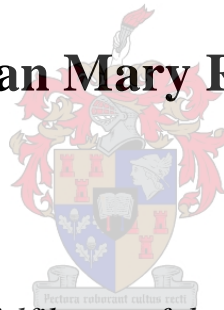


**A textual analysis of Jonny Steinberg's *The Number*:
Exploring narrative decisions**

by

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at

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Declaration

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the owner of the copyright thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated) and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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Date:

Gillian Rennie

November 2012

*For L,
and for things with feathers that perch*

Abstract

This study attempts to explore aspects of the textual representation of Magadien Wentzel, the main character of *The Number*, a work of literary journalism by Jonny Steinberg. It sets out to respond to the following two central research questions: Firstly, what narrative decisions does Jonny Steinberg make in the text of *The Number* to convey aspects of the reality he experienced in relation to his main character, Magadien Wentzel; and secondly, what effect do these decisions have on the reader? As literary journalism is a genre with fluid boundaries and therefore various definitions, the thesis first presents the challenge of definition and lays out a broad history of the genre in its attempt to situate *The Number* as a work of social documentary and of literary journalism in South Africa. Taking realism as its theoretical point of departure, this study aligns itself with the view that there exists an independent, extra-textual real-world and that knowledge of this real-world can be produced and shared. In doing so, realism presents itself as a literary form associated with art that cannot turn away from harsh aspects of human existence – a characteristic mirrored by Steinberg's (and thus his character's) major themes. By means of a textual analysis which seeks to interpret aspects of Steinberg's narrative decisions in his text, this study uses tools of literary realism, namely the empirical effect and the character effect, in its exploration. This research, conducted within the qualitative research paradigm, is informed in particular by the assumption that there exists an implicit communicative contract between author and reader which leads to narrative trust, seen as an indispensable quality to the non-fictional reading experience. In the case of Steinberg and *The Number*, this study finds that the writer's representation of a particular reality relies to an important degree on the level of trust he is able to inspire in a reader. This is pertinent because, being factual, non-fiction demands that a reader not only imagine a world other than their own, but that they believe it too. One of the ways in which Steinberg enables a reader to trust his representation of his particular reality is by overtly placing his literary and authorial concerns alongside his reportage of Magadien Wentzel, the main character of *The Number*. This distinctive narrative approach results in a modification of the reader's traditional contract with the writer, forged by the text between them, to one in which the text unites the reader with both Steinberg as narrator and Magadien Wentzel as character.

Opsomming

Hierdie studie poog om aspekte van die tekstuele voorstelling van Magadien Wentzel, die hoofkarakter in *The Number*, 'n werk van literêre joernalistiek deur Jonny Steinberg, te verken. Dit probeer om die volgende twee sentrale navorsingsvrae te beantwoord: Eerstens, watter narratiewe besluite neem Jonny Steinberg in die teks van *The Number* om aspekte van die werklikheid wat hy ervaar het met betrekking tot sy hoofkarakter, Magadien Wentzel, oor te dra, en tweedens, watter effek het dit op die leser? Aangesien literêre joernalistiek 'n genre is met vloeibare grense en daarom verskeie definisies, probeer die tesis eerstens die uitdaging van definisie te beantwoord. Daarmee lê dit ook 'n breë basis van die geskiedenis van die genre in sy poging om *The Number* te situeer as 'n sosiale dokumentêr en as literêre joernalistiek in Suid-Afrika. Met realisme as teoretiese vertrekpunt, vereenselwig hierdie studie hom daarmee dat 'n onafhanklike, ekstra-tekstuele regte wêreld bestaan, en dat kennis van dié “regte wêreld” geskep en gedeel kan word. So representeer realisme hom as 'n literêre vorm wat verband hou met die kunste, en wat sigself nie kan afwend van die harde aspekte van die menslike bestaan nie – 'n kenmerk wat deur Steinberg se hooftemas – en daarom ook dié van sy hoofkarakter – weerspieël word. Deur middel van 'n tekstuele analise wat poog om aspekte van Steinberg se narratiewe besluite in sy teks te interpreteer, gebruik hierdie studie aspekte van literêre realisme, naamlik die empiriese effek en die karakter-effek, in sy ondersoek. Hierdie navorsing, wat binne die kwalitatiewe navorsingsparadigma uitgevoer is, is veral geïnformeer deur die aanname dat daar 'n implisiete kommunikatiewe kontrak tussen die skrywer en die leser bestaan wat lei tot narratiewe vertroue, gesien as 'n onmisbare element van die nie-fiksie-leeservaring. In die geval van Steinberg en *The Number* het hierdie studie bevind dat die skrywer se voorstelling van 'n bepaalde werklikheid tot 'n belangrike mate berus op die vlak van vertroue wat hy by die leser genereer. Dit is belangrik, want synde feitelik, vereis nie-fiksie dat 'n leser nie net 'n wêreld anders as hul eie voorstel nie, maar dat hulle ook daarin kan glo. Een van die maniere waarop Steinberg 'n leser in staat stel om sy voorstelling van sy besondere werklikheid te vertrou, is deur die plasing van sy literêre en outeursbesorgdheid direk langs sy reportage van Magadien Wentzel, die hoofkarakter in *The Number*. Hierdie unieke narratiewe aanslag het 'n modifikasie van die leser se tradisionele kontrak met die skrywer tot gevolg, 'n kontrak wat gewoonlik deur die teks tussen hulle gesmee is, en wat

verander in een waarin die teks die leser met beide Steinberg as verteller en Magadien Wentzel as karakter verenig het.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

True to type?

Truth is in the details of real lives.

– Mark Kramer (1995: n.p.)

1.1 Introduction

This chapter, the first of seven, introduces the research problem which gives rise to this study. The chapter introduces the research project by touching on the significance of literary journalism as a field of academic enquiry, including the value of the genre's history. The problem of defining a genre that goes by multiple names is also introduced. The chapter then highlights the centrality of narrative to the human endeavour and thus to the journalism which aims to convey truths related to that endeavour. Intrinsic to such truth-telling is the complex matter of reality or, as analysts such as Shields (2010: 4) put it, “reality”.

The ways in which reality problematizes story-telling and therefore truth-telling lead this study to investigate realism as an appropriate theoretical point of departure. The specific research activity which forms the basis of this study is a textual analysis of a literary journalism work by Jonny Steinberg,¹ a leading South African author in this genre. The text to be analysed is his second book, *The Number*, which presents a main character in ways which, this study posits, offer scope to explore narrative representations of reality. Therefore, posed as a two-sided research question, the problem explored by this study is: What narrative decisions does Jonny Steinberg make in the text of *The Number* to convey aspects of the reality he experienced in relation to his main character, Magadien Wentzel and what effect do these decisions produce in the reader? These questions are explored by means of a textual analysis conducted within a qualitative research paradigm.

¹ Jonny Steinberg is a South African writer, journalist and researcher who has published several book-length works of literary journalism. After *Midlands* (2002) and *The Number* (2004), his books include *Three-Letter Plague* (2008) and *Little Liberia* (2011). He also publishes monographs and research papers for institutions such as the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, and contributes columns and analyses to various newspapers. He has twice won the Sunday Times Alan Paton Award for Non-Fiction, and has been short-listed a third time.

1.1.1 Synopsis of the Steinberg text

In 2002, author Jonny Steinberg spent two weeks at Cape Town's Pollsmoor Prison researching an article he wrote for *Colors* magazine. In that fortnight, he discovered that gang life "inside" closely resembled gang culture outside the prison and that an eccentric and intriguing response to apartheid's demise was being played out in the prisons (Steinberg, 2004: xviii). Steinberg set out to write a serious history of South African lawbreaking in an attempt to understand – and thus, this thesis posits, to help readers understand – why generations of young black men lived violent lives under apartheid, and why generations more will live violently under democracy (Steinberg, 2004: xx). To do this, *The Number* takes the form of a single life story, that of a prisoner named Magadien Wentzel.

However, at the time of their first meeting, he is introduced to Steinberg as William Steenkamp. By the time of their first meeting, Steinberg is already familiar with the history and mythology of the prison gangs known as "numbers". The 26s, 27s and 28s originated from bands of outlaws that operated in Johannesburg around the turn of the 20th century. The most prominent of these gangs was called the Ninevites, led by Nongoloza Mathebula, and pivotal in contemporary gang culture. It is in this culture that Steenkamp/Wentzel was steeped, and it is this culture – part mythological, part historical, greatly wishful – that shaped the man who quickly becomes the focus of Steinberg's book and thus the lens through which Steinberg's story is told.

Steenkamp/Wentzel, who has served five or six prison sentences each under a different name, tells Steinberg his multiple names are rooted in an early life that features a Muslim mother (Wentzel), a Christian foster-mother, and a Christian father whose name he does not bear. Desperate for his own (true) identity, Steenkamp/Wentzel declares to Steinberg his wish for a "proper life" (Steinberg, 2004: 31) once he leaves Pollsmoor. *The Number* charts the zigzag journey taken by these two men – white journalist and coloured gangster – led by story and by memory as Steinberg, Wentzel's proxy, seeks the pieces of that identity until the prison sentence is over and Wentzel can complete the task himself.

1.2 Background to the study: Origin and contexts for the research

This thesis explores the narrative representation of a character in the second of literary journalist Jonny Steinberg's books, *The Number*, which was published 10 years after the inception of South Africa's democracy, in 2004. This timing is relevant as crime (the focus of Steinberg's text) had become by then something of an unexpected outcome of the decades-long struggle for freedom. According to Schönteich and Louw (2001: n.p.), expectations that violent crime would decrease after 1994 have not materialised (see also Gastrow, 1999; Harris, 2003). *The Number's* lucid illumination of one aspect of crime came, then, at a time when South Africans were trying to make sense of their changing society and Steinberg's book offered a potential key to such understanding. To contextualise this assertion, consider the view of Hartsock (2009: 5) that literary journalism is possessed of “the capacity to prompt us imaginatively to consider and negotiate different possibilities of meaning”. The contribution of literary journalism to social insight is a topic discussed further in Chapters 2 and 3.

Although *The Number*, being ambitious and expansive in its own scope, offers considerable opportunity for academic exploration, the limitations of this study demand a somewhat narrower focus. To this end, this research sets out to explore the narrative representation of Steinberg's main character, Magadien Wentzel, as a way of understanding narrational choices made by a literary journalist who attempts to represent a “reality”. That is, reality as he experienced it, or, in the words of Sims (2009: 12) who refers to literary journalists collectively, “a perspective on the world as they find it”. For, as Steinberg himself puts it: “What I know best about him [Magadien Wentzel] is what I experience of him, and that is the relationship he develops with *me*” (in Lehman, 2010: 32; author's italics).

In 1937 journalism historian Edwin Ford (Hartsock, 2000: 241) opined that literary journalism may no longer be in that “twilight zone that divides literature from journalism”. Yet, for decades after this statement, and as recently as the turn of the century, it was widely held that a contemporary body of work was going largely unexamined by the academy (Hartsock, 2000: 2). The author, expanding on this assertion, goes on to say that academic examination of literary journalism is an exercise in frustration as there is only limited scholarship on the form, and even less that specifically historicises it as a literary form. He was continuing a lengthy refrain:

Connery (1994: n.p.) had already claimed that the boundaries of literary journalism remain imprecise and is consequently somewhat of an academic orphan with no clear ancestry or home. More recently, and in South Africa, it is held that the study of narrative journalism in this country is still relatively unresolved and fragmented (Mulgrew, 2011: 49). Taking these assertions as a provocation to explore rather than as an invitation to mourn, this study sets out to situate *The Number* in its South African context as well as within a global context of literary journalism. The study also investigates the matter of definition before attempting to analyse Steinberg's text with a view to making sense of the way Steinberg makes sense of Magadien Wentzel, his life as a gangster, and his life as a South African. The purpose of this research is thus to explore how a literary journalist's narrative choices, as constructed by Jonny Steinberg in the text of *The Number*, contribute to readers' understandings of a reality they do not or cannot know – but which they seek to know as a result of reading this text. This, then, would live out the view of Heyne (1987: 489) that we are students of human constructions shaped by human purposes.

Some of the terms used to label the genre under discussion include “literary journalism”, “narrative non-fiction”, “longform journalism” and “creative non-fiction”.² For the purposes of this study, the term “literary journalism” is used, a choice explained and substantiated in the following chapter. The motive for focusing on representation of a narrator is rooted, to a large extent, in the words of Clark (2006: n.p.):

When we write stories, rather than reports, *Who* becomes *character*. *What* becomes *action set in time*. *Where* becomes *setting*. *When* becomes *chronology*, or time unraveled. *Why* becomes *motive*. *How* becomes *narrative* – how things happened. All these changes happen, and the role of the narrator becomes much more important [author's italics].

The motive lies also in the words of a prominent South African literary journalist: Telling a story about the truth, claims Krog (in Brown & Krog, 2011: 18), is a complicated business.

² In accordance with the *South African Concise Oxford Dictionary* (2002), this thesis uses the hyphenated spelling of the term, “non-fiction”. However, where direct quotes are taken from authors who use the single-word spelling, “nonfiction”, this thesis represents such spelling accordingly.

Finally, this study turns to a Steinberg text because he is, in the words of Mulgrew (2011: 25) “undeniably the current heavyweight of South African non-fiction....one of the country's most prolific, visible and successful writers of any genre and of any format”. Likewise, Lehman (2010: 31-32) places Steinberg “out on the frontier as a nonfiction writer” on account of the writer's “habit” of counting the costs of his relationship with the subjects who become his characters. It is this relationship which, in the case of *The Number*, sits close by the book's narrative heart that is the focus of this study.

1.3 Significance of the study

Why does narrative – and therefore literary journalism – matter? Answering this question points to the significance of this study. One lucid response comes from Schiffrin and De Fina (2010: 1):

Narratives are fundamental to our lives. We dream, plan, complain, endorse, entertain, teach, learn, and reminisce by telling stories. They provide hopes, enhance or mitigate disappointments, challenge or support moral order, and test out theories of the world at both personal and communal levels.

A second response, from Lehman (1997), elucidates the “deep stakes” of the reader in a text, and underscores this study's exploration of how an author's narratival decisions might influence a reader's apprehension of a reality:

The production and consumption of [such] nonfictional narratives...is a site of both artistic and social engagement, an engagement that contests the manner by which we apprehend and communicate experiences (Lehman, 1997: 3).

Further on, the author continues:

...an implicated reading of nonfiction over the edge of history is served by an active contest of readings and referentiality the way that writers of nonfiction implicate themselves within the text, how their narrative presence reveals the ideology of their projects (Lehman, 1997: 38).

As previously indicated, much of this study is rooted in Lehman's position. It could

then be said that we all are implicated in a text. To explore this hypothesis, this research turns to *The Number*, the text Twidle (2012a: 10) refers to as Steinberg's prison ethnography. Twidle (2012a: 21) goes on to point out that the work of Jonny Steinberg is "a highly readable but unadorned and largely informational prose...honed to deliver large amounts of contextual data as economically as possible". While this may be deemed an accurate assessment of Steinberg's prose, it fails to encompass the possibility that Steinberg also delivers highly readable cultural and narrational data, both of which are essential to a reader's apprehension of the author's experience of Pollsmoor Prison. In other words, how does Steinberg tell the reader about Magadien Wentzel, his main character? Twidle (2012a: 21), calling this "the immense work of cultural translation" writes that

...to read *The Number*...is to be exposed to a torrent of new information previously held in trust – about prison communities... – and also to be faced with an array of difficult questions about the politics of such knowledge: how it is gained and how it should be used.

Insight into how a literary journalist conveys such knowledge has the potential to offer insight into the politics of such knowledge. In a field of academic endeavour that is relatively under-explored, and using a theory that has been recently under-valued, this research strives to contribute to scholarly conversations about literary journalism's definitions, and some of its pertinent narrative concerns in a complex social context. In addition, it sees itself as a partial response to the "need", articulated by Sims (2009: 9), for an international scholarship that recognises there are different national manifestations of the genre.

Finally, as mentioned previously, Connery (1994) is one of a generation of commentators of the view that mass interest [in literary journalism] for the most part is absent. This is not so in South Africa: as figures presented in Chapter 3 illustrate, publishers' lists of literary journalism titles grow. Connery also asserts that within academic circles literary journalism is seldom considered legitimate material for scholarly consideration, and that when scholars submit literary journalistic research for publication or presentation, it is unlikely that truly knowledgeable referees will be assessing the work. This, too, is changing. *Literary Journalism Studies*, a peer-reviewed journal sponsored by the International Association for Literary Journalism

Studies, is one output from this burgeoning field which also yields books and papers documenting its scholarship. While it may be the sole journal solely devoted to literary journalism, the journals of complementary disciplines do publish articles and/or editions focusing on the genre (*Safundi's* special edition is referenced comprehensively throughout this study, for instance). The literature review of this study aims to portray this academic landscape and, more broadly, to contribute to its growing body of scholarship.

1.4 Objectives of the study

As mentioned above, literary journalism scholars and historians have asserted in recent decades that the genre has been largely disregarded by the academy. However, there is also evidence that the genre has not gone entirely unnoticed. It is therefore important that this study acknowledge such attention. Internationally – chiefly in North America – literary journalism has been the focus of some academic enquiry (see Fishwick, 1975; Hartsock, 2000; Sims, 2007). Arguably, such attention intensified from the 1960s when “new journalism”, originating in America, ostensibly changed the way non-fiction stories could be told. Critical attention, on the other hand, can be said to date back to the dawn of this genre which, according to at least one scholar, broke in ancient Greece (Hartsock, 2000: 117), or with St Paul in the first century of the Common Era (Fishwick, 1975: 2), or with Daniel Defoe in 1722 (Carlean, 1988: 110).³ South Africa, meanwhile, has remained outside these endeavours, not only geographically and historically but, until recently, critically. As Chapter 2 proposes, the genre has been present in South Africa for some time. It is only relatively recently, however, that its proliferation has become pronounced, a circumstance which finds its explanation in the times-of-turbulent-change view which is advanced in the same chapter. Because the increased volume of literary journalism is a comparatively recent phenomenon, academic examination of literary journalism is also a comparatively recent endeavour and appears, as a result, to be still nascent in South Africa. Despite one scholastic pioneer (Carlean, 1988) whose study was on non-fiction works of American origin, it is only in the past short while (Mulgrew, 2011; Scott, 2012;

³ Some analysts (for instance, Wolfe, 1973: 42; Shields, 2010: 13) dismiss Daniel Defoe's *Journal of a Plague Year* as less than factual. The matter of whether art is a more efficient marker of truth than reportage lies beyond the scope of this study. However, its relevance to literary journalism and the genre's representation of “reality” is discussed by many of the sources referenced in this study (for instance, Brown & Krog, 2011; Barnard, 2012).

Twidle, 2012a) that the genre has begun to attract academic attention locally. This research strives to expand this focus.

1.4.1. Theoretical point of departure

In considering the role of theory in framing the research approach of this study, Iser (2006: 4-7) offers clarifying insight. Theory as an intellectual tool, he states, is an attempt at mapping, an activity which strives to discern something. This is in line with the humanities, the primary concern of which is to achieve understanding. In seeking a philosophical frame of reference, this proposal considers those outlined by Fourie (2001: 237-253) and, in doing so, arrives at the conclusion that it is critical theory which offers the most appropriate paradigm for this study.

In locating an appropriate theoretical point of departure, Iser (2006: 6) once more proves instructive, by saying that it is due to changing interests and fashions that certain theories at times dominate their “rivals”, while others move out of orbit. As Chapter 4 demonstrates, this study finds realism to be the most fitting paradigm for its exploration of a narrational representation of an author's reality. As Morris (2003: 2) states, the terms “realism” and “realist” inhabit both the realm of everyday usage and the more specialist aesthetic realm of literary usage. This study posits that Morris's position accords with the position of literary journalism, a genre which fulfils its authors' dual aims of representing “reality” via a literary aesthetic. Particularly salient is the fact that realism as a term is entangled with other words central to journalistic concerns: factuality, truth, reality (Morris, 2003: 2). Comments from Fourie (2001: 236) also guide the selection of realism as a theoretical framework which meets all five requirements (scope, testability, parsimony, utility and heuristic) for a theory to effectively describe and explain a phenomenon.

Regarding this study's focus on Steinberg and his representation of his main character in *The Number*, it is worth listening to Lehman (1997: 42):

We might examine specifically the author's positioning vis-à-vis the subject, not only what the author *acknowledges* (the intention) but also what the author *reveals* and thus communicates through cultural signs in the production and exchange of meaning. The emphasis in these sorts of readings is on the relationship of the writer to his subject and to his reader within a

literary and social text [author's italics].

Taking Lehman's viewpoint as foundational, this study aims to examine Steinberg's positioning vis-à-vis his subject as represented by Magadien. A textual analysis of aspects of *The Number* aims to begin to uncover what its author reveals in relation to Magadien and to the reader. The following section of this chapter returns to this aspect of the research. Before doing so, however, it is important to note that the scope of this study limits its reach: excavating *The Number's* literary context, social context, cultural signs, production, and exchange of meaning demands levels of extensive research lying beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, the integral nature of these aspects with the focus of this project means that they hover always on its periphery and, when appropriate, are directly addressed. For instance, the social context of crime, and the genre's literary context in relation to publishing, are both outlined in Chapter 3.

1.4.2 Research design and methodology

Analysts and theorists of literary journalism (for instance Carlean, 1988; Connery, 1994) broadly agree that work in this genre is an expression of community, that readers enter a narrative with the narrator, either as participant or as observer. In this way, literary journalism offers a system of meaning, an interpretation of reality. As Connery puts it, literary journalism tells us who we are. This study, then, aims to offer a view of *how* we understand who we are by locating some of the ways in which Steinberg, as author/narrator, enables the sort of understanding Carlean (1988: 117) refers to when he claims that, for literary journalism, a greater understanding of reality through the consciousness of the author is always the dominant end.

To explore the reality presented/represented in *The Number* through Steinberg's consciousness, this study sets out to analyse the text which lies between writer and reader. In accordance with Lehman (1997: 43), such endeavour will pay close attention to the author's word use and scene construction with a view to measuring not only what the author *crafts* but also what the author *reveals* [Lehman's italics]. Allied to this exercise are the "artistic means" Morris (2003: 101) offers as useful tools to discern meaning. These are returned to briefly at the end of this section of the chapter, and explored more fully in Chapters 4 and 6.

Taking into consideration the relative strengths and capacities of the quantitative and qualitative research paradigms in conjunction with the exploratory nature of the research problem giving rise to this study, it becomes clear that qualitative methodology will best serve the aim of the research under discussion. Chapter 5 presents a fuller discussion of this aspect of the study's research design, which assumes a position in line with Babbie and Mouton (2008: 53) that the goal of research is defined as describing and understanding (*Verstehen*) rather than the explanation and prediction of human behaviour, and that the term “qualitative research paradigm” refers to that generic research approach which most facilitates this. Although verification lies beyond the reach of qualitative methodology, this adopts the view of Lemon (1995: 29, 30) that this inherent characteristic is accommodated within the contextual and circular process that is characteristic of social research.

Regarding textual analysis as the most appropriate research tool with which to explore the research question under discussion, this study turns to McKee (2003: 4) who writes that “a text is something we make meaning from”. This is reiterated by Ifversen (2003: 68) who states that texts are “linguistic representations of reality”. Given this collective position, textual analysis can be seen to offer a useful tool to glean what McKee (2003: 1) terms “an educated guess” into what interpretations might be made of that text. We interpret texts, the author continues, to “try and obtain a sense of the ways in which...people make sense of the world around them”. With these words, McKee returns this study to the position Connery (1994) expounds at the start of this section.

This section of Chapter 1 concludes by following the prompts presented by Babbie and Mouton (2008: 75-79) which can be likened to navigating with the aid of a map, prompting this study to plot its research design route thus: an empirical study which aims to explore narrative representation of one character by analysing existing data (*The Number* by Jonny Steinberg) by means of textual analysis. This methodology, and the implications it introduces to this study as a consequence of its qualitative paradigm, are explored more fully in Chapter 5. For the purposes of this introductory discussion, two research questions can therefore be formulated as: What narrative decisions does Jonny Steinberg make in the text of *The Number* to convey aspects of

the reality he experienced in relation to his main character, Magadien Wentzel, and what is their effect on the reader?

1.4.3 A final consideration

Implicit within the research question at the heart of this study is the matter of sense-making by both writer and reader, an aspect of literary and also of journalistic endeavour which ineluctably places writer and reader in relationship with each other. Thus, in tandem with the research aim set out above, this study also explores ways in which Steinberg makes sense of his reporting experience with respect to Magadien, and ways in which readers of *The Number* might make sense of that experience. This is conducted by means of two of the three “artistic means” presented by Morris (2003: 101) as ways in which literary realism authenticates itself. As a work in the post-structuralist mode, this study sees the role of the reader as pivotal to the construction of meaning from polysemy, i.e. the potentially multiple meanings offered by the text. The exploratory nature of qualitative research as a methodology and textual analysis as a tool accommodates this study's quest for increased understanding rather than verifiably finite answers.

1.5 Thesis outline

Following this opening chapter, which aims to contextualise the topic of this thesis, discuss its relevance, and frame its research problem, this study has six further chapters. The history of literary journalism in both North America (as the putative original home of this genre) and South Africa is presented in **Chapter 2**, as well as a discussion of the difficulties associated with definition. **Chapter 3** presents a survey of literature pertaining to the focus of this study. As this study's research problem focuses on authorial choices regarding representation of a reality (in this case, Jonny Steinberg's narrational choices regarding his main character in *The Number*), the literature surveyed focuses on three main topics: literary journalism, narrative, and reality/realism. **Chapter 4** presents a discussion of relevant theoretical considerations before presenting realism as the theoretical framework best suited to this study. In **Chapter 5**, this study's research methodology and design are explicated in the course of a discussion of textual analysis as a qualitative research methodology most suited to the aims of this exploration. The research findings are presented in **Chapter 6**.

Finally, in **Chapter 7**, this thesis concludes its presentation of, and response to, the research problem introduced in Chapter 1. In doing so, the final chapter also points to avenues for further research. An index of references appears beyond the concluding chapter and closes this document.

1.6 Summary

This chapter seeks to clarify the context and motivation of the study which unfolds in the following chapters. In locating literary journalism as its field of exploration, this chapter draws attention to the importance of definition and to the genre's history. It also highlights the centrality of narrative to the human project and thus to journalism, points which therefore make aspects of narrative central to this study. Because this work is a journalism study, the complex matter of reality is introduced. Considerations of reality lead this study to realism as a theoretical framework within which to conduct its qualitative research exploration. To conclude this chapter, this study's research problem is once more framed succinctly as two questions: What narrative decisions does Jonny Steinberg make in the text of *The Number* to convey aspects of the reality he experienced in relation to his main character, Magadien Wentzel, and what effect do these decisions have on the reader? The following chapter begins this study's exploration of these questions with an investigation of definition and an overview of the genre's history.

Chapter 2:

The definition and history of a nebulous genre

The twilight zone that divides literature from journalism.

– Edwin Ford (in Connery, 1994: n.p.)

2.1 Introduction

While no one can decide what name to give this style of writing (Green, 2010: 2), everyone agrees that defining it presents problems (see, for instance, Weber, 1980: 1; Sims, 2007: 6; Sims, 2008: xvii). Before offering a concise history of a journalistic form which goes by many names, this chapter discusses the problem of defining a genre with slippery boundaries and then presents a rationale for the term “literary journalism” which this study will hereafter employ. In addition to this term, among the many labels attached to this genre are: the art of fact, the literature of reality, the chronicler of culture (Chance & McKeen, 2001: vii, ix). Other terms frequently used include: reportage, creative non-fiction, literary journalism, narrative journalism, and narrative non-fiction. Terms less often used but nevertheless valid include: life writing, longform journalism, literary reportage, non-fiction with a literary purpose, art-journalism, and journalit.

2.2 Defining a few essential terms

It is important for a piece of research to delineate its field so that focus is clear and parameters are set. This section of the chapter defines four terms pivotal to the way this study intends to explicate its research. These terms are: text, non-fiction, narrative, and a selection of terms frequently seen as interchangeable.

2.2.1 Text

For the purposes of analysing aspects of Steinberg's narrative choices, this study adopts the broad definition presented by Franklin, Hamer, Hanna, Kinsey, and Richardson (2005: 264). Text, they state, is the record of a communicative event and bears two characteristics. Firstly, the events need to be recorded or recordable and, secondly, they must communicate, i.e. they must generate and exchange meanings – however open-ended these meanings. In the case of Steinberg's work at Pollsmoor

Prison, events that took place there fulfil both these characteristics. Indeed, it is precisely such meanings that this study aims to explore. The fact that such meanings are open-ended is particularly pertinent to introduce at this point (but will be expanded upon in Chapter 4) because this immediately implicates the reader as meaning-maker, a notion central to this study. Or, as Frus (in Lehman, 1997: 195) has it, the text as read is constantly being produced by the interaction between reader and text, and by the resistance of each.

2.2.2 Non-fiction, and non-fiction as a genre

Genre, according to Rabinowitz (in Lehman, 1997: 16), is best understood not as a group of texts that share textual features, but, rather, as a collection of texts that appear to invite similar interpretive strategies. Alluding immediately to the role of the reader in this way not only augments preceding comments but also highlights the absence of specifically definable parameters which characterises this terrain. In addition to an embrace of writing which makes its meanings at the unstable fault line of the literary and journalistic (Brown & Krog, 2011: 1),

the decision by either the author or the publisher to term a product “nonfiction”...remains an important key to how it is written and read and is much more socially constructed and negotiated by both author and reader than derived by some empirical standard of truth (Lehman, 1997: 7).

Nonfiction narratives normally are born and marketed as mass mediations and thus are produced and read as reportage: representations of public knowledge and history, writes Lehman (1997: 36). Yet, the problem of twentieth century non-fictional reportage is that it frequently plays across the boundary of fact and fiction. So, as we rely less and less on empiricism, intentional and cognitive standards become the two efforts with which we aim to maintain a clear division between fact and fiction. One of non-fiction's “special powers” (Lehman, 1997: 19) is the way it makes the reader an important partner in the negotiation of truth. Ultimately, this study concurs with Lehman (1997: 23) that

...fact-based narratives can affect and challenge actual human beings through the process of representing the history of material human bodies

and that

...for most forms of nonfiction, the trio of author, text, and reader...must be expanded to admit a fourth player: the actual living or lived beings that make up the subjects of nonfictional narrative (Lehman, 1997: 23).

It is this position which informs the research question of this study. Establishing the extent of fact in *The Number* lies outside the scope of this study and mentioning the fluid boundary between fact and fiction in no way imputes that Steinberg may have flexed that boundary. I have raised the matter simply to indicate how contested is this terrain as a genre (see, for instance, Heyne, 1987), and how permeable are its attempted definitions. For the purposes of this study, Lehman's position above is pertinent: that a reader of *The Number* is forced to engage with Steinberg, his text, its reader – and thus with its subject, Magadien Wentzel.

2.2.3 Narrative

The most comprehensive yet succinct summary of narrative, adopted by this study, is:

A narrative is a story that has a beginning, middle and end. It engages the reader's mind and heart. It shows actors moving across its stage, revealing their characters through their actions and their speech. At its heart, a narrative contains a mystery or a question – something that compels the reader to keep reading and find out what happens....lets the story unfold through character, scene and action – usually without summing up the story and telling readers what it's about. A narrative also attaches a little story...to a big story (Allen, 2006: n.p.).

2.2.4 Terms frequently seen as interchangeable

2.2.4.1 New Journalism and New New Journalism

New journalism as a term is most readily associated with the style of reporting practised by journalists trying to make sense of the “blazingly nonconformist decade” (Sims, 2007: 163) of the 1960s. The form introduced to journalism some distinctive stylistic features: scene-by-scene construction, realistic dialogue, third-person point of view, and the recording of symbolic details (Wolfe, 1973: 31-32). The style was not

entirely an innovation, however, with roots which, though buried, ran deep. According to Kerrane (1997: 17):

The term “New Journalism” was originally coined by Matthew Arnold in 1887 to describe the style of Stead's Pall Mall Gazette: brash, vivid, personal, reform-minded – and, occasionally, from Arnold's conservative viewpoint, “featherbrained”. The Victorian social reporters, and the American muckrakers who followed them, aimed at a factual literature of modern industrial life. Their literary touches came less from artistic design than from the writers' sense of moral or political urgency: a determination to dramatize the reality of poverty, prostitution, and prejudice.

From such roots, what emerged above editorial ground nearly a century later was, according to Boynton (2005: n.p.),

a truly avant-garde movement that expanded journalism's rhetorical and literary scope by placing the author at the center of the story, channeling a character's thoughts, using nonstandard punctuation, and exploding traditional narrative forms.

Following this Wolfe-led movement (for a fuller overview of the New Journalism, see Sims, 2007: 219-262), the next generation of new journalists produced work which featured all the hallmarks of the New Journalism but which, additionally, started to experiment more with the way they got the story. Wolfe said he went inside his characters' heads; the New New Journalists become part of their lives (Boynton, 2005: n.p.). This then, continues the author, is the New New Journalism: Rigorously reported, psychologically astute, sociologically sophisticated, and politically aware (the political nature of the New Journalism is discussed also by Connery, 1994).

2.2.4.2 Literary journalism

Literary journalism, states Kramer (1995), describes the sort of non-fiction in which arts of style and narrative construction long associated with fiction help pierce to the quick of what's happening. He continues:

Literary journalism couples cold fact and personal event, in the author's

humane company. And that broadens readers' scans, allows them to behold others' lives, often set within far clearer contexts than we can bring to our own. The process moves readers, and writers, toward realization, compassion, and in the best of cases, wisdom (Kramer, 1995).

Ford (in Sims, 2007: 8) had earlier pointed to the confluence of "the interpretive caste of literature as well as the contemporary interest of journalism". Allied to this sense of literary and journalistic power is the view of Connery (1994), who asserts that literary journalism is an expression of community offering a sense of identity and familiarity that comes from readers entering the narrative with the narrator, either as participant or observer. Literary journalism, he says, helps tell us who we are. It is a way of obtaining "this felt sense of the quality of life at a particular time and place" (Williams in Connery, 1994).

Yagoda (1997: 13) is another authority who settles on "literary journalism" even though he finds it a profoundly fuzzy term and sometimes nothing more specific than laudable non-fiction. For Yagoda (1997: 14-15), literary journalism must be factual, it must have currency, and it should be thoughtfully, artfully, and valuably innovative. He also lists three hallmarks of the genre: it is narrative journalism in the novelistic tradition (where the reporter gathers as much information as possible about an event, then uses it to re-create what happened in the manner of narrative fiction) or narrative journalism in the movie or play tradition (where the reporter is on the scene and more or less matter-of-factly relates what happens, in the manner of a script); it features the reporter at its forefront; and it features style as substance. For Sims (2007: 6-7), literary journalism features immersion reporting, complicated structures, character development, symbolism, a focus on ordinary people, accuracy, and a consciousness on the page through which the objects in view are filtered.

Ultimately, literary journalism has a sense of attitude and a confident point of view (Chance & McKeen, 2001: x). It is not wholly surprising, then, that according to Tom Wolfe, the New Journalism can be seen as synonymous to literary journalism. Does it follow, then, that literary journalism can be seen as synonymous to the New Journalism? While probing the answer to this question lies outside the scope of this study, posing it points to the slippery nature of these terms and the consequent possibility that they become interchangeable.

2.2.4.3 Narrative journalism and narrative non-fiction

Although Mulgrew (2011: 1) claims that narrative journalism is not so much a genre as an indicator of textual style, he is outnumbered by analysts whose attempts to define it point to the more widespread belief that narrative journalism is indeed a distinct form. Its essence, according to Halberstam (2007: 11) is taking an idea, a central point, and pursuing it, turning it into a story that tells something about the way we live today. According to Marren (2002: n.p.), the so-called New Journalism is still out there, it's now called creative non-fiction, or even sometimes narrative journalism. In view of the foregoing comments, it is possible to conclude that narrative journalism serves as one more term in a raft of interchangeable terms for a form of journalistic reporting that features the particular stylistic and creative elements of Steinberg's work that informs this study. It is necessary, then, to arrive at a term for the purposes of this research.

2.2.5 Considering the options

Writing at the time of the New Journalism's peak, Lounsberry (1978: 3-4), eschewing that term as “unfortunate”, offers instead

...'transfiction' to fill the need for an accurate and suggestive title for this distinctive genre. Each of the terms which have recently been proffered to describe this genre has liabilities. The 'New Journalism,' as many have pointed out, is not new. Furthermore, the term has been used indiscriminately to describe works of the new nonfiction, alternative journalism, advocacy journalism, the underground press, and precision journalism.... 'faction' is ...lexicographically ambiguous... 'Reportage' is simply French for 'reporting',... 'parajournalism' is pejorative... 'nonfiction novel' represents a negative definition – defining a genre by what it is not, rather than what it is.

More than three decades ago, Lounsberry was not the only researcher lamenting the lack of clarity and consensus in definition, due in part to the variety of the form itself (Lareau, 1978: iv). Lareau was writing about the use of narrative techniques in the New Journalism works of Agee, Capote, Wolfe, Mailer and Thompson but, if considered in light of contemporary literary journalism, his sentiment remains valid. Indeed, Sims (2007: 6-7; 24) has written more recently that, at best, definitions have

always been a bit vague and written definitions are, at best, abstractions. A list of characteristics, he adds, can be an easier way to define literary journalism than a formal definition or a set of rules. On his list are: immersion reporting, complicated structures, character development, symbolism, voice, a focus on ordinary people, and accuracy.

Possibly the only common thread stitching together all analysis is the fact that each analyst favours a different term for what they appear to agree is much the same phenomenon. Indeed, agrees Marren (2002: n.p.), academics are “having a hard time defining narrative journalism...broader meaning leads to unstable boundaries between forms”. Consider also this view of other commentators on the same topic:

The genre of telling true stories goes by many names: narrative journalism, new journalism, literary journalism, creative nonfiction, feature writing, the nonfiction novel, documentary narrative....This genre, which we'll call narrative nonfiction (or just “narrative”), challenges audiences as well as practitioners. It mixes human content with academic theory and observed fact, allows specialized understanding of everyday events, and unscrambles and sorts the messages of a complex world. It begins with practitioners going out into the real world to learn something new (Kramer & Call, 2006: xv-xvi).

However, as Carlean (1988: 4) points out, it is not generically helpful to classify these works together under one label as the functional differences between them defy broad definition. In addition, as Mulgrew (2011: 2) avers, scholarship of narrative journalism in this country is as confused as the texts on which it focuses. In its bid to avoid such confusion (or, at least, not to add to it), this study, having taken account of the babel emanating from the field, aims now to settle on a term appropriate for the purposes of this study. In light of all the aforementioned considerations, it is the view of Sims (2007: 8), that reporting work of this nature has the interpretative caste of literature as well as the contemporary interest of journalism, which encapsulates the genre's confluence of imperatives. This leads naturally to this study's adoption of the term “literary journalism” which, as the sections below set out to show, is also apposite.

2.3 Defining the terms: Summary

While remaining a hazy and perhaps puzzling form, literary nonfiction places severe demands on reader and writer alike (Weber, 1980: 3). Since Rian Malan's *My Traitor's Heart* in 1990 began pegging out the literary non-fiction terrain in South Africa, Antjie Krog, Ivan Vladislavic and others have contributed their shape-shifting approaches to the genre in the intervening decades, blurring limits and rendering existing literary boundaries entirely flexible.

To conclude this section, which examines the complexities of arriving at a working definition and therefore a useful label to attach to the genre under discussion, Lounsberry's argument for the adoption of the term "transfiction" remains persuasive. The goal of transfiction, she writes, is to chronicle the complexity of a subject while simultaneously suggesting its simple, meaningful, metaphorical centre. Living as we do in this most complex of times, it is not surprising such a form should evolve and become more prevalent (Lounsberry, 1978: 21). However, although times have remained complex and continue to require journalism that traverses transfiction's delicate and dangerous road between fact and art (Lounsberry, 1978: 1), the term has failed to find currency in the field. This study will therefore refer to the genre under discussion as "literary journalism".

2.4 Situating *The Number* in the field of literary journalism

In the past two decades, the South African publishing scene has witnessed a surge in literary journalism (Scott, 2012c: 25). But this has not happened in a vacuum. The boom in narrative non-fiction is global (Nixon, 2012: 29), but the catalysts would be, by virtue of their context, local. Regarding the non-fiction boom in South Africa, Steinberg (in Mulgrew, 2012: 67) explains it this way:

Perhaps non-fiction has an extra kind of power in a country like ours. We live in a place that's changing profoundly and there's a great amount of uncertainty in all spheres of life, and if a book comes out that professes to show life beneath the surface, people urgently want to know that.

One of the points outlined in the remainder of this chapter is the pattern, demonstrated repeatedly through history, for literary journalism to bloom during periods of

significant political and social upheaval. It can be no surprise, then, that in South Africa's post-apartheid awakening, literary journalism is flourishing. Indeed, publishing statistics cited in the following chapter indicate that the readers and writers of this country are increasingly turning to non-fiction storytelling to help them make sense of the tumult they find themselves living through. This might indicate that, at a time of immense identity-shifting and shaping, it is literary journalism that helps tell people who they are. Indeed, it is the task of the worker in non-fiction, writes Twidle (2012b: 69), to find strategies for breaching the country's enormous social, economic and linguistic gaps. Steinberg (in Mulgrew, 2012: 67), claiming that “these stories can resonate far beyond themselves”, indirectly confirms this position: “any story about any individual life or set of actions is inevitably also about the world and times it happens in”.

Yet, while it could be said that literary journalism aims to make sense of a collective experience, it is frequently the personal that proves to be the illuminating prism. So it is with the work of Steinberg who, according to Twidle (2012a: 6), writes a kind of non-fiction that may or may not be best described as literary or creative, but is undoubtedly intensively researched, textured, character-driven, *self-aware* and immensely ambitious (my italics).

As a means of clarifying the literary locale of *The Number*, it is instructive at this point to note the work of Carlean (1988: 27-31), which appeared at the dawn of the current boom in South African literary journalism but which continues to offer a useful navigational tool. Using a model of communication put forward by Russian Formalist turned structuralist, Roman Jakobson, which was designed for linguistic use, Carlean applies it effortlessly to narrative texts, an act which serves this study well. Carlean's delineation of Jakobson's concept offers up three functionally distinct groups of modern novelistic non-fictional narratives. Firstly, there are works of social reportage that perform a predominantly sociological function. These are works which most readers read in order to learn something about the sociological backgrounds of people from other groups or classes. In such works, the narrative strategies are geared mostly towards describing and explaining a relatively unknown or misunderstood social context to readers. Secondly, there are predominantly journalistic works that can be distinguished from the sociological works in that they are based on events or

controversial issues rising from what the mass media and public would consider to be newsworthy events. In such works, the primary narrative concern is with achieving a greater reader understanding of single events that are largely familiar to readers, but that have been mystified by the mass media. Thirdly, there are works that perform a dominant novelistic function in that the thematic significance of the events they portray is more important to the communication than the facts of the events themselves. In such works, the facts are less significant for what they are than for what they represent. According to Carlean's typology, derived from Jakobson, this study contends that Steinberg's *The Number* slots most obviously and neatly into the first two categories of narrative non-fiction.

In the next section this study attempts a concise overview despite the fact that multiple scholars fail to agree on where or when or how literary journalism began. Baldly put, there is no consensus (Fishwick, 1975: 2), but awareness of the contested roots of literary journalism helps situate *The Number* against a pedigree.

2.4.1 Introduction to history

Because writers have been personal, partisan, and sensational for centuries (Fishwick, 1975: 2), the author asks: where then did “it” all begin? Reviewing some notable candidates (Wolfe, 1973: 45-46) and writing in positive terms about the virtues of autobiography as an early incarnation of new journalism, Wolfe (1973: 42) points to the necessity of a detailed and “everyday” realism if “it” is to succeed in its definition. The importance of realism to literary journalism will be examined more closely in Chapter 4. What is worth noting at this point is Wolfe's allusion to the self-ness of author. In other words, to the role of the author in literary journalism texts. As the rest of this chapter sets out to illustrate, the author as a central character has been central to the evolution of this genre from the earliest texts.

As Mulgrew (2011: 9-12) enunciates, citing Steinberg among others, literary journalism in South Africa is following a path of introspection, using non-fiction either as a natural response to the prevailing circumstances of postmodern life, in which imagination is found to be an inadequate guide, or as a corrective response to the pervasiveness of so-called reality TV, in which other people's personal stories, laid out in detail before us, prompt us to reconnect with our personal selves before they

vanish out of reach. However, as Twidle (2012a: 7) warns, the form's combination of the literary and the journalistic must be met in the Southern African context with ideas of limit, caution, cultural untranslatability and perhaps even unintelligibility – a reality which dogs every attempt not only to produce such work but also every attempt to locate such work in a global context where the norms are almost entirely American. Along with the constraint of academic scope, these are constraints worth noting. Prioritising them, however, risks hobbling the literary journalism enterprise altogether, for do we not approach such texts precisely as translators of otherwise unintelligible (i.e. unreachable) contexts? It is in this spirit that the next section of this chapter offers a snapshot view of the history of literary journalism, as a way of locating *The Number* in an august literary heritage both local and North American.

2.4.2 The history of literary journalism: America

Historic accounts of American letters which dwell on the 1960s point to Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* and Tom Wolfe's new wave of reporting style before adding how long and distinguished the lineage is of these works. While agreeing on the latter as honourable (Weber, 1980: 1) and with proper pedigree (Kramer, 1995: n.p.), scholars tend to disagree on its starting point and often appear to be vying in a quest for ever earlier proponents of the form. As the following excerpts illustrate, one name, however, recurs:

The history of literary journalism runs from Daniel Defoe in the early 1700s (Sims, 2007: 8);

Daniel Defoe used a form of novelistic narrative in *A Journal of the Plague Year* as early as 1722 and one could probably cite several examples preceding this (Carlean, 1988: 110);

and:

Daniel Defoe, writing just after 1700, is the earliest cited by Norman Sims, one of the few historians of the form. The roster also includes Mark Twain in the 19th century and Stephen Crane at the start of the 20th. Before and just after the Second World War, James Agee, Ernest Hemingway, A.J. Leibling, Joseph Mitchell, Lillian Ross, and John Steinbeck tried out narrative essay

forms. Norman Mailer, Truman Capote, Tom Wolfe, and Joan Didion followed, and somewhere in there, the genre came into its own – that is, its writers began to identify themselves as part of a movement, and the movement began to take on conventions and to attract writers. Public consciousness of a distinct genre has risen, slowly (Kramer, 1995: n.p.).

For all these confident references to Defoe, however, Wolfe (1973: 42) himself claims that Defoe wasn't writing non-fiction at all. Be that as it may, literary journalism – that genre which, by the mid-twentieth century was distinct – continued to evolve:

In the 1970s John McPhee, Edward Hoagland, and Richard Rhodes...broadened the form, joined in the 1980s by several dozen then-youthful counterparts, including Tracy Kidder and Mark Singer. Richard Preston and Adrian Nicole LeBlanc...began publishing in their 20s, and both had studied literary journalism in seminars – a sure sign a new genre has arrived (Kramer, 1995: n.p.).

The position occupied by *The New Yorker* in a history of literary journalism, and the contributions that publication has made – and, it could be argued, continues to make – cannot be ignored. Although detailed discussion of its writers and their work lies beyond the scope of a broad overview such as this, journalism historians (for instance, Sims, 2007: 163-199) give it due regard.

Withdrawing for a moment to a longer view, Connery (1994) focuses attention on broad-sweep history. It would appear that there are three distinct periods in which literary journalism is more common than at other times. Why? What connects the periods? It would seem, for instance, that each period (1890-1910, 1930s-1940s, 1960s-1970s) was a time of tremendous change and reform, periods in which progressive ideas come to the front, wars are fought, big changes in media occur. Sims (2008: xviii) agrees:

I cannot talk about literary journalism without talking about the writers...and the times in which they lived. The times mattered because changes and innovations have come in response to events and in some cases in response to personal relationships.

For further corroboration of this point, see Scott (2012a: 10). Inevitably perhaps, alongside this increasingly distinctive genre, aesthetic sensibilities were also evolving – or, as Connery (1994) has it, evolving into a reversal of sorts:

The boundaries of fiction and conventional journalism became so fixed in the twentieth century that literary journalism became distinguishable and distinct, later becoming an antidote to the conventional forms of both magazine and newspaper style. But until late in the nineteenth century, journalism was more literary and stylistically varied than it would become in the following century. As the twentieth century advanced, newspapers in particular developed a restricted and confining narrative form. Consequently, it is far more likely that in this century literary journalism will be found in magazines.

However, this is not the case in contemporary South Africa where literary journalism, as Chapter 3 illustrates, flourishes in book form. Further evolution occurred in the sensibilities of book review editors who, according to Kramer (1995)

...used to assign area experts routinely – geologists to review McPhee’s “Basin and Range” (1981), computer programmers to review Kidder’s “The Soul of a New Machine” – with neither brand of scientist generically qualified to assay the subtle narrative techniques and deft wordsmithing. Now editors are likelier to assign such reviewing to other writers and to critics.

Thus did a distinctive reporting genre develop, which had been consecrated in 1937 by Edwin H Ford in *A Bibliography of Literary Journalism*:

Although the term had been used a couple of times earlier in the century, Ford seems to be the first to use *literary journalism* with its contemporary scholarly meaning as a form of journalism and not as the product of a journalist who wrote about literature (Sims, 2007: 8).

Thus the history of American letters offers a compelling case for North America to be regarded as the home of literary journalism. Yet South Africa, as the next section points out, is not without its own honourable lineage.

2.4.3 The history of literary journalism: South Africa

Antecedents of South African literary journalism arguably lie with the narratives of self-aware authors who, working within the seam of texture Wolfe respects, include:

Lady Anne Barnard's *South Africa a Century Ago* published in 1910 (in Clare, 2010: 90-91):

Having been told that no woman had ever been on the top of the Table Mountain (this was not literally true, one or two having been there), and being unable to get any account of it from the inhabitants of this town, all of whom wished it to be considered as next to an impossible matter to get to the top of it, as an excuse for their own want of curiosity, and having found the officers all willing to believe the Dutch for ditto reason, laziness to wit, there was some ambition as a motive for climbing, as well as curiosity...We first had to scramble up the side of a pretty perpendicular cascade of a hundred feet or two, the falls of which must be very fine after rains, and the sides of which were shaded with myrtles, sugar trees, and geraniums.

William Burchell's *Travels in the Interior of South Africa* dating from 1810-1815 (in Clare, 2010: 118):

We made our dinner from the ostrich eggs....A small hole the size of a finger was very dextrously made at one end, and having cut a forked stick from the bushes, they introduced it into the egg by pressing the two prongs close together; then by twirling the end of the stick between the palms of their hands for a short time, they completely mixed the white and the yolk together. Setting it upon the fire, they continued frequently to turn the stick, until the inside had acquired the proper consistence of a boiled egg.

William Cornwallis Harris's *Narrative of an Expedition in Southern Africa* published in 1838 (in Clare, 2010: 107-110):

At one time we crossed bare stony ridges, at another threaded the intricacies of shady but dilapidated forests; now struggled through high fields of waving grass, and again emerged into open downs. At length we arrived amongst

extensive groups of grassy hillocks, covered with loose stones, interspersed with streams, and occasional patches of forest in which the recent ravages of Elephants were surprising....Never having before seen the noble Elephant in his native jungles, we gazed on the sight before us with intense and indescribable interest....Andries became so agitated that he could scarcely articulate. With open eyes and quivering lips he at length stuttered forth “*Dar stand de Oliphant.*”

RM Ballantyne's *Six Months at the Cape* published in 1879 (in Clare, 2010: 131; 134):

Like superfine cloth, they were of various shades; some were brown-black, some almost blue-black, and many coal-black....They were coming down to unload the surf-boat, and seemed full of fun, and sly childlike humour, as they walked, tripped, skipped and sidled into the water. At first I was greatly puzzled to account for the fact that all their heads and throats were wrapped up, or swathed, in dirty cloth. It seemed as if every man of them was under treatment for a bad cold. This I soon found was meant to serve as a protection to their naked skins from the sharp and rugged edges and corners of the casks and cases they had to carry.

Thomas Pringle's *Narrative of a Residence in South Africa* published in 1834 (in Clare, 2010: 130):

The site which I fixed for my residence was about three miles distant from my neighbours on either side; Mrs Rennie and her family being on the stream above me, and Captain Cameron below, with rocky heights and clumps of shrubbery intervening. I selected an open grassy meadow, with a steep mountain behind, and the small river in front, bordered by willow-trees and groves of thorny acacia. It was a beautiful and secluded spot; the encircling hills sprinkled over with trees and bushes, and the fertile meadow-ground clothed with pasture, and bounded by cliffs crowned with aloes and euphorbias.

As if confirming this study's contention that the roots of South African literary journalism lie with these writers, Wolfe (1974: 50) also argues for the role of travel writing in new journalism's evolution. However, it could be argued that none of the

writers above – who fall into the categories of colonial administrator, temporary settler, curious traveller, or a combination of these – is South African by birth and that their accounts would therefore not qualify as South African literary journalism. But I would argue that this is beside both the literary point and the journalistic point: these are the narratives that shape understandings of life in South Africa in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; these are the early pages of South African literary journalism – written in English. This last distinction is an important one to make because if, like O'Shaughnessy and Stadler (2002: 62), we take “text” to mean any media item that can be read by any form of engagement, it could be argued that South African literary journalism actually began on cave walls scores of thousands of years ago, for that, surely, can be counted as evidence of what Bech-Karlson (2009: 6) calls “the reporter's role as first-hand eyewitness”.

Furthermore, as Chapman (1996: 41) states, literary history in South Africa is not easily disentangled from the country's political history. Put another way, attempting a responsible literary history is a political act. Because this study is a journalistic act, or, rather, an act of journalism research and not overtly an act of political research, and because Steinberg's *The Number* is a work of literary journalism written in English, this study confines its historiographic attention to journalistic narratives which (a) purport to represent topics singularly South African and (b) that are written in English. But even in this confined scope, there lies danger still. Factual narratives written in English have been historically associated with projects of dubious political ambition (Wade, 1996: 2). The works cited above point repeatedly to the otherness of their subjects and, in so doing, point repeatedly to the otherness of a South African literary past. This study intends to keep alive its acute awareness of any divergence resulting from this circumstance. Who, then, might be the South African-born pioneers of factual narrative? Possibilities include:

Deneys Reitz's *Commando* published in 1929 (in Clare, 2010: 290-292):

During the course of the morning, pillars of smoke began to rise behind the English advance, and to our astonishment we saw that they were burning the farmhouses as they came. Towards noon word spread that, not only were they destroying all before them, but were actually capturing and sending away the women and children.

AM van den Berg's *Journal of the War* which is quoted in a 2003 publication, *Women Writing from Africa* (in Clare, 2010: 288-289):

Then they dismounted and began to help me carry out the things, such as the furniture in the sitting and dining rooms, the beds and other goods....I had spoken gently and had besought; but nothing availed – the house must be burnt....The flames rose up instantly in the gable of the house. I stood looking at it – no pen can write what was in my heart.

Sol Plaatje, who, asserts Willan (1996: 14),

...reveals a remarkable capacity to describe what he saw going around him, to convey his moods and feelings, to reveal an intriguing sense of humour, and ability to describe not only the hardships of life under siege, but also its moments of humour, the incongruities of a daily life that fluctuated between the banal and the tragic.

...everyone was sure that – bullets failing – he [FitzClarence] would capture the Dutch fort at the point of the bayonet, but they unfortunately found it a tough business. They got up to the fort and were preparing to jump right into it amongst the Boers. But the walls were so high that only a few managed to get on top...and the Boers, who meanwhile had their rifles through the loop-holes, played havoc with them until they hoisted the red cross (Plaatje in Willan, 1996: 35).

Half a century after this, South African journalism was struck by the literary thunderbolt that was *Drum*. The magazine's writers, such as Nat Nakasa, Can Themba, Henry Nxumalo, Todd Matshikiza, and their work, have been thoroughly documented elsewhere (for instance Chapman, 1989). For the purposes of this overview, it is sufficient to turn to the view of Scott (2012c: 25):

Through their often challenging yet sometimes playful merging of literary styles, the *Drum* writers captured the pulse of a uniquely South African time. They also produced a style of literary journalism that left a legacy which still resonates – and resurfaces – today.

2.4.4 Towards a local history: Summary

While a history of South Africa lies outside the scope of this study, it is nevertheless evident from the historic overview above that literary journalism in South Africa, as elsewhere, has proliferated at times of significant social and political – and therefore personal – change. Adopting the view that to understand the present we must possess the past (Scholes & Kellogg, 1966: 57), this chapter has sought to establish a preferred term, as well as a broad history of literary journalism in both South Africa and North America in a bid to situate *The Number* within its heritage. This chapter also sought to demonstrate how contested are the roots of this heritage and where it begins. Where Brown (in Brown & Krog, 2011: 22) cites Jonathan Swift, Charles Dickens, Joseph Pulitzer and Jack London, this study proposes that Steinberg's earliest literary and journalistic forebears reported their observations on cave walls. This debate aside, Scott (2012c: 25) sums up thus:

...literary journalism does in fact have a long and vibrant history in this country. It remains the most important genre in moments of transition, upheaval and flux – and it continues to provide a form in which writers can interrogate, challenge and enunciate the contradictions that combine to form the disparate nation of South Africa.

It is against this background that Steinberg's *The Number* finds its literary and journalistic place in the disparate nation that is South Africa which, being contradictory, requires translation by its writers.

Chapter 3:

Literature study

In most literary journalism, an informal, competent, reflective voice emerges... a voice that reflects – often only indirectly, as subtext – the writer’s self-knowledge, self-respect, and conscience....a sociable, humorously self-aware, but authoritative voice.

– Mark Kramer (1995: n.p.)

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a survey of scholarship and commentary pertaining to the focus of this study. A literature review is necessary, Lemon (1995: 37) states,

to sharpen our understanding of the topic, to familiarise us with the latest theoretical developments and debates in the area of research we wish to undertake, and to acquaint us with the problems, hypotheses and results obtained by previous research....The literature survey also serves to identify gaps in existing knowledge....and provide us with the definitions and key terms associated with the particular field of study.

It is with these requirements in mind that this chapter presents its survey findings. Setting out to explore ways in which Jonny Steinberg represents his main character in *The Number* leads to an examination of “all types of sources” (Lemon, 1995: 38), including book reviews, contemporaneous documents relating to social and cultural context, author interviews and discussions, academic journals, books dealing with literary theory, books and online sources dealing with literary journalism, and literature surveying the history and evolution of literary journalism as a genre. Information presented in this review of relevant literature takes into account comments by Mouton (2001: 91-95) that successful literature reviews in exploratory studies can be organised around themes or constructs. For the purposes of this study, such themes or constructs would be literary journalism, narrative and character, and representation of reality. With these as the primary areas of attention, this chapter is ordered according to the six guiding questions offered by Lemon (1995: 38).

3.2 What previous research has been done in this field?

For the purposes of this section, the field is regarded as including the aforementioned threefold focus: firstly, literary journalism; secondly, narrative; and, thirdly, the theoretical terrain framing this research.

3.2.1 Previous research in the field of literary journalism

Although a review of literature aims to confine itself to work that is topical (Lemon, 1995: 38; Mouton, 2001: 91), this study takes equally seriously the work of certain analysts and commentators dating beyond the generally accepted time frame of approximately five years. This is because literary journalism as an academic pursuit is relatively young and the pioneers of such commentary and analysis therefore stand out for their prescience and for their insight. The drawback of paying attention to the theorists of previous literary eras is that, even in the rare instances of South Africans such as Carlean (1988), the focus of analysis is North American in origin. As Chapter 2 aims to make clear, there are sound historic and aesthetic reasons substantiating this study's examination of North American literary journalism output and analysis.

Happily, however, literary journalism has latterly become a burgeoning genre in multiple societies, not least in South Africa where writers and academics are arguing that non-fiction, for both writers and readers, increasingly can do what fiction cannot (Krog in Brown & Krog, 2011; Nixon, 2012). That being said, production of literary journalism outstrips its analysis. Also, thus far, much of the existing literature which pertains to the production of literary journalism focuses more on the why and the how of its production and less on what its production might mean. *Rhodes Journalism Review* (2012), for instance, carries a substantial section focusing on literary journalism, bearing interviews and conversations with authors who discuss the backstory of their work. While such a focus is a provocative response to the national hunger for non-fiction, it continues to leave unmet the opportunities for academic research this genre offers scholars.

Because this study focuses on ways in which Steinberg as author chooses to represent Magadien Wentzel as primary character in *The Number*, and therefore on ways in

which this speaks of Steinberg's narrative positioning of them both, much of the literature surveyed focuses on narrational concerns. The fact that much of this survey looks to North America is immaterial as issues of narrative are not geographically bound. Kramer (1995: n.p.), who both produces literary journalism and has a reputation as commentator and analyst, writes:

The defining mark of literary journalism is the personality of the writer, the individual and intimate voice of a whole, candid person not representing, defending, or speaking on behalf of any institution, not a newspaper, corporation, government, ideology, field of study, chamber of commerce, or travel destination. It is the voice of someone naked, without bureaucratic shelter, speaking simply in his or her own right, someone who has illuminated experience with private reflection, but who has not transcended crankiness, wryness, doubtfulness, and who doesn't blank out emotional realities of sadness, glee, excitement, fury, love. The genre's power is the strength of this voice.

This commentary is instructive to this study in view of the fact that, as highlighted in Chapter 5, Steinberg's relationship with his source/character is seldom a straightforward one. In *The Number*, Steinberg repeatedly lays on the page his doubtfulness and his emotional realities; it is aspects of this voice that this study seeks to explore.

3.2.2 Previous research in the field of narrative

As a broad definition of narrative, this study takes the term presented by Scholes and Kellogg (1966: 4):

By narrative we mean all those literary works which are distinguished by two characteristics: the presence of a story and story-teller....For writing to be narrative no more and no less than a teller and tale are required.

The scholarship of these narrative theorists may be half a century old but, as their work makes plain, its subject matter is several centuries old. Consequently, it is the view of this study that the emphasis on narrative in contemporary non-fiction does not render such scholarship obsolete. Indeed, these authors also detail the narrative

relationship which lies at the heart of this research:

In the relationship between the teller and the tale, and that other relationship between the teller and the audience, lies the essence of narrative art...In any example of narrative art there are, broadly speaking, three points of view – those of the characters, the narrator, and the audience. As narrative becomes more sophisticated, a fourth point of view is added by the development of a clear distinction between the narrator and the author (Scholes & Kellogg, 1966: 240).

Also germane to the epistemology of this research is their view that

...what in fact made possible the revolutionary complexity of point of view in written narrative was the introduction, not of narrators, but of *authors* (Scholes & Kellogg, 1966: 53; authors' italics).

This view is held also by more recent experts, such as Boynton (2005: n.p.), who states that *the way writers construct the story* of who we are is as important for our culture as it is for the study of journalism [my italics]. Allied to this position is the notion of the persuasive narrator (Clark, 2006) which transforms the journalistic tropes that construct news into narrative constructs:

When we write stories, rather than reports, *Who* becomes *character*. *What* becomes *action set in time*. *Where* becomes *setting*. *When* becomes *chronology*, or time unraveled. *Why* becomes *motive*. *How* becomes *narrative* – how things happened. All these changes happen, and the role of the narrator becomes much more important [author's italics].

Seabrook (2000: n.p.) theorises a concept he terms “the naive narrator technique” by which an author states at the outset of their story that they don't know that much more about the subject than the reader knows. This narrative movement ruptured the traditional approach, which implied a certain expertise by virtue of its supposed objectivity and methodology but which risked alienating and losing readers. A naive narrator is offered the advantage of being allowed to express ambivalence, and also to insert their insights into the story. In other words, an author who constructs himself as a naive narrator is able to convey information as well as emotion about learning that

information, as Steinberg does in ways which Chapter 6 demonstrates. However, one disadvantage of such a technique is, according to Seabrook (2000: n.p.), that people may not believe them as naive as they represent themselves to be. A second disadvantage is an issue Steinberg wrestles with on the page and is a feature of his openness with the reader: how to make choices about what to put in and what to leave out. This, too, is illustrated in Chapter 6 which returns to the matter of narration and its challenges.

3.2.3 Previous research in the theoretical terrain of this study

As Chapter 4 explains, the theory of realism is presented as a suitable theoretical framework for this study. Its emergence for this purpose, however, prompts some reservations. The past decades have seen realism, the concept so firmly domiciled in aesthetic movements of the nineteenth century, eclipsed by subsequent – and, some (for instance, Bhaskar, 2011) would argue – by more evolved theories such as critical realism and the portmanteau postmodernism. But, as Iser (2006: 6) asserts, it is due to changing interests and fashions that certain theories at times dominate their “rivals”, while others move out of orbit. It is the view of this research that changing interests and fashions do not automatically diminish an item's intrinsic usefulness. Thus, led in part by theorists such as Beaumont (2007), the review of theoretical literature narrows its attentions to the continued usefulness of realism. In support of this refined focus, Morris (2003: 118) points out that in serious realist writing universality is always formally and rigorously tested against specificity.

What realism offers the aims of this study is its world-representing capacity, its visualising aspect, which Morris (2003: 142) avers may be the aspect readers find most pleasurable. What realism is up against is a prevailing postmodern literary and cultural criticism which stresses the incommensurability of other worlds, the localism of known realities. It is argued that without a degree of common cultural roots in a community and place, experience and knowledge is incommunicable (Morris, 2003: 145). Yet much insight has been gained from the journalism of writers with no cultural roots in common with their subjects. Indeed, if it weren't for the journalist, the reader's curious proxy, so much would still be uncommunicated. Thus it is with *The Number*. Had Steinberg been impelled to walk away from Pollsmoor Prison because he thought he had nothing in common with its characters and their stories, he would have walked

away from a potential source of illumination – of knowledge – about the turbulence of a society in transition. It cannot be said that such in/action would contribute to the personal and the political knowledge project.

Textual research is a broad field which, according to theorists such as Bertrand and Hughes (2005: 173-175) and Ifversen (2003), embraces a range of scholarly pursuits from content analysis to post-structuralist analysis, history to linguistics. Salient to the focus of this research is this statement about a post-structuralist perspective:

In this paradigm, objectivity is impossible; the value of the research lies in its descriptive power, its capacity to enlarge our horizons, without any claim to “truth” or prediction; and the only way a researcher can “know” the real world is through representation, through “realism” rather than “reality” (Bertrand & Hughes, 2005: 175).

The authors also state that human understandings of both the natural world and the social world are mediated through language. It is the thinking provoked by reading such as this which informs the chapter following this one, because realism (with or without scare quotes) presents itself as an appropriate theoretical tool for the exploration of Steinberg's representation of his main character in *The Number*.

3.3 What are the findings of previous studies?

Possibly the primary finding emerging from literature surveyed is that defining terms is a challenge: every component of the topic under discussion appears to resist definition. Setting aside this layer of complexity, which is dealt with in Chapter 2, a survey of previous studies yields a number of findings relevant to this study.

3.3.1 Literary journalism

According to Kramer (1995), literary journalism has helped us sort out the level of complexity that has characterised a society which has grown to such an extent that, in 1900, when there were a few hundred types of labour, just a hundred years later there were 10 000 different types of job. Furthermore, Kramer asserts, at roughly the same pace of change, science started providing confusion rather than answers. The consequence more generally became multiple levels of social confusion, rendering ever more critical the role of journalists to convey information with which citizens

might govern their lives (see Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001: 9-35). As Chapter 2 points out, history shows that literary journalism has burgeoned during periods of social change and/or turbulence. It is as if literary journalism allows society to self-educate rather than self-medicate. In the prologue to *The Number*, and in author interviews (for instance, see Mulgrew, 2012: 67), Steinberg acknowledges just this. This topic, too, is returned to in Chapter 6.

By conveying information to help readers make sense of contemporary South Africa, Steinberg is conforming to the view of Connery (1994: n.p.) that literary journalism can be read as a system of meaning, an interpretation of reality, a cultural form of expression but one that should not be divorced from the social milieu that created the work. Consider, for instance, information related to the subject matter of *The Number* and which is dated either 2002, the year Steinberg began his research for the book, or 2004, the year it was published. Graphics accompanying research by the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (2008), and illustrating statistics of violent crime in South Africa between 2001 and 2008, indicate almost exclusively that 2002 – the year research began on *The Number* – is routinely the highest point on every graph. Of the seven time periods plotted, it is never the lowest. For both murder and attempted murder, 2001/2002 scores highest. Interpol figures released in 2002 established South Africa as having the world's highest murder rate, with 114.8 murders per 100 000 inhabitants.

In addition to the climate of crime which shapes the ways in which South Africans live in South Africa, race continues to provide an over-arching meta-narrative to life as it is lived in South Africa. Says Steinberg (in Lehman, 2010: 37):

If my books have any insight into South Africa, it is in part because they explore the power that I as a white person have over my subjects and the power they try to exert over me as black people. I think my books trade on an extremely unequal racial relationship.

While an exploration of the racial inequality of the narrator-character relationship lies outside the scope of this study, the fact of its existence has a bearing on the individuals concerned and on the book's narrative.

3.3.2 Narrative

In reviewing the role of narrative in literary journalism, the work of scholars long recognised in the field has been instructive. Scholes and Kellogg (1966: 242) refer to the problem of the authority of the narrator as just one aspect of the problem of point of view as it developed over time. In traditional narrative, the events being recounted are always long past so the narrator fulfils the functions of entertainer and historian simultaneously in a tradition that provides him with his authority. More recently, narrative makes other, possibly even conflicting, demands on a narrator. In literary journalism, the source of a narrator's authority is particularly vital. For, as Lehman (1997: 41) puts it in a demonstration that he, too, finds earlier scholars instructive:

Booth [who in 1961 had presented the notion of “implied author”]...suggests that a narrative intended to be read as nonfiction positions an actual authorial presence and implicates its author much more readily than does fiction.

Likewise, Smith (in Heyne, 1987: 489) claims that all factual narratives are versions “constructed...by someone in particular, on some occasion, for some purpose, and in accord with some relevant set of principles”. Steinberg's own view – and constructed narrative – of his authorial presence, purpose and principles appear in Chapter 6.

3.3.3 Representation of reality

There is evidence (for instance, an entire edition of *Safundi: The journal of South African and American studies*, 2012: 13: 1-2; and public panel discussions such as Brown & Krog, 2011) to suggest that increasing amounts of attention are being paid to the increasingly blurred line that is believed to demarcate “reality” from “art”. Or, as Brown (in Brown & Krog, 2011:1) has it, the unstable fault line of the literary and journalistic, the imaginative and the reportorial. One reason why this distinction (and consequently its blur) matters is because, in the words of Barnard (2012: 4), allowing literary critics to believe that fiction triumphs over history legitimates a retreat from the political. Another reason is that perceptions of reality – the very route to sense-making – are founded on the ways in which those realities are conveyed. This is how one advocate for the theory of realism puts it:

Writing has to select and order, something has to come first, and that

selection and ordering will always, in some way, entail the values and perspective of the describer (Morris, 2003: 4).

Concurring, this is how one such describer puts it:

The moment one uses something as “unreal” as language to describe a live-three-dimensional complex moment, one is already falsifying, fictionalizing by deciding which angle, which words to use and what detail to leave out....So the reason why one chooses to describe A and not B, mentions C and not D, is because one is busy picking out the pattern that one has discovered....By leaving out D am I not distorting what is happening in order to make reality fit the particular pattern that I want to impose? (Krog in Brown & Krog, 2011: 3; 14).

Later in the same discussion, Krog (in Brown & Krog, 2011: 21-22) refers specifically to her book, *Begging to be Black*, but she is referring also to her work as a writer of literary journalism:

I present myself as a single creative sensibility that has selected and shaped the narrative presented to you. You will read it...as a very personal sensibility of a particular reality presented by me. But unlike the fiction writer, you can hold me to the truth, you can judge me right through the story on the ways I respect the integrity of that truth.

Bloom (2009) appears to some extent to disagree, pointing to “the major shortcoming” of literary journalism which, in his view, is that far too many readers expect to find in the text a species of “objective” truth.

A survey of literature dealing with representations of reality proves somewhat inconclusive. Whether it is legitimate or not for a reader to judge the truthfulness of a writer's truth is an issue whose edges are as blurred as the literary edge between real accounts of reality and accounts of real reality. It is the view of Clingman (in Barnard, 2012: 2) that writing in and about South Africa can disrupt the surfaces of the real, but because the real has often disrupted the surfaces of writing. In his plea to disregard the binary between history and fiction – what Twidle (2012a: 7) calls the leaden binary – Clingman (2012: 56-58) offers eloquent argument that “fiction or non-fiction, it's the

story that has to be written.”

3.4 What suggestions do other researchers make for further study?

Nixon (2012: 34), in referring to the social depth of field of South African literary non-fiction, states that an ambitious social canvas has become a hallmark – and a strength – of this burgeoning genre. It would follow, then, that further study of any of its aspects would yield worthwhile insight, a position Connery (1994: n.p.) has long espoused:

Within academic circles literary journalism seldom is considered legitimate material for scholarly consideration. Furthermore, when scholars submit literary journalistic research for publication or presentation within one of the traditional academic disciplines, it is unlikely that truly knowledgeable referees will be assessing the work because those most knowledgeable are few and scattered about the disciplines.

This appears no longer to be the case, particularly in South Africa – a situation this survey of relevant literature aims to illustrate. Connery's sense of marginalisation has been dissolved in the intervening two decades by an accumulation of rich literary journalism and, latterly, attendant academic endeavour. This dual abundance could be taken as an invitation to deepen and widen a complex field rather than as a signal that the field is already exhaustively explored.

For as long as one continues reviewing relevant literature, suggestions for further study would continue to arise obliquely. For instance, when Lehman (1997: 42) writes:

The effect of a nonfictional narrative on its characters always is germane, because both the author and characters live outside the text as well as inside,

his assertion provokes the reader to regard it as an idea for further study. Lehman's model for reading non-fiction is threefold: to locate the author inside and outside the text, to examine these intertwined and differing presences, and to explore their relationships in both historical and artistic terms (Lehman, 1997: 42). He continues [his italics]:

We might examine specifically the author's positioning vis-à-vis the subject, not only what the author *acknowledges* (the intention) but also what the author *reveals* and thus communicates through cultural signs in the production and exchange of meaning. The emphasis in these sorts of readings is on the relationship of the writer to his subject and to his reader within a literary and social text.

Taking Lehman's emphasis as foundational, this study aims to examine Steinberg's positioning vis-à-vis his subject as represented by Magadien. The study's textual analysis of aspects of *The Number* aims to begin to uncover what its author reveals in relation to Magadien and to the reader in a literary and social context (which this dissertation has, with its preceding chapters, already begun to lay out). However, the scope of this study limits its reach: excavating *The Number's* literary context, social context, cultural signs, production, and exchange of meaning demands extensive research and presents a complexity which lies beyond the scope of this study. In this way, researchers in the field indirectly offer multiple suggestions for further study.

3.5 What areas have not yet been investigated?

As pointed out earlier in this chapter, a survey of literature which analyses literary journalism yields relatively scanty results: output in the genre far outstrips its scholarship. As a result, it is the view of this study that the burgeoning genre of literary journalism in South Africa offers diverse scope for academic investigation. Specific suggestions are enumerated in Chapter 7; for the purposes of this review, unexplored areas are discussed more broadly.

To partially understand a literary journalistic text on its own terms is to assess it in the tradition of a type of nonfiction prose narrative, reflecting certain literary traditions and conventions. But to thoroughly assess its meaning and impact, it must be placed within the media framework of its time and in light of the cultural forces of the moment as well (Connery, 1994: n.p.)

The author here states explicitly what other voices in this survey have said more allusively: there is considerable scope for investigation of the meaning of literary journalism, and of its impact, within the media and cultural framework of its time. In

view of this, it would be fair to say that nearly two centuries of South African non-fiction writing is waiting to be investigated in this light.

More recently, Boynton (2005: n.p.) frames the sort of questions for American literary journalists that South African scholars of literary journalism could do well to take as departure points for exploration. His questions to American literary journalists are: How does a fast-growing society of immigrants construct a national identity? How does a country built by capitalism consider questions of economic justice? How does a nation of different faiths live together? These are, he claims, questions the genre has been posing since the nineteenth century. Equivalent questions in South Africa might be: How do demonstrations of xenophobia contribute to a national identity in an already multi-cultural society? How does a rapidly-changing post-democracy consider questions of economic justice? It is not just literary journalists who should be attempting to answer such questions; literary journalism scholars have equally valuable contributions to make towards sense-making.

With regard to narrative as the focus of an area thus far uninvestigated, this review turns to Carlean (1988: 21) who states that a narrative is, above all else, an act of communication – part of a communicative process involving a reader as well as an author and text – and that readers read texts for a number of different communicative reasons. Taking this position as a departure point, readers' reasons for consuming literary journalism offer potential for exploration. Also in relation to readers, Nixon (2012: 42) asserts that narrative trust is that most indispensable quality to the non-fictional reading experience. Concurring with such a position, this study explores the issue of narrative or authorial trust in forthcoming chapters. Such exploration, however, is far from exhaustive, leaving the topic ripe for further investigation.

That narrative concerns are inextricably bound up with representations of reality is a position this study attempts to thread through every level of its exploration. Related to this is the view of Lehman (1997: 41) who states that all narratives are constructed. Readers, he claims, can learn about the author and the narrative from the way the author constructs (his)story. He goes on:

...reportorial and analytical methods are always open to scrutiny because the nonfiction narrator is measured against a human presence that must gain

access to the other presences that become part of the narrative...she deals with characters whose presence extends outside the text.

While such methods are always open to scrutiny, and in literary journalism they always will be because of the shifting nature of reality, there will always be areas awaiting investigation.

3.6 How can this study add to our knowledge of the subject?

Narratives are fundamental to our lives (Schiffrin & De Fina, 2010: 1). The authors continue:

We dream, plan, complain, endorse, entertain, teach, learn, and reminisce by telling stories. They provide hopes, enhance or mitigate disappointments, challenge or support moral order, and test out theories of the world at both personal and communal levels.

Literary journalism is a form which exploits the virtues of narrative with conscious purpose in a bid to carry out every aspect of Schiffrin's and De Fina's thesis. Yet, despite this centrality of narrative, and thus of literary journalism, to our lives and despite the fact that literary journalism, as Chapter 2 elucidated, has been central to our lives for a long time, the genre has received comparatively little scholastic attention. Close to two decades ago, Connery (1994) was drawing attention to the fact that the field was largely wide open for research. Such research was desirable, he argued, because the nature and extent of literary journalism over time becomes more firmly established through additional research. Close to a decade later, scholars of literary journalism were indicating little had changed: Narrative journalism is the poor waif still looking for a home in the academy (Marren, 2002). Fast forward another decade and this study's survey of relevant literature finds that, while significant contributions such as those referred to above have certainly been added to the field in the interim, the field appears still to be fairly wide open for academic exploration. It is with this context in mind that this study's exploration intends to contribute to knowledge of the subject.

In addition, it is the view of this study that it could help inform the reception of the growing corpus of literary journalism, much of which has its publishing home in

academe, as many platforms for the publication of literary journalism have an academic partner. Outside South Africa, for instance, *Fourth Genre* comes out of Michigan State University and *River Teeth* from Ashland University in Ohio. In South Africa, University of the Witwatersrand is a partner in *Mampoer*, a digital platform devoted to long-form journalism developed during 2012.

3.7 What research methods and theoretical approaches were used in previous studies?

As possibly South Africa's foremost literary journalism practitioner and analyst, it is worth paying attention to Antjie Krog's work in both these realms. Her conversation with Brown (in Brown & Krog, 2011) touches on many of her literary concerns and refers to some of the theoretical insight she relies on: Scarry and mimesis, Bakhtin and ethnography, matters of whiteness and othering, Brockmeier and narrative integrity, and Wolfe's take on realism. Clingman (2012: 51) points to Nuttall's notion of "entanglement" as does Scott (2012b) whose reading of Steinberg and Bloom is conducted within a postcolonial theoretical framework. The literature survey that informs this chapter indicates further that a considerable body of literary journalism studies is conducted within the theoretical framework of critical realism (for instance, Wright, 2011). The merits and potential applicability of critical realism for this study are discussed in the following chapter. In this study's broad survey of textual analysis as a sense-making tool, McKee's comprehensive introduction to "a few useful tricks" is useful. Ultimately, however, his suggestion to apply the concept of exnomination (drawing attention to that which is regarded as so normal as to be outside of naming), the commutation test (a thought experiment where you replace one element of a text with a similar but different part of culture), and structuring absences (drawing attention to certain kinds of representation that are absent in a text) to the analysis of *The Number* is set aside in favour of the suggestion made by Morris (2003: 101; 113) which is presented in more detail in Chapter 5. While McKee's tools certainly help make visible what might otherwise be too obvious to see in a text (McKee, 2003: 111), the more specific interest of this study in representation of a character for a narrative end renders this particular textual analysis more susceptible to Morris's tools than the broader sense-making tools offered by McKee.

3.8 Summary

Having isolated literary journalism, narrative and the representation of reality as the three themes or constructs central to this research project, this chapter sets out the results of this study's review of literature in these broad fields. This study is largely motivated by the finding that scholars concur in the view that, as Nixon (2010) puts it, a re-estimation of non-fiction is long overdue. In this, Nixon is echoing an old refrain. Almost two decades ago, Connery (1994) claimed that mass interest in literary journalism for the most part is absent. In South Africa, at least, this is no longer the case: publishers' lists of literary journalism titles lengthen. In 2010, adult non-fiction accounted for 60,5% of all adult title turnover with a list that year of 381 titles compared with 222 adult fiction titles (Le Roux, Struik & Labuschagne, 2011: 39; 54).

Connery also asserts that within academic circles literary journalism is seldom considered legitimate material for scholarly consideration, and that when scholars submit literary journalistic research for publication or presentation, it is unlikely that truly knowledgeable referees will be assessing the work. This, too, is no longer the case. Journals (*Literary Journalism Studies* is one), books and papers (many of which are referenced in this thesis) proliferate; periodicals such as *Rhodes Journalism Review* (2012) have featured the topic in substantial editorial sections; scholars (for instance Scott, 2012; Twidle, 2012) are making their academic mark via literary journalism studies; and there is a growing number of websites focusing on literary journalism (such as *Mampoer*, mentioned above). Further afield, announces Nixon (2010: n.p.) two zesty, ambitious, polemical new books – Ben Yagoda's *Memoir: A History* (Riverhead) and David Shields's *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto* (Knopf) – signal that non-fiction is pushing for greater scholarly respect.

In the course of presenting this study's survey of literature, this chapter has also illustrated that the academic study of literary journalism could now be considered to be in an early phase of maturity. Although no longer in its infancy, however, a review of the field indicates that the study of literary journalism has not yet evolved to a point where certain substantive normative models exist against which the form may be analysed. Consequently, this research project conducts a further survey – borne out by the following two chapters – of theoretical and methodological approaches with which

to approach its research problem. As a result of this endeavour, this study is now in a position to present considerations which inform its theoretical basis.

Chapter 4:

Realism as a realistic theory

A cultural approach to literary journalism studies needs a scholarship that can grapple with the issues of reality.

– Norman Sims (2009: 14)

4.1. Introduction

This chapter gives a broad overview of realism as a theoretical vehicle for this study. In doing so, this section of the study notes that, as a theoretical point of departure, realism is ancient – harking back to ancient Greece – and may consequently be seen to be obsolete, particularly in light of the proliferation of theories developed in response to circumstances of the late twentieth century as well as early twenty-first century. In fact, realism fell so far from theoretical favour it appeared to fall from view. However, this chapter also notes that, owing to the work of contemporary theorists who argue persuasively for its renewed relevance, realism is once again a theory in contention. As such, it has a considerable amount to offer the academic study of literary journalism. In this context, this chapter takes a brief look at the history of realism before mapping it against reportage to determine its suitability as a theoretical point of departure. Finally, the chapter briefly weighs up realism against other potentially suitable theories currently employed as points of departure elsewhere in the field.

4.2 Defining realism

Any exploration of this term, even of the curtailed variety dictated by the scope of this study, results in an agreement with Levine (2007: 14), who states that “realism” is a word that begs so many questions that it seems absurd to talk about it as though it were susceptible to full definition, and Earnshaw (2010: 207), who infers it is a slippery term. Indeed, agrees Davies (in Morris, 2003: 2), realism is one of those words whose range of possible meanings runs from the pedantically exact to the cosmically vague. That being said, for this study to be able to continue its intention to understand Jonny Steinberg's narrative representation of a reality in *The Number*, it is necessary at this point to establish a working definition of that broad realm known as

realism. For this Morris (2003: 6) is instructive. Literary realism, she states, is any writing that is based upon an implicit or explicit assumption that it is possible to communicate about a reality beyond the writing. Her reference to assumption is critical to any understanding of realism. For a succinct explication of my claim here, I turn to Pearce and Woodiwiss (2001: 51) who write:

Ontologically, ordinary realism comprises two assumptions. First, that the world, including the social world, subsists independently of our thought about it. Second, that it is a material entity in that if it were not accessible to our senses there would be no grounds for assuming its externality to our minds.

This leads directly to more complex assumptions requiring to be taken into account:

Realism...can briefly be sketched as the assumption that it is possible, through the act of representation, in one semiotic code or another, to provide cognitive as well as imaginative access to a material, historical reality that, though irreducibly mediated by human consciousness, and of course by language, is nonetheless independent of it. This comprehensive definition of realism cannot ultimately be separated from its specific significance in literature and other art forms. Aesthetic debates about realism are inevitably imbricated in philosophical debates. "To investigate realism in art is immediately to enter into philosophical territory," Terry Lovell wrote in 1980, "– into questions of ontology and epistemology of what exists in the world and how that world can be known" [Lovell, 1980: 6]. It is also to enter into political territory, because the form in which these questions are answered at a particular time necessarily shapes the relationship of intellectuals both to the historical past and to the future into which, potentially at least, the past opens up; and it consequently determines whether intellectuals feel it is their task, as Karl Marx famously put it, to interpret the world or to change it too (Beaumont, 2007: 2-3).

These assumptions, particularly the assumption that language makes itself available as a vehicle of representation, will be returned to throughout this thesis as they are foundational to its conceptualisation.

To paraphrase Scholes and Kellogg (1966: 250), we recognise verisimilitude as an identifying characteristic of realism in narrative because it is a natural function of the eye-witness point of view – and it is an eye-witness point of view, i.e. Steinberg's – that this study interests itself in. Because events and characters have a presence outside the text, in the words of Lehman (1997: 29), non-fiction “forces negotiation with its referentiality”. So, state O'Shaughnessy and Stadler (2002: 307), realism can be described as an attempt to portray things as they “really are”, as they appear to the human spectator. Realist art often involves portraying ordinary humans in their social situations, and realist art and media products tend to reflect and comment on society. Consequently, realism is still a common approach to representing life today.

What, though, is “allowed” to count as “real” so that it may be deemed, once described or reported, to be “realistic”? An answer to this question would be one useful route to arriving at a definition of realism – or at least an apprehension of what realism entails. To start with, but also to extend the aforementioned thought relating to sensory perception,

...any version of realism must embrace the claim that what can rightly be said to exist is not confined to what can be displayed to the senses or appears as empirical data. In particular, realisms are grounded in categories of entities that are characterised by their causal powers. Agency is exercised by powerful particulars.....The fact that the power is not observable in itself, but only in its effects, is, as Thomas Reid pointed out two hundred and fifty years ago, not an adequate ground for throwing it out as a sound ontological concept.....social structures do not exist in the way that powerful particulars must exist (Harré, 2001: 22-23).

Harré introduces here the issues of structure and agency, issues pivotal to the thinking which informs critical realism. This theory, more recently developed than realism, is discussed further on in this chapter. It is introduced at this point, however, because the issues of structure, power and agency have significant bearing on Magadien Wentzel, Steinberg's primary character/narrator: on the way his life develops, and consequently on the way Steinberg represents the effects of such non-material entities on his character, who is a man inhabiting a material realm in a material way. Realism, states critical realist Bhaskar (2011: 12), concurring with realist views presented thus far, is

the theory that the ultimate objects of scientific inquiry exist and act (for the most part) quite independently of scientists and their activity. Bhaskar proceeds to outline types of realism – empirical realism, subjective conceptual realism and transcendental realism, for instance – which afford levels of research nuance to match the complexity of the reality of lived lives.

Ultimately, however, this study eschews critical realism as a theoretical paradigm (see also section 4.6) and adopts the position that the broad and basic definition of realism provides adequate and appropriate theoretical terrain with which to interrogate the research question. This study arrives, then, at this definition of realism, taken from Morris (2003: 132):

A genre based upon an implicit communicative contract with the reader that there exists an independent, extra-textual real-world and that knowledge of this real-world can be produced and shared.

To solidify the discussion on defining realism (though the problem of definition is returned to briefly in section 4.4), this section closes with a point which points to realism's integral relationship with the focus of this study:

The epistemology that underwrites all uses of realist representation is the same: the need to communicate information about the material, non-linguistic world. Thematically and formally, realism is defined by an imperative to bear witness to all the consequences, comic and tragic, of our necessarily embodied existence (Morris, 2003: 44).

With this in mind, note Steinberg's stated imperative regarding the genesis of *The Number*:

I went to Pollsmoor Prison....it was just extraordinary to meet the gangs and see what they were all about...I was also struck by the fact that crime had a history, an ideological history, a history of narrative. And I wanted to know how individuals were swept up into that narrative and how it reshaped their lives (in Steinberg & Perlman, 2005: 62).

In other words, Steinberg desired to bear witness to the consequences of the embodied

existence of one of the inmates of Pollsmoor Prison. It is this witnessing, presented in *The Number*, that this project intends to explore. Before substantiating realism as an appropriate theoretical paradigm for the exploration of Steinberg's narrative representation in *The Number*, this chapter outlines three further points worthy of consideration.

4.3 Tracing the origins of realism

As an aesthetic, realism came into full flower as a response to romanticism, which had governed art and literature until the nineteenth century. Yet the roots of realism reach back to ancient Greece where Aristotle espoused the view that art was capable of imitating reality. Yet, paradoxically, the act of imitation, or copying, produced a coherent and plausible world that belonged solely to the imitation – creating in turn, it might be said, a reality with two edges.

In this regard, the term “mimesis” is much entwined with the term “realism”, a semantic relationship that quickly becomes philosophical. Dwelling on philosophical aspects of realism, however, takes this discussion away from its focus, which is how Steinberg presents – or re-presents – his primary character in *The Number*. For a fuller discussion on mimesis and its primary theorists including Auerbach, see Earnshaw (20: 84-87; 208-217; 264) who outlines and problematises its role in relation to realism and who also outlines the contribution Barthes made to the debate with his essay on “the reality effect”, the term most closely linked to Barthes with respect to realism (see Macey, 2000: 324-5; Earnshaw, 2010: 245-249). Returning to this study's journalistic interest in realism, it is worth noting media theorists O'Shaughnessy and Stadler (2002: 166):

The aesthetic tradition that is closest to real life is the mimetic or realist tradition....aim to imitate reality, to produce narratives and stories that are recognised as realistic. This mimetic tradition started with Greek culture and the history of mimetic art is a history of continually evolving styles and methods used to reproduce reality. The styles evolve partly because reality is, in the final analysis, impossible to capture.

Styles also evolve because taste, that ephemeral force, is constantly in flux. In relation to *The Number's* status as non-fiction reportage, it is worth noting at least one aspect of the history of realism – a history which, as Morris (2003: 3) also notes, dates back to the ancient world debates over what constitutes reality. The rise of empirical sciences like botany, anatomy and geology in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries challenged the authority of metaphysical and divine truth, inviting novelists to write in ways which reflected the modern secular understandings of reality. Empirical truth became grounded in the particular and specific. It can be no coincidence, then, that, at roughly the same time, the ideal of objectivity in journalism was born (see, for instance, Glasser, 1984: n.p.; Sims, 2007: 21; Hildebrand, 2010: 3). This developing emphasis on empirical truth led to a dichotomy:

The distinction between fact and fiction, once it is clearly established, forces story-telling to choose the rubric under which it will function: truth or beauty. The result is a separation of narrative streams into factual and fictional, producing forms we have learned to call history and romance. In Western culture the two streams both spring from the fountainhead of Homeric epic and go their separate ways until they reunite in the novel. The novel's combination of factual and fictional elements is not naive and instinctive but sophisticated and deliberate, made possible by the development of a concept called realism, which provides a rationale for a marriage that rationalism had seemed to forbid (Scholes & Kellogg, 1966: 58).

Although this chapter confines itself to a consideration of literary realism, the fact that the theory of realism has an equally long and influential political history (see Earnshaw, 2010: 207-278) is worth bearing in mind as *The Number* concerns itself with prisons, with gangs, with contemporary – and therefore with political – life in South Africa. However, exploring political aspects of Steinberg's text lies beyond the scope of this study. To close this brief discussion on the history of realism, it is germane to note, as O'Shaugnessy and Stadler (2002: 166) do, that “realism” is an important critical term in relation to nineteenth century painting and literature, and twentieth century film and television – and, this study argues, twenty-first century literary journalism. For, as the authors continue, the different elements that make up realist texts are: ordinary people, particularly the working classes, as subject matter;

serious treatment of their lives; and lives situated in contemporary social contexts. Every one of these elements is present in *The Number* (see Chapter 6 for ways in which these elements inhabit this study's analysis of this text). What is salient to the focus of this study is the point that is pivotal, too, to Barthes – that writing and language are representations rather than the real itself (Earnshaw, 2010: 248-249), a matter central to the journalism project.

4.4 Realism and reportage

Examination of the relationship between reportage and realism reveals it to be another contested – and contentious – field of endeavour, not least because realism characterised works (and therefore worlds) of fiction. Continuing to lean on Morris (2003: 2) who holds that the terms “realism” and “realist” inhabit both the realm of everyday usage and the more specialist aesthetic realm of literary and artistic usage, this study contends that literary journalism also attempts to fulfil this dual obligation, i.e. to report via aesthetic means – in Steinberg's case, via words/literature – the realm of what is (for another) the everyday. While such congruence might suggest that realism is an appropriate paradigm for the research problem under discussion, attempts to clarify and define the term tend to compound complexity already innate to both realism and the research problem under discussion. Firstly, as Earnshaw (2010: 4) reminds us, reality has been mediated in some way by the writer, an act which raises questions of presentation, re-presentation, creation and construction. Secondly, as Morris (2003: 2) has it:

Inevitably our judgements...are generally influenced by our attitudes to non-fictional reality. It is impossible to draw absolute boundaries separating the meaning and values of the terms as they are normally used from their evaluative meaning as used in critical discourse. Related to this is the entanglement of realist and realism with a series of other words equally resistant to clear-cut definition: factuality, truth, reality, realistic and real...the term realism almost always involves both claims about the nature of reality and an evaluative attitude towards it. It is, thus, a term that is frequently invoked in making fundamental ethical and political claims or priorities, based upon perceptions of what is 'true' or 'real'.

The words the author lists as resisting definition – factuality, truth, reality, realistic and real – are precisely the points at which reportage and realism map onto each other, forcing us to attend to their confluence. McQuail (2005: 389-390) reminds us that different genres require different concepts of realism, an exercise of differentiation assisted by his summary of Hall's six dimensions of realism: plausibility, perceptual persuasiveness, typicality, factuality, emotional involvement, and narrative consistency. Narrative, McQuail continues (simultaneously echoing the discussion in section 4.2),

often depends on assumptions about realism and helps to reinforce a sense of reality, by invoking the logic, normality and predictability of human behaviour....realism of media depends on a certain attitude that what is portrayed is 'true to life'. The more real the portrayal seems, the more difficult it is for the reader, who is likely to take the reality of the world for granted, to establish any alternative meanings (McQuail, 2005: 389-390).

Yet, as Krog (in Brown & Krog, 2011: 3) points out, even the simplest journalism is inadequate in giving a single fact in its complete fullness – the moment there is language, reality is already affected. In other words, consuming journalism also entails being consumed by a journalist's reality. In this vein, it is this study's view that, through language, authors take temporary custody of their readers' sensibilities and that, in submitting to such custody, readers activate a powerful contract between the two parties: the writer undertakes to be as faithful as possible to the material of the story while the reader trusts that material *and* the way it is delivered. The critical question here is: how does a portrayal succeed in presenting itself as realistic? Often, it is through lavish attention to detail – carefully or minutely observed phenomena are one way for a reader to trust that what a writer is delivering is “true” and therefore “real”. This position rests on what Morris (2003: 44) refers to as realism's humanist contract with the reader, which is based upon the consensual belief that shared communication about material and subjective realities is possible.

If, as Steinberg implies when he says of his interest in prison gang culture, “I wanted to tell that story” (in Steinberg & Perlman, 2005: 62), *The Number* must then be taken as the embodiment of his aim to represent the facts of that story. Clearly, such an aim – to tell the story of prison gang culture – is in line with the view that

realist works can disturb or please or educate us by showing reality as not what we think we know, by showing realities we have never seen or dreamed, or by making speakable realities that might previously have seemed only idiosyncratic or incommunicable (Bowlby, 2007: xviii).

Thus realism, being an integral part of the reporting enterprise, offers researchers a useful prism with which to illuminate the central research questions under discussion. To reiterate, these questions are: What narrative decisions does Jonny Steinberg make in the text of *The Number* to convey aspects of the reality he experienced in relation to his main character, Magadien Wentzel, and what effect do such decisions have on the reader?

4.5 The role of the narrator in realism

Around the mid-twentieth century, there began a widespread movement of novelists away from a reality they felt increasingly unequal to understanding and describing. Literary realism of the sort epitomised by George Eliot et al gave way to the literary wave that became known as post-modernism. But social and aesthetic movements never occur in a vacuum, so the rapid ascent of narrative non-fiction was not simply nor solely a response to a playing field left open by flummoxed novelists (see Carlean, 1988: 8-10). It was, as has been pointed out in Chapter 2, a response also to tumultuous times. It is precisely in such times that

...stories appeal primarily because they offer a simulacrum of life which enables an audience to participate in events without being involved in the consequences which events in the actual world inevitably carry with them. Our pleasure in narrative literature itself, then, can be seen as a function of disparity of viewpoint or irony. Because we are not involved in the action represented, we always enjoy a certain superiority over the characters who are (Scholes & Kellogg, 1966: 241).

It could be argued that this final qualification by the authors comes across now, nearly 40 years on, as somewhat high-handed in the light of democracy and egalitarianism becoming more widespread, a socio-political condition which could be said to encourage citizens to be less judgemental or “superior” towards others. Nevertheless, the authors are worth consulting for the comprehensive overview they offer with

regard to historicising the narrator.

The problem of the authority of the narrator, they aver (Scholes & Kellogg, 1966: 242), is just one aspect of the problem of point of view as it developed over time: in traditional narrative, the events being recounted are always long past so the narrator fulfils the functions of entertainer and historian simultaneously in a tradition that provides him with his authority. By means of a textual analysis applied to aspects of Steinberg's narrative choices with respect to his narrator, Magadien Wentzel, in *The Number*, this research explores in Chapter 6 where this notion of narratorial authority might now be situated. Before doing so, however, it is instructive to note that the role of the narrator can be traced to the era of Homeric storytelling. According to Scholes and Kellogg (1966: 58), Homer used the term *histor* rather than *narrator*, though it should be noted also that the concept of history in anything like its modern sense did not exist for him. They add:

The *histor* is the narrator as inquirer, constructing a narrative on the basis of such evidence as he has been able to accumulate. The *histor* is not a character in narrative, but he is not exactly the author himself, either (Scholes & Kellogg, 1966: 265-266);

and:

He [the *histor*] examines the past with an eye toward separating out actuality from myth (Scholes & Kellogg, 1966: 242).

That there is no authority granted to an eye-witness, empirical, narrative in the ancient world is relevant: it could thus be argued that this literary convention adumbrated the journalistic convention that became enshrined as the quest of objectivity. A document aspiring to achieve truth of fact, state Scholes and Kellogg (1966: 243), had a better chance of being appreciated as factual if it did not seem too personal.

Continuing their broad sweep through narrative history, the authors report that medieval narrative features little or no *histor*, eye-witness or empirical authorial position and that it is not until the Renaissance that the eye-witness narrator stages a return in texts such as Dante's *Commedia* (see Scholes & Kellogg, 1966: 250). Realism, states Earnshaw (2010: 54), is concomitant with the idea of a neutral

observer with all the information to hand from which to identify patterns and causality, and from which to draw conclusions. Thus it becomes possible to envision Steinberg assuming his position in the latter stages of this long tradition.

However, this is contestable. It could be argued that the very act of selection has positioned the reporter of stories as a positioned narrator since the first tale was told; that Homer's *histor* was picking his personal way through whatever evidence he was able to accumulate – which is not the same as all the evidence in existence. For, as Morris (2003: 4) states, writing has to select and order, something has to come first, and that selection and ordering will always, in some way, entail the values and perspective of the describer. This argues that oral tellers of tales also had to select and order; even in a chronologically linear tale, a narrator would have to select where to start, for instance.

Although much of this chapter is drawn from thinking which informs the literary realism that concerns itself with novels, this section of the research aligns itself philosophically with Earnshaw (2010: 57) who states that the techniques of realism can be used in any genre to make a story seem more plausible, functioning as a link between the author, narrator, novel, reader and real world. It becomes clear, therefore, that whether a writer positions herself as primary narrator or not, within her text or without, offering scrupulously recorded detail to gain our trust or leaving us to roam the epistemological spaces of her story, we are interminably in relationship with that writer, forming a narrative reality, making sense, linking. For that realism is needed.

4.6 In defence of realism

As outlined in Chapter 2 of this study, the four devices Wolfe (1973: 31-32) lists as the techniques of realism are: scene-by-scene construction; realistic dialogue; third-person point of view; and the recording of symbolic details. With these, plus what Carlean (1988: 9) terms typical bravado, exponents of the new non-fiction seized upon the literary gap created by the post-modernist retreat from reality. In light of Carlean's reprise of Wolfe's claim that the “new journalists” dethroned the novel as the number one genre in the sixties, and took over the techniques of realism for themselves, this study turns to realism as an appropriate theoretical basis. For, as Wolfe (1973: xi) himself puts it:

Realism is not merely another literary approach or attitude. The introduction of detailed realism into English literature in the eighteenth century was like the introduction of electricity into machine technology. It raised the state of the art to an entirely new magnitude. And for anyone, in fiction or nonfiction, to try to improve literary technique by abandoning social realism would be like an engineer trying to improve upon machine technology by abandoning electricity.

In tune with this compelling standpoint, this study asserts that for it to abandon realism as a theoretical paradigm in favour of another would be like a writer trying to keep her pencils sharp without a sharpener. Or, as Earnshaw (2010: 10) puts it, if “the real” is our default orientation in the world, then an aesthetic which self-consciously embraces this tells us something about the way we understand self and world.

Indeed, realism has proved so powerful an agent in narrative art that its influence may never wholly disappear (Scholes & Kellogg, 1966: 85). This is because, the authors continue, in modern empirical narrative we are interested – in history as well as in journalism and realistic fiction – in “the way it was” (Scholes & Kellogg, 1966: 244). Mindful of this overarching interest, it can be no surprise to find that realism has been in use as a philosophical label virtually as long as philosophy has existed (Lopez & Potter, 2001: 5). Yet, latterly, realism has come to seem philosophically compromised, as a result of the institutional entrenchment of the anti-realist elements of poststructuralist thought, that it is at present of peculiar importance for criticism (Beaumont, 2007: 3). Consequently, as germane as realism presents itself to be for the purposes of this research, it is necessary to survey the field for paradigms equally – or more – fitting. The most pressing of these is critical realism, a descendant of realism which takes account of social structure and agency, thus lending itself to an academic exploration of *The Number*, a text which purports to represent the story of a gangster, much of which is set in a prison. Setting aside the rest of the text's complexity, just these two circumstances fulfil a great deal of what critical realists Lopez and Potter (2001: 15) term realism in action:

We are shaped and affected by social structures. Social forces act upon us. Social structures limit our range of possible choices of action and thought. The long-standing sociological debates concerning the determination of

individuals and their activities by social structure on the one hand, and their freely chosen activities and individual causal powers to act and create as agents on the other, are resolved by this transformational model. We do not 'create' social structure. We reproduce and transform it. But it too causally affects us.

Deepening this point, a founding scholar of critical realism put it this way:

It should be appreciated that all philosophies, cognitive discourses and practical activities presuppose a realism – in the sense of some ontology or general account of the world – of one kind or another. The crucial question is: *what kind?* ...Critical realists...hold that we will only be able to understand – and so change – the social world if we identify the structures at work that generate [those] events or discourses....These structures are not spontaneously apparent in the observable pattern of events; they can only be identified through the practical and theoretical work of the social sciences (Bhaskar, 2011: 2).

One such structure could be said to be literary construction, i.e. the selections and editorial decisions a writer makes in the construction and representation of any particular story. *The Number* presents multiple opportunities for scholarship, one of which might be an identification of structures contributing to Steinberg's discourse. That, however, lies beyond the remit of this study, which aims to analyse aspects of the relationship between author and narrator as represented on the page. Such examination of a text is a more straightforward affair than a political desire for structural change in the Bhaskarian mode. So, despite its manifold attractions as a theoretical grasp on a world, this study eschews critical realism, then, in preference for realism which, while possibly appearing the more simplistic option, does offer potential for a thoroughness of application. The brevity of this study is a compelling imperative for its theoretical framework to be able to deliver the investigation to a satisfactory conclusion. Opting for increased theoretical complexity means opting to open gates that will swing wider than the scope of this study can satisfactorily close. Finally, this study notes the comment of Lopez and Potter (2001: 5) that realism *struggles* for clarity and simplicity [authors' italics] and that critical realism does not always achieve its goals in this regard.

This study returns, then, to Morris (2003: 44) whose reliance on realism stems from her view that we need an intelligent critical understanding of writing that aims to respond adequately to the materiality of existence in all its sensuous plushness and its bloodied flesh. This, then, is what this study aims to do: to critically understand Steinberg's writing in *The Number*, a text which aims to respond to the materiality of the existence of one man, Magadien, in all his bloodied flesh. Chapter 6 examines aspects of Steinberg's text in the light of "artistic means" Morris (2003: 101) lists as the ways in which literary realism authenticates itself. These means are the empirical effect, the truth effect and the character effect.

4.7 Meta-theory

Before closing the issue of appropriate theory, it is worth probing this study's position regarding realism with one final test: Does realism fit its meta-theoretical framework? Particularly salient to the quest for a philosophical frame of reference for this research is a collection of assumptions listed by Fourie (2001: 237-253) as underlying critical media theory, including:

- that the communicator assigns meaning to reality or some aspect of reality;
- that the meaning a recipient attaches to a text is a result of their confrontation with that text;
- that the circumstances of the communicator influence what they produce; and
- that the creation of meaning and the attachment of meaning to reality is central.

In addition, as Oosthuizen (1995: 16-18) has it, critical theory focuses on social issues in the absence of being able to provide permanent answers about existence, and deconstructs social phenomena through reflection. It also takes into account the personal (subjective) nature of the relationship between researcher and research. As the examples cited in Chapter 6 aim to illustrate, Steinberg's frequent references to his position vis-à-vis his primary character is one of the distinguishing narratival aspects of *The Number*. In light of this, and also foregoing arguments about realism and the nature of reality and its representation, it is believed that critical theory does indeed lend itself as an appropriate meta-science to frame this study.

4.8 Summary

Lopez & Potter (2001a: 9) assert that knowledge, being culturally and historically situated, means we rationally judge between competing theories on the basis of their intrinsic merits as explanations of reality. Academic scholarship, being a knowledge endeavour, concerns itself with a parallel judgement. This chapter has offered a defence for realism as an appropriate theoretical portal through which to explore aspects of narration in *The Number*. Having considered the intrinsic merits of critical realism, it has made a rational judgement in favour of realism. In arriving at this position, this study draws reassurance from the view of Lopez and Potter (2001a: 4) that it seems to be a sociological fact that intellectual and academic life has its fashions and enthusiasms. One can cynically observe that the demise of one “exciting new” trend or school of thought generally means that another will soon be born, they write. Taking that as the case, some “dull old” ones – like realism – will be returned to, and discovered anew because contemporary circumstances, having changed, will offer them new life. And because, as Morris (2003: 3) has it, realism as a literary form has been associated with an insistence that art cannot turn away from the more sordid and harsh aspects of human existence, it presents itself as a theoretical framework appropriate to this study of a work of literary non-fiction which, among other things, aims to present harsh aspects of human existence in South Africa. Moreover, realism participates in the democratic impulse of modernity (Morris, 2003: 3), as vivid a description as any of Steinberg's aim in writing *The Number*, that is to place it as a literary participant in South Africa's own democratic impulse.

Chapter 5:

Research design and methodology

You can never just “analyse a text”. We analyse
in order to answer specific questions.

– Alan McKee (2003: 73)

5.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter outlined the theoretical considerations which inform this study's research design and methodology, including foundational assumptions regarding the term “reality” and what Ifversen (2003: 60-61) terms the inevitable role of language in the formation of reality. It is because literary journalism as a genre uses language to represent particular realities that this study aims to explore aspects of a specific literary journalism text. This chapter outlines the philosophical and epistemological underpinnings of the route this study intends to follow in order to arrive at a conclusion, by way of answering two research questions, namely: What narrative decisions does Jonny Steinberg make in the text of *The Number* to convey aspects of the reality he experienced in relation to his main character, Magadien Wentzel, and what effect do such decisions have on the reader? In considering the role of theory in framing the research methodology of this study, Iser (2006: 4-7) contributes clarifying insight. Theory as an intellectual tool, he states, is an attempt at mapping, an activity which strives to discern something. The exploratory nature of this study is therefore in line with his view of the greater academic project of the humanities, which is to achieve understanding. To deliver this study to such a position, the prompts presented by Babbie and Mouton (2008: 75-79) can be likened to signposts on a map, a cartographic metaphor which serves this research design by navigating its route thus: an empirical study which aims to explore narrative representation of one character by analysing existing data (*The Number* by Jonny Steinberg) by means of textual analysis. What follows in this chapter is an explication of this research design.

5.2 Epistemological considerations

The exploratory nature of this study falls within the rubric advanced by Lemon (1995:

32) as well as Babbie and Mouton (2008: 75-79) as a purpose of research. However, exploratory studies also present shortcomings, chief of which, according to Babbie and Mouton (2008: 80), is that they seldom provide satisfactory answers to research questions. But, the authors concede, exploratory studies can hint at answers. It is this modest quest which motivates this research. Before pursuing this quest, however, a sober consideration of an important shortcoming is pertinent. The reason exploratory studies are seldom definitive in themselves has to do with representativeness (Babbie & Mouton, 2008: 80; 172-173). The authors' explication of their assertion concerns itself primarily with sampling and selection, technicalities of no relevance to the focus of this study which focuses on a single literary journalism text. Nevertheless, the requirement of representativeness is worth bearing in mind: the degree to which a lone researcher is able to bring representative perspective to a project is debatable and ultimately unquantifiable.

It is necessary, therefore, for this study to locate itself within a philosophical frame of reference which accommodates and supports such exploration, and to deploy a research methodology able to serve the aims of such exploration. To this end, this study has already presented a rationale for situating itself within the meta-theoretical paradigm of critical theory and, more specifically, taking realism as its theoretical point of departure. The study now surveys issues relating to its research methodology and design.

5.2.1 Qualitative research

With regard to methodology, this section now concerns itself with a brief assessment of qualitative research since, as Oosthuizen (1995: 21) points out, it is linked so fundamentally with critical theory. Unlike quantitative research, which yields knowledge based on empirical observation and measurement, qualitative research, being analytic and interpretive, allows for the belief that there is no single, observable, objective reality lending itself to being quantified (see Lemon, 1995: 33). As discussed in Chapter 4, challenges related to the term "reality" make pinning it down, objectifying it, attempting to observe it, a contested enterprise. As the aforementioned discussion attempts to demonstrate, reality by its very nature does not allow for empirical corroboration. Taking into consideration the relative strengths and capacities of the two research paradigms (quantitative and qualitative), as well as the exploratory

nature of the research problem giving rise to this study, it becomes clear that it is qualitative methodology that will best serve the research under discussion. In doing so, this research assumes a position in line with Babbie and Mouton (2008: 53) that the term “qualitative research paradigm” refers

to that generic research approach in social research according to which research takes its departure point as the insider perspective on social action. Qualitative researchers attempt always to study human action from the insiders' perspective...The goal of research is defined as describing and understanding (Verstehen) rather than the explanation and prediction of human behaviour.

Further supporting this position is the notion of “thick description”, i.e. that cultural analysis guesses at meanings, assesses the guesses, and draws explanatory conclusions from the better ones (Geertz in Iser, 2006: 190) to which Iser adds that such a process cannot appeal for verification to any given frame of reference. Indeed, as the following discussion on textual analysis sets out to illustrate, this research aims only to offer some guesses as a way of opening up space for debate. This research's quest for understanding can never be quantifiable; verification lies beyond the reach of qualitative methodology. However, this is no stumbling block: research and reflection lead to further research and reflection, a process of intellectual circling that leads to developing familiarity, depth of recognition and, ultimately, explication of a research problem. In other words, as Lemon (1995: 29, 30) puts it, research is a contextual and circular process.

5.2.2 Textual analysis

McKee (2003), whose philosophical approach to textual analysis is central to this research, makes two statements in particular which underpin the way this study regards this methodology:

A text is something we make meaning from (McKee, 2003: 4),

and:

Scientific knowledge is usually numerical and iterable. Textual analysis is not. This does not mean that it is less truthful, objective or accurate –

scientific knowledge is one way of representing the world, not the truth (McKee, 2003: 137).

Because texts are linguistic representations of reality (Ifversen, 2003: 68), textual analysis offers a useful tool to glean insights – or what McKee (2003: 1) terms “an educated guess” – into what interpretations might be made of that text. And, the author continues, we interpret texts to try and obtain a sense of the ways in which people make sense of the world around them (McKee, 2003: 1). It is in this light that this research intends to interpret aspects of the text of *The Number* with a view to understanding ways in which readers might make sense of Magadien Wentzel as a narrator as a result of Steinberg's authorial choices. Being neither numerical nor repeatable, textual analysis as a methodology is often regarded as subjective. But, counting in favour of this post-structuralist methodology is the general acceptance that there is a value in the more intuitive work that happens in the humanities. In addition, the study of human sense-making can never be truly scientific for human reactions function differently from chemical reactions, and even the supposed objectivity of science is open to debate (see McKee, 2003: 118-120).

5.2.2.1 Textual analysis as a framework

Hughes (2007: 250) points out that there is no single methodology of textual analysis. In fact, agrees McKee (2003: 2), there is a huge range of methodologies, many of which are mutually contradictory and incompatible. Textual analysis is simply a general term embracing the variety of ways researchers and students analyse texts to gather information about how texts produce potential meanings for human beings to make sense of the world (McKee, 2003: 1; Hughes, 2007: 249). The latter author goes on to outline two main traditions of textual analysis: those that understand texts as “reflections” of the world; and those that understand texts as culturally produced and interpreted “constructions” (Hughes, 2007: 249). It is the second of these traditions that frames this study's exploration.

5.2.2.2 Relevance of textual analysis

This research does not set out to evaluate how accurate *The Number* may be in its representation of reality. This is not a feasible exercise in view of the fact that Steinberg's experience was an individual one and therefore cannot be replicated.

Rather, this research sets out to explore Steinberg's text as a route to understanding the narrative representation of a reality only he experienced. To rearrange the point Ifverson (2003: 68) makes above, the text known as *The Number* is a linguistic representation of reality as Steinberg experienced it.

The intention of this study, then, is contained by the view that textual analysis must get to grips with the representational chain that links memory to testimony and testimony to writing (Ifverson, 2003: 60). To attempt getting to grips with this representational chain, this study aims to apply the techniques of textual analysis (outlined below) to *The Number*, particularly those passages in which Steinberg represents his main character. In other words, as Mouton (2001: 168) puts it, to exploit the strengths of textual analysis so as to arrive at a plausible and credible interpretation of the text. Indeed, to interrogate the way Mouton (2001: 167-168) maps textual analysis as one possible research design type is to be comprehensively persuaded of its suitability for the research question under discussion. In relation to its suitability specifically for this text of testimony, the following is pertinent:

...reportorial and analytical methods are always open to scrutiny because the nonfiction narrator is measured against a human presence that must gain access to the other presences that become part of the narrative...she deals with characters whose presence extends outside the text....all narratives are constructed...readers can learn about the author and the narrative from the way the author constructs (his)story (Lehman, 1997: 41).

Indirectly concurring, Steinberg, in conversation with Lehman (2010: 32), explains the focus of his work thus: "What I know best about him is what I experience of him, and that is the relationship he develops with *me*" (author's italics). Likewise, Perlman (in Steinberg & Perlman, 2005: 62) states that this type of journalism is "fundamentally and profoundly about the relationships between people".

In this respect, it is worth noting *The Number's* sub-title: *One man's search for identity in the Cape underworld and prison gangs*. The text certainly does focus on one man – but his search is mediated by a second man. Conceptually, it follows then that the second man (Steinberg) is actually first on the scene, textually speaking, thus making *The Number* one man's representation of another man's search for identity, a process

which identifies certain things about himself as constructed narrator. This study contends that this type of journalism is fundamentally and profoundly about a further relationship – that between author and reader. Such relationship rests entirely on the author's particular permutations of the 26 characters of the English language. The reader, being intellectually sequestered with those ink marks, is left to fashion her own relationship with the author and with his character. Consequently, this study turns to textual analysis as a tool for understanding this narrative relationship.

5.3 Research design and procedure

Guy (in Lemon, 1995: 38) advances the following as a definition of a research design: the plan of procedures for data collection and analysis that are undertaken to evaluate a particular theoretical perspective. Such a plan, furthermore, is the blueprint for the collection and analysis of data. The items any research strives to observe, describe and explain are known as units of analysis. These, as Babbie and Mouton (2008: 84) explain, are the entities a researcher is interested in investigating. For the purposes of this study, then, the units of analysis would be words and phrases, written or reported by Steinberg and appearing in *The Number*, which convey (or construct) a level of meaning to the reader. Specifically, the units of analysis which concern this research centre around Steinberg's presentation of his main character, Magadien Wentzel, and his own position in relation to that character. Employing the vocabulary of McKee (2003: 15), *The Number* exists as a material trace of the practice of sense-making and, as such, is the only empirical evidence we have of how Steinberg makes sense of its (*The Number's*) world.

Because *The Number* is a social artefact residing in what the authors conceive of as World 1, or “everyday life” (Babbie & Mouton, 2008: 6-7), an exploration of its text amounts to empirical research. Knowledge acquired in this realm comes through learning, experience, and self-reflection, is referred to as “lay knowledge”, and is needed in order to be able to cope in this world. The authors contend that one needs knowledge of fellow human beings, and the forces that impact on society. Such contention, it could be argued, underwrites the journalistic aim and thus Steinberg's and even the motive behind this study. However, the “ordinary knowledge” gleaned in World 1 is not regarded as acceptable in the world of science which resides in what the authors conceive of as World 2. Here the knowledge acquired is collective, the

product of rigorous, methodical and systematic enquiry into the phenomena of World 1, driven by an epistemic imperative that “fits” the world and is rational (Babbie & Mouton, 2008: 16). Rationality in science implies objectivity, specifically as applied to process, and also critical interest which in turn implies reflection on scientific practice. This is located in what the authors conceive of as World 3, the world of meta-science where philosophical and methodological paradigms reside. The Three Worlds Framework operates as a tool to help organise thinking and is a useful frame of reference for the design and execution of this research project (see also Mouton, 2001: 137-142).

This section now lays out how this research responds to the requirements of a sound research design, as presented by Kothari (in Lemon, 1995: 40). These are: the sources and types of information relevant to the research problem, and the strategy and approach to gather and analyse data. The third item – a consideration of the constraints of time and money – has little bearing on the research under discussion, as the following material implies.

5.3.1 Sources and types of information

McKee (2003: 73) states that we analyse text in order to answer specific questions. It is implicit in any research problem that its question be explicit, but its answers, for reasons laid out above, can only be tentative – the “educated guess”. To arrive at one, McKee (2003: 93-101) suggests preliminary knowledge of four categories of intertexts.

5.3.1.1. Other texts in the series

The Number is Steinberg's second book. It follows *Midlands*, which appeared two years earlier and which introduced two characteristically Steinberg tropes. The first is the unpicking of a pressing South African topic: “I knew that the story of his [Peter Mitchell, the son of a farmer] and subsequent deaths would illuminate a great deal about the early days of post-apartheid South Africa” (Steinberg, 2002: ix). The second is the open way Steinberg shares with the reader his narrative doubts and defences with regard to his primary sources/characters: “My task was not to protect Mitchell [the deceased's father] from his readership, still less to point out the poisonousness of having a readership at all....My purpose was to tell a grander story, one that happened

to implicate, and to reach into the life of, a man who had agreed to talk to me” (Steinberg, 2002: xi).

5.3.1.2. The genre of the text

The Number is a book-length work of literary journalism, one of Steinberg's portraits of the “shattered souls of post-apartheid South Africa” (Mulgrew, 2011: 27). As information on the book's back cover puts it, *The Number* is a tale of modern South Africa's historic events seen through the eyes of the country's underclass (Steinberg, 2004: back cover).

5.3.1.3. Intertexts about the text itself

Steinberg's standing as a crime reporter, researcher and literary journalist, in addition to the relevance and weight of his book's subject matter, meant that both text and author precipitated the appearance of multiple reviews, critiques, journal articles and interviews. Some of these, which comply with the injunction of Lemon (1995: 42) to examine secondary data, are quoted in the course of this thesis.

5.3.1.4. The wider public context in which a text is circulated

Context is no small matter, nor a simple one; Ifversen (2003: 62-63) points to some of the layers of complexity surrounding context. For the purposes of this study, however, the textual analysis which is the focus of Chapter 6 confines itself to examples which illustrate one aspect of contemporary society – crime – in which production of *The Number* was situated. The aim of this narrow illustration stems from this study's attention on textual representation of just one character, i.e. Magadien Wentzel.

5.3.2 Strategy and approach to gather and analyse data

Ifversen (2003: 61) enumerates questions arising from his experience in textual analysis and which are rooted in his initial incarnation as a historian. While useful, their abundance (a list of six, although umbrella questions bring the total to eleven) and probing complexity make them more exhaustive than a study of this nature can do justice to. Consequently, as indicated in Chapter 4, I shall analyse aspects of *The Number* via two of the three “artistic means” outlined by Morris (2003: 101) which literary realism deploys in its bid to authenticate itself. The three means are the

empirical effect, the truth effect and the character effect. However, as Morris's thesis focuses exclusively on fiction, transposing her exposition of the truth effect to an analysis of a non-fiction work is less than straightforward. As a result, this study focuses its analysis on the empirical effect and the character effect.

5.3.2.1 The empirical effect:

This refers, according to Morris (2003: 101), to all those techniques by which realist writing seems to convey the experiential actuality of existence in physical space and chronological time.

5.3.2.2 The character effect:

This is probably, states Morris (2003: 113), for many readers, the primary means of entry into a work. But, she asks, how is the character effect achieved? Citing Barthes, she outlines the role of the semic code, or the voice, of the person. When identical semes traverse the same proper name several times and appear to settle on it, a character is created...The proper name acts as a magnetic field for the semes (Barthes in Morris, 2003: 113). One avenue of exploration open to this study, then, is the location of what might be called the Magadien semes for, as Morris (2003: 115) continues, a character's spoken words or the verbal articulation of their thoughts can give substance to the sense of an individual consciousness.

However, there are other avenues of exploration and these pertain to the division in narration summarised by Genette (in Morris, 2003: 115) as “who speaks” and “who sees”, also known by some critics as “narrative point of view” and “narrative voice”. The aspect of “seeing”, continues Morris, is termed by Genette as “focalisation” which is to say the perspective from which characters and events are viewed. Convincing literary realism offers a consonance between narrative voice and narrative focalisation, resulting in a detailed understanding of a character's subjective state of mind. This technique is pertinent to the aim of this study, which is to analyse the means by which the author establishes the identity and therefore the presence of his main character as a way of exploring Steinberg's narrative decisions in the course of portraying aspects of his reality in relation to Magadien Wentzel.

Two further topics require brief discussion: triangulation and validity. Triangulation is

defined as an attempt to include multiple sources of data collection in a single research project to increase the reliability of the results (Lemon, 1995: 33). To varying degrees, triangulation may also compensate for the limitations of each research method. In other words, triangulation refers to multiple methods of data collection. However, the fact that the research focus of this study is narrow (just one aspect of just one Steinberg text) narrows its scope for triangulation. What can be done to overcome this potential downfall includes an exploration of a growing body of literature in an expanding field (i.e. literary journalism) plus a sample of intertexts as a way of situating *The Number* socially, politically, and culturally. It is anticipated that these efforts at triangulation would contribute to the “educated guess” of the proposed textual analysis.

Turning now to the matter of validity, this study heeds Lemon (1995: 31) who asks: How do we know that the results of the research answer the question(s) posed at the beginning of the research process? She goes on to explain the importance of internal validity, i.e. the extent to which the data collection, analysis, and interpretation are consistent, given the same conditions, and external validity, i.e. the issue of whether or not independent researchers can replicate studies in the same or similar settings and obtain similar results. For this study, internal validity is satisfied by the fact that Steinberg's text is the same, page for page, for any researcher approaching its content. It is also equally accessible to any other researcher, as are the intertexts referring to it either directly (such as book reviews) or obliquely (such as contextual social and cultural information), a circumstance demonstrated by the reference list at the end of this thesis. Analysis and interpretation, however, are not directly replicable; this would be contingent on theoretical foundations informing such activities. As for external validity, this study does not rely on setting to obtain results. The testability of the findings of this research would hinge on the paradigmatic approach of the researcher. It is the view of this study that this does not render the current research invalid as appropriate and thorough explication of theoretical perspective, which Chapter 4 presents, would provide a satisfactory validation.

5.4 Summary

This chapter has sought to outline and substantiate the research design and methodology adopted by this research project, which is to explore Steinberg's

narrative decisions in the representation of his main character in *The Number*. The methodological approach chosen for this study is qualitative, on the grounds that it provides allowance for the interpretive nature of analysis of a reality which cannot be objectively observed. The study used textual analysis, specifically tools known as the empirical effect and the character effect, to explore Steinberg's representation of his main character, Magadien Wentzel, in *The Number*. This chapter also paid particular attention to epistemological considerations related to the topics under review, i.e. qualitative research as a paradigm, and textual analysis as a methodological approach. The next chapter presents the findings of this study's research.

Chapter 6:

Presentation and analysis of findings

...that most indispensable quality to the
non-fictional reading experience, namely, narrative trust.

– Rob Nixon (2012: 42)

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the data and findings of this study's textual analysis of Jonny Steinberg's work of literary journalism entitled *The Number*. This analysis explores some of the narrational decisions Steinberg has made in his bid to convey the reality he experienced in the course of his relationship with the book's main character, Magadien Wentzel. As preceding chapters have outlined, this analysis takes realism as its theoretical point of departure and, in particular, leans on Morris's interpretation of that theory. Specifically, the analysis employs analytic prisms offered by Morris (2003) as tools to approach an understanding of Steinberg's narrative representation of his prison experience. Placing its epistemological foundation within the framework of critical theory, this study presents itself as a qualitative research project with the aim of increasing understandings of narrative reality and thereby of literary journalism.

This chapter sets out on its exploration of Steinberg's text having pursued the precepts laid out by Lemon (1995: 31), i.e. that this research has been a pre-planned, conscious, and deliberate process in which the researcher has attempted to systematically investigate a problem. In this case, that problem, framed as questions, are: What narrative decisions does Jonny Steinberg make in the text of *The Number* to convey aspects of the reality he experienced in relation to his main character, Magadien Wentzel, and what effect do such decisions have on the reader? The chapters preceding this one explicate the pre-planned, conscious, and deliberate process which now delivers this study to this critical point: the presentation of this project's data and findings which emerge in the course of exploring the research question. The material which follows in this chapter aims to analyse and interpret certain textual elements, and to present such analysis and interpretation. As such, this material is intended to serve as evidence to support the findings of this exploratory research into the problem outlined above.

We can never know for certain how people interpret a particular text, argues McKee (2003: 15), but we can look at the clues, gather evidence about similar sense-making practices, and make educated guesses. In attempting to make its own educated guesses, this study pays close attention to the author's word use and scene construction with a view to measuring not only what the author *crafts* but also what the author *reveals* (Lehman, 1997: 43; author's italics). To do this, the study turns first to its data. However, before proceeding, one important preliminary point is briefly presented.

6.2 A preliminary point: Regarding the literary trinity

While it may be common cause that every text contains within it a triangular relationship, this study deems it useful to draw overt attention to this three-sided conjunction before proceeding. A text always stands between two parties – writer and reader – and unites them in ways they would be unable to achieve were it not for that text. In this regard, it is worth recalling from Chapter 2 the observation made by Connery (1994) that literary journalism is an expression of community that comes from readers entering the narrative with the narrator, either as participant or observer. Taking into consideration the exploration of the research at the heart of this study, it could be said that literary journalism adds complexity to this literary trinity by virtue of its operation in the realm of reality. As Lehman (1997: 50) has it:

...nonfiction pits the teller and its subjects in a contest over facts and interpretation that plays out across the text. The subject cannot be contained within the imagination of the author; thus the author confronts a living subject as one character to another.

It is the aim of this chapter to illustrate, via analysis of the text of *The Number*, ways in which Steinberg as author confronts the book's main character, Magadien Wentzel, as one character to another. This aim falls within the overarching research aim of this study, which is to explore ways in which Steinberg conveys aspects of reality as he experienced it. In this endeavour, again in line with Lehman (1997: 2), the discursive relationships among author, subject, and reader [that] undergird nonfiction are read as closely as the words and images that make up the narrative itself. For, as the author continues,

[t]he writer of nonfiction produces a document for an audience that reads history as both text and experience, an audience that is engaged over the edge, by which I mean both inside and outside the story. This audience will be drawn by the lure of the narrative and the direct or indirect knowledge of the events and people on which the narrative is based (Lehman, 1997: 2-3).

It is with this in mind that the data and findings which constitute this chapter are presented. Before this chapter closes, however, it returns to the matter of literary trinity, and to its specific incarnation as enabled by *The Number*. The three-way relationship of writer/text/reader will be re-presented as a particularly Steinbergian triad.

6.3 Concerning the data

What makes us “educated”, in our “educated guesses at the likely interpretations of a text”, states McKee (2003: 92), is our knowledge of relevant intertexts: the same ones that audiences have on hand when they interpret the text. These McKee lists as: other texts in the series, the genre of the text, intertexts about the text itself, and the wider public context in which a text is circulated. Chapter 5 has already responded to these pre-requisites in some detail, allowing this section of Chapter 6 to supplement existing knowledge. Consequently, instead of packaging information under headings which already exist, the following section contributes further material in an arrangement intended to expand upon the thoughts of the preceding chapter while leading towards findings.

6.3.1 The genre of the text

Connery (1994: 6) writes:

...to partially understand a literary journalistic text on its own terms is to assess it in the tradition of a type of nonfiction prose narrative, reflecting certain literary traditions and conventions. But to thoroughly assess its meaning and impact, it must be placed within the media framework of its time and in light of the cultural forces of the moment as well.

Like all journalism, literary journalism helps tell us who we are, signifies how we define and constitute ourselves. Like other cultural forms of

expression, literary journalism interprets and reaffirms common values, but it also, by its subjective/interpretative nature, challenges those values and versions of reality.

Thus it could be said that to separate *The Number* from the social context it aims to illuminate would be to undermine attempts made by its readers to discern how they define and constitute themselves. It is for this reason that Chapter 3 lays out some of the social context in which Steinberg's book was produced. There is also a wider context to the book's production, however. As Chapters 2 and 3 point out, history shows that literary journalism has burgeoned during periods of social change and/or turbulence. Steinberg, broadly acknowledging the role of literary journalism in the way citizens might discern how they constitute themselves, writes of his subject matter in *The Number*:

Twentieth-century South Africa bore witness to a host of political and social movements that will never find a place in the lexicons of political orthodoxy; movements both politically articulate and chillingly anti-social; movements enraged by, and yet symptomatic of, the psychological damage inflicted by South African industrialisation.

Prison gangs are precisely that. They are a century old, avowedly political and yet horribly pathological. They illuminate the fact that crime too has a history and future, a canon of myths and legends by which its practitioners understand what happened in the past and decide how to act in the present. As such, they get too close to the bone. They show us why generations of young black men lived violent lives under apartheid, and why generations more will live violently under democracy (Steinberg, 2004: xix-xx).

That prison gangs are able to show us this is, to a significant degree, because Steinberg wrote *The Number* – an act, this study argues, which meets McKee's (2003: 97) expectation for texts with a modality to offer information and ideas that can be applied to other parts of our lives. Thus it is that Steinberg, in entering the world of prison gangs, acts on behalf of those readers who seek to discern "who we are".

6.3.2 *The text and its author*

Steinberg's work, states Mulgrew (2011: 27), is characterised by portraits of “the shattered souls of post-apartheid South Africa”, an assertion borne out by passages in *The Number* such as this one describing Magadien Wentzel:

When I came to see him, his eyes clawed at me gratefully. He kept looking at the clock behind my head. 'Another 15 minutes, and then you're gone. And sanity with you.' (Steinberg, 2004: 348).

Continuing his profiling of the Steinberg style, Mulgrew (2011: 28) includes among the defining features of Steinberg's work the following: reductionist expositional and narrative modes, and particular construction of himself and journalistic positionality. The first of these features corroborates Twidle's (2012a: 21) view, advanced in Chapter 1, that Steinberg's work is “a highly readable but unadorned and largely informational prose...honed to deliver large amounts of contextual data as economically as possible”. Illustrating this, consider, for instance:

The tiny prisons that dotted the Western Cape hinterland were, in reality, stations for the distribution of cheap labour. The system Magadien got to know had been in place since the 1950s; farmers' district associations were permitted to build 'prison farm out-stations' which were managed by the Department of Prisons. Farmers throughout the district could employ prisoners in proportion to their contribution to building the prison. The inmates themselves were paid nothing (Steinberg, 2004: 172).

Regarding the second of the two defining features listed by Mulgrew (i.e. construction of himself and journalistic positionality), it is upon this aspect of *The Number* that much of this analysis focuses. According to Mark Freeman and Jens Brockmeier (in Brown & Krog, 2011: 21), narrative integrity comes about through an open and de-centred, multiple self whose many possible voices nevertheless remain highly individuated and self-defined, whose narrated life embodies the adamant refusal of binding and substantialised character ideals. They describe narrative integrity not only as “harmony of proportion or beauty of form as principles of narrative composition”, but also as “the coherence and depth of one's ethical commitments. Narrative integrity encompasses both aesthetics and ethics”. Such a position echoes that of Lehman

(1997: 41) who, in Chapter 3, suggested that a narrative intended to be read as non-fiction positions an actual authorial presence and implicates its author much more readily than does fiction. In light of this, listen to Steinberg's description of his position both materially and narratively:

Pollsmoor [Prison] is a journalist's paradise; it is an interminable labyrinth of pure story. You walk down a corridor, a journalist clutching a notebook, and you are assailed by a thousand groping hands. Everyone wants to stop you, to own you, to unload his tales into your notebook.

[...]

After you have heard a few tales, though, you realise that there is something wrong with them, but you can't put your finger on it. You are aware that something of the madness of the place has been transmitted into the narratives its inmates weave; but what, precisely? (Steinberg, 2004: 6).

This is followed by:

It was at my fourth meeting with Steenkamp that we finally made a connection and I began to understand. He was no less sane than I; the vicissitudes I had witnessed spoke to something far more compelling than madness (Steinberg, 2004: 29).

However, growing insight into his subject quickly leads Steinberg to admit his label had been too hastily applied. He writes:

When I met Magadien Wentzel, he inhabited a no-man's-land far lonelier than the one that separates Pollsmoor's gangsters and warders. It was this no-man's-land I mistook for madness – a hell of identities not yet erased, and identities not yet formed (Steinberg, 2004: 33).

This is Steinberg's authorial and narrative home. By his own admission, he seeks to show the "unloved and unlovable parts" of his subjects, an exposure he posits is a tenet of all non-fiction writing (Mulgrew, 2011: 26). This study's textual analysis demonstrates that, on occasion, he also exposes parts of himself not so much to render himself lovable but to render his position as narrator credible.

6.3.3 *The context of the text*

The content of *The Number*, regarded as both factually and sociologically outstanding (Nyamnjoh, n.d.: 7), is the result of particular contexts. The reason why this point is pertinent is because making an “educated guess” about a likely interpretation depends on three words: “context; context; context” (McKee, 2003: 92). In terms of a wider public context, *The Number* situates itself in a national community, its recent halcyon history described by Steinberg (2004: 247-248) like this:

Magadien was released from Allendale in September 1990, seven months after Mandela walked out of Victor Verster. By then, the leaders of the African National Congress had come home after nearly thirty years in exile, and negotiations for a democratic dispensation were under way. It was a magical time....It was a brief, unrepeatabe period of delight.

Swiftly overtaking this period of delight, however, came South Africa's extended season of crime. It was unexpected, as Chapter 1 indicates, and it was pervasive, its ubiquity reinforced by a dominant discourse of violence. For instance, in press coverage quoted by De Beer (2002: n.p.), petrol attendant Bernard Gama said about the killing of five of his colleagues at a filling station in Cape Town: “Why must people be killed like chickens, like pigs, for just R1 000? Man, we are shocked, shocked, shocked.” In the same year, which was also the year Steinberg started work on *The Number*, the United Nations (2002: ii) said that South Africa remains among the most crime-ridden and crime-concerned societies in the world. At the time, corroborate other researchers, Cape Town had a reputation as one of the world’s “murder capitals” (Gie & Haskins, 2007: 9).

In light of such social context, the arrival of Steinberg's book was viewed as one way South Africans could start to make sense of their existence. Steinberg's first book, *Midlands*, facilitated such a view to the extent that he had arguably established himself as a narrator with some authority – an authorial presence a reader could trust. Investigating the ways in which *Midlands* succeeds with this literary mission lies beyond the scope of this study. Suffice it to say that, as mentioned in Chapter 5, by the time *The Number* appeared, *Midlands* had succeeded in establishing Steinberg as a reliable narrator. Furthermore, Steinberg himself was more certain of his narrative

mission. For instance, he tells Mulgrew (2012: 67):

I don't think they [*Midlands* and *The Number*] sold well because they were especially good books, but because they were very carefully aimed to show a South African readership a very urgent and important part of life that they didn't know about, and I think a lot of people read them because they were useful in that way.

South Africa's "period of delight" turned out to have repercussions salient to this discussion of context in that the rise of violent crime which contributed to Cape Town's status as a murder capital wove a strand of gang violence into the broader discourse of violence. According to *The Number's* aforementioned authorial style of "reductionist exposition", the discourse regarding gangs and gangsterism ran thus:

The rapid insertion of South Africa into global markets brought new drugs into the country – like crack, heroin and club drugs – new merchants, and, above all, new markets. An impressively innovative network of West Africans took over inner-city prostitution and used it to create a brand-new crack market, one that, significantly, cut across class and racial lines....

The traditional street gangs of the Western Cape found not only that drug consumption was growing rapidly, but that a sizeable proportion of the emerging drug market was located outside their traditional turf. With the prospect that their own clients would desert them for new drugs and new players, they knew they had to expand quickly or risk being swallowed (Steinberg, 2004: 282-283).

This, then, is a broad view of the South African context in which Steinberg began researching and writing *The Number*. Explaining both his journalistic and narrative motivations, the author's own words add to this context: "I wanted to find a redemptive tale, to write about someone who had journeyed to the heart of the inferno but had come out the other side" (Steinberg, 2004: 17).

This sub-section of the chapter aims to unpack the injunction from Hughes (2007: 252) that any understanding of an individual text begins with some understanding of its context(s) of production, reception and analysis. The next sub-section, which

discusses narrators, follows this discussion of context because the matter of narration implicates the matter of reader expectation. As Scott (2012a: 9-10) points out, this text, being non-fiction, would be regarded as “true”. Steinberg, the writer of the non-fiction under discussion, is widely hailed as a master of this genre (*Midlands* won the 2003 *Sunday Times* Alan Paton Award for non-fiction writing, for example). As a consequence of these two circumstances, readers would arrive at a Steinberg page with certain expectations of the writer's sense of responsibility towards his readerly obligations. The following note on narrators aims to locate a narratorial background against which it might be possible to situate Steinberg as a narrator.

6.3.4 Narrators

In Chapter 3, the survey of literature relating to narration highlighted the concepts of the persuasive narrator (who transforms the 5xW + 1xH of journalism into narrative gold) and the naive narrator (who declares his relative ignorance of the story at its outset). Through its close reading of the text of *The Number*, this study aims to explore in what ways Steinberg might embody both notions, i.e. in what ways Steinberg appears on the page as what could be termed a persuasive naive narrator. It is worth clarifying that probing for such an entity is not the same as probing for a naively persuasive narrator; this would be the research problem of another study altogether.

It is the manner in which Steinberg portrays his personal responses to narrative events that provokes this study to explore how he may construct a position for himself as a naive narrator. Two illustrations of this are: “...he was terrified. There were times when I too was scared” (Steinberg, 2004: 33); and: “I am left feeling puzzled” (Steinberg, 2004: 155).

Also highlighted in Chapter 3's review of literature that concerns narrative issues is the narrator's challenge of what to include and what to omit. Steinberg makes it a feature of his narrative style to lay bare his authorial heart. He does this, for instance, when he admits, “It is difficult to know where to begin” (Steinberg, 2004: 32), but also when he admits to the personal challenge he sees before his reportage even needs to begin: “I was frightened of penning a story about hell...I didn't want to tie myself to someone who would haunt me” (Steinberg, 2004: 17).

It is narrative hallmarks such as these which motivate this study's exploration of Steinberg's text. Before doing so, however, it is necessary to revisit one more aspect of this study's data.

6.3.5 Reality

The role of reality in this background for the findings of this study can be summed up in a single point raised in Chapter 4. Reality, writes Morris (2003: 132), is:

A genre based upon an implicit communicative contract with the reader that there exists an independent, extra-textual real-world and that knowledge of this real-world can be produced and shared.

It is this implicit contract that scholars and practitioners refer to in ways this thesis has already drawn attention to via, for instance, Wolfe (1973), Brown and Krog (2011), and Scott (2012). However, as mentioned in Chapters 3 and 5, it is Lehman's (1997) elucidation of the reader's engagement “over the edge” of a non-fiction text that this study relies on for its perspective on Morris's “implicit communicative contract”. This perspective could be summed up thus: A reader approaching *The Number* would accept that beyond the text exist the independent worlds of Pollsmoor Prison, the suburbs of Cape Town, and their inhabitants, and that Steinberg is able to share his knowledge of those worlds on the page. In entering such a contract a reader is also entering a contract with reality, all the while assuming her position within the literary trinity. All these actions demand a reader's trust because, as Shields (2010: 60) writes, unlike a fiction reader, whose only task is to imagine, a non-fiction reader is asked to behave more deeply: to imagine, and also to believe. Beyond this, according to Heyne (1987: 480), the reader is asked further to distinguish between “factual status” and “factual adequacy”. In other words, after distinguishing whether a work is fiction or fact, a reader is required also to distinguish good fact from bad – a relative matter that is open to debate.

This study participates in such debate by exploring ways in which Steinberg asks readers of *The Number* to believe his experience of reality – as he tells it – in relation to Magadien Wentzel. To do so, this study relies on textual analysis.

6.4 Concerning textual analysis as a research tool

To analyse text in a forensic exercise – to borrow an analogy from McKee (2003: 63) – is to treat it as a clue or trace of how people have made sense of their world. The drawback of this approach is that just as there is no single correct representation of any part of the world so, in the same way, is there no single correct interpretation of any text. Techniques of text analysis cover a spectrum from the algorithmic to the exploratory. In the latter, which is the approach of this study, no specific goal is aimed for. Exploratory studies search instead for leads (Fundamentals of the digital humanities, 2008: n.p.) or, as McKee frames it:

Doing textual analysis, we're interested in finding out likely interpretations, not in deciding which of them is the most correct one.... Performing textual analysis, then, is an attempt to gather information about sense-making practices (McKee, 2003: 63; 14).

It is in this spirit, and guided by all the foregoing considerations, that this study now aims to gather information about Steinberg's authorial choices regarding his narrative relationship with Magadien Wentzel and to explore the implications of such sense-making. In the course of this practice of sense-making, this study aims to reach beneath the text's surface or denotative meanings and examine more implicit or connotative meanings, an interpretive act provoked by “the reality effect” referred to in Chapter 4.

6.5 Findings

The quotation that heads Chapter 4's exposition of this study's theoretical framework carries a thought worth reiterating at this point of the presentation of research data and findings: “I would suggest,” writes Sims (2009: 14-15), “that a cultural approach to literary journalism studies needs a scholarship that can grapple with the issues of reality.” Then he adds, highlighting an issue close to the research project under discussion: “Literary journalism speaks to the nature of our phenomenal reality *in spite* of the fact that our interpretations are inevitably subjective and personal” [author's italics].

Morris (2003: 4) also aligns herself with this position when, as mentioned in Chapter

4, she states that writing has to select and order, something has to come first, and that selection and ordering will always, in some way, entail the values and perspective of the describer. Taking into account that Steinberg has selected and ordered his material, this study now considers its dual research question, namely: What narrative decisions does Jonny Steinberg make in the text of *The Number* to convey aspects of the reality he experienced in relation to his main character, Magadien Wentzel, and what effect do such decisions have on the reader?

6.5.1 Attempting to report how things really are

Kramer's (1995) case for the way literary journalism's power rests with the strength of its author's voice – the “voice of someone naked” – is referenced in Chapter 3. Its relevance here, in the first of this study's findings, is his further statement that this “key characteristic” is the voice in which writers of literary journalism “disclose how people and institutions really are”. However, in light of the comments above by Sims and by Morris, it would be more accurate to describe such a voice as that which discloses *the writer's perspective* of how things really are [my italics]. Indeed, Steinberg (recording the start of his mission to disclose how prison gangs really are, and thus how Magadien Wentzel really is, he attempts to gain access – which is denied – to his subject after lock-up) writes:

[But] nothing could substitute for being there.... So I was left only with prisoners' interminable stories, which had everything and nothing to do with the place (Steinberg, 2004: 10-11).

Steinberg's use of the personal pronoun, a position so long considered antithetical to truth-telling, has become integral to Kramer's key characteristic of literary journalism, i.e. the authorial voice. Krog explains her own authorial position thus:

I use the pronoun 'I' which immediately creates space allowing for an individual take on facts, a deeper reading and interpretation of the non-fictional 'reality'. The 'I' also allows me personal access to fact....The 'I' also at times assists the reader who can piggyback into the text – safe in the knowledge that the 'I' would never abandon them (in Brown & Krog, 2011: 3-4).

Explaining his own deployment of the 'I', Steinberg (in Mulgrew, 2012: 65) states:

I feel that I should show the reader how this relationship evolved and therefore how I know what I know. It is in part a question of earning authority. I know that other people have written very effective books in which they are invisible; they screen themselves out completely and make no appearance in the book. I respect that way of working, but I don't know how to do that.

Instead, as Steinberg explains to Perlman (in Steinberg & Perlman, 2005: 64), he sees his position as somewhat voyeuristic:

There's an 'I' in the book who's me but you don't reveal anything about yourself. You peer obsessively and constantly into somebody's life and it doesn't always feel comfortable.

Starting the process of showing the reader how he knows what he knows, Steinberg (2004: 17) writes in *The Number*:

There is a sense in which the William Steenkamp⁴ of my imagination tallies with the real man, but only in the most banal and uninteresting ways. Journeys are interesting for their detours; they are never as simple as the narrative I conjured.

In his study of certain American works in the genre, Carlean (1988: 116-117) says of the way those writers deploy their personal voice:

[And] in each of these works, the personality of the writer as a reader's guide through the complexity of the events and issues is a dominant narrative device. This does not mean that the narrators are characterised in a novelistic sense. Having read at times of their most intimate thoughts, we are not meant to judge them as we would the characters of a novel in terms of the moral themes of the text. Intimacy with the narrator in these journalistic works allows the reader to view the central events from a different and more trustworthy perspective. A greater understanding of reality through the

⁴ William Steenkamp, an assumed identity, is the name with which Steinberg first encountered Magadien Wentzel, the man who became the focus of Steinberg's book, *The Number*.

consciousness of the author is always the dominant end.

Steinberg's own consciousness, in the service of his own dominant narrative end, appears in ways such as the following:

“Before I met you,” he [Magadien] said, “I risked my life in prison....You weren't there. You'd never met me. It had nothing to do with you. What makes you think it has anything to do with you now? Must I live my life in a way that will make *your* conscience feel better? You've spent a long time with me now. You've known for a long time that I've been cooperating with you for my own reasons. I need to fight. If this book doesn't help me to fight, it will have been a waste of time.”

“It *is* my business,” I said (Steinberg, 2004: 209-210).

This brief discussion of the overtly personal manner in which a writer/narrator is implicated in a reader's apprehension of a particular reality points towards the contested status of author as narrator. As a result of its exploration of the text under discussion, this study finds the consciousness of the author to be a conscious presence on the page, offering readers a trustworthy perspective.

6.5.2 Regarding ownership of reality

The author's status as narrator is contested within the tensions of the literary trinity: the author narrates his character's story, in which the character views himself as the narrator, to a reader who is engaged in narrating her own story of these two characters. Lehman (1997: 41), citing Booth (who in 1961 had presented the notion of “implied author”), suggests that a narrative intended to be read as non-fiction positions an actual authorial presence and implicates its author much more readily than does fiction. Recognising this implication, Steinberg (in Mulgrew, 2012: 65), declares:

I think that any non-fiction book has to deal with the question of authority: how it knows what it knows. That question is heightened when you go into a world that is not your own, or at least one that is very different to your own. If I'm ever going to understand that kind of world with any depth or complexity, it's through my personal relationship with people who live in it.

Elsewhere, Steinberg also declares:

A narrative non-fiction writer who writes about a real living person will have readers who expect to confront a specific literary construction and, if he or she doesn't see it, they will close the book, and perhaps even accuse the writer of an ethical lapse (Steinberg in Mulgrew, 2011: 41).

This is the sensibility, then, which Steinberg brings to his position in the literary triad as it pertains to *The Number*. Further informing this study's perspective on the issue is commentary from Roux (2009: 239) which begins by alluding to modes of testimony to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa:

Steinberg...draws on a dominant post-apartheid understanding of narratives of personal suffering and transformation as a form of public dialogue. In the process, it becomes difficult to locate the subject of the narrative...: as much as Steinberg recounts Magadien's life story, he is, of course, also producing an autobiographical narrative about his own encounter with Magadien and his world.

Such commentary spells out the dialogic nature of this text's narration. Is this Magadien Wentzel's story? Steinberg's? Or is it a Steinberg manifestation of Flaubert's admission, regarding his own protagonist, "Madame Bovary, c'est moi" (Flaubert, 2010), at work? In light of Steinberg's own commentary and the text he authored and which is highlighted here, this study posits that the text of *The Number* is, to borrow a term from Roux (2009: 242) "auto/biography". For, as his commentary spells out:

...Steinberg's book constructs a subjectivity that is increasingly fractured precisely in its subject's attempts to create a coherent, integrated identity: the dialogic way in which Wentzel's story is presented interweaves the activity of self-representation with deconstructive critical reflections on the nature and uses of autobiography and confession (Roux, 2009: 240-241).

To illustrate this, consider for instance, the way Steinberg makes public his private navigation through a narrative conflict:

I want to get into my car and drive straight from Pollsmoor to her

[Magadien's mother, Gadija] home; I want to sit down with her, cultivate a relationship with her, slowly tease out her past, eventually get to the point where I can ask her about the circumstances of her son's conception. But I restrain myself. It is too meddlesome. Magadien's release date is a few months away, and he needs, perhaps more than anything, to mend his relationship with his mother. I fear the damage I might do (Steinberg, 2004: 93).

A further illustration lies in the way Steinberg ruminates on the ethical dilemma posed by turning a life story into currency, which Steinberg (2004: 385) frames as, "I did not want to buy a poor man's story". Further on, he writes:

But aside from being a journalist and his subject, we were two human beings together. One had money and the other was penniless. The idea that no money exchanged hands became utterly perverse. And so we broke our rule, but only a little....It was a strange and uncomfortable compromise. A rich man walks into the life of a very poor one and gives him scraps. But if he gives him more, what is the cost? However honourable his intentions, he is in essence bribing the poor man to share his story with the world (Steinberg, 2004: 385-386).

The compelling power of non-fiction is the fact that, as Scott (2012a: 3) puts it, non-fiction forces the reader to engage with a character because the non-fiction reader is forced to acknowledge that, in the words of Wolfe (1973: 49), all this actually happened. This is the "over the edge" position advanced by Lehman (1997) and the relevance of this pivotal conceptual point here is that, being coerced in this way to engage with Magadien Wentzel as a character, the reader of *The Number* is consequently also persuaded to buy into the narrational means Steinberg deploys to facilitate this relationship. The means of such persuasion are discussed next.

6.5.3 Jonny Steinberg and Magadien Wentzel: Representations of their realities

Thus far, this study has interrogated crucial but broad considerations regarding an author's representation of a reality, with specific reference to Jonny Steinberg's *The Number*. This section of the study now responds to its research question by exploring the text more closely with a view to locating what narrative decisions Steinberg makes

in *The Number* to convey aspects of the reality he experienced with respect to his main character, Magadien Wentzel. As indicated in Chapter 4 and expanded upon in Chapter 5, the study sets about this exploration guided by two of the “artistic means” Morris (2003: 101) lists as ways in which literary realism authenticates itself. They are the means by which Steinberg establishes the identity and therefore the presence of Magadien Wentzel in his text. For the purposes of this study's textual analysis, these means are the empirical effect and the character effect.

6.5.3.1 The empirical effect

By the empirical effect, writes Morris (2003: 101), I mean all those techniques by which realist writing seems to convey the experiential actuality of existence in physical space and chronological time. The empirical effect results in a “here and now feel” (Morris, 2003: 104) which, she argues, has an almost cinematic presence. It is possible, for instance, to sense metaphorically the presence of a camera in the way *The Number's* locations and chronologies shift and slide through this excerpt which simultaneously sustains the dialogic author/narrator tension referred to above:

I begin sharing my thoughts with him about the gangs' strange relationship with their custodians. I have barely cleared my throat when he interrupts me.

'You're the boss,' he says. 'This is your book, not mine. Write what you like.'

He does not want to discuss the matter any further. He does not like me interrogating the memory of his recruitment into the 28s. Victor Verster must remain cleansed and abstract; it is not a place that permits questions.

I am left feeling puzzled. Magadien's relationship to this entire episode of his life is peculiar, out of character....What is it about this period – the period in which he crossed the boundary between the world outside and the Number? (Steinberg, 2004: 155).

This same excerpt could be said to also illustrate the second code that contributes to the empirical effect of realist writing, i.e. what Barthes (in Morris, 2003: 105-106) calls the cultural or referential code. In this passage, such a code is present in Steinberg's reference to Victor Verster, to the 28s, and to the Number, all of these

being aspects of “a known social reality”. Steinberg presents the empirical effect here too:

I met him on my third or fourth day back at Pollsmoor. I was walking through the entrance of the maximum security prison along with a warder I had been shadowing. Three prisoners, dressed in the bright orange overalls inmates must wear when outdoors, filed past us (Steinberg, 2004: 17);

and here, where the narrative visual sweep of a movie camera's view is particularly noticeable:

Hout Bay's steep shelves command a magisterial view of the Atlantic ocean; you look out and the peninsula's coastline stretches for miles beneath your feet. Behind the bay, the hill slopes are carpeted in thick, pristine fynbos. Indigenous forest climbs up the bay's southern arm. It is home to some of the most coveted real estate in Cape Town.

A quirk of history has left a poor coloured community there. Its forbears had lived beneath the southern slopes of the bay for generations. When the architects of the Group Areas Act got to work in the mid-1960s, there was a great deal of bickering about what to do with them....The coloureds were moved a few kilometres – to a 30-degree cliff face that towers over the northern flank of the harbour.

It is the strangest of sights; you drive up the steep harbour road, the sea dropping further and further beneath you, and instead of ocean-view mansions, you enter a world of stone-façade tenement blocks, washing hanging from the windows, unemployed men loafing on the streets. Behind the tenement blocks, a jumble of wooden shacks crawls up the slopes, each shack on its own pair of stilts (Steinberg, 2004: 293).

Each of these three examples demonstrates also Steinberg's ordering of time, an achievement of realist writing which, according to Morris (2003: 106-107), authenticates an empirical effect by simultaneously meeting readers' expectations of the orderly sequence required for intelligibility and their sense of temporal anachrony. In other words, the readers' sense that strict linear progression, while not possible in

the temporal realm, is nevertheless desired in the literary realm in order for a narrative to be intelligible. Put another way, a writer is required to order time for a reader even though actuality is lived with an advanced degree of disordered time and even though a reader has personal empirical evidence of such disorder. In the third of these extracts, for example, Steinberg as writer moves the reader from the narrative present to contextual history and back to narrative present, a temporal illumination that parallels his physical ascension of the Hout Bay hill. As such, the Steinberg text meets Morris's (2003: 109) final requirement of the empirical effect, i.e. a careful manipulation of the representation of temporal duration and to authenticate the empirical effect. Specifically, while on the Hout Bay hill Steinberg traverses time from his presence there in 2004, back 40 years to the 1960s for context, and returns to contemporary time.

The effect produced, Morris writes further on, is a simultaneous sense of quite particular empirical specificity and an encompassing social world. With regard to the specific research question this study is exploring, the effect produced by all three of these extracts is a particular empirical specificity in relation to Magadien Wentzel and a social world encompassing him.

The next section of this chapter discusses the second of Morris's artistic means which she calls "the character effect".

6.5.3.2 The character effect

The character effect is probably, states Morris (2003: 113), for many readers, the primary means of entry into a work. But, she asks, how is the character effect achieved? Citing Barthes, she outlines the role of the semic code, or the voice, of the person. When identical semes traverse the same proper name several times and appear to settle on it, a character is created....The proper name acts as a magnetic field for the semes (Barthes in Morris, 2003: 113). One avenue of exploration open to this study is the location of what might be called the Magadien semes for, as Morris (2003: 115) continues, a character's spoken words or the verbal articulation of their thoughts can give substance to the sense of an individual consciousness. The research question which impels this study provokes an exploration of Steinberg's narrative decisions in relation to Magadien Wentzel. Such exploration is prompted by the imperative

imposed by non-fiction upon its writers to persuade their readers to form a trusting relationship with the writer and a narrative relationship with his narrative character (in this instance, Magadien Wentzel). Applying the concept of Magadien semes to such a textual analysis reveals the following.

In *The Number*, Steinberg has the reader first meet Magadien Wentzel at the same point that he himself does, namely early in Chapter 2 which is titled “William-Magadien”. The encounter for both writer and reader is brief, but Steinberg (2003: 17) allows the reader to hear even less of William-Magadien's “studied politeness” than he does:

“This is my speech for the event on Sunday,” he said, “when the Minister of Correctional Services is coming to Pollsmoor. Read it and tell me later what you think.”

Steinberg's following two pages then summarise that speech's “press conference history” of the Number. It is noteworthy that Steinberg chooses to frame the reader's encounter with Magadien thus; on one level, it is a literary manifestation of the dual-identity man whose story is the centre of this book. Additionally, on at least one other level it functions also as a transition from the imposed stiffness of Steenkamp to the narrative magnitude of Magadien. The character's studied politeness and press conference demeanour as William Steenkamp yield in the space of just two pages to the linguistic particularity that soon, to quote Morris (2003: 113), “appears to settle” upon Magadien Wentzel. After a couple of unsatisfactory meetings, some of which Steinberg reports in direct speech but which offer few if any semes, writer and character finally “made a connection” at their fourth encounter. Here is how Steinberg first has the reader hear Magadien speak:

He would curse himself for having buried vast tracts of his story, pacing his cell in frustration. “I have forgotten my own life,” he would say. “I was too fucking angry to take notice of my own life. I'm scared I will never get it back (Steinberg, 2004: 34).”

The identity angst and the turn of phrase are introduced to the reader in a way that indicates both will become familiar. Indeed, both do. Consider, for instance:

“I am so fucking tired of people blaming apartheid,” he shouts. “Every time some community on the Cape Flats fucks itself up, people shrug and say, 'apartheid this, apartheid that'. It's pathetic.

“Long ago, I stopped blaming apartheid for who I am.” He thumps a long digit into his chest. “It's me, just me. I made all the choices. I fucked up. And I'm sorry, but the same applies to my mother” (Steinberg, 2004: 92-93);

and:

“I didn't fear him,” Magadien says. “And he couldn't cope with that. I could see it in his eyes. And I liked that. I was a proud 28; I wasn't going to be fucked around” (Steinberg, 2004: 188);

and, lastly, following a school visit:

“...I described the horrors of prison. I told them prison does not make you a man, it fucks you up and rapes you and then throws you out. I said that no human being who cares for himself will want to go to prison” (Steinberg, 2004: 336).

These, then, can be said to be Magadien semes. However, it is perhaps his multiple identities which bring with them to the text multiple names (William Steenkamp, Darryl, JR) and correlating semes, which explicitly bear out the point made by Barthes (in Morris, 2003: 114) that it is pre-eminently the Proper Name (sic) that functions ideologically to sustain belief in human identity as unique, coherent and individual rather than as amorphous clusters of attributes. Thus the text's sub-title, *One man's search for identity in the Cape underworld and prison gangs*, is borne out on the page in ways this textual analysis lays out in its aim to explore narrative decisions Steinberg makes to convey aspects of the reality he experienced with respect to his main character, Magadien Wentzel. Put another way, this textual analysis has interpreted Morris's artistic means of the empirical effect and the character effect in the ways it has explored narrative decisions Steinberg has made to render his main character, Magadien Wentzel, as the “one man” of *The Number's* sub-title.

In a final gesture to illustrate the above textual analysis, consider how Steinberg

provides the following vivid visual portrait of his main character:

Steenkamp was small and balding, in his early to mid-forties perhaps, and he was astonishingly thin. The bone structure of his face was strikingly visible, high cheekbones and a pointed, protruding chin. He appeared to use his chin in the way other people gesticulate with their hands, pointing it this way and that as he spoke or listened, the movement of his head darting and nervous (Steinberg, 2004: 17).

Yet, as the book unfolds, it is this man's profound identity crisis – a far more abstract characteristic – that renders him most recognisable. This study finds that much of this recognition rests upon what it calls the Magadien semes.

Before concluding the findings of this study's textual analysis, it is worth being reminded of a point raised in Chapter 5. There are other avenues of exploration and these pertain to the division in narration summarised by Genette (in Morris, 2003: 115) as “who speaks” and “who sees”, also known by some critics as “narrative point of view” and “narrative voice”. The aspect of “seeing”, continues Morris, is termed by Genette as “focalisation”, which is to say the perspective from which characters and events are viewed. Convincing literary realism offers a consonance between narrative voice and narrative focalisation, resulting in a detailed understanding of a character's subjective state of mind. The reason this technique is pertinent to the aim of this study is because it returns this study to one of its primary points of epistemological reference, i.e. that Steinberg the author also presents himself in *The Number* as Steinberg the focalising character. To clarify this position, this study now returns to the matter of literary construction.

6.5.4 Regarding literary construction

While, or possibly because, Steinberg's representation of his experience of *The Number's* reality appears to succeed on the page, it is easy to forget one crucial point about that representation – that it is, in fact, a representation. To be more precise, perhaps, would be to say that Steinberg's reality is re-presented. In other words, his representation of reality as it relates to Magadien Wentzel has been constructed. Media theorists O'Shaughnessy and Stadler (2002: 166) put the reminder this way:

Because there are numerous, changing ways of seeing the world there are also many realist styles or sets of conventions (realisms)...The connections these styles forge with real-life issues and the seriousness this imparts to the particular media product mean that media products using these styles have tended to be given more cultural weight than 'escapist entertainment'. Because they appear realistic it is sometimes easy to forget the construction involved in these representations.

In relation to Steinberg, this position is rendered by one scholar thus:

Steinberg's narratives, above and beyond being narratives constructed about his subjects, are also very much narratives constructed about himself....a tactical means of imbuing his narratives with apparent verisimilitude and, therefore, trustworthiness. Somewhat contradictorily, by pointing out his narratives' faults and his shortcomings in providing a perfect or comprehensive rendering of his subjects, he attempts to draw attention to what is true (at least in a subjective sense) about them; or rather, by constructing himself as a morally aware writer sensitive to any potential ethical lapses in his journalism, he invites, and intends to keep, the trust of the reader (Mulgrew, 2011: 40).

The matter of trust, also discussed elsewhere in this study, is integral to this study's understanding of literary journalism production. It is worth reiterating, therefore, the view that this trust as such is constructed, as well as some of the ways in which Steinberg executes such construction. Mulgrew (2011: 47) calls this "the heavily constructed nature of Steinberg's depictions of his relationships with his subjects". One such incarnation could be said to appear in *The Number* thus:

When I met Magadien he was eight months away from having served his sentence, and he was terrified. There were times when I too was scared. Our relationship took us places a subject should probably never go with a journalist. We would sit in Magadien's cell and he would shore up those fragments of his history he could remember. Then I would go out into Cape Town, searching for the spectres of his past, and return with news (Steinberg, 2004: 33-34).

Mulgrew's view of such text is that Steinberg is forced to carefully construct a narrative self as a conduit through which he is able to explore, empathise with, and come to (at least) a partial understanding of the individuals and cultures about which he writes (Mulgrew, 2011: 50). Steinberg even says as much when he is quoted as saying, "I was aware...that I was writing a book about a man in relation to me, it was about his relationship to me, not to the rest of the world. It's still an outsider's account" (Steinberg in Magardie, 2005: n.p.). In *The Number*, he puts it this way:

I leave the prison that day feeling hollow and unhappy. In writing this book, I have used the words 'I' and 'me'. 'I say to Magadien ...' 'Magadien tells me ...' As if we are equals. We are not. The relationship between a journalist and his subject is never a relationship between equals. The 'I' in the pages of the book the journalist pens is not a flesh-and-blood being with a soul to be bared and a heart to be scorched. He is a cipher, an abstraction; he is a pair of eyes that sees all. The subject, on the other hand, the 'Magadien', he is the one with the one with the bared soul and scorched heart. The 'I' is capable of doing him violence (Steinberg, 2004: 240).

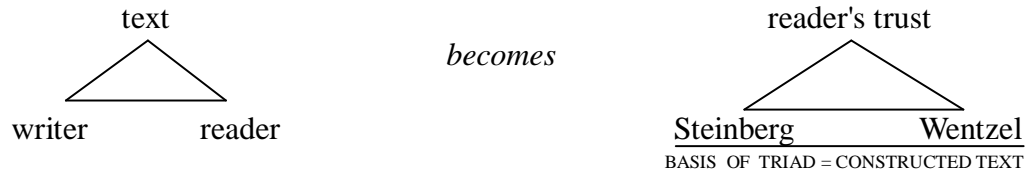
Foregrounding Steinberg's literary construction in this section serves as a somewhat explicit position statement: this study, viewing *The Number* as a Steinberg construction, has attempted to tease out aspects of that construction in the course of its analytic exploration. The concomitant attempt to construct readers' trust is allied to the matter of literary construction, by virtue of the fact that narrative success pivots on it. Thus does this study return to a topic introduced earlier in this chapter, that of the literary trinity.

6.6 A final point: Regarding the literary trinity

In the opening section of this chapter, overt attention was drawn to the inevitable triadic literary relationship of writer/text/reader. The intention of this was to foreground a foundational epistemological assumption at the basis of this exploration of a Steinberg text. The intention of foregrounding the notion of a three-way literary relationship in the closing section of the chapter is to offer a modified version, in light of this chapter's data and findings, as a particularly Steinbergian trinity. That is to say, in terms of the foregoing textual analysis of *The Number*, this study posits that the

triad of writer/text/reader becomes one now repositioned.

Such a triad, having displaced its text so as to lean upon it more securely, now becomes writer/character/reader. To be specific, the literary trinity now offered is: Steinberg, as constructed character + Magadien Wentzel, as narrative character + reader's trust. In visual terms, the two incarnations of the literary trinity might appear thus:



Why this matters is because, in the words of Nixon (2012: 42) at the start of this chapter, it is narrative trust which is that most indispensable quality to the non-fictional reading experience.

6.7 Summary

This chapter presents the main findings of this project's research which set out to explore narrative decisions made by Steinberg in his text, *The Number*, regarding representations of the reality he experienced in relation to his main character, Magadien Wentzel. The discussion, which seeks to contribute to a debate on sense-making practices, is underpinned by the meta-theoretical paradigm of critical theory. This research has relied for its approach on the theory of realism as expounded by Morris (2003), and for its methodology on a qualitative textual analysis deploying two of Morris's "artistic means", on the grounds, presented in Chapters 4 and 5, that these are wholly suited for work of an exploratory nature such as this.

This study locates *The Number* among those works which, as mentioned in Chapter 2 and according to Brown (in Brown & Krog, 2011: 1), makes its meanings at the unstable fault line of the literary and journalistic. If, as outlined in that chapter, literary journalism has a sense of attitude and a confident point of view and if, as Chance & McKeen (2001: xi) claim, readers want great storytelling, this chapter broadly finds that it is not possible to have either without a narrator in possession of such attitude and such point of view. In relation to this study, it could thus be said that it would not be possible to have *The Number* – recognised, as witnessed in Chapter 2, as "great storytelling" – without Jonny Steinberg or Magadien Wentzel, whose

narrations and attitudes drive the text. How the two men relate to each other, and how Steinberg has the reader relate to them both, is the research focus of this chapter. Such a project is based to a large extent upon Lehman's (1997: 42) model for reading non-fiction that locates the author inside and outside the text, that examines these intertwined and differing presences, and that explores their relationships in both historical and artistic terms. Lehman goes on:

We might examine specifically the author's positioning vis-à-vis the subject, not only what the author *acknowledges* (the intention) but also what the author *reveals* and thus communicates through cultural signs in the production and exchange of meaning. The emphasis in these sorts of readings is on the relationship of the writer to his subject and to his reader within a literary and social context [author's italics].

It is the aim of this chapter to do just that via its presentation of the data and findings of this study's textual analysis of Steinberg's *The Number* and ways in which it represents its main character, Magadien Wentzel. The content of this chapter, however, is not offered in a vacuum; the chapters which precede it present the literary and social context against which this analysis is carried out. Consequently, it becomes possible to propose that Steinberg's text known as *The Number*, in line with Krog's assertion (in Brown & Krog, 2011: 1), is just one manifestation of the way in which “we are continually translating...our experiences of other communities to one another” and “unearthing a hidden or unacknowledged or unnoticed life”.

The exploration documented in this chapter finds, following interpretation and analysis of relevant literature which is mapped against Steinberg's text, that the narrative decisions made by the writer in his portrayal of a particular reality with Magadien Wentzel, rely to an important degree on the level of trust Steinberg can “persuade” his reader to place on the page where he places his literary concerns alongside his main character, Magadien Wentzel. As a result of this exploratory analysis, this study modifies the classic triadic relationship of writer/text/reader to Steinberg/reader's trust/Wentzel, a trinity which stands upon the text of *The Number*. The next chapter offers a broad conclusion to this study as a whole.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Making new worlds

What is at stake is the possibility of community
and the potential to make new worlds.

– Pam Morris (2003: 162)

7.1 Introduction

This thesis critically examines an exploration of narrative decisions made by Steinberg in his text, *The Number*, regarding representations of the reality he experienced in relation to his main character, Magadien Wentzel, and by answering its dual central research question, which is: What narrative decisions does Jonny Steinberg make in the text of *The Number* to convey aspects of the reality he experienced in relation to his main character, Magadien Wentzel, and what is the effect of such decisions on the reader?

It starts by outlining the challenges of defining a genre which goes by many names and offers a rationale for settling on the term “literary journalism” for the purposes of this study. The thesis then paints a broad-stroke history of literary journalism in North America (widely regarded as the putative home of such work) as well as South Africa (the locus of this study's exploration). The thesis then presents a review of literature relating to the central topics presented by this study's research problem, these topics being literary journalism, narrative, and so-called reality. Following this are two chapters outlining the study's theoretical point of departure and methodology respectively. This study has been conducted within a paradigm of critical theory and has taken, as a theoretical framework, aspects of the theory of literary realism, primarily as expounded by Morris (2003). Further, this study has been undertaken as a qualitative exploration employing textual analysis as a means of interpreting the Jonny Steinberg (2004) work of literary journalism known as *The Number*. The study then attempts to respond to its core research project which is an exploration of narrative decisions made by Steinberg to convey aspects of his reality in relation to *The Number's* main character, Magadien Wentzel. In doing this, the study considers its data and offers certain findings. Finally, this thesis concludes its project with this chapter which sums up the key issues that emerged in the course of this study.

7.2 Key issues

Hartsock (2008: vii-viii) claims that almost all scholarship on this topic until recently was written in the shadow of the New Journalism movement and thus influenced by it, and that, as a result, the field of study relating to literary journalism has been underpopulated. Even in America – presented in Chapter 2 as the pre-eminent progenitor of literary journalism – and as recently as 1990, there was no significant scholarship on the subject, he states. This view was not a new one. As long ago as 1937, Ford (in Connery, 1994: n.p.) wrote that literary journalism may no longer be in that “twilight zone that divides literature from journalism” but that its boundaries remain imprecise and consequently it is somewhat of an academic orphan with no clear ancestry or home. In the face of this prevailing view, this study's survey of relevant literature found that there had, in fact, been some academic attention paid to literary journalism, for instance Fishwick in the 1970s, Carlean in the 1980s, Connery in the 1990s, and Hartsock himself at the turn of the century. Further, this study argues that the lineage of literary journalism in South Africa, or variations of the genre, has profoundly deep roots.

Research, states Lemon (1995: 30), is a search for knowledge and, as such, is a process of discovery. The research that is at the centre of this study, i.e. a textual analysis of Jonny Steinberg's *The Number* which explores narrative decisions made to convey aspects of reality in relation to Magadien Wentzel, the book's main character, attempts just this. Guided by critical theory as a meta-science, adopting a qualitative research paradigm, and using textual analysis as a vehicle of exploration, this study strives to describe and understand rather than to explain or provide quantifiable knowledge. Such a process, termed *verstehen*, is entirely contextual and is the primary goal of studies such as this one (Babbie & Mouton, 2008: 270-272). This thesis attempts to demonstrate that its exploration has been a process of discovery and that performing a textual analysis of *The Number* offers a layered response to the question that catalysed this study. That question is: What narrative decisions does Jonny Steinberg make in the text of *The Number* to convey aspects of the reality he experienced in relation to his main character, Magadien Wentzel? Put another way, how has Jonny Steinberg represented his main character, particularly in relation to his own authorial presence? A search for possible answers offers the potential to

understand certain narrational choices made by the author in a genre of journalism which purports to help the reader explain the world they find themselves in.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, this research has been conducted in line with the position laid out by Bertrand and Hughes (2005: 173) that the dominant paradigm currently accepts the view that human understandings of both the natural world and the social world are mediated through language. In this paradigm, a text is not a vessel into which meanings are poured for transmission to others, but a structure (or a system of “signification”) by which meanings are produced within a cultural context. This study’s process of discovery also leaned on the use of textual analysis presented by McKee (2003: 10-11) who, in agreement with the above, states that no single representation of reality can be the *only* true one, or the *only* accurate one, or the *only* one (author's italics).

Regarding an appropriate theory to frame such sense-making, this study turns to Iser (2006: 163; 172) who explains that theory explores a given subject matter, which it translates into cognitive terms, thus systematically opening up access to whatever is under scrutiny. He also explains that modern theories allow us to perceive that art cannot be explained ontologically, but only in terms of how it functions. Finding realism to be an appropriate point of theoretical departure for this level of perception, this study also found realism to be at the nexus of considerable debate regarding its relevance in these postmodern times. However, it is due to changing interests and fashions that certain theories at times dominate their “rivals”, while others move out of orbit. Consequently, this study is predicated on the theory of realism as a framework that is able to adequately account for the relationship between the so-called real world and representation of that world. As Chapter 4 points out, there is no normative theory of realism, nor a normative perspective on reality. Indeed, the “scare quotes” mentioned by Shields (2010) and Wright (2011) on “reality” could be said to be the closest approximation of a normative view of reality. Yet Chapter 4 also aims to illustrate that, despite having fallen out of academic favour for reasons such as these, realism has much to offer the study of literary journalism. The summary of this concluding chapter returns to the topic of realism and its bearing on *The Number*, and thus more broadly on literary journalism.

For a perspective on narrative, this study drew significantly on the work of Kellogg

and Scholes (1966). In the course of their speculation on the future of narrative, the authors asserted that intellectual prose and journalism will no doubt survive for ages. Further, they predicted that the main impetus of narrative art would flow from the book to the movie screen. However, when they wrote that almost half a century ago, the ink of Capote's *In Cold Blood*, published in 1965, had only just dried. Kellogg and Scholes could not have foreseen that things had already started flowing and that narrative literature – that “most restless of forms” – was assuming the form that has come to be known as literary journalism.

In applying this literary, journalistic, and narrative context via textual analysis to an exploration of Steinberg's *The Number*, this study found that Steinberg as author appears on the page virtually interchangeably in the guise of Steinberg as narrator-character, alongside his representation of Magadien Wentzel as narrator-character. His mode of doing so, discussed in Chapter 6, is seen by this study to re-shape the more conventional triadic relationship of writer/text/reader (in which writer and reader are bound in relationship to each other via and as a result of the text) to one which Steinberg makes his own. This modified triad appears thus: Steinberg as author/reader's trust/Magadien Wentzel as character. Steinberg does this by constructing both his own position and his character's within the text in such a way that the reader's trust is constructed concomitantly. Steinberg achieves this via the means of realism known as the empirical effect and the character effect. Both of these effects, unpacked and explicated in Chapter 6, rest upon the textual means Steinberg deploys in his construction of Magadien Wentzel as narrative character and how he endows that character with semes, i.e. how he re-presents him in such a way that Magadien Wentzel is able to reliably fulfil – to incarnate – the text's sub-title (*One man's search for identity in the Cape underworld and prison gangs*).

While this study presents its data and findings within a context that frames them with due consideration, such exploration is not seen as, nor intended to be, finite. It is in the nature of exploratory work that it leaves many scholarly paths untravelled. The next section acknowledges this circumstance.

7.3 Absences and uncertainties

In terms of research paradigm and methodology, this study has been undertaken

mindful of the over-arching view that a post-structuralist researcher is not an objective observer of any textual phenomenon, but actively engaged in meaning production in relation to the text. While the scope of this study has limited the extent to which it can interrogate interpretive frameworks which might lend themselves to combining with its qualitative methodology, this study has been conducted with a heightened awareness that its highly interpretive nature could be construed as a weakness. Working within a paradigm premised on an absence of objectivity is thus one acknowledgement of the risk accompanying interpretive work. According to Bertrand and Hughes (2005: 194), the report emerging from such work can be judged by how perceptive one considers the author to be, and how well the piece succeeds in provoking new insights. That judgement, the authors continue, will probably come out of how closely one's own intellectual framework matches that of the writer. It is inherent in a study such as this that it can never be exhaustive. It can, however, catalyse further studies. Some research possibilities provoked by the foregoing study are offered below.

7.4 Scope for further research

In the course of its exploration of its research problem, this study located discussion both academic and literary (for instance, Boynton, 2005; Brown & Krog, 2011) about the displacement of the novel as the most prestigious form of literary expression. While interrogating this assertion lies beyond the limits of this study, it nevertheless informed the work of this study which accords with Green (2010: 3) that one must never stop asking questions about literary journalism; its creators, readers, contexts and forms. If pursued, such a position could ultimately render irrelevant the previously mentioned views that scanty scholarship makes literary journalism something of an academic orphan. In this spirit, this study proposes literary journalism as a fertile field for further research. This proposition emerges from its exploration of commentary on the genre broadly and on Steinberg's *The Number* specifically. While this thesis cannot go so far as to offer the alleged orphan a home, it does strive to contribute to her guardianship. To take this quest forward, a number of research possibilities emerge, including:

- Investigating the extent to which South African literary journalism reflects the hypothesis, presented in Chapter 2, that literary journalism is more noticeable

at times of social change and reform.

- Investigating ways in which works of literary journalism are received by their subjects, an exploration provoked by interview comments from Steinberg (in Lehman, 2010: 38) and from Lehman (1997: 42), who states that the effect of a non-fictional narrative on its characters always is germane, because both the author and characters live outside the text as well as inside. In the case of the Steinberg work at the heart of this study, for instance, such research would explore the ways in which *The Number* was received by Magadien Wentzel.
- This study's exposition of Steinberg's narrative challenge in relation to his position as witness to the life story of Magadien Wentzel leads to the possibility that there would be additional value arising from a Foucauldian investigation of the power relationship between the two men, since, in line with Ifversen (2003: 65), the organisation of subject positions in the analytical framework proposed by Foucault prompts questions relating to Steinberg's position as an agent of narrational material surrendered by another.
- Investigating the effect of digital publishing on literary journalism, a research prospect prompted by reading Nixon (2012) and Johnston (2012).
- Exploring in what structural or narrational ways (if any) South African literary journalism distinguishes itself from its North American heritage, i.e. in what ways local literary journalism appears to have deviated from the North American model.
- Interrogating the assertion by Twidle (2012a: 9) that South African literature offers a particularly rich case study when considering the construction of the narrative "I" and the limits of the confessional mode.

Research in these areas offers the potential to augment what Sims (2009) sees as literary journalism's "tenuous" status in the academy, as well as to advance the scholarship of literary journalism and consequently of journalism studies more broadly.

7.5 Summary

Morris (2003: 5, 23) points out that the development of realism as a critical term means that it now encompasses the general idea of close artistic imitation of social reality, that it is committed to the material actuality we share as embodied creatures. It

is the view of this study that, with *The Number*, Steinberg is aiming to present a close artistic imitation of a social reality. However, it is a social reality as only he experienced it. So, it may be asked, what else is the intellectual function of realism if not presenting the problem of definition? For, according to Morris, phrases like “fidelity of representation” tend to be associated with notions of truth such as verifiability. This, then, begs a more specific question: Whose truth does *The Number* present, and how verifiable is that truth?

While this study heeds the call by Sims (2009) for a literary journalism scholarship that recognises national manifestations, this study also strives to heed his warning against a scholarship that does not examine literary journalism on its own terms. He advises that such a scholarship should emerge from an effort to determine what those terms are. It is against such a background that this study explores narrative decisions Steinberg made regarding representations of narrator in relation to *The Number's* main character, Magadien Wentzel, taking into account the fact that literary realism bears both aesthetic and cognitive dimensions. Such dimensions, it could be said, that feature also in illuminating journalism and which bear the potential, too, to create new worlds for readers.

Finally, in conclusion, it can be stated that the central research question motivating this study, namely, an exploration of the narrative decisions Jonny Steinberg makes in the text of *The Number* to convey aspects of the reality he experienced in relation to his main character, Magadien Wentzel, and the secondary research question which focuses on the effect such decisions provoke in a reader, have been answered by the foregoing analysis which finds that Steinberg's narrative decisions, made in the course of portraying a particular reality, rely to an important degree on the level of trust which these narrative decisions inspire in a reader. One of the ways in which he achieves this, it is argued, is by placing his literary and his authorial concerns alongside his reportage of Magadien Wentzel, the main character of *The Number*.

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