

**PRESENTATIONS OF MASCULINITY IN A SELECTION OF  
MALE-AUTHORED POST-APARTHEID NOVELS**

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**Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Master of  
Arts at the University of Stellenbosch**

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**Declaration:**

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

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Date: .....

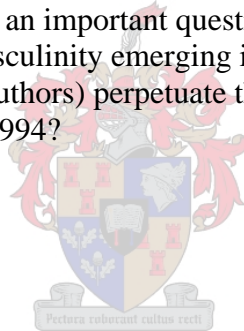


**Summary:**

In this thesis I examine the presentations of masculinity in several novels published in the post-apartheid period in South Africa, that is, the period after 1994. The novels under discussion are all male-authored texts and include novels by J M Coetzee (1999), André Brink (2000), Phaswane Mpe (2001), K Sello Duiker (2001), Zakes Mda (2002) and Damon Galgut (2003).

In the introduction theoretical issues regarding masculinity are discussed on the basis of Morrell (2001) and a broad framework for the thesis is outlined. Subsequently the presentation of masculinity is analysed in each of the respective novels under discussion. Issues such as a definition of masculinity (or rather, masculinities), the interaction between men as friends, as colleagues; as well as issues such as heterosexuality and homosexuality are discussed. What perspectives does the author provide on masculinity? How do the male characters experience the new South Africa? What is the nature of their interaction with the female characters in the novels? Another aspect dealt with is the repression of homosexual desire for another man and the way in which it is suppressed beneath a macho façade.

In the conclusion the different perspectives are compared and similarities and differences are briefly pointed out. In the end, an important question that comes to mind is: Do these men present a different type of masculinity emerging in the period after liberation, or do they merely (as depicted by their authors) perpetuate the patriarchal masculinities associated with the period before 1994?



**Opsomming:**

In hierdie tesis word gefokus op die voorstelling van manlikheid in enkele romans wat in die periode na 1994 (in die sogenaamde post-apartheidperiode) gepubliseer is. Die romans is almal deur mans geskryf en die outeurs wie se werk onder bespreking kom, is J M Coetzee (1999), André Brink (2000), Phaswane Mpe (2001), K Sello Duiker (2001), Zakes Mda (2002) en Damon Galgut (2003).

Aanvanklik word teoretiese kwessies verken aan hand van onder meer Morrell (2001) en word die breë raamwerk vir die tesis daargestel. Vervolgens word elk van die romans geanaliseer om die onderskeie perspektiewe op manlikheid wat daarin uitgebeeld word, uit te lig.

Kwessies soos, wat is manlikheid (of liever, tipes manlikheid), die interaksie tussen mans as vriende, as kollegas, asook kwessies soos heteroseksualiteit en homoseksualiteit word onder meer ondersoek om vas te stel watter perspektief hierdie onderskeie outeurs gee op manlikheid. Hoe ervaar mans die nuwe Suid-Afrika? Wat is die aard van hulle interaksie met ander mans en met vroue? 'n Ander aspek wat ondersoek word, is die kwessie van die onderdrukking van homoseksuele begeertes vir 'n ander man en tot watter mate dit bedek word agter 'n *macho* fasade.

Die doel met hierdie ondersoek is om aan die hand van die romans onder bespreking vas te stel, watter perspektiewe elk van die onderskeie outeurs gee op manlikheid, wat veral na vore tree in die post-apartheid periode, en hoe die perspektiewe onderling by mekaar aansluit of van mekaar verskil.

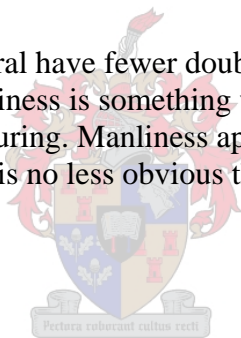


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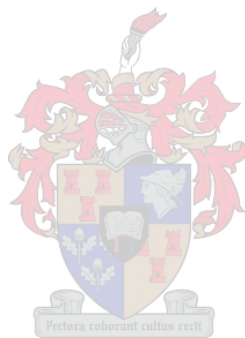
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It seems to me that women in general have fewer doubts about gender identity than men do. The implication is that womanliness is something which cannot be taken away from you: it is both self-evident and enduring. Manliness appears in comparison as a frail, elusive thing. Given that maleness is no less obvious than femaleness at birth, why should this be so?



Sheila MacLeod (1985:18)



## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Introduction

In an article in *The Harvard Crimson*, Laura Krug (2003: cover page) quotes Afsenah Najmabadi on the reasons why university authorities have opted for a change in the name of a course from “women’s studies” to that of “women, gender and sexuality studies”. Najmabadi explains this as follows:

Women, gender and sexuality are each their own domain of intellectual challenge. Each continues to pose questions, encourage fresh scholarship and inform one another. Yet the two are intertwined enough that they cannot be studied one without the other. It is for this reason that the committee wants to combine the fields of women, gender and sexuality studies, rather than beginning a new committee to address the latter two.

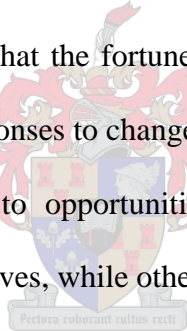


The exclusive study of women’s issues has now expanded to include all facets of gender inquiry, including the study of masculinity. The latter was necessitated by the proliferation of an interest in issues pertaining to men and the role of men within a new genderised perspective on society. Connell (1995: ix) points out that in the last five years, in particular in the capitalist world, “men’s gatherings, magazine and newspaper articles on masculinity have multiplied”. An exclusive focus on women’s issues is also criticised by Steven Kurtz who writes as follows: “To speak about a social concern as a women’s issue is considered a naïve if not harmful reduction that tends toward the very universalization of the subject that feminism claims to resist” (1997: 2).



Criticism has also been expressed, however, against a focus on masculinity and issues concerning men as a form of inquiry, in particular from those who feel that the exclusive emphasis on men's issues will merely perpetuate existing sexist assumptions. One example is the following: "All men benefit from sexism. We live in a patriarchal society. It operates in men's interests" (Flood, 1990: no page numbers). This also explains why feminists tend to treat the notion of an alleged "crisis in masculinity" (Morrell, 2005:xi) with suspicion:

[Such a crisis in masculinity] is regarded as a Trojan horse intended to roll back the advances of women under the pretence of concern for the declining fortunes of men. [We] acknowledge that the fortunes of some men have changed for the worse but note that their responses to changes are not uniform. Some have seemed able to respond positively to opportunities to live more harmoniously with women, children and themselves, while others have experienced crises of identity.



Sandra Scott Swartz (1998: 5) points out that some critics regard masculinity studies as "a fad or even a fraud", for example, because it "encroaches on the province of women's studies" or as an "ideological red herring" symptomatic of "today's political chic". In response to these assumptions, Morrell (1998: 7) says that even though gender studies have always been equated with women, "gender analysis involved both women and men" and, he concludes:


Masculinities studies forced the restatement of gender understandings and relations to include men and women. Agreeing with the feminists that men

oppressed women, they acknowledge that masculinity was something constructed.  
(Morrell, 1998: 7)

In contrast, Judith Kegan Gardiner (2001) proposes in her study, *Masculinity Studies and Feminist Theory* that masculinity studies comes of age as an intellectual field both in dialogue with and in alliance with feminist theory and regards feminism as the key to the development of more egalitarian forms of masculinity in society.

In post-apartheid, post-1994 South African society it is interesting to study masculinity, albeit it from a fictional perspective, especially if one takes into account that one of the founding provisions of the new Constitution reads as follows:

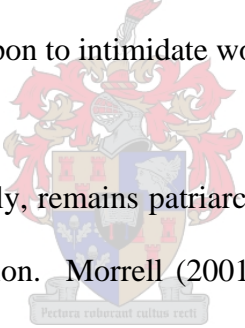
The Republic of South Africa is one sovereign democratic state founded on the following values:

- 
- (a) Human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms.
  - (b) Non-racialism and *non-sexism*. [my emphasis]

And further on, in chapter 2, clause 9 (3):

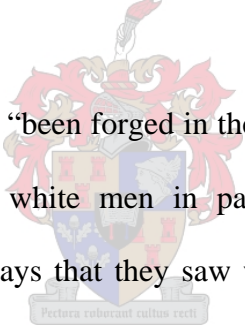
The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone or on one or more grounds, including race, *gender, sex*, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, *sexual orientation*, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth. [my emphases]

As a result the new constitutional democracy in South Africa leads, according to Reid and Walker (2005: 1) to changes in the “gendered ordering of society” and the former patriarchal society has “given way to new ideals of equality between men and women, which are enshrined in the Constitution.” Furthermore, this has “unseated gender hierarchies” and provided the space for what Reid and Walker (2005:1) see as “the construction and expression of new masculinities.” Ratele (2004: 2) believes that in order for men to accept democracy, they have to “go against a long history of social and economic relations, a global history that goes far beyond apartheid and 1994.” Men need to “pay attention to what [their wives] or girlfriend[s] or female friend[s] [say]” and accept that although they are physically stronger, in a democratic society, men should no longer “use [their bodies] as a weapon to intimidate women” (Ratele, 2004:2).



South African society, unfortunately, remains patriarchal in essence in spite of the noble intentions set out in the Constitution. Morrell (2001:29) claims that the “guardians of African patriarchy” have not “reacted to the challenge of women” and that there is still serious opposition to “the improvement of women’s positions” in society, as well as a lack of tolerance towards gays. According to Morrell three responses dominate the reaction to a new gender dispensation in South Africa: They are (a) reactive, (b) accommodating and (c) responsive (or progressive). A reactive response tends to be shown when white males react to the contemporary changes in society: they see government being taken over by black people and in the business world note that affirmative action policies “were giving jobs to blacks” (Morrell, 2001: 27). They fear being made redundant within the working environment. The second reaction refers to a

“[resuscitation] of non-violent masculinities”, whereas a responsive or progressive reaction refers to “emancipatory masculinities” (Morrell, 2001: 31), most evidently in the gay movement. An example of accommodating responses to the new gender dispensation in South Africa manifests itself in the case of initiation practices amongst African youth: “The practice of circumcision has never been stopped and, if anything, it is currently on the increase in rural and urban areas... Being initiated into manhood has strong ethnic connotations but it also invokes the ideal of manhood, which is responsible, respectful and wise. This is distinct from the anti-social masculinities of the many street youth where the knife, crime, rough behaviour and a loyalty to one’s gang and nobody else are more the norm” (Morrell, 2001:29).



Masculinities in South Africa have “been forged in the heat of apartheid and the struggle against the apartheid state” and white men in particular construct their notion of masculinities “in relation to the ways that they saw women and black men (or men of colour generally)” (Epstein, 1998: 49). In “the new South Africa” after 1994, we have a “post-struggle masculinity”, which, according to Xaba (2001: 109) is characterised by “respect for law and order, respect for public order, resumption of paying for services, respect for state institutions and co-operation with the police to fight crime.” The defiance against authority associated with the struggle had to be replaced and the so-called “configurations of masculinity forged in one historical moment” (Xaba, 2001: 119) had become obsolete.

In the aftermath of apartheid, white men, and in particular Afrikaner men associated with the National Party apparatus of the state, have lost their privileged positions. In the new dispensation a distinct loss of political power is experienced especially by older members of this group (but not necessarily a loss of economic power), and the younger generation of white males tend to feel threatened by affirmative action and gender equality (Du Pisani, 2001: 171). Swart (2001: 77) captures the essence of this trend as follows:

[Being a] white male meant being kept from poverty, with jobs in the traditional Afrikaner preserves like the mines, the railways, the police and the civil service being handed down “from father to son”. Now fathers are retrenched and the sons face competition from blacks in the work place.

In the modern patriarchy of South African society, where African men have acquired political power, African women are faced with new difficulties, in particular assumptions relating to the maleness of African power. Rape is on the increase and this could be an effect of the mindset that was predominant during the struggle years, namely that women were considered to be fair game (Xaba, 2001: 116). Posel (2005: 21) argues, however, that before the mid-1990s sexual violence “languished on the margins of public debate and political engagement” and it was only recently that it has entered the public domain, particularly following the brutal baby rape in December 2001. The anger following that incident has focused particularly on the sexual behaviour of South African men and called for a moral regeneration campaign.

In contemporary South Africa the predominantly white colonial notion of manliness associated with “Anglo-Saxon virtues” (Midgeley, 1998:196) is now replaced by “new hegemonic reifications of race, nation, citizenship and sexuality” (Spurlin, 1999: 232) aimed at establishing a South African identity. It is especially important to bear in mind, however, that to imply that all South African men are chauvinistic, misogynistic and homophobic is to adopt a reprehensibly essentialist perspective because, as Morrell points out, there is “no one typical South African man”. (2001: 33)

### **What is masculinity / What are masculinities?**

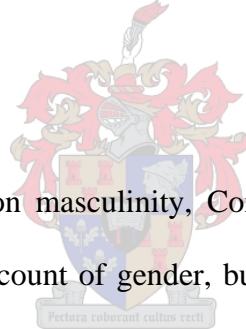
What is “masculinity”? From the outset it should be emphasized that one should not talk of “masculinity” but rather of “masculinities”, or as Flood (1995: no page numbers) puts it in an article, entitled “Men plural”:

Any writer on men worth his or her salt knows to write about “masculinities”, not “masculinity”. This is because there are multiple versions of how to be a man in any particular society, and the relations between them are a crucial part of the makeup of gender relations in general.

Ouzgane and Morrell (2005: 4) also reject the notion that “all men are the same” and conclude, “gendered writing on men shares an anti-essentialist foundation that explains the highly differentiated life trajectories of men around the world.” When writing about

“African masculinities” they reiterate that they start from “ a position of diversity” because “the variations are infinite.”

Concomitantly, concepts such as “male” and “gender” also need to be addressed here, because as Leach (1994: 36) points out, unlike the fact that maleness is a “biological state”, masculinity is a gender identity category constructed “socially, historically and politically” and interpreted from a cultural perspective. Ratele (2001: 245) also points out that masculinity is not “only about male things” nor is it “only about men’s relationships to their bodies and sexuality”. Masculinity also “constructs the social reality of institutions and the identities of women” and reflects the gendered relations in our societies.



In his first path-breaking study on masculinity, Connell (1995: 67) shows that in all cultures there is some or other account of gender, but that the concept “masculinity” is not part of all cultures. In contemporary use the term is often associated with violent, domineering behaviour by men and contrasted with femininity. According to Connell, some cultures do not have a polarised view that stereotypes the individual and thus “[do] not have a concept of masculinity in the sense of modern European / American culture.” To define masculinity, this theorist suggests, four main strategies have been used (Connell, 1995: 68-71):

- 1) **Essentialist definition:** This approach usually identifies a feature that defines the core of the masculine and associates it directly with men’s lives. For example,

Freud associated masculinity with activity and femininity with passivity. The result is that such associations are merely arbitrary and open to constant challenge.

- 2) **Positivist definition:** A simple definition of masculinity is proposed, namely, “what men actually are”. It rules out the usage of expressions such as references to a woman who acts in a “masculine” manner or speaking of a man who acts in a “feminine” manner: “If we only spoke of differences between men as a bloc and women as a bloc, we would not need the terms ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ at all. We could just speak of ‘men’s’ or ‘women’s’ or ‘male’ or ‘female’. The terms ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ point beyond categorical sex difference to the ways men differ among themselves, and women differ among themselves, in matters of gender.”
- 3) **Normative definition:** Differences between men and women are recognised and included in a definition of standard identity or conduct, namely “masculinity is what men ought to be”. This definition is often used in media analysis and according to this a blueprint of such an assumption would be: “No Sissy Stuff! The Big Wheel, The Sturdy Oak and Give ‘em Hell.” Following Morrell (2001: 7) one could typify such assumptions of “real man cultural images” as “hegemonic masculinity”.
- 4) **Semiotic approaches** define masculinity “in effect as ‘non-femininity’” (Connell, 1995:70) and as part of a system of symbolic difference in which masculine and feminine roles are contrasted. Connell (1995:70) explains this approach as follows: “ The approach has been widely used in feminist and post-structuralist



cultural analyses of gender. It yields more than an abstract contrast of masculinity and femininity and masculinity is the unmarked term, the place of symbolic authority. The phallus is master-signifier, and femininity is symbolically defined by lack... To grapple with the full range of issues about masculinity we need ways of talking about relationships, about gendered places in production and consumption, places in institutions and in natural environments, places in social and military struggles.”

Gendered relationships in institutions and social struggles, as mentioned by Connell, are necessarily controlled by power. There is indeed a direct link between masculinity and power, because as Ratele (2001: 250) shows, the main nexus of social power is determined by gender, class and heterosexual masculinity. This places men in what Pronger (1990: 51) calls “the spectrum of power” and the phallus is the symbol of male sexuality and power (Segal, 2001: 103). Shefer and Ruiters (1998: 38) support this and regard masculinity as “predominantly associated with a man’s capacity to exercise power and control”, suggesting that this is sustained within the realm of heterosexuality. In the latter sphere women can be dominated and made subordinate to men, and it is one where male sexuality will be in a position of privilege. Sex is often used as a power tool to oppress women, especially if is associated with being “menacing, predatory, possessive and possibly punitive” (Kimmel, 2001: 271).

According to Seth (1996: 27), what is inherent to any study of masculinity is not men’s biological manhood as such, but “our historically specific, socially constructed, and

personally embodied notions of masculinity”. Men “confuse maleness with masculinity” at their own peril. Following Butler, Warnes (2005: 2) remarks that “[m]en are not men because of what they are, but because of what they do, and what is done to them.”

All the aspects of the above-mentioned definitions could be incorporated into a working definition, which, according to Connell (1995:71) recognises that masculinity is not merely a character type or a behavioural norm, but part of “the processes and relationships through which men and women conduct gendered lives”, which implies that we should focus on (a) the place of masculinity in gender relations, (b) the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender and (c) the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture. Connell (1995:65) motivates the point more clearly:

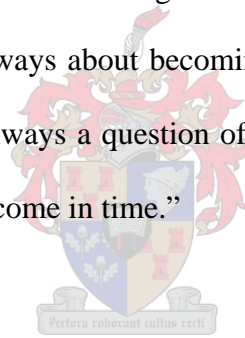


The social semiotics of gender, with its emphasis on the endless play of signification, the multiplicity of discourses and the diversity of subject positions, has been important in escaping the rigidities of biological determinism (Connell, 1995: 65).

For the purpose of this investigation into presentations of masculinities in a selection of post-apartheid male-authored novels, the theoretical framework will be underpinned by what Judith Butler (1999: 173) terms performative acts:

That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality... interiority is an effect and function of a decidedly public and social discourse. Words, acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality.

She explains the idea that gender identity is a performative construct as follows in an interview with Reddy (2004: 116): “ The first point to understand about performativity is what it is not: identities are not made in a single moment in time. They are made again and again ... [being] human is always about becoming. There is always the question of what I will become ... There is always a question of whether what I was yesterday will be precisely the same as what I become in time.”



Butler further identifies three dimensions of sex and gender, namely “anatomical sex, gender identity and gender performance” and Mirsky (1996: 31) applies her three dimensions to the field of masculinities as follows:

Although the full implications of such a schema remain to be developed, in a men’s studies context, the corresponding terms for analysis might be “men”, “maleness” and “masculinity”, respectively. That is, men’s studies might explore how (anatomical) men are gendered male within society and perform or do not perform masculinity according to society’s norms.... Masculinity is always a

contested term within the larger context of gendered power relations between men and women.

Connell (1987: 35) argues that the imbalance in power between men and women is the result of “a need for social reproduction”, that is, “the reproduction from generation to generation of social structures as well as bodies.” Hegemonic masculinity or the image of masculinity of those men who hold power (Kimmel, 2001: 271) is often seen as homophobic, especially since gay men tend to challenge specific definitions of what is meant by masculinity and male roles. Heterosexual men impose certain definitions and set certain boundaries and use their power to maintain it. Or as Connell (1987: 108) describes it, “accounts of patriarchy give the impression of a single, orderly structure like a suburban war memorial”.



But as we know from Foucault, power is often produced in subtle and covert ways. He explains this as follows:

Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything but because it comes from everywhere. Power comes from below; that is there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between ruler and ruled at the root of power relations, and serving as a general matrix – no such duality extending from the top down and reacting on more and more limited groups to the very depth of the social body. One must suppose rather that the manifold relations of force that take shape and come into play in the machinery of production, in families, limited groups

and institutions, are the basis for wide-ranging effects of the cleavage that runs through the social body as a whole. (Foucault, 1978: 93)

Foucault explains at length the way in which power is exercised and controlled in society and according to him it is exercised from “innumerable points” and positions of power which are not always in “superstructural positions with merely a role of prohibition or accompaniment” (Foucault, 1978: 94), to such an extent that it is often difficult to ascertain the positions of the ruler and the ruled within such relations. Power relations are also “intentional and nonsubjective” (Foucault, 1978: 94) and the rationality of power is often characterised by certain “tactics” which are interconnected and often assumed to be the norm. Connell (1987: 35) calls such tactics “imperatives” outside the direct relationship between the power of men and the subordination of women. One such tactic or imperative of power is the normative approach to heterosexuality, seen as “a site of power” and a “site of reproduction of women’s subordination and the privileging of male sexuality” (Shefer and Ruiters, 1998: 39). At a micro-level the link between gender and power could be analysed in places such as the classroom or within the family to show how the mechanisms of power at work, e.g. preferential treatment for boys to follow subjects such as science or mathematics (McHoul and Grace, 1993: 90). Ratele (2002: 3) for his part is of the opinion that masculinities in general “cling together around points of power” resulting in the impossibility of escaping the strictures imposed by social ideology. Connell (1995: 107) writes as follows in this regard:

It is often difficult to see beyond individual acts of force or oppression to a structure of power, a set of social relations with some scope or permanence.

Power may be a balance of advantage or an inequality of resources in a workplace, a household or a large institution.

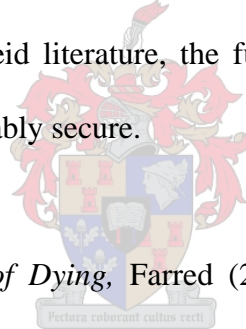
### **Post-apartheid society and text**

As the title of my thesis suggests, the texts under discussion were all published after 1994, the date associated with the first democratic elections in South Africa and the assumption of power by the black majority under the leadership of the ANC. Following Ashcroft et al. (1987:2) this could be regarded as the “post-colonial moment” because in the context of South African history, it signals the end of apartheid rule and oppression. In the new era of the post-apartheid society black writers, according to Nkosi (2002: 253) are “stunned by the sudden change” and as a result examine “the ways in which our recent and distant past” played a major role in shaping the present, and how the ways of the past “[continue] to exert their pressure on the present”. In contrast, white writers tend to “explore their own sense of guilt” whereas others, according to Nkosi (2002: 253), invent black villains “to serve as pawns in a game in which roles are suddenly, conveniently reversed”. Gagiano (2002: 7) observes that in the works of post-1994 authors “some letdowns and weaknesses of the post-1994 state administration are clearly or less overtly criticised” but there is also “the recognition of the regional and communal realities of South Africa”. The latter can be contrasted with “the political and racial features that inevitably used to dominate the local literary scene”.

Similarly, Attwell and Harlow (2000: 4) in their introduction to a special edition of *Modern Fiction Studies* on “South African Fiction after Apartheid” point out that under

apartheid attempts to “separate the political and the aesthetic” were risky because they could lead to “political censure”. In the post-1994 society the freedom of expression is widely endorsed and they conclude:

The liberalism of the new order is more accommodating than a revolutionary culture could ever be, to the re-invention of tradition, to irony, to play. Under apartheid, writers were expected to address the great historical issues of the time, whereas now they are free to write in a more personal key. Finally, under apartheid, particularly in the intense 1980s, anxiety about the future fuelled a number of writers: now, it is the past that sustains many of the most earnest reflections. In post-apartheid literature, the future has little future, whereas the future of the past is reasonably secure.



In his analysis of Mda’s *Ways of Dying*, Farred (2000: 183-184) illustrates what he regards as “symptomatic of the condition of post-apartheid South Africa”. According to him there is “the rich uncertainty of the political transition” and also the fact that Mda has a problem placing his text within the apposite historical moment (“an indistinct, contradictory historical moment” - Farred, 2000: 184) and finds it difficult to distinguish between the democratic present and “the memories of past injustice” – but then again, everything did not change overnight in the New South Africa. Having criticised Mda for his “regressive attempt” to interpret South African society, Farred (2000: 195) draws the following conclusion:

The post-apartheid moment, *Ways of Dying* implies, signals the end of a need for radical politics. None of the crucial issues – why the violence is contained to the black ghetto, why it is still permitted (we know who spawned and sponsored it), and what its implications are for the black underclass in the postapartheid society – are interrogated.

Interestingly enough, Farred calls for the direct opposite of what Ndebele (1991: 37) cautioned against in the early nineties, when he depicted black South African writing as being largely “the history of the representation of spectacle” in which “what matters is what is seen”. An obvious feature of such writing, according to Ndebele, is that “subtlety is secondary to obviousness”. Commenting on the style of the post-apartheid canon Green (2005: 6) suggests that in post-apartheid writing “magical realism” is acceptable (in contrast to the “standard realism” of struggle literature) but “as long as it is made clear that it is drawn from African tale-telling traditions rather than any particular international influence.”

In his reflection on contemporary South African writing, Brink (1998: 25) cautions that to focus on “mere materialities, sterile rationalizations, and the narrow mechanics of retribution or amnesty” may inhibit “the larger implications of our silences”, the latter referring to issues that were not addressed in the apartheid years. One way of doing so is to move beyond “the strains of realism” and “the conventions of struggle literature” (Brink, 1998: 27) through employing techniques of magic realism or unsettling allegories such as are used by Marechera. Thus, when Boehmer (1998: 53) asks that in the new



writing there should not merely be the old oppositions of “history versus discourse, or reality versus fantasy” she is reinforcing Brink’s argument even further. The novel is no longer a necessary messenger to tell the world about apartheid (Boehmer, 1998: 53), but could act as “the lens of vigilant social observation” to present “non-camera-ready ways” of society. Or as Pechey (1998: 58) summarises this type of observation:

Post-apartheid writing turns from the fight against apartheid, with its fixation upon suffering and the seizure of power, into just such stories as these: stories which then open out to transform the victory over apartheid into a gain for postmodern knowledge, a new symbiosis of the sacred and the profane, the quotidian and the numinous.

In the writing of white South African authors like Brink, Coetzee and Gordimer, Diala (2001: 68) points out that their post-apartheid fiction “remains firmly anchored in history and politics” and by probing the apartheid past, “they strive to exorcize the present of its enduring trauma”. Nuttall and Coetzee (1998: 6) talk of the “mode of the confessional” that is often characteristic of white South African writing, used especially in order to “proclaim one’s liberation from the bonds of the past”. In the case of black authors, there is now, in the words of Gagiano (2002: 71), an attempt to extend “our sense of the local rather than the national imaginary” and there is an engagement with “communities and sub-strata of our society whose variety and vitality were to a large extent hidden”. The true South African novel, according to Chapman (1996: 407) needs to reflect on the

South African society as a whole and move towards depicting “a common citizenry as the basis of communal identification”.

### **Focus and scope of thesis**

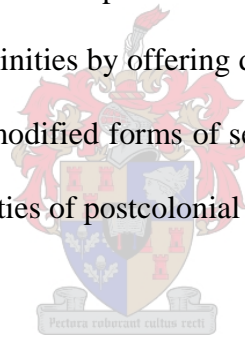
The focus of this thesis is an examination of how anatomical men are gendered male within the societies created by the respective authors and how these men perform (or do not perform) masculinity according to society’s norms. The focus is on imaginative writing and in the novels of Brink and Coetzee there is a reflection on the “white” perspective on masculinities, whereas in the case of Mda, Mpe and Duiker a “black” perspective on masculinities is provided to the reader. In the case of Duiker, there is also a perspective on urban gay life from a black point of view. Mda extends his perspective on masculinity by focusing on the white Afrikaner community in the Free State town of Excelsior.



The texts under discussion are all written by men and for the sake of the structuralists, I should probably have included female-authored texts, to show non-masculine focalisation on masculine issues. Such an approach would support the description of South African literary culture as a “fertile ground for foundational binary inscription” (to quote Leon De Kock, 2001: 285). This investigation is part of an ongoing dialogue and as the feminist critical project progressed from initially concentrating on female characters portrayed by female authors, so I presume, the masculinity studies project will also progress from similar roots in “suffering and anger” to “passion and identification” (to adapt Kaplan (1985: 35). Similarly Haywood and Mac an Ghail (2003: 5) call for “a need to re-

engage with earlier academic and political representations of women, alongside critical explorations of the suggested crisis in heterosexual men's lifestyles."

In his study, *The Fiction of Imperialism*, Phillip Darby (1998:1) observes that he intends to "[trace] the ways in which fictional narratives have depicted the interaction between colonizer and colonized" and asks the question: "What do we learn by reading fiction that is missing from the conventional and historical sources?" Similarly, when Ouzgane and Morrell (2005:10- 11) regard masculinity as "a fictional construction" they pose the following questions: "How are myths of masculinity reinforced or challenged in literature and the popular media? Do the new practices reinscribe or modify conventional understandings of men and masculinities by offering different images, different roles, and different options for men? What modified forms of sexualities and genders are produced and maintained in the hybrid societies of postcolonial places?"



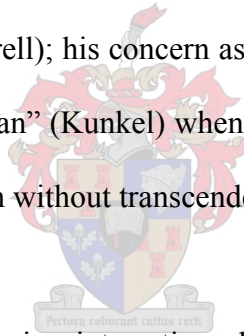
Following Darby, Ouzgane and Morrell, I envisage the analysis of the fictional presentation of masculinity in a selection of novels published since 1994. But I also need to bear in mind, as Knights (1999:3) explains, that "[t]exts are not simply mimetic; they are not confined to describing worlds, real or imaginary. They are productive in giving rise to renewed performances of themselves in which the readers play a necessary and active part." The latter, a typical post-modern observation, suggests the openness of the text and calls for the intervention of the reader as an active co-writer. Novelists, as Gagiano (2000: 42) explains, are usually the "*analysts* of the societies they depict" and they act, as she puts it, "as primary thinkers who concern themselves with the

investigation of social, psychological and political issues, and are not mere recorders.” By analysing the presentation of masculinity in the fictional narratives of the selected authors I will not only show how they reflect aspects of masculinity in South African society, but also how they analyse the power relations and interactions between male characters, their interaction with female characters and related issues such as male views on sexuality, the portrayal of the male body – to mention but a few.

Theoretical questions that inform this analysis are the following: What are the sex role demands imposed on the male characters in the novels? What hegemonic male ideal is presented by the patriarchal society in which these characters find themselves? Is there in any way a questioning of male privileges and do the male characters in the novel experience a crisis of masculinity, because they are “confused about what it means to be a man” (Lemon, 1995: 62)? To what extent is homosexual masculinity presented as an alternative to hegemonic masculinity, for example, in the case of Sello Duiker’s novel? The fictional narratives about these aspects pertaining to the study of masculinity form “an entry to other worlds” where imaginative literature can assist us to “bridge the gulf between established approaches to [masculinity] and new discourses directed to culture, identity and subjectivity” (Darby, 1998: 234).

## Chapter 2: “Does the drinking of tea seal a love-bond?”: J M Coetzee’s *Disgrace*<sup>1</sup>

J M Coetzee’s eighth novel, *Disgrace*<sup>2</sup>, was published in 1999 and earned him the Booker Prize for a second time. In the editorial of a special edition of the journal *Scrutiny*<sup>2</sup> focused almost exclusively on *Disgrace*, Leon de Kock (2002: 3) observes that, “not since the aftermath of an earlier metatext by Coetzee, *Foe*, have we seen such multiples of invested, engaged and argumentative critical writing about a South African author”. Some of the readings of the novel have alluded to the theme of masculinity that forms the basis of this thesis and focus on Lurie’s “mid-life male recklessness” (Ram), his “taste for exotic women” (Horrell); his concern as a father for his daughter (Azoulay) and as “a kind of representative man” (Kunkel) when he is reduced to basically the same level as the dogs, “a packet of flesh without transcendent meaning” (Kunkel).



Kochin (2002: 8) makes the following interesting observation regarding the life of the main character, David Lurie and his observation will be explored in detail when analysing the novel, and in particular the presentation of masculinities: “Lurie has no relationship of depth with men. His one effort is with Isaacs, Melanie’s father, and seems to be more of a quest for the sources of Melanie’s beauty than the expression of a desire for friendship with a man.”

In his essay that deals specifically with the friendship between men entitled, “Friendship, Intimacy and Sexuality”, Messner (2001: 253- 265) examines the issue of male friendship extensively. According to him women usually have “deep, intimate, meaningful, and

lasting friendships” whereas men have “a number of shallow, superficial, and unsatisfying acquaintances” (Messner, 2001: 253) – a sexist generalization. The main reason for this shallow nature of men’s friendships, according to Messner (2001:253) is the way in which men are brought up. They are taught to be homophobic, not to express their emotions and to be competitive towards other men. Men enjoy each other’s company during sporting activities, for example, because within the framework of such activities, there is no threat to what Messner (2001: 254) describes as their “fragile masculine identities”. On the sports field men can relate to one another without the development of intimacy between them. The danger inherent in such assumptions, according to Messner (2001: 255) is that men’s friendships are examined “against the standard of the type of intimate relationships that women tend to develop” and the question arises: How are [men’s] friendships with each other affected by – and in turn how do they affect – their attitudes toward and relationships with women? Is there a definite “displacement of the erotic toward women as objects of sexual talk and practice” (Messner, 2001: 258) and are women merely seen as “objects of sexual conquest” in order for men to gain status within the male peer group?

Nardi (2001: 289) points out that friendship entails “an element of community building, mobilizing and effecting social change” resulting in some form of heteronormativity of the dominant culture. The latter is often evident in “the pomp and posturings of virility” (Woods 1993: 168) displayed by men during which they, ironically though, display the so-called vices associated with women, namely “shallowness, narcissism, flirtatiousness, immodesty, lack of critical distance and sentimentality” (Woods 1993: 168). Male

friendships, especially when conducted in public, are “scrutinizable, regulable, controllable, manipulable” (Culbertson 1996: 171) as an attempt to guard against behaviour not befitting a man. Should men attempt some form of intimacy within their relationship, there is often a so-called triangular relationship with a woman who functions as a disguise for the men’s “homosocial behaviour”. The latter term coined by Sedgwick (1985:1) is explained as follows: “Homosocial is a word occasionally used in history and the social sciences, where it describes social bonds between persons of the same sex; it is a neologism, obviously formed by analogy with ‘homosexual’ and just as obviously meant to be distinguished from ‘homosexual’.”<sup>3</sup>

In contrast to male friendships based on some form of machismo where men’s bodies are portrayed as violent, controlling, often “preoccupied with phallic values or disconnected from close male friendship” (Nelson 1996: 313), Doty (1996: 186) suggests “co-operation and reciprocity, exchange and alliance” between men as important for the well-being of society.<sup>4</sup>

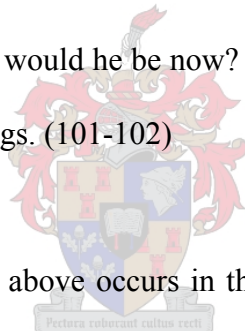
A central passage dealing with the issue of male-male friendship in *Disgrace*, as will be examined below, is the following:

“I’m all right. Light burns, nothing serious. I’m sorry we’ve ruined your evening.”

“Nonsense!” says Bill Shaw. “What else are friends for? You would have done the same.”

Spoken without irony, the words stay with him and will not go away. Bill Shaw believes that if he, Bill Shaw, had been hit over the head and set on fire, then he,

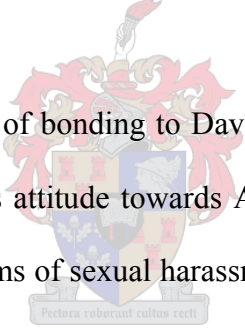
David Lurie, would have driven to the hospital and sat waiting, without so much as a newspaper to read, to fetch him home. Bill Shaw believes that, because he and David Lurie once had a cup of tea together, David Lurie is his friend, and the two of them have obligations towards each other. Is Bill Shaw right or wrong? Has Bill Shaw, who was born in Hankey, not two hundred kilometres away, and works in a hardware shop, seen so little of the world that he does not know there are men who do not readily make friends, whose attitude towards friendship between men is corroded with scepticism? Modern English *friend* from Old English *freond*, from *freon*, to love. Does the drinking of tea seal a love-bond, in the eyes of Bill Shaw? Yet but for Bill and Bev Shaw, but for old Ettinger, but for bonds of some kind, where would he be now? On the ruined farm with the broken telephone amid the dead dogs. (101-102)



The mediation on friendship cited above occurs in the novel immediately after the rape incident on the farm (91-97) and focuses on the way in which people in the rural areas interact and are interdependent on one another. From the passage, we learn that David has always looked at male-male friendships with a sense of scepticism and has always been distrustful of such relationships. The reference to the “drinking of tea” not only calls to mind the old saying of “tea and sympathy” but also evokes associations with the ritual sharing of some or other cup so as to seal a friendship. “Tea” is also associated with the settlers, in particular white English speaking settlers, and the act suggests a sense of cultural civility in the harsh rural landscape. There is a definite opposition between “hardware store” and “drinking of tea” since the former belongs to the domain of men



and the latter traditionally to the domestic domain of the women. The reference to the hardware store also suggests David Lurie's condescension towards the "[c]ountry ways" (65) and towards a small town shop clerk who has seen "so very little of the world" – in comparison to the cosmopolitan David with his knowledge of opera (he is composing one himself) and his love of "Beethoven and Janáček" (176). Out of necessity, David is forced by circumstances to accept the friendship of unsophisticated men and become part of their interdependent group of friends. There is indeed, as Doty (quoted above) suggests, "co-operation and reciprocity, exchange and alliance" among the settlers in the Eastern Cape. David is forced to adapt to the new dispensation, as Lucy did when she accepted Petrus's proposal of marriage and new role of taking care of her (202).



One could also contrast this sense of bonding to David's experiences with other men in the urban context, in particular his attitude towards Aram Hakim and the other men on the committee that investigate claims of sexual harassment against David. Hakim, "sleek and youthful" (40), is the Vice-Rector and has been a friend of David's for several years. They also played tennis together (42). Hakim's attempts to support David during the trial and to provide him with some advice are scorned by David as mere "male chumminess" (42). In their case, their friendship is based on mutual interests: they are both academics and they play tennis together. Their male-male bonding fits with the often-stereotypical assumption about such friendships (see also Messner, quoted above), namely that it occurs only within a sporting context. Hakim transgresses the heteronormative boundaries of such friendships when he expresses sympathy for David and cautions him to get legal advice (41). For Hakim their friendship seems to be more than simply playing

tennis together and he is essentially concerned about David's wellbeing ("These things can be hell", 42). This is evident during the hearing when Hakim frankly tells him that they "would like to help [him]" so that David can find "a way out of what must be a nightmare" (52).

David's reaction to the concern of his friends, in particular that of his close male colleagues,<sup>5</sup> is that they want to secure his future as an academic and do not want to see him "begging the streets" (52). They are also very aware of the fact that they too have had "their weak moments" (52) and may have sexually harassed their students in the past. This is echoed by Lucy when she talks about sexual harassment to her father and observes that, if "they prosecuted every case of [sexual harassment] the profession would be decimated" (66). Both his daughter and his male colleagues feel sympathetic towards him, yet their "chorus of goodwill" (52) is an irritation to him. Interestingly, apart from Lucy, there is "no female voice" (52) among his colleagues to support him. That is self-explanatory. The female characters side with the female victim, probably because they have suffered as well in the past. This explains why Farida Rassool wants "the severest penalty" (51) and typifies his stubbornness in refusing to co-operate as "quixotic" (49).

In the context of the hearing, when David's female colleagues act in a "coldly formalistic way" (51), their conduct subverts the sexist assumption that men are intellectual and formal in their conduct, whereas women tend to be more emotional. The male colleagues are the ones who feel that David should confess, and in doing so, expose his vulnerability. In an act befitting Archbishop Desmond Tutu before the Truth

Commission, the aptly named Desmond Swarts pleads “one last time” (53) that David should make some form of statement. He admonishes David not to “sneer at [their] efforts” (54) and merely wants him to acknowledge that what he did was wrong.<sup>6</sup>

Evidently what is being portrayed here is a new form of masculinity. Du Pisani (2001: 171) has pointed out that in the “new” “post-apartheid” South Africa, there has been a loss of political power for Afrikaner men in particular, but that white males generally feel “threatened by affirmative action and gender equality”. Whereas academics could probably have got away with harassment in the past, now it is no longer possible and David Lurie is measured against the norm of the so-called new male, the one who accepts responsibility for his sexual misconduct. On the one hand his colleagues want to secure his position as an academic, because if affirmative action is applied, he would not find a new position easily – and there has already been “great rationalization” (3) at their institution. David mentions to Lucy that he is “no longer marketable” (88) and he would always be associated with the scandal. On the other hand we have the female academics who want to implement the policies of gender equality and see to it that he is punished for his deeds. Whereas his male colleagues have started to “unlearn [their] privileges as [their] loss” (Spivak 1996: 4) and go along with the new gender sensitive environment with its “[r]e-formation of the character” (66), David alleges that he has an old-fashioned nature and refuses to do so.

To David, to apologise in public and acknowledge his transgressions would be similar to some form of castration (66). He would rather be “put against a wall and shot” (66) than

confess. His mindset is ruled by the old notion of heroic masculinity, which prescribes that one should rather die an honourable death than admit defeat or betray one's beliefs. In modern terms, one could reformulate this to read: rather suffer the consequences than show one's emotions and confess openly. Poyner (2000: 70) has indicated that David seeks "his own, private form of redemption" and therefore refuses to confess. Krog (2004: 130) points out that the rape of Lucy eventually "exposes Lurie's moral bankruptcy" and that whereas Lurie wants Lucy to "make it public", he is not prepared to do the same regarding his encounters with Melanie Isaacs.

David perceives the investigation by his colleagues as an attempt to force him to do "breast-beating" (66) and to show "remorse, tears if possible" (66). He also regards this investigation as "a spectacle" (66) and believes that they want to castrate him (66). This is an important issue, especially since it comments overall on the issue of masculinity. It calls to mind Freud's theory of castration anxiety and the castration complex. According to Badcock (1988: 179) this could be briefly explained as follows: "A system of unconscious representations centering on fear of castration and related to infantile sexual theories which sees females as castrated males and castration as punishment for sexual sins." David's silencing of the self by not uttering the word "castration" to his daughter could be read as a Freudian slip, because, unconsciously, he feels that he is being punished for his "sexual sins" with the prostitutes, the girl friends, and in particular with Melanie Isaacs.<sup>7</sup>

To David confessing his sins would be on the same level as losing his phallic power. The latter refers not to the literal amputation of his sexual organ, but rather to the symbolic attributes associated with the phallus as “an empty marker of difference” (Eagleton 1985: 168). Phallic power implies accepting the law of the father within patriarchal society, severing all ties with the maternal body and identifying oneself as a subject in relation to others around you. Segal (2001: 103-104) shows that the phallus is responsible for “an ineluctable bond between male sexuality and power” and argues that society tends to sustain the symbolic power of the phallus. The result thereof is that “men’s sexual coerciveness towards women has been socially tolerated, often, indeed, both expected and encouraged.” David, the “lover of women” and “womanizer” (3); the man who was enriched by each of the women he was involved with (192), and especially David, the older man who has to act his age, will lose his sexual prowess and energy and should allow himself to be admonished for his sexual sins. He will no longer represent the norms attributed to hegemonic masculinity and be able to hide his vulnerabilities and weaknesses. He will no longer fit the hegemonic definition of manhood as “a man *in* power, a man *with* power, and a man *of* power” (Kimmel 2001: 272).

When Ettinger offers to lend one of his guns to David (113), it is a sign of a neighbour’s good intention to help safeguard life on the farm, but it also suggests that David as subject is offered a substitute phallus. The gun is usually a phallic symbol, “a symbol of male power and aggression” or “the ultimate weapon of patriarchy to penetrate and possess women” (Poe, 2003: 6). Ettinger always carries his Beretta in a holster at his hip (100) and this symbolises phallic masculinity and phallic power. After the attack (when

discussing it with Ettinger), David asks, “if he had had a gun, would he have saved Lucy?” (100). By making this obvious link between the gun and the protection of his daughter, David inextricably links phallic power to the protection of women, and in particular with the fulfilment of his role as father and protector of his family. Kossew (2001: 133) is of the opinion that the guns and dogs in this novel are “emblematic of a society trying in vain to protect itself from the violence within”, particularly since the violence “has taken up residence inside the once-hallowed white domestic spaces of the suburban block or the farmhouse.” To expand on this, I would propose that Lucy’s keeping of a gun could be read as signifying the possession of a substitute phallus. It is her way of exemplifying a sense of power in the realm usually associated with the male frontiersman and farmer. Ironically, the attackers take this rifle (95) and use it during the brutal attack on the farm and shoot the dogs with it, and in doing so they rob her of this substitute phallus and relegate her to the role of sexual object, victim and later on, mother of an illegitimate child. Lucy is seen by her own father as someone who is “lost to men” (76) because of her “Sapphic love” (86) for other women, whereas Petrus observes that she is “as good as a boy” (130). Elsewhere David contemplates whether it is worse “to rape a lesbian ... than raping a virgin” (105). Heterosexual men often resent gay women for not having “need of men” (104), and therefore such women are seen as needing to be “taught a lesson”. David suggests this when, according to him, “the word [has] got around” (105) that Lucy is gay and that she “deserves” to be violated. The fact that David is musing over “what women do together [sexually]” (86) and whether they “need to make the beds creak” (86) is another example of the heterosexual man’s stereotypical obsession with gay women and their sexuality.

On a sexual level, David also experiences a form of castration, because up until then he was a womaniser, and a man who, according to Rosalind, loves young women with “[c]unning little weasel [bodies]” (189). His relations imply a kind of father-daughter incest and he feels protective towards his girlfriends. One can compare for instance, in this regard, the making of the bed for Melanie in his daughter’s room and his later making love to her in the same bed (26- 27). Significant is the point that unconsciously he wanted to ask her, “Tell *Daddy* what is wrong” (26 – my emphasis). His symbolic castration is underpinned by the fact that he now has to resort to an affair with the motherly, caring Bev Shaw, who is not sexually attractive to him (“He does not like women who make no effort to be attractive”, 72). David has an obsession with beautiful women, and it is ironic that the first thing he observes about Lucy when he visits her, is the fact that “she has put on weight” (59). Yet, when he learns of Lucy’s pregnancy, he finally has to admit to himself that old age has taken over and “[w]hat pretty girl can he expect to be wooed into bed with a grandfather?”(217).

There are other male-male relationships in the novel that do not subscribe to the category of friendships per se. For the purpose of analysis, they could be contrasted to the more intimate friendships between David, Hakkim, Bill Shaw and Ettinger, and these are David’s relations with Petrus, Ryan and Mr Isaacs. Kochin (2002: 14) alleges that Petrus is treated as a neighbour because of David’s white guilt, and Petrus is ready to “manipulate this guilt as well”. I want to suggest that one could go as far as interpreting the relation between the two men as the inability to accept the Other as an equal, and

ensuing from that, the inability to form a friendship with the Other. David remarks that there “was a time when he thought he might become friends with Petrus” (152), but because of Petrus’s decision to allow Pollux to stay with him (“He is my family, my people” – 201) and because David feels that Petrus is “not an innocent party” (133) when it comes to the rape of Lucy, he detests Petrus. There is a distinct class difference between the two men with one being from the urban middle-class and the other being from the working class in the rural areas. However, David as the intellectual from the city is also aware of class differences between him and Bill Shaw, for instance.

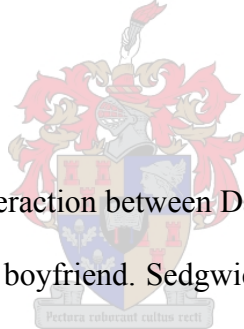
Under the old apartheid dispensation black men were, in the words of Majors (2001: 210), “rendered invisible” or viewed as “helpless victims of a racist system” and there was a definite institutionalised decimation of black males. In *Disgrace* Petrus represent the new black male, the post-apartheid black man who is rendered *visible*. He is a landowner, a “co-proprietor” of a piece of land (62) owned by a white woman. The fact that the farm belongs to Lucy is also significant, since as Du Pisani (2001: 158) shows, the white farmer in the South African context has always been a man typifying virtues such as being “simple, honest, steadfast, religious and hard-working.” And in addition to the farm being owned by a woman, one should also remember that she is a lesbian. In this portrayal of life of the farm there is, as Poyner (2000: 72) suggests, “a shift from white patriarchal authority to black” – and there is also a distinct deconstruction of the typical rural scenario pertaining to gender roles and racial identities. Gagiano (2004: 45) writes that Petrus is constantly “expanding [his] patriarchal land ownership scheme” and one way of “legitimis[ing]” his claim on the land is to marry Lucy. Krog (2004: 128)



comments on the relationship between David and Petrus and observes that “the eye and behaviour of Lurie are virtually the same as the eye and behaviour of Petrus.” She calls Petrus “the antagonist or the [morally bankrupt] mirror image of [a morally bankrupt] Professor Lurie” and states that although David Lurie does not see himself as “a white version of Petrus” (Krog, 2004: 131) the text provides us with “enough convincing parallels to make Petrus and Lurie echo each other in troubling ways” (Krog, 2004: 131). Initially the impression is created in the text that Petrus “does what needs to be done, and that is that” (116). Petrus is presented as co-proprietor of Lucy’s farm (62) but he is also “the gardener and the dog-man” (64) for Lucy. From David’s first conversation with Petrus (64) one deduces that he uses simple language to address the worker and his language suggests the stereotypically condescending way in which white people generally address black people, particularly black people of the working class.

In contrast to David’s patronizing treatment of Petrus, Lucy trusts him to make the right measurement for the spray and mentions that “[h]e has his head screwed on right” (64). Whereas working the land and making a living from it is a necessity for Petrus, to David it becomes a way of passing the time, although “his fingers are soon too cold” (70) to do the job properly. David turns Petrus into an object of study, because to him, “it is an education to watch [Petrus]” (137) at work. Compare also in this regard David’s description of Petrus as “[a] good peasant” (118) who provides David with several “reading[s]” (118) of Petrus’s involvement in the attack. The description of the “anthropological” search for the truth and the use of “an interpreter” (118) also confirm that Petrus and his ways of doing are objects of knowledge that need to be analysed.<sup>8</sup>

Whereas both Lucy and Bev Smith regard Petrus as “solid” and “dependable” (171), David remains suspicious of him and cannot accept the new dispensation where Lucy will become “part of [Petrus’s] establishment” (203) and form “an alliance” or “[a] deal” (203) with the man who is allegedly indirectly involved in the attack on Lucy. On the farm, where David has realized that he has never been a proper father to Lucy, as was pointed out above, he comes to the conclusion that “[they] live too close to Petrus” (127) and it felt like “sharing a house with strangers” (127). He cannot befriend the man who is Lucy’s surrogate father (“Fatherly Petrus” – 162) and protector – especially since he was unable to do so during the attack on the farm. The presence of Petrus would always act as a reminder of his inability “to be a good person” (216) and perhaps develop to “an eye for rural life” (218).



Another example of male-male interaction between David and another man occurs during his dealings with Ryan, Melanie’s boyfriend. Sedgwick (1985: 21) points out that within a particular erotic triangle, the bond between the rivals is “even stronger, more heavily determinant of actions and choices” than is the case with the bond “between either of the lovers and the beloved”. We seldom learn about the interaction between Melanie and her boyfriend, Ryan, the one who, according to the focaliser’s description “looks like trouble” (30). Through his interaction with David, we not only learn about his machismo, but we also learn indirectly about Melanie’s emotional instability following the relationship with David – albeit as interpreted and conveyed by a third party, namely Ryan.

Ryan is able to unnerve David Lurie and acts as some form of conscience when it comes to Melanie Isaacs: “ And don’t think you can just walk into people’s lives and walk out again when it suits you” (30). David is forced to test his assumptions and masculine identity against that of Ryan, the younger, more virile man: always wearing black, the colour representative of “the younger generation rather than the product of racial discrimination”(Azoulay 2002: 36). Ryan also reminds David of his age and his transgression as a lecturer and figure of authority; as well as his inability to continue his relationship with Melanie without being reprimanded by the authorities. He is also the one who tells David to forget about Melanie and to “find [himself] another life” (194).

The interaction between David and Ryan is characterised by overt displays of machismo behaviour. Ryan is crude (“That you fuck her”, he threatens David and vandalises his car –30; 31). His overt display of machismo often occurs within David’s personal space (e.g. the office) or in David’s domain of authority, namely his lecture room (31-33). The reference to the “erring spirit” (32) or Lucifer is significant in this context, since indirectly David sees his rival also as some type of Lucifer figure. The boyfriend not only has some form of control over Melanie, but also silences the rest of the class (“They will not speak, they will not play his game, as long as a stranger is there to listen and judge and mock” -32). The battle over the desired female is fought within an intellectual context and the two men wish to humiliate one another. True to his haughty nature, David shuns the boyfriend as being the stereotypical possessor of “motorcycles and flashy clothes” (33) and nothing more. During their final confrontation in the theatre, David derides him for being childish (194), but has to accept his own final fall from

grace. He is no longer virile and sexually attractive to Melanie and has to resort to having sex with a drunk prostitute.

According to Sedgwick (1985: 66) in some instances of male-male interaction, there is no sense of “brotherhood, but of extreme, compulsory, and intensely volatile mastery and subordination”. In *Disgrace*, we have a sense of such volatile interaction in the portrayal of the power struggle between the two men, each representing a different generation. On the one hand we have the middle-aged professor who has to learn to relinquish his desires for younger women and learn “grandfatherhood” (218), representing the white male from the old apartheid order. On the other hand we have the young urban macho man with his “ear-ring and goatee” (193) representing the new post-apartheid order. It is evident that masculinity associated with Romantic ideas about love, and concomitant to that, a Byronic, lascivious pursuit of younger women (represented by David) have to make way for a form of enigmatic and macho masculinity (represented by Ryan). If we include Pollux and the rapists in this comparison, we deduce from their conduct that post-apartheid masculinity is associated with some form of homosocial behaviour (the rapists are compared to “dogs in a pack” - 159) in which men act together, are sexually violent, especially when it comes to women, and protect one another (Petrus takes care of the young Pollux, for instance). Niehaus (2005: 75) is of the opinion that gang rape is “essentially a kind of male bonding” and that men who participate in such an activity, “share the same woman as sexual object”. It is seen as an attempt by men to “publicly demonstrate their heterosexual virility to their peers.”

The association of post-apartheid masculinity with sexual violence underpins what Gagliano (1999: 5) writes about the novel, namely that it “endorses and legitimises a number of prevalent stereotypes – particularly in its depiction of racial identities (and shifting roles) within the dispensation following the formal end of apartheid rule”.<sup>9</sup> The novel suggests that post-apartheid masculinity, and in particular black masculinity, has very little regard for the body of women, and white women in particular. Does that support the idea posited by Fanon (1967: 63) that the body of the white woman is associated with “white civilization and dignity” or is it a case of “the quest for white flesh” (Fanon, 1967: 81)?<sup>10</sup> One can, for example, in support of this, take the incident where the young boy Pollux returns to the farm and peeps through the bathroom window and peeps at Lucy taking a bath (206). When Pollux is confronted by David in an attempt to save his daughter’s honour – having failed the first time – the boy’s reaction is quite meaningful: “We will kill you all!” (207). Although it is blamed on his being “mentally deficient” (208), it could also be read as support of Fanon’s notion of the white female body being unattainable and out of reach, particularly to black men. The following remark by Messner (2001: 263) is applicable here: “Though [such] structured denigration of women truly does hurt young males, in terms of making the development of true intimacy with women more difficult to develop, ultimately, it is women – the ‘prey’ – who pay the price for young men’s fear of intimacy with each other.” And this links with the whole notion of a lack of ethical behaviour in the new South Africa as is portrayed in the novel. Men do not respect women and the political changes in the country “have not affected the base of sociality, that is, the way in which the individual conceives of his/her fellow relations to his/her fellow human beings” (Marais, 2000: 3).<sup>11</sup>

Post-apartheid masculinity, as portrayed in the novel, is avaricious and selfish. In order to improve one's social standing and gain possession of the land, one is even willing to commit sexual violence to instill fear and acquire new land in the process – as is alleged by David about Petrus. Or as Xaba (2001: 119) writes: “[I]t is no secret that the knife-edge life of violent crime is eminently more remunerative than the palliatives offered by the Adult Basic Education and Life Skills programmes in which former ‘comrades’ and ‘exiles’ are expected to enrol [in the new South Africa].”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The chapter title is taken from *Disgrace* (102).

<sup>2</sup> Page references refer to the 1999 edition published by Secker and Warburg.

<sup>3</sup> See Heyns (1998: 108-122) for a thorough application of this theory in his reading of selected gay texts written during the so-called State of Emergency in South Africa.

<sup>4</sup> Compare in this regard Gagiano (2001: 31-46) for an examination of machismo within the African context, exemplified in the novel of Mphahlele. She distinguishes between a “benign form of masculinity” and a more “dominant or hegemonic masculinity”. Woodward (2001:106) deems David to be trapped in “[t]he dualistic thinking of hypermasculinity” and which “allows for acts of violence against the other of the self, whether it be natives, women or animals.”

<sup>5</sup> The female characters, Farodia Rasool and Elaine Winter are not presented as being sympathetic towards David. Elaine Winter, his departmental chair, is described as someone who has never liked David, because she regarded him as “a hangover from the past” (40) – probably a patriarchal, white male remnant of the past dispensation.

<sup>6</sup> Compare in this regard Poyner (2000: 67-77), who reads the trial of David Lurie as “an allegory of the troubled Truth and Reconciliation Commission within the context of a nation in transition”. Bonthuys (2002: 60) also comments on the difference in viewpoint of Lucy and her father on the issue of reconciliation. Samuelson (2003: 63-76) uses this novel as a point of departure for a lengthier discussion on “selected fictional narratives that explicitly respond to the TRC.”

<sup>7</sup> David Lurie was brought up in an all female household and “[h]is childhood was spent in a family of women” (7) and this has made of him “a lover of women” (7) and “a womanizer” (7). He calls his life “an anxious flurry of promiscuity” (7). This is supported by Rosalind when she talks of “[j]ust [his] type” (189) and mentions his “inamorata”, “quick flings” and “peccadilloes” (189) – all of which suggest his love of quick amorous affairs and petty indiscretions, even while they were married. He has never been a faithful husband to her. This also echoes Mr Isaacs’ remark: “We put our children in the hands of you people because we think we can trust you” (38), which reiterates what is seen as the predatory nature of David’s sexual promiscuity. Supporting his favourite Romantic poet, Byron’s ideas, David believes that a

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woman should share her beauty (16) - but “beauty” could also mean “the sweet young flesh” (150) that he so much desires and wants to abuse for his own pleasure.

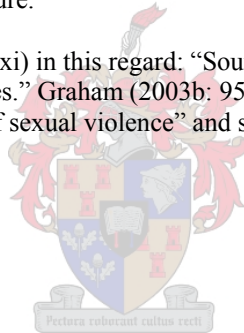
<sup>8</sup> Compare Gagiano (2004: 48. note 18) for an analysis of the use of the word “anthropological” in this context.

<sup>9</sup> Connell (2001: 41) comments extensively on the stereotypical view on the black rapist and his symbolism within white right-wing politics. The following remark by Krog is apposite in this regard: “[M]any black readers feel uncomfortable that they are once again stereotyped as unfair brutes cruelly depriving well-educated white men of their rightful lives” (2004: 134). For a more extensive commentary on Coetzee’s role as social commentator on South Africa, see Gagiano (2004).

<sup>10</sup> This is also suggested by David when he compares the rape of his daughter to “mating” (199). The attack was meant “to soil her” (199) and “to mark her” (199). Compare also Krog (2004: 133) in this regard: “[S]ymbolically Lucy bears the brunt of the actions of her father – the deeds of one generation visited upon the next. In a sense, one could say that Lucy is raped by her own father.” According to Graham (2003a: 439) the novel also suggests “female bodies may not fare better in the new order, as after Lucy is raped she becomes pregnant, gives up her land and retreats into the house.”

<sup>11</sup> The issue of ethics forms the basis of several readings of the novel. See Marais (2000, 2001) and Clarkson (2003). According to Graham (2003b: 96) the novel “confirm[s] that Coetzee’s fiction is an ethically and politically committed literature.”

<sup>12</sup> Compare the remark by Morrell (2005: xi) in this regard: “South African men are confronting new material, political and social circumstances.” Graham (2003b: 95) describes [p]ost-apartheid South Africa as having “an extremely high incidence of sexual violence” and she mentions that “most rapes in the country are intraracial, not interracial.”



### Chapter 3: “Note on sex for the aged widower.” - André Brink’s *The Rights of Desire*<sup>1</sup>

In his review of Brink’s novel, Boylan (2001) points out that the main female character in the novel, Tessa Butler, is “an embodiment of beautiful, dangerous, modern South Africa” whereas Ruben, the protagonist, “symbolizes the resilience of Afrikaners who helped mold the country”. He concludes: “Like his Boer forebears, [Ruben’s] learned to live alone. And then comes Tessa to awaken his old man’s desire, which feels the same as a young man’s.” In the new South Africa, of which this novel “stands as both narrative about and metaphor for” (Schroeder, 2001), the position of white males, and in particular the Afrikaner male, has changed mostly because of the change in social status and the loss of political power. In this regard, Visagie (2002: 139) points out that the “death knell” for white male supremacy became a reality in the new South Africa, resulting in “a new definition of Afrikaner masculinity” that had to take shape “to compensate for the severing of the bond between white masculinity and political power.”<sup>2</sup> Swart (2001: 77) is of the opinion that in the new South Africa, Afrikaner masculinity has moved “from a hegemonic, indeed an exemplary, identity to a socially marginalised, and in many sectors, an actively dishonoured identity.”

Bearing this in mind, the emphasis in this chapter is on the portrayal of Afrikaner masculinity in André Brink’s *The Rights of Desire*, as an attempt to determine the validity of Morrell’s (2001: 270) central thesis about masculinity, namely that it is about “men making and remaking masculinity, about challenging hegemonic masculinity and reconstituting it.” In his portrayal of Afrikaner masculinity, does Brink confront the



hegemonic and patriarchal power structures associated with Afrikaner men or does he provide the reader with a new perspective on Afrikaner masculinity? In Brink's presentation (a) how do Afrikaner men relate to other men and (b) how does he depict them in relation to their social class and to women? <sup>3</sup>

The following propositions form the basis of this analysis of Brink's presentation of Afrikaner masculinity:

- The thesis that the character Willem Mostert, the master and lover of the slave woman, Antje of Bengal, serves as Brink's exemplar of traditional Afrikaner masculinity
- The thesis that the character Ruben Olivier presents Brink's conception of the contemporary Afrikaner male, in particular the older Afrikaner male, in facets of his life such as (a) his relation with his farmer-father, (b) his role as husband and father and (c) his relationship with the much younger Tessa, whose lover and/or protector he aspires to be. <sup>4</sup>

In the very opening paragraph of the novel reference is made to Willem Mostert, Antje of Bengal's "violent lover and master" (3), which prepares the reader for what will ensue in the course of the novel. Willem was the first owner of the house in which Ruben now lives and one could interpret the house as a symbol or microcosm of South African society. Compare in this regard the following remark by Du Plooy (2002: 50): "His house encapsulates the story of his life and his life evolves within the space of his house.

His house carries the memories of the history of the people of the land, the land in which he has to survive; but both the past and the present also occur within this house.”<sup>5</sup>

By focusing on events in the house from the colonial times to the present, one could necessarily identify a historical lineage that stretches from the time of Willem to the present times of Ruben’s life. Mostert was “the first owner of [the] house” (40) and is presented by Brink as the precursor of the Afrikaner men subsequently living in this microcosm. Willem Mostert is presented as a pillar of society at the Cape. As a member of the hegemonic class, he was in the position to abuse his slaves as it pleased him. Willem Mostert’s obsession with Antje, a girl “barely nubile” (40), and his subsequent sexual abuse of her, provides a clear example of the “unseen and permissible rape of women of colour by white men” (Samuelson 2002:91) that formed the essence of the institution of slavery. The description of their relationship also makes several interesting comments on eighteenth century Capetonian society. Willem arrived, “practically penniless” (41) at the Cape, but managed to seduce Susara Uytenbogaert, an affluent widow (41) and married her for her money. The result is that he becomes a rich and important man in society and a prominent member of the so-called “Cape elite” (47).

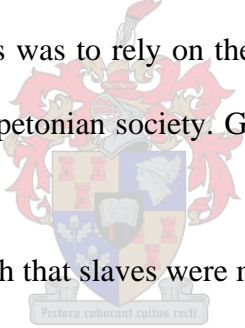
As an affluent and influential man he does not want to jeopardize his position and be disgraced in the eyes of the community (44). To avoid divorce proceedings he gives “a startlingly different account” of what has really happened between him and his wife. He also gives “a hefty contribution to the church coffers” (44) which not only suggests corrupt practices on the side of the then socially very powerful church, but also shows

how interlinked the different power structures are, which work together in informal co-operation. That is also evident later on during the trial of Antje of Bengal when she is hauled before the court “on the charge of murder” (47), whereas Willem is never “indicted, never even summoned as a witness” (47). An explanation for this conduct by the hegemonic structure in power at the Cape is provided in the excerpt from an imaginary “perceptive historian” cited in the text (at the bottom of 47), in which the class distinction at the Cape between master and slave is given as a major reason for the authorities not acting against someone such as Willem Mostert.

The eighteenth-century Afrikaner male is aware of his dominant position in society. Ross (1993: 156) shows that at the Cape of the time, “the Dutch had used the law to maintain distinctions of status between master and slave” and since there was no separation of powers, all were concentrated in a very few hands. The Afrikaner male’s dominant position in society will only be completely altered in the lifetime of his scion, Ruben Olivier, when he has to deal with issues such as affirmative action and early retirement – to mention but two examples.

The depiction of Afrikaner male sexuality in this novel suggests that the men were manipulative and saw women merely as a means to an end be it financially as in the case of Susara, or sexually as in the case of Antje. Susara was simply used by Willem to obtain a position of financial security, because as soon as that is established, he leaves “the solid, canopied conjugal bed at night” (41) to satisfy his sexual desire for the Other. The narrator creates the impression that there was mutual passion and consent between

Willem and Antje, but that would have been impossible, especially because of the imbalance in power between master and slave, and in view of Antje's age. Willem is also not representative of what Du Pisani (2001: 158) calls the puritan nature of Afrikaner hegemonic masculinity and does not adhere to the principles of "rigid austerity and strictness in conduct and morals" with which this type of hegemonic masculinity is more usually associated. Yet, despite this outward maintenance of a strict code of conduct, it is also true that there were frequent sexual encounters across the marital and racial boundaries imposed by the state. A relevant case in point is Willem's sexual escapades with Antje (in the attic of the outhouse - 41; then in the tavern section in the front part of the homestead - 42; the attic above the main bedroom - 42; into the bed itself- 43). One way of justifying the sexual antics was to rely on the so-called ideology of paternalism that formed an integral part of Capetonian society. Giliomee (2003: 49) explains this as follows:

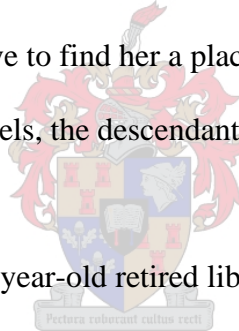


Owners propagated the myth that slaves were members of the household and even part of the extended family, consisting of the patriarch's immediate family, some brothers and sisters and their families, one or more bywoner families, [and] Khoikhoi servants and slaves.

Another interesting facet of Afrikaner masculinity evident in the novel is the use and abuse of the Bible, as well as the superstitious beliefs of women (42). This is particularly ironic since the stereotypical portrait that is painted of the colonial Afrikaner is that of a staunch Christian and guardian of moral values. When confronted by his wife as to why he slept with the female slaves in the household, Willem Mostert describes his behaviour

as “the Cape custom” (42) based on the Old Testament. His wife’s beliefs in witches and superstition are also used to “reduce his wretched wife ... to a permanent state of abject terror” (42).<sup>6</sup>

Antje’s death and Willem Mostert’s role in it signify the beginning of a long history of exploitation of women, in particular black women, in the Southern African context. Willem Mostert’s hanging of himself is an attempt to seek penance for his deeds and his burial of Antje’s body under the floor of his house is an attempt to restore their previous relationship within the boundaries of the house. It also signifies that the remains of abused women will always lurk in the historical psyche of the Afrikaner male. Ruben, as heir to this historical past, will have to find her a place of rest. This also explains why he attempts to support Magrieta Daniels, the descendant of Antje of Bengal.



In this novel, Ruben Olivier, a 65-year-old retired librarian, represents the modern, urban Afrikaner and within the symbolic space of the house in Papenboom Road he continues the historical line started by Willem Mostert. An analysis of his character suggests that Brink’s portrayal of him deconstructs some of the notions associated with Afrikaner hegemonic masculinity as exemplified by Willem Mostert.

According to Morrell (2001: 127) one of the central and critical issues in the study of masculinity is the issue of fatherhood and the role men play as fathers. It is within the home that the men as fathers, “reflectively and reflexively act out their masculinity.” It is also within the context of the family that the father’s position of power is “contested and

challenged and therefore has constantly to be defended and reasserted.” Ruben’s own father confirms several of the Afrikaners’ traditional ideas concerning fatherhood and masculinity. Ruben’s childhood has been one of belonging to “the hard, masculine world of the farm” (29) where only the Bible was read and where his only escape from reality was through books and libraries (“a place of ultimate refuge”, 32). His father-in-law also presents the traditional ideal of the hard working farmer, affluent and proud of his tradition and lineage (“the pride of seven generations of Hugos”, 4). In contrast, Ruben is seen as someone with “hardly a penny to his name and only the smell of books around him” (4). Life on the farm centred on the Bible and the concomitant Calvinist principles and interpretations of the Bible, coupled with a strong work ethic. The only escape from that reality for Ruben was through books and libraries. His only real companion on the farm was Outa Hans, who “could tell stories about the rain” (29). As an outsider child on the farm the only true companion for the young boy is the farm worker or the Other. This is later echoed in Ruben’s relationship with Johnny MacFarlane, who is also Othered by society because of his alleged homosexuality.

Ruben does, however, reveal to Tessa that in his relationship with his father there was “always something ambiguous” (83) and that his father understood him much better than Ruben wanted to believe. It is clear from the narrative that his father “was never meant to be a farmer” (82), but since he was the only son and heir, he had no choice in the matter. His father, just like Reuben, is described as having been “[a]n introverted child” (82) who wanted to become a teacher: “He would recognise in me the child he himself had once been – a studious boy, a dreamer, driven by an ambition to explore the secret

world beyond the confining realities of the Old Testament” (84). The imposition of a specific patriarchal identity onto his own father by his grandfather, aptly named after the Biblical giant, Goliath, suggests that Reuben’s father was in fact silenced by tradition and the demands of hegemonic masculinity. Stoffel had to marry and produce an heir and subscribe to his father’s belief “that women served only one function in the world” (83), namely to bear children.

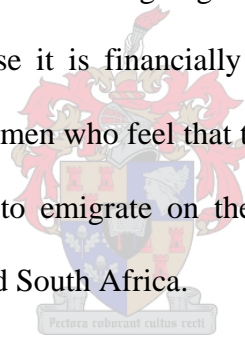
The ambiguity of the relationship between Ruben and his father is evident from the following passage, particularly since it shows that his father had lived out his dream through his son:

My own future had been decided from that first day when Pa had forgotten me in the town library. And he supported me, though he hardly ever spoke about it directly. When it was time for me to go to university, he took me to the bank and made me sign some papers already drawn up. Only then did I discover that over the years he’d saved the money to make this possible. It was all signed over to me: a convoluted process, as I was still a minor and a sympathetic teacher had to be found to act as a shield. (85)

Ruben’s university studies coincided with his father’s loss of the farm because of debt, which suggests that the father could now leave the harsh world of the farm behind and live out his dream through his son. His father’s life, “wasted by disappointment and depression” (85), ended in suicide and prevented them from reaching out to one another. The feelings of guilt Ruben shows after his failure to show compassion towards Johnny

are possible projections of his guilt for letting down his father, although both are a result of his self-centredness.

According to Gallipeaux (2001) Ruben is portrayed as “an unfaithful husband and a cold, aloof father”, especially since Ruben himself acknowledges that “[t]here has always been a distance between [his] sons and [himself], for which [he’s] willing to take the blame” (260). But the murder of his neighbour, Johnny MacFarlane, has even had an effect on the relationship between Ruben and his sons. One of the main reasons why his son, Johann, lives in Australia is because of the escalating crime rate in the new South Africa, and “the way hospital services are going down the drain” (25). Louis, a civil engineer, lives in Canada because it is financially more profitable and crime is less present. Both are white, educated men who feel that they do not belong in the new South Africa and base their decisions to emigrate on the loss of “standards” or privileges typical of the old, white-controlled South Africa.



The interaction between Ruben and his children is a clear example of what Morrell (2001: 127) describes as the contesting and challenging of authority. Both sons believe that their father, after his angina attack, needs to spend the rest of his days in peace (4) and want him to give up his house, the seat of his patriarchal authority. A new masculinist discourse signifies the change in position and authority. The sons are independent, married and live their own lives and feel obliged to interfere in their father’s life. Cathy, Johann’s wife, manages to persuade Ruben to place an advertisement for a lodger. By sending her as emissary, his sons know that they would convince their



father, especially since he is so susceptible to female charm – as will be evident in his relation with Tessa.

By studying the affair between Ruben and Tessa Butler, the reader learns a lot more about facets of the older man's masculinity. The relation between the young woman and an older man, twice her age, provides us with insights into the Afrikaner male's views on sexuality. The relation that Ruben has with Tessa echoes the earlier incident with the young Lenie, when he, as a young boy felt the need to protect her against his brothers (28). In the present he feels the need to protect Tessa from her suitors, and in an act of jealous rage, he even punctures one of her suitors' car tyres (131).<sup>7</sup>

This preoccupation with women and in particular the urge to fight for her rightful position in a patriarchal society is an attempt by the author to inscribe his familiar characterization of women as nymph-like whores in a new feminist discourse. Yet one remains skeptical, especially since it is constantly undermined by the narrator-focaliser's vulvacentric obsessions and his excessive preoccupation with Tessa's sexiness and sexual exploits. Whitehead (2001: 356-357) is of the opinion that in the case of a pro-feminist attitude among men, it is often a case of trying to find "more strategic responses to their perceived loss of gendered power". The emphasis is merely on "maintaining [of] location within the social and cultural parameters which define and confirm its gendered status". Brink's attempt to write from a more sympathetic male perspective about women and women's rights does not prevent him from still inscribing in his discourse the waif-like stereotypical female character associated with his oeuvre.<sup>8</sup> Despite creating a new

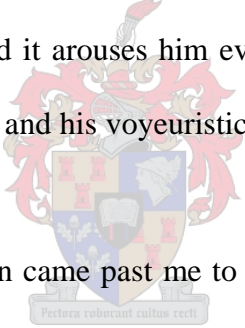
type of male, he undermines his own discursive project when he retains his overtly voyeuristic perspective on the female body.

The first encounter between Ruben and Tessa occurs when he listens to her voice on the phone and deduces from the voice that she has “[a]n unusual voice, with a kind of liquid darkness in it, and hidden laughter, reminding [him] somewhat of Françoise Hardy in the sixties” (7). He immediately associates her with the young French songstress in the sixties known for her love ballades, her long hair and child-like beauty. This romanticized description of Tessa is underpinned by the description of her when she arrives at his house for the interview:

Was it really only on Saturday, the night before last, that she arrived with dirty feet and a smudge on her cheek, an hour late? Her black hair, hacked off unevenly and very short, was plastered wetly against her small neat skull. She was wearing a large shapeless sweater that sagged down to her bare knees and massive clodhopper boots. (16)

The emphasis is not so much on her sexual attraction as it is on her natural beauty and her unspoilt natural looks. Later on he mentions that having her in the house is as if she “had always been there, a child of the home” (21) which suggests that she takes the place of his daughter who died at childbirth. But the emphasis on her child-like state is definitely an attempt by the older man to turn her into an object of desire, probably a sexual object (“a nymphette”) to satisfy his desires. It is she who asks him about the ways in which he finds sexual satisfaction and from his “Note on sex for the aged widower” (22) we learn

more about the sexual needs and desires of such an older heterosexual Afrikaner man. His only form of consolation comes from phoning an escort agency (22) and having anonymous sexual encounters with women he does not know. From his interaction with Tessa it is evident that she is more sexually experienced and enlightened than he, while her use of the expletive “fuck” to refer to sexual intercourse indicates her membership of a younger generation. As a result, Ruben starts to feel “a tingling in [his] loins” (27) and this is reinforced when Tessa asks to go to the bathroom. In floral and poetic language (“Ah sweet bird of youth”- 39) Ruben expresses his delight when he can hear her urinate (he uses the word “pee” to describe it, probably to be as open minded as she is with her use of four-letter words).<sup>9</sup> He experiences delight when he becomes aware of the bodily functions of the female subject and it arouses him even more. An excellent example of his growing awareness of her body and his voyeuristic gaze thereupon is illustrated in the following paragraph:



She looked hard at me, then came past me to the couch and flopped down on it, swinging up her legs with a charmingly casual flash of the small white triangle of panties between her thighs, the sort of thing which the sex-starved hermit I'd become cannot fail to notice. (39)

The above paragraph illustrates clearly what Hawthorn (1994: 82) pinpoints as the essence of the so-called male gaze: the gaze is in the possession of the male (Ruben) and by focusing on Tessa's “white triangle of panties” and not on her as a person, she is deprived of power and of her subjectivity. She becomes an object of desire, someone to be viewed. As soon as she moves into his house, Ruben begins this seduction game and

has to acknowledge that “[he was] behaving like a twenty-year-old” (73). Whereas before he regarded himself as some sex-starved recluse, now he shows visible signs of his desire when he wakes up “with a more powerful morning hard-on that [he’d] had in years” (93). He even compares his preparation for sexual intercourse with her in terms of a conquest: “The little packet [of condoms] live in my sock drawer. I feel like a freedom fighter keeping sticks of dynamite in his room” (100). Does the choice of this metaphor suggest a violent way of asserting his masculinity? Is Tessa some virgin territory that needs to be conquered and colonized? However, it emphasizes Ruben’s pathetic attempt at making an impression on Tessa and conquering her sexually, especially when one reads about his attempt to put on a condom.<sup>10</sup> When he does manage to have sexual intercourse with her, his vulvacentric obsession is reiterated. In language befitting a pornographic catalogue he has to point out that “[s]he’d shaved her mound” (113), that there is an “exquisite vulnerability to the exposed sex” and later on, that she should allow him “to kiss her pussy” (116). The female other is reduced to a mere sex object and there is a preoccupation confined to her genital sexuality, which according to Segal (2001: 106) suggests that most “men’s fantasies, desires, and experience of sex in actual relationships with women [recall] pre-pubescent fantasies.” Ruben does ask Tessa whether her decision “[to] shave [her] pussy” (192) is an expression of “a way of wishing [she was] still a little girl” (192), but according to her it should be seen as a way of getting in touch with her body. Interestingly enough, he immediately reduces this “being in touch with one’s body” to suggest a highly eroticised sense of being.

A central passage in the novel that inevitably calls for comparison with Coetzee's *Disgrace*,<sup>11</sup> and which comments on the interaction between Ruben and Tessa, is the incident with the attackers (292-296). Earlier in the novel Tessa remarks that, “[t]hey say one out of every two women in the country will be raped in her lifetime” (25). Tessa, as the modern descendant of Antje of Bengal, manages to save both her and Ruben's lives by screaming (“I'd never thought that such sound could come from her” – 295). In a grotesquely politically incorrect manner, the reader is somewhat prepared for the incident with the attackers when Ruben mentions that Tessa was not wearing her bra during their walk in Newlands forest. This is done not to describe his desire, but “because [the details] are relevant for what followed” (292). The narrator supports the sexist assumption that women who dress provocatively want to be raped, which inevitably forces the reader to ask the question: Is Ruben really a pro-feminist? Is he really a liberated male who champions the rights of women or is he merely portrayed as just another heterosexual male who supports stereotypical notions about women and their sexuality? In his case there appears to be no “desire to break free from existing stereotypes about the Afrikaner” (Du Pisani, 2001: 171). Does Brink imagine he is portraying a new kind of male, while inadvertently revealing how habituated to male sexist perceptions of women he remains?

As is the case with David Lurie in *Disgrace*, Ruben is also powerless to do anything during the attack and he even feels that “[he] should have brought a cane” (294). It is perhaps a less violent weapon than a gun, but it still signifies his impotence during the situation, and his reversion to the notion of the powerful, protective (and whenever

necessary, fiercely violent) male. Yet the older white male with his cane is unable to defend himself and his beloved against the young black males armed with flick knives (293). The choice of weapon suggests something of their phallic masculinity: the older man with the useless cane and the younger men with the dangerous and fast-moving knives. Ruben, as representative of the old white hegemonic order, is associated with a cane, a remnant of the colonial times when one could freely go for a walk in the woods, whereas the young men are associated with fast-moving knives. The cane would also have been an instrument of authority making reversion to physical power unnecessary. The latter suggests that they are contesting the existing order and replacing it with what Xaba (2001: 112) calls “masculinities of survival.” In the new South Africa where white men such as Ruben are still economically stronger than the rest of the population, the young black men find that the “masculine characteristics they possessed were inappropriate for the new South Africa”. As a result, they resort to “finding affirmation and confirmation from each other” (Xaba 2001: 112). The only alternative for them as economic, political and social outsiders is to form groups who attack affluent people and steal from them. The setting for the confrontation between Ruben, Tessa and the attackers is also significant in the sense that the characters return to the forest, the primal seat of violent encounters where all behaviour is reduced to animalistic fighting as part of some type of pecking order.

During the attack and the near-rape of Tessa by the young men, she is the one who saves their lives with her screams, described as ominous and eerie sounds, which Ruben could not believe could emerge from her body. The scream is a scream against all men: against

men who attack defenceless women like herself and women like Antje or Magrieta. It is also a scream to end the silencing of women – women like Lucy Lurie who accepted her ordeal in silence. It is significant that Ruben “ [touches] his throat” (296) after the ordeal, since he was now the silenced one; the Afrikaner male who is unable to protect his beloved against the violence of other men. <sup>12</sup>

In the final chapter of the novel we find an interesting exploration of the so-called “rights of desire” (rites of desire?) when Tessa forces herself onto Ruben and exclaims: “Fuck me! ... Fuck me, damn you!” (303). This final encounter between the two of them reads like a controlled enactment of the rape scene that could have taken place in the forest. Tessa is portrayed as “possessed by an uncontrollable violence” (303) whereas Ruben acts in an endearing and supportive manner. Now that he has the opportunity to succumb to the “act of taking” (303) and to satisfy his lust for her, he comes to the realization that his thwarted possessiveness was indeed a futile endeavour (“Is this what I envied others for [?]” – 303). It is important to note that there is a progression in her plea, because at first she asks him “to help [her]”, then “[to] make love to [her]” and finally to “[f]uck [her]”. Ruben is definitely not unaffected by her sexual demands, because even though he is portrayed as the supportive male <sup>13</sup>, reference is made to his “rampant [penis]” (303). What we detect here is the stereotypical notion that men have no control over their own genital sexuality. Another commonly held notion about male sexuality is the notion that men regard “a feeling of rejection as debilitating” (McCloughry, 1992: 168). In the case of Ruben, it is the man rejecting the woman, refusing to be opportunistic. His rejection of Tessa not only emphasizes his dominant position in the relation between the two of them,

but also conveys the idea that the female Other is reduced to “some dumb kind of animal” (a description also used to describe the male phallus) in times of crisis, indicating that the woman needs a strong, supportive male to help her cope with the situation. The impression is created that in times of distress her only reward to express her gratitude is to give herself sexually to the man in her life.

In the end Tessa’s decision to leave and “free [Ruben from her]” (304), especially since she has “ruined [his] world” (305), signposts the true ideological message regarding masculinity: although her presence was like “ [a] miracle of rain after three years of [sexual and intimate] drought” (305) he can continue unperturbedly with his life. He is filled with hope, knowing that there is “the world outside” (306) of which he feels part. His “desire is [also] intact” which inevitably takes the reader back to the “notes on desire” (154) earlier on in the novel. As a “redundant” older white male he still feels that he has “the *right* to live, to move, to breathe” (154 – his emphasis). His remark that the “possibility of fulfilment” and “fulfilment [as] the end of desire” is also apposite in this context. He did not get the fulfilment of his desire with his beloved object of desire, the younger woman with her “adolescent naïveté, her arrogance, her bitchiness [and] her untouchability” (151). He is still the self-centred, aloof man, who “never felt much need of other people” (8) and who will continue to live his life, “only with the smell of books around him”(4). Yes, Reuben is willing to adapt to the new South Africa, but one may remain sceptical whether he would really be able to re-enter that world. He refers to the fact that what “has to be faced” (306) is something that “all [his] life [he has] tried to turn away from” (306) and that is, “the world outside” (306). His reference to his “desire



[that] is intact” (306) does, however, leave us with a sense of skepticism at the close of the novel. It leaves us with the feeling that once every now and then a younger woman might come along to liven up his existence, but should the need arise for sexual gratification, he will make a “late-night call” to “an agency listed in the smalls” (22) and feed his “infuriating flesh” (23) within the walls of his own, safe home.

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<sup>1</sup> Pages references are to Brink (2000). The title of the chapter reflects the essence of my investigation and is taken from Brink (2000: 22).

<sup>2</sup> Compare in this regard the observation by Morrell (2001: 18) that until recently South Africa was “a man’s country” and the uneven distribution of power “gave [white men] privileges but also made them defensive about challenges (by women, blacks, and/or other men).”

<sup>3</sup> Kossew (1996: 29) compares the work of Coetzee and Brink and observes that in the case of Brink’s writing there is a “reaction to traditional values of Afrikaner nationalism on both political and personal levels”, as well as an attempt to “[sever] himself from the conservative moral traditions of Afrikanerdom.”

<sup>4</sup> A fascinating aspect of Ruben’s character is his Oedipal relation with Magrieta Daniels, his housekeeper. Viljoen (2002: 109), following McClintock, points out that the nanny has played an important role in the lives of children and although Magrieta was not Ruben’s nanny, through her associations with Antje of Bengal there are several Oedipal resonances in their interaction – and also her interference in his love life could be interpreted against this background. Gallipeaux (2001) regards the portrayal of the interaction between Ruben and Magrieta as “[t]he most successful subplot in [the novel]”, especially since he finds the depiction of Antje’s narrative as sentimental and superficial. I take issue with this because I feel the inclusion of the narrative of Antje of Bengal is an attempt to sustain the historical perspective on women’s oppression, starting with Antje and concluding with Magrieta. Ruben indeed has an interesting relationship with Magrieta. Not only is she the housekeeper, but she is also his confidante, his conscience and she keeps him informed about life outside the white suburbs. Her presence in his life is significant because she shows the reader another facet of history in South Africa, namely the effects of forced removals (141).

<sup>5</sup> My translation of Du Plooy’s original Afrikaans. For a related discussion on the depiction of “the house in fiction” (and in particular in two novels by J M Coetzee), see Heyns (1999: 20-35).

<sup>6</sup> One example of the deconstruction of the image of the religious pioneer occurs when Willem, “still firmly ensconced between Antje’s thighs”, “would make the sign of the cross over Susara’s head”(46). Not only does it link miscegenation, sexual exploitation and blasphemy, but the gesture shows his disdain for religious institutions.

<sup>7</sup> It is telling that a wealthy and privileged white man can here, in another type of jealous manifestation (than that of the black youths who rob and murder and rape well-off whites) engage in knife-wielding crime and get away with it.

<sup>8</sup> Compare in this regard Kannemeyer’s (1983: 384) remark that Brink’s sexual scenes are often sentimental and syrupy and adolescent at times. Regarding his female heroines, Lindenberg (1998: 305) writes as follows: “The lover is the typical Brink projection at its most feeble: she is half girl, half slut, undeterred and vitalistic with a sense of mystery – often more of a delusion than the truth” (my translation). Tessa’s obsession with losing her virginity (163) is a recurring theme in Brink’s novels, thus suggesting that women need to be sexually initiated by men, as some rite of passage.

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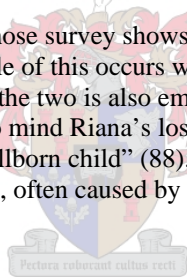
<sup>9</sup> Another curious incident in the text where urination is also used as a form of interaction between the sexes, occurs during an incident in Ruben's youth when a girl at school would choose a particular boy to "pee on her feet" (209) to warm them and as an expression of "truest love". It is seen as some form of worship by Ruben, probably as a remnant of some pagan belief in his subconscious.

<sup>10</sup> Not to mention the excruciatingly sentimental way of describing the condom as "the corpse of a saint" floating on the surface of the toilet basin!

<sup>11</sup> Brink's novel is described by Wood (2001) as "an analogue and answer to that austere and brilliant novel" (*Disgrace* by Coetzee). There is indeed an intertextual relation between the two novels, since Brink's novel takes its title from a remark in Coetzee's novel, quoted as one of the epigraphs of Brink's text.

<sup>12</sup> In contrast to *Disgrace* where the dogs are also killed during the attack, in this case "there was a sound of dogs barking" (296) which suggests that help was on its way and the situation was not as bleak and as futile as was the case with the characters in *Disgrace*. From this we deduce that for Brink there is indeed a space for the white male in the new South Africa but he has, in the words of Spivak, to "unlearn his privilege as his loss" (Spivak, 1996:4). He has to realise when to relinquish power and especially to accept his position as the silenced one. Reuben does not share David Lurie's vision of the white male being similar to a destitute dog waiting to be put down. What keeps him going is the realisation that there is a world outside, which "requires [him] and strangely concerns [him]." The constant yearning for the woman of his desires keeps him going, because in the end he realises: "[His] desire is intact" (306).

<sup>13</sup> Segal (2001:107) quotes Nancy Friday whose survey shows that "men strongly desire to be caregivers just as much as women." A poignant example of this occurs when Ruben accompanies Tessa to the abortion clinic (171). The age gap between the two is also emphasized in the scene because Tessa is mistaken for his daughter. The scene calls to mind Riana's loss of their baby girl (183), the incident with Antje's miscarriage (44) and Magrieta's "stillborn child" (88). This emphasizes the notion of barrenness and sterility among women through the ages, often caused by male indifference.



## Chapter 4: “Love. Betrayal. Seduction. Suicide.” - Phaswane Mpe’s *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*<sup>1</sup>

Within the field of black masculinity studies there is a definite need to “rethink the sexual cultures of black men apart from dominant racial and stereotypical representations” (Marriott, 1996: 192). Two issues that need to be addressed in this regard are the “racist stereotypes of sexual superiority” of black men and the phallogentric misogyny associated with an almost heroic worship of “black manliness” (Marriott, 1996: 190). The so-called “genital sexuality of black men” (Marriott, 1996: 190) is usually emphasized from a white point of view to show the loss of white phallic power, particularly in post-colonial societies.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, there is also resistance to a monolithic view of black masculinity, which identifies the former as “an unsuccessful version of white masculinity” (Mac an Ghail, 1996: 10). Gause (2000: 2) points out that white society feels that the black male is unable to fulfil what is perceived as “the ideal male gender role”, particularly because black society is associated with high rates of imprisonment, criminality, poverty and unemployment.

In Phaswane Mpe’s novel the main character is Refentše, “[the] child of Tiralong” (1) who is the first person from the rural village to come to Johannesburg and later “obtain the degree Master of Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand” (41) who subsequently becomes “a lecturer [at Wits]” (41). Initially it is suggested that he came to Hillbrow because of all “the stories of the migrants” (2) and that he wants to “to be a witness” (6) of the reality of the city and possibly write about it. It also shows that he has aspirations

to improve his position in society, but the “pressure to succeed” and the subsequent “weight of Tiralong’s expectations” (40) are given as possible reasons for his suicide. The emphasis on his status as an intellectual, writer and lecturer contrasts him with the people in the rural area, where beliefs in witchcraft still form part of their culture. There is indeed as Blair (2002: 167) points out a “linking of Hillbrow and Tiralong” and events in the one environment necessarily impact on the other. It is even suggested in the text that “Tiralong was in Hillbrow” (49) and that people always take Tiralong “along with [them] in [their] consciousness” (49). This implies that people never really escape their traditional values, something that is evident in the text, as I will indicate. A central figure who forms a link between the two places is Refilwe, who “[nourishes] Tiralong with stories of [Refentše’s] intellectual achievements” and gossip about his sexual encounters with “Johannesburg women” (42).<sup>3</sup> Refentše represents what Atieno Odihambo (cited in Lindsay and Miescher, 2003: 19) calls “the modern or the cosmopolitan African man”, the man who remains aware of tradition but is willing to “break with older models of patriarchy” and who “derive[s] [his] wealth and position from the modern state or the capitalist economy.”

In contrast to Refentše the reader is also introduced to other male characters such as Sammy and Terror – the latter is aptly named especially since he “[makes] a career for himself as a rapist” (65). Sammy, “[a] mutual friend” (23) of Refentše and Lerato’s, plays a pivotal role in Refentše’s life – as will be shown below. In analyzing the characterisation of these three male characters, the reader gains insight into the life and experiences of the urban black male in the new post-apartheid South Africa as presented

by the author. Whereas Duiker in his *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* (2001) focuses on urban homosexuality, this novel focuses exclusively on heterosexuality, and sex between men is regarded as “filth” (4) and a perversion by the characters in the novel.

The text also comments on heterosexual men who are guilty of perversion. A clear-cut example in this regard is the character of Terror, who is called a “womaniser of the worst kind” (64) and as someone who has made himself a “career” out of raping women. This, together with the reference to his “greedy ever-erect penis” (69) characterizes him distinctly as the representative of the oversexed, genitally obsessed black man.

His assault on Lerato is a good example to show that the seduction process and the subsequent sexual intercourse with a particular woman is to him nothing more than a game of some sort. The whole sordid incident is even described in terms of soccer imagery <sup>4</sup> and her thighs are seen as “a playing field” with his penis as “the player, referee and spectator simultaneously” (65). If one is the player, the referee and the spectator in a particular game, then one does not allow any opposition. He wants to have sexual intercourse with her and act as voyeur so that afterwards he can tell everyone of her “open-thighedness” (69) and boast that she is “just as cheap as [all women] are” (65). A woman is a mere object to be conquered and the penis is the ultimate weapon with which to dominate women and make them submissive. This explains why the penis is often referred to as the phallus because it becomes endowed with power. Despite the fact that in the new South Africa dynamic young black women get a chance to get out of the misery of the townships and the rural areas and be professionals, there are still the

patriarchal black males who rule over them and exert a dominant force which controls the women. A case in point is Refilwe who is portrayed as “a hard worker” (32) and who finds a work as a commissioning editor and later continues her studies at Oxford Brookes University.

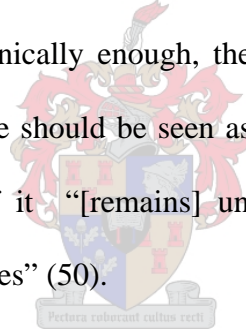
From Terror’s perspective Lerato is a mere sexual object and he can use her to “play games between her thighs” (67). To him the rape of a young woman is similar to a soccer game, which supports the notion that he is a career rapist. It is shocking to realise that once his lust has been satisfied, he uses that as a way of proving his point that all women are “cheap” and can easily be coerced into sexual submission. This reaffirms the assumption that he presents the oversexed and promiscuous urban black man who sees all women as mere sex objects.



For Lerato, the only way of escaping Terror’s unwanted attention and protect her honour, especially when he threatens to tell her mother about her role in Refentše’s death, is to commit suicide (69). She represents the young woman who falls prey to the assault of the black male of the kind described above. Not only does Terror regard the rape as a game, but also sexual violence becomes a pawn in a sick personal game to keep control over his female subject. He deliberately uses his sexuality and the rape of his victim to “put her in her place”, keep her submissive bodily and also make sure that she does not tell on him, thereby “protecting” his own status. This silencing of the female through phallic subjugation supports the stereotypical notion of the black male as sexual predator.

Similarly, Refentše is also responsible for silencing Bohlale when she feels compelled to tell Sammy of their transgression (52).

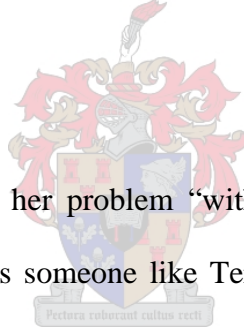
In contrast to Terror who defiles all honour associated with “manhood” (65),<sup>5</sup> we have the character of Refentše. As an intellectual and author he stands in direct contrast to Terror and depicts another perspective on black masculinity. When one reads his criticism of Terror’s conduct, the question arises whether in fact he himself has always acted in an honourable manner. Issues that relate to this are Refentše’s judgmental attitude towards Refilwe’s sexual looseness (32), his “generous expression of sympathy and support” for Bohlale (36) and his disdain for Sammy and Lerato, whom he calls “traitors” and “Devils” (50). Ironically enough, the narrator points out that what has transpired between the four people should be seen as “humanness” (50) and that sexual infidelity remains human only if it “[remains] uncovered [sic] by prying eyes and unpublicised by enthusiastic tongues” (50).



Somehow, Refentše’s behaviour seems critical of the other black men who only abuse women, but he himself abuses his friend’s girlfriend. Perhaps we have here confusing or conflicting ideas about the way an urban black male in modern, supposedly Westernised society should conduct himself are in conflict with a locally embedded, African social ethos. The idea that there is this duality in someone’s behaviour where he says one thing in the one moment and then does something else in the next is not too easily accepted. Gause (2000: 3) regards sexual promiscuity among urban black males as “[c]ompensating

for feelings of insecurity in a Eurocentric world” particularly because they feel the need to “redefine what it means to be a man in the present world.”

The incident with Bohlale occurs when she calls Refentše (35) and informs him of his friend Sammy’s drug abuse. Immediately the self-righteous and judgmental Refentše tries to analyse Sammy’s conduct and concludes that the latter is not “a violent man” nor is he a “womaniser” (35) as is the case with Terror. The impression is created that Sammy was a victim of foreign drug-abusers and a foreign woman (“a *lekwerekwere* woman”, 35) and that he was not to blame for his actions. By viewing the issue in this light, Refentše acts exactly like the xenophobic community at large who blames all their problems on the foreigners.



Refentše approaches Bohlale and her problem “with a sympathetic gaze” (36) which contrasts with his conduct towards someone like Terror, who “immediately [thinks] of making advances to [a woman]” (64) when he sees her. Refentše’s gaze is one of compassion, concern and interest, whereas in the case of Terror one could describe it as pure lust. It would be apposite to refer in this instance to what Driver (1990: 246) describes as characteristic of the so-called new African man and the new African community. The new African community is marked by “gentle, loving, responsible men, with the standard gendered role divisions otherwise unchanged” (Driver, 1990: 246). Driver writes in particular about Bessie Head’s short stories, but the arguments are just as applicable here. Bessie Head, according to Driver, “castigates men for their irresponsibility” and “sexist abuse” of women and tries to create feminised heroes to



disrupt the patriarchal notions about masculinity and femininity.<sup>6</sup> Refentše's "generous expression of sympathy and support" (36) could be interpreted as an example of behaviour that befits this new African man but indeed he remains cast in the role of the stronger and dominant male. Gause (2000: 4) mentions that one of the dilemmas faced by the inner city black male is that he is often "grounded in masking strategies" and these strategies "require him to deny and suppress his feelings." Often the urban black male comes across as "the epitome of control, strength and pride" (Gause, 2000: 4), whereas in fact it is often a façade "to ward off the anxiety of [his] second class status."

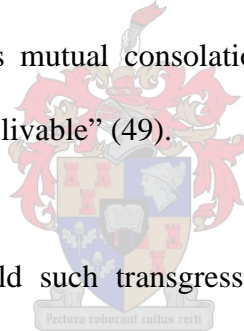
Directly after this expression of both spiritual and physical support, the events take a turn for the worse and Refentše finds himself sexually stimulated by the closeness to the body of his female friend. Reference is made to the "the boy in [his] trousers" (37) who has decided to "express his sympathies too." The choice of words is another example of what Goodman (2003: 88) calls the "parodic-travesty" nature of the novel: The narrator's description of Bohale's consolation is presented by means of elements of humour and the grotesque and it results in an almost satirical moment commenting on the majority of men and their genital inclination.<sup>7</sup> During the colonial period the designation "boy" was often used to refer to adult African men (Brown, 2003: 157) and by using it in this context, Mpe conveys an impression of humour and mockery. It could also be read as an expression of camaraderie between men because of the tone and the nature of the word choice. One could also interpret it as turning the penis into a fetish, as an object or persona with a life of its own. Significantly the penis is addressed as "the boy", suggesting that unlike an adult man's phallic power, the penis-as-boy has no real phallic

power. The use of “the boy” further suggests that he uses the excuse that it cannot be expected of a boy to act responsibly. It is a useful form of denial of the possibility of male self-control. Greer (2003: 228) points out that a boy is usually not associated with phallic power and one could thus assume that in the case of Refentše, the narrator does not necessarily want to emphasize his phallic prowess or genital endowment, as is the case with Terror, for instance.

This “first and last [act of] sexual betrayal” (37) leads to a serious crisis of conscience in Refentše. Not only does he acknowledge his treachery towards Lerato, but also towards his friend Sammy. He also comes to the realisation that he was unfair to criticise Refilwe for her sexual misconduct, which according to Ticha (2003: 86) suggests that the author wants to raise “the contentious idea of mediating and distinguishing between the ethics and functions of an action.” Despite Refentše’s inner turmoil, he remains the stereotypical male who hides his frustration and depression (48). He does not share his problems with Lerato, even though she is the Bone of his Heart and the only one who, with her “kisses and embraces” (38) can be powerful medicine to him. Her physical presence (and her bodily expressions of love) are sources of support to him. The use of the description “Bone of his Heart” signifies that she is the core of his heart and his existence. As she is his beloved and the person who knows him best, Lerato notices his “loss of appetite for food and love and life” (49) and decides to speak to Sammy about it and determine whether the two of them can do something to improve Refentše’s mood. Since she realises that he does not want to share his problems with her as a woman, despite his being an urban intellectual man who is aware of his inner turmoil and his

bouts of depression, she opts to discuss her problems with his best friend and try and find a solution – probably since one man would better understand the psyche of another.

This meeting between Sammy and Lerato is, to some extent, a repetition of the one between Refentše and Bohlale and there is indeed an interchange of sexual partners involved. Yet, the narrator cautions the reader not to indulge in self-righteous condemnation because the emphasis should be on the “humanness” (50) of what the two couples did. Refentše is requested by Bohlale to assist her with Sammy and his problems, whereas Lerato decides to speak to Sammy about what was bothering Refentše. The result is that Sammy and Lerato end up “doing exactly what [Refentše] and Bohlale had done” (49), and this mutual consolation of one another is described as attempts to make their lives “more livable” (49).



The narrator reiterates that should such transgressions take place, it should remain “uncovered [sic] by prying eyes and unpublicised by enthusiastic tongues” (50). Ironically though, the prostitutes who eke out a living in Hillbrow by “dispensing under-waist bliss” (21) do not have such freedom of choice. Similarly, Refilwe, who is regarded as one of the “loose pair[s] of thighs with a voracious appetite” (116), is punished for her sexual behaviour by the portrayal of her as a victim of AIDS – contracted during sexual intercourse with a Nigerian in Oxford (117). The impression created by this is that men may have sexual intercourse with their friends’ girlfriends and it is not condemned if it occurs within the context where the woman in distress needs consolation. Furthermore, the text tends to reinforce the stereotypical notion that men may spill over their “heart

and semen” (48) because it is seen as “love and care” for the other, but women may not do so. Such “brotherly and loverly counselling” (50) results in a “burdened conscience” (53) on the side of the women involved, but not in the case of the men. Refentše’s depression and guilt is based on the fact that he discovered Sammy and Lerato having intercourse, and his jealousy causes him to reject both of them and call them “traitors” and “Devils” (50).

The narrator’s choice of words in this instance is also very significant. The sexual act is regarded as something therapeutic and the male character assumes the role of a counsellor. It also makes an interesting comment on the relation between masculinity and power because as the dominant party, the male assumes the role of the counsellor and has power over the vulnerable female in her role as patient of some sort.<sup>8</sup> This also supports the assumption by Connell (1987: 85) that usually men are seen as the so-called “holders of power”, an image which is then translated into “mental body-images and fantasies” and into “muscle tensions, posture, the feel and the texture of the body.” In the novel the narrator points out that initially Refentše gives Bohlale “a hug, an embrace” (36) and is aware of the fact that “physical touch could work wonders” (37) in times of crisis, which suggests (as Connell alleges) that Refentše’s position of strength vis-à-vis Bohlale’s relative weakness is evident from his body language.

This intricate relationship between the four characters also comments to a lesser extent on the whole notion of male-male friendship as one of the aspects of masculinity. Despite the fact that Refentše had sexual intercourse with Bohlale, who is Sammy’s girlfriend,

once he discovers Sammy and Lerato in bed, he regards Sammy as a “friend-turned-traitor” (40). The friendship is jeopardised mainly because Refentše, in his usual self-righteous manner, on the one hand hates Sammy and on the other, has a “nagging sense of guilt” (40) over what he has done with Bohlale. The main reason for Refentše’s attitude is the fact that his friend had invaded his intimate and private space – he found them in “[his] bedroom that morning” (40) – and as such he regards them as having completely violated his trust. Yet the narrator regards Sammy and Lerato’s intimate moment as an attempt “to make [Refentše’s] life more livable” (49). This suggests through some strange logic that if a close friend of his sexually satisfies Lerato, then she would be less demanding on the already distressed Refentše. This notion of male-male friendship is based on deceit because if one sleeps with the other’s girlfriend, and he does not find out about it, and then it is deemed acceptable. Refentše, however, catches Sammy and Bohlale, and in their case it is immediately seen as a case of infidelity and treachery. He calls them “traitors” and “Devils” (50), because they did not do it in the secretive and deceitful manner, as is usually the case with the rules of this sexual game. They are seen as traitors because he believes that they are having an affair. The use of “Devils” is apposite in the context of the novel where there is such a strong awareness of the supernatural and the role of witchcraft in the lives of the people of Tiralong. One horrific example of this preoccupation with witchcraft and demonising language is the necklacing of Refentše’s mother, because the village believed that she was a witch (43).

Refentše has his opportunity to redeem himself when he recognises Sammy’s screams (51) on the street and he is the one who takes Sammy to hospital.<sup>9</sup> This incident

suggests that there is still a strong bond of friendship between the two men, despite Refentše's anger. His helping Sammy also suggests that he executes some form of penance for his transgression with Bohlale. The interaction between the three of them during this crucial time in Sammy's life evokes a sense of severe guilt in Bohlale and she feels ready to confess to Sammy – much to Refentše's horror. He is judgmental when dealing with other people's sexual transgressions but as soon as his own infidelity comes to the fore he wants it to “remain uncovered [sic]” (50).

In contrast to Refentše, Bohlale's conscience is burdened by what she and Refentše did, but he advises her not to divulge what has happened between them - knowing well how such a confession affected his own relationship with Lerato. Bohlale's comment in this regard captures the uniqueness of this whole encounter: “What friends betray their loved ones in this manner?” (52). Despite reluctance on Refentše's side to come clean and confess what happened to Sammy, Bohlale is adamant that she wants to “confess and apologise” (52). Luckily for Refentše, by way of authorial intrusion she is “knocked over by a speeding car that jumped the red robot” (53) and any confession to Sammy “seemed a needless complication” (53). The author-narrator wants Refentše to experience an ongoing sense of guilt, which would result in his suicide and therefore employs this *deus ex machina* technique to rid the text conveniently of Bohlale. <sup>10</sup>

Interestingly enough, when Refentše visits Refilwe, his former love, he immediately thinks of Lerato and realises that he cannot betray her. This time he “[keeps] the embrace in check” (89) because he knows what catastrophic results would ensue from getting

intimate with yet another woman behind Lerato's back. Is it because she does not belong to another man? There would be no challenge (and reward) in it for him. One may also suspect that her remark about the "worthless boys" (85) and their phallic preoccupation, as well as her tale about her unfaithful boyfriend and his kissing of another woman (86) could have resulted in his decision not to exploit her. The impression is created that the modern heterosexual black man is able to remain friends with his former girlfriend without any sexual tension between them. He is able to remain faithful to his beloved and he realises that sexual transgressions only result in a melancholic sense of loss for all.

Throughout the text the impression is created that Refentše is an emotional and melancholic figure. The narrator points out that he has a "natural tendency to brooding" (88) and he has regular thoughts about suicide. One reason for his melancholy is the fact that his first girlfriend was not prepared to have a relationship with him because he was poor and he did not own status symbols such as a car (88). The outward trappings of success and wealth are important to her, whereas Refentše is portrayed as a character who is more inclined towards study and intellectual activity and his values are more spiritual than materialistic.

Sammy, then still in the role of friend, advises Refentše to focus on his education because in that way he would ensure a better future for himself and his family.<sup>11</sup> Education is also one way of escaping the "shackles of poverty" (88) of life in the rural areas and establishing oneself as a successful person in the new urban context.<sup>12</sup> Refentše also plays a major role in Refilwe's decision to study at Oxford-Brookes because he has

always cautioned her “not to sell her talents short” (96). He is aware of her thirst for knowledge and supports her in her quest to improve her situation (Compare also the recommendation he writes for her when she applies for a position -33). In this regard he is shown to be supportive and as not discriminating on the basis of gender.

In his analysis of the role of intellectual workers in the context of resistance Ngugi (1993: 80) makes the following remark, which is appropriate in the context of this discussion on masculinity: “[Resistance] will be finally successful when people are in total control of all the means of their physical, economical, political, cultural, psychological and spiritual survival.” In other words, once an urbanised black intellectual such as Refentše starts questioning issues like xenophobia, the role of fidelity in relationships and the traditional beliefs in witchcraft, and once he, as an intellectual and writer starts sharing it through his “image-making processes” (Ngugi, 1993:80), only then will the community benefit. The people with their “taste for the popular and the notorious” (95) need to be educated so that they realise that “life was not a long night of cosiness” (95). From one of Refentše’s short stories we learn that in his opinion “the people of Tiralong were, in fact, no better or worse than Johannesburgers” (96).

One of the central messages of the novel is indeed - as Blair (2002: 167) remarks - that prejudice is prejudice everywhere. After Refilwe’s return to Tiralong the narrator observes that if Refentše were still alive, he would have added his voice “to the few voices of reason who say that disease is just disease” (123). One would expect from Refentše, because of his education and his role as intellectual, to be more outspoken in



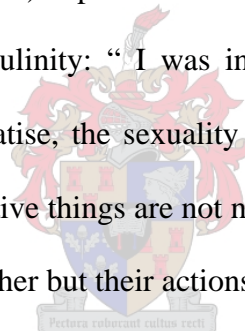
the novel as a whole, but indeed he never “[comes] to [anyone’s] defence” (123) and remains entangled in his own self pity and “swamp of melancholy” (25). He does try to “grapple with [the] profound questions of euphemism, xenophobia, prejudice and AIDS” (59), but he does so in English. He does not write in Sepedi, because the text itself is not for the edification of the people of Tiralong who “pretended to have answers” (59) for all the problems facing society. The story becomes a form of therapy and serves to “steady [himself] against grief and prejudice” (59). Refentše realises that he is no public intellectual who should provide the answers but, given the harsh prejudice encountered around him, one would expect from him to add his informed voice to the discussions.

The ignorance of the rural community and the impact it has on the main character, Refentše, is reflected in the interaction between him and his mother. His mother believes that women in Hillbrow are all “cunning” (40). When Refentše has financial troubles, she is of the opinion that he wastes his money on the city women. Could he not have explained to his mother that he has to “settle [his] study loan repayments and other accounts”(39)?<sup>13</sup> His interaction with his mother illustrates what Mac an Ghail (1996: 110) calls the “blaming of the black mother” for the emasculation suffered by the black male. She remains a powerful presence in his life and is a constant link between him and Tiralong. Ironically, she warns Refentše against Lerato and tells him to leave Lerato, or face ostracism, because he is then “no longer [his] mother’s son” (40). During his time of crisis over Lerato and Sammy’s transgression, he cannot “cry on [his] mother’s shoulder” (40), which suggests the close and intimate bond between mother and son that is temporarily severed. His mother’s cruel death after she is accused of bewitching her own

son (43) suggests that she is the victim of ignorance and superstition and Refentše, her beloved son, is unable to save her. His death had indirectly caused her death as well, since it was at his funeral that she “slipped and fell into [his] grave” (43). Compare in this regard the following remark by the narrator: “You [i.e. Refentše] understand now what you are, in fact, a killer. You killed yourself. And unintentionally you have also killed your own mother” (47). In the afterworld Refentše is punished for this allegedly murderous intent when he is forced to “watch [his] screaming mother” (47) during the brutal attack on her by the people of Tiralong. The description that he is a killer and a murderer suggests that he has failed in the eyes of the community by not living up to their expectations. Even the narrator seems to be critical of his selfish conduct, although in the end there is a lot of compassion for all the different characters that are welcomed to “our Heaven” (124). This suggests that despite the criticism against lascivious masculinity in particular that is expressed in the novel, eventually there is compassion for all types of masculinity and there is a sense of balance between criticism and compassion pertaining to the kinds of black masculinity depicted in the novel.

What this analysis suggests is that “black masculinity” is indeed not a monolithic concept but that there are indeed “plural versions” (Cornwall, 2003: 244) of what it means, “to be a [black] man.” The different male characters in the novel each exemplifies some aspect of black masculinity: some are caring and compassionate; or lascivious and genitally obsessed; or gullible and open to seduction by the strange underworld; or victims of circumstances. The common denominator is heterosexuality and a particular way of looking at women, as if they form the crux of a man’s heart. A fascinating aspect of the

novel is the perspectives of heterosexual black men on fidelity and sexual transgression inside (or outside?) the boundaries of an ostensibly monogamous relationship. As a result there is a strong sense of duality in the urban black male's perception of what is moral, what is immoral and what is good manly conduct.<sup>14</sup> The impression is created that he, to judge by the example of Refentše in particular, never really escapes the constraints imposed on him by his rural upbringing. A case in point is the issue of AIDS. People in the rural areas believe in strange causes for the disease (4), but an educated and urban intellectual such as Refentše, like the villagers, regards it as "the fruit of sin" (112) and he never really dispels the rural myths about the disease. Perhaps the following quote from an interview with Mpe (Taitz, 2001) captures the essence of what he wishes to convey with regard to urban black masculinity: "I was interested in looking at that part of sexuality that people don't stigmatise, the sexuality of people who are supposed to be educated and respectable ... Negative things are not necessarily caused by bad behaviour. People don't intend to hurt each other but their actions have serious repercussions."




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<sup>1</sup> Page references to Mpe (2001). The title is taken from Mpe (2001: 38).

<sup>2</sup> Marriott (1996: 194) suggests that it indicates the "fragility of white hegemonic masculinities" and the loss of the "white man's hegemonic symbolization of the ownership of the phallus." This is aptly described by Doane (1991: 220) as sexual anxiety over the "genital nigger" or the "oversexed black male who is envisaged as an enormous penis." Compare also Fanon's discussion on the alleged sexual prowess of the black male and the fact that "in relation to the Negro, everything takes place on the genital level" (1967: 157). See also Saint-Aubin (2005: 33-38) for a discussion of the "anatomy of sex" as part of his "grammar of black masculinity."

<sup>3</sup> Refentše even believes that "the moral decay of Hillbrow ... was in fact no worse than that of Tiralong" (17). This perception deconstructs the notion that the rural areas are predominantly moral and utopian and not as violent as the urban areas. An incident such as the necklacing of Refentše's mother (43) suggests the violent nature of rural life. Samin (2003: 5) comments on the discourse used by the people in Tiralong as reflected in the novel, particularly relating to rural belief.

<sup>4</sup> Soccer indeed plays a major role as a sport that unites the community. On Refentše's arrival in Hillbrow the events are set against the background of the people watching a soccer game (17). Even the xenophobia that dominates Hillbrow is suggested by the fact that one should not support "black non-South African teams" (17). Morrell (2001: 18) points out that sport in South Africa has always been popular with both black and white, and associated with the chauvinism of South African men. Compare also Goodman's analysis of the death of the child amidst the rejoicing of the people over a Bafana Bafana victory (2003: 92).

<sup>5</sup> "Manhood" or the determination to become a man, according to Morrell (2001: 8), is a powerful feature of masculinity. Segal (1990: 104) equates it with "manliness" and is of the opinion that "the guardians of true manhood still believe that living one's life as a man involves toughness, struggle and conquest." According to Refentše Terror has violated the values associated with manliness and "left it to swim in the pools of AIDS spilling into the night streets of our Hillbrow" (65). His promiscuity and lascivious conduct have resulted in manliness being associated with death and disease.

<sup>6</sup> In the case of *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* there is indeed a similar perception. Compare remarks such as "men do spread like pumpkin plants" (70), "he left [his manhood] to swim in the pools of AIDS" (65) or the reference to the "semen found flowing aimlessly in the streets" (82), which emphasize men's irresponsibility and lasciviousness. Green (2005: 12) comments on the treatment of the AIDS epidemic in the novel and the lack of "alignment" with movements such as the Treatment Action Campaign: "[It] tends to flip the novel over into a moral – even moralizing – rather than a political agenda."

<sup>7</sup> This incident calls to mind Ruben's consolation of Tessa in *The Rights of Desire* (301), where he as the comforting male also becomes sexually aroused during a crisis.

<sup>8</sup> It calls to mind Terror's dominant masculinity and the description of him as "player, referee and spectator" (65).

<sup>9</sup> Compare this incident with that of Ruben and his friend Johnny in *The Rights of Desire*, which suggests the closeness of the black community where one man cares for another, whereas in the case of Brink's novel, the opposite is suggested concerning the white community.

<sup>10</sup> As in some modern tragedy all the main characters in the text either kill themselves or get killed during the course of the novel. Refilwe, who is not part of the foursome, in the end dies from AIDS. It implies she represents the loose and immoral woman who is punished for her deeds. Some of the ways in which people die in this text tend to be quite absurd. Compare in this regard Tshepo's death and the subsequent death of his mother when she "choked to death on her grief" (45).

<sup>11</sup> "People have an internal urge to succeed. It may be through education or social mobility but people have the urge to move. Sometimes, when that fails, they redefine success by trying to emulate bad examples." This remark by Mpe to Taitz (2001) could be directly linked to the notion of being educated for a better life as expressed in the novel. Clarkson (2005: 454) comments on the "toxic brew of superstition and xenophobia" in Tiralong and concludes: "It is hardly surprising that educated and urbanised individuals should no longer identify with these 'beliefs', or share them, or that they should no longer feel obliged to offer a common and accountable response to that which the 'community' represents."

<sup>12</sup> Niq Mhlongo (2004) explores the same theme in his novel, *Dog Eat Dog*. In fact, there are several similarities between the two novels, which could be successfully investigated. Both are written from the perspective of a young black man in Johannesburg and both novels foreground urban masculinity. In an interesting reading of a series of novels on Johannesburg Kruger (2005: 78-85) points out that whereas female-authored novelists such as Jooste and Richards portray their characters as having "a suspicion of urban spaces", Mpe [in his *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*] portray "women and men who can negotiate these [urban] spaces with pleasure as well as caution."

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<sup>13</sup> The situation is repeated when Refilwe goes to Oxford Brookes University and her mother immediately reminds her that she should be “the financial support of the family” (96). This suggests that once an individual manages to leave the constraints of Tiralong and find a better life in the city, he or she is still bound to support the people who stayed behind in the rural areas. It is a case of putting one’s education to use by providing for one’s extended family. Trinh T. Minh-ha (1989: 8) points out that in the case of rural communities one cannot be merely a writer or intellectual but must become involved in the community. Writing fulfils a “social function” in contrast to the Westernised concept of “art for art’s sake”.

<sup>14</sup> This preoccupation with the duality in man calls to mind Herman Hesse’s classic novel, *Steppenwolf* (1965) and in particular the following quote: “These people all have two souls, two beings within them. There is God and the devil in them ... the capacity for happiness and the capacity for suffering; and in just such a state of enmity and entanglement were the wolf and the man in Harry” (55).



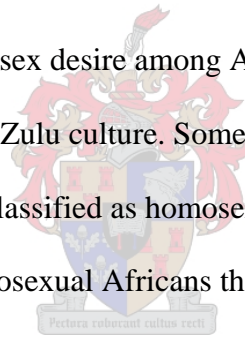
## Chapter 5: “ [A] paeon to male love” – K Sello Duiker’s *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*<sup>1</sup>

Whereas the novels discussed up till now focus predominantly on the portrayal of heterosexual masculinity, this text focuses on Duiker’s portrayal of homosexual masculinity in an urban environment. Initially the main character, Tshepo, experiences a sense of uncertainty with regard to his sexuality but through his interaction with his housemate, Chris and in his work as a masseur in a gay brothel, Steamy Windows, he becomes aware of his sexual identity – as will be evident from a reading of the novel below.<sup>2</sup>

Central to any theoretical discussion on homosexuality from a masculinity studies perspective is the notion that homosexuality is “[a] revolt against the symbolic domination” (Bourdieu, 2001: ix) of heterosexual masculinity. Thus, when South Africans went to the polls in 1994 to vote for a democratic government, homosexuals also voted for “the legalisation of homosexuality” (Reddy 1998: 65). They did not only vote against the symbolic domination of the white apartheid regime but also against the symbolic domination of a heterosexist patriarchy. The result is, according to Reddy (1998: 65), that homosexual men view themselves as men now and they operate in “a more liberalised context.”

Traditionally in the South African context homosexuality was considered to be “sinful, unnatural and abnormal” (Du Pisani, 2001: 169) and was a threat to “a patriarchal and racial order that shaped interlocking structures [of] power in South Africa during

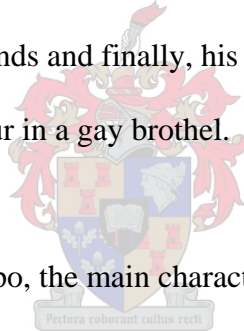
apartheid.” The main criticism of homosexuality from a hegemonic, heterosexual point of view is that it implies “the taboo of the sacrilegious feminization of the masculine” (Bourdieu, 2001: 119). From a masculinist, phallogocentric point of view, the masculine principle is the active and penetrating principle whereas the feminine principle suggests passivity and “being penetrated”. In a machismo culture like that of Mexico, Mirandé (2001: 346) points out that homosexuality “is defined not by object choice but by the distribution of power”. He explains this intricate dynamic as follows: “Mexican men, then, are able to engage in homosexual acts without impugning their masculinity or homosexual persona as long as they assume the active inserter role.” Similarly, Louw (2001: 292-293) shows that in the African context the term “gay” for instance, “cannot be uncritically used to describe same-sex desire among Africans” because the distinctions are far more subtle, particularly in Zulu culture. Sometimes men who “are effeminate in manner” and hermaphrodites are classified as homosexual – the latter is based on the commonly held myth among heterosexual Africans that homosexuals are hermaphrodites.



Male-male sexual relations are a direct challenge to the heteronormativity of the dominant heterosexual culture (Nardi, 2001: 289), particularly since it subverts the hegemonic definition of masculinity. Connell (cited in Nardi, 2001: 290) also examines intimate non-sexual relations between homosexual men and women and points out that such non-sexual relations between members of the opposite sex also challenge the social relations of gender and create a sense of “relative equality” between the sexes. By studying homosexual masculinity, according to Still and Worton (1993: 51), we learn more “of what a man is” and how the category of “manliness” can be subverted.

Following Foucault, they believe that by challenging dominant notions about manliness and masculinity, we might “re-appropriate or invent” terms that would play a central role in the establishing of sexualities.

In their discussion on homosexual identity, Isaacs and McKendrick (1992: 6) point out that for the homosexual man, “a duality of experiences exists” since he “gains two sets of behaviours”. Firstly, there is the influence of his immediate environment (family, friends, school and community) and secondly there is his “direct or indirect exposure to homosexual sub-culture.” In my discussion of homosexual masculinity in K Sello Duiker’s novel I focus on his interaction with Chris Swart – his first object of affection; his relation with his father and friends and finally, his exposure to a homosexual sub-culture while he works as a masseur in a gay brothel.



The first interaction between Tshepo, the main character of this text, and Chris Swart, “a coloured guy” (150), occurs four weeks after Tshepo’s release from the asylum where he was treated for “cannabis-induced psychosis” (9). What is evident from Tshepo’s narrative – he is both narrator and focaliser – is that his description of Chris has homoerotic undertones and there is a strong preoccupation with the latter’s virility and physical bodily attributes. Illustrative of this is his first remark about Chris’s “sort of gait” (151), which appeals to him immediately after he has met him. From the first encounter between the two male characters, the two are contrasted: Chris is an ex-convict, Tshepo was in an asylum; Tshepo is more verbal and eloquent than Chris; Tshepo manages to get a job as a waiter while Chris is content with the dishwashing job

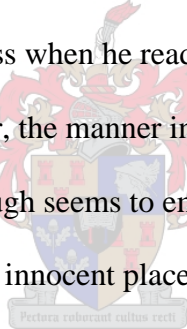


(151) – to mention but a few. When they are required to make their choice about rooms in the two-bedroom flat, which they share, this already suggests something of the discrepancy in their relationship. Chris assumes the position of the dominator and occupies “the bigger room”, whereas Tshepo opts for the smaller room (151). There is a strong pecking order within their domestic sphere, which is reversed in the outside world, as there, Tshepo is the one who manages to get a better job and earn more money than Chris. Yet their sense of both being outsiders is constantly emphasized. Chris was convicted for murdering a close friend (“I stabbed someone and he died” -152), whereas Tshepo spent time in an asylum (“I wasn’t crazy. I had an episode” - 152).

Putting these two outsiders together in one confined space is effective since it not only emphasizes the differences between the two men, but also comments on male-male relations between a black and a Coloured man in the South African context. When the two men are juxtaposed against each other, Chris is portrayed as the more aggressive of the two, probably because he believes that Tshepo is better off than he is: “He’s a little spoiled, one of those darkies who went to larney schools and learned to talk like them” – 156.<sup>3</sup> In contrast to Tshepo’s privileged life, Chris’s life has always been that of living in “a growing ghetto” (154) characterized by urban squalor and misery.<sup>4</sup> Chris regards Tshepo as a spoilt brat and emphasizes his privileged upbringing (“larney schools and learned to talk like them”) while Tshepo’s clothing also signifies his privileged state. Noticeably, once Chris starts to earn more money, he also starts buying expensive clothes with the right labels (203). After years in jail, it is important for him to regain his self-respect and one way of accomplishing that is to keep the flat tidy.

One detects that, after Chris and Tshepo have been out together a few times, Tshepo realises he has homosexual feelings for Chris and he mentions that “[he] desperately [likes] him” (166). Tshepo is constantly bent on pleasing Chris. His attitude is evident in his description of Chris doing the dishes, a scene he finds “enthralled to watch” (167):

It is embarrassing to think about a man like this. I don’t know what to do. He is so captivating. His powerful arms and strong but elegant neck keep me guessing about the rest of his landscape. I wonder what lies under the clothes that fit him so well. I wonder how soft or rough his skin is, how gently his breath comes and goes. And his scars and the stories that each scar would have to tell. I have studied his movements, his clumsiness when he reads at the desk, his natural grace and ease when he lies on the floor, the manner in which he clutches his groin every now and then, the way his laugh seems to emanate from his pelvis, from the depths of his humanity, a shy innocent place that I rarely see.



Tshepo provides us with a voyeuristic and erotic description of the object of his desire, namely the body of the other man. His reference to “the shy innocent place”, however, is tender and cherishing and underpins his romantic nature. He is entranced and his gaze focuses firstly on what is visible to him, namely the arms and the neck. Chris’s powerful arms and a strong neck signify virility, male strength and power. Tshepo is, however, also curious as to what is hidden under Chris’s clothes. Since it is impossible for him to caress the skin of the desired other, he can only contemplate the texture of the skin (“how soft or rough his skin is”). Mention is also made of Chris’s scars that result from his life as a

gangster and his spell in jail. The scars act as markers of his suffering in jail but also emphasize his vulnerability and humanness. Tshepo idolizes Chris's body yet the scars are blemishes on his body. During the rape of Tshepo later in the text, Chris also shows him "[his] twenty-eight number on [his] left hand" (212), a scar that shows his allegiance to the Twenty-Eights, a gang notorious for sodomising other prisoners in jail (Gear, 2005: 89). Ironically, the object of Tshepo's homoerotic affection is also a male rapist and gangster and in jail, one way of his gaining acceptance is to join a gang specialising in male rape.

Since Tshepo is not "comfortable in his own skin" (167) it explains why he is so enamoured with the body of the virile ex-convict. In order to hide his own vulnerability Chris constantly acts out some form of masculine aggression – shown for instance in the habitual clutching of his groin. This action also suggests that he wants to emphasize his phallic power in Tshepo's presence. Tshepo's only weapon against Chris's physical masculine aggression is to speak in a verbally aggressive or sophisticated manner.

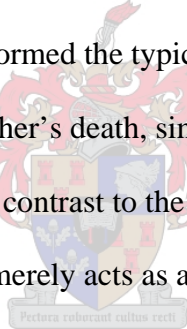
His infatuation with Chris is presented to the reader in a romantic, albeit kitschy discourse, such as the following: "It is like watching a beautiful flower and not being able to comment on its luminous beauty" (168). Tshepo is unable to find the apposite language to describe the desired other. Even when Chris looks at him in anger, it feels to him as if "he's plucking a delicate flower" (168). In Chris's presence Tshepo feels vulnerable and he is exposed to the whims of the other. He even plays with the idea that if Chris wants him to, he will commit a murder for him (168). From this we deduce his

submissive adoration of the stronger man which even suggests something of self-sacrifice to propitiate the god-like Chris. Perhaps this pre-empts his sacrifice later on when he is brutally raped by Chris and his two friends. When he is raped by Chris and his friends he is sacrificed to them instead of being allowed to offer a self-sacrifice to Chris.

In contrast to Tshepo who acts like a lovesick teenager in Chris's presence <sup>5</sup> the latter feels embarrassed in Tshepo's presence, because of a lack of education on his [Chris's] side. The issue of "a little learning" (169) not only emphasizes the contrast between the two men, but is also the cause of conflict between the two. Chris believes that Tshepo sees him as a "stupid moegoe" (172) and as someone who "[doesn't] have all the reading" (173). Chris is used to domestic violence and suffering and it probably explains why he acts violently towards Tshepo, since it has always been an integral part of his life. Later on when Chris has managed to steal Tshepo's job from him while he was in jail, he once again refers to Tshepo's "reading" and remarks: "Even with all his reading I'm beating him. I'm doing better. What good are his books to him now? They won't feed his stomach. He can't even afford to buy toothpaste" (210).

The incident with the television (169), which causes Tshepo to feel rejected by his beloved, reminds him of the tension with his father. Does this suggest that Chris is not necessarily his beloved, but rather a substitute father, especially since he has a strained relationship with his own father? During the first encounter with his father we learn that Tshepo despises him and blames him for his mother's death (144). He describes his father as "sick" and "evil" (146) and negates the idea that his father exists: "I don't have

a father ... He died with my mother that night.” (147). Later on in the text when he talks to his dead mother, he calls his father “darkness” (379); “lord of the underworld” (379) and someone “[he] cannot love” (381). Once he learns that his father was shot (400) he is forced to face his father and acknowledge his existence. Whereas his father used to be angry because Tshepo went to “*faggot* night clubs” –190; emphasis added), he now acknowledges and accepts his sexual orientation (“ I know you’re a *moffie*”- 401, emphasis added). His father’s choice of words is apposite in the context of this study because his derogatory references to homosexuality are indicative of his patriarchal and homophobic attitude. It is only after his father’s death that Tshepo manages to reveal his real feelings for his father and tell him that he loved him (406). From their interaction it is clear that Tshepo and his parents formed the typical Oedipal family triad. This explains why he blamed his father for his mother’s death, since his father had robbed him of his beloved maternal object of desire. In contrast to the mother for whom he felt only affection and love, the father figure merely acts as a surrogate for financial support.



Chris, like Tshepo’s father, is preoccupied with whether he is homosexual or not. In a typical, machismo manner Chris talks about women, “and boasts a little about some of the ones [he] had” (171) and how “to make [other men] envious and their piels stand up a little” (171). By talking about his sexual conquests, Chris believes that he heightens other men’s erotic feelings, but it probably only serves as a projection of his own poor self-image and emphasizes his sexual inadequacy. In jail he had to join a gang of sodomisers to express himself sexually in a violent manner, particularly to fit in with a

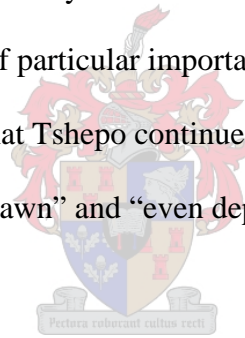
particular group in order to survive. Outside of jail he is no longer part of that peer group and that explains his disdain for Tshepo, who he feels is unfairly privileged by society.

To Chris, women are mere sexual objects and represent some trophy to be won during a conquest among men. When Tshepo does not share his phallic victories with Chris, he becomes a peeping Tom, willing to spy on Tshepo when he uses the toilet: “I sometimes peep through the key hole in the hope of catching him having a skommel, and then walking in and laughing” (171). It reiterates the distance between the two of them and the only real sexual intimacy between them is limited to voyeurism through a keyhole. His preoccupation with Tshepo’s supposed masturbatory fantasies link with the idea of getting men erect when one is talking about sex in their presence. Chris has to perform the role of a homosexual rapist in jail in order to survive, and outside of jail he no longer needs to perform that specific role, yet one may infer from his behaviour that the homosexual tendencies are still there, even though they are mostly repressed. His behaviour is similar to that of the married man who later frequents the gay brothel, not necessarily for sex but to find some kind of male solidarity among other men.

When Chris urinates and it sounds to Tshepo “like an industrial pump” (176) and walks around the house with “his cock and balls in his hand” (176), his conduct is similar to what Woods (1993: 168) calls “the pomp and posturings of virility”. One has the impression that he unknowingly attempts to seduce Tshepo, but it could also be seen as the type of behaviour that would be disallowed in jail. Since he cannot show his real feelings, and since he is only familiar with violent sexuality, he attacks Tshepo physically

and punches him. Yet, Tshepo, in his naïve and romantically inclined way, is “caught somewhere between lust and fear” (176) and interprets Chris’s reaching out to him for some form of bodily contact as a sexual invitation. His only consolation is to sleep next to Chris and to smell his clothes the following day (176).

Mmabatho, Tshepo’s female friend, is the one who realizes that Chris is violent towards Tshepo but he does not heed her warnings, due to his infatuation with Chris. In a sense Chris once again uses Tshepo, because he realizes that the only way he can really work his charm on a woman such as Mmabatho is to join her and Tshepo. Mmabatho confronts Tshepo about his sexuality but he merely remarks that “in Cape Town it’s kind of a given” (181) to be homosexual. Of particular importance regarding the interaction between the two men, is the fact that Tshepo continues to “[show] off in front of Chris” (180), causing him to look “withdrawn” and “even depressed” (181).



Revenge upon Tshepo for being in a better socio-economic position than he is, becomes a real possibility for Chris when Tshepo is arrested for possessing narcotics (184) and sent to jail. <sup>6</sup> Not only does Chris tell the management at the restaurant where they both work of Tshepo’s past in the asylum – knowing about the stigma associated with people who spent time in an asylum – but he persuades them to hire him in Tshepo’s place as a waiter. His conniving is informed by his yearning for revenge and he acknowledges that, once he had taken over Tshepo’s job, “[Tshepo] doesn’t think he’s better anymore, not since he lost his job” (210).

His joy at getting rid of Tshepo, however, is short-lived because Tshepo returns after his father had intervened and arranged for his release. Chris's dissatisfaction is evident from his violent outburst over the wet bathroom floor (197) and he even locks Tshepo in the bathroom. Yet amidst all of this, Tshepo remains infatuated with Chris's virile and violent masculinity and is still ecstatic about his "physique" and his "bare muscled bum".

The brutal rape of Tshepo by Chris and his gangster friends, Brendan and Virgil, could be seen as an attempt to show allegiance to the gang, especially in front of his two fellow gang members ("these are also my brothers", 212). But it could also be interpreted as some form of revenge on Tshepo, who, despite the fact that Chris tries to act cruelly towards him, is still acting so "fucking nice" (210). "[N]iceness" arouses vengefulness in Chris because all his life he has been used to violent treatment and he associates niceness with the feminine aspect of one's personality. As an exponent of virile and aggressive masculinity "niceness" does not fit in with or even challenges or undermines his frame of reference. Despite attempts at humiliating him, Tshepo "won't break" and thus remains a challenge for Chris to humiliate and treat in the same manner as he has been treated all his life: "Maybe I want to see that he's not as strong as he thinks he is, not as good as he pretends"(211). He wants to submit Tshepo to the same humiliating and dehumanizing behaviour as he had to endure in jail, particularly the male on male sexual violence and the rape of one another: "Now you know what I had to do all those years in Pollsmoor, you check, you naai, gemors" (212). Only once he had been submitted to this brutal treatment does Tshepo realize that the virility and machismo that he admired in the object



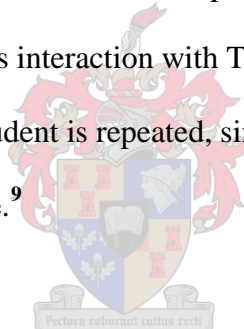
of his affection, is now used to torture and humiliate him and to rob him of his romantic idealism.<sup>7</sup>

With reference to the role of Chris, it is interesting to note that the male-male relationship between him and Tshepo (in the context of the brothel he is called Angelo) is in direct contrast to Tshepo's relationship with the white Afrikaner, Karel (known as West in the brothel).<sup>8</sup> Once again we have the adoration of the body of the other male and Tshepo finds in West a substitute for Chris. One should also remember that the adoration of the male body is often indication of an indirect desire for masculine contact (Pronger 1990:157). Eventually Tshepo realises that West has other qualities to his personality and a strong sense of moral being that is just as significant.

Tshepo experiences serious bouts of jealousy when the other sex workers even look in West's direction ("A dagger of jealousy stabs me", 248). Even when Tshepo and West share a bed (258) it recalls the incident earlier in the text when he shared a bed with Chris. Whereas during that incident he was completely infatuated with the object of his desire and was sexually turned on by Chris, now with West he feels it is a case of "men seeking comfort in each other" – a commonly held view within the context of the brothel.

The description given of Kalahari West (292) emphasizes his "rugged marine looks" and his choice of name suggests something of his rugged masculinity and virility and immediately associates him with the untamed wild open spaces; as if he is a character from the Camel Man advertisement. He is preoccupied with his body and realizes that his

body is his instrument that he uses to lure prospective clients (“I go to the gym at least once a day to maintain those vital statistics” -292). Regarding his sexuality we deduce from his own viewpoint – he acts as narrator and focaliser in this particular passage – that he prefers women to men, but that he would not necessarily regard himself as bisexual. His outlook on his life as a prostitute is also rather egocentric and self-absorbed. On the one hand he feels that he restores men’s fragile egos , because they know that with him “they will be appreciated, held in esteem” (293), but on the other hand he merely flatters himself and supports his own egocentric perceptions. His assumption that in doing this type of supportive therapy (he describes himself as a psychologist) he plays the role of a “kind teacher” underpins one form of the notion of power and a power imbalance between prostitute and client. In his interaction with Tshepo this imbalance between powerful teacher and powerless student is repeated, since West is the one who has to teach Tshepo the tricks of the trade.<sup>9</sup>



Within the microcosm of the brothel, life is portrayed as a form of “brotherhood” (343) and there is a strong sense of non-racism and acceptance of one another; to such an extent that Tshepo even remarks that he no longer thinks of men “in terms of race groups” (343). Yet, once he is outside this so-called “sanctuary” he is faced with reality again. When West decides to leave this close knit family of men, since he feels that he has a responsibility towards himself as an individual (324), we learn from Tshepo’s reaction that he is in fact in love with West (“I want to say I love him”, 344), and that he cannot fathom a life without West in the brothel. The following illustrates this: “I feel

bereaved. I suddenly realize how easy it is to form a bond and how easy it is to get used to something. What would Steamy Windows be without Kalahari West?" (345).

Just as Chris formed the centre of Tshepo's existence earlier, in the brothel it is West who plays that role. West is not only the object of his desire and adoration, but he also acts as his substitute father figure. Tshepo feels that he is losing a lover, but West points out to him that they will always be "bras" (345), suggesting a sense of brotherhood and camaraderie between the two. Ironically, Chris had also alluded to the idea of brotherhood and camaraderie when he described his fellow gangsters and rapists as "my brothers" (212). Ironically, the two men who dominate Tshepo's life give different meanings to the concept of brotherhood and by doing so emphasize the differences between them. The one is a murderer and rapist, the other is a caring and sensitive human being; the former had a deprived and the latter a comparatively more sheltered upbringing. Despite the differences, each plays a vital role in Tshepo's acceptance of his homosexual identity. Whereas Chris taught him about the ugliness of life (175), West is instrumental in teaching him about forgiveness and acceptance of others, which later forms the basis of Tshepo's outlook on life in Johannesburg.

In a scene signifying reconciliation and brotherhood in a new South African dispensation we see Tshepo paying West a visit at his parents' home. The black Tshepo visits the white West – who has now resumed his old identity of Karel ("By the way, don't call me West. My name is Karel" - 351), and there is an immediate acceptance of Tshepo. Karel introduces him as "[his] friend, Angelo" perhaps suggesting that the name sounds more

exotic and it makes him more acceptable within white society. As a result of this utopian spell between two representatives of the different races in South Africa, Tshepo concludes that “Afrikaans people” can also be seen as “sensitive or as being something other than oppressors” (355). It is mostly due to West’s “subtle charm” (355) that Tshepo is exposed to a group of Afrikaans people who are portrayed as non-racist. Yet one has to remember that Karel and his mother are also outsiders within the white Afrikaans community (294), which explains their acceptance of Tshepo. <sup>10</sup>

To further emphasize and sustain this notion of acceptance and reconciliation, the author describes a sexual encounter between the two men during Tshepo’s visit. Karel acknowledges the idea of brotherhood and close friendship between the two of them and according to him that is sufficient reason for them to be intimate. Tshepo is portrayed during this incident as someone who has learnt from his past mistakes, because he is more hesitant to fall for Karel’s charms: “I don’t want to be always lamenting over people, crying over unrequited love like a hapless Mills & Boon character” (365). <sup>11</sup>

Before sexual intercourse, Tshepo expresses his adoration of Karel’s “beautiful torso like the work of a virtuoso artist” (365) which one can interpret as an undermining of the stereotypical viewpoint held in specific contexts of the black body as the exotic object of desire. In this section of the text the white body becomes the exotic object of desire, and othering takes place from a black perspective, thus turning the white male body into a desired sexual object. The intimacy between the two men and the sexual penetration of Tshepo by Karel suggests that Tshepo surrenders himself to Karel. His remark, however,

that such intimacy and such sexual bliss may cause one to recall “happy memories of childhood” pinpoints the role played by Karel as a substitute parent figure in his life. Given the ideological context of this scene, one could posit that it suggests a mutual surrendering of power between both white and black males and a strengthening of the bond between them in a new dispensation. The fact that afterwards they feel “vulnerable” together (366) underpins this bond. Emotionally and socially Karel seems much stronger than Tshepo, however, especially in the sense that there are no suggestions in the text that he will pine for Tshepo.

This intimacy between Karel and Tshepo has resulted in the latter gaining self-confidence and realizing his own potential as an individual. Karel, the ever-willing teacher, wanted to teach Tshepo that “[e]veryone has to try and find their own way” (369) and one should not necessarily rely on someone else as “a crutch” to sustain oneself. On his return, Tshepo, as was the case for him with Chris, draws the conclusion that Karel was “charming, interesting, attractive” but also that “he wasn’t the best-looking guy [he] has ever seen” (370). This final encounter between the two men serves as an example of what Tshepo later terms the “blueprints of survival” (455) offered by the men with whom he is intimate.

In the final chapter of the novel Tshepo, who “[has] left Angelo behind in Cape Town” (452) attempts to heal the “too many wounds” he kept over from his life as a masseur in Cape Town. He acknowledges that there is “a spiritual dimension to liking men” (455) which suggests that Tshepo accepts himself as part of the homosexual sub-culture and


there is “an integration of [his] sexual impulses and urges” (Isaacs and McKendrick, 1992:22). Although he still frequents “clubs, sometimes bars, sometimes bistros” (455) that are part of the homosexual sub-culture. He is also not as sexually active as he necessarily was in Cape Town. In Cape Town, however, one must remember that his sexual encounters were part of his job to sustain himself financially.<sup>12</sup>

His new sense of self-awareness and self-acceptance results in his having an almost Zen-like view on life, especially in accepting the need to let go and to accept his suffering (457). All of his ordeals were part of his search for a homosexual identity and for the subsequently attained acceptance of his sexual orientation as part of some universal brotherhood of men. Not only does he preach the strength of forgiveness (453) but there is a “belief in humankind” (454) and a renewed sense of his own mortality.

Duiker’s depiction of homosexual masculinity closely follows Tshepo’s struggle to accept his homosexual identity. Initially there is a strong sense of denial (“Not everyone in Cape Town’s gay, you know” – 181) but once he gets involved in the gay subculture of Cape Town, there is an exploration of what it means to be a homosexual and eventually there is a sense of acceptance. During the phase of identity exploration, Isaacs and McKendrick (1992: 17) point out, the homosexual subject experiences “adolescent turmoil”, there is rebellion against norms imposed by heterosexual society and there is a playing around with “narcissistic features” that are directed towards “opposite-gender behaviour”. In the case of Tshepo there is the decision, for instance, to colour his hair “platinum blond” (229) and he joins an “exclusive gym in Sea Point” (298). He also

frequents the openly gay spots such as “the Sea Point promenade” (298) and “a disco pub” called Biloxi (298).

An interesting aspect of his homosexual exploration is his interaction with Andromeda, who might be “even more masculine, more macho than your typical straight guy” (302). In his search for acceptance, Tshepo is fascinated by this straight-looking homosexual, because although he is a homosexual, his appearance does not reveal his identity on face value and it makes him a revered, phallic object for both men and women. Tshepo has always been fascinated by the muscular physique of other men and has always admired the power associated with such muscular men.<sup>13</sup>



Another facet of homosexual masculinity in South Africa that is explored in this novel is the fact that “gay friendly places are still a white male preserve” (417). During one of his evenings out on the town Tshepo encounters a group of young boys and one of them is a black boy (419). Tshepo is aware that being black in such a group emphasizes one’s sense of “schizophrenia” (419), particularly if you have to “[switch] between two cultures and languages.” Even as part of the brotherhood of Steamy Windows, Tshepo has to realize that this brotherhood of homosexual solidarity “has its own, racist, frayed edges” (Gagiano, 2002: 74). As one of the “black stallions” (204) he is mostly appealing to German tourists who are “always looking for an authentic African man” (205). The Europeans regard him as an exotic sexual animal. Their assumptions are similar to those summarized by Fanon (1967: 157): “In relation to the Negro, everything takes place on the genital level... [T]he Negroes have tremendous sexual powers... They copulate at all

times and in all places.” Illustrative of this sexual predilection for the exotic Other is the encounter with Arthur, “ a tall coloured looking man” (314) from America: “I’ve never had a real African man. So what tribe are you from?” he says, still sipping his drink. I hate that question. It’s like asking what’s your breed” (315) .

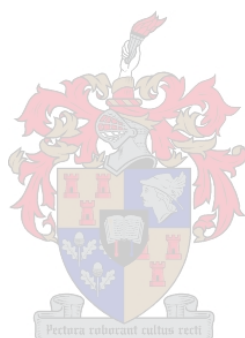
For the American from the so-called First World the prospect of sex with an African man evokes imagery of the untamed savage willing to copulate for an unlimited period of time. He describes this stereotypical notion of the sexually endowed African man euphemistically as follows: “Yes, but Africans are so ... How shall I put it? You’re expected to be manly, aren’t you?” (315). It is noteworthy that he equates “manl[iness]” with sexual prowess. <sup>14</sup>



Outside of the brothel, Tshepo has to deal with the grim reality that as a black man he is one of the “pigments in a whirlpool of colour” (344) and the centre of that whirlpool is “lily white” (344). He draws the conclusion that within the gay sub-culture it is usually the affluent black men who are able to participate. They are not the black people associated with “the township” or “the squatter camp”, but people “dressed in a certain way” and who “spoke with a certain accent” (344). According to Isaacs and McKendrick (1992: 94) urban gay culture has always been characterized by a strong sense of racism: “White gays, who have been suckled on racial prejudice, maintain the status quo. They seek out coloured counterparts for sexual interaction, but refuse to extend this into all aspects of egalitarian living.” Evidently this is also the notion that Duiker tries to put across in his investigation of the life of the urban black homosexual in South Africa.



There is a false sense of brotherhood and acceptance, but tolerance is merely based on one's exoticism. As an exotic sexual object Tshepo will benefit the brothel and as such is considered an economic asset by the management. As a black sex worker the other white masseurs accept him, because he is in a similar position than them. Within the brotherhood of Steamy Windows his exotic, animal-like sexual energy can be controlled. Once he finds himself outside the brothel, the grim reality is that he is forced to realize that most white gays are "white people before they are gay" (343). Within the homosexual ghetto he is tolerated because of his sexual preference, but in the hegemonic heterosexual world he is both black and homosexual and becomes a victim of prejudice.




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<sup>1</sup> The title is taken from Heyns (2001): "The novel, in fact, turns into something of a paean to male love, which is a welcome relief from the self-flagellation of so much gay fiction." Page references to the novel refer to Duiker (2001).

<sup>2</sup> Gagiano (2002:73) points out that "the descriptions of his friend Mmabatho's more conventional, heterosexual story" intercepts Tshepo's narrative and could be seen as "a second-order narrative" within the text. By focusing on this second-order narrative one finds perspectives on heterosexual urban life, seen from the perspective of a female character and can contrast it to Tshepo's unconventional way of living.

<sup>3</sup> Viljoen (2001) analyses the issue of "non-racialism" in the novel and shows how bigotry is "omnipresent not only in white minds, but in black as well." Gagiano (2001: 74) is, rightfully so, critical of the fact that the text is "not always free of disappointingly crude stereotyping" especially when it comes to the issues of racism and misogyny.

<sup>4</sup> From Chris's description of his life we learn about the impact of his life as a gangster on his mother. Initially she was the one who "used to come faithfully for the first year of [his] ten-year sentence" (153) to visit him in jail. Later on, being the mother of four gangsters, life became unbearable to her and she did not want to be reminded of her ongoing suffering. One can contrast her suffering to that of Tshepo's mother

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who was allegedly killed by his father (320) to get some perspective on the suffering of mothers from the disadvantaged communities in South Africa.

<sup>5</sup> Tshepo's romantic dribble becomes almost unbearable and sometimes verges on the absurd. Compare for instance the incident with the toothpaste (168).

<sup>6</sup> The cautionary warning to Tshepo that he can be glad that he is not locked up in the other cell where the man will be "chowing [his] buttocks like a woman's thighs" (184) pre-empts the rape scene that follows later on in the text. Tshepo indeed has to endure such treatment from Chris and his gangster friends.

<sup>7</sup> Samuelson (2002: 88) observes that in South African fiction of the period during transition from apartheid to multi-racial democracy, "race [is inserted] into the scene of rape by focusing almost exclusively on interracial rape". She also points out that in the case of Duiker's novel, we have "the rape of a black man by a coloured man". See also Graham (2002) for a discussion on rape in recent South African fiction.

<sup>8</sup> Chris reappears in Tshepo's life, one evening when he goes to a restaurant with one of his clients (281) and only now in a new context does Tshepo realize that "[he] was so wrong about Chris. He wasn't that beautiful at all" (282). Despite attempts to humiliate Chris in public and get some form of revenge on him for having raped him, Tshepo still feels "unwelcome tenderness" (283) for Chris, his first object of sexual affection. He cannot avenge himself completely on Chris, because vengeance, to him, is "a kind of self-mutilation" (283) – perhaps pre-empting the sense of forgiveness and reconciliation later on in the text between Tshepo and his father, as well as the conciliatory tone that he takes towards the Afrikaner.

<sup>9</sup> Also compare West's philosophic piece on phallic beauty, where he describes the penis as "a beautiful instrument, a melody maker that fills men with passion" (325).

<sup>10</sup> Compare in this regard the incident with the young black boy and his white friends (419). In that context Tshepo emphasizes the idea of feeling "schizophrenic half the time, switching between two cultures and languages that are as different and diverse." Or compare his reference to "gay friendly places [that] are still a white male preserve" (417) which points to the contrast between the world of the heterosexual Afrikaans family and the urban gay world. It is remarks such as these that prompt me to be somewhat sceptical of the idealized harmony between black and white portrayed in this part of the novel.

<sup>11</sup> This is, no doubt, an excellent example of metatextual commentary by the author. See also note 5 above.

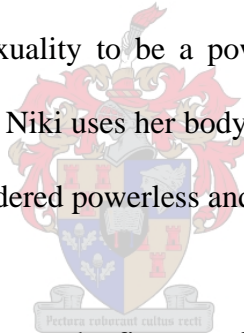
<sup>12</sup> Tshepo has become a real socialist in Johannesburg. He lives as part of a commune that he calls "[o]ur little home" (452) and tries to fight "the derogatory and defiant arrogance" (454) with which other Africans are treated by xenophobic South Africans. He also agrees that "capitalism is not the only way" (455) – yet at the close of the novel he turns inward and in a somewhat self-centred way focuses on "[his] greatest treasures... within [himself]" (457).

<sup>13</sup> Pronger (1990: 154-155) writes in this regard as follows: "Muscles have great power, a power that consists not only in their ability to move heavy objects but also as puissant symbols of masculinity. The preeminent symbol of masculinity is the phallus. But a muscular build is also an important star in the constellation of masculine signs... Muscles, being a sign of masculinity, are beautiful to homosexual men because they reflect their interest in the paradoxical dynamics of masculinity in general."

<sup>14</sup> Tshepo is curious why it is mostly white men who come to the brothel and wonders whether it "has something to do with money" (331). Black men, according to Tshepo, feel it is "too foreign for black culture" to pay for sex. An interesting twist is the issue of the black men who do come to the brothel, but who do not ask for him. Is it not similar to the white Europeans asking for black African masseurs? The black clients participate in an Othering process of the white prostitutes. They see themselves as "turning the tables" on the Othering that blacks have historically (or they personally) have been subjected to. For a discussion on Cape Town's pivotal position in international gay sex tourism, see Elder (2005).

## Chapter 6: “ A battle between lust and loathing” - Zakes Mda’s *The Madonna of Excelsior*.<sup>1</sup>

In a discussion on masculinities and masculinity,<sup>2</sup> Brittan (2001: 52) observes that “masculinity does not exist in isolation from femininity” and that masculinity will always be “an expression of the current image that men have of themselves in relation to women.” This is a development of the opinion held by Connell (2001: 31), namely that, in principle, “women and men [are] bearers of polarized character types.” The following reading of Mda’s novel focuses on the interplay between masculinity and femininity, and in particular the role of female sexuality in the formation of masculinity. Taitz (2002) points out that Mda portrays “sexuality to be a powerful force” and that it shows in particular how a black woman like Niki uses her body as “a weapon and the only tool she has with which to resist [being rendered powerless and victimised by men].”<sup>3</sup>



The narrative is presented in two parts: the first part focuses on life in Excelsior in 1971; whereas the second part focuses on life in the town, post-1994. As the opening sentence of the novel suggests, what happened in 1971 still has an effect on present-day life in this rural community – and immediately places women in a very central position in the novel: “All these things flow from the sins of our mothers” (1). This line becomes like a refrain throughout the text and in the final sentence, the narrator inverts the syntax: “From the sins of our mothers all these things flow” (268), which not only acts as a narrative device to conclude “all these things” as described, but acts as some kind of frame for the text. Ironically, “sins” have always been associated with women and with female sexuality ever since the account given of Eve in the Bible.

The first description of the interaction between the two major female characters in the novel, Niki and her daughter Popi, and the group of men who had a major influence on their lives in the past – the second chapter is set in the present – is offered to the reader through the eyes of Niki as focaliser. The setting is a dance party at Adam de Vries’s house (6) and shows these “pillars of the local Afrikaner community” (8) at play. From the description of “all the revellers” (7) we learn that they have influential positions within the rural town of Excelsior: the head of police, prosperous farmers, the reverend of the local Dutch Reformed Church and the mayor.

Significant also is the identification of traits, characteristics and dress code of each of the respective male characters, since it acts as a major characterisation device: Sergeant Klein-Jan Lombard dances as if he participates “in a military drill”; Groot-Jan Lombard is described as his “doddering father”, whereas the Reverend Francois Bornman is significantly described as one-eyed. This was caused by his failed suicide attempt (84), but serves as an indicator of his moral blindness and hypocrisy. He is one of the men who was charged with miscegenation, but blamed it on the Devil. His viewpoint belongs to the Middle Ages when the devil was said to have appeared in the guise of a temptress. Meaningful, however, is the fact that the devil is disguised as “the black female” (87) who is set on tempting the male Afrikaner. A distinct link is made between sexuality and politics in this regard and the inability of the white men to control their lust is disguised as a ploy from black women (probably as tools for the Movement) to defeat the Afrikaner. Ever since Stephanus and Tjaart were “seized by the fiends of lust” (42) and

Stephanus asked Niki to “[do] things with [him]” (50), Cornelia Cronje has shared this opinion of the reverend, namely that black women in particular are set on “ lur[ing] [white men] into a deep sinful hole” (120). The impression is created that black women are associated with sin and evil, which places them in direct contrast to the Afrikaner - constituted as primarily male who has a “Great Fellowship” (30) with God. The Afrikaner, according to Reverend Bornman, is the chosen race with a greater divine purpose (88, 164), and the black women used their evil sexuality to test the faith of the Afrikaner as part of “God’s grand plan” (88). This shows how, during the heyday of apartheid, religion was used to cover up misdemeanours; even the lack of sexual control amongst white men.

From the description of Johannes Smit we see that he is a “very prosperous and very hirsute farmer with a beer belly”(7), which is somewhat of a stereotypical description, since he likes to visit the bar of the Excelsior Hotel and drowns his sorrows in beer (242). Niki also observes Adam de Vries, a “pint-size” man who is completely overshadowed by his wife, Lizette. <sup>4</sup> It is, however, of interest to note that Adam, who is physically smaller than the other men, is the one who has to defend them in court. He is the intellectual and learned man among the physically stronger and larger men, which explains why he was elected as mayor. His name, similar to that of the first man in the Biblical account, refers back to his historical roots in the town with his grandfather being one of the “founders of [that] town” (8).

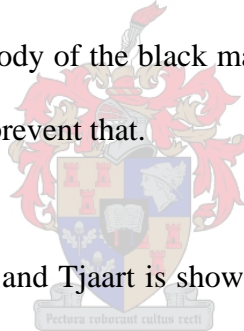
Reference is made to “the late and lamented butcher, Stephanus Cronje” (8) who, as was suggested above, played an enormously important role in the lives of Niki (as her seducer) and Popi (as her father). The reader is also introduced to another male character who is representative of the younger white generation and who influences both Niki and Popi’s lives throughout the text, namely Stephanus’s son and heir, Tjaart Cronje. Up till that moment, Niki has not seen Tjaart “since he was seven” (8).

The close bond between Niki and Tjaart was established when she worked as a nanny for his mother, and she used to carry him “in a shawl on her back” (9). During their pretend game of horsey-horsey it soon becomes evident that Tjaart was sexually aroused by his closeness to Niki’s body and often he “induced an erection and worked himself up with unseemly rhythmic movements” (9).<sup>5</sup> The closeness of the body of the black woman initiates Tjaart into sexual awareness. As a result, she becomes his first primary object of desire, something that is underpinned by Mmampe’s remark: “White men have always loved us. They say we are more beautiful than their own wives. We are more devastating in the blankets” (62). Ironically enough, this erotic fascination is also shared by Tjaart’s father who, when Johannes Smit makes lecherous remarks to Niki, “bark[s] at Niki to get into the bakkie” (49) and rescues her from Smit’s attentions. His action is deliberate because he wants to use her for sexual gratification, mostly out of a sense of jealousy and because the sight of her naked body has continued to haunt him since the incident in the butchery.

This incident in the butchery is a central event in the novel and acts as a catalyst for the erotic fascination with the forbidden body of the black Other. It is in the butchery, the property of Stephanus Cronje, that he subconsciously claims Niki's body as another one of his possessions. Niki is accused of "hiding something" (40) under her clothes and forced to "strip" by Cornelia Cronje. Not only does Cornelia force her to remove her brightly coloured outerwear ("pink overall", "her mauve dress") but also her intimate underwear ("white petticoat", "fawn bra" and her "knickers"). This stripping process anticipates the lifelong struggle that follows hereafter for both Niki and Popi, right up until the end of the novel when both Niki and Popi find calmness of mind (268). The white woman as employer is powerful enough to humiliate Niki, and, due to a lack of proper labour legislation at the time, to threaten her with "instant dismissal" (41). In the violent society where policemen, as representative of the law and justice, tortured people from the Movement "[for] a confession" (137), the white woman also has the power to do so when she threatens Niki with "lock[ing] her up in the cold room with all the carcasses" (41). In the South Africa of the 1970s white women were just as instrumental in sustaining the machinery of apartheid as were men, as is evident from this incident. The humiliation of Niki is, however, later reciprocated when she takes Stephanus as her lover and makes love to him "[o]n Madam Cornelia's own metal antique bed" and under her own "downy duvet" (53), thus penetrating the most intimate space belonging to her white oppressor and the person who humiliated her.

A major consequence of this incident in the butchery is the effect that it has on the sexuality of the two white men. Their erotic gaze is compared to Niki being "[raped] with

their eyes” (42) and sparks off a chain of events that would change the course of events in Excelsior, not only politically but also morally. It leads to prominent figures in the community being accused of contravening the Immorality Act, to Stephanus’s suicide (73) and Reverend Bornman’s attempted suicide (84) and even causes John Vorster to “[instruct] Percy Yutar to withdraw the case” (222) because it would affect the country as a whole. This shows how the different components of apartheid society, namely the church, the judiciary and the national government, dovetailed into one another. Niki, according to the narrator, was never even aware that “a whole government was under threat because of her body parts” (103). This remark looms large in its irony: the mighty masculinist apartheid regime, sustained by the white minority, was under threat because its supporters desired the female body of the black majority and not even draconian laws such as the Immorality Act could prevent that.



The bond cemented between Niki and Tjaart is shown to continue throughout the novel, and her mother constantly reminds Popi that it is “not a good thing to fight Tjaart” (184). In times of hardship Niki often thinks about the young, supportive Tjaart, “[a] generous giver of cakes” (112), who shared the exquisite food of the white household with her. Her reaction when she hears that Tjaart “is being sent away to fight real wars in Suidwes and in Soweto” (133) is meaningful, since it comments directly on this bond between the two of them: “I care about all my children, Viliki... [n]ot only those of my womb” (133). Popi feels that Tjaart has been “h[olding] Niki’s compassion to ransom for so many years” (133). This feeling of closeness between Niki and Tjaart suggests that Niki sees herself as Tjaart’s surrogate mother. Ironically, during apartheid there was often a close



bond between the black nanny and the white child she had to take care of, but once he was usurped into the machinery of state, he forgot about that close interaction – or as Popi explains it: “[I]t is possible that this Tjaart Cronje [Niki] [seems] to care so much about does not even know that [she] [exists]” (133). The obvious explanation for Niki’s affection, however, is that she knows that Stephanus is Popi’s father – something Tjaart also acknowledges on his sick bed (262) – and that Tjaart is Popi’s half brother.

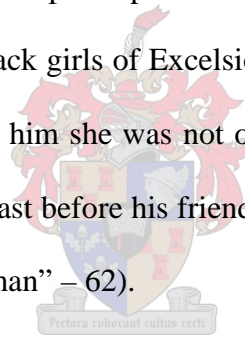
In contrast to Tjaart for whom she has always shown her affection, Stephanus is used as a tool with which to have her revenge on Cornelia Cronje. Considering the context of a racially divided society such as South Africa, it is fascinating that she as a black woman could have such a hold over a white man like Stephanus Cronje – or even over Johannes Smit before him. From the outset she believes that to Johannes Smit she is nothing more than “a masturbation gadget” (19). Initially Niki was unwilling to participate in Smit’s “harrowing games” (15) in exchange for money, but her friends “assured her” of his innocence and his impotence (he is called “Limp Stick” and “Sleeping Horn” – 18). Smit realises the power of money and abuses his position as affluent white male to get sexual favours from the young black girls. The power of the white male landowner is depicted as being of such unfathomable proportions that he is able to abuse these young girls as a form of amusement, using them as mere sexual objects to gratify his desire.

The symbol of his authority, “a whip in the hand” (14), suggests that he will use violence to attain his goals. The whip is also a symbol of the phallus, the “ineluctable bond between male sexuality and power” (Segal, 2001: 203), but in the case of Johannes Smit

it is a substitute phallus, because we learn from the text that he suffers from premature ejaculation; something that the young girls are aware of. They make mocking remarks about his “manhood [that] always fails him” (17). Despite this, during one of these so-called games, he manages to “[enter] her” and “[rupture]” and “[haemorrhage] her maidenhood” (19). This suggests that it is no innocent sexual game on the side of a sexually inept man, but a clear case of rape. This act of violence is an attempt to establish his dominance, particularly over Niki, the unwilling object of his sexual fantasies. His impression of the deed is that it was an initiation for her into womanhood or sexual maturity. Illustrative of his lackadaisical attitude is the remarks he makes to Niki: “You seem to forget that you are my sleeping partner,” said Johannes Smit with a dirty smirk on his face. “Me and you, we go a long way back. To our days in the sunflower fields. Surely you cannot forget that you ate my money. I gave you enough chance to get rid of your wildness. Tonight is the night” (48). The reference to the “[eating of his] money” suggests that she was nothing more than a prostitute to him, whom he paid for her sexual services. In the rural context of the text this also suggests that the only way for her to get money to buy food to eat, is to give in to his sexual molestation. Furthermore, the impression is created that she had to make herself available to him whenever he felt like having sex with her. In front of Stephanus Cronje, probably to boast about his sexual prowess, he calls Niki his “padkos – [his] provision for the road” (49), which confirms the point that to him she is a mere sex object who has to be at his disposal at all times. The use of the food metaphor suggests that the sexual encounters are something of a snack for the road. It provides him with quick sustenance. Niki is some form of nourishment and entertainment to make the journey home shorter and more enjoyable.

During their final encounter in the novel, Johannes is the emissary sent by Tjaart to fetch Niki and Popi to his house (260), because Tjaart wants to “make peace with [Popi]” on his deathbed. Aware of this, Johannes uses the opportunity to “declare a truce” (261) and in a nonchalant manner asks for Niki’s forgiveness (262). The impression is created that she should forget about their sexual encounters of the past and that even the rape incident could be seen as some minor event from the past (“Bygones should be allowed to be bygones” – 261), whereas Niki points out that he “stole [her] girlhood” (262).

As one of the white farmers who had fun “way[laying] black girls in the field” (15), it comes as no surprise that Smit later participates in the “partner-swopping orgies” (53) between the white men and the black girls of Excelsior. Whereas she wanted to kill him earlier because he was a rapist, to him she was not only a desired and forbidden object, but also a trophy with which to boast before his friends (“Even if you scored a bull’s eye, I had Niki first. Before any other man” – 62).



The sexual encounters between Niki and the white men have a direct impact on her marriage with Pule. From the relation between Niki and Pule the reader gains some insight into the image of black masculinity at this time as depicted in the text. On the day of the wedding the relatives and friends of the couple indirectly comment, in a series of satirical songs, on the marital prospects of the couple. Ironically, phrases such as “Pule was going to die of hunger” (21) and Niki, “a woman of soaring beauty and dimpled smiles” (21) prove to be prophetic in the novel, since it comments indirectly on the hardships that Pule is to suffer because of his beautiful wife and the “secret desires” (22)

that the white men have for her.<sup>6</sup> Pule is portrayed as a hard-working miner (28) and provides for his family so that Niki can lead a comfortable life. The narrator points out that such a lifestyle was only possible if you were married “to a man who burrowed in the earth for the white man’s gold” (28). The process is twofold: the white man benefits abundantly from the hard labour of the unskilled black man, and in the process the black man benefits financially, to a lesser extent, but has to leave his wife “unguarded” against sexual predation, imagined or real.

The highlight of Niki and Pule’s apparent marital bliss is the birth of a son and heir, Viliki. The trouble sets in when Pule becomes suspicious of Niki and begins to “[assign] a motive for her actions” (34). When she does not fulfil her marital duties of cooking “meat and rice for [Sunday] lunch” (33) he immediately jumps to the conclusion that she saves the meat to feed her lovers. Meat serves as a metaphor of affluence and abundance to be enjoyed on a special occasion such as Sunday lunch, but indirectly the reference to meat also comments in a sexually derogatory manner on Niki: she is relegated to a piece of meat to be devoured by her lovers, just as Johannes wanted to eat her as “padkos”. The only way that Pule can deal with his suspicion is to accuse her of “sleep[ing] with [her] white masters” (34) and violently “push[ing] her away and slap[ping] her”.

From Pule’s viewpoint he realises that there is a racial imbalance at stake here, because he is no match for a rich, white man. He can only react in a violent manner, and as Connell (2001: 44) remarks, such conduct is a way of “claiming or asserting [one’s] masculinity.” What makes the violent attack even more startling is the fact that Pule

reminds her of her rapist, Johannes Smit – to such an extent that she even imagined Smit’s “overwhelming smell” (35) in their home. Similar attacks repeat this cycle of domestic violence and even though Pule shows some remorse and “promise[s] that he would stop blaming [Niki] for things she knew nothing about” (36), it tends to continue. A major result of their domestic fights is that Viliki is not brought up to grasp the harmful effects of marital violence and to him it is “[a] spectacle” with which to impress and entertain his white friend, Tjaart. <sup>7</sup>

It is clear that Pule bases his sense of human worth on the amount of money that he makes as a mineworker (39). He believes that his regularly sending Niki money gives him the right to abuse her emotionally (by staying away for long periods of time) and physically (by attacking her and throwing things around). He does, however, point out to her that even though he sends her the money, she is “gallivant[ing] around” with money that “was dripping with his sweat” (60). From the perspective of the community his conduct is beyond reproach, especially since he is such an excellent provider for his family (“unlike many other men, Pule supported his family” - 39). The only way in which the neighbours can respond to the “crass displays of wealth” (40) that accumulate in Pule’s household is to envy them for that and to suggest that Niki should quit her job. She no longer needs to work in the butchery because she is sufficiently well off merely to stay at home and “eat Pule’s money” (40) – a similar expression that is used by Smit in a different context, suggesting a sense of greed associated with financial reward. It suggests how males convert economic power into gender power and exercise their contemptuous social control over their wives and households.

The presence of “a coloured baby” (60) <sup>8</sup> in his house and his wife’s unwillingness to divulge the identity of the father results in Pule withdrawing into “ a world of silence” (61) and drinking excessively. He does not know how to respond emotionally to the presence of the child and decides to drink his sorrows away. Ironically, this is the same way in which white men such as Tjaart and Johannes deal with their anger (242). Despite his disgust with the baby, it is striking that he does not resort to violent action, as is usually the case when he is involved in an argument with Niki. He is blaming himself for neglecting Niki and leaving her to fend for herself, although the narrator points out that other women could have used that excuse (61). Despite his withdrawal from his family, he still continues to send them “money and beautiful clothes” (62), as an attempt to show that he has forgiven Niki. But since he feels an accessory to her infidelity, he appeases his conscience by continuing to share his wealth with his family. His forgiveness is centred on his newly found faith because he reforms himself and becomes “a born-again Christian” (64), finding comfort in the “arms of salvation” (64). Religion gives him a sense of purpose in life, just as working in the mine was a means to a goal, namely to provide a better life for his wife and child. Since Niki has subsequently given birth to a Coloured child, Pule realises that he will be unable to do anything to the white man who impregnated his wife, and he has to find peace somewhere for his angry and troubled mind. Niki also realises that Pule can never confront Stephanus Cronje, because Stephanus “was well known for drawing his gun at the slightest provocation” (61). This portrayal supports the idea put forward by Cock (2001: 43) that guns are “ a key feature

of hegemonic masculinity” and are “central to the way many men act out their masculinity.”

In Stephanus’s case it serves both as weapon with which to protect him and his family, and a symbol of his power and authority over black people: “If [a] customer insisted that he wanted a refund, Stephanus Cronje would whip out his gun and ask the customer to disappear from his sight” (61).

Pule’s re-entrance into the life of his family is as a result of his illness (“the mines had now eaten his lungs” – 134), and he returns to his family to die there in peace. In this regard the use of the metaphor associated with eating suggests a different type of avarice: in his case the white bosses’ avarice for gold has eaten away his body. His illness represents the exploitation of cheap black labour in the mines and shows how generations of black South African men were robbed of their humanity by doing demeaning work in the gold mines, only to enrich a few white capitalists (Moodie, 2001:299). The digging for gold provides his family with a better way of living, but in the end it is gold that left him “[drained] of all flesh and blood” (135). Whereas Popi welcomes the return of “our father” (134) as she calls him, thus emphasizing the irony associated with her paternity, Viliki is not prepared to accept him back. His father deserted him seventeen years ago (134) and he is still angry that his father unfairly associated him, the “child of his [father’s] blood”, with his mother and her “sins” (134). As the man in the patriarchal household, it was Viliki’s duty to protect his father’s home in his absence, but he failed to do so, and this explains why he is also “hit by stones that should have been aimed only at

his mother” (134). He thus was not only saddled unfairly with an impossible burden (that of protecting his mother’s sexuality), but made to assume an adult role while still a child – both aspects of young black males’ lives (vis-à-vis white as well as older black males) during the apartheid era.

Pule represents the older black male who worked in the gold mines under the apartheid regime, but who does not share in the post-1994 liberation of the country. He, like many of his generation, was diagnosed with “phthisis” (134) and died before the advent of the new democracy. Pule represents the older African male who was often perceived “to be complicit with apartheid” (Xaba 2001: 109), whereas the adult Viliki, with his participation in the Movement exemplifies an “anti-authority” inclination (Xaba 2001: 109) and challenges the hegemonic white state. In contrast, someone such as Sekatle, the “rich businessman” with his “new Mercedes Benz” (186) who “had worked for ‘the system’ before liberation” (180, also 135, 242) continues to thrive in the new South Africa. He joins the Movement and later becomes the new mayor of Excelsior (246) and “employ[s] his sister as a clerk at the registry” (249) – a clear case of nepotism. The extent to which he would go to benefit financially and gain political power is clearly illustrated by his abuse of the Baipehi and their need for land (186). Whereas the destitute see him as “ a man who stood with the people”, and who serves as an example of what could be termed “heroic masculinity” (Connell, 2001:25), it is evident that he is merely power hungry and abuses the new system for his own gain – as he did in the past with the apartheid state. Interestingly, his sister Maria, who was one of the women implicated with the Excelsior 19, is reinstated in a prime position of power by these



dealings of her brother, because he “transformed [her] RDP house into a gleaming palace” (187) and manages to create a position for her at the council, despite her being “barely literate” (249). Disillusion with post-apartheid society and with the men who rule over that society is clearly implied when Viliki expresses concern that the “Mandela legacy of tolerance [would not] last” (242) and that people like Sekatle “were turning into black Tjaart Cronjes” (242) - suggesting that they profess to be sympathetic to the cause of their own people’s struggle, but in reality are racist, power hungry and self-centred.

Viliki, Niki and Tjaart Cronje form an interesting triangular relationship throughout the novel, whereas the two young men form a definite binary opposition. This is an interesting narrative device which distinctly supports the following remark by Morrell (2001: 25):

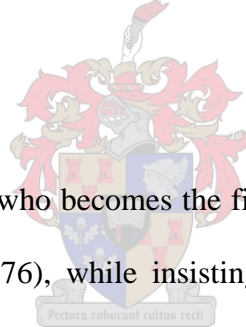
Since all masculinities influence one another and are never discrete and bounded entities, elements of white masculinity can still be seen in many other masculinities, primarily in the emphasis on achievement and appearance, which are features of a commoditised society. Yet masculinities that formerly were oppositional ... are now jostling for ascendancy.

During the apartheid years Tjaart is portrayed as a military right-winger who has to fight “terrorists who were infiltrating the Free State farms from Lesotho” (133), a war incited by the propaganda machine of the Nationalist government in order to destabilise its neighbouring countries. Viliki joins “the mysterious underground” (128) simply known as the Movement and as a result of his activities for them, has to suffer torture at the hand

of the Special Branch (137), after Sekatle betrayed him. Viliki becomes one of the so-called “terrorists” who infiltrated the country and is indirectly one of the enemies against whom Tjaart comes into combat. After the liberation of the country, Viliki is rewarded for his services to the Movement by being elected as a city councillor, following the 1994 elections (165). The council subsequently elects him as “the first black mayor of Excelsior” (171). Ironically, Tjaart is also elected to the same council, as representative of the right-wing Freedom Front, yet retains his job in the family business.

From the portrayal of Tjaart in the post-apartheid years we learn that he is opposed to affirmative action (172), that he is disillusioned with the apartheid government (172), and that he blames some of his fellow Afrikaners like Lizette de Vries for “[selling] the country down the drain” (173), fights for the right to speak Afrikaans during council meetings (178) and criticises the new council for being unable “to govern the town in a civilised manner” (187) and forcing the “white citizens of Excelsior [to] subsidise [black] people” (193). Tjaart still exemplifies the stereotypes traditionally associated with the Afrikaner and he also shows a reluctance to accept the changes associated with the new dispensation. He tries to enforce his cultural identity onto others and is protective of his linguistic identity as an Afrikaans speaking person. Furthermore, he still believes in the God-given ideal of the Afrikaner as the chosen race and supports the establishment of an Afrikaner homeland and “plan[s] for the return of the Afrikaner to his rightful place” (233) by “regain[ing] his power” (243). He is also angered by the loss of political power of the Afrikaner and affirmative action is to him a direct indication of this loss of power. When he realises that his only supporter in the struggle, Johannes Smit, has also deserted

the ranks, he “altogether [loses] control” (255) and “foam[s] at the mouth” (255). His collapse symbolises the demise of the old apartheid order and the room becomes symbolic of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Firstly there is the “group of elders in black suits” (256) who gathers around the bed and comments, by means of Gys Uys, on the past atrocities against “[our] children”, but also about “[their] wealth and [their influence]”, as well as the consequences of affirmative action for the younger generation. Subsequently Popi and Niki pay him a visit and he acknowledges Popi as his half sister (262) and reconciles with her. Although Popi has finally accepted her identity as “a coloured person” (259), Tjaart’s reference to her being “a lady” and “[a] beautiful lady” (263) reinforces her acceptance of her identity and helps her to accept it completely.



In contrast to him we have Viliki who becomes the first black mayor of Excelsior (171), claims himself an RDP house (176), while insisting that as a mayor he “deserved a second house in order to supplement his meagre income from the council (177). He refuses to forgive Sekatle for “doing all those filthy things to our people” (181) and for neglecting his duties as mayor because he was “bathing in the sweat of the Seller of Songs” (197). Eventually Viliki is expelled from the Movement for bringing it “into disrepute” (212). Initially Viliki creates the impression that he represents the young black success story of the new dispensation, but it soon becomes apparent that he is merely power hungry and wishes to enrich himself. His attitude is shared by the members of the Movement who also serve on the council when they refer to the fact that they had sacrificed enough during the struggle and now it was their turn to “eat the fruits of [their]

labour” (177). The eating metaphor recurs, suggesting avarice and enjoyment of that which is readily available, without recourse to the consequences. The narrator presents a less sympathetic picture of Viliki<sup>9</sup> and he plays a much more minor role in the novel than Tjaart. It is only during his brief visits to Adam de Vries’s office (222) that he engages in discussion on political issues. In this instance, the narrator’s sympathy lies undoubtedly with the disillusioned Afrikaner presented by Tjaart and that explains why we gain more extensive insights into the nature of the Afrikaner male, as presented through the eyes of Mda.<sup>10</sup> Mda represents both black and white masculinity in the novel and shows that both are flawed and can be implicated in one another’s flaws. He suggests that despite past harm, there is the possibility for the “next generation” to progress beyond the flaws of the past and reconcile as members of a new society.

Another aspect of masculinity that is explored by means of Viliki is men’s attitude towards masturbation and menstruation. This is of interest from a sexual point of view. The radical change brought about in his life from being a powerful councillor living a reasonably comfortable life to that of a drifting musician, roaming the rural areas, is caused by the Seller of Songs, one of the children borne out of the miscegenation case of 1971. Before her arrival on that particular Sunday, Viliki was in bed, “enjoy[ing] his fingers” (196).<sup>11</sup> His self-centred, solitary masturbatory activities allow him to make love to “any full-bodied figure he had fancied in the street” (196) and in his imagination he is able to reach out to the “half-naked sirens” (196) in the magazines. Another interesting aspect about his sexuality that is presented in the text is the ease with which he accepts the Seller of Songs’s menstruation (197). Whereas she, from a traditional

perspective, calls it “her bad time of the month”, he rebukes her for calling menstrual blood “her filth”. Illustrative of his modern attitude towards menstrual blood is his decision to “[touch] it and let it slide between his fingers” (197), whereas she herself feels a sense of disgust. It is probably convenient for him as a man to go on about the reproductive, albeit divine nature of menstrual blood, since as a man he does not have to suffer the monthly inconvenience of having a period.

By contrasting Viliki and Tjaart as representatives of masculinity in the new South Africa we gain some interesting insights into the post-apartheid South African male as portrayed by Mda. In the case of Tjaart there is loyalty to his language group and a disdain for others. He clings to what Popi describes as “the Anglo-Boer War mentality of the Afrikaner” (189) and wants a separate homeland for his people (172). According to the narrator there is an “immers[ion] in anger” (213) on his side because he feels betrayed by his leaders. Only at home can he be in power (214) because after the demise of apartheid, he feels, he has joined the ranks of the powerless. Tjaart, as a young white male is forced by the apartheid regime to join the army as conscript, or as one of the elders in the novel, Gys Uys observes: “we used these children to fight our wars [and] then we discarded them” (257). Connell (2001: 17) describes South Africa in the 1970s – the time in which the first part of the novel is set – as a “highly militarised state with a panoply of repressive instruments to deal with those who did not agree with the direction of government policy” (Connell, 2001:17). The type of masculinity associated with military conscription is, according to Thompson (2001: 100), one that emphasizes “the machoistic [sic!] qualities of assertiveness, bravery and enduring pain.” The aim of military

conscriptio was given as fighting for “the survival of Western civilization and Christianity in southern Africa” (Du Pisani, 2001: 166).

In *The Madonna of Excelsior* the portrayal of the different male characters and their sexuality is closely linked to their experience with the bodies of the black women in their immediate environment. Black women not only play a vital role in the sexual development of the young white man (as represented by Tjaart) but rather play a meaningful role in the lives of adult white males as objects of desire forbidden by political sanction. The ideological message posited by the text is that white men during the apartheid era (as in the case of Johannes Smit) abuse young black women for their own sexual gratification. The abuse is regarded as a rite of passage among white men in the rural areas to be sexually initiated by black women – an attitude similar to that held by the slave owners in the past.<sup>12</sup> From a socio-economic perspective the women realise that “[they] can make a lot of money from [these] foolish white [men]” (18) and it makes them more powerful to abuse the sexually obsessed men for their own financial gain.

As a continuation of the association of black women with the position of nannies in white households, an interesting case in point is the character of Groot-Jan Lombard, an old man, who participates in orgies held in the barn. Illustrative of this scenario is the following description: “[The woman with the baby] sat on Groot-Jan Lombard’s lap and ceremoniously took off his shirt. Then she yanked at the hair in his armpits. With each jerk he bleated like a goat. The pleasurable pain *was all he would ever get from these sprees*. It was before the wonder of Viagra was invented” (54 – my emphasis). Even

though he is “[t]ottering with a walking stick” (74) and is described as “ a true hero of the Afrikaner people” (148), he also participates in the orgies and regresses to the state of a young child that needs the ministrations of a black nanny. It is a purposefully inserted detail by the author that his “date” for the evening is a mother with a young baby. Or is it rather a case of the white man who never outgrows his forbidden desire for the body of the black, female Other whom he first encountered in the role of his nanny?

Another point with regard to masculinities issues in this rural context is the realisation by black women – as exemplified by Niki – that one of the ways of undermining the power of the white madam is to seduce her husband sexually. The black woman knows that her forbidden body bodes “[t]hreatening pleasures of the future” (42) and she capitalises on this in her favour. In pre-1994 South African society the white man epitomised political and economic power and control, but it is ironic that these men are powerless when confronted by black female sexuality, or as the Reverend Bornman puts it more poignantly, “[t]he devil made the Afrikaner to covertly covet the black woman while publicly detesting her” (87). Submission to black women, however, has to happen in secrecy: in uninhabited places such as “ a big barn built of corrugated-iron sheets” (52), in the “sunflower fields” (48), “[in] the grass” (50), in “a light delivery van” (90) or in “a car [parked] under the trees” (92). Despite the proclivity for sexual intercourse with black women, it has to occur on the margins of society because it has to remain a secret. The racist stereotype of the supposedly uncontrolled, perceived “animal-like” sex drive of black people is undermined by the depiction of the uncontrollable sexuality of the white men who have sex in the grass, and among the haystacks in the barn. Fanon (1967: 49)

observes that “white men do not marry black women” and blames black women for wanting to escape their sense of inferiority by marrying a white man. One could, for the purpose of this novel, amend it as follows: “White men only want black women for sex and not to marry them: one’s nanny remains one’s servant and will never be one’s wife.”

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<sup>1</sup> Page references are to Mda (2002). The title of the chapter is taken from Mda (2002: 87). The text calls to mind Paton’s *Too late the phalarope* (1953) which, according to Van Wyk Smith (1990: 71) also deals with the theme of miscegenation and the impact it has on the Afrikaner psyche.

<sup>2</sup> “Masculinism” is defined as “the ideology that justifies and naturalizes male domination. As such, it is the ideology of patriarchy. Masculinism takes it for granted that there is a fundamental difference between men and women, it assumes that heterosexuality is normal, it accepts without question the sexual division of labour, and it sanctions the political and dominant role of men in public and private spheres” (Brittan 2001: 53). Haywood and Mac an Ghaill (2003: 154) suggest that this concept “compare[s] the continuity of the underlying processes of manhood to the historical variability expressed in ‘male styles’.”

<sup>3</sup> From a literary perspective this novel is even more significant since the narrator and focaliser is black, but comments on white masculinity. This is indeed an interesting development on the issue of the authenticity of such depictions. Illustrative of this are comments such as the following made by Gordimer: “There are some aspects of a black man’s life that have been put impossibly beyond the white man’s potential experience, and the same applies to the black man and some aspects of a white man’s experience.” And: “As a black man, the one thing he cannot experience is whiteness” (both quotes are taken from Wagner, 1994: 118-119). Compare also the comment made by Achebe in this regard: “I am not saying that the picture of Nigeria and Nigerians painted by a conscientious European must be invalid. I think it would be terribly valid... [But] no man can understand another whose language he does not speak” (cited in Wagner, 1994: 120). One could ask the question: Is Mda’s somewhat one-sided portrayal of white men as racist and sexist in this novel not politically incorrect? Or does he balance that towards the end with his conciliatory pro-Afrikaner message? See also n.12. Compare also Weber’s remark (2004) on Vikili’s role as “mouthpiece on politically charged subjects” in the novel.

<sup>4</sup> Adam de Vries plays a major role in the post-1994 life in Excelsior, as is evident from his friendship with Viliki. He is derided by the right-wingers for “deceiving the Afrikaner” (243). Through his involvement in the Excelsior Development Trust he tries to involve both black and white in the financial upliftment of the town. His wife, Lizette, becomes the first white female mayor (206) of Excelsior and the decision of both Pule and Vikili to support her is given as one of the reasons why they were kicked out of the Movement (212). This suggests that the Movement is not set on reconciliation but that it is more a question of wanting complete political power. This is underpinned by the appointment of Sekatle as mayor. Goodman (2004: 65) describes Sekatle as “someone who has appropriated the discourse of the Movement for his own ends and is using it to increase his constituency and consolidate his political power.”

<sup>5</sup> Compare in this regard the following remark by McClintock (1995:85): “The sexual history of boys often demonstrates that their initiation into the sexual life was first at the instance of women older than themselves, often servants. Freud agrees: “It is a well known fact that unscrupulous nurses put crying children to sleep by stroking their genitals.” Tjaart’s reference to the “forbidden quarry that lurked beneath



[the] nannies' pink overalls" (42) supports this assumption. Compare also the remark that "[y]oung Afrikaner boys were eager to taste what their fathers were eating on the sly" (94).

<sup>6</sup> It is interesting to note the covert warning contained in the following remark by the narrator: "Old Pule who had been married before. And was deserted. Or did he desert?" (28)

<sup>7</sup> The frying pan, used by Pule's first wife, a string of girlfriends and now by Pule (37) acts as a metaphor for their marriage. The frying pan "yoke[s] her to all the previous women in [Pule's] life" which suggests that she is but one of a string of women abused by him who had to cook for him using that particular cooking utensil; a reminder of their imprisonment in the kitchen. Only when she leaves the pan behind will she be freed from Pule and his past. In the final chapter of the novel, she acknowledges that the pan "brought Pule very much alive in the shack" (267).

<sup>8</sup> The identity crisis experienced by Popi as a coloured woman in a black community calls to mind the suffering experienced by the author Bessie Head, as well as some of her main characters in her works. As a coloured woman she went into exile to Botswana to escape apartheid racism and experienced xenophobia first-hand in Botswana.

<sup>9</sup> Mda is rather critical of the new black elite in post-apartheid South Africa and his portrayal, in particular of Sekatla, is similar to what Ngugi (1993: 91) writes about post-colonial politics and culture in Kenya: "The result of [the] economic, political and cultural alienation of the majority from their post-colonial rulers has been a perfect replica of colonial practices." According to Mda in *The Madonna of Excelsior*, the same culture of silencing one's opponents and acting in a greedy manner to enrich oneself that were associated with pre-1994 South Africa persists in post-apartheid South Africa society. Lebogang Mashile's poem, "Kedi's song" (2005: 8) comments on the refusal of the people of Excelsior to speak about the events about thirty years ago. Compare the lines: "These women sweep the whispers beneath their children's skins/ Suckled on hushed voices / Shaded by history's sins / Even as her voice is captive, Her skin will always sing[.]"

<sup>10</sup> The reconciliatory and accommodating attitude displayed towards the Afrikaner – and the disdain for English-speaking South Africans ("The English, common wisdom stated, were hypocrites" – 223) is similar to the views expressed by Duiker. This is an interesting topic that warrants further exploration but does not fall within the scope of this project. Taitz (2002) quotes Zakes Mda who mentions that as a writer he is "naturally a social critic" and that his critique is "tempered with sensitivity to the fraught nature of race relations in post-apartheid South Africa", which explains his critical stance on people who "pretend that they are socialists" (241) and "tramp[e] on the human rights of their own people" (241). Compare also Viliki's "gripe about the lack of cleanliness" (253) and the lack of care in post-apartheid South Africa. In an interview with Kachuba (s.d.) Mda discusses this issue and concludes: "I am a writer and my own values will come through. I cannot divorce myself from this work. I cannot be objective. I do not try to be objective... I reflect their [the other side] perspective as well, to understand their fears, some of which are true fears. I tried to do that here when I depicted these Afrikaners... I tried to be more compassionate, to treat them with compassion and not to say they were bad people because they did bad things... It's a balanced portrayal of the situation in South Africa today."

<sup>11</sup> Ironically, Viliki's masturbation reminds one of Johannes Smit's abuse of Niki –using the image of her as "a masturbation gadget" (19).

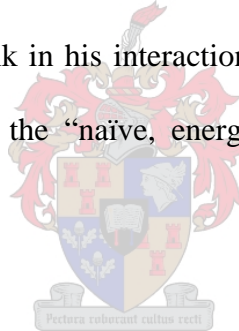
<sup>12</sup> Compare for instance: "They [young Afrikaner boys – MLC] went out on hunting expeditions for what they called swart poes. In the fields. In the veld. In the byways of one-street towns. In the farm villages. And in the kitchens of their very homes, where maids and nannies cooked them their dinners" (94). – This stereotypical depiction of the young Afrikaner boys in particular is, of course, also offensive to black women, since it reduces them merely to sex objects (sexual organs?). Mda's reference to slave owners' sexual abuse of their female servants calls to mind the exploits of Willem Mostert in *The Rights of Desire*.

## Chapter 7: “[L]ost in some labyrinthine intimacy” - *The Good Doctor* by Damon Galgut<sup>1</sup>

In an interview with Lin Sampson (2003), Damon Galgut, the author of *The Good Doctor*, points out that central to the novel is the “ambiguous relationship of [the] two men”, namely Frank Eloff and Laurence Waters: “The clash at the heart of the book is really one between souls, if I can put it that way ... Frank hates Laurence not because his politics are different but because he is different.” In his review of the novel, Christopher Hope (2003) regards Frank Eloff and Laurence Waters as “opposite sides of the same coin” and both Wheelwright (2003) and Van Niekerk (2003) suggest that the relationship between the two male characters is “subtly homoerotic”. Van der Vlies (2003) feels that the “clearly homoerotic relationship” between the two men “is awkwardly marginalized” and concludes that Galgut seems “unsure of how to wring post-apartheid significance from the residual (but uncomfortably suppressed) gay sub-plot.” When asked about this ostensibly gay sub-plot of the novel, Galgut (De Waal, 2003) pointed out that he did not want to write an overtly gay novel. To him the underplaying or subtle suggestion of homoeroticism is much more effective as a literary strategy. Elsewhere he suggests “there are gay male elements in [his] work but they are not [his] central concern” (Wilmot, 1995: 131). In her analysis Van Niekerk (2003) views *The Good Doctor* as an allegorical novel and considers Waters as Eloff’s alter ego.<sup>2</sup>

In my analysis of the interaction between Frank and Laurence I wish to focus instead on interaction between them as two male characters and to examine in particular, as Kerfoot

(2001: 235) puts it, “masculinity as actively produced in given settings and in specific moments.” Kerfoot discusses the intimacy between men in the workplace and examines to what extent masculinity “gives the appearance of providing masculine subjects with the knowledge of how to respond to, and how to manage intimate situations” (2001: 237). Within the workplace masculine subjects are generally unable to express emotional intimacy, because as Kerfoot (2001: 238) concludes: “Regarded with suspicion, doubt or outright hostility, emotional intimacy acquires the status of a no-man’s land for masculine subjects who are unwilling or unable to let go of the barriers that protect them from the threat of their own vulnerability and its consequences.” One way in which men can protect their vulnerability is to display typical machismo in their conduct, as appears to be the case with regard to Frank in his interaction with Laurence, who, according to Hope’s notion of masculinity, is the “naïve, energetic, obtuse and remorseless good doctor” (Hope, 2003).



In his analysis of the culture of machismo, Lancaster (2002: 42) explains that machismo is predominantly “ a means of structuring power between and *among* men.” On the one hand certain actions are undertaken to prove one’s virility and masculinity to others, and on the other hand there is the need to assert one’s own masculinity to oneself.<sup>3</sup> One way of asserting one’s machismo masculinity is by exhibiting “aggressive manliness” and by repressing one’s femininity (Almaguer, 1993: 259). The macho man’s sexual activity is also characterised as “aggressive, active and penetrating” (Almaguer, 1993: 259). Is this applicable in the case of Frank Eloff and his sexual relations with Maria, Claudia and with Zanele? Is he indeed trying to repress any signs of femininity and weakness? The

subject of my analysis of the portrayal of masculinity in the novel focuses on the interaction between the male characters within the workplace, in this case the hospital in the rural areas, and assesses to what extent a character such as Frank suppresses his feelings of yearning for intimacy with Laurence. I shall also concentrate on other, lesser male characters in the novel, such as the Colonel, the Brigadier and Dr Santander. Another important facet of the novel is the interaction between Frank, Laurence and Tehogo, another male co-worker.

The novel is set in a rural hospital that is a remnant of the past when it formed part of an erstwhile independent homeland. Not only is the hospital in a dilapidated state but there are also “no people” (4) since they all go to the town with its “busy hospital” (16). The setting is significant because this “joke” (5) and “accident of history” (17) in which they have to work, serves as a reminder of the ridiculous policies of the apartheid past. In order for the so-called independent homeland to create the impression of self-sufficiency, this hospital (and probably also several other buildings of its kind) was built. The two male characters are constantly reminded of a time when the hospital formed part of an independent state run by the military. Ironically, a hospital that should be a place where people can come for care giving is a mere showpiece and symbol of “accomplishment” for the homeland government. Incidentally, the role of the military is still prevalent in the new dispensation since there is a constant presence of soldiers that act as a reminder of the past dispensation when everything was ruled by the “hyper-masculine mythology of apartheid” (Van der Vlies, 2003). With regard to the latter, Galgut (Heyns, 1994: 3)

explains to Rosenthal, “the values that made apartheid possible are extremely male values... I see apartheid in its entirety as a male mythology.”

Frank, one of the main characters in the novel, has been at this hospital for approximately seven years, waiting for the superintendent, Dr Ngema, to leave for a better position in the new government structures. One would expect that Frank, a remnant from the old order, would be dissatisfied with affirmative action, but on the contrary, he has a “a good working relationship” (12) with his black female superior and they mutually understand each other’s ambitions and limitations. Her appointment is one of the major changes in the post-apartheid South African setting of the text, because now Frank has “[to take] orders from that black woman” (145) – as Frank Senior puts it. In contrast to Laurence who does not realise that she is “sensitive to criticism” (13) and thus challenges Dr Ngema’s authority, Frank accepts his position and never really disrupts or challenges the “fragile politics” (31) between the two. His original reason for coming to the hospital was personal, because he was at “a critical juncture in [his] life” (31) following the collapse of his marriage. He opts to stay and not accept “a payout” (32) and with a sense of equanimity awaits his promotion.

But this resolute acceptance of his position is challenged by the arrival of Laurence, “[the] bland, biscuit-coloured young man, almost a boy still” (2). A device used by the author in this novel is to make the two main characters share a room. The close proximity in a confined space provides the platform for the reader to study the tension between the two main characters and also provides interesting opportunities for the author to contrast

the two men. The room was originally allocated to Frank and now he has to share his space with the new doctor. His remark that “[t]he moment you put two people in a room together, politics enters in” (18), is significant because it suggests that sexual politics and ideological differences will indeed play a major role in two such people’s lives – as is evident in the novel. Galgut (quoted in Wilmot, 1995: 105) argues that what he regards as the measure of a successful novel is the way in which the novel “look[s] through the spaces between ideology” and the way in which it “deconstructs ideologies which have been superimposed over reality.” Frank, who has always been the one to look for “consolation and comfort” (6) in the arms of someone, preferably female, with whom to share the intimate space of a room, does not particularly look forward to the idea that he has to share his room with Laurence. Such a confined space is ideal to study the operation of masculinities within a context of intimacy, especially since the feeling of being threatened by the presence of another male “necessitates letting go of the script that fashions the responses of masculine subjects” (Kerfoot, 2001: 237), and it requires that they “reveal aspects of themselves as vulnerable”, particularly because each is unable to control or predict the reaction of the other.

Initially Frank creates the impression that the presence of the new “young doctor [who is] coming to do a year of community service” (7) does not affect him, but as soon as he learns that the two are to share a room, he is dismayed and dares to question Dr Ngema’s authority. From the outset there is a strong sense of the division of roles with the older, established male taking the lead as the one responsible for the room. Frank is the one who has to clean up after Laurence (9) and he is affected by Laurence’s smoking. Later on in

the novel Frank refers to the roles (71) acted out by the two of them in the room and comments on the fact that in the confines of the room he is “the shy, private one”, whereas Laurence is the exhibitionist who “[doesn’t] care how [Frank] saw him” (71).

The fact that Frank has to reprimand Laurence not to make “burn marks everywhere” (9) suggests Frank’s attachment to his environment, whereas Laurence as the intruder does not have such an affinity to their living quarters. He is ignorant of the fact that Frank did not want to share his room with him. Laurence, who has grown up with a missing father figure in his life (98) prefers sharing the room with Frank as a substitute father and mentor. The notion of a mentor figure is sustained throughout the novel and Dr Ngema acknowledges that Frank is “a good influence on [Laurence]” (153) and that Laurence “listens to [Frank]” (153). Dr Ngema also uses the room as a possible trade-off or bartering tool because she knows that Frank is unhappy about having to share his intimate quarters with the newcomer and informs him that he can have his room back should Laurence decide to leave (33). This suggests that she is aware of his vulnerability as a man and the only way in which she can restore the status quo and her position of authority is to collude with him against Laurence and abuse Frank’s vulnerability.

Laurence, however, feels that he has to remain because the place has “a lot of problems” (35) and he wants to “do work that means something” (40). Laurence exemplifies a type of paternal masculinity, which is ironic given his youth and inexperience. Collinson and Hearn (2001: 157) show that in the case of paternal masculinity, men tend to emphasize “the moral basis of cooperation” and that they believe in the “importance of personal trust

relations.” Laurence’s sense of purpose and his need to contribute to solving the problems of the new post-apartheid society correspond to the observation by Collinson and Hearn (2001: 157) that in the case of paternal masculinity, there is the “self-justifying claim” that “power is exercised in positive ways which enhance subordinates’ self-interests.” In a sense this type of behaviour by Laurence emulates the missionaries who felt obliged to do something meaningful for the rural people, albeit to promote their own selfish agendas. Once he acknowledges his position, Laurence also expresses his liking for Frank (41). This expression of intimacy is the beginning of a sense of camaraderie that develops between the two, even though Frank does not want to acknowledge it openly. In his mind he does feel that he also likes Laurence. Immediately after having acknowledged the fact that he also likes Laurence to himself, he qualifies his feeling and claims that it “wasn’t based on anything except the few hours we’d spent in each other’s company” (41). Frank’s realisation that he has a sense of affinity towards Laurence, however, immediately causes him to resent having such feelings. This supports Kerfoot’s remark that “masculine subjects must at all times labour at being masculine and to conceal or downplay personal fears and weaknesses” (2001: 237).

The more intimate the interaction between them, the more it results in Frank feeling that he is now “two people in [his] dealings with Laurence” (42). On the one hand there is the Frank who feels “under siege” because of Laurence’s intuitive probing into his life, and on the other hand we have the Frank who is “grateful not to be alone” (42). At the same time, Laurence is also “like two separate people to [Frank]” (42), namely both “[his] shadow” and “a companion and confidant” (42). The notion of something like a shadow



that always accompanies him was suggested earlier in the novel when Frank, following Laurence's subtle reprimand by Dr Ngema, calls him "a puppy" (14) that follows him around. This description suggests that Frank is the more dominant member of the relationship – the leader of the pack - and Laurence follows in his footsteps in a more subservient position. The reference to the shadow is also noteworthy from a Jungian point of view. The shadow is one of the archetypes in the unconscious and reveals itself in "those qualities and impulses he denies in himself but can plainly see in other people" (Jung, 1964: 174) and it contains "the overwhelming power of irresistible impulse" (Jung, 1964: 182). Dawson (1998: 260) explains this in relation to the character of Mr B in Richardson's *Pamela*: "The 'other' Mr B is the brutal master, i.e. the personification of everything that the first Mr B fails to recognise about himself." Laurence's compassion, his sense of duty and the fact that he is able to bring about a complete change in the hospital with his "fresh energy" (154), are all qualities that Frank suppresses in himself. Such inversion is the moral pattern whereby people try to suppress or hide their less humane or shameful impulses. Ironically, most readers would see the ironically named Frank as suppressing and embarrassed by his own "better feelings" – but of course the latter are seen as less than adequately "masculine"; as "weak" or "feminine" (or homosexual) by Frank. The closeness with Laurence in "a confined space" (42) reminds Frank of his days in the army, but now without the strict discipline and the codes of conduct regulating their lives according to a macho system.

Whereas Laurence finds this closeness likeable ("I like sharing with you, Frank" - 55), Frank feels that there is more to his life than "Laurence or the hospital" (58). Yet he

cannot escape from Laurence's presence, because everybody constantly reminds him of the so-called friendship between him and Laurence. Frank's aversion to the use of the word "friend" is based on past experiences. His friend, Mike, ran off with his wife (49) and as a result he has never allowed anyone else close to him again. When Frank is questioned by Laurence about his love life and when the last time was that he had a lover, his answer is significant: "Not since my marriage. Why are you asking? Are you worried about your girlfriend?" (84). The irony is that Frank eventually does get involved with Zanele (113), as an attempt to hurt Laurence, since Frank is unable to deal with his real feelings for Laurence. The only way of dealing with his feelings is to act in a typical macho way and sexually possess Laurence's girlfriend. The body of Zanele is conceived as contested territory, and by having intimate relations with her; Frank imagines that indirectly he is also intimate with Laurence. Frank exercises his "regime of control" (Hook et al., 1999: 136) over Laurence's body indirectly and abuses the female body – as he usually does – to hurt the masculine object of his desire. Remarks such as, "You're my best friend, Frank" (77) or references to their friendship by Mama Mthembu (39) or even to Laurence's sister (97) merely irritate him because they tend to remind him of his cuckolding by his best friend. Even the reason for marrying Karen in the first place suggests that Frank has never been one to disclose his emotions and affection. Their marriage was a marriage of convenience to please Frank Senior and Karen's father, Sam. They were from "[s]imilar backgrounds of privilege and wealth" (139) and it was Karen's position as "an idle madam at home" (139) that were the reasons for her to have an affair.<sup>4</sup>

One significant occurrence of male-male bonding in the novel occurs on the night of the party for Zanele, when there is male bonding and intimacy between Frank, Tehogo and Raymond, Tehogo's "almost girlishly pretty" (89) friend. Frank not only allows Raymond to put his arm on his shoulder, but he makes small talk with them and starts dancing with "the most unlikely of partners" (90), namely Tehogo. The relationship between Raymond and Tehogo is portrayed as overtly homoerotic, particularly because of the description of Raymond and the camp manner in which Tehogo drapes his arm around his friend's shoulder (87) and dances with Frank. It is also noteworthy that Frank as narrator describes Raymond later on in the text as "Tehogo's pretty friend" (155), which one could argue is a Freudian slip, revealing something of Frank's homoerotic inclination. The novel is structured around several binary oppositions when dealing with relationships: Frank and Laurence / Raymond and Tehogo; Frank / Mike; Frank and Zanele / Mike and Karen. This strange dance is some form of reconciliatory gesture between Frank and his nemesis, Tehogo, but if one takes Laurence's "puzzled, mournful expression" (90) into account, it indicates that Frank attempts to humiliate Laurence in front of the others, especially since Frank has never shown such closeness towards Laurence. This probably also explains why Laurence goes to Dr Ngema's office and tells her that he was in Tehogo's room and that he found the stolen goods in the latter's room (148).

Laurence's sense of misplaced loyalty towards Frank and his repressed desire for Frank cause him to take the blame for Frank and he informs Dr Ngema that he is the one who entered Tehogo's room. This gesture also shows that Laurence's feelings for Frank are

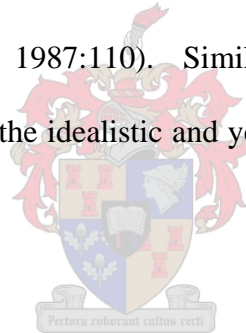
much stronger and suggests a demonstration of his love. These undercurrents indeed have the elements of a romantic relationship, which support the notion that there is an underlying homoerotic relation between the two doctors. Although Frank tries to be cynical about love and intimacy at all times, he reveals another side of his personality during instances when he observes Laurence with what is depicted as a strong awareness of the young man's body. He watches him, for instance, lying "sprawled face-down" (93) and focuses on his open mouth with "a string of saliva on his lip" (93), which suggests an intimate awareness and almost zooming in, camera-wise on the erotic aspects of the body of the other. The mouth is an erogenous zone and in a heterosexual context, one man would definitely not openly study or admit studying the mouth of another male that intimately.<sup>5</sup> Frank thus suppresses his secret desire for intimacy with Laurence and manages only to gaze at the desired body of the other from a distance.

Frank's description of his "perverse closeness" (115) to Laurence, I would argue, suggests that he is uneasy about his feelings for another man and thus he regards these emotions he experiences as being perverse.<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere he also refers to "a perverse comfort" (182) that he experiences when he is very close to Colonel Moller. Frank experiences unease when he feels too intimate and close to another man, and he construes such intimacy as deviating from what is regarded as normal behaviour between two men. According to Brown (1995: 3) closeness towards another person implies "a sense of responsibility about the commitment" and may even be "frightening" to some. Frank does not want to share his life with Laurence, as intimacy with Laurence implies sacrificing his independence. Instead of spending the night with his girlfriend after her

welcoming party, Laurence returns to the room and expresses his admiration for Frank (“You were fantastic, Frank” – 92). Laurence expects a sense of commitment and intimacy from Frank but his relationship with Zanele is more platonic and intellectual than physical. Frank feels obliged (94) to spend time with Laurence and his girlfriend but true to his macho, heterosexual nature, he also probably feels obliged to engage sexually with Zanele, because her relationship with Laurence lacks that facet. However, the “entangle[ment] in [Laurence’s] personal affairs” (94) causes Frank to resent Laurence and immediately he wishes to create a distance between them. Therefore it is ironic that Laurence mentions that he thought Frank “[had] run out on [him]” (94) because it is indeed what Frank contemplates doing, because he does not want to show his vulnerability to Laurence, and he does not want to reveal that he needs Laurence’s presence in his life. Brown (1995: 3) explains that a fear of intimacy is often “a fear of rejection” and if we consider Frank’s past and the way in which his friend, Mike, had betrayed him years ago when Mike had an affair with Karen, Frank’s wife, it explains why he finds an intimate exchange with Laurence somehow frightening.

The room in which the welcoming party for Zanele takes place functions as a microcosm of South African society. It suggests that the only way in which men from different racial backgrounds in the country can really come together and forget about their past experiences, is within the context of a party atmosphere with artificial goodwill, temporary acceptance of one another and with a frenzied sense of madness fuelled by alcohol and music. Only in such a context is it possible for Frank to come to the realisation that Tehogo’s “grinning, sweating face [that] seemed mad to [him]” (90) is

actually his own mirror image. This moment of self-recognition calls to mind the conversation that Frank has with Laurence after Tehogo's attack, when Frank denies that Tehogo has any symbolic role to play in his life (194). The notion of a mirror image is significant because throughout the novel the different men and their depictions of masculinity act as mirror images of one another: Frank's subservient position as medical doctor who has to obey his Colonel (64) is a mirror image of Frank's own torture and humiliation of Tehogo (195). Masculine power is vested in the one who is in the position of authority (Connell, 1987: 109). For instance, whereas Frank has no masculine power in the presence of Moller, once he has Tehogo as his "object of control" (Foucault, 1977: 137) he is the powerful one and he is able to fit the image of a "tough, dominant and combative masculinity" (Connell, 1987:110). Similarly Frank and Laurence are also mirror images of one another and the idealistic and young Laurence is a mirror image of the older, cynical Frank.



The need to avenge Laurence is based on Frank's perception that Laurence is a Trojan horse who has managed to come "within the gates" (161). Frank even compares his malicious nature to "a dark brother" (162), a "temporary resident" (162) who enjoys, in a sadistic manner, Laurence's ethical dilemmas (such as Maria's abortion – 159) and emotional suffering. By forcing Laurence into a state of emotional confusion, Frank can triumph in the proof that he, by contrast, embodies a traditional assumption about masculinity, namely that men are rational, disciplined and in control of their emotions (Whitehead and Barrett, 2001: 17). Laurence is reduced to someone who embodies traditional attributes associated with femininity, such as docility, passivity, feebleness

and sensitivity. This also corresponds to the conventional assumption that in a relationship, the male is the active and dominant party. I even want to suggest that it provides an interesting subtext for the homoeroticism that lurks below the surface of their interaction, in that Frank sees himself as the active party in the relationship and Laurence is the passive, receptive one. <sup>7</sup>

Frank's split personality is further the result of his disdain for the way in which Laurence has managed to accomplish a respected position within the community. In the period that he has been at the hospital, Frank accepted his position and has done nothing to improve the conditions at the hospital. Even when he eventually moves into Dr Ngema's position as head of the hospital, he acknowledges that "[they] are not doing very much of anything, in fact" (214). Frank's character fits in with the stereotypical description of the male office worker who does very little work but who knows that one day he will get his promotion. He has had to sacrifice his promotion years ago as a result of affirmative action policies and accepts the appointment over him of a black woman, but he has remained resolute in awaiting the day when he will be made the head of the institution.

His malicious undermining of Laurence, however, is in direct contrast to the times when Frank and Laurence co-operate with each other, particularly when Frank tells Laurence about his time in the army (60). In the post-apartheid society portrayed in the text it is striking to note to what extent the military is still a dominant force. The soldiers invade the tranquillity of the town and Mama Mthembu's place, which has been a haven where

“[e]very bored civil servant and off-duty worker” (39), as well as “scatterings of clerks and farmers and workers” (95) can come for a drink, is now invaded by the presence of the soldiers. This “full contingent of soldiers” (95) is one homogenous group of men and the only individual that is mentioned among them, is Colonel Moller (98). In contrast to the other men who sit in the bar, the soldiers are disciplined and are in town for a purpose, namely to ensure safety on the border. Frank associates the presence of the military with “the bad old days” (99) and with the killing of people in “a shit-hole in the bush” (99), but to Mama Mthembu their presence is “good for business” (82). Military masculinity has always been associated with financial gain especially since the soldiers spend their spare money (and time) in the place where they are stationed. Another example of someone who has benefited from a life in the military, is the puppet dictator, the Brigadier, who “overthrew the homeland government in a military coup” (36), and who is still a force to be reckoned with in the text, especially since Frank links him with Maria and with Tehogo’s disappearance. The dictator’s mansion (“that big place on the hill”-102), in contrast to the dilapidated hospital and the shack in which Maria has to live, is a constant reminder of the way in which being associated with the military has benefited him financially.

In the old South Africa, with its forced conscription (60), being in the military was regarded as a rite of passage and young men became part of an all-male hierarchy that separated them “physical[ly] and symbolic[ally] from the world of women” (Donald, 2001: 174) – indeed a form of “alternative masculinity” as Mann (2003: 74) describes it. The presence of the soldiers (ironically seen as “a sign of renewed life” by the



townspeople- 181) confirms the impression of their aggressive masculinity and acts as a constant reminder of violent militarily organised aggression and the notion of men as killing machines.

Frank's awareness of the presence of Colonel Moller, the former Commandant Moller from Frank's past, forces him to recall his army experiences. His horror about his experiences in the army is also in reaction to Laurence's near veneration of conscription so that Frank is forced to recall what has become "more like a blankness" (61) to him. The naïve Laurence observes that he would have liked the "formative experience" (61) of serving in the army and suggests that he supports the notion that conscription enacts some rite of passage. Thompson (2001: 100) points out that the army was supposed to nurture the "macho qualities of assertiveness, bravery and enduring pain" in the young conscripts and in similar vein, Galgut (in Wilmot, 1995: 131) remarks that, "It's very difficult to fit in a male system like the military ... because of the values that you have to take on." Frank's experience of the military (64-67) shows that he associates it with brutality, racism and complete disregard for human life. Even the medical profession becomes an instrument in the hands of the torturers, because the doctor is called in to determine how much more torture a particular victim can take during interrogation. Within the insulated world of the military, Frank violates the Hippocratic Oath, and in particular the part that reads, "I consider the benefit of my patients, and abstain from whatever is deleterious and mischievous. I will give no deadly medicine to any one if asked, nor suggest any such counsel" (*The Internet Classics Archive*). As a doctor he is obliged to be compassionate and serve his patients, but now he has to violate his beliefs to serve the cruel and

inhumane military apparatus of the state. In this “inverted world” (66) characterised by brutal masculinity, there is no opportunity “to heal and repair” (66).

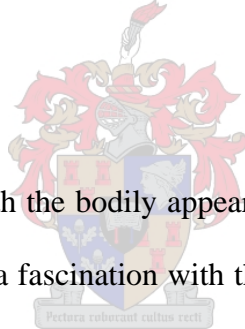
A startling aspect of Frank’s recollection of that particular night is the way in which he describes Commandant Moller’s body, and throughout the novel there is a homoerotic fixation with the aggressive masculinity of the Commandant. The body of the powerful military figure is turned into a fetish, and described as “not unattractive, with the cold, symmetrical face of a religious idol” (64). Frank as the focaliser and narrator comments on the body in its “brown army pants and boots and white T-shirt” (64) – a figure in complete contrast to the naked and hurt black body of the powerless victim at his feet. The reference to the “religious idol” conjures up associations of veneration, adoration and propitiation, whereas the position of the broken body at the feet suggests that the interrogated man is a sacrifice at the altar of the religious idol. Similarly Frank is also sacrificed because he cannot challenge the authority of the dominant male who is in command within the context of the military. Masculinity in the military context implies, after all, total obedience and subservience to authority. If Frank wants to assure his position as an aspiring doctor in a militarised society, then he has to please the Commandant and not pay attention to his own conscience: “It is myself I must look after, so that I don’t find myself in his place, naked on my back in a cell, not a doctor any more, a patient for whom there will never be a cure” (66). Frank encounters what Heyns (1994: 4) calls “this form of male camaraderie and a political system that finds its logical conclusion in killing.” Frank’s veneration and his almost erotic fascination with the

strong male figure, is again a mirror image and in this instance it calls to mind Laurence's subsequently expressed veneration of Frank.

In this system of exclusive masculine power the Commandant is the alpha male or leader of the pack and all his subalterns, ranging from the "corporal who'd brought the summons" (63) to the "four soldiers ... two of them ... officers" (64) present during the interrogation, are subservient to him. They endure his leadership because they may eventually also move through the ranks and assume his position of power. They fear him just as Frank acknowledges to himself that "[he] was afraid of the commandant and what he could do to him [Frank]" (64). Frank's position as doctor and healer is used to serve the military machine at the helm of affairs in apartheid society. The fact that Frank has to convey the Commandant's regards to the Captain suggests that Frank will eventually be rewarded for his services (66).<sup>8</sup> It does not transpire and Frank ends up in "a dull camp" (67) where he learns to accept his "failure" (67) – a situation similar to the one in which he finds himself in the rural hospital at present. This intricate network of hierarchies and interaction between the respective officers illustrates what Foucault (1980: 142) says in the following passage about power: "[R]elations of power are interwoven with other kinds of relations (production, kinship, family, sexuality); for which they play at once a conditioning and a conditioned role."

When Frank encounters Moller several years later in Mama Mthembu's, there is still the fascination with the "lean body [that is] generating a disproportionate power" (99). Compare also the following description of Moller, as reported by Frank: "I could see his

neck and the straight line of his haircut. He wasn't in uniform tonight. He was wearing jeans and a blue T-shirt... I watched the blond hairs on his arm change colour in the light" (182). Frank's gaze is loaded with eroticism but his description focuses only on the body and negates any awareness of the face of the other man. The following remark by Pronger (1990: 144) clearly describes an underlying eroticism evident in Frank's bodily obsession with Moller: "Paradoxical masculinity takes the traditional signs of patriarchal masculinity and filters them through an ironic gay lens. Signs such as muscles, which in heterosexual culture highlight masculine gender by pointing out the power men have over women and the power they have to resist other men, through gay irony emerge as *enticements* [his emphasis –] to homoerotic desire – a desire that is anathema to orthodox masculinity." <sup>9</sup>



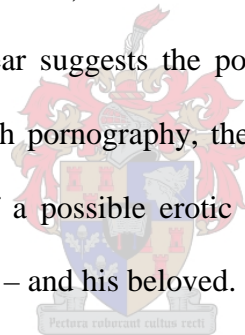
Not only is Frank preoccupied with the bodily appearance and the powerful physique of the Commandant, but he has also a fascination with the body of Laurence, which further supports the notion of repressed homoerotic feelings on his part. Zanele brings the issue to the fore when she confronts Frank with the fact that he and Laurence are "obviously in love with each other" (101); a remark that leaves Frank speechless. During Frank and Laurence's exploration of the countryside, Frank takes off his clothes and swims in the pool (70) whereas Laurence merely watches. When Laurence finally decides to take off his shirt, he is described as having a "pale, hairless chest, knobby with bones" (71). The inference drawn from this description is that Laurence is still young and innocent with an almost boyish look and that he lacks the stereotypical hairy chest as a sign of virility or

masculinity.<sup>10</sup> His shyness about his seemingly less masculine body is indicative of his timid homoerotic feelings for Frank.

Elsewhere in the novel, Frank even goes as far as describing Laurence as “almost sexless” (130). That supports this notion of a lack of potency and virility associated with Laurence. What we also learn from this incident is that Frank is usually “the shy one” within the space of the bedroom, but out here in the open, “the roles are somehow reversed” (71). Frank is the shyer of the two because he does not feel at ease to display his naked body to another man, but it also suggests that he is afraid that he might give in to his feeling of suppressed homoeroticism towards other men. Kimmel (2001: 277) points out that the great fear associated with manhood is that “[they] are afraid of other men” and that other men will “unmask us, emasculate us, reveal to us and the world that we do not measure up.” Laurence’s presence has already unmasked Frank’s lack of commitment to the betterment of the lives of the people in the rural areas and subsequently there is the fear that Laurence might also unmask his sexual vulnerability. He has to keep up the façade of being a lusty and virile heterosexual. The repression of supposedly homoerotic feelings for one another hence results in competitive displays of masculinity between the two men.

The reversal of roles forms an integral part of the interaction between Frank and Laurence and one central passage in this regard occurs after Laurence’s return from Maria’s shack, where he had to perform an abortion. Frank notices that Laurence immediately goes into the bathroom where he can hear the sound of Laurence “washing

himself over and over” (168). This suggests that he tries to cleanse himself not only physically but also emotionally and wants to remove all signs of the abortion that he had only just performed on Maria as an indication that he feels guilty or nauseated by this destruction of a potential life – in a way a macho male is not supposed to feel. The fact that he appears naked in the room has connotations of rebirth and innocence, but it also hints at his exposure and humiliation in Frank’s eyes. In contrast to Frank, he is not shy to appear naked in front of the other man and is usually depicted as being at ease with and in his body. Given the repressed homoeroticism of the relationship and the sense of expectation that is created throughout the novel, it is significant that Frank finds himself – in his underwear – on Laurence’s bed, and Laurence “sat on [Frank’s] bed” (168). The fact that Frank is in his underwear suggests the possibility of an erotic encounter. In popular romances, in contrast with pornography, the hero is often depicted only in his underwear to suggest the idea of a possible erotic encounter, but his phallus remains hidden from the gaze of the reader – and his beloved.



Both men are seen as “stripped down in the disarray of the room” (168), which suggests that the facades that they have been holding up to each other have now been stripped away. The understated homoeroticism is once again hinted at, but there is no real emotional intimacy between them. Kimmel’s remark that “[h]omophobic flight from intimacy with other men is the repudiation of the homosexual within” (2001: 276) is applicable here. From a masculine point of view, the fulfilment of erotic desires can occur without intimacy and emotional involvement but because of both men’s repressed homoeroticism, there is no physical contact between them either. Laurence has now

become “a stranger” (168) to Frank, suggesting that he has been stripped of his naivety. Frank also apportions blame to Laurence for being an intruder in their close-knit community: “We were all okay here. It was all going along fine. Then you came. And you couldn’t leave everything as it was. No, you had to make it better” (168). Frank sees that there is nothing left of Laurence’s “pride and confidence” (159), which he showed after the staff meeting. At the staff meeting Laurence was the centre of attention and his enthusiasm rubbed off on all present and filled them with “fresh energy” (154). Frank at that time felt that his position in the hierarchy of the hospital as the second in command was in jeopardy, since “[n]obody was speaking to [him] in quite the same way any more” (157).

The only way to escape into the “the hard, cold place deep inside” (159) where he has no sense of compassion for others, is to put Laurence in a moral dilemma. Laurence has to terminate Maria’s pregnancy without Frank’s help. Frank is unable to undermine what he calls Laurence’s “grand symbolic gestures” (159) such as starting a clinic in the rural areas. “[T]he moment reality rose up” (159), when Laurence is forced to do the operation on Maria and go against his conscience, then Laurence is unable to cope with the situation, mainly when he has to do so without the assistance of his mentor and substitute father figure, Frank. This recalls Frank’s remark to Zanele when he berates her and tells her “to lose [her] African outfits and [her] fake name” (100). To him any suggestion of change or any attempt at improving the status quo is artificial, futile and self-centred.<sup>11</sup> Dr Ngema even suggests that he might be a racist: “I can see you have no idea of what it means to be a black person in this country. Only your own life is real to you” (210). Not

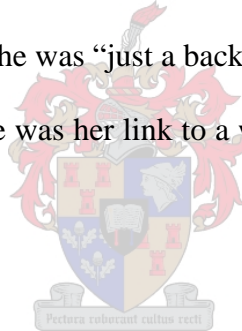
only is Frank cynical and critical about other people's endeavours, but he reveals himself to be a manipulator as well. Subtly and silently, he works towards the breaking down of Laurence's powerful position as the energetic and enthusiastic newcomer.

Frank and Laurence end up in each other's beds with the realisation that although "[they] were in the wrong beds" (170), it does not matter. They have invaded each other's private and intimate spaces completely. They have even swapped personalities as well, because Frank suddenly experiences a sense of heaviness. He now displays Laurence's former sense of duty and responsibility, which is evident from his decision to clean their room first, before going out to pay a follow-up visit to Maria. The cleansing ritual, which started with Laurence's bath, results in an analysis of one another's characters and their respective roles serve the community or functioning within it as doctors. Elsewhere in the novel Frank mentions that "[t]wo could play at this pseudo-psychology of [Laurence's]" (46), and that is exactly what now transpires between the two. The conclusion of this is that Frank has to acknowledge to Laurence and himself that he is not willing to do something about his predicament. He is also told that he is not part of the "new country" (169) being built around him. Frank symbolises the white male who is content with his position and who does not want to work towards the betterment of society. He is seen as someone who "say[s] no to everything" (170).

Yet, the next morning the roles are reversed and Frank reveals a renewed sense of purpose, but it is self-centred and only focused on serving his own interests. For the first time he sees Maria as "solid and warm and real" (171), which suggests that he has



discovered some inner compassion for her. He has abused her in a dual way and attempts to correct his behaviour to set the balance right. Firstly he abused her by turning her into a sex object to satisfy his desires and secondly, he exploited her to get at Laurence and turn her into an “abstract problem” (171) that Laurence had to resolve. Frank decides to clean their room (171) and in a symbolic gesture, rids the room of “an offensive mark” (172), which suggests that he has rid the room of Laurence’s presence – showing a complete lack of compassion for Laurence. He realises now that he has abused Maria and he is trying to clear his conscience and renew his friendship with her with a sense of something “almost like love” (173)- perhaps as an attempt to use her to re-establish a macho or at least heterosexual identity. Ironically Frank draws the conclusion that Maria also exploited him, because to her he was “just a background detail, bringing mystery and disturbance” (213) into her life. He was her link to a world outside of the shack, the shop and life with her husband.



The final encounter between Frank and Laurence suggests that Frank is out to avenge himself on all the other men who cross his path. Such behaviour is typical of the weak and spiteful non-alpha male who clings to a heterosexual self-definition. He has started with Laurence and now it is Tehogo’s turn. Frank wants to restore his dominant presence in the hospital; he remembers the “trace of petulance” (197) on Laurence’s face and enjoys the hurt he inflicts upon the latter, particularly because it reminds him of the restoration of his power over him. In the end he has the “false peace of resignation” (215) he so desires. The hospital is the domain where he, as Moller did in the army camp, can exercise his control over others and acts out the role of the alpha male.

Frank sees the sharing of his room with Laurence as a pivotal moment in his life (215), but being in the same room as the young, ambitious Laurence did nothing to awaken compassion for others in Frank. He blatantly abuses Laurence's good work with the clinics "to bolster [his] own argument" (214) so that he can convince the department not to close the hospital of which he is now in charge "after seven years of waiting" (215). In the end he has disposed of all the men who were real challenges to him and his authority and it is only Jorge who remains behind. Jorge is no real threat to him and Frank even had a brief affair with Claudia Santander; an affair that he describes as "very powerful – lust fuelled by grief" (52). Frank has a problem of intimacy not only with the women in his life, but also with the men - as can be deduced from his interaction with Laurence. He openly distrusts other men and he assures himself that he "wasn't made of the same fine stuff as Frank Eloff senior" (139). The relationship with the father is formative for the masculinity of the son, and in Frank's case there was always "pressure on him" because "[he] had something to prove" (137) to his father. His father is portrayed as a heroic figure who saved the lives of "six or seven miners" (136) and who became "the poster boy" of "the big white dream" (136).

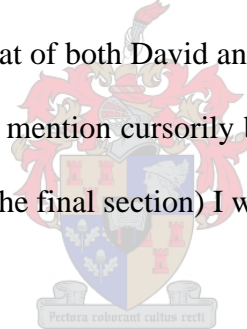
Frank's inability to emulate his father's success story as a well-known and respected surgeon and lecturer explains his lack of ambition, of wealth and of power. He can only exercise power over a group of weak, mostly female characters such as a poor black woman, an unhappy married woman, a confused American woman with an identity crisis and a very young, ambitious doctor engaged in his community service. He is incapable of

standing up to Commandant Moller and to Frank Senior and is excluded from their world which is characterised by violence, military precision, a strong work ethic aimed at making money and “a comfortable, complicit, white lifestyle” (Van der Vlies, 2003). In the eyes of the world Frank is not man enough to make a success of his life as his father was, which explains why he feels attracted to strong male figures and derides weaklings such as Laurence, because it reminds him of what he sees as his own failure as man. In contrast to his, Frank’s father’s life is a patriarchal success story. As son and heir he does not continue the bloodline of the successful Eloff family.

In the end Frank is “unable to give of [himself]” (Kerfoot, 2001: 250) and his life becomes a struggle “to retain control of the organizational sites wherein such masculinity is reproduced” (Kerfoot, 2001: 250). He has waited the biblical seven years for his appointment as head of the hospital, and no man will be allowed to stand in the way of his accomplishing that. In the end his macho façade is replaced by a realisation that he has abused Maria and he tries to make amends.<sup>12</sup> She turns out to be the only woman towards whom he feels some affection and he pleads with Moller to see to it that she “mustn’t be hurt” (184). Even though Frank is seen as not being “part of the new country” (169), his late realisation of his love for a black woman suggests that he is willing to adapt to the changes in the country in order to rescue Maria from her life as an impoverished shopkeeper living with an abusive husband. His relationship with Laurence, however, had soured and became more cruel and exploitative particularly because as his alter ego, Laurence, reminded him of his emotional side and his repressed or latent homosexuality. The only way in which to cope with this is to suppress any

feelings or emotions that are not associated with masculine behaviour. In the end he opts for a macho façade to provide him with his “false peace of resignation” (215).

Significantly, this final novel in the series selected for the analysis of masculinity in a variety of South African contexts in recently published male-authored texts serves as appropriate culmination point to this thesis. It vividly reflects some of the crucial concerns of white masculinity in particular, as elucidated in my earlier analyses: Frank’s selfish disregard for others echoes that of David Lurie; his sexual prowess and lustful exploits of women call to mind Ruben and the white characters in *The Madonna of Excelsior* (particularly Frank’s sexual exploitation of a black woman); his marital problems show similarities with that of both David and Ruben; and his fear of intimacy is similar to that of David Lurie – to mention cursorily but a few of these correspondences. In the conclusion to my thesis (in the final section) I will expand on this in more detail.



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<sup>1</sup> Page references to Galgut (2003). The title is taken from Galgut (2003: 168).

<sup>2</sup> The novel also has striking similarities with the tradition of the Theatre of the Absurd. The bleak setting, the despair and the hopelessness, and the futility of the characters' everyday existence as doctors in a hospital without patients or equipment, calls to mind the absurdity of the human condition, or as Esslin (1980: 399) defines it: “[A search] for a way in which they can, with dignity, confront a universe deprived of what was once its centre and its living purpose, a world deprived of a generally accepted integrating principle, which has become disjointed, purposeless – absurd.” See also Yeoh (2003) for a similar reading of Coetzee's *Disgrace*.

<sup>3</sup> Compare in this regard Gagiano (2001: 31-46) for her comments on “African machismo”. She also mentions “competitive masculinity” as one element of the culture of machismo. Lancaster (2002: 45) gives examples of Latino men who boast about their sexual experiences and thus gain status in the eyes of their male counterparts.

<sup>4</sup> Contrast his relationship with his wife to his sexual relationship with Maria. It is ironic that Karen expresses the wish to get together with Frank's “lady friend” (143). In the rural areas Frank's life is in direct contrast to that of his ex-wife. He has become a pariah in their world: “I almost laughed. It was absurd to think of Maria amongst these people – even among this furniture. And I saw how far I had moved from the *normal* way of things” (143- my italics). Their superficial, affluent way of living is seen as the norm.

<sup>5</sup> The mouth is associated with kissing but as Hartley (1996: 4) points out, kissing in heterosexual relations “may be publicly displayed”, but in the case of homosexual relations there is a “strongly prohibitive socio-legal prejudice against the public display of homosexual kissing.”

<sup>6</sup> This calls to mind Foucault's reference to the “perverse implantation” (1978: 36) when he discusses the “sexual heterogeneities” and in particular the Church's disdain for “an aberration” such as the sodomite.

<sup>7</sup> Mirande (2001: 346) points out that homosexuality “is defined not by object choice but by the distribution of power.” The active partner is the one who penetrates, whereas the other assumes the “passive insertee role” (Mirande, 2001: 346).

<sup>8</sup> Compare also in this regard Commandant Moller's remark: “The Brigadier is dead. There is no brigadier. Except me – in a few years, Doctor, I will be brigadier” (185).

<sup>9</sup> Compare also Frank's description of Moller's physique when he pays him a visit in his room (188) when he provides us with a voyeuristic description of Moller's intimate space outside the military context. Frank is fascinated by the “[c]amouflage pants [and the] brown boots” , the accoutrements of military masculinity

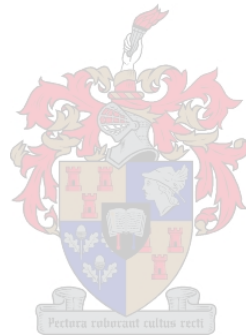
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and virility. The object of his eroticised gaze has “taken off his shirt” and he is aware of his “smooth, and almost hairless [upper half of Moller’s body]” (188). Incidentally, Laurence also has a “pale, hairless chest” (77), which, I aver, implies that Frank has an erotic fascination with smooth-bodied men. The description of the room as having a “nude austerity” (188) is a Freudian slip, because for the first time Frank sees Moller in the semi-nude. Significant is the observation that “a disassembled rifle” (188) is lying on the table, suggesting a lack of phallic potency.

<sup>10</sup> Throughout the text the emphasis is mostly on Laurence’s boyish looks and his somewhat adolescent-style behaviour – (2, 37, 43, 56, 72, 97, 129, 130, 151, 159). This immediately distinguishes him from the more cynical, adult-like Frank, who is portrayed as sexually promiscuous, divorced and who has been in his job for years – to mention but a few so-called mature characteristics. Given the subtly homoerotic subtext of the novel, the beautiful, boyish Laurence represents “one of the west’s great sexual personae” (Paglia, 1990: 110), namely the beautiful boy with his “male muscle structure but [with] a dewy girliness.”

<sup>11</sup> Compare Frank’s words in this regard: “What did you achieve? Nothing. Talk, talk, talk. A lecture about Aids. A lecture on hygiene and health. For God’s sake, Laurence. Those people need drugs and treatment, but of course they’re not available. All you can give them, is talk” (169).

<sup>12</sup> A striking contrast is Frank Senior’s treatment of Betty (146) which serves as a definite indication of the patriarchal masculine power over the black female subordinate and the humiliation that goes with working for him.



## Conclusion

Cornwall and Lindisfarne (1994: 1) start their introduction to *Dislocating Masculinity: Comparative Ethnographies*, as follows:

Over the last few years there has been a surge of interest in the study of men and masculinity. We are told that on both sides of the Atlantic men are starting to respond to the challenges of feminism. Women and gay men are no longer “the problem” to be unravelled. Now the spotlight is on the heterosexual male. Fresh definitions of “masculinity” abound, affirming old myths in attempts to create new males. From “the wounded man” to the “new man”, images of reconstructed men appear on advertising bill-boards and television and in magazines and newspapers.<sup>1</sup>

This present study of six male-authored novels from the post-apartheid period in South African writing confirms the remarks made by Cornwall and Lindisfarne above, since their attempt is also an attempt to (re-) examine the notion of “masculinity” and suggests to what extent there are indeed “[f]resh definitions” thereof in the analysed works. The emphasis in this study was not only on the portrayal of “the heterosexual male”, who, from a patriarchal point of view, embodies specific qualities associated with what is meant by masculinity and manliness, but also on the homosexual male, who is regarded as deviant and who transgresses the norms of society. By studying “male-authored” presentations of masculinity, I wish to argue that such research provides us with some insights into male-centered views on what men do, what men think and how men react to their environment, whilst at the same time, understanding that one cannot “[conflate]

depicted characters' ideas and beliefs with those of authors" (Gagiano, 2004: 38). Adapting Kaplan (1985: 38) slightly in this regard, my approach focused on interpreting the studies of the images of men in the works of male authors to establish, and among others, "how an author's own absorption of patriarchal values [and views on masculinity] might cause [him] to create [male] characters who fulfil society's stereotypes of [men]." Accordingly, my analyses have shown to what extent male authors deconstruct stereotypical notions of masculinity, especially in the light of the reconciliatory interaction between men in the post-apartheid society depicted in the novels under discussion.

In their investigation into the role of masculinity and gender in African studies, Lindsay and Miescher (2003: 1) point out that whilst gender plays a major role in African studies nowadays, "men have rarely been the subject of research on gender in Africa." Accordingly, the male subject served as "a backdrop in the examination of women's experiences" (Lindsay and Miescher, 2003: 1) and has only recently become the subject of critical investigation. Ouzgane and Morrell (2005: 1) agree with this assumption and suggest that with "the burgeoining of work on gender in Africa" a critical analysis of masculinities on the continent needs to be undertaken. My study contributes to this ongoing debate but it should be emphasized that the depiction of masculinity in a series of male-authored texts is only a point of departure to establish "which institutions promoted specific notions of masculinity, how they did this, and in what contexts" (Lindsay and Miescher, 2003: 7).



Broadly speaking, the novels depict the following issues regarding masculinity: the interaction between men, the older (white) male and his experience of his sexuality, the young urban black man and his views on promiscuity and his interaction with women, the depiction of both black and white males in the rural areas and their interaction, particularly in times of political turmoil, the search for a masculine identity in the case of the young black gay man, and the stereotypical macho man who is unable to show his emotions during his interactions with other men in the workplace, as well as references to masculinity in a military context.

With regard to the portrayal of older white men in the novels studied such as *Disgrace* and *The Rights of Desire*, it is evident that they experience a sense of loss in the post-apartheid setting. Some have had to retire as a result of affirmative action, but the impression is created that they are still in a socioeconomic position of influence and affluence and that they live comfortably. As a result of their strong financial position in society, they are able to live out their sexual fantasies by hiring sex workers for sexual gratification. Young women (both black and white – and I qualify this, given the apartheid period’s obsession with interracial relations) have a definite sexual attraction for them, which may result in sexual exploitation or violence, should they feel the desire to satisfy their lust. <sup>2</sup>

Older white males are also portrayed as selfish and not compassionate towards others. They are self-centred and their needs and desires get preference – as was the case during the patriarchal apartheid years when white men were still in power.

In contrast, the younger generation of white men are more idealistic and aim to redress the past. Even in the rural areas there is an attempt to reconcile and reach out to black people, particularly to those who are the children and grandchildren of the black people who suffered at the hands of whites. The impression is also created that these young men feel that they can assist with the reconstruction and development of the new post-apartheid society. Whereas the older men lack “the virtues of the old” such as “equanimity, kindness and patience” (Coetzee, 1999: 217), the young black and white men are trying to find, in the words of Duiker (2001: 455), “blueprints for survival, for building a new civilisation, a new way of life.”

Within this new civilisation, however, dominant black masculinity is, in some cases, portrayed as a continuation of the past practices associated with white men. There is a strong desire to possess land, to use women as a sexual commodity and to exercise their power over women in particular. There is also a strong sense of duality in the urban black male’s perception of what is regarded as good moral behaviour and what is not. There is a stronger sense of brotherhood and camaraderie among heterosexual black men than is the case with the white males in the different novels under discussion – but this is not portrayed as resulting in any significant improvement of women’s social or sexual status.

In contrast to this black heterosexual camaraderie, the world of the black homosexual is characterised by sexual violence, sometimes even as a result of jealousy or class differences. Intimate spheres such as gay bars and brothels are seen as the ideal place to

pursue one's sense of identity because outside these spaces, in particular in the rural areas, homosexual behaviour is seen as not being part of black culture. Woods (2001: 163) refers to the "heteronormative paradigm" that is specifically applied in the case of black Africans, which regards homosexuality as belonging to "the make-believe world of white gays."

A common denominator with regard to masculinity in a post-apartheid society is the association of masculinity with violence. Linked to this is the issue of honour: a man needs to be strong to defend a woman's honour and if he is unable to do so, then often his only option is to commit suicide. Each of the respective male characters is also associated with some or other weapon: from David Lurie who wishes that he had a gun to protect him and his daughter, to Ruben Olivier who wants to ward off the young men's knives with a cane, to the Colonel with his revolver and the soldiers with their guns. Due to the phallic symbolism associated with the weapons, the reader immediately comes to the conclusion that masculinity is associated with violent sexuality. This, together with the prevalence of rape and sexual abuse in all of the texts under discussion, inevitably suggests that the South African men portrayed in the texts under discussion are sexually violent or live in a society where rampant sexual violence against and/or exploitation – especially of women and gay men by heterosexual males - is at the order of the day.

My analysis of six male-authored novels corroborates what Faludi (1999: 9) captures, to some extent, as the essence of masculinity as expressed in these novels: "The underlying message [is]: men cannot be men, only eunuchs, if they are not in control."

Interestingly enough, this assumption is shared by Visagie (2004) who comes to the conclusion after his exploration of masculinity in a selection of texts by Afrikaans authors, that despite an emphasis on diversity when it comes to the portrayal of masculinity, all the texts - incidentally they are also all male-authored - “maintain a certain relationship with hegemonic masculinity.” Even though contemporary men try to be more sensitive, more understanding of the needs of women and attempt to be more accommodating in accepting women’s improved societal position, patriarchal tradition still plays a very important role in men’s views on women, sexuality and intimacy between the sexes, because (as Phaswane Mpe puts it so poignantly) “Tiralong was in Hillbrow. You always took Tiralong with you in your consciousness whenever you came to Hillbrow or any other place” (2001: 49). In other words, the past and its attitudes are powerfully persistent presences in the supposedly new South Africa – sexually as much as racially. The overall impression one gets from studying a range of views of masculinity in the different novels under discussion is that existing views on masculinity are not contested and men that feel most comfortable in their patriarchally entrenched positions of power.

The texts under discussion were all published after the first democratic elections in South Africa in April 1994. Hopefully this investigation into the portrayal of masculinity will not only lay the basis for further critical interventions of this nature but will contribute to the ongoing debate on gender and masculinity in a society that was up till now characterised as being “one of the last bastions of chauvinism” (Athol Fugard, as quoted by Morrell, 2001:3).

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<sup>1</sup> Cornwall and Lindisfarne (1994: 28) are of the opinion that the study of masculinity “must also embrace prior studies of women and femaleness” and should also “locate discussions of masculinity in the history of gender studies.” Subsequently many studies of masculinity do indeed “share a common goal with feminist scholars” (Cornwall and Lindisfarne, 1994: 29).

<sup>2</sup> Compare Warnes (2005:5) who characterises novels such as the ones written by Coetzee, Brink and Galgut discussed in this thesis as “literary responses to the deliberate and necessary devaluation of white masculinity in South Africa in the post-apartheid period.” And, further on, that Coetzee and Galgut “clothe their protagonists’ failings in the accountments of modernist high seriousness – ennui, alienation and despair.”



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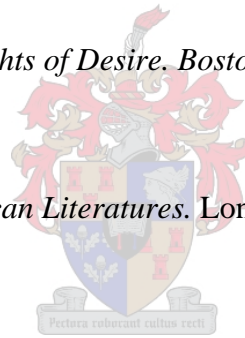
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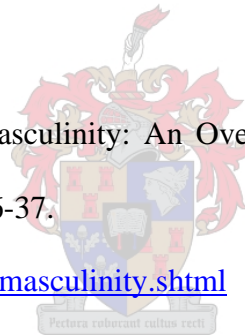
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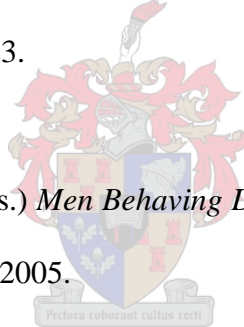
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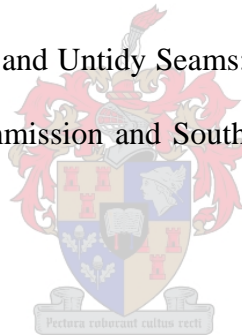
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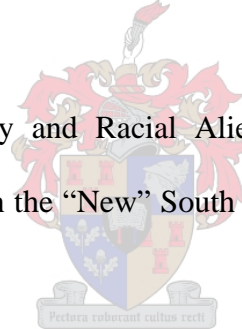
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