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## Apartheid Haunts: Postcolonial Trauma in Lisa Fugard's *Skinner's Drift*

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When post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was officially recognized by the American Psychiatric Association in 1980, it marked a breakthrough for those who believed the condition played a defining role in shaping contemporary culture. Since this date, interest in the traumatic, described by Sigmund Freud as “any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break the [mind’s] protective shield” (607), has grown rapidly. Trauma has been called a symptom of the age (Miller and Tougaw 1), and the twentieth century has been marked as an era of “historical trauma,” incorporating “occasions for communal mourning too numerous to chronicle” (Henke xi). Recognized, variously, as a phenomenon of delayed response, an assault on the categories of identity, “a disorder of memory” (Leys 2), and a spiritual, psychic, or mental injury (Gilmore 25), this new conceptualization of trauma has struck a chord within an unsettled society which has experienced countless horrors and tragedies, and which finds itself constantly haunted, through the immediate, arresting insistence of the media, by the past.

Trauma studies’ growth can be attributed to its exposure of the significant long-term effects of traumatic experience on individuals. In highlighting the suffering of various groups of marginalized peoples (for example, oppressed women, war veterans, victims of genocide, the sexually or physically abused, and the terminally ill), trauma studies has drawn attention to those often forgotten, and highlighted the importance of addressing the pain of wounds to the psyche and exploring possibilities for individuals and collective groups to recover. This represents a

natural progression within critical studies, which, since the 1970s, has increasingly highlighted the experiences of minority groups. However, trauma studies has to date been largely pre-occupied with Western experiences of (and Western perspectives on) trauma. This is largely the consequence of ongoing negotiations with the Holocaust, which have produced the most fruitful critical discourse on trauma and out of which trauma studies emerged in the 1990s. This field has incorporated many disciplines, including psychoanalysis, history, literature, film, photography, art, and even science. A great deal of trauma studies argues for the centrality of the Holocaust to the current age; for example, Andreas Huyssen sees it as “the ultimate cipher of an unspeakable trauma that must never be forgotten yet can never be completely spoken” (1), and Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub describe it as “the watershed of our times . . . a history which is essentially *not over*, a history whose repercussions are not simply omnipresent (whether consciously or not) in all our cultural activities, but whose traumatic consequences are still actively *evolving* . . . in today’s political, historical, cultural and artistic scene” (xiv). It is this recognition of the Holocaust’s far-reaching and ongoing traumatic legacy upon which trauma studies currently rests.

However, trauma studies’ failure to examine non-Western and postcolonial contexts of trauma means it has become guilty of the same kinds of omissions and “forgetting” which its own theory argues is detrimental to the processes of recovery and healing. As Huyssen suggests, written large is the command to remember, and forgetting is chastised as somehow unethical, politically incorrect, or worse. “Never again” is the sublime command of this early 21st-century, and the guarantee against repetition is held to be remembrance. At the same time, unspeakable repetitions occur all the time—in reality and on TV. Remember

Bosnia. Remember Rwanda. What good was memory here? And how many other places are there in the world whose ingrained violence doesn't even appear on our screens and can thus be neither remembered nor forgotten. Thus we should not look to all this memory work as a prop to our conscience. It does have its insidious, compensatory side. The universalized "never again" command and with it the instrumentalization of memory for political purposes have become a veil covering ongoing atrocities in our present world. The Holocaust is a screen memory. We have to face the hard question: to what extent are the public memory rituals of our culture at the same time strategies of forgetting? (18-19)

This tendency towards a selective memory of the traumatic is evident in the emerging studies of the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001, which have stimulated further interest—and new directions—in studies of trauma. In *Trauma Culture*, New York resident E. Ann Kaplan describes her own response to 9/11 as one of shock, confusion, and an attempt "to make 'real' [by taking photographs] what [she] could barely comprehend" (2). For Kaplan, this event recalled a previous trauma, that of growing up in England during World War II. It is this connection between two traumatic events (the second proving evocative of the earlier childhood experience) that she believes contributed to her experience of traumatic symptoms including repetition, flashbacks, and numbness. Despite the fact that she was, in many ways, merely on the periphery of the events taking place, she felt a radical shift, as "the new traumatic event merged with the childhood events, so that history and memory, time and space collapsed into one present time of terror; 9/11 produced a new subjectivity" (4).

Kaplan compares her own personal response to 9/11 with the wider responses she noted in

the local community and the media. All appeared to show the catastrophe pushing established notions of individual and collective identity to their limits. For example, she notes the solidarity apparently shared by locals as they attempted to make sense of what had happened. Suddenly a sense of unity and commonality—“a newly engaged patriotism” (9)—were present in public places such as the subway and street, she notes, written on posters in slogans such as “United We Stand: God Bless America” and “We Are Not Broken,” which appeared all over New York (9). She describes experiencing a compulsion to make personal records of the event (in her case this involved photographing the physical effects of 9/11 and collecting all the related newspaper articles she could find) in order to come to terms with what had happened. Meanwhile, “[i]t gradually became clear that national ideology was hard at work shaping how the traumatic event was to be perceived” (13). This project influenced official media representations, a response which ultimately proved to be a source of disillusionment for Kaplan, as she realized that the perspective adopted by the media assumed a commonality which did not bear out in reality: “The media aided the attempt to present a united American front. But this proved to be a fiction—a construction of a consensus in a Eurocentric and largely masculine form” (13). Six months after 9/11, Kaplan noted the shift in her personal attitudes towards that period:

I . . . now understood . . . that we really had not been “together,” as my notes from the time assumed. Many Arab and Muslim individuals have been (and continue to be) arrested or interrogated. There is an entire spectrum of responses to the attacks, a diversity of interpretations. It has become its own phenomenon, with circles spreading out like those from a stone thrown into a pond. I sometimes no longer know what “my” response really is. (17)

Kaplan's experiences of 9/11 and its aftermath show how traumatic experiences challenge existing positions of subjectivity and identity. In particular, she suggests that trauma which is experienced by a group or collective can challenge the way that society views itself, provoking a distrust of collective forms of media, a compulsion to make personal records rather than rely upon public, "official" forms of history. In the case of 9/11, Kaplan highlights how the collective response failed to encapsulate all the different subject positions, particularly "forgetting" to address the perspectives of those who did not fit with the specific idea of national identity being projected at that time. This failure to attend to non-Western oppressed groups (in this case Arabs and Muslims) and their trauma ultimately exacerbated Kaplan's (and others') existing anxieties, as it reflected a deep-rooted tension between the personal and political, individual and collective spheres which had been exposed by the trauma. Kaplan suggests that the fiction of a unified response separated different people rather than bringing them together, and that this contributed to an identity crisis within the nation (18) and an ongoing struggle to address the consequences of 9/11 in an adequate or sufficiently meaningful way. Her text argues that "catastrophic events (like 9/11) remind us of the urgency for a focus on transnational conflict with a view to developing understanding amongst people" (23).

The dilemma of addressing collective trauma when national identities are in flux, and the struggle to gain agency as an oppressed or marginalized individual are central features of postcolonial studies. This context provides a space to respond to these questions, so writes Robert Young: "If you are someone who does not identify yourself as western, or as somehow not completely western even though you live in a western country, or someone who is part of a culture yet excluded by its dominant voices, inside yet outside, then postcolonialism offers you a

way of seeing things differently, a language and a politics in which your interests come first, not last” (2). Indeed, in attending to the marginalized, and in seeking to draw different oppressed peoples together through the shared histories of colonization, postcolonialism engages with the same task which Cathy Caruth argues may be performed by trauma when she writes that, rather than separating and dividing different peoples, “trauma itself may provide the very link between cultures” (“Trauma and Experience” 11). Jill Bennett and Rosanne Kennedy also recognize an overlap when they write that “the work that has already begun to be done on cultural experience and the representation of memory and trauma promises to inform the study of culture in the postcolonial future in a much broader sense than was previously understood” (4). However, they argue that “[trauma studies] must move beyond its focus on Euro-American events and experiences, towards a study of memory that takes as its starting point the multicultural and diasporic nature of contemporary culture” (5). This transition is essential in order that trauma studies might “transform from a mono-cultural discipline into a mode of enquiry that can inform the study of memory within a changing global context” (5).

Kaplan’s argument highlights the role of media forms such as photography, film, and the written word in the process of seeking to understand traumatic experience. She emphasizes the role of the media in “translating” trauma—that is, “of finding ways to make meaning out of, and to communicate, catastrophes that happen to others as well as to oneself” (19). Petar Ramadanovic claims that literature is uniquely placed to perform such a task:

What makes literature into the privileged . . . site of trauma is the fact that literature as an art form can contain and present an aspect of experience which was not experienced or processed fully. Literature, in other words, because of its sensible and representational

character, because of its figurative language, is a channel and a medium for a transmission of trauma which does not need to be apprehended in order to be present in a text or . . . in order to be witnessed. (2)

The fact that literature has also become a significant tool by which postcolonial subjects are able to claim agency makes it an ideal context for exploring postcolonial trauma. Literature is central to both postcolonialism and trauma studies because it is a key mode to which trauma victims and postcolonial subjects frequently take recourse in order to process their experiences. In turn, such literature may feed into the way in which trauma is understood or configured by those working at a scholarly level.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the intersection of trauma and fiction offers much potential for new perspectives for the literary imagination. Anne Whitehead writes that

fiction itself has been marked or changed by its encounter with trauma. Novelists have frequently found that the impact of trauma can only adequately be represented by mimicking its forms and symptoms, so that temporality and chronology collapse, and narratives are characterized by repetition and indirection. Trauma fiction overlaps with and borrows from both postmodern and postcolonial fiction in its self-conscious deployment of stylistic devices as modes of reflection or critique. (3)

This suggests that literature may provide a valuable imaginary space for those who wish to explore the traumatic experiences of others and their impact on society.<sup>3</sup>

From this set of questions or dilemmas which permeate trauma studies and for which literature offers a site for exploration, I will now explore postcolonial trauma through the narrative framework of Lisa Fugard's novel *Skinner's Drift* (2006). In order to examine Fugard's negotiation of the traumas of apartheid and their continuing legacy, I test a close analysis of the



text against Whitehead's theory that "[i]f trauma fiction is to be effective, it cannot avoid registering the shocking and unassimilable nature of its subject matter in formal terms" (83).

Following an initial outline of the traumas with which this text is concerned, the rest of this essay focuses on Fugard's use of a fragmented or dispersed narrative and her employment of repetition as formal literary devices which communicate traumatic experience. I wish to show how Fugard's representation of apartheid experience through the characters in *Skinner's Drift* closely resembles many of the features which have come to be associated with traumatic experience. As a result, her novel engages with the tensions between individual and collective, and personal and political spheres, which are central to the experience of postcolonialism and postcolonial trauma. Indeed, I suggest that it is in addressing these tensions that Fugard highlights the haunting legacy of apartheid, both in South Africa and in its emerging art forms.

### Textual Haunting

In *Skinner's Drift*, the rugged landscape of the Northern Province in South Africa forms the backdrop to an exploration of the ongoing effects of apartheid, and in particular, the power shift taking place between the white and black populations following years of oppression. Set on the banks of the Limpopo River, the inhabitants of Skinner's Drift farm struggle for survival as the region is threatened by drought and unknown "terrorists," who lurk just over the border in Botswana. Alongside them live the blacks in their employ, characters whose lives they unknowingly direct. Born in the latter years of apartheid, the protagonist Eva feels love, pride, and, alternately, resentment and shame towards her parents (especially her father Martin's violence and her mother Lorraine's English fragility). This is intensified by her growing

awareness of all that they represent through their attempts to subdue and control nature as they farm the land and hunt the animals which live upon it, and as they oppress those around them.

When Eva is forced to return to South Africa from America to visit her estranged, dying father, she journeys back to the land upon which she was raised. It is now 1997, and the transition to democracy has impacted everyone. Skinner's Drift, the former locus of her family's existence, is now deserted, and her father—who once sought to defend his land with the violence and passion of an archetypal Boer hero—is now an old man who lies inert and voiceless in a hospital bed. Alongside him lie other white Afrikaans farmers whose lives, spent struggling to protect and control the land, are also all but over. All illusions of white superiority banished, a black nurse caring for Martin notes how the dramatic national power shift which has taken place is now manifest at a personal level:

“Your nightmare, hey, Mr. van Rensburg, to have me looking after you? You know what my revenge is for all you old white farmers? To do such a good job that I bring you back to health. Maybe I get some *muti* from the *sangoma* and mix it into your jelly and custard and make you younger. Mmm hmm, start a conspiracy, all across the country, turn all the dying old *boere* into young men!” . . . “So you have many, many years to experience the joy and freedom of our new South Africa!” (24)

Whilst her father appears insensible and lifeless, Eva finds herself deeply conflicted and emotional as she comes to terms with the context of the new South Africa. This, in turn, reveals an identity crisis stemming from a traumatic past she has not addressed. For, prior to her departure from South Africa ten years previously, Eva's mother was tragically killed in a hunting accident. Eva blamed her father for her mother's death and left South Africa soon after the event;

indeed, his violent nature had been a contributing factor, although he was not responsible. However, this incident, and the emotions it conjures up in Eva, evoke another, more serious trauma, which she had witnessed some time previously. One night, when Eva and her father were out hunting, her father had shot and killed a small black child he had thought was a jackal. Afterwards, Eva describes feeling numb, and unable to voice what has taken place:

If she'd only nudged her father into speaking then they could have dealt with it. But Eva could barely believe what had happened. Driving back to the farmhouse she'd had the sensation that her ears were blocked, she couldn't hear anything, not even the growl of the bakkie's engine. . . . [Back at the farm] she said, I'm going to bed. A test to see whether she could still speak because she felt so strange. She vomited in the upstairs bathroom, catching the spill of it in her hands so it wouldn't splash in the toilet and make a noise and wake her mother. Eva knew she had to talk to her father, but she felt like her body was in pieces, like she couldn't put herself together to walk back downstairs.

(283-84)

For Eva, the trauma of witnessing the shooting is compounded by the fact that it is never spoken of; it becomes a secret which Eva carries and never betrays out of fear and love for her father.

Instead, she returns in secret to the site the next morning in order to bury the child.

Now living in New York, Eva has all but denounced her past and her national identity; the shame and resentment she feels about being South African belie "some sodden longing for what used to be home" (2). She refuses to engage with South African affairs or vote in the first democratic elections of 1994, and claims to be a New Zealander to all who question her accent.

However, Eva's rejection of the political aspects of her identity causes friction in her personal

life. When a boyfriend develops an interest in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings and tries to elicit her opinion, she lashes out at him, saying: “Don’t you dare snivel in my apartment over my country, my history, my life! . . . You’re so in love with that fucking country. Well, guess what? I’m not. I’m never going back” (12). When they break up, Eva keeps herself emotionally distant from people, yet attempts connection through a series of meaningless sexual encounters. She is fragmented, isolated, and disenfranchised. She admits her own reflection reveals a vacancy and a sadness: “She was twenty-eight years old, but with her short haircut—it had been so chic in New York—and the emotional tumult of returning [to South Africa] etched across her face, she looked odd, like a middle-aged teenager” (6). She buries her memories and refuses to think about the past; indeed, “Just thinking about it set something shameful burrowing into her gut. How she wanted to drown it with a few drinks, masturbate it away, crawl into someone’s arms” (35).

One of the central tenets of trauma theory is an acknowledgment of the way in which traumatic experience overwhelms the individual and resists language. As an experience which is not fully understood at the time, but only belatedly, trauma defies ordinary cognitive processes. It is not fully possessed by the traumatized individual; rather the individual is possessed by it. Its haunting quality disturbs linearity and pushes memory and history into crisis. As Caruth writes, “The traumatized . . . carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess” (“Trauma and Experience” 5). Thus, in her representation of fictional Eva’s trauma, of Eva’s return to South Africa and the site of the past, Fugard attempts to represent an experience which remains elusive to language and form. This becomes even more problematic when we consider that Fugard is using the story of

domestic trauma symbolically, as a microcosm for an examination of the traumatic legacy of apartheid. Her efforts to surmount these problems compel her to explore the ways in which the fragmentary nature of trauma may be “translated” into art.

*1. A Fragmented or Dispersed Narrative*

One of the primary modes in which this is achieved is through the structure of the narrative itself, which is fragmented and disjointed. In the telling of *Skinner’s Drift*, Fugard collapses temporal order and rejects a linear approach to plot. Instead, present and past intersect in a manner which echoes the very conditions of traumatic experience. Fugard suggests that the past is not accessed directly, but is triggered by memories, sensations, flashbacks, dreams, and other, more “official,” public forms of history. For Eva, returning to the events of the past takes the form of an archeological journey as she uncovers fragments of memory, many of which are too painful to excavate fully. Waiting for her father to awaken from his coma, she immerses herself in reading her mother’s recovered diaries. These trigger her own memories and, more importantly, enable her to access the past through a different perspective:

Day after day her childhood spooled out in her memory. Sightings of aardvarks and aardwolves; the purchase of irascible Shylock, Eva’s first pony; the excitement of the early harvests; a flask of afternoon tea beside the Limpopo and a swim when the river was flowing swiftly and crocodiles weren’t a threat. Eva hadn’t wanted to know how sweet the early years on Skinner’s Drift had been, and to have them documented so left her feeling tender. (30)

It becomes clear that Eva’s reluctance to think about the past is the partial consequence of what

Judith Lewis Herman calls “an abnormal form of memory” which encodes the traumatic moment so that “[i]t is as if time stops at the moment of trauma” (37). Reminded in this way of life “before,” Eva begins to recover memories of her childhood recorded in the diaries, yet all the while admonishes herself: “You know how this is going to end, stop reading them” (32). Reading the diaries proves somewhat compulsive, however, and once Eva has allowed herself to reflect on the past, she finds herself captivated.

As she is the protagonist in *Skinner’s Drift*, it is through Eva’s eyes that much of the story is viewed. However, the use of third-person narration throughout the novel casts the reader in an observational role and diverts sympathy away from Eva and onto some of the other characters. This technique is similar to one used by Toni Morrison, who employs the third-person narrative in order to obtain an “intimacy in which the reader is under the impression that he isn’t really reading this; that he is participating in it as he goes along” (100). Fugard develops this through deftly switching points of view and employing multiple characters as focalizers for the narrative. These characters present different perspectives, which challenge and subvert the isolating effects of trauma. As a narrative strategy, this technique questions a traditional hierarchy of third person narration, whereby a protagonist dominates the narrative and takes priority over all the other characters who are, in turn, effectively silenced.<sup>3</sup> In narrating several of the chapters from different perspectives, Fugard gives voice to those silenced by Apartheid, highlighting the oppressive regime under which relationships are determined as much by what remains unsaid as what is spoken aloud. Consequently, the events of the narrative are viewed through a variety of individuals’ perspectives, including the van Rensburg family (Eva, Lorraine, and Martin) and their black labourers (Lefu, the chief farm hand; Nkele, the domestic maid and Lefu’s daughter;

and Mpho, Lefu's grandson and Nkele's son).

The effect of this is initially disorientating. The reader is required to deduce whose perspective provides the narration for each chapter, and the emerging voices are strikingly different with often-conflicting perspectives. This is common to literature which addresses traumatic experience, claims Laurie Vickroy: "many voices, emotions and experiences intermingle to produce individual and collective memory and to counteract silence and forgetting. . . . multiple accounts sometimes reinforce and sometimes challenge each other, illustrating both the potential for sharing and healing but also missed connections, as when traumatic reactions isolate individuals with similar experience from one another" (27).

Consequently, the resultant narrative thread is patchy and full of gaps. For example, Lorraine's neat diary entries are largely dispassionate as they recount life on the farm; similarly, Martin's perceptions are often hazy, to imply—we are led to presume—that he has been drinking.

Importantly, these gaps are most evident during the key events of the novel, namely the two killings, of the black child and Lorraine. The former is presented through the eyes of Martin and does not clarify that it is a child who is shot; in fact, it is not clear exactly what happened until much later on in the text. Instead, emphasis is laid upon the immediate emotional impact of the event on Martin's relationship with Eva: "[Martin] turned to find his daughter's terrified eyes, terrified and terrifying, as if they'd become unmoored, were floating towards him. . . . Eva had moved away. She hadn't brushed past him, but he felt something flowing from himself. A part of him was leaving. It was her" (43). The latter event, the accidental shooting of Lorraine, is narrated by one of the least established characters, Martin's friend and fellow farmer Jannie. The men have been out on a night hunt and have killed a lion. They return to the compound, and

Lorraine emerges to greet them:

Standing in front of the bakkie, with a dead lion in the flatbed, Jannie knew how vulgar the scene must look to Lorraine. He wanted to keep the peace, he wanted his friend Martin to have his celebration, and he wanted Lorraine to know that he knew the killing of the lion distressed her. He was about to say something to her when Dolf, who was unloading the rifles, stumbled. The guns fell to the ground, a shot resounded and Lorraine was lifted off her feet and blown backwards. She hit the fence and fell to the ground, head twisted at a funny angle. (241)

This is the most direct reference ever made to Lorraine's death, and it is important to note that it reflects Jannie's perspective, rather than any of the primary characters'. Thus, in her narration of the novel's two central traumatic events, Fugard silences the main characters in order to help the reader to gain a sense of Eva's detachment from her experience, which means that she can only access it long afterwards.<sup>4</sup> In fact, the journey on which she draws the reader brings its own belated shock and sorrow, as we finally become aware of what has taken place and begin to grieve for the characters ourselves.

Whilst emphasizing Eva's isolation, Fugard also shows that the characters in the novel are related by their common experiences. In her use of multiple focalizers, Fugard shows that no single perspective is sufficient to communicate the traumatic significance of what has taken place or its range of effects. Rather, she draws together a collection of individual experiences to communicate collective suffering, consequently engaging in a process of dialogical witnessing, whereby different perspectives are brought together to create a collective testimonial. This inevitably gestures towards politics. In her inclusion of oppressed voices, Fugard provides



agency for the formerly silenced, bringing their stories to public consciousness. In her vivid portrayal of the black characters (the strongest aspect of the text), she allows space for their hopes, fears, and anxieties to emerge within the story, filling in the gaps left by the selective amnesia of collective history. The attention she gives to these characters also breaks down basic stereotypes which are associated with apartheid, and raises fundamental questions such as who or what constitutes a victim, a perpetrator, a bystander, and a protester. For example, not all the black characters are victims, and not all the white characters are perpetrators. Indeed, we come to see that several of the white characters find themselves victimized, just as several of the black characters resist oppression in ways which might be considered aggressive and harmful to others. Interestingly, the breakdown of relationships is itself characteristic of traumatic experience, as Herman suggests:

Traumatic experiences call into question basic human relationships. They breach the attachments of family, friendship, love and community. They shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others. They undermine the belief systems that give meaning to human experience. They violate the victim's faith in a natural or divine order and cast the victim into a state of existential crisis. (51)

As a structural and stylistic literary device, the use of a fragmented narrative highlights Eva's distress at returning to South Africa to face the past, enabling Fugard to show the intensity with which traumatic memories have come to control her. It also increases the dramatic suspense and disrupts the structural clarity of the novel, so that Fugard's lucid realist prose takes on a force that conveys the significance of what is taking place, even if the details themselves are at times somewhat ambiguous. This again evokes trauma. As Herman writes, "[t]raumatic memories lack

verbal narrative and context; rather they are encoded in the form of vivid sensations and images. . . . The intense focus on fragmentary sensation, on image without context, gives the traumatic memory a heightened reality” (38). Finally, in her reliance upon social ties and a sense of community, Fugard highlights the role of the collective in addressing traumatic experience. Using a trope which recurs throughout much postcolonial writing, she challenges and subverts the grand narrative of history, and presents instead a collection of fragments from multiple perspectives, which are all intrinsic to establishing a meaningful connection with the past. This emphasis enables Fugard to use Eva’s story to engage with the wider, collective context of apartheid.

## 2. *Repetition*

Whitehead writes: “[o]ne of the key literary strategies in trauma fiction is the device of repetition, which can be seen at the levels of language, imagery or plot. Repetition mimics the effects of trauma, for it suggests the insistent return of the event and the disruption of narrative chronology or progression” (86). Fugard’s employment of repetition foregrounds and echoes an underlying trauma, so that anxiety and tension pervade the text. The use of repetition as a literary device mirrors the compulsion-repetition, which Freud recognized in trauma victims as being an obligation “to *repeat* . . . repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of, as the physician would prefer to see, *remembering* it as something belonging to the past” (602).

Whitehead describes the process in the following way: “By continually returning to the traumatic situation, the individual can master the amounts of stimulus which have broken through by binding them together and simultaneously construct a protective shield against trauma after the

event” (119).

Both Eva and her father experience flashbacks and nightmares, which are classic trauma symptoms. These intrusions draw them back to the death of the child so that their lives are haunted by the past. In one passage, Martin is “flung out of sleep, a buffalo of a memory bearing on him, making him gasp, adrenalin shooting into his heart, his gut in spasms” (36). Out hunting at night, he begins to use a machine gun instead of a rifle, obliterating animals so that they can barely be recognized and cannot be eaten. A fellow black labourer, Mosanku, suggests to Lefu that he is “a crazy one,” remarking: “Van Rensburg is usually a careful man, those eyes know just where to shoot. A bullet in the neck, one that breaks the spine, or in the heart. But these impala had been shot many times. The skins were torn and the meat was full of pieces of metal” (87-88). Eva, too, appears to suffer from a compulsion to repeat the past. Following her return to the bushveld the following day in order to bury the child, she begins to bury all the animals her father has killed. Traveling around the farm early in the morning, she routinely collects destroyed animals in secret and buries them in the same place that the child is buried. This act suggests an attempt to shield her father’s transgression. It shows her attempting to soothe her conscience and absolve her guilt. It also evokes the Freudian notion that traumatized individuals repeatedly return to the scene of trauma in order to relive the event and master its effect on them.

As well as replicating the effects of trauma, Fugard employs repetition as a literary device, and establishes a set of trauma-signifiers in symbolism and metaphor. Using recurring themes, she refers to resurfacing memories which invoke a personal trauma. These, in turn, signal back to an earlier traumatic experience of colonization. One of the most significant examples of this is in

descriptions of the physical landscape, which recurs in the text's negotiations of belonging and (dis)connection. Fugard describes the landscape using violent hunting images which undermine its natural beauty, creating a tension between this and the threat and danger it also represents: "Africa lay stretched beneath [Eva] like the ravaged hide of some ancient beast, and something fierce shuddered inside her; a love that startled her and set off another round of tears" (1); "it would have been so cosmopolitan if it hadn't been for that light, wild and fierce, as if gleaned from the eyes of animals that kill" (5). Fugard continues to personify the land in this way throughout the text; a wild creature, dangerous and unknowable, it is capable of providing life or claiming it. Given this, the relationship between people and the land they live upon is fragile. The drought presents a very real danger, as Lorraine notes in her diary: "The monkeys are truly desperate. This morning I saw them sucking the corners of the wet sheets that Grace had hung on the washing line" (107).

The image of drought and a land thirsty for water also appears throughout the book as a motif of hopelessness, depression, and a growing fear for survival (particularly of terrorists who may cross the Limpopo from Botswana whilst the river is low). In contrast, water recurs as a life-source bringing joy and refreshment, simultaneously washing the past away and bringing transgressions to light. Interestingly, in his search for a water supply on his land, Martin van Rensburg finds he must rely on black water diviners with "another way of knowing" (46). One explains that "[u]nder every river there was a second river" (46-47), and talks of "the country of water beneath the thirsty land. Underground pools and rivers. Dark water dripping endlessly down slabs of rock" (47). This image of unobtainable water requiring special, mystical knowledge underlines the white farmers' precarious hold upon the land, as they depend upon

black farm labourers for survival. As the novel progresses, water comes more and more to represent renewal and hope for the black characters, as it promises to wash the land clean and bring all transgressions to light (for example, “Wind, sun and now rain had all subtly changed the features of the land and Lefu felt his heart had been rinsed clean” (97)). This is enacted in a very literal way when Lefu discovers the child killed by Martin, which has been unearthed by heavy rain: “[H]e peered once again into the water. The silt was sifting and Lefu saw the small skull and the delicate curve of ribs. He drew back, fearful. It can’t be, he thought, then he once again knelt down and stared into the donga. A scrap of blue cloth, caught on a piece of bone, swayed gently in the water” (97-98).

In her emphasis upon the collective nature of postcolonial trauma, Fugard uses familial relationships as a microcosm to show how a single traumatic experience reverberates in different ways in different lives until ultimately it refers back to an original, colonial trauma. In doing this, Fugard establishes a series of links between her characters, emphasizing the ways in which their lives are interrelated. For example, each white character has a black counterpart, a character whose life is bound to theirs, serving as a parallel, “other,” or “double.” Thus, within the text, the chief farm labourer, Lefu/Ezekiel, serves as “other” to his master, Martin. This parallel is voiced by Mosanku to Lefu: ““We do not live separate from these white people. . . . I say to myself that I do what I want with my life, but I am here because Baas Jannie is here. I am like this with Jannie Louw,” he said, and he entwined his arms. ‘And you, my friend? You are like this with a crazy one’” (88). Lefu acknowledges this link when he reflects that “in riding [horses] with Eva he had trespassed into Martin’s life” (89), thus usurping his position of authority and power. Indeed, Lefu comes to represent something of a father-figure for Eva; it is he whom she enlists to help

her as she seeks to bury animals killed by her father, and it is he in whom she seeks solace: “He smelled of earth and fire and she wanted to reach down to touch his face, to believe he’d come to her. She wanted to tell him everything, wanted him to help her” (286).

In a similar way, the farm domestic maid Nkele can be seen as Lorraine’s “other” in the text. Like Lorraine, she is trapped, unable to stand up to the powerful and passionate men who control her. Both women are more liberal than their male counterparts (Lefu and Martin respectively); furthermore, they are both rebellious and resist their circumstances in quiet, subversive ways. For example, Lorraine chooses to be cremated, something Eva recognizes as her “final act of rebellion” against her life on the farm (3), whereas Nkele satisfies herself with executing her domestic tasks with a spirit approaching vengeance (she admits that “[m]urdering the carpet was a deeply satisfying chore” (151)) and, for a short while, smuggles food to a terrorist hiding in the compound.

Finally, their children, Eva and Mpho, who are both born at the latter stages of apartheid, are alike in their refusal to acquiesce to apartheid’s oppressive regime. Both struggle to follow the models established for them by their parents, and instead strike out independently, attempting to forge new identities in the new society of post-apartheid South Africa. However, where Eva chooses to escape from her homeland and ignore the traumas of her past by remaining silent, Mpho is empowered by democracy and the arrival of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the region. The novel’s climax finds them meeting at Skinner’s Drift. Mpho appears to have moved into the abandoned farm with all the confidence and assertion of a newly liberated prisoner. He is intent upon bringing Martin’s transgressions to light. He has begun to dig around the farm, hoping to unearth the bones of the child Martin killed and take them to the Truth and

Reconciliation Commission. Eva finds a diary where Mpho has written “Martin Van Rensburg Shot an Afrikan Child on the Farm Called Skinner’s Drift,” underneath which he testifies to the killing of the child as a story carried by his grandfather for many years but now given to him. He writes: “The white people think we are animals and they shoot us. They throw our bodies away. They think they are safe. But I am not afraid. This is my land. I will speak now. I will tell them what happened” (277).

The pairing of these characters enables the reader to perceive the two parallel worlds orbiting Skinner’s Drift. This is exemplified in the way that the black characters each have two names: an English one (Lefu calls this “a white-world name” (60)) and an African one. Nkele often refers to her “white-world” name as if she were another identity: “Grace the quiet maid who was prompt, obedient and well mannered; Grace the cleaning presence, who was almost a non-presence, so much so that the white people would sometimes forget she was even there” (157). She suggests that, whilst Grace is quiet and submissive, feelings of anger and rebellion are growing inside Nkele which can scarcely be contained: “Downstairs in the kitchen she squeezed the loaves of bread from the bread box. Nkele would have cut four fat slices from the freshest loaf; good girl Grace cut two slices from the stalest loaf” (160). This duality in identity and allegiance echoes the same sense of division and segregation which defined South Africa’s apartheid regime. However, whilst apartheid promoted white and black people living separately, Fugard subverts this notion by showing how these groups are intrinsically linked, depending upon each other for survival. Interestingly, whilst the black characters are allocated white names so their employers can refer to them easily, giving black names to white people is considered an honour. Indeed, the only white character to have a black name is Eva, whose Sotho

name “Naledi,” meaning star, is bestowed to her as a young girl by Lefu as a token of affection (60). In this way, names come to represent a play for power and an act of resistance; Lefu’s naming of Eva shows how he subverts white oppression and turns it into a black man’s privilege.

This use of repetition and “doubleness” also further complicates the central traumas of the text, because for every white character that is traumatized, a black character has a different experience of the same event and is consequently traumatized in a different way. For example, while Eva is traumatized for having witnessed the death of the child and attempts to protect her father by burying it in secret, Lefu is traumatized by his own collusion in the crime, as he unwittingly helps to cover the deed by burying animals with her afterwards. He feels betrayed by Eva when he realizes he has been participating in an act which further humiliates and degrades his own people. Of course, it is the traumas themselves which are most clearly paired. For where Lorraine’s death is publicly witnessed, deeply mourned, and remembered, the other death—of the small child Martin kills—is never named and, apparently, never publicly noted. It takes place in the dark and remains secret. It is repressed, forgotten, and, until Mpho writes his testimony, remains unvoiced. In the moments after the killing Martin even suggests that he considers the life of a black person to be expendable: “A laugh spiralled inside him and then vanished. *If this is what I needed to do to bring rain I would have shot one a long time ago*” (43). Lorraine’s death can, then, be viewed as a repetition of an earlier, colonial trauma. As it is not consciously willed, and no life-affirming explanation can be offered for it, it captures what Freud referred to as the “daemonic” quality of reenactment, as “a compulsion to repeat which overrides the pleasure principle” (605), or as “death instincts” (618). In turn, the death of the nameless child comes to represent all the countless unspoken wrongs committed against the oppressed peoples of South



Africa. As each death represents a reenactment of a previous crime, Fugard establishes the notion of cyclical violence, the thoughtless disposal of life that comes to define the systemic racism and oppression of apartheid. Her use of repetition, then, at levels of language, imagery, and plot, exposes the interrelatedness of traumatic events and reveals how they bind together segregated peoples. She emphasizes the far-reaching impact of traumatic events and their consequences whilst constantly referring back to an original trauma, which occurred during colonization.

In this way, Fugard uses *Skinner's Drift* as a vehicle of resistance against the silencing, shaming effects of her nation's past. She exposes Eva's self-centeredness: how she and her family obsess over the darker aspects of their survival (adultery, drought, betrayal, rebellion, violence) whilst oppressing their workers and exploiting their position of authority. Their neuroses are evident even before the central events of the text take place. In contrast, the black characters existing on the periphery of their world exude self-possession and poise; they engage with the larger questions of apartheid because they feel its effects so keenly. Eva's final meeting with Lefu perfectly epitomizes this point. Eva wants to reconcile the past and make amends for her part in the wrongs committed by her family, so she apologizes to Lefu. His response is startling: "You want me to forgive you, Naledi. For what? For telling me I am black and I cannot speak, I cannot see. They all tell me that, people tell me that every day. You are not the first. And I forgave you a long time ago" (292).

### Trauma and Postcolonialism

Fugard's manipulation of literary devices at levels of plot, style, and structure shows how valuable the novel form is for exploring traumatic experience. Her use of fragmentation and

repetition enables her to “translate” traumatic experience so that the reader becomes, in a sense, a witness to trauma, even if the trauma itself is a fiction. Thus the novel achieves a vivid intensity and a lucidity which impress even as it investigates complex theoretical and political questions. However, the strength of the novel lies in its emphasis upon the relationship between trauma and postcolonialism. This is evident in the central focus of the novel, namely, Fugard’s reliance upon the black characters to provide context to and alternative perspectives on events. This emphasis shows her privileging the silenced and oppressed victims of trauma. It also highlights how the postcolonial context collapses conventional boundaries which make up subjectivity (notably the boundary between the individual and the collective and the personal and the political). The resulting narrative insistently focuses upon the interrelatedness of people, especially in their connections to the past. It embodies the African spirit of *ubuntu*, or, “togetherness,” which Antjie Krog identifies as the concept that “a person is a person through other persons” (399). This contrasts with the emphasis upon the individual which has dominated trauma studies, and which Kaplan notes in relation to 9/11.

In light of this relationship between trauma and postcolonialism, a reading of Fugard’s text suggests that the way trauma’s primary theorists (including Freud and Caruth) have configured the experience is problematic. This is shown at the centre of Fugard’s narrative, which describes a trauma reminiscent of the original example of traumatic neurosis suggested by Freud, yet with a strikingly different emphasis. In Tasso’s romantic epic *Gerusalemme Liberata*, Tancred, the hero, accidentally kills his beloved, Clorinda, whom he mistakes for an enemy knight. Freud writes: “After her burial he makes his way into a strange magic forest which strikes the Crusaders’ army with terror. He slashes with his sword at a tall tree; but blood streams from the

cut and the voice of Clorinda, whose soul is imprisoned in the tree, is heard complaining that he has wounded his beloved once again” (605). Whilst there is no evidence which might lead us to believe that Fugard is aware of trauma theory and scholarly writings on the subject, there are several similarities between this incident and the traumas she describes. Like Tancred in Tasso’s epic, Fugard’s character Martin van Rensburg accidentally kills someone, having mistaken their identity. Like Tancred, Martin is traumatized, and provoked to further violence. He, too, is bound to compulsively repeat what he has done, a repetition which culminates in the death of his wife some time later.

Interestingly, Freud highlights Tancred’s trauma as the epitome of what it means to be traumatized; yet, he does not address the experiences of Clorinda, who is clearly the only truly innocent victim in this incident. Indeed, her experience (perhaps because she is dead) is barely even registered by Freud; it receives little attention in the text save for the further suffering it supposedly inflicts upon Tancred. This point has been well argued by Ruth Leys in her critique of Caruth’s *Unclaimed Experience*. Leys criticizes Caruth for, like Freud, suggesting that this incident is central to the definition of traumatic experience, without acknowledging the problems which such a formulation provokes. Leys writes that “Tancred is a murderer, albeit an involuntary one, and Clorinda is his victim twice over. Caruth knows and admits this . . . Yet she is determined to identify Tancred as a victim of trauma, even though that identification creates problems of yet another kind” (295). In contrast, Fugard’s text gestures towards the unnamed child as the primary victim of trauma, thus privileging the silenced and forgotten over the stunned and shame-faced. In her account, Martin and Eva are secondary victims of trauma; Martin suffers for his crime and Eva is traumatized by what she sees, but neither experience

equals that of the child. Thus, *Skinner's Drift* implies that any theory of trauma which fails to consider those who find themselves victims yet are silenced is woefully inadequate.

However, despite her clear distinction between the kind of experiences of Eva and her father, and the trauma of the dead child, Fugard rejects any suggestion that reserving focus for a single victim is sufficient for understanding what has taken place here. Instead, she draws together different fragments of traumatized experience in order to underline the complex relationship between individual and collective and indicate a wide-scale crisis of identity at a national level. This crisis becomes most clearly apparent at the end of the novel, as Mpho's impending visit to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission suggests that the events on the farm form just one episode in a national crisis. Such an emphasis suggests that a re-configuration of traumatic experience may be needed, one which acknowledges the complex relationship between trauma and the postcolonial context and its long-term impact on national identity.

I have shown how Fugard employs structural and stylistic literary devices in order to explore a specifically postcolonial experience of trauma. In particular, her use of the novelistic form emphasizes the relationship between individual and collective identity. This has its own ramifications for the novel, highlighted in a common criticism that has been made regarding the ending to *Skinner's Drift*, which appears somewhat unsatisfactory because it does not provide any clear resolution to the plot. In fact, the ending leaves several key questions open. Will Eva sell the farm? Will she reconcile with her father before he dies? Will Mpho go to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission with his claims, and will Eva's fears of being arrested as an accomplice to her father be realized as a consequence? Furthermore, Eva's relationship with the

past remains ambiguous. Has she adequately addressed her past experiences? Has she begun to engage on a process of healing and recovery? What, in fact, might it mean to heal or recover from apartheid in South Africa? Such questions lead us to consider how writing about postcolonial trauma might offer new possibilities and new boundaries for fiction writers. For an authentic, sincere engagement with traumatic memory must, argues Caruth, address the problem of how to help to alleviate suffering and understand its nature “without eliminating the force and truth of the reality” (“Trauma and Experience” vii). In *Skinner’s Drift*, Fugard shows how personal trauma in South Africa becomes embroiled in the greater traumas of apartheid and its legacies. She exposes the deep-rooted and ongoing impact of postcolonial trauma, which means that recovery and reconciliation cannot be tied up within one character’s renewal but belong to all. Thus there can be no satisfactory conclusion to the text; the resolution falls victim to the messy remnants of its apartheid context. Despite this, the strengths of the narrative—its voicing of different characters’ experience, its manipulation of novelistic practices, its process of excavation to explore traumatic experiences—all demonstrate the significance of trauma in the postcolonial context and suggest that fiction is a valid and valuable site for those who wish to draw attention to, and explore, this aspect of traumatic experience.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> This is evident in the work of key critical trauma theorists, including Caruth, Felman and Laub, Freud, LaCapra, and Leys, all of whom examine forms of literature and narrative in order to gain insight into the complexities of traumatic experience.

<sup>2</sup> Examples of this include second- and third-generation Holocaust survivors such as Anne Michaels, and postcolonial writers including Bapsi Sidhwa, Salman Rushdie, J.M. Coetzee, and Lisa Fugard.

<sup>3</sup> However, a further consequence of this narrative style is that the reader becomes troublingly aware of Fugard, whose authorial presence overshadows every shift in the shape and direction of the novel. Whilst this is problematic, as it endangers the strength of the narrative as an independent force, it also highlights an important relationship between this text and its historical context. For although this is by no means an autobiographical narrative, Fugard's South African status means that she cannot fully dissociate herself from the national story she attempts to tell. The tension produced by Fugard's relationship with the past is central to the way the novel negotiates representing trauma experienced at a collective level.

<sup>4</sup> It is interesting to note the closeness with which this process resembles Freud's concept of *nachträglichkeit*, the experience of belatedness whereby traumatic events are not fully experienced at the time, but return belatedly to haunt the victim. This suggests that Fugard, whilst not engaging directly with scholarly configurations of trauma, nevertheless recognizes a similar process at work in the character of Eva.

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