and many relevant issues and concerns are able to be explored through the lens of fiction.

Though highly popular, the crime fiction genre is still maturing and there are elements in these novels which have not been entirely successful and need to be considered. The aspect that struck me as

the weakest in the novels I have examined was the depiction of black characters. While crime writers are moving away from the traditional white, male voice, I have found that incorporating a black perspective is not always successful. Generally, the white, middle-class characters are evoked far more convincingly than black characters who tend to be poor and marginalised. I have discussed this problematic aspect in relation to Orford's *Daddy's Girl* but I would argue that it is a concern to be held up against all of these novels. Even Thlolwe, as a black writer, fails to evoke his black characters convincingly, as discussed in chapter three. The problem here, as I show, is that the author appears to be limited by his somewhat archaic personal views and stiff writing style. While Smith's Coloured characters can be seen as perhaps more vividly depicted, the form of his novel, which aims to evoke thrill after thrill, compromises any complexity or depth in his treatment of character. Though the genre is highly entertaining, it is limited in its engagement with character or motive. In terms of convincingly describing a full range of contemporary South African characters, I would suggest that Meyer offers the most successful work. Through deeper characterisation, the author gives a broad range of perspectives and the occasional light touch of humour.

The second major question for me to respond to is what does local crime fiction contribute to discourse about South Africa? Much of our South African crime fiction has garnered the respect of those who might previously have seen crime fiction, because of its more 'popular' origins, as less worthy of serious consideration than more canonical fiction. In an article entitled, "Roger Smith and the 'Genre Snob' Debate" Leon de Kock suggests that "the dividing line between "crime fiction" and "serious" so-called SA Lit is becoming increasingly blurry" (De Kock, 2012: para.11). The idea that local crime fiction has the capacity to offer meaning beyond the expectations of providing a pleasurable and frivolous read is significant. De Kock goes on to assert that:

Yes, it is "genre" [...] but it's also more. It's the "more" that we should perhaps be interested in, and how that margin of "more" is performing some of what one might call the "uses" of literature in reading bewilderingly changed political out-there. (De Kock ,2012: para.12)

I believe that the central focus of this dissertation, that of post-apartheid South Africa and how it is narrated, goes some way to uncovering the “more” that De Kock refers to above.

In terms of content, contemporary South Africa is depicted differently by each author: Orford presents a country whose women and children are the most vulnerable and abused in our society; Smith depicts a country ignoring the conditions of its townships that are described as warzones; Thlolwe describes a society strongly divided along urban and rural lines; while Meyer highlights a country struggling to find a sense of justice in a context of rampant crime. These are all very different perspectives and they are presented with varying intensity. For instance, Smith’s violent and desperate world is an intense and constant atmosphere in a relatively short novel, whereas Meyer’s approach, in a longer novel, explores the points of view of several characters in depth to offer diverse, and often contradictory, perspectives. The vastly different ways in which the authors describe post-apartheid South Africa are useful because the reader is required to compare them to the reality s/he experiences and find, for him/herself, which parts are realistic and which parts are not. In other words, the reader is invited to compare the *status quo* in the novel he or she is reading to his/her reality and thereby perhaps see and interrogate his/her reality more clearly. For example, a reader might not find Smith’s *status quo*, arguably the most extreme version of contemporary South Africa that I have discussed in this dissertation, an accurate description of their reality. But, equally, the happy endings of Orford and Thlolwe’s novels can also be seen as a fanciful depiction of the post-apartheid.

As I have pointed out in each chapter, the author’s choices in describing the *status quo* of the story are highly significant because, as constituting the world of the novel, they remain beyond the resolution of the story’s individual crime. There are several aspects of the description of post-apartheid South Africa which recur in all of the crime novels I have examined in this dissertation which are worth mentioning. The first is that contemporary South Africa is still very much connected to and influenced by the structures of its history. The second recurring feature, which is perhaps a result of the first, is that of



gross economic inequality which provides a social context to much of the crime these novels depict. A police and judicial system that are overwhelmed and under-supported is another frequently described factor in these novels. Three of the four novels which I have examined feature a police detective protagonist and in each of these three novels, the stories involve corruption within the law enforcement establishment. Such recurring features clearly point to the key choices and assumptions these contemporary crime writers make in describing post-apartheid South Africa.

From the specific details of content, I would like to move on to some broader questions related to form and the crime genre. The first question that needs to be addressed is whether or not crime fiction can be regarded as an appropriate form to engage with post-apartheid South Africa. Small publishing figures and an internationally-dominated readership show that local crime fiction was clearly not popular locally during the apartheid era. Apart from the exceptions I outlined in the introduction, the socio-political was simply too close, too confusing and too complex to decipher with the crime genre. However, this dissertation has shown, in its broad range of representations, that the crime genre can effectively capture the atmosphere of this time and the concerns of many South Africans. Crime transfixes onlookers and speaks to every aspect of our identity: race, class, gender. By talking about crime, we talk about these aspects of our individual, group and national identity. Referring to Sir Philip Sidney's assertions about the 'uses' of fiction being "to delight and instruct", De Kock argues that: "[w]e've got the delight part working pretty damn well here, but what about the brief to 'instruct'? I would argue that literature, in any form, is engaged in shaping the sensemaking capacities of particular cultures and people at particular times. And that, seriously, is what it's about" (De Kock 2012: para.12). Through its focus on cause and effect and its weighing of crime and justice, the crime genre highlights the connections between the past and the present and enables the reader to engage with and interpret the collective injustices of the apartheid era as well as those of our new democracy. In this way, the

crime genre can be seen as an effective form to work through much of our shared history as well as expose what is going on right now.

Crime fiction tunes into the frequency that South Africa is running at by talking about the day-to-day consequences of the state of the nation. This is evinced in the novels I have examined by their exploration of the law enforcement and education establishments and their depictions of corruption and organised crime. The crime genre speaks to our society's fears and frustrations while also giving a sense of closure. By implementing a fictional form of justice, the genre enables a cathartic experience for the reader.

One position that has emerged about our crime fiction is that the genre is 'South Africa's new political novel'. I first encountered this idea in Linda Gilfillan's article, "Orford's Challenge to the Genre Snobs", which looks at Margie Orford's latest novel, *Gallows Hill* (2012). In the article, Gilfillan (Orford's current editor) claims that "many critics perceive crime fiction as the new 'political novel'" (Gilfillan, 2011:para 10). The ensuing debate in the comments responding to this post on *Slipnet*, the online journal on which the article first appeared, suggest that South African crime fiction is being taken seriously as an effective way of talking about our nation, whether one agrees with Gilfillan's assertion or not. De Kock sees Gilfillan's point from the opposite perspective, that of the traditional South African political novel. He asserts that:

As far as "political fiction" goes, "crime thrillers" are about the most operative and readable kinds we have going right now. I won't mention any names here, but one could cite a few examples of political novels written by heavyweight writers in the "old" style, in recent years, which have proved mesmerisingly unreadable. Something had to give in the older style – the documentary manner, the serious overlay, the earnest, almost sanctimonious posturing, the high ground, the mythologisation of struggle-hero types, the relentlessly tedious social realism (give us some "genre"!), and the utterly predictable outcomes, despite layerings of ambiguity and Fanonesque warnings about neo-colonial corruption. (De Kock, 2012: para.15)

These comments from Gilfillan and De Kock, and the debate that still rages around the idea of South African crime fiction and the 'value' of genre fiction, show how effectively the genre can engage with South African society. Questions still remain, however, about how the genre 'operates' (to use de Kock's

term from his comment above) in our post-apartheid society. These questions centre on the socio-economic context of crime fiction, and literature in general in our society.

While the genre clearly has the capacity to engage effectively with post-apartheid society and its influencing factors, one must wonder what proportion of the nation is actually reading crime fiction or reading books at all. Also one question that needs to be considered is, is the genre simply affirming middle class conservatism in its structural resolutions? These reservations might be serious limitations to the reach and capacity of the crime genre in South African, but one must bear in mind that most of the work in the genre is not written with social goals in mind, and perhaps that is why it is so popular. To look at it from another perspective, one could argue that the gripping form reaches more people than a 'serious' or 'earnest' one (as De Kock describes traditional political fiction above) and that what I have shown in this dissertation is how the crime fiction genre can embody a vast range of challenging concepts and social issues; more than one might expect from 'genre fiction'. While a crime novel may not set out to be a political work or a social study, often, as in any genre, the very well written novels achieve these interrogations. These are the 'mores' that De Kock refers to above.

The third and final question to answer is what are the ideological implications of South African crime fiction? While each novel is unique in its ideological impact and the implications of these novels have been discussed, there are some general remarks that can be made about these authors' treatment of ideology. As I have emphasised in each chapter, the element of the narrative which most clearly highlights this is the novel's *status quo*: how the author depicts the world of the novel which, in these cases, is post-apartheid South Africa. This representation of society is so important because the conditions of this world remain despite the relatively minor resolutions of the investigation's narrative. In all four of the novels I have examined, there are two major features which stand out. Firstly, the narrative's world is one of disillusionment with the dream of a 'Rainbow Nation'; post-apartheid South Africa has not fulfilled the hopes that so many people had for the country. Secondly, violence is often a

major part of the norm rather than the disruption. For example, in Orford's *Daddy's Girl*, the disruption is the kidnapping of Faizal's daughter which leads him to ask Hart for help. The multiple cases of abuse and murder of girls and women in the novel are part of norms of the novel.

The impact of these ideological implications is closely related to the form of the crime novel. Narrative devices such as verisimilitude, a sense of authenticity, and characterisation play a major role in how effectively the themes and ideological implications of the novel are communicated. While crime novels have particular generic conventions which remove them, to a certain extent, from what we could call novels of canonical realism, I would argue that a sense of realism within the generic conventions is crucial for the effective communication of ideological implications. When a sense of realism is created successfully, the content of the novel is associated with this believability which creates a feeling of authenticity and urgency as well as a sense of collusion on the part of the reader. In this way, realism is a crucial narrative tool in linking the *status quo* of the novel and its ideological implications.

In the novels I have examined in this dissertation, this approach has been used in different ways. Smith employs verisimilitude masterfully, however, there is a certain lack of believability in that the novel's action is constantly spectacular. There is nothing of ordinary life in the narrative and so it does not feel realistic. Authenticity and urgency are manifested in other ways, such as a plot which escalates in threat and thrill. One could argue that with the extreme experience of Smith's thriller, the reader has a diminished sense of collusion because the world is spectacular, not realistic and recognisable. Orford balances verisimilitude and believability more successfully, so that the violence and abuse in the novel make an impact on the reader because they remain in a world very much like our own after the resolution of the narrative. These problems, while fictional, highlight a reality that is often marginalised and is not adequately addressed elsewhere. The realism of Tlholwe's depiction of post-apartheid South Africa is adversely affected by the author's assumptions, as I have argued. His use of the hardboiled subgenre is not the flaw in creating this sense of believability; rather the problem lies with his depiction

of rural identity and the generalisations the author makes about different types of people. Rather than convincing realism, one could argue that the author communicates the narrative's major themes through the juxtaposition of rural and urban spaces. Meyer's work echoes Orford's successful use of realism, but he works more deeply with characterisation and characters' backgrounds. Instead of foregrounding violence and abuse, Meyer foregrounds the question of justice in post-apartheid South Africa.

The draw of the genre is often the anticipation of escape, however, as the popular success of Meyer and Orford shows, the satisfaction of a crime novel often actually comes from the way the genre can offer complex social commentary within the entertaining form. The key to effectively communicating this commentary to the reader is the use of realism in a crime novel.

A crucial part of a discussion about the ideological implications of these South African crime novels is the question of whether the genre is conservatively reductive or permanently contested. I would argue that the conventionally 'safe' or 'pleasing' resolutions of these crime novels may suggest that the genre is conservative, however, this form allows for a catharsis; it allows the reader to experience challenging and unsettling ideas and then returns the reader to an ideological equilibrium. This return is central to the genre's conventions, and to discard it could stretch a narrative beyond its generic boundaries. One of the aspects of the crime novel that challenges and unsettles the reader is the *status quo* of the narrative which, as I have argued, makes the most important ideological impact because it is the representation of a recognisable world that remains beyond the resolution of the novel. The norms of these narratives, the diverse representations of post-apartheid South Africa, are an important area where popular culture is constantly contested.

Looking ahead to the future of crime fiction, it appears that the genre is going to maintain its popularity and will hopefully grow in its range of voices. I look forward to witnessing the ways in which the conventions are challenged and adapted to suit the many stories of our society. I have no doubt that

the genre will continue to morph because South African crime fiction is relatively young in relation to the genre's long history and our writers have all the genre's tools to play with and little of the reverence that more established nations' crime fiction authors might have.

In terms of future research that needs to be conducted in the field of South African crime fiction, I would suggest that, while there is a healthy debate about the genre as a whole, and how it 'operates', there is a dearth of criticism that focuses on the novels themselves and provides detailed analysis. To build a strong body of academic writing about South African crime fiction, this detailed criticism is essential. In addition to this, I believe that an examination of apartheid-era crime fiction, especially that of James McClure, which has equally suffered a lack of critical attention, would be highly illuminating.



## Bibliography

Abrams, M.H. (1999) *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. 7th ed. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

Amid, J. (20 October 2011). "Crime Fiction and the Metaphysics of Disorder". *SlipNet*. Available from: <http://slipnet.co.za/view/reviews/crime-fiction-and-the-%E2%80%98metaphysics-of-disorder%E2%80%99> (Accessed: 29 March 2012).

Beckbessinger, S. (2010). "The Queen of Krimi". *Wordsetc.*, First Quarter 2010. Johannesburg: Flamenco Publishing. pp24-31.

*Collins English Dictionary - Complete and Unabridged*. (2003). 6<sup>th</sup> ed. Glasgow: HarperCollins Publishers.

De Kock, L. (9 January 2012). "Roger Smith and the 'Genre Snob' Debate". *SlipNet*. Available from: <http://slipnet.co.za/view/reviews/crime-fiction-the-%E2%80%98new-political-novel%E2%80%99/> (Accessed: 9 January 2012).

Erasmus, B. (21 November 2007). "Who's Who in South African Crime Fiction: Arthur Maimane". *Crime Beat*. Available from: <http://crimebeat.book.co.za/blog/2007/11/21/whos-who-in-south-african-crime-fiction-arthur-maimane> (Accessed 9 September 2010).

Gilfillan, L. (26 December 2011). "Orford's Challenge to the Genre Snobs". *SlipNet*. Available from: <http://slipnet.co.za/view/reviews/orford%E2%80%99s-challenge-to-the-genre-snobs> (Accessed 2 January 2012).

Glover, D. (2003). "The Thriller". In *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*. Edited by Priestman, M. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp 135-153

Hichens, J. (18 May 2009). "The True Crime Behind the Fiction". *Crime Beat*. Available from: <http://crimebeat.bookslive.co.za/blog/2009/05/18/the-true-crime-behind-the-fiction> (Accessed 17 August 2011).

James, P.D. (1993). *The Art of Murder: British Crime Fiction*. London: John Rawlinson Ltd.

Jordaan, D. (28 September 2008). "Dirk Jordaan Gets Afrikaans Crime Fiction in his Sights". *Crime Beat*. Available from: <http://crimebeat.book.co.za/blog/2008/09/29/dirk-jordaan-gets-afrikaans-crime-fiction-in-his-sights> (Accessed 23 June 2011).

Klein, K. (1988). *Woman Detective*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Knight, S. (1980). *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Kwela Books. (n.d.)" Author Focus: Diale Tlholwe". Available from: <http://www.kwela.com/Authors/5794> (Accessed 17 February 2011).

Ludman, B. (5 June 2009). "Rise of the Slasher". *Mail and Guardian*. Available from: <http://mg.co.za/article/2009-06-05-rise-of-the-slasher> (Accessed 17 August 2011).

Mackenzie, J. (2010). "Of Heroes and Villains". *WordsEtc*, First Quarter 2010. Johannesburg: Flamenco Publishing. pp.13-15.

Mandel, E. (1984). *Delightful Murder: A Social History of the Crime Story*. London: Pluto Press.

Meyer, D. (2007). *Devil's Peak*. Trans. K.L. Seegers. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. (2005). 11<sup>th</sup> ed. Springfield: Merriam-Webster.

Munt, Sally R. (1994). *Murder by the Book? Feminism and the Crime Novel*. London: Routledge.

Musiitwa, D. (1 July 2011) "Meet Roger Smith, Master of the Crime Fiction Genre". *Africa Book Club*. Available from: <http://www.africabookclub.com/?p=4347> (Accessed 17 August 2011).

Nicol, M. (2009a). "A Short History of South African Crime Fiction". *Crime Beat*. Available from: [http://crimebeat.book.co.za/a-short-history-of-south-african-crime-fiction\\_](http://crimebeat.book.co.za/a-short-history-of-south-african-crime-fiction_) (Accessed: 15 November 2009).

---. (11 November 2009b). "The Rainbow Duo in the SA Krimi". *Crime Beat*. Available from: <http://crimebeat.book.co.za/blog/2009/11/11/the-rainbow-duo-in-the-sa-krimi> (Accessed: 15 November 2009).

---. (25 August 2009c). "A Chat with Wessel Ebersohn". *Crime Beat*. Available from: <http://crimebeat.bookslive.co.za/blog/2009/08/25/a-chat-with-wessel-ebersohn> (Accessed: 25 August 2009).

----. (25 March 2009d). "A Cosy Chat with Roger Smith". *Crime Beat*. Available from: <http://crimebeat.bookslive.co.za/blog/2009/03/25/a-cosy-chat-with-roger-smith> (Accessed: 12 June 2011).

----. (6 April 2009e). "Diale Tlholwe: Between Two Worlds". *Crime Beat*. Available from: <http://crimebeat.bookslive.co.za/blog/2009/04/06/diale-tlholwe-between-two-worlds> (Accessed 7 March 2010).

Orford, M. (2009). *Daddy's Girl*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball.

---. (4 September 2011) "Once Upon a Life: Margie Orford". *The Observer*. Available from: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2011/sep/04/once-upon-a-life-margie-orford?INTCMP=SRCH> (Accessed: 4 September 2011).

*Oxford-Hachette French Dictionary: French-English English-French* (2001). London: Oxford University Press and Hachette Education.

Plain, G. (2001). *Twentieth Century Crime Fiction: Gender, Sexuality and the Body*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.



- Porter, D. (1981). *The Pursuit of Crime: Art and Ideology in Detective Fiction*. London: Yale.
- Priestman, M. (1990). *Detective Fiction and Literature: The Figure on the Carpet*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Pronzini, B. & Muller, M. (2006). "James McClure: 1939 – 2006". *Mystery File*. Available from: <http://www.mysteryfile.com/McClure/Bibliography.html> (Accessed: 23 June 2011).
- Pyrhönen, H. (1994). *Murder from an Academic Angle: An Introduction to the Study of the Detective Narrative*. Columbia: Camden House Inc.
- Rankin, I. (1999). "Why Crime is Good For You". *Edinburgh Review* (102). pp9-16.
- Rutter, K. (2 April 2008). "South Africa's Crime Wave – in Bookstores". *Time.com*. Available from: <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1727386,00.html> (Accessed 6 August 2010).
- Sayers, D. (Ed). (1928). *Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery, and Horror*. London: Victor Gollancz Limited.
- Scaggs, J. (2005). *Crime Fiction*. London: Routledge.
- Smith, R. (2009). *Mixed Blood*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.
- Stanners, B. (Editor). (2007). *Exploring Genre: Crime Fiction*. Australia: Phoenix Education.
- Symons, J. (1993). *Bloody Murder: From the Detective Story to the Crime Novel*. New York: The Mysterious Press.
- Tlholwe, D. (2008). *Ancient Rites*. Cape Town: Kwela.
- . (2011). *Counting the Coffins*. Cape Town: Kwela.
- Willett, R. (1992). *Hard-Boiled Detective Fiction*. Staffordshire: British Association for American Studies.