Point of View in a Divided Society:

“The Parts” (a novel) and “Putting ‘The Parts’ Together” (an exegesis)

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Introduction

Dismantling apartheid: Point of view in a divided society

No two people experience their surroundings in an identical fashion, whether they are in the real or the fabricated world. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o sums up the issue succinctly: "How we see a thing – even with our eyes – is very much dependent on where we stand in relationship to it" (88). While the author of *Decolonising the Mind* is talking about the dangers of imperialism, his comments extend to a general definition of perspective. Point of view operates on more than one plane, incorporating both literal and psychological location. As Susan Lanser notes, "technique is never wholly independent of ideology", a central thread in *The Narrative Act* (17-18). She says: "Human perception is shaped not only by our position in the physical world but by all that creates individual and collective identity, just as our identity may be continually reshaped by what we see" (*Narrative* 3).

Lanser's arguments for a strong relationship between form and content are compelling and convincing. They are in keeping with how the PhD novel, "The Parts", has evolved over the course of more than a decade, its structure shifting as personal circumstances changed. Early drafts of the manuscript, penned around 2003 in Grahamstown, South Africa, explore an opposition that grew out of social polarities. In a 2001 interview, Thabo Mbeki states: "So wide, historically, is the gulf between black and white that, in reality, we have different perceptions of South Africa, depending where you are, this side of the street or the other" (n.pag.). This seems especially obvious in the Makana region, with its "Frontier Country" marketing serving as a reminder of racial conflict. Almost two centuries after the war between the settlers and the Xhosa, Grahamstown remains a "contact zone", in Mary Louise Pratt's words, a "space in which peoples geographically and historically separated" coexist in a situation of "radical inequality" (6). The dichotomy is reinforced by the visual contrast between the dwellings on the city's opposing hills. A legacy of apartheid's divisions, the townships and the suburbs offer a spatial rendering of the split that Mbeki describes.

The qualifiers that the former leader uses are necessary, given the country's past. Toni Morrison elaborates: "To identify someone as a South African is to say very little; we need the adjective 'white' or 'black' or 'colored' to make our meaning clear" (*Playing* 47). The distinctions emerge in an enhanced form in André Brink's *A Chain of Voices*, published in the turbulent early 1980s. Julian Moynahan is correct when he remarks that the novel, which "goes behind" the system of apartheid to trace "the fatal pattern of ... relationships" between slaves and masters in the Cape Colony around 1825, "is as much about the present as the past" (1). On the surface, Brink depicts a binary clash between black and white. Abdul JanMohamed warns against seeing the world in mutually exclusive opposites, drawing on Frantz Fanon's interpretation of the Manichean struggle between conqueror and native for support (60). Not surprisingly, JanMohamed regards *A Chain of Voices* as "rooted in racial stereotypes/archetypes", a valid judgement, which is softened by the admission that Brink's text is a brave attempt to present alternative points of view in a nation built on separation (72).

As Brink's English title suggests, assorted narrators offer their versions of the tale's events, among them an uprising and subsequent bloodshed on two farms. The string of linked first person accounts is framed by the official court documents that make up the "Act of Accusation" and the "Verdict". Rather than keeping anyone quiet, Brink gives all of his characters the opportunity to be heard. He highlights the connections between them as he probes their alliances and flags ongoing misunderstandings, most of which arise from their disparate vantage points. What complicates the situation, as Sue Kossew stresses, is that a white writer is "speaking 'for' the silenced voices and thus could be seen as merely imposing another kind of imperial authority upon them", resulting in a "double bind" (*Pen* 127). This risk applies to any author striving to portray different racial groups, but nowhere more so than in the context of a land with a history of discrimination based on skin colour. Nevertheless, it is worth taking the gamble that is inherent in trying to convey a comprehensive spectrum of viewpoints and voices. Drawing on multiple perspectives offers a means of disrupting the established order that is associated with empire. In Elleke Boehmer's "warring dichotomy" of extremes, erring on the side of what she terms

"postcolonial subversion and plenitude" seems preferable to adopting "the single-voiced authority of colonial writing" (*Colonial* 4).

There is an interesting, although not irreconcilable, tension in the names of Brink's work in the two official languages of the apartheid era. Where *A Chain of Voices* carries a sense of speaking out and integration even as it hints at imprisonment and restrictions, *Houd-den-Bek* implies silence and the domination that goes with ownership. The Afrikaans form is taken from something that the old patriarch Piet van der Merwe recalls, about one of his ancestors shooting at a detachment of dragoons sent to summon him after a quarrel with the Landdrost. "'In this place your word counts for nothing,' he told them. 'No one but I have the right to speak here.' And so he called the farm Houd-den-Bek, which means Shut-Your-Trap" (Brink *Chain* 33). As Judy Gardner points out, this puts the emphasis on "spatial location" and "a non-articulation of thoughts, feelings, experiences, questions, etc. as was expected of slaves" (144).

Enforced separation has far-reaching consequences, whether in the 1820s or the 1980s. Helene Johanna Strauss says: "The South Africa inherited from colonialism and apartheid is a deeply fragmented society, not just because of the ideological, racial and spatial divisions set up *between* people, but also because of the divisions that have settled *within* the psyches of individual South Africans" (36). These internal rifts are manifest in the distinct chunks of Brink's multiple-narrative saga, which demonstrate a kind of literary apartheid. The first person monologues have things in common and often sound alike, even as the various points of view evoke a broken community and the inability to see in a similar manner.

Examining the "implications of the 'apartness' of apartheid" and its influence on the act of writing, Paul Dornan comes to the conclusion that "a society governed by legislated segregation, cannot but feel the effect of estrangement from itself" (1). Brink's method of crafting *A Chain of Voices* demonstrates the pull between different cultures while showing the friction between his protagonists. In "The Jump into Darkness", he explains that "some of the voices were written directly in English, others in Afrikaans" (64). This bilingual approach illustrates what is happening to Nicolaas and Galant,

childhood playmates thrust into the antithetical roles of master and slave. Brink embraces “the link of structure to meaning”, for “they can, quite literally, not communicate in the same language” (“Jump” 64). In addition, his technique signals an internal split, a duality within the self. “I have always been interested in looking over my own shoulder when I write” is how Brink phrases his personal dichotomy (Wroe 15).

Mikhail Bakhtin, in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, says: “The author of a polyphonic novel is not required to renounce himself or his own consciousness, but he must to an extraordinary extent broaden, deepen and rearrange this consciousness” (68). Bakhtin’s illuminating idea is as encouraging as it is challenging. It seems to be what Brink does here and it is a formidable achievement, given the restrictions on freedom at the time, literary censorship and banning among them. In an interview with Frances Dickenson, where he discusses the solitude at the core of *A Chain of Voices*, Brink declares: “What emerged from the book, for me, was the terrible isolation in which people find themselves” (n.pag.). That lack of contact between people of diverse races and cultures was enforced in Hendrik Verwoerd’s policy of separate development. The National Party’s official doctrine seeped into every aspect of life, from where someone could live to what he or she could learn at school.

In “Stories of History”, Brink maintains that apartheid “imposed certain priorities on a writer’s choice of themes” (29). For authors with strong moral compasses, the practical limits dictated by the laws were often balanced by an ideological compulsion to reflect the political realities in their literature. Nadine Gordimer outlines how “the categories that the state would keep apart get mixed through literature – an unforeseen ‘essential gesture’ of writers in their social responsibility in a divided country” (294). This play between segregation and integration is evident in the episodic and fragmented structure of *A Chain of Voices*. The opening and closing third-person sections provide a pair of soliloquies that seem to allow for no questioning, being the official record of “His Majesty’s Fiscal at the Cape of Good Hope” (Brink *Chain* 9). In contrast to the authoritative version of the conflict, the collection of first person narrators offers a discordant chorus of alternative explanations.

A loud postcolonial retort is as much a polyphonic exercise as it is a means of writing back to the centre. Towards the end of Brink's book, the old slave woman, Ma-Rose, says: "We go on talking and talking, an endless chain of voices, all together yet all apart, all different yet all the same; and the separate links might lie but the chain is the truth" (Brink *Chain* 441). Bakhtin believes that any "novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types ... and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized" (262). Elaborating on dialogism, a concept synonymous with Bakhtin's name, David Lodge notes that the "medley of styles and voices" makes the novel as a genre "a supremely democratic, anti-totalitarian literary form, in which no ideological or moral position is immune from challenge and contradiction" (129). With this in mind, Brink's method seems particularly effective. Whether in the context of slavery or apartheid, *A Chain of Voices* shows up the divisions only to undermine them as the oppressed and the oppressors are yoked together. Kossew is right to describe Brink's title image as "resonant" because "it invokes the contradictory notions of the imprisoning nature of 'dialogue' and the interdependency and interrelation of speech acts" (*Pen* 139).

While much has changed with 20 years of democracy, South Africa still bears the signs of its troubled history, remaining fractured along racial and economic lines. Boehmer, Laura Chrisman and Kenneth Parker make an interesting and valid point when they observe that the country's writing is "doubly postcolonial, in that it is releasing itself from both the past it shares with other formerly colonised territories, and from its own form of internal colonisation, apartheid" (xvi). This creative exorcism informs much of the national literature. Margaret Lenta identifies an enduring tendency towards "stiflingly South African" content in debut novels after 2000, noting a preoccupation with "issues of social justice and, especially, relations between the different race groups" ("Expanding" 51).

Putting the situation into a broader, universal context can be a hard task for the writer. During the apartheid era, many authors, activists and journalists were only able to talk openly about their country once they left it. Today, international mobility is common, whether for political or personal reasons, but dealing with the process is seldom simple. The distance provides a release of

sorts, bringing with it a semblance of objectivity and greater freedom. Søren Frank argues convincingly that displacement can be good for intellectual development. While he concedes that it brings "a rupture of the 'natural' order", it is "an inescapable condition in the contemporary world of globalization" (18). Moving from South Africa to regional Western Australia in 2005 changed the shape of "The Parts", with extra perspectives being added to convey the relevant background information in greater depth.

Away from what is known and reassuring, point of view expands to take in altered conditions and offer fresh ways of looking at the world. Boehmer describes the "generic postcolonial writer" as a "cultural traveller, or an 'extra-territorial'" and the migrant text as Homi Bhabha's hybridity "writ large and in colour" (*Colonial* 227). Salman Rushdie catches the essence of this idea in his "Imaginary Homelands" essay: "If literature is in part the business of finding new angles at which to enter reality, then once again our distance, our long geographical perspective, may provide us with such angles" (15). For all its stresses, relocation has its benefits. Rushdie recognises that "however ambiguous and shifting this ground may be, it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy" (15).

Nor is it out of keeping with a general attitude that involves social withdrawal as well as engagement. Gordimer regards both as necessary characteristics of the creative dialectic. She says: "Powers of observation heightened beyond the normal imply extraordinary disinvolvement; or rather the double process, excessive preoccupation and identification with the lives of others, and at the same time a monstrous detachment" (Gordimer 114). In a sense, the dichotomy accords with the otherness that accompanies dual citizenship or metaphorical homelessness. Gordimer sums it up neatly: "The tension between standing apart and being fully involved; that is what makes a writer" (114). The ambivalence of the South African psyche finds an echo in the position of the artist.

Referring to Gordimer's novel, *My Son's Story*, Bhabha queries binary divisions and spatial oppositions in *The Location of Culture*. He explores the areas of overlap, probing "the moment of aesthetic distance that provides the

narrative with a double edge, which like the coloured South African subject represents a hybridity, a difference 'within', a subject that inhabits the rim of an 'in-between' reality" (13). Though the migrant character in "The Parts" is not of mixed race, he is a product of Bhabha's interstitial zone, not only because he has lived in two countries but also because one of his parents is of Afrikaans descent and the other English. His sense of confused identity is a facet of the cultural disconnection that Brink enacts when he writes the separate segments of *A Chain of Voices* in apartheid's two official languages.

Bhabha's liminal or third space emerges as the arena of intersection and "symbolic interaction" (4). This threshold is reminiscent of Pratt's contact zone, with its "conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict" (6). Kevin Bloom explores post-apartheid friction in his thought-provoking investigative work, *Ways of Staying*, getting to grips with how South Africans normalise horror and accept it as part of the everyday. As an example, after one of many confronting interviews, Bloom is "moved but unsurprised" by a tale of brutality told "in a voice incongruously calm and detached" (56). He is aware of "how odd" his "questions might sound to an outsider, how the sheer abundance of such stories has almost robbed the individual case of its (necessary, rightful) power to astonish" (Bloom 56). Shocking accounts often do not make news because they have become the norm.

Apartheid's after-effects present a host of daunting challenges. These include what Shane Graham describes as "the continuing ravages of HIV/AIDS, crime, rape, and other social problems" which "all promise a foreseeable future of continuing struggle, conflict, and hardship" (181). Attacks and home invasions occur in both the townships and the suburbs, in spite of the fact that the nation's progressive constitution embraces human rights. As Meg Samuelson explains, "at the same time, South Africans continue to inhabit manifestly unequal and segregated material worlds and the transition has been marred by one of the highest rates of violence against women in the world today" (11). In terms of abuse, the society is split along gender lines, another division that has been factored into the presentation of both the creative component of the PhD and the exegesis.

While Brink's isolated perspectives in *A Chain of Voices* run the gamut from the marginalised to the mainstream, his structure possesses a flaw, detected by most reviewers. The stream-of-consciousness technique becomes monotonous (Rabie; Kramer). Dorothy Driver notes that the speakers are "insufficiently distinguished by their thought patterns and choice of imagery, admittedly a hard task for an author juggling some 30 voices" (10). One approach to overcoming the problem is to opt for what Gérard Genette calls "multiple internal focalisation", where events are viewed from assorted points of view (144). With this in mind, "The Parts" is an experiment in narrating from four different angles.

Mark Tredinnick cautions that the writer has to have "steady hands" when creating a polyphonic novel, to avoid the potential cacophony (193). On a practical level, this has involved using specific methods while researching, revising and reworking in order to keep the sections separate and distinct. Helen Garner's advice to use a five subject notebook for compartmentalising protagonists has been invaluable (Grenville 63). So has Kathy Crowley's list of tips and tricks in her online article, "The Novel with Many Narrators is a Multiheaded Beast". She includes guidelines for avoiding the merging of styles. In *A Chain of Voices*, the elements of earth, water, air and fire dominate the motifs running through each of the four sections. This has also influenced the organising principle for the images in "The Parts".

Being aware of the potential pitfalls and stumbling blocks on the narrative path has proved essential in limiting the blurring of perspectives and voices. What has been more difficult to overcome is the confusion that tends to accompany multiple vantage points. If "the various sections sit side by side" and do not have a linking narrative, the reader has to search, sometimes fruitlessly, for what Derek Neale calls "the points of potential connection" (173). For the work to make sense, it should possess the sort of unity that underlies William Faulkner's plots. Moynahan refers to Brink's "technical debt to Faulkner for the device of telling a story entirely through a series of first-person monologues" (15). *A Chain of Voices* resembles *As I Lay Dying*, with its string of interconnected personae. The shape of "The Parts" gives a definite nod to Faulkner. However, it is *The Sound and the Fury* that serves as the structural model for the experiment. Frank observes that Faulkner's "four parts stand beside one another and are relatively

isolated" (115). The same comment could be made about the PhD's research component, where the segregation of apartheid informs the quartet of viewpoints.

Faulkner's technical daring has been an invitation to play with historical boundaries and test their post-apartheid limits. Parallels between "The Parts" and *The Sound and the Fury* are suggested in a brief outline of the exegesis, which offers an exploration of the thinking behind the structure, relating how point of view choices are appropriate to the character and images of each section. Just as Faulkner begins with the bewildering tale told by Benjy Compson, so the PhD novel opens with Riaan Niemand's disorientating perspective. The second person migrant narrative is the focus of Chapter 1. Quentin's segment of *The Sound and the Fury* is lodged further back in time, on the day of his suicide, to provide context. Cikiswa Songongo's portion of "The Parts" contains background material as well. Relayed through the communal voice of a group of women, this aspect of the story touches on death and the HIV/AIDS scenario. The "we" voice is considered in Chapter 2. Faulkner switches to Jason's relatively straightforward and linear point of view midway in his book. Lily Blake, like Jason, speaks from a position of material privilege in "The Parts" and her eyewitness account is unreliable. Chapter 3 examines limited vision. For his final take on events, Faulkner discards the first person in favour of the third and his conclusion is focalised through the black servant, Dilsey. There is an echo of this format in Siyaya Songongo's section of "The Parts", which is analysed in Chapter 4.

How contrasting points of view play off each other is worthy of further consideration. Brian Richardson draws attention to "the absence of sustained accounts of multiple modes of narration" and the need to probe "the conjunction of different narrators" in texts like *Ulysses* and *The Sound and the Fury* (61). He illustrates the omission by saying that "while many typologies contain a space for both Bloom's subvocal speech and Molly's internal monologue, there is usually no place in such schemas for *Ulysses* as a whole" (Richardson 61). In a similar fashion, Richardson uses the stark juxtaposition between the first person reminiscences of Benjy, Quentin and Jason Compson and the "resolutely third person segment that concludes the novel" to highlight an "unfortunate" gap in research (61). These ideas are metaphorical flags, signalling areas where original contributions to knowledge could be made.

Two broad questions inform the overall research project that comprises the PhD. What is the strongest way to set up and sustain the disparate approaches and shifting perspectives? And how can they best be brought together in order to provide a satisfying overarching interpretation? The conclusion of the exegesis strives for reconciliation and a synthesis of sorts.

Bakhtin states that "the human being in the novel is first, foremost and always a speaking human being; the novel requires speaking persons bringing with them their own unique ideological discourse, their own language" (332). In "The Parts", ways of talking are as intrinsic to the individual narrators as their modes of looking, thus it seems essential to allow for both aspects in a definition of point of view. Genette distinguishes between "*voice* ('who speaks?') and *vision* ('who sees?')", with Lanser reminding that the one who sees need not be the one who speaks (*Narrative* 37). This is the case in the third person sections of *The Sound and the Fury* and "The Parts".

In trying to convey the conflicting aspects of post-apartheid South Africa, a multiple-perspective narrative seems more suitable than a single focus. Lodge contends that choosing the point of view from which the story is told is "arguably the most important single decision that the novelist has to make, for it fundamentally affects the way readers will respond, emotionally and morally, to the fictional characters and their actions" (26). Providing four frames of reference shares the responsibility for finding meaning within the depiction of a divided society. Lanser regards point of view as "essentially a *relationship* rather than a concrete entity", describing it as "a complex network of interactions between author, narrator(s), characters, and audiences both real and implied" (*Narrative* 13). The reader, seeking harmony within the rendering of the whole, is drawn into the web.

Several core texts inform the chapters of the exegesis, the better to illuminate the arguments for selecting the various vantage points. In addition to Brink's *A Chain of Voices*, they are Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to our Hillbrow*, Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying*, Antjie Krog's *A Change of Tongue* and Yvonne Vera's *Butterfly Burning*. While the writing spans a wide range of topics and embraces a medley of artistic approaches, these southern African authors have in

common a genius for surprising patterns of perspective and lyrical leaps in voice. Their remarkable novels help to place “The Parts” in a postmodern, postcolonial and transnational context.

Chapter 1

You are in no man's land: The second person

If point of view is shaped by physical position as well as individual and collective identity, the migrant character inhabits a strange space, often lacking in spiritual and cultural markers. Whether it takes the guise of wilderness, desert, war zone or city, the metaphorical area is set apart, functioning as a buffer zone between the foreign and the familiar. Edward Said describes this frontier as "the perilous territory of not belonging", the region "where, in primitive times, people were banished, and where, in the modern era, immense aggregates of humanity loiter as refugees and displaced persons" (51). While Said is referring to the condition of exile, his observations apply to the general experience of relocating from one country to another.

As a character, Riaan Niemand has been constructed to help readers with navigating the different realms of "The Parts". Because he has connections with both Australia and South Africa, he acts as a bridge between the continents. However, his dual vision is fraught with tensions. Mads Rosendahl Thomsen emphasises that the migrant position incorporates "a certain double perspective on things by someone who is both at home and away at the same time" (99). The "you" mode has been chosen as an appropriate method for depicting this unsettled stance, lodged as it is between the self-assuredness of "I" and the detachment of "he/she/it". In his chapter on second person narration, aptly titled "At First You Feel a Bit Lost", Richardson suggests that the "protean" form "permits authors to explore the boundaries of and invent variations on a new fictional voice", adding that it offers fresh "possibilities of creative representation, particularly for revealing a mind in flux" (35). Innovative and edgy, writing as "you" or to "you" has the potential to be awkward and destabilising, which makes it suitable for expressing Riaan's situation.

In the context of "The Parts", it is not only Riaan that is in a state of confusion. South Africa has been through its own upheavals, entering a period of ongoing transformation with the end of legalised racial segregation and the advent

of democracy in 1994. Graham draws attention to the ensuing “sense of disorientation amid rapid changes in the physical and social landscape” (1). Mpe’s groundbreaking *Welcome to our Hillbrow* illustrates the concerns and trends in post-apartheid literature. Recounted in the unconventional second person, the novel captures the uneasiness of a country in transition. Like Riaan, the main characters, Refentše and Refilwe, are torn between the reassuring customs of the past and the fluctuating realities of the modern world as they vacillate between the recognisable and the alien.

Mpe’s work circles around its eponymous no man’s land, which resists quantification and firm definition. Hillbrow, the densely populated neighbourhood on a ridge above Johannesburg’s central business district, is a cultural melting pot, historically grey, as opposed to black or white. The suburb is described as “that locality of just over one square kilometre, according to official records; and according to its inhabitants, at least twice as big and teeming with countless people” (Mpe 1). In a long and punctuation-free paragraph, which suggests Hillbrow’s anarchic nature, the residents complain that the streets are “overflowing with *Makwerekwere* come to pursue green pastures” (Mpe 26). *Makwerekwere* is a derogatory term for foreigners. The stigma is enhanced by association with disease for the residents speculate that they facilitate “AIDS’s travel route into Johannesburg” (Mpe 4).

Apartheid’s divisions have been replaced by other sets of distinguishing features. Distinctions are now drawn between the urban and the rural, the locals and those from further north, the healthy and the sick, and people on earth as opposed to those in heaven. The last category is evident in the conditional clause of the opening sentence, which also establishes the fluidity of the second person voice. Mpe’s novel starts: “If you were still alive, Refentše, child of Tiragalong, you would be glad that Bafana Bafana lost to France in the 1998 Soccer World Cup fiasco” (1). This introduction is disconcerting, not least because the protagonist appears to be dead, raising questions about his precise location. In contrast to his absence, there is a string of specific allusions to places, including Tiragalong, the fictitious village where Refentše and Refilwe were born.

Traversing the post-apartheid urban sprawl is difficult. Refentše's arrival in the maze-like metropolis is "the culmination of many converging routes" (Mpe 2). "Hillbrow: The Map", the first section's heading, hints at the need for order and management. The title sounds as if it is from an information brochure and indeed, within a few pages, directions are given. These instructions begin in a recognisable format: "If you are coming from the city centre, the best way to get to Cousin's place is by driving or walking through Twist Street" (Mpe 6). The list contains valid streets and intersections, using genuine landmarks as reference points and filling in details. As Richardson confirms, the second person is the preferred voice for "pseudo-narrative forms", among them "the travel guide, and the self-help manual" (35).

Movement is at the centre of Mpe's tale, with spaces morphing together as the characters cross borders. Refentše says: "You always took Tiragalong with you in your consciousness whenever you came to Hillbrow or any other place. In the same way, you carried Hillbrow with you always" (Mpe 49). The boundaries collapse and are reinforced by turns. For Frank, the migrant perspective has an "unstable equilibrium" of "familiarity and foreignness as it is positioned between cultures" (19). He cites Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's essay on "Rhizome", where "in-betweenness" implies "the destabilisation of each position as well as a movement into a completely new dimension" (Frank 19). The "you" voice serves as a means of evoking and exaggerating this unbalanced state, reinforcing the uncomfortableness of being in a figurative no man's land.

Notions of acceptance and exclusion are explored from a different angle in the second half of *Welcome to our Hillbrow*, which is focalised through Refilwe, Refentše's former girlfriend. Journeying to Oxford, she endures "a scary flight across thousands and thousands of kilometres of land and ocean" before reaching "our England" (Mpe 97). The first person plural form implies sharing and the type of hospitality alluded to in the book's ambiguous, and often ironic, title. However, Refilwe makes an unpleasant discovery as she watches the Customs officials. "Our Heathrow strongly reminded Refilwe of our Hillbrow and the xenophobia it engendered. She learnt there, at our Heathrow, that there was another word for foreigners.... *Africans*" (Mpe 102). The tables have been turned. Ha-Eun Grace Kim notes: "In broadening the notion of 'foreigners' to encompass all, *Welcome*

to our Hillbrow illustrates the shifting, open-endedness of identity" (63). Belonging is a relative concept for migrants. Rushdie explains the dilemma thus: "Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools" (15). In *Welcome to our Hillbrow*, the international airport functions as the symbolic threshold between the opposing places.

Bhabha discerns an "estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world – the unhomeliness – that is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations" (*Location* 9). Away from Africa, Refilwe is lodged on the outskirts of "this centre of human civilisation" that is England (102). Roger Bromley, assessing a variety of diasporic writings, is struck by "figures who look in from the outside while looking out from the inside, to the extent that both inside and outside lose their defining contours" (5). Vision becomes peripheral and distinct from the norm. The perspective allows for a simultaneous detachment and involvement, evident in the name of Rian Malan's autobiographical text, *My Traitor's Heart: A South African Returns to Face his Country, his Tribe, and His Conscience*. Malan's tormented memoir is about his "divided state", for he has "always been two people, you see" (412). He has internalised the "howling ambiguities" of being a white South African and he finds merit in "living on the edge" (Malan 334; 422).

In *Welcome to our Hillbrow*, the sense of remoteness is amplified in Refentše's case. His position is marginal, for he is "looking down from Heaven, helpless to intervene" as he surveys Refilwe "from his high vantage point" (Mpe 111). Not only is he lacking in power; he is also otherworldly. Earlier in the novel, when Refentše contemplates suicide, he listens to his favourite song from another elevated spot. The lyrical reference supports Mpe's overarching preoccupation with point of view. "With Stimela's *See the World through the Eyes of a Child* ... providing the musical background to your brooding, you sat alone on your twentieth-floor balcony, thinking your gloomy thoughts about love, friendship and the whole purpose of living" (Mpe 25).

Michael Holquist highlights an important idea while explaining the law of placement in dialogism. In terms of Bakhtin's theory, "everything is perceived

from a unique position in existence; its corollary is that the meaning of whatever is observed is shaped by the place from which it is perceived" (Holquist 20). For protagonists like Riaan and Refentše, who have a connection to more than one realm, this influence is neither steady nor static. Gazing from the spiritual sidelines, Refentše too is a man divided, within and without. The internal rift is a mirror of the external contradictions. Home, wherever and whatever it is, "always travels with you, with your consciousness as its vehicle" (Mpe 55). Hillbrow stirs up mixed emotions and Johannesburg is "this city of gold, milk, honey and bile" (Mpe 56).

The pull between opposing forces is reflected in the structure of the novel, which hinges on duality as well as variable points of view. Refentše is referred to as "you" in the first three sections, only to become "he" as the focus swings onto Refilwe. Richardson warns that the "second person is a playful form, original, transgressive, and illuminating, that is always conscious of its unusual own status and often disguises itself, playing on the boundaries of other narrative voices" (23). Pinning down who is talking in *Welcome to our Hillbrow* is near impossible. Michael Green proposes that "the second person in this case is a form of split address through which the author lets us overhear his address to himself as a fictionalized subject" (10). The autobiographical echoes are strong.

Gao Xingjian does something similar in *Soul Mountain*, albeit for a different purpose, when he employs second and first person narrators in alternating chapters. As translator Mabel Lee notes, his "rigorous and critical analysis of the self of one man is achieved by dissecting the authorial self into the singular pronouns", thereby fashioning a "composite protagonist" (Gao ix). The "you" and the "I" are facets of the same individual, expanding the notion of self by opening up a cleft between what is invented and what is real. Using the second person provides a sense of distance from the verifiable events of Gao's own life. The use of the "I" as a mask is explored in Chapter 3 of the exegesis, which examines the blurred space between fiction and fact in greater detail.

Refentše's situation in *Welcome to our Hillbrow* has striking parallels with that of his creator, Mpe, his demise among them. The nebulous narrator speculates on subjects "that you might have written about, Refentše, child of

Tiragalong and Hillbrow, had you not chosen to exit prematurely from this world of trials" (Mpe 38). When Lizzy Attree interviewed Mpe in late November 2004, "he was in poor health and sadly died suddenly on 12 December 2004" (*Blood* 1). Considering his work in the context of how African authors approach HIV and AIDS, Attree finds that "the ambiguity that surrounds his death is in keeping with the cultural mystification of AIDS that he laid bare in his fiction, always performed at least one remove from reality" (*Blood* 15). Distance blends with a curious intimacy as the line between fact and imagination is distorted. Sarah Nuttall asserts that "the narrator uses the device of addressing his dead protagonist to achieve this self-reflexive space" (*Entanglement* 43). The voice draws attention to its own construction, colouring what has been contrived with disturbing elements of truth and a prediction of what is to come.

While the second person evokes the writer, the form also encourages the reader to participate in the action. In his seminal paper, penned in 1965, Bruce Morrissette is alert to the subtle nuances of "a mode of curiously varied psychological resonances" and he detects an "almost subliminal use" of the word "you", which invites "sentimental identification" (2; 9). The verb tense is usually the present, "thus further generalizing the action into something which the reader not only might *have done*, but might conceivably *do*" (Morrissette 3). Italo Calvino pushes the technique to interesting extremes in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*, opening with a teasing reference to the person holding the book. Determining the deictic pronoun's context is essential for meaning but Calvino's "you" is mercurial. Analysing the quasi-conversational structure of certain media, Irene Kacandes maintains that mixed reactions to *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* are appropriate. She experiences "delight and annoyance, engagement and disengagement, identification and alienation" (Kacandes ix-x). Being charmed and irritated simultaneously is the nature of this type of oration.

Contradictions seem inevitable in a malleable style. Dennis Schofield, whose thesis investigates the second person's narrative and discursive functions, acknowledges the form's "shape-shiftiness" (129). Writers choose it for miscellaneous reasons, willing it to perform multiple roles. In her literature overview of salient ideas and academic stances related to the mode, Monika Fludernik pays homage to Helmut Bonheim. He coined the term "referential

slither" to denote the capacity of "you" to address reader, narratee, fictional protagonist and narrator – though Fludernik thinks he is wrong to include the latter (Fludernik 286). Defining the elusive "you" or limiting its range is challenging. In *Welcome to our Hillbrow*, this grammatical slipperiness accords with Mpe's themes, notably those that explore the insidious crossings of borders, whether social or linguistic, psychological or spiritual.

The idea is in keeping with the recognition of a link between medium and message, with the "you" involved in an uncomfortable process. Minesh Dass explains that the "unavoidable task" is "to respond appropriately to a novel that places you where you may not actually be, invokes and includes you in a community (denoted by the 'Our') you may not feel you belong to and that simultaneously excludes you" (167-168). The "you" is associated with both hospitality and the xenophobic actions of the residents, seesawing between expressions of prejudice and empathy towards the migrants. Carrol Clarkson is correct to argue that "the question of answerability ... extends to the reader as well" (452). Conflicting emotions come to a head in the flowing passages that conclude Refentše's sections, each finished off with a wry yet inclusive greeting. "Welcome to our Hillbrow..." the narrator says, over and over again (Mpe 27; 62; 79; 124). The refrain swells to incorporate diverse places. Neville Hoad detects "a vibrant interconnectedness between urban and rural worlds, home and exile" as Mpe's means of negotiating what he terms "African cosmopolitanism" (123). The "you" mode bridges these polarities.

Just as the second person point of view is instrumental in conveying the motion from the specific to the universal in terms of geography, so it is able to flit back and forth in time. By the end of the novel, Refilwe is absorbed into the "you" voice. She has "passed on from this Earth" and is ready to be embraced in "our Heaven", though "Heaven can also be Hell" (Mpe 124). Opposing realms are pitted against each other before being reconciled in the imagination. This fits with Said's belief that the exile's perspective is ambiguous because "habits of life, expression, or activity in the new environment occur against the memory of these things in another environment" (55). What results is a curious blend of the strange and the familiar. In *Welcome to our Hillbrow*, the events of the present are acted out before the backdrop of the past, "with the world of our continuing existence,

located in the memory and consciousness of those who live with us and after us" (Mpe 124). Heaven, for Refentše, is a kind of no man's land, a lounge from which to witness events unfolding while pondering "the complex paradox of life, death and everything in between" (Mpe 79).

Stuart Hall advises thinking of cultural identity not as "an already established fact" but as "a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" ("Cultural Identity and Diaspora" 222). Hall's philosophy ties in with the fluidity of the second person. Internal rifts take assorted shapes in literature but there is a definite pattern in the figurative language, which balances detachment with engagement. As an example, the nameless "you" in Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City* is aware "of being misplaced, of always standing to one side of yourself, of watching yourself in the world even as you were being in the world" (159). This attitude is in line with his journalistic profession of verifying facts. Striving for objectivity, he is at once a part of the action and apart from it.

According to David Herman, the second person may be "searching for an identity" rather than depersonalised (355). Herman's idea is intriguing, especially when considered in relation to unsettled characters, for it illustrates how the vocabulary of narrative theory often complements that of transnational literature. In Riaan's section of "The Parts", geological images function as a structural device to show the dislocated sense of self. Riaan's story is revealed in layers that resemble the sedimentary strata he uncovers as an aspect of his job. With time arranged as a series of tiers in the depths of his psyche, memory becomes a type of interstitial space to hold the in-between "you". Heaven, in *Welcome to our Hillbrow*, operates in a comparable fashion. It is "the archive that those we left behind keep visiting and revisiting; digging this out, suppressing or burying that" (Mpe 124).

Even as the "you" mode enhances the disorientating effects of migration, it hints at the emptiness that results from Riaan's rupture with his birthplace. The hollowness within is signalled by his surname, Niemand, which means "nobody" in Afrikaans. Riaan's account of events is suffused with loss and the unspecific pronoun is pivotal in conveying that something is missing. Similarly, *Welcome to*

our Hillbrow, as Graham remarks, is structured around "a perpetually present absence" (115). The text calls attention to the relationship between life and death as well as that between the first and second person. Ken Barris describes Mpe's narrator as "disembodied, because the key word 'you' is never uttered by an explicit 'I'" (Barris 41). His choice of adjective is perfect, for the speaker is both intangible and spiritual.

The haziness of the point of view allows for generic interpretation. As Morrissette notes, using "you" serves as a means of avoiding "the appearance of excessive egotism or self-reference" (6). The protagonist is often an ordinary person, with whom the reader is encouraged to sympathise. Rationalising his decision to explore his mind as he remembers it from childhood, Paul Auster employs the Everyman model in *Report from the Interior*. He says of his task: "Still, you feel compelled to give it a try. Not because you find yourself a rare or exceptional object of study, but precisely because you don't, because you think of yourself as anyone, as everyone" (Auster 4). If there is a fine line between the random and the all-inclusive, the second person smudges it. Blurring the boundaries between the singular and the plural, "you" evokes solitude and community alike.

In the penultimate section of *Welcome to our Hillbrow*, the residents of Tiragalong, Hillbrow, Nigeria and Oxford are united by shared sickness. Barris observes that "in bringing her illness home, Refilwe demonstrates the integrity of which fallible human nature is capable: her original pride and malice give way to reconciliation with a universalised human nature" (124). As the web of relationships spreads, the "you" becomes an empathetic "we". Refilwe experiences an "expanding consciousness" and there is an invitation to enter "the World of our Humanity" (Mpe 113). While this appears to be directed at the reader, it also encompasses the protagonists, the narrator and the author.

The insistent titular refrain operates in a comparable fashion, reaching outward to incorporate everyone within its reach. Nuttall aligns this practice with the "ethics of hospitality" inherent in African culture, explaining that "the narrative repeatedly performs an act of embrace" (*Entanglement* 43). As such, the appeal is a manifestation of *ubuntu*. Zakes Mda clarifies the concept as

embodying “the values of humaneness, generosity, humanity and compassion” (*Sometimes There is a Void* 180). Traditional Southern African societies rest on this group philosophy, which offers an antidote to self-absorption and xenophobia with its ethos of altruism and acceptance. Riaan, with his westernised background, is an emblem of individuality. His loneliness is exaggerated by the use of the second person pronoun, even as the reader enters no man’s land with him.

Chapter 2

We are making memories: First person plural

Ubuntu is at the heart of Mda's debut novel, *Ways of Dying*, which incorporates a collective point of view. Like *Welcome to our Hillbrow*, the imaginative work emerges from an intense awareness of community. While the two authors use perspective and voice very differently, their fiction has much in common. Mpe even includes an intertextual reference in his plot when Refilwe recommends *Ways of Dying* to an erudite Irish pub owner. She says: "Here was a strange story – both funny and sad – about Toloki, a man who hoped to found the profession of mourning" (Mpe 107). Published in 1995, a year after South Africa's first democratic elections, *Ways of Dying* is set in the week around a Christmas and New Year in the early 1990s. Apartheid was over officially but this was a time of turmoil because the new nation's birth coincided with the old regime's ending.

Death and disease are woven into the fabric of everyday existence, especially in the poorer regions of South Africa. As Toloki remarks to his beloved Noria, "'our ways of dying are our ways of living. Or should I say our ways of living are our ways of dying?'" (Mda *Ways* 89). Noria replies that both statements are correct. In a climate where burial ceremonies are commonplace, Toloki's vocation is symbolic. He describes himself as "a Professional Mourner who mourned for the nation" (Mda *Ways* 155). Through Toloki's unconventional career, Mda explores violence as theme and metaphor for the turbulent transition period. Funerals in *Ways of Dying* are "associated with the reconstruction and narration of history by the community", as Rogier Courau and Sally-Ann Murray put it (112). During the era of legalised discrimination, such occasions offered an opportunity for mass gatherings when political meetings and anti-government rallies were banned. In *Ways of Dying*, as then, they offer a situation where the people's dissenting voices can be heard. Presiding over the ritual is the figure designated the Nurse. As "the last to see the deceased alive", this orator has the important task of recounting the victim's final moments and celebrating his or her death (Mda *Ways* 3).

The memory box serves a similar function, where those affected by HIV and AIDS choose what to leave behind as a legacy for their loved ones. Letters, documents and other objects are placed in decorated containers, which are passed on to their families when they die. In this manner, the terminally ill sufferers are able to communicate with their sons and daughters. Years later, when they are old enough to understand what their mothers and fathers experienced, the orphaned children try to make sense of the contents. In his personal reflection on AIDS in Uganda, *I Die, But The Memory Lives On*, Henning Mankell reflects that they "tune into their parents who are no longer alive" (31). He outlines what he believes is within the boxes and books that will be handed on from one generation to the next: "Recollections of physical contact buried deep down inside, words and voices that are only vague memories, as something in a dream" (Mankell 31).

As Mankell's poignant description illustrates, the concept is a rich source of images for a writer. In "The Parts", the memory box acts as an extended metaphor as well as a structural device, revealing information about Cikiswa Songongo. The female narrators pay close attention to what she puts in her container. Each item that Cikiswa selects provokes a sequence of reminiscences and commentary. On a practical level, this offers a means for accessing the events taking place in September 2000, while tapping into recollections and speculations about what happened prior to that date. Like the joint voice in *Ways of Dying*, the group shares an abundance of fellow feeling but also indulges in scandal mongering and is prone to biased interpretations. Mda's "we" demands control, insisting that the "community is the owner of the story, and it can tell it the way it deems it fit" (*Ways* 8). Within the approach, there is space for discrepancies and disagreements around the facts. The crowd is divided on how much the Nurse should say about the cause of death at the funeral of Noria's young son, for instance. As Margaret Mervis indicates, the judgements of the fallible witness narrator "provide information about the collective 'character' of the community" within the fictional realm (48). This in turn gives insight into the rich culture of black South Africans.

Krog poses a pertinent question in her article on the pull between African and Western influences in Njabulo Ndebele's *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*. "If one comes from a background in which the individual is profoundly part of the

communal, would that not affect the way in which one tells a story?" she asks (Krog "What the hell?" 57). There is no doubt that it would. Furthermore, building on the arguments for a relationship between form and content, it seems right that it should be so. Lanser stresses "the convergence of representation and narration that occurs when a collective or group protagonist is represented through formal strategies that allow the plurality itself to speak" (*Fictions* 256). She identifies two techniques for creating the communal voice. In the sequential mode, the mass effect "is produced from a series of collaborating 'I's'" (*Fictions* 256). *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* illustrates this trend, with four individual female characters taking turns to deliver their tales in the first person. As Driver spells out, Ndebele's novel dramatises "a complex human interaction that follows the spirit of *ubuntu*" ("'On these premises'" 12).

Lanser's second form, simultaneous narration, arises when "voice and focalization are represented as communal, so that the 'we' who perceives is also the 'we' who speaks" (*Fictions* 257). *Ways of Dying* and Cikiswa's section of "The Parts" rely on this approach. It suits traditional African tales, where the plural point of view challenges the broader tendency to consider feelings, speech and thoughts as belonging to a lone persona. Lanser emphasises that the technique "transgresses Western fiction's conventionally singular notions of consciousness" (*Fictions* 256). Laura Miller agrees, adding that modern readers find the practice unsettling because "the contemporary mind keeps searching for the familiarity of an individual point of view, since it seems impossible that a group could think and feel, let alone act" in unison (35). This is exactly what Mda's collective narrator claims to do: "Just like back in the village, we live our lives together as one. We know everything about everybody. We even know things that happen when we are not there" (*Ways* 8).

Mda's "we" has astute powers of observation, possessing "the all-seeing eye of the village gossip" and being acquainted with "things that happen behind people's closed doors deep in the middle of the night" (Mda *Ways* 8). Richardson notes that this passage offers a "playful and sustained interrogation of the curious epistemology of the 'we' narrator" (55). The group justifies its unusual position, arguing that it would not need to do so "if you had not wondered how we became so omniscient in the affairs of Toloki and Noria" (Mda *Ways* 8). With its direct

address to an audience, the utterance enters the oral realm. In *Ways of Dying*, as in *Welcome to our Hillbrow*, the spoken voice merges with the textual, making for an interesting hybrid of the colloquial and the formal. The novels are examples of what Kacandes terms "talk fiction", literature that promotes "a sense of the interaction we associate with face-to-face conversation ('talk') *and* a sense of the contrivance of this interaction ('fiction')" (x). As the "we" perspective ties in with aspects of magic realism in *Ways of Dying*, disbelief is suspended.

Community, as María J. López proposes, is "constituted by the very act of narration" and includes the reader (100). Though the witnessed events are focalised largely through Toloki and Noria, they are embedded within a bigger vision. Even when the pair "forgot about the existence of each other" and moved to the city, "we never stopped following their disparate and meagre lives" (Mda *Ways* 8). This identification with the protagonists extends to participating in their happiness and pain, no matter where they are. Occasionally the facts yield to hearsay. When Noria is a baby, for instance, there are rumours about her "beautiful laughter" but this "is one of the few things that we do not know for sure" (Mda *Ways* 26). Noria's early talent for delighting others is unconfirmed because her mother, That Mountain Woman, gives birth in her distant home in the hills. As the recollections are reinforced by repetition, they acquire a near-mythical status. This is in keeping with Mda's elements of fantasy and make-believe as well as the enduring patterns of traditional African narrative conventions.

Orature is defined as a "continuous" practice that is "not frozen in some particular period of time" and is dominated by black women (Daymond vviv). The first person plural form reaches back to another age, when tales were shared and communal lifestyles were the norm. In *Ways of Dying*, the collective speaker is older than Toloki and Noria are. As a result, the voice is able to recount things that the protagonists cannot remember. The "we" muses on Toloki's early years in an anecdotal fashion: "Come to think of it, at the very first funeral he ever attended back in the village, he was with Noria" (Mda *Ways* 35). Incidents from Toloki and Noria's childhood are recounted with a convincing certainty: "This is how it happened: he was eight, and she five" (Mda *Ways* 25). Similarly, in Cikiswa's segment of "The Parts", the collective mode is aligned with an

environment that is neither as modern nor as developed. The section is set further back in time than the rest of the novel, affording a glimpse of the impoverished township realm, with its economic inequalities, social problems and lack of infrastructure.

Around the year 2000, a hush surrounded HIV/AIDS in South Africa. Denial was common and people did not talk about it because a stigma clung to the disease, which was regarded as a death sentence before anti-retroviral drugs became available. Secrecy and misconceptions flourished in such an environment and most of those living with the virus were reluctant to disclose their status for fear of discrimination. Hall, who is concerned with questions of representation and omission, notes that "AIDS is the site at which the advance of sexual politics is being rolled back" ("Cultural Studies" 272). Cikiswa's story is conveyed by the group because it is a tale that they share.

However, her silence also hints at her lack of agency. As Tamsin Wilton stresses, AIDS is a feminist issue, not least because the unequal power relations between women and men become "life or death issues" in the context of the medical condition (4). Safer practices are not always optional in South Africa, with some men refusing to wear condoms or forcing women to have intercourse when they do not wish to do so. Louise Vincent holds that the emphasis has shifted from marriage, control and responsibility to "the right of access to sex as a primary marker of manhood" (442). In such a climate, which fosters submission and breeds fear, the opinions of wives, girlfriends and sleeping partners carry little weight. Georgina Hamilton laments "the fact that women frequently bear the burdens of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in South Africa alone" (3) Patriarchal attitudes and aggressive male behaviour contribute to the problems.

Choosing the first person plural for Cikiswa's section has been motivated by the desire to raise awareness of the gendered issues and misperceptions that cling to the illness. Felicity Horne recognises "the potential of texts to displace, disrupt and rewrite culturally dominant narratives" (24). Keeping silent is tantamount to condoning discrimination against those who are most vulnerable. Gayatri Spivak acknowledges the difficulties of operating in this type of environment, even in a way that is not phallocentric. However, she retorts: "No

activist wants to keep the subaltern in the space of difference. To do a *thing*, to work for the subaltern, means to bring it into speech" (De Kock 46). The women speak out, drawing attention to the realities of what they endure, and their unity affords a type of healing.

Disease, as Susan Sontag asserts, can function as "a creator of community" (25). Channelling the section through the "we" voice seems apt because the focus is on the collective experience of people living with sickness and suffering. Jonathan Morgan notices that HIV-positive support units are comprised mainly of women. He believes that "this gap reflects how it is here in South Africa. Most men don't want to know their HIV status and only present for treatment when they are very sick, which is often too late" (Morgan 14). Similarly, in Uganda, Mankell has conversations with just one man. He learns that they seldom discuss "their fate, whereas women were always prepared to talk openly about their lives" (Mankell 49).

The collective voice is not without might. A symbol of unity and cohesion, the group stands in opposition to exclusion and alienation. The editors of the anthology, *Nobody ever said AIDS*, proclaim the importance of moving beyond the silence. For them, words possess the potential to "transport us from isolation to a sense of community, even if only imaginary", something that is "particularly important in a context where so many people are made to feel cast out – alone with illness, with loss, with grief" (Rasebotsa 11). Speaking as a community contrasts with the quietness and solitude, for the plurality suggests noise as well as strength in numbers. AIDS is a universal rather than an individual challenge, another reason to use a narrative method that is inclusive and empathetic.

Sontag discusses how the disease is viewed differently to the "collective calamities" of the past (45). Her words signal the notion of AIDS as a tragedy of epic proportion. As the women sit around their memory boxes and talk in "The Parts", their voice assumes the nature of an enduring chant. Responding to *Ways of Dying*, Imke Brust is reminded of "the chorus in *Antigone*" and she compares Toloki to "the Antigone character" (115). Mda, who is also a playwright, evokes the mood and themes of Sophocles while achieving a similar effect of unison in

the face of adversity. Rob Gaylard links the core ideas of Greek philosophy with "what is often referred to as 'African humanism' or sometimes (in South Africa) as *ubuntu*" (267). Both doctrines recognise the value and dignity of human beings. This is in direct contrast with apartheid, which "constituted a systematic and deliberate denial of the humanity of black South Africans" (Gaylard 267). Mda uses the mass voice to spotlight the insidious nature of discrimination and sexual abuse in his 2002 novel, *The Madonna of Excelsior*. The "we" voice offers an alternative to male-centred histories and Europe-biased accounts, which tend to use third person narration.

Like the second person mode, the "we" form rests on ambiguity and dual meanings. Uri Margolin points out that "readers or overhearers may appropriate tokens of 'we' as applying to them even if they are not part of the initial or intended reference group" (242). As a member of the community, the reader is implicated in the situation. Commenting on Jeffrey Eugenides's *The Virgin Suicides*, Debra Shostak proposes that the "single but composite voice resists the distinctiveness of person, standpoint, ideological position, and personal interests" (810). Named characters are featured briefly, in isolation from the group, only to be absorbed back into the homogeneous mass. The risk of dehumanisation is balanced by the empowering nature of a cohesive perspective.

Margolin cites "collective prayers and hymns, such as those found in the book of Psalms or the prayer books of church and synagogue" as good examples of how people "utter jointly as one speaking entity" (243). He maintains that this action occurs where there is cooperation and "a joint commitment by members of the group to act as a body in order to achieve the shared goals" (Margolin 249). Christianity is as important to most black South Africans as the practice of *ubuntu*. Mtuze traces the foundations of the *ubuntu* doctrine to "a culture that regards life as a seamless garment that is so great and inclusive that there is no effective difference between the spiritual and the natural" (103).

For Lanser, the simultaneous collective voice seems most viable when those in the group "are a 'natural' community" (*Fictions* 261). She considers the movement to be "not only psychological but ideological, and it is the recognition of shared experience that forges the unity" (266). Many of the writers who

contributed to *Nobody ever said AIDS* admitted that the virus was a threat to the rights they had fought for in previous decades. They use similar expressions to those that were employed in the battle against apartheid, returning to "the language of struggle to confront both the pandemic and the inadequate response of local governments and the international community" (Rasebotsa 13). Sontag warns against using metaphors of warfare to describe diseases, arguing that military images contribute to "the stigmatizing of certain illnesses and, by extension, of those who are ill" (11). Nonetheless, first person plural narration sets up a contrast between "us" and "them", an idea which ties in with anti-apartheid rhetoric. Richardson notes the political uses of the technique, calling "we" narration "a vehicle for representations of intersubjective feminist, agrarian, revolutionary, and postcolonial consciousness" (x).

In *Ways of Dying*, the women sing while preparing food for a community meeting. The narrating voice slips into omniscience to describe them: "Their song is about the freedom that is surely coming tomorrow. They also sing about the enemy that will be defeated" (Mda *Ways* 159). In "The Parts", the "we" point of view reaches out to the reader. Attree stresses that AIDS is not an external threat in the African context but rather "an attack from within, from amongst ordinary people" ("Reshaping Communities" 67). As such, it is "our" problem in a tight-knit community.

Chapter 3

I am the self-conscious eye of the artist: The first person singular

Where the communal voice of "The Parts" is associated with solidarity and hospitality, the individual narrator stands in relative seclusion. Lily Blake's isolated perspective offers a contrast to the section that precedes it. She leads a self-absorbed existence in Grahamstown's predominantly white suburbia, cut off from the hardships that the majority of the town's residents endure. Rather than alleviating her separateness and insecurity, Lily's comfortable position of middle class privilege and material wealth is what puts her at risk. Domestic privacy is dangerous in a violent climate, especially for those who lack neighbourhood support structures. The solitary "I" reflects Lily's marginal status as a member of a minority group while accentuating her loneliness and vulnerability. No longer at ease in the place of her birth yet not wanting to be anywhere else, Lily speaks out of what Boehmer terms "a reality of social displacement or disintegration" (*Colonial* 122). She clings to outdated patterns and ways of being, unwilling to engage fully with what is going on around her. The first person, with its limitations on how much a character is able to know and share, seems suited to this restricted approach.

The clash between the past and the present is one of the conflicts that Krog explores in *A Change of Tongue*, her analysis of linguistic and cultural diversity in a nation undergoing intense transformation. Historically, pioneers were defined by what they possessed, an attitude that Krog's protagonist sums up as "I have land, therefore I am" (*Change* 76). Recalling a protest march through her hometown in the 1980s, she hints at the possibility of interracial unity. As the police presence becomes increasingly sinister, the narrator says: "We felt more and more thin, I more bleak, more pulsing, more alone in the cold sooty air blowing over the township" (Krog *Change* 114). The next paragraph brings a turnaround as she is bolstered by the group. "We linked arms. We stood arm in arm. Suddenly it was as if the whole landscape stopped breathing. Then we started walking.... after a few steps, we felt the power flowing through us. We marched, therefore we were" (Krog *Change* 114). The speaker moves from

isolation to inclusion, mirroring the progression from segregation to non-discrimination that the country makes with the abolishment of apartheid.

Krog shuffles back and forth between various points of view, though the first person is *A Change of Tongue*'s dominant mode. Contemporary accounts are set beside childhood recollections and these memories are juxtaposed with autobiographical snippets, for example. If the disjointed and seemingly haphazard structure replicates the confusion within South Africa at the turn of the century, it also highlights ambiguities within the central character. Narratives of the "I", as Nuttall remarks, "reach for the self in different ways: the self-disclosure that the first person singular implies may take place ... in relation to others ... or it may involve deciphering more closely what the self already is" (*Entanglement* 59). Krog's persona does both, yearning to be a part of the whole even as she grapples with her individuality. She admits that "Black-ness or African-ness ... is a way of looking at the world that neither I, nor the culture I grew up in, nor the books I have read are able to come up with" (Krog *Change* 259). However, she wants to belong and to be accepted for who she is.

In her study of the confessional mode in South African discourse, Susan VanZanten Gallagher cautions against a type of "narcissistic exposure", which serves "to elevate the self in isolation rather than to incorporate it in community" (xiv). This is linked to the ambivalence that Mary West detects in contemporary white women's writing in South Africa, where lingering assumptions of privilege undermine attempts at reconciliation. West describes *A Change of Tongue* as "searching in its negotiation of the complexities and paradoxes confronting white identities in relation to a newly acquired sense of unhomeliness in a space that was reserved exclusively for whites as home" (66). Like the migrants who experience the discomfort of Bhabha's third zone, the white people remaining in South Africa occupy the symbolic interstitial terrain between what was and what is yet to come. As West argues, many "choose to leave the country rather than forego the narratives that promote a sense of superiority and entitlement" and she adds that "those who have stayed are often guilty of an insularity that relieves them from actively seeking acceptance" (87). Hidden behind high fences, they appear reluctant to engage with those who are not in their social sphere, fearing attack or invasion.

When Krog's protagonist has a debate with two comrades about the normative or pervasive nature of whiteness, the discussion is "'not just ... about skin'"; it incorporates a certain "'mindset'", with "'exclusion'" listed as a defining characteristic (*Change* 274). This perceived elitism, whether it indicates neglect or omission of others, could be interpreted as a strong argument for using "I" to express a narrow outlook such as Lily's in "The Parts", rather than the inclusive "we". Nuttall couches her understanding of white South African identity in terms of privacy and singularity. She maintains that "such modes ... may account for why so many whites say they had nothing to do with apartheid, and why some can shield themselves so effectively from postapartheid South African society" ("Subjectivities" 132). Their detachment operates on the physical and the emotional levels. In Lily's case, it is illustrated by her short-sightedness, which functions as a type of metaphorical blindness. She suffers from what Adrienne Rich refers to as "white solipsism" or "tunnel-vision", for she is preoccupied with her own concerns and "simply does not see nonwhite experience or existence as precious or significant, unless in spasmodic, impotent guilt-reflexes" (306).

The notion of different races not perceiving each other is mentioned in the same conversation in Part Four of *A Change of Tongue*. Krog's "I" tells of being "uncomfortable" while attending the performance of a "blatantly anti-white" play (*Change* 273). She feels self-conscious about going into the foyer during the interval but is amazed at how she is ignored. "'The black people there, mainly young people, they didn't even *see* me. When I walked past them, they looked right through me. As if I didn't exist'" (Krog *Change* 273). This is reminiscent of the "distorted vision" that Gordimer addresses in "Living in the Interregnum", where she suggests that white people need to change their experiences from within, observing astutely that "we actually see blacks differently, which includes not seeing" (266). Her comment remains valid, although it was made in the early 1980s when the country was in a state of emergency. As Nuttall notes, "looking and watching are ... part of a racial scopophilia" ("Subjectivities" 123). With the freedom that accompanies desegregation, the process of gazing and not gazing operates in both directions.

For Stephen Clingman, divisions are unhelpful in the post-apartheid South African context. He stresses the need to get past the "simple binaries of fiction or

non-fiction", for instance, focussing instead on quality storytelling in what he dubs "the land of the fragmented I, not to mention eye" (55). If the homophone is apt, so is Clingman's reference to erasing the boundaries. Using English rather than her native Afrikaans to negotiate the terms of daily life in a fresh manner, Krog adapts to her altered situation. She takes her cue from the sole, perhaps punning on the soul and the solitary state of her "I". The flatfish is a creature that evolves to suit its environment, with one of its eyes migrating to the opposite side of its head. While the title of Krog's work evokes a switching of languages, it also alludes to the Afrikaans word, *tongvis*, which literally means "tongue fish". A. Polatinsky notes that this is a "rich symbol for the idea of transformations ... that result in new ways of being and seeing" (70). Krog forges her own style, resisting labels and easy classification.

"Isn't the splitting of the self into many selves precisely what makes it possible to permeate the borders of genres with authenticity – showing up the ludicrous notion of compartmentalised lives and art?" Krog asks, in the spirit of Bakhtin's dialogism ("'I, me, me, mine!'" 106). She draws on her multiple talents as poet, journalist, author and translator, bringing them together in the unique mesh of fact, fiction, prose and verse that is *A Change of Tongue*. What she fashions is a space where the political and the personal, the conventional and the creative, and the real and the imagined are able to coexist. Furthermore, she toys with point of view, morphing smoothly from "she" to "I" in a section that is called, fittingly, "A Translation". Kossew applauds "the increasing fluidity of identity that is resulting in the new subjectivities" being explored by contemporary white female writers in the postcolonial arena (*Writing Woman* 101). At the forefront of this group, Krog experiments on almost every level, clouding the categories and manipulating her narrative perspectives.

Fusing the elements integrates the persona into the larger realm of community. Krog contemplates dispensing with the divisions as a means of "underlining the embeddedness of the self in others" ("'I, me, me, mine!'" 106). In "A Journey", the central character of *A Change of Tongue* leaves South Africa and embarks on a 15-day Poetry Caravan. "Distance and isolation" are a given, as the destination is Timbuktu, which is "beyond the limits of experience" and "caught up in two dreams: the Western one and the African one" (*Change* 287).

Krog presents the entire segment in the third person, which disrupts the flow and disorientates the reader. At the same time, the jarring switch replicates the protagonist's discomfort and alienation. Richardson suggests that oscillating between points of view "can help a writer reproduce more accurately the jagged fissures within a single subjectivity", by collapsing "conventional distinctions", including those between "competing narrative worlds" (67). This is what Krog does as she tells the pivotal expedition tale.

It is as if she steps back and hovers over the group of ten delegates as they ply their mutual craft in foreign surroundings. Events and emotions are focalised through the nameless "she", who is worried about performing in Afrikaans. After uttering her lines, she is swept up in the dramatic interaction. "People are reacting in voice and dance and song" and she realises that "she will have to learn this change of tongue" (*Change* 294). Judith Lütge Coullie confirms that this is the "climactic turning point" of the protagonist's transformation for it brings the "dissolution of self" (5; 6). Towards the end of the adventure, the travelling wordsmiths achieve a tentative solidarity. When they are sick, they do not say anything about it. The narrator explains why: "It is our continent. Ours. And we take what it dishes up for us" (Krog *Change* 320). She has morphed from the singular to the plural. As in *Welcome to our Hillbrow* and *Ways of Dying*, illness is the unifying force in Africa.

The theme spills into the final part of *A Change of Tongue*, "An End", which begins with the communal voice. Krog's "I" is an eye among a party of five people who have been invited on a fact-finding mission with the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (*Change* 340). The poverty and pain she encounters in the Eastern Cape rattles her to the core. "What has happened to us?" she wonders, admitting that "I want to pluck someone from somewhere and shake them for answers" (Krog *Change* 354). Krog's writing becomes as raw and beautiful as it is confronting and rousing. It is a cry of outrage and a call to action. Describing the diseased and the dying, she employs personal testimony to devastating effect. As Shannon Hengen notes, a "kind of speech that witnesses has the power to turn, or to translate, private passion into public use" (2). This is advocacy journalism at its best.

Among her eight compelling reasons for using the first person form, Krog lists this: "To allow the reader to piggyback on the 'I' into the text" ("'I, me, me, mine!'" 103). She suggests that the intimacy of the mode encourages identification with the narrator. A passage in *Country of My Skull* sums up its impact. Krog interviews a young Tswana interpreter who finds it difficult to translate victim hearings "'because you use the first person all the time. I have no distance when I say "I"... it runs through me with I'" (Krog *Country* 129). The proximity that is signalled by the pronoun brings the reader closer to the action, thereby heightening the sense of participation in what is happening. As Margaret Lenta observes, first person narratives "have a serious purpose – that of ensuring that we know and respond to their protagonists as far as possible as we do to ourselves" ("*Autre*biography" 158). Where the tone is confessional, the reader may even be implicated in something that is disturbing or unpleasant, such as the collective memory of apartheid. In "The Parts", Lily is a beneficiary of South Africa's inhumane system and she retains traces of residual racism.

Jane Smiley proposes that the subjective realm depends on "the balance between the inner life and the outer life" (76). This is evident in Lily's interior monologue, which veers from a deep absorption in her thoughts to a running commentary about what unfolds around her. Her mind flits between the private musings of the "I" and the external distractions that are revealed to the myopic eye. The present tense creates immediacy. Krog favours it because it allows for "a lack of overall perspective" ("'I, me, me, mine!'" 104). Being near to an object alters how it is perceived. On an extended metaphorical level, what Lily sees is often out of focus. There is much that she fails to observe and her delicate paintings offer a watered-down version of reality. Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg probe the relationship between considerations of character and those of point of view in eyewitness accounts, noting the "ironic gap" that emerges with disparities in understanding (256). How Lily views herself is not the same as how the reader regards her in "The Parts". There is a tension between what she says and what she does.

When autobiographical details are thrown into the mix, the situation is complicated further. The other discrepancy that interests Scholes and Kellogg turns on the extent to which "the narrating character is differentiated from the

author" (256). It is important to decipher who is speaking, especially where the actual merges with the imagined. Atwood remarks that the writer as eyewitness implies the truth. However, she recognises stories that "exist in a realm that is neither fact nor fiction, but perhaps both: let us call it enhanced fact" (118). Transformative in terms of structure and content, *A Change of Tongue* inhabits such a space. Coullie categorises the work as "multi-modal – and partly fictionalised – life writing" (12). Hers is as good a definition of the slippery genre as any. Krog crosses the line between the autobiographical and the general, entering the terrain of faction or creative nonfiction, where the techniques of literature enhance the reporting style. The chameleon-like voice that she selects is in keeping with the blurred boundaries of her subject matter. Annel Pieterse specifies that "she draws no clear distinction between the real author, the narrator and the protagonist" (182). The overlap is part of Krog's message because "everything which has been transformed into language has already become fiction" (*Change* 362).

Lanser tackles the ontological ambiguity of the first person in "The 'I' of the Beholder", asserting that "the impossibility of linguistic distinction opens a seductive bridge across the structural chasm between a first-person narrator-character and the author of the text" (207). This is compounded in *A Change of Tongue*, as Krog wields her trademark "I" with disarming duplicity. In her acknowledgements, she states that those who "are really telling the change", among them her brothers and mother, "have taught me how the stories around one can lie the truth. Therefore many names and places have been changed – the 'I' is seldom me ... and so forth" (Krog *Change* 369). After encouraging the reader to assume that there is no disparity between her various first person configurations, the disclaimer comes as a shock. It is a stroke of genius, forcing a reassessment of all that Krog has written in her text and reinforcing that nothing is certain, especially in times of political transition.

Defending her practice, Krog cites "what Anne Sexton says: I use the personal when I am applying a mask to my face. 'I' means I can lie. Many of the things said by the 'I', I would never say" ("'I, me, me, mine!'" 104). Elaborating on the argument of a confessional poet confirms Krog's preoccupation with self. The first person mode is almost taboo in the media profession as it seems to be at

odds with the quest for objective truth. Anthea Garman observes how Krog is not averse to “breaching the constraints of journalism”, with its “strong prohibition on saying ‘I’” (181). Garman is referring to Krog’s radio coverage of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings, the content of which bleeds into *Country of My Skull*. Krog flips the regular approach on its head, finding honesty in grappling with the “I” in *A Change of Tongue*. While elements of the narrative are grounded in verifiable events, Krog changes names and details to protect innocent people. Playing with multiple perspectives, she interrogates the self, which is undecidable in the end. Krog is free to “forge a new ‘I’, another ‘I’” because the first person “allows many breathing spaces around the facts” (“‘I, me, me, mine!’” 103).

The final section focuses on the death of the protagonist’s father, bringing with it a subtle shift in point of view. As the coffin is lowered into the stony ground, Krog’s persona addresses her Pa: “We stand here forlornly, your children, lost in a landscape in which we so often feel we no longer belong.... You could not safeguard a place for us here. You left us bereft, unfamiliar with sharing” (Krog *Change* 364). The funeral symbolises the end of the old South Africa and all it represents (West 101). But it also offers a vision of a shared future as the farm labourers help to shovel soil into the grave. In “The Parts”, the white artist figure is associated with the era that has passed. Where Krog’s central character must adapt to a change of tongue, Lily needs to see clearly. She has to find her own vision in the country that is transforming around her.

Chapter 4

He is moving to the beat: Third person singular

Siyaya Songongo's segment of "The Parts", which is mediated through a nameless speaker, was written in the first person originally. The change to a detached point of view has brought many benefits, among them the chance for stylistic experimentation. While Siyaya remains the focaliser for this version of events, the distance between voice and vision has increased since the early drafts. Valerie Vogrin sums up the main advantage of the third person mode with her observation that "employing an 'outside' narrator allows the writer to craft the language in ways that may be implausible coming from the mouth of a first-person narrator" (86). Removing the restrictions of trying to imitate the speech patterns of a 19-year-old African male has opened up opportunities for innovation while maintaining authenticity and subjectivity.

With its emphasis on music as the metaphor for mood and motion, Vera's *Butterfly Burning* has been an inspiration, especially in the area of rhythm and rhyme. The mellifluous tone is established on the first page as the omniscient narrator plays with the aural aspects of what is described. After a "pause" which is an "expectation", there is a quick "refrain on handmade guitars" followed by an alliterative phrase: "Butterflies break from disused Raleigh bicycle bells" (Vera 3). The perspective flits to "the sound of a sickle cutting grass along the roadside where black men bend their backs in the sun and hum a tune, and fume, and lullaby" (Vera 3). Atmospheric images are carried on the cadence of the words and driven by the tempo of sentences that are often drenched in onomatopoeia and assonance.

Rhodesia, the southern African country that is now called Zimbabwe, provides the backdrop for Vera's compelling novel. *Butterfly Burning* is set in the late 1940s, two decades before the declaration of independence from British rule. It is a period when Bulawayo's black residents "walk in the city without encroaching on the pavements from which they are banned" (Vera 6). Oppressed by laws and with their mobility restricted, they manage to be unobtrusive and to

keep their heads low. They are forced to sweep and clean the very places where they are forbidden to linger. In such an environment, the yearning to transcend social barriers builds up inside them as their "bodies long for flight, not surrender" and they feel "the need to leap over the limit quickly and smoothly" (Vera 6-7). Tension mounts, with "humility and obedience" concealing the hostility and resentment that simmers beneath the surface (Vera 7). While the people do not wish to bend, they yield to the dominant culture. Colonialism's heavy weight holds them down.

Back in the township of Makokoba, where the main road, Sidojiwe E2, is "flooded with Kwela music", there is the release that accompanies "feet feeling free" (Vera 7). The narrator is aware that "a song is a respite" rather than an end in itself, with the "distinctions always unclear, the boundaries perpetually widening" (Vera 7). Music brings relief from the hardship of toil and the divides of racial discrimination but it is a temporary comfort. The "symphony of understanding" contains "other desperate confusions" (Vera 7). Furthermore, the music is a vehicle for pain as well as fleeting pleasures. According to Charles Pfukwa, kwela has its roots in the disruptive migrant labour system, which wrecked family structures by separating workers from their wives and children who remained in the rural areas. The men "sought solace in the illegal liquor stores called *shebeens*", listening to the poignant refrains played on simple instruments, such as the flute, guitar and improvised drums (Pfukwa 259). For them, kwela is a means of escape as well as a reminder of what they have lost or left behind. Nonetheless, they accept whatever solace it gives: "If not freedom then rhythm" will suffice (Vera 8).

Music takes centre stage in the opening section of *Butterfly Burning*, looming larger and more vibrant than any character. In contrast, the second chapter begins with a reference to the "voices of drowned men" which "cannot be heard", for they "die in whispers" (Vera 10). The narrator steps back in time, presenting the spectre of seventeen bodies, dangling from a tree, with lyrical beauty. Although they "seek flight, lighter than raindrops" and the "moon gives them a living light", they are still, except for movements caused by the stirrings of nature (Vera 10). The hanged ones are silent and symbolic. Robert Muponde identifies them as "anti-settler warriors", executed by the colonial authorities in

1896, adding that the passage "recalls Lewis Allan's poem on lynching in the American South" ("Roots/Routes" 20). Attree draws on Billie Holiday's memorable version of Allan's "Strange Fruit", which "evokes the blues" ("Language" 75). Fumbatha, the male protagonist of *Butterfly Burning*, is associated with all of these allusions, including the jazz legend's haunting song. The son of one of the "prisoners in a tree", his life started "where death and birth touch" (Vera 13).

Phephelaphi, Fumbatha's much younger lover, is drawn to the modern strains of kwela. Headstrong and spirited, she chooses "her own destination", visiting Deliwe's shebeen without Fumbatha's knowledge or consent, "the freedom spreading its wide wings" (Vera 63). Like a "white butterfly", dressed in her finest skirt with its stiff petticoat, she is "thrilled to be walking in the night on her own" (Vera 64). In these images, Phephelaphi's quest for independence is portrayed as a process of metamorphosis. She is becoming the beautiful yet fragile creature of the novel's title. The final portion of "The Parts" turns on a similar notion of evolution into another form of self.

Siyaya is in the liminal stage of the traditional Xhosa initiation ceremony. While he is no longer a boy, neither is he a mature adult. Rachel Slater recognises that: "To experience a rite of passage is ... to cross a boundary in order to understand belonging and to be transformed in some way that enables us to live in the world differently than before" (209). Becoming a man enables Siyaya to read the letter in Cikiswa's memory box and respond to its contents. His psychological transition is mirrored on the physical level as he walks from the familiar townships to the strange suburbs. The journey unfolds in a slow, rhythmic style, suggesting that Siyaya (or Siya) is propelled by a beat of his own: "He has to grope in the greyness, staggering towards the petrol station. It is taking forever to get closer, like a kind of damnation, this sense of moving yet reaching nowhere."

What transports Phephelaphi from one state to another is kwela, which emboldens and overwhelms her. Standing on the "precipice" that is the threshold of the door, "she feels not complete" (Vera 65). The music facilitates her transformation. As it "tears into the room she almost falls to the floor with agony" (Vera 66). She is mesmerised by "a hurricane of tender tones" and the "absolute

harmony" of "a mournful tune which has no beginning at all, just a presence which makes Phephelaphi feel she has heard this song before, that she has lived and breathed in it" (Vera 66). Kwela takes her back to a distant memory. As she "kneels down into the sound ... she is able to cross the distance it asks her to cross" (Vera 66). Her past is woven into the present. Literary critics, as Pfukwa argues, tend to underestimate the "artistic force of music" and neglect its role as a metaphor within society (251). Phephelaphi's defiant behaviour and search for autonomy gain resonance if regarded in the larger context of a colonised nation.

Just as Phephelaphi's tale is told in relation to kwela, Siyaya's section pays tribute to the brash thump of kwaito. The hip-hop-like genre, which emerged during South Africa's transition from apartheid nation to democracy, is both a product and a reflection of that exciting time. Where the focus of the struggle had been on ending discrimination, the post-1994 era was concerned with the recognition of autonomy. Kwaito, as Gibson Boloka remarks, breaks with tradition by repositioning the African male body, shifting the emphasis from political consciousness to physical freedom and recreation (99-100). The dismantling of the oppressive laws ensured the "right" of passage after several decades of legalised restrictions. Adding hints of rhyme to the third person point of view in the last section of "The Parts" is an attempt to illustrate the increased mobility of the country's citizens as well as the path forward into a better future. The practice is in keeping with the idea that the story is strengthened and enhanced when its form works in tandem with its content.

Music, in *Butterfly Burning*, performs diverse roles because it embraces multiple interpretations. Kwela "means to climb into the waiting police Jeeps" and it "has been fully adapted to do marvellous things. It can carry so much more than a word should be asked to carry; rejection, distaste, surrender, envy. And full desire" (Vera 6). Paradoxical and pliant, kwela incorporates resistance to the dictates of a foreign government while accommodating sexuality and complete surrender. Force is set against fear, pride against passion, and love against loss. The narrator says: "Kwela. Climb on. Move. Turn or twist or ... move. No pause is allowed, and no expectation of grace" (Vera 7). The sharpness of the abrupt commands is balanced with the soothing surprise of the melody. Kwela is

ambivalent and all-enfolding, synonymous with hurt and healing, "its curing harmony as sudden as it is sustained" (Vera 5).

Vera replicates the rhythms of music in her tale, creating the linguistic equivalent of kwela as she incorporates the details of the everyday into her structure. Attree examines how the ordinary is juxtaposed with "the transformative power of beauty" in *Butterfly Burning*, thereby achieving "an alternative, fluid and often ambiguous perspective on life, language and conflict" ("Language" 63). The lyrical images and verbal nuances appear to be at odds with the subject matter, prompting the reader to look beyond the obvious or to view the familiar in an altered manner. Attree holds that the technique's strength resides in the fusion of opposites, with "the private language of beauty and emotion, matched with the harsher social reality of prose" and thereby enhancing it ("Language" 64). Vera heightens this effect by switching her focus back and forth between Phephelaphi and Fumbatha. Crossing to and fro between their interior perspectives is "a way of attempting to actualize freedom" and "not dissimilar to the discursive rhythms of kwela" (Attree "Language" 69).

Using kwaito as the form for translating Siyaya's ideology onto the page has been difficult but rewarding. Gavin Steingo refers to it as "the soundtrack of liberation as well as other struggles still to be fought: poverty, crime, unemployment and HIV/AIDS" (345). The music of the ghettoes is loaded with ambivalence, for it is linked to the monotony of a world that has not really changed, even as it acknowledges the dream of rising above the situation. Bhekizizwe Peterson considers kwaito to be "an eloquent testimony of the agency of young blacks, especially their desires to create their own narratives and meanings in response to the harsh and hostile urban landscapes in which they find themselves" (197). However, the synthesised beat is slowed-down and sensual, encouraging dancing rather than serving as a call to action. Steingo alleges that kwaito "goes nowhere" because it relies on "rhythmical pounding without vision, without a future" (351). While it offers the illusion of freedom, the music is aimless, leading to a dead end.

As an extended metaphor, kwaito suits Siyaya's frustrated and circuitous trek across the town. Though he would like to run and reach his destination

without hindrance, haste is prohibited. Xhosa men who have been through the traditional rite of passage are expected to conduct themselves "with dignity and honour" (Mtuze 134). The goal in crafting Siyaya's section of "The Parts" has been to catch the essence of movement and then curtail it, largely by slipping rhyme into the text and disguising it as prose. Siyaya appears to advance, yet his motion is often arrested, symbolising the debilitating restrictions that endure in contemporary South Africa. He is suspended between states, wanting to get ahead but held back by the socio-economic legacies of apartheid.

Vera uses the image of the steam engine as a vehicle for unimpeded progression in *Butterfly Burning*. Its shrill whistle is a reminder of kwela and the narrator marvels: "Nothing has more music in it than trains" (Vera 51). People "simply leap on it without checking which way it is now heading", swept up in the noisy excitement (Vera 52). Once they reach the city, the passengers have nowhere to go, so they are condemned to stasis. The "most congested place is the railway station, with its waiting rooms" and the "obstacles" of bodies lying on the ground (Vera 54). For Muponde, the prone figures "speak of the potential to move, to seek destinations and horizons" even as they suggest "trapped mobility" ("Roots/Routes" 17). Siyaya experiences a similar condition of confined motion. He is in a state of limbo and the township imprisons him, ideas that are reiterated in many kwaito lyrics. Peterson identifies "entrapment and flight" as the genre's key recurring motifs (207). Music makes the mundane bearable. One night, Phephelaphi and Fumbatha "dance with a joy that is free, that has no other urgency but the sheer truth of living, the not-being-here of this here-place" (Vera 86). Kwela affords a temporary escape from their problems.

Phephelaphi yearns to be a nurse. What matters to her is not the profession itself "but the movement forward – the entrance into something new and untried" (Vera 71). Fumbatha forbids it. Phephelaphi "wonders if he can stop her" from pursuing her destiny (Vera 71). She refuses to give up her dream. Ranka Primorac points out that "movement is synonymous with resistance" in all of Vera's novels (161). For Phephelaphi, becoming a nurse heralds her personal transformation and "it made her breathless just to imagine being anything else other than what she was" (Vera 107). Two weeks after learning of her acceptance, Phephelaphi realises that she is pregnant and her career is at stake.

Both motion and defiance are often associated with music in *Butterfly Burning* and thus with the freedom it appears to promise. However, kwela is an ambiguous entity and it is associated with Deliwe's shebeen, which is frequented by men. Phephelaphi is "excluded from the world of male mobility that lends kwela its rhythm" (Samuelson "Yvonne Vera's Bulawayo" 27). When she sees the squalor and hopelessness of her surroundings "for the first time", Phephelaphi's feet lead her to the shebeen (Vera 101). There she mutters incoherently, "moving in circles", with "the drums beating in her head like a storm" (Vera 103). Words, music and motion fail her.

An eerie silence begins to permeate the last third of the book. Chapter 16 opens with abstract descriptions of what is not suspected and the absence of anything solid for support. The effect is of vertigo, the "type of weightlessness that comes with looking down a steep descent" which "alone would have helped with flight" or resolution (Vera 113). As the reader suspects what Phephelaphi is about to do, the point of view changes briefly to the second person: "You are on the ground with nothing to measure the distance", experiencing "the tremors of distrust or of a cruel inhalation" (Vera 114). The complicity makes for a terrible closeness as Phephelaphi prepares to abort the child within her. "Stark and perfectly still" are the thorns that "break boldly from every shrub", one of which is used as a long needle for "an irreversible harm" (Vera 114). The only noise is the "pounding of the heart, the solitary whisper" as Phephelaphi's "hand moves and beats in rapid motions", fluttering and desperate (Vera 114; 115). The narrator wavers between proximity and a fatalistic detachment: "From a distance, she is only a mark on the ground" (Vera 115).

Erik Falk proposes that Vera's shifting voice is linked to the "notion of becoming", a major theme in her novels, and he argues that "it represents an attempt to *be* the other" (258). The technique reaches an extreme in the penultimate chapter, which is written in the first person. Phephelaphi has discovered that she is pregnant again. She has "stopped moving" and she says: "Today I ... listen to all the silence in my bones. I hear something beautiful. I see myself die in a storm" (Vera 146). Dropping the mediating role gives Vera a way to dramatise Phephelaphi's intense feelings and perceptions, as Sisi Maqagi notes (132-133). The final section returns to the objective mode, infusing it with the

poetic. “Phephelaphi seeks her own refuge” and sets herself alight (Vera 148). Her metamorphosis assumes the guise of the burning butterfly: “She has wings. She can fly” (Vera 150).

Using kwela rhythms and images of beauty, Vera deals with taboos and confronting material. Her daring pays dividends. Pfukwa admires how she creates “a meta-language for the exploration of mental and spiritual space” while reclaiming the traditional storytelling practice of putting music at the centre of the tale (258). Morrison does something very similar in *Jazz*, where the narrator plays with points of view and riffs around the speech patterns of the different protagonists. As Ashleigh Harris demonstrates, Morrison and Vera present “black music ... as a form of resistance to dominant linguistic and literary codes” (7). The spirit of opposition, improvisation and liberation filters into Siyaya’s section of “The Parts”, with its rhythmic kwaito-speak. Sizwe Satyo dubs the style “a performer’s language” because it is “onomatopoeic, sound symbolic and pictorial” (101). The hints of music convey a sense of crossing from one state to another, evoking the transitions of both the new man and South Africa. While the emotional distance between the narrator and Siyaya fluctuates, the mood strives to be true to the essence of his character. The third person gives the impression of objectivity, lending credibility to Siyaya’s point of view. Having the last word endows his version of events with authority.

Conclusion

Not black and white: Reconciling the points of view

“The Parts” utilises competing discourses in a bid to catch and convey the contradictions of a divided nation. If the novel’s title alludes to its structure, it also brings to mind the roles that have been negotiated and renegotiated since the dramatic scrapping of racial segregation. Like actors onstage, the characters grapple with the social, political and psychological nuances of what they are experiencing in the world around them. They test out new identities, wondering where they belong. Graham observes correctly that “the whole history of colonization, modernization, and apartheid has served to rupture the connections between people and places in South Africa” (2). Brink’s *A Chain of Voices* presents the binary opposition of a land that is split between those who rule and those who serve. His masters and slaves are isolated from each other, bound by circumstances yet unable to communicate. With the passing of the decades, the dilemmas have altered but they are no less taxing, as Mda, Mpe and Krog show in their dialogic fiction.

Fragmentation, paradoxically and appropriately, is what holds *A Change of Tongue* together. Krog’s eclectic work reflects both the facets of multiculturalism and the semblance of unity in diversity. A snippet of garbled text, recovered from the protagonist’s damaged computer hard drive, encapsulates the confusion: “When I look around, %Imarvel é^+at how we battle to be normal – and no one knows how shattered we are inside.+=” (Krog *Change* 143). Like the random extracts that are retrieved from her media reports and articles as the motherboard is examined, the components of the whole have to be reassembled. The process mirrors what is going on around her as people strive to make sense of the transformation. “How does one reconstruct a society after conflict?” Krog asks (*Change* 144). As if in answer to her own query, she draws on various sources to fashion her mesh of perspectives and voices. What results is a comprehensive picture of a broken community, allowing for fracture as well as convergence and thereby promoting healing.

In his essay, “Memory, Metaphor, and the Triumph of Narrative”, Ndebele requests that “all the stories be told”, so that “the different features of our society will now emerge as aspects of a more complex definition of that environment” (27). As a journalist, Krog is adept at tracking down and assembling a medley of tales. She juxtaposes them in interesting ways, so that they engage in a stilted exchange of sorts. Bakhtin describes how heteroglossia “enters the novel in person (so to speak) and assumes material form within it in the images of speaking persons, or it determines, as a dialogizing background, the special resonance of novelistic discourse” (332). Incorporating the disparate tongues into a sequence that possesses logic, as Krog does, is no mean feat. Her translation depends on a range of registers for its jarring resonance. She complicates the polyphonic effect by fluctuating from one point of view to the next, switching her stance as she jumps from “you” to “I” to “she” and back again, throwing an occasional “we” into the mix. This seems fitting in a land that has eleven official languages.

Rick Altman argues that multiple-focus narratives “thrive on discontinuity, forcing characters and readers alike to devise novel methods of deriving meaning from apparently unrelated fragments” (243). This is very true. Krog facilitates interpretation by joining the six main parts of *A Change of Tongue* through a series of italicised sections. She explains these “pre-passages” as a means of imagining the self as the other (“‘I, me, me, mine!’ 104). Most of the poetic interludes are penned in the second person, which lends them a dreamy quality. Their subject matter is abstract or associative, ranging from the essence of rain and mist to a giraffe and a poverty-stricken black child. Krog plays with the relationship between the “you” and the “I”, recognising that they are co-dependent. In “River”, she states: “You should imagine yourself through me and I myself through you” (Krog *Change* 282). The images that comprise the pre-passage topics recur as a collective. In the pivotal Poetry Caravan episode, they are fused into a mythical lesson on how to “‘live with grace on the earth’” (Krog *Change* 321).

For Krog, reconciliation is achieved through interconnectedness, as “all things in the world are linked” (“‘*This thing called reconciliation...*’” 355). The idea leads into the importance of “creating a culture of ubuntu, humaneness,

medemenslikheid", words which evoke compassion and fellow feeling (Krog *Change* 157). Krog's persona defines the philosophy as the "most profound opposite of Apartheid" and "what humanity has lost" (*Change* 159). Using a hybrid structure, Krog engages with the conflicting voices, holding them up as a representation of the diversity of personhood. Democratic South Africa is known as the rainbow nation, in celebration of the assortment of skin colours. As with *ubuntu*, the post-1994 focus is on what is shared by the country's citizens rather than what distinguishes them. In her analysis of the new patterns of integration and cohabitation, Nuttall discerns what she terms entanglement or "human foldedness" (*Entanglement* 6). She affirms the validity of art that pays attention to the "intricate overlaps" between people, rather than their differences (Nuttall *Entanglement* 1).

This metaphorical common ground is reminiscent of Bhabha's liminal zone, which occurs "in-between the designations of identity" and thus promotes interaction (*Location* 4). Bhabha cites the architectural image of a stairwell as a symbol of connection between planes. His cultural theory transcends polarities and its ambivalence manifests as both/and thinking. In an interview with Jonathan Rutherford, Bhabha equates hybridity with "the 'Third Space', which enables other positions to emerge" (211). Multiple narratives operate in a similar manner, with meaning surfacing in the interstices as well as the obvious places. In "The Parts", the four distinct sections make sense when they are brought together. Thus a fifth point of view appears when the novel is considered in its entirety. Lanser stresses that the individual perspectives merge in sequential narration "to create the portrait of an identifiable group" (*Fictions* 264). She maintains that "voice not only constructs and controls narrative but also enacts more-or-less visibly 'a plot' of its own" (Lanser *Fictions* 277). This trend is evident in *A Chain of Voices* and *A Change of Tongue*, where the major themes of communication and its breakdown are replicated in the shape of the novels.

Dialogism, as summed up by Holquist, is "the general science of ordering parts into a whole" (28). How to arrange the points of view has been the overarching question in terms of the research component of the PhD novel. Because post-apartheid South Africa is forging an all-inclusive national identity, cutting back and forth between the perspectives would seem to be the logical

choice. As Krog proves, there are strong arguments for fusion, among them the dismantling of authority. In the early drafts of “The Parts”, then called “Double Vision”, the voices were spliced and the seeing was blurred. However, interracial barriers and gross inequalities continue to exist in the contemporary rainbow nation. The stand-alone versions of events attempt to illustrate the legacy of discrimination, highlighting the separation of the characters rather than their intermingling. At the same time, a reconciliation of the elements is vital if understanding is to be reached.

The reader of the multiple-focus text builds a composite picture from the details and clues that are provided. According to Altman, she or he searches for “the quintessential conceptual pattern that gives meaning to the entire narrative universe” (288). Looking at an incident from various angles is ideal for “lending depth, volume, and complexity, while contesting simplistic explanations of the event” (Altman 289). This is what many journalists do as they strive for balance in their reporting and Krog is among them. In *A Change of Tongue*, Coullie suggests, “there is no objective vantage point – and Krog wouldn’t want it, even if it were possible” (3). Instead, she aims for a collage of opinions and a synthesis of interpretations. Her “I” protagonist is well aware that point of view influences perspective. “No easy walk between perception and truth in this country” is what she says, putting away her notebook (Krog *Change* 27). She recognises that the convoluted South African situation demands thorough investigation to be rendered comprehensively.

Holquist spells out that “the impossibility of being neutral is one of the founding assumptions of dialogism” (x). The writer has an agenda, deciding what information to provide and what to withhold, as well as when to release it. Determining who says what has been a huge challenge, with experimentation at the heart of the PhD’s research methodology. Communication includes what is neither heard nor articulated. The quietness has yielded interesting messages too. Lanser mentions Caddy’s silence in *The Sound and the Fury*, elaborating on how it is incorporated into “the total ‘profile’ of point of view” that Faulkner displays (*Narrative Act* 43). This is relevant to “The Parts” where the relationship between Cikiswa and Charlie, for instance, is woven into what is rumoured or left unsaid.

During the apartheid era, love across the colour bar was hushed up because it was a crime.

The voices and perspectives play off each other in a manner that was not anticipated, adding to the effect of the novel as a whole. Bringing the divergent points of view together has a parallel in South Africa's social reconstitution. As Ingrid de Kok puts it, "permitting contradictory voices to be heard" is necessary "not in order to 'resolve' the turbulence, but to recompose it" (61). People are learning to live with each other and themselves in an ongoing process of acceptance and tolerance. As Krog shows in *A Change of Tongue*, the personal transformation is echoed in the nation's metamorphosis. The "you" of her opening pre-passage comes full circle with the last poetic segment. In "Wing", the narrator says: "I bend over your face. You open your eyes and I see myself for the first time. As you widen your eyes, you see yourself there, compellingly completed" (Krog *Change* 367). Redefining identity becomes a spiritual translation, in harmony with the natural realm. What Krog's speaker appreciates most about the altered country is the "interaction" and the "opening up of perspectives" (*Change* 257).

South Africa's political release has ushered in corresponding liberties, in art as in life. Rid of the dichotomies of apartheid, writers are as free to tackle what was once forbidden as they are to embrace the unexpected. Nuttall is among those who applaud "the fresh, experimental vantage" that has been expedited by the transition (*Entanglement* 37). The hard-won autonomy spills into all aspects of creativity. Richard Samin reinforces the importance of evolving "new modes of representation which provide discursive room for contradictory voices to exist" (88). In the context of "The Parts", the claustrophobic story of Siyaya and Lily has morphed into a broader novel, with geography and history factored into the equation. With its interconnected elements, the text aims to illustrate complications in plot and setting. Graham notes that the literature of the post-apartheid era contains "a sense of flexible, open-ended possibility and indeterminacy" (181). The points of view are reconciled in a tentative rather than a straightforward way, with issues left unresolved.

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