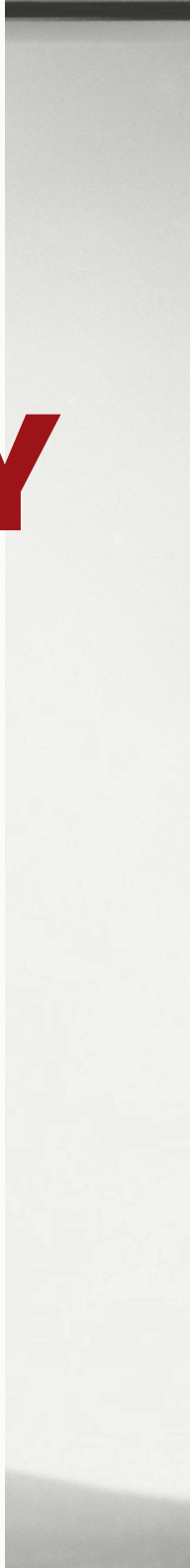
AUTHORITY IN SOUTH AFRICAN NON-FICTION

NICK MULGREW



ABSTRACT

What is so special about non-fiction texts? Or, in other words, what are the properties inherent in them that makes readers bring different expectations to these texts than those they bring to fiction texts?

This book aims to answer these questions with a view to unraveling the reasons behind the heightened praise given to South African narrative non-fiction texts in the years following apartheid. These texts have attracted critical attention for their (seemingly unique) ability to depict scenes of epistemological difference, navigate differences of perspective, and thus provide some form of extratextual, societal value. Why does this perception exist, and what are the particular narrative strategies that seemingly allow these texts to negotiate these scenes of difference?

By examining the basics of non-fiction's generic claims to factuality, this book delineates the ways in which non-fictional narratives are said to have – or are *perceived* to have – primacy of verisimilitude over other narratives, particularly in a country in which empirical truth across cultural, linguistic, and social lines is universally contestable. In doing so, this book argues for the theorisation of the concept of textual *authority*, which exists in a relationship with fictionality and factuality, and is made up of various intra- and paratextual components. These components are explored through case studies of various contemporary South African non-fiction texts – including those of Jonny Steinberg, Redi Tlhabi, Jacob Dlamini, Mandy Weiner, and Anton Harber – which in turn enrich a broad theoretical framework that, it is hoped, may be employed to enrich readings of narrative non-fiction, heightening the standard of critical readings and criticism in general of narrative non-fiction texts in South Africa.

AUTHORITY

IN

SOUTH AFRICAN NON-FICTION

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

This book was originally written and submitted as a thesis in fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Arts in English Language and Literature from the University of Cape Town in 2016. I have decided to repackage it as something of a self-published monograph to allow greater access to work that swallowed up a few years of my life. Why is it the norm that academic work remains difficult to access?

No significant changes or updates have been made to this text since I finished and submitted it in December 2016. As such, the language I use throughout is somewhat aloof, owing to being at the mercy of external examiners who require signposting throughout the text as to what 'this book' will and what 'this book' will not argue. In addition, I should note that 2015 and 2016 were difficult years to be a student and/or activist in South Africa, especially at the University of Cape Town. This is my excuse for – or, better, a rhetorical genuflection in defence of – any language or perspectives in 'this book' that might be over-keening or over-aggressive.

All that said, some of the chapters here have been, since 2016, re-written and published in peer-reviewed journals:

- Chapter 8 (including case studies 5 and 6) were re-written and published as "The Subject as Writer: Substituting Discourse and Story in Jonny Steinberg's *A Man of Good Hope*", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 44, 6, 2018.
- Chapter 9 (including case study 7) were re-written and published as "A Negotiated Authority: Webs of Facticity in Jacob Dlamini's Askari", *Research in African Literatures*, 50, 1, 2019.

For the most complete versions of my work on the subjects in these two chapters, please read the above articles in tandem with the original chapters.

– N.M. Edinburgh, 2020

INTRODUCTION

What's so special about South African narrative non-fiction?

For anyone interested in journalism or non-fiction in South Africa, it has been difficult to ignore the perception that narrative non-fiction[1] is one of – if not *the* – most illuminating, lively and innovative genres of texts produced by South African writers. Narrative non-fiction, it is said, has an ability and authority to negotiate difficult subjects – things like race, reconciliation, rehabilitation, disease, poverty, and so on – in more effective ways than other kinds of texts. It might be, as I argued two years ago in an article for *Literary Journalism Studies,* the "most useful" textual type "with regard to any attempts to negotiate the gaps of imagination left by apartheid" in South Africa – "that is, within contexts in which the printed word possesses any sort of cultural power in this country."[2]

But *why specifically* do many of us believe that narrative non-fiction can tell us more about the world – about the state of things – than other kinds of texts? Why can't a novel or a collection of poem deftly do these things, and thus also be described as 'useful'?

I have been considering this question for the past few years, and I think I have an answer. One needs to look at what kind of comparisons are being made between narrative non-fiction and other texts types. Rob Nixon, for example, states the seemingly "indisputable fact" that "[narrative] non-fiction has proven over the past twenty years to be South Africa's most

[1] The genre of texts discussed in this thesis will be referred to as 'narrative non-fiction'. A deeper explanation for this choice of term will follow in Chapter 1. (When quoting other texts that refer to the genre differently, however, their chosen nomenclature will be retained.)

[2] Nick Mulgrew, "Tracing the seam: non-fiction and imaginings in South African literature", *Literary Journalism Studies*, 6, 1 (2014), 14.

dynamic, inventive literary genre",[3] and this has gotten to the point that there have been suggestions – as Hedley Twidle points out – that fictional forms are "being outstripped, outdone or overpowered by non-fiction."[4] Perhaps most emblematic of this idea is the assertion of the lauded novelist Marlene van Niekerk, who noted on the dust-jacket of Antony Altbeker's *Fruit of a Poisoned Tree*, that the most fully-realised South African narrative non-fiction texts "almost [convince] one that fiction has become redundant in this country."[5]

'Redundant' how, though? Being 'almost convinced' aside, how can fiction 'become redundant' in any context? Redundant to whom, and to what ends? Is it because narrative non-fiction possesses some kind of mimetic ability – some kind of revelatory and aesthetic ascendency or authority – that other kinds of texts do not? Granted, narrative non-fiction is common to, and practiced in, many other countries and regions that have witnessed "cultural, social and political extremes" – such as the United States, Germany, and various countries in Latin America during the middle years of the 20th-century; places that have developed a need for representations and narratives more "closely attuned to the altered state of reality"[6] than the contemporary novel or the commercial press were seen or supposed to allow. Given South Africa's currently "endemically polycultural"[7] national space, Van Niekerk's assertion seems entirely

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[3] Rob Nixon, "Non-Fiction Booms, North and South: A Transatlantic Perspective", *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies,* 13, 1-2 (2012), 31.

[4] Hedley Twidle, "'In a Country where You couldn't Make this Shit up?': Literary Non-Fiction in South Africa", *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies*, 13, 1-2 (2012), 5.

[5] Marlene Van Niekerk, dust-jacket of Antony Altbeker, *Fruit of a Poisoned Tree* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2010).

[6] John Hollowell, *Fact and Fiction: The New Journalism and the Nonfiction Novel* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1977), 14–15.

[7] Rita Barnard, "Beyond Rivalry: Literature/History, Fiction/Non-Fiction", *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies*, 13, 1-2 (2012), 3.

plausible, even if it is just a riff on the truism that the truth is stranger than fiction.

In the end, however, this kind of praise is problematic, mostly because – as this book argues – there is no inherent, purely textual quality to narrative non-fiction that allows it a unique ability in exploring epistemological disjuncture. And, as such, that perception is just that – a perception. Certainly, critics like Claire Scott still write that narrative non-fiction is "able to open new rhetorical spaces in which […] South African identity can be interrogated,"[8] or that it provides "a means to make sense of the country's still-contradictory social and political environment."[9] But these assertions, as this book asserts in turn, is not solely a textual matter. Rather, it has more to do with paratextual information: non-fiction – and narrative non-fiction in particular – operates on reader expectations, on the perceived rules and conventions by which the text is seen to work. Indeed, all texts operate on reader expectations to some degree, and readers expect certain things of texts that they understand as non-fiction. Non-fiction narratives are thus constructed in a way that is mindful of these expectations, and are thus valued on their negotiation of reader expectation. Narrative non-fiction is expected to be authoritative; therefore, these texts are constructed to be authoritative. If they are successful in their constructions of authority, then readers will see them as authoritative. And so the cycle continues.

As such, this book attempts to provide an intervention to what I believe is a particular malaise in the study of narrative non-fiction as a text type, both in South Africa and abroad. This, at least in the South African context, is understandably a product of the relative newness of South African narrative non-fiction studies. While narrative non-fiction has been

[8] Claire Scott, "Whiteness and the Narration of Self: An Exploration of Whiteness in Post-Apartheid Literary Narratives by South African Journalists", PhD thesis, University of the Western Cape, 2012, 3.

[9] *Ibid.*

popularly practised in South Africa since the mid-20th century – by the *Drum* journalists of the 1950s especially, prior to the New Journalism of the United States[10] – the study of narrative non-fiction in South Africa is relatively new: indeed, Rennie characterises it as "a comparatively recent phenomenon"; even, like South African democracy itself, "nascent".[11] This, of course, is exciting. But nascent critical cultures tend to have teething problems, chief of which in the South African context is the lack of theoretical standards by which non-fiction, narrative non-fiction, and the operations of narrative non-fiction can be easily understood, divorced from the current critical perceptions of narrative non-fiction as a privileged text type.

Almost three decades ago, in an essay titled "Toward a Theory of Literary Nonfiction", Eric Heyne observed similar issues with the study of narrative non-fiction in the United States: although

> critical attention to [narrative non-fiction] has succeeded in increasing our understanding and appreciation of particular works […] there remains a great deal of confusion about theoretical issues, such as the distinction between fact and fiction, the qualities of literary status in nonfiction, and the responsibilities of the author in turning history into art.[12]

This book hopes to clarify many similar issues confronting South African narrative non-fiction studies today. To pick just one, the enthusiasm

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[10] *Ibid.,* 25.

[11] Gillian Rennie, "A textual analysis of Jonny Steinberg's The Number: Exploring narrative decisions", MA thesis, University of Stellenbosch (2012), 7.

[12] Eric Heyne, "Toward a Theory of Literary Nonfiction", *Modern Fiction Studies*, 33, 3 (1987), 30.

surrounding Van Niekerk's idea that one could be even 'almost convinced' of the redundancy of fiction points to a general lack of understanding about the function of fictional status in texts; a lack of understanding that proliferates throughout South African narrative non-fiction scholarship, in its nomenclature, in its analytical frameworks, in its inexactness about the techniques used by writers in their authoritative construction of narrative non-fiction texts.

In such a context, this book should be seen in part as an attempt to address this confusion, through a clear and structured study into the exact theoretical causes and textual tropes that inform the enthusiastic perceptions of South African non-fiction, in order to create and contribute a new theoretical framework for analysing narrative non-fictional texts; one that eschews inexact terminology and looks deeply into the paratextual and intertextual machinations of texts. I hope to do this particularly through the identification and exploration of the phenomenon of textual *authority* – the narrative techniques and tactics that enable texts to be seen as useful, valid, reliable, convincing or otherwise effective with regard to representing their subject matters. Predicating this exploration, however, is the creation of a framework which identifies and places in relation to each other the discrete phenomena of fictionality, factuality and authority – three textual statuses or components that are too often used synonymically, inaccurately or inconsistently in the discussion of narrative non-fiction texts, and narrative texts in general.

In doing so, this book hopes to answer a number of questions. Firstly, it asks: *What are the clearest ways and terminologies with which we can talk about narrative non-fiction texts?* Secondly, it asks: *How is (non-)fictionality and narrativity constructed?* Thirdly, it must consider: *What happens when someone reads a non-fiction text, and what drives their perceptions and expectations of that text?* And ultimately, to bring all of these answers together, we ask: *In what ways does a narrative non-fiction text meet these*

expectations, and thus convince the reader that what they are reading is to be perceived in a certain way?

The answers to these questions lie in discussions about narrativity, fictionality, paratextual signifiers, nomenclature, and, eventually, close readings of components of texts – such as epitexts and packaging – many of which are neglected in typical analyses of narrative non-fiction texts. These discussions will build on the work of various theorists – chiefly Daniel Lehman, Seymour Chatman, Gérard Genette and H. Porter Abbott – and will be tied to close readings of various texts (and various components of texts) by Redi Tlhabi, Jonny Steinberg, James Frey, Jacob Dlamini, Mandy Wiener, Anton Harber, Adam Levin, Hugh Lewin, Edwin Cameron and others. In understanding how each of these writers' texts attempt to exhibit and construct a sense of authority based on their fictional and factual statuses – and in which ways they succeed and fail in those exhibitions and constructions – we will come to see not just how South African non-fiction texts specifically navigate scenes of epistemological difference – as they are expected and perceived to do – but also better understand how authority and its predicates work within narrative non-fiction texts in general.

Some readers might think I am being unfair to Van Niekerk, Nixon and other critics who have tried to encapsulate the current spirit of South African narrative non-fiction. Why pick on critics who, in excitement or to a lay audience, might have lavished inexact praise on South African non-fiction texts? I suppose I should make a caveat: I have also done this. Plus, critical enthusiasm with regard to South African narrative non-fiction is completely understandable. Although narrative non-fiction is a long-historied, international phenomenon, Rennie writes that "the catalysts [of its South African reception] would be, by virtue of their context, local."[13] In the words of Jonny Steinberg:

[13] Rennie, "*The Number*", 20.

> Non-fiction is on a crest; it's much more read and much more powerful and influential than fiction in a way that wasn't true even a few years ago. […] If there is anything specifically South African [about it], it's the fact that we do live in a country that's changing profoundly and there's uncertainty, and if a book comes out that professes to show life beneath the surface, people urgently want to know that.[14]

Steinberg's assertion, if rather obvious, does helpfully reiterate the fact that people who live in a country undergoing profound and unpredictable change will be drawn to narratives that could help them make sense of it. That is, of course, why such texts are interesting. And, as Roy Robins, a former online editor of *Granta*, asserts, "much [South African] narrative non-fiction takes place on the road, in alienated urban areas or rural zones infested by poverty, illiteracy and the still-heavy spectre of apartheid – […] to locations mainstream writers have for too long ignored entirely."[15] Any phenomenon that results in the creation of texts that focus on new subject matter or liminal settings is a phenomenon that will garner a lot of attention. It would be churlish to criticise someone for expressing how much they like a type of texts, especially when I too enjoy those texts. Paratextual excitement around the creation of new kinds of texts, however, should not be confused with the paratextual performances of the texts themselves.

South African narrative non-fiction is perceived to be especially illuminating *chiefly as a by-product* of its component texts' employment of

[14] Nick Mulgrew, "Rummaging in Private Worlds", *Rhodes Journalism Review*, 32 (2012), 64.

[15] Roy Robins, "Joan Didion…", unpublished essay for *Rhodes Journalism Review,* 32, 2012, 2. Available on request.

tactics of authority; techniques that are in heightened use *specifically because* canonical South African narrative non-fiction texts tend to enter into epistemologically contested terrain. And because non-fictional texts by definition purport to be factual and authoritative, the burden of proving fluency with the conventions and representations of a epistemologically contested subject lies squarely with the text. The text has to prove its worth, and thus makes performances of authority, in order to convince the reader that it is presenting its subject matter in a reliable or valuable way. This is especially true when the producer of the text is reporting on social phenomena that, due to South Africa's long histories of separation and difference – as well as in contexts where historical record has been destroyed or is otherwise unavailable – may be profoundly distanced from their own knowledge and cultural understandings.

These trends offer opportunities for new textual and generic enquiries, new means to analyse texts, and new texts to analyse: in particular, we need to discover what specific components of South African narrative non-fiction texts makes them be seen by readers and critics alike as more trustworthy negotiations of scenes of contestation, alienation and difference. But without a framework to articulate these specific performances of authority – and without a basis on which one can analyse them separately from one's paratextual excitement about the proliferation of the narrative non-fiction text type – we risk muddying our analyses of these texts. This book seeks to clear the water, and to give a few examples of where analysis based on a fluent understanding of fictionality, factuality and authority can lead the study of South African narrative non-fiction.

This book is split into two sections. The first section seeks to investigate how and why certain types or genres of texts – non-fiction especially – are produced by their producers and read by their readers, with the long view of providing an analytical framework by which fictionality and other aspects of texts – factuality and authority, specifically – can be observed to work. This framework is created in order to inform and support my work in this book's second section, which seeks to understand how and why narrative non-fiction texts are imbued with and perform para- and intratextual authority, through expositions and investigations into various aspects of authority in South African narrative non-fiction texts.

We start with basics, though. In Chapter 1, I attempt to clarify the jumble of nomenclature that usually surrounds what I call 'narrative non-fiction' – and what other critics call 'literary journalism', 'literary non-fiction', and so on – with a view of identifying what it is exactly that is common to all narrative non-fiction texts and, therefore, what conventions and theory can be most accurately applied to narrative non-fiction texts. This chapter, as my choice of generic nomenclature might have foreshadowed, includes basic discussions of narrativity and fictionality.

Chapter 2 clarifies what exactly is meant when a text is identified as 'non-fiction'. Equally, it considers which properties of a text will make a reader perceive that text as 'non-fiction', and what implications that has for the reading of that text. This chapter introduces a key concept of this book, that of the 'paratext' – or the information that can be said to 'surround' the text – and what expectations these paratexts create for the producer and reader of the text. This chapter also contains the first case studies of this book – of James Frey's *A Million Little Pieces* and Redi Tlhabi's *Endings & Beginnings* – which foreground the importance of non-fictional paratexts by explaining what happens when the expectations engendered by these paratexts are not met by the text they surround.

Chapter 3 follows on directly from the first case studies, and considers specifically the problem of memoir, a genre of non-fiction that some critics and producers think should be treated by readers as exceptional, and thus operate and must be read differently to other genres of non-fiction text. This chapter argues that memoir cannot be taken as exceptional, with the long view of arguing that all non-fiction is subject to promises of factuality by sole virtue of their being designated as non-fiction.

Chapter 4 considers the problem of 'truth', and its usual confusion with or conflation with the idea of 'non-fictionality'. It argues that there is, in fact, no relation between fictionality and factuality (or truth) other than the setting up of a paratextual expectation that informs the reader's interaction with the text. This chapter thus argues for the dismissal of conceptions of 'truth' in the study of narrative non-fiction.

After dismissing what is not useful in the study of narrative non-fiction, Chapter 5 posits a three-tiered analytical framework of concepts that are argued to be useful: namely, *fictionality*, *factuality* and *authority*. These terms are set in relation to each other, specifically defined, and shown to be common not just to all narrative non-fiction texts, but *all* narrative texts. These definitions, delineations and establishment of a framework strongly informs the remaining four chapters of this book, which, given the lack of theoretical attention to this tier of the framework in comparison to the other two, each consider one specific component of *authority*.

Chapter 6 considers the ways in which a text is packaged and otherwise peritextually primed to be viewed as authoritative by the reader. This includes a listing of various peritextual elements that can be said to constitute authority claims on behalf of the text, the operations of which are highlighted and exemplified by an peritextual and semiotic analysis of two editions of Mandy Weiner's text, *Killing Kebble*.

Chapter 7 considers the narrative positioning of narrative non-fiction texts, specifically the ways in which various producers of texts textually

credential themselves with regard to their subjects. In doing so, two types of narrative credentialing are identified and examined through case studies: self-credentialing is observed in relation to the HIV/AIDS memoirs of Edwin Cameron (*Witness to Aids*) and Adam Levin (*AidSafari*); external credentialing is observed through the successes and failures of positioning and credentialing in Anton Harber's *Diepsloot*.

Chapter 8 delves into an already exhaustively-studied aspect of narratology, namely narrative reliability. As such, this chapter serves as a primer on how narrative reliability is seen to operate in narrative non-fiction specifically, especially with relation to the concepts of story and discourse. The work of Jonny Steinberg is foregrounded here, including a case study on his early works *Midlands* and *The Number*, as well as a close reading of *A Man of Good Hope*, his most recent text.

Finally, in contrast to the previous chapter, Chapter 9 attempts to introduce a newer, less-considered concept, namely applying the newsroom concept of *facticity* to narrative non-fiction texts, by explaining how webs of accepted 'good facts' can be structured in a narrative to make non-facts seem like facts, and thus shore up a text's claim to authority. This is further explained and exemplified by a close reading of Jacob Dlamini's text *Askari*, which holds very few conventional claims to authority.

As this book is not meant to be – nor can ever claim to be – exhaustive on the topic of authority as it operates in narrative non-fiction, I finish off with some loose remarks about where the concepts and frameworks introduced in this book can be taken, including prompts for study into certain text types that might further complicate or problematise the ideas I put forward here: this book, after all, aims to provide a theoretical jolt to South African narrative non-fiction studies. This is just a starting point.

CHAPTER 1

What is 'narrative non-fiction'?
(Or, Redefining the scope of 'literary journalism')

But first, some groundwork. In order to identify and examine the conventions of a genre, one should probably first decide on what the genre actually *is*. Contemporary scholars – such as William Roberts and Fiona Giles – opine that "despite [the] efforts" of "numerous theorists and academics [to] define" it, the genre "currently lacks a […] working definition and normative terminology."[16] This is "partly because it is an innovating genre that is still developing and resisting narrow definitions";[17] nevertheless it is frustrating that "after a productive period of theoretical debate in the wake of [Tom] Wolfe's essay on the New Journalism in the 1970s, the task of defining this genre has largely been abandoned".[18]

So, let us help to remedy that. While in my previous work[19] I have used the terms 'narrative journalism' and 'literary journalism' – and while it seems to be the agreed-upon term for journals such as *Literary Journalism Studies* – in this book I will shift to using the term 'narrative non-fiction', a generic designation that – while somewhat "amorphous" and "perhaps even unhelpful" in Robins's estimation – is "nonetheless exciting in its lack of limitation" and "floats free of pre-existing notions of rigour and

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[16] William Roberts and Fiona Giles, "Mapping Nonfiction Narrative: A New Theoretical Approach to Analyzing Literary Journalism", *Literary Journalism Studies*, 6, 2 (2014), 102.

[17] *Ibid.*

[18] *Ibid.,* 112.

[19] See Nick Mulgrew, "The Unlovable Parts of Us", honours thesis, University of Cape Town, 2011; Nick Mulgrew, "Rummaging in Private Worlds" and "How Did We Get Here?", *Rhodes Journalism Review*, 32 (2012); and "Negotiating the Seam: Non-Fiction and Imaginings in South African Literature", *Literary Journalism Studies*, 6, 1 (2014).

regimentation."[20] Building on this, I argue that 'narrative non-fiction' is a far more inclusive, flexible, generous and – most importantly – appropriate name for a genre of texts that, in South Africa at least, display high levels of generic innovation and hybridity.

An imperative to widen the scope of genre aside, there is other logic behind this. While I have argued previously that narrative non-fiction is "not so much a genre but a textual style"[21] – more specifically, "an indicator of a usage of a particular combination of journalistic and literary devices within a text"[22] – I have been, in Rennie's words, "outnumbered by analysts whose attempts to define it point to the more widespread belief that [it] is indeed a distinct form."[23] Consensus on what this 'distinct form' is, however, is far from being achieved. Critics and scholars' attempts at definition aside, authors have referred to their own texts in the genre by a number of names: literary reportage, reportage literature, creative non-fiction, *nuevo periodismo*, *testimonio*, long-form journalism, *ocherk*, narrative journalism, narra-descriptive journalism[24] and other examples of etymologic dexterity.[25]

In her own attempts to peg down a workable definition for the genre, Rennie concludes that "narrative journalism" – her choice of term – "serves as one more term in a raft of interchangeable terms".[26] Not every scholar agrees, however, that these terms – even the most etymologically similar

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[20] Robins, "Didion", 3.

[21] Mulgrew, "Unlovable", 1, in Rennie, "*The Number*", 18.

[22] Mulgrew, "Unlovable", 2.

[23] Rennie, "*The Number*", 18.

[24] John Hartsock, "Literary Reportage: The 'Other' Literary Journalism", *Genre: Forms of Discourse and Culture*, XLII, 1-2 (2009), 23.

[25] For her part, the U.S. 'literary journalism' researcher Jan Whitt offers no less than 22 different terms, including "art-journalism", "intimate journalism" and "nonfiction with a literary purpose". (*Settling the Borderland: Other Voices in Literary Journalism* [Lanham Maryland: University Press of America, 2008], 1-2.)

[26] Rennie, "*The Number*", 18.

terms – are interchangeable: in his study of the works of Russian journalists Svetlana Alexievich and Anna Politkovskaya, for example, Hartsock asserts that "'*literary reportage*' of European origin is a much more 'elastic' form than American *literary journalism*."[27] *Granta*, the leading international magazine publisher of the genre, defines "literary reportage" as a kind of extension of journalism, one "marked by vivid description [and] a novelist's eye to form [which] reveals hidden truths about people and events that have shaped the world we know."[28]

Unsurprisingly, each differing definition gives a different version – and "vision"[29] – of the genre. Isabel Hilton, writing about the establishment and judging of a prize for "creative non-fiction" writing in 2003, argues that the genre and its definitions remain "elastic", its frontiers "porous":[30]

> It was swiftly borne on the jury […] that though reportage was widely practised and its best examples long remembered, its boundaries seemed elastic. What was literary reportage? What was excluded? History and memoir were ruled out. Straight travel writing was on the margins […] Some jury members even argued, unsuccessfully, for the place of historical fiction. War reporting, with its drama and sense of importance, clamoured for attention. It was one of the journalists on the jury who finally came up with a description that I adopted. Good reportage and good novels shared some

[27] Hartsock, "Literary Reportage", 23. Emphasis added.

[28] *Ibid.*, footnote 7.

[29] *Ibid.*, 25.

[30] Isabel Hilton, "Commentary - A prize for the underrated genre of literary reportage", *New Statesman*, 13 October 2003.

> characteristics, he said: both had to be truthful, but reportage also had to be factual.[31]

The panel's cut-and-paste approach to defining the genre tells us one thing above all others: consensus has not been and probably will never be achieved on the textual make-up of the genre; certainly not on the interchangeability of definitions, nor the definitions themselves. In their attempts to define the genre, scholars have done little other than foreground their perceptions and subjectivities. "How convenient it would be," writes Whitt,

> at the beginning of a study of […] literary journalism to argue that the terms […] exist in harmony, but, in fact, when one has many words for "snow", each signifies at least a slightly different understanding of the white flakes that fall to earth in winter.[32]

Perceptions of narrative non-fiction as a subaltern genre

But are these kinds of discussions always helpful? Neither critics nor the practitioners themselves think uniformly on this matter. Scott, for example, asserts that "most" South African writers "rarely use the term 'literary journalism'" or similar terms anyway.[33] John S. Bak argues that "we should

[31] *Ibid*.

[32] Whitt, *Settling*, 2.

[33] Scott, "Literary journalism", 25.

stop referring to literary journalism as a genre", or "even as a form […] and starting calling it what it is: a discipline".[34] "Doing so", he argues further,

> would move us beyond Ben Yagoda's view of literary journalism as a "profoundly fuzzy term" and help situate it alongside literature and journalism and their respective fields of inquiry. […] Raising literary journalism to the level of a discipline would institute a moratorium on the barrage of definitions and defenses that have hindered the advancement of literary journalism studies and allow international scholars to work together on equal footing to promote their discipline.[35]

Exposure to this 'barrage' of circular, transnational, translinguistic discussion – inclusive and wide-ranging but ultimately conclusion-averse – is probably what led me to make the not-entirely-well-thought-out assertion that narrative non-fiction is not so much a genre but a particular set of literary and journalistic conventions[36] in the first place. But while it might be tempting to dismiss these discussions about generic nomenclature and definition as so much handwringing, it is still pertinent: one still needs to impose some kind of ambit. For the sake of brevity – as well as for the sake of readers who are not genre theorists – one should perhaps search for a more inclusive, yet still nominally correct and adequately descriptive definition, that would 'advance' a wide-ranging discussion.

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[34] John S. Bak, introduction to *Literary Journalism Across the Globe: Journalistic Traditions and Transnational Influences*, eds John S. Bak and Bill Reynolds, (Amherst and Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011), 18.

[35] *Ibid.*

[36] Which, itself, is something of a definition of 'genre'.

While Rennie does admirable work in arguing for a stable definition and nomenclature of the genre for the purposes of her studies, "literary journalism" (along with its synonyms and near-synomyms) is too restrictive a term for the purposes of this book, chiefly because not all texts that employ tactics of authority are pieces of journalism. Quite obviously, not all non-fiction is journalism – there also exists memoir, autobiography, history, polemic, and so on. But all journalism is necessarily non-fiction.[37] And while "non-fiction" encompasses texts that do not always necessarily purport to record what is true – but simply attempt to make, in H. Porter Abbott's words, "reference to the real world"[38] – the binary opposition to fiction in itself defines journalism as non-fiction: indeed, as Abbott argues, "there is no middle ground between fiction and nonfiction"; and as John D'Agata observes, non-fiction is "a genre that's popularly defined almost exclusively by its promise to not purvey fiction."[39]

Some scholars of literary journalism baulk at the idea that the genre/practice/discipline should be defined by what it is not. Jenny McKay argues that "there remains a problem for reportage with defining it as nonfiction, for, "as a category, nonfiction is clearly not synonymous with journalism, nor can it ever be satisfactory to describe a genre, or anything for that matter, in terms of what it is not."[40] By doing this, McKay says, "we imply that we attach much more importance to the opposite – to fiction in

[37] As part of his definition of the "generic meaning of journalism", journalism scholar Warren G. Bovée asserts that all journalism – and therefore any journalistic text – "is or at least purports to be literally true, rather than invented or fictional" (*Discovering Journalism* [Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1999], 28.)

[38] H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, second ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 146.

[39] John D'Agata, "Mer-Mer", in *Truth in nonfiction: Essays*, ed. David Lazar (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2008), Kindle edition.

[40] Jenny McKay, "Reportage in the U.K.: A Hidden Genre?", in L*iterary Journalism Across the Globe: Journalistic Traditions and Transnational Influences*, eds. John S. Bak and Bill Reynolds (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011), 53-54.

this case."[41] Indeed, "so often the worth of a piece of documentary reportage is described in terms of its similarity to fiction" – how its prose is fiction-esque, how it reads like a novel, and so on.[42] Hartsock also "prefer[s] 'journalism'" for a number of reasons, but chiefly because he believes that "defin[ing] the form as a 'nonfiction' reinscribes its status as a 'nought', thus re-enacting an elitist literary conceit that has long consigned such writing as a 'non' 'essential' literature".[43]

One's insecurity over whether or not a genre of texts is devalued by its generic designation, however, is probably not the best reason to avoid certain generic designations. These are texts, not people. Anxieties about an imagined textual hegemony – especially when this hegemony is not linked to or reflective of hegemonies of power outside literary studies – are, for lack of better words, silly and distracting, if only because these textual hegemonies are not temporally stable nor spatially universal. Non-fiction outsells fiction in South Africa;[44] the English novel (and perhaps the entirety of literature in the English language) "could be said to have had its roots in reportage".[45] It is arguably unprofessional, or at the very least professionally precious, to shy away from a more correct label – or to warn other writers to not use a label even when it is more appropriate to their literary context – simply because it *seems* to devalue the texts involved.[46]

For his part, Thomas B. Connery, a seminal scholar of literary journalism, argues that

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[41] *Ibid.,* 54.

[42] *Ibid.*

[43] John Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism: The Emergence of a Modern Narrative Form* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 12, in Whitt, *Settling the Borderland*, 2.

[44] Leon de Kock, "Going after the real thing", *Mail & Guardian*, 25 August 2010.

[45] McKay, "Reportage in the U.K.", 54.

[46] This is a different matter, of course, if one were to talk about and contest the appropriateness of labels such as 'African literature', when textual hegemonies reflect social hegemonies of power outside the literary realm.

> Use of the word "journalism" is preferred over "nonfiction" because the works assigned to this literary form are neither essays nor commentary. It also is preferred because much of the content of the works from traditional means of news gathering or reporting, including interviews, document review, and observation. Finally, journalism implies an immediacy, as well as a sense that what is being written about has a relevance peculiar to its time and place.[47]

But, again, this is something that is context-specific: many texts labeled by scholars and reviewers as "literary journalism" in South Africa are not wholly journalistic, or even journalistic at all. They might not even be written about current or immediate affairs, seeing as how South Africa's history has left blanks in history and literature that writers are still working hard to fill in. For example, Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull*, a canonical work of the genre, is, in Anthea Garman's words, a mixture of "journalistic reportage, verbatim testimony, poetry, memoir and other literary material"; thus "a work reviewers found difficult to categorise".[48] Jacob Dlamini's *Native Nostalgia*, a book subject to large amounts of dissection by South African reviewers,[49] is described on its dust-jacket as "part-history, part-memoir, part-meditation and part-ethnography".[50] Further, as Nixon argues, while "South Africa and the U.S. have both experienced non-fiction

[47] Thomas B. Connery, "Discovering a Literary Form," in *A Sourcebook of Literary Journalism: Representative Writers in an Emerging Genre*, ed. Thomas B. Connery (New York: Greenwood, 1992), 15.

[48] Anthea Garman, "Global resonance, local amplification: Antjie Krog on a world stage", *Social Dynamics*, 36, 1 (2010), 187.

[49] As we will see in Chapter 9.

[50] Jacob Dlamini, *Native Nostalgia* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2009), back cover.

booms", South Africa's is characterised not by "investigative reporting" and other journalistic genres, but by streaks of "personal memoir"[51] – texts like Rian Malan's *My Traitor's Heart*. Why describe texts that are not journalism as journalism? The label is inadequate, confusing, and in many cases, plainly incorrect.

'Narrative' vs 'literary'

In the absence of better options, non-fiction seems the most stable label for this collection of texts. Granted, it is vague: as Hilton attests to above, which sub-genres of non-fiction should be included, and which excluded? While Rennie and many others use the word "literary" – meaning works that carry "the interpretative caste of literature"[52] – as a distinguishing feature, the defining characteristic I will adopt is *narrative*, succinctly defined by Abbott as follows:

> Narrative is the representation of events, consisting of story and narrative discourse; story is an event or sequence of events […]; and narrative discourse is those events as represented.[53]

While Rennie warns that "it is not generically helpful to classify these works together under one label [i.e. "narrative non-fiction"] as the functional differences between them defy broad definition",[54] Abbott's

[51] Nixon, "Booms", 29.

[52] Rennie, "*The Number*", 18.

[53] Abbott, *Narrative*, 19.

[54] Rennie, "*The Number*", 19.

summation of narrative helps one decide which texts might be included within the ambit of "narrative non-fiction": for while all non-fictional texts contain descriptions of events or sequences of events – a story, in other words – not all exhibit evidence of these events' mediation or mediated-ness by a narrator. In other words, while it is true that all stories are necessarily mediated in order to be shared as texts, it does not follow that all texts display evidence of this mediation. The sense of mediated-ness that marks narrative texts as different from non-narrative texts is generally brought most strongly across by a disconnect in what Seymour Chatman calls the "chrono-logic" of narrative texts:

> Narrative entails movement through time not only 'externally' (the duration of the presentation of novel, film, play) but also 'internally' (the duration of the sequence of events that constitute the plot).[55]

In other words, in a narrative text, the length of time that events are understood to take in the story are or can be perceived to be different from the time these events take to happen in their mediation. So, while some non-fictional texts – such as a history textbook or certain pieces of hard news journalism – will consist of sequences of events (story), they do not outwardly exhibit narrative discourse, either through a difference in chrono-logic, or otherwise. Such "non-narrative text-types"[56] have no such temporal disconnect: the length that the text takes is how long it takes to tell the story.

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[55] Seymour Chatman, *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 9, in Abbott, Narrative, 16.

[56] Chatman, *Terms*, 9, in Abbott, *Narrative*, 16.

There are other ways that the narrative function of a text can be detected: for example, in defining what constitutes a narrative text and what does not, one could also take into account the levels of *narrativity* that a text exhibits. This approach does not regard narrative, in the words of Marie-Laure Ryan, "as a strictly binary feature, that is, a property that a given text either has or doesn't have".[57] In Ryan's model of narrativity, narrative is a "scalar conception"; an "open series of concentric circles which spell increasingly narrow conditions" of semantics, form and pragmatism.[58] It is, in other words, a "fuzzy set allowing variable degrees of membership" of narrativity[59] – a veritable "do-it-yourself" toolkit.[60] Similarly, in Abbott's estimation,

> Narrative […] is a 'scalar' category in that there are degrees of *narrativity*, ranging from pronounced signs that a story is being narrated to so slight a narrative quality that a text fails to justify the overall category of narrative but is instead recognized as something else: a meditation, a treatise, an anatomy, a lyric poem.[61]

Ryan's model, although interesting in itself, raises a broader, more philosophical point: what one considers a narrative text, or whether one considers a text to have narrativity, is often a matter of opinion, or model, or, in Abbott's opinion, "subjective human response".[62] "As with many

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[57] Marie-Laure Ryan, "Toward a definition of narrative", in *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative,* ed. David Herman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 28.

[58] *Ibid*., 29.

[59] *Ibid*., 28.

[60] *Ibid*., 30.

[61] Abbott, *Narrative*, 148.

[62] *Ibid*., 25.

issues in the study of narrative," he states, "there is no definitive test that can tell us to what degree narrativity is present", only that it is "a matter of degree".[63]

> There may be many different ways to draw the frontiers of narrative, but these differences of opinion do not carry significant cognitive consequences, because when we read a text, we do not ask "is it or isn't it a narrative", nor even "to what extent does this text fulfill the conditions of narrativity," unless of course we are narratologists. Asking people to decide whether or not a text is a story is one of those artificial situations in which results are produced by the act of investigation.[64]

That all said, why not just use "literary" as a distinguishing characteristic? Connery again is convincing when he argues that

> Use of the word "literary" is more problematic than use of "journalism". The word "literary" is not meant to suggest that journalism is not part of literature, or that literary journalism is literature and most daily journalism and magazine journalism is not. Nor should it be thought of as an attempt to categorize a specific kind of journalistic writing as more artistic, and perhaps elite, although occasionally that may be the case. "Literary" is used because it says that while the work considered is journalistic […] its purpose is not just informational. A

[63] *Ibid.*

[64] Ryan, "Toward a definition", 31.

> purely journalistic work is structured to convey information, primarily facts and authoritative viewpoints, clearly and efficiently. In a literary work, and in literary journalism, style becomes part of the meaning conveyed; the structure and organization of language interpret and inform.[65]

It is true that texts that aren't just purely journalistic have different and expanded illocutionary functions to texts that are. But 'literariness' alone – depending on what one believes constitutes 'literature' – does not mark out the outwardly manifested mediatedness – or narrativity – that this genre of texts exhibit and, in South Africa at least, most distinguishes it as both a genre and as a negotiator of difference. 'Literary', as a term, is also exclusive: what distinction between 'non-fiction' from 'literary non-fiction' is not also covered by the distinction between 'non-fiction' and 'narrative non-fiction' – other than, perhaps, the degree to which a text fulfils one's expectations and ideas of what should be considered 'literature'?

As John M. Ellis argues, "literary texts are defined as those that are used by the society in such a way that the text is not taken as specifically relevant to the immediate context of its origin."[66] But, often, in South African contexts, texts deemed to be works of "literary non-fiction" or "literary journalism" are taken as specifically relevant to the immediate (or near-immediate) physical, geographical, cultural, linguistic and temporal contexts in which they originate and in which they are written – in fact, the texts' deep contextual embeddedness – Steinberg in the rural Eastern Cape in the mid-2000s, Antjie Krog at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission – is

[65] Connery, "Discovering a Literary Form", 15.

[66] Ellis, John M, *The Theory of Literary Criticism: A Logical Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 44, in Heyne, "Toward a Theory", 486.

often what marks them out as significant texts. Eric Heyne believes that it "would be more accurate to [say] that literary texts are not taken as *limited* in relevance or significance by the details of their origins,"[67] but even that is not helpful, as the relevance and significance of many texts are often matters of opinion. Such questions, Heyne might argue, would "[indicate] the degree to which an essentialist theory of literary value is alive and well."[68] Besides, to use John Searle's words, "the literary is continuous with the nonliterary. Not only is there no sharp boundary, but there is not much of a boundary at all."[69] Literariness is therefore also a matter of perception, and as such, literariness is at once too specific and too broad to be helpful.

Heyne argues that "part of the reason" we should group narrative non-fiction texts together under the designation 'literary' "would be to separate them from novels, as nonfiction narratives of such power and complexity that they deserve the attention of literary critics."[70] To which I say: fair enough. Seeing as this book is based on perceptions – of readers, writers and subjects – let me impose a definition of "narrative non-fiction" that, based on my own perceptions, makes the term as easy to understand and as graspable and malleable as possible, while adequately separating narrative non-fiction texts from other kinds of texts with similar claims to factual status, or similarities in format or aesthetic.

Simply put, a text defined as a work of 'narrative non-fiction' necessarily exhibits two traits: firstly, it purports to make reference to the world outside of the text; secondly, it contains both story and narrative discourse, as defined above by Abbott and Chatman. In other words, it is paratextually non-fiction and exhibits narrativity. This way, in 'narrative non-fiction', we are able to include genres such as memoir, travel writing, and the generic

[67] Heyne, "Toward a Theory", 487.

[68] Ibid.

[69] John Searle, "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse," *New Literary History*, 6 (1975), 320.

[70] Heyne, "Toward a Theory", 482.

hybrids that are so common in the South African non-fiction canon but are excluded by less generous definitions of the genre, while excluding genres that make only partial claims to factuality – historical fiction, for example. We are also able to exclude non-fictional genres that do not exhibit narrativity, such as textbooks, scientific manuals, hard news journalism, and so on, without having to enter the argument of whether a text is considered 'literature', sufficiently 'literary' and so on.

What this leaves us with is a group of texts – a genre minimally, yet specifically defined – allowing us to accept the hybridity and elision of sub-generic boundaries that has, as discussed in the introduction to this book, contributed to the perception of South African narrative non-fiction as a dynamic, effective expository genre. A definition, in other words, to match the texts.

CHAPTER 2

Unpacking 'non-fiction'

Now that we have established the generic nomenclature that we will be working with, we must interrogate more deeply what the 'narrative' and the 'non-fiction' in 'narrative non-fiction' signify exactly, in order to build a robust analytical framework suited to its component texts.

As this book deals primarily with aspects, assumptions and perceptions of 'fact' and 'truth' in narrative non-fiction texts, over the next few chapters I will focus chiefly on what constitutes a non-fiction text – more specifically, the properties of a non-fiction text that makes readers perceive the text as non-fiction. For as Daniel W. Lehman rightly notes: "One can hardly insist on nonfiction's important power to implicate its writers and readers without considering some sort of 'classifying statements' about it."[71]

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So, to begin with the most basic of questions. Firstly, what is a non-fiction text? And secondly, how does a reader know that the text they are reading is a non-fiction text? Both of these queries, as simple as they may seem, have complicated answers, which will, in turn, lead us to further, deeper questions about functions and perceptions of truth in narrative non-fiction broadly.

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[71] Daniel W. Lehman, *Matters of Fact: Reading Nonfiction over the Edge* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1997), 16.

Let us start with the question of what constitutes a non-fiction text. The work of Abbott in the second edition of *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative,* Lehman's *Matters of Fact: Reading Nonfiction over the Edge*, and Eric Heyne's essay "Toward a Theory of Literary Nonfiction" will all help in untangling the knots.

"Attempts to draw the line" between non-fiction and fiction, as Lehman relates, have been informed by a number of intellectual traditions in a number of fields, including (but not limited to) historiography, narrative theory, literary theory, Marxist theory, physics, linguistics and philosophy.[72] In such a cognitive maelstrom, it's perhaps unsurprising that much classical scholarship on the status of non-fiction works from an empirical basis. Empiricists – seeking, as per some of their tendencies, to look for the most ancient basis upon which to construct an argument about modern texts – usually look first to Aristotle's *Poetics,* in which there are many attempts to affirm "the ascendancy of mimetic imagination over historical narrative".[73] In this "classical distinction[74]," mimesis and historicism are pitted against each other as two, discrete phenomena: the writer of non-fiction – "the historian", in Aristotle's terms – "narrates events that have actually happened, whereas the poet" – or the writer of fiction – "writes about things as they might possibly occur".[75] Non-fiction, in Aristotle's terms, trades in the inferiorities of "unpersuasive possibility", while fiction upholds the virtues of "persuasive impossibility".[76]

This, quite obviously, is an assertion that should not be applied to texts produced more than 2300 years after Aristotle's death. Historical fiction texts, for one, merge together events that have 'actually happened' with elements of the fictive or fantastical. "Many realistic novels," writes

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[72] Lehman, *Fact,* 16, 18-20.

[73] *Ibid*., 17.

[74] *Ibid*., 16.

[75] Aristotle, *Poetics* (New York: St. Martin's, 1989), 48.

[76] *Ibid*., 64.

Lehman, make use of "actual characters or public events […] to draw readers into the mimetic life of the text", which "can produce reactions that are similar to […] the process of implication […] in nonfiction."[77] And, as we will see later, persuasive elements – moments of "persuasive possibility", to twist Aristotle's words – may be built (perhaps as a matter of narrative necessity) into texts of narrative non-fiction.

But while such classical assertions are not wholly applicable to modern texts, the assumption that non-fiction sticks to events and things that can be demonstrably shown to have 'actually happened' is useful. As was briefly mentioned in Chapter 1, all narratives – both fiction and non- – are made up of two components: *story* and *discourse*. The temporal disconnect between the events of a narrative as they are rendered between story and discourse – how time operates differently with regard to the events depicted in a narrative and the narrative itself – is one of the main components that lends a narrative its *narrativity*, or its sense of being a narrative.

In non-fiction texts, however, there is "an additional defining factor" that is "absent in fiction".[78] This, as postulated by Dorrit Cohn, is the relationship between *story* and *reference*,[79] or how the events that are depicted in the narrative have analogues in the world outside of the narrative's textual bounds. This complicates matters, for any claim that a narrative makes to the world outside of it is complicated by its narrativity. That is to say, it has been *narrated*, by a *narrator*, and the narrativity of a narrative – or, to take a further step back, the textuality of a text – belies its constructedness by a constructor. "Not a few readers," thinks Emily Brugman, "will believe that fiction is make-believe and non-fiction tells the truth."[80] This is "obviously" not true for many reasons, she adds, "if only

[77] Lehman, *Fact*, 27.

[78] Abbott, *Narrative*, 146.

[79] Dorrit Cohn, *The Distinction of Fiction* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), 109-31, in Abbott, *Narrative*, 146.

[80] Emile Brugman, "The Truth of Non-fiction", *Publishing Research Quarterly*, 14, 2 (1998), 17.

because all writers are subjective, whether they write fiction or non-fiction."[81] Because of this, Lehman argues, "current literary theory in large part agrees that is it difficult indeed to separate 'what happened' from how it is told or experienced".[82]

A non-fiction text, however, cannot actually assert that its representation of the events it represents – its *discourse* in relation to its *story* – has direct, literal analogues to the events themselves as they exist or have existed outside of the text. Reference to an event should not be confused for the event itself, just as the discourse of a story cannot be conflated with the story itself.[83] As Abbott notes, writers or constructors of non-fiction texts usually deal "at best with an incomplete record,"[84] whether it be an incomplete archive, patchy testimony, or – as we will discuss in our first case study – fuzzy memory.

Reference could therefore be taken as "an intent to tell the truth",[85] or perhaps less problematically phrased, an intent to link the events depicted in a narrative with – this link might take the form of a complementary text, or another experience that is potentially available to – and corroboratable by – the reader. This results in non-fiction taking the "form" of a kind of communication "that *purports* to reenact for the reader the play of actual characters and events across time", in which "what counts is not so much whether these phenomena can be empirically known but that they are also available to and experienced by the reader outside the written artifact."[86]

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[81] Brugman, "Truth", 17.

[82] Lehman, *Fact*, 18.

[83] Although, as we see in Chapter 8, one can use the discourse of one narrative as the story of another narrative.

[84] Abbott, *Narrative*, 146.

[85] Abbott, *Narrative*, 146.

[86] Lehman, *Fact*, 4.

This intent would constitute what Lehman might term the "intentional" argument of defining the status of non-fiction.[87] In such an argument, a text is generically defined by what the intent of its producer was when they produced it.

Paratexts: what surrounds the text

While useful to consider, such a top-down, producer-imposed status is conceptually inadequate for the purposes of this book, chiefly because it discounts the role of the reader in experiencing a text. We need to establish the role of the reader in the determining of what makes a non-fiction text a non-fiction text. In doing so, we will attempt to more fully answer our first question – what is a non-fiction text? – by tackling the second question: how does a reader know that the text they are reading is a non-fiction text?

Lehman argues that while "it is impossible to delineate an exact boundary between fiction and non-fiction", it "does not mean that the boundary does not matter".[88] Nor does it mean, I might add, that is does not exist. The consensus is, however, that a reader cannot know on which side of the boundary a text lies solely from the text itself: Phyllis Frus insists that, stripped of generic context, the "experience of reading an invented tale is identical to that of reading a historical one."[89]

Abbott argues that – skewering the words of speech-act theorist John Searle's seminal essay "The Logical Status of Factual Discourse"[90] – "there is no textual property, syntactic or semantic, that will identify a text as a

[87] *Ibid*., 17.

[88] Lehman, *Fact*, 5.

[89] Phyllis Frus, *The Politics and Poetics of Journalistic Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 160.

[90] Searle, "Fictional Discourse".

work of nonfiction."[91] Indeed, he writes further, "what does not apply for fiction does apply for nonfiction […] because fiction, with its freedom, can imitate every single device one can find in nonfiction and still remain fiction".[92] That said, fictional texts might be able to be distinguished from their non-fictional counterparts if they use narrative techniques such as indirect thought and interior monologue, techniques that would "raise all kinds of alarm bells if you found it in a text claiming to be history".[93] [94] Obviously, nothing theoretically can actually stop a writer of non-fiction from rendering the consciousness of another person in a non-fiction text. Indeed, some do.[95] Abbott thinks that these instances occur because "nobody is standing guard" to make sure that non-fiction writers do not use narrative techniques usually associated with fiction.[96] I disagree. There *are* people standing guard to make sure writers of non-fiction do not take liberties with – say – rendering consciousness they cannot hope to render

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[91] Abbott, *Narrative*, 146.

[92] *Ibid.*

[93] Abbott, *Narrative*, 149.

[94] While he adds that there can be – and is – "much rendering of consciousness in non-fiction", he also asserts that (in accordance with Cohn) that "what marks the prose of a scrupulous historian are formulas of speculation", such as saying that a character in their text "might have known", "could have known", "might have thought", "possibly have done", and so on. (*Ibid.*)

[95] Abbott mentions the example of Lytton Strachey, whose "hugely popular" 1918 work *Eminent Victorians* featured frequent use of free indirect thought – a "novelistic liberty", in Abbott's words. (*Ibid.)* Michael Pickett hints that free indirect thought and free indirect discourse is not uncommon in contemporary non-fiction either, noting in a textual study of a 2003 book of collected narrative non-fiction by authors from the United States, that such techniques constitute "one area" that "set[s] renowned authors apart from others," by attempting to "seamlessly report on a character's thoughts, feelings, and expressions [in order to] make it easier for readers to navigate through the narrative." ("An Analysis of Narrative and Voice in Creative Nonfiction", *Journal of Arts and Humanities (JAH)*, 2, 7 (2013), 6.) Olga Blinova goes as far to say that free indirect discourse was "widely used in journalist writing" throughout the last century "and is still popular today". ("The Notion of Free Indirect Discourse and its use in Contemporary Journalism", *Humanities and Social Sciences Review*, 1, 2 (2012), 365).

[96] Abbott, *Narrative*, 149.

accurately, or making assertions without reference, or simply falsifying information. There are millions of them, in fact: readers, sentinels of the fuzzy lines between reality and falsity, good fact and bad fact, and fiction and non-fiction. A producer of a text employs narrative techniques in response to the expectations of these imagined readers.

The differences between fiction and non-fiction, therefore, is not a strictly textual one; rather, these differences occur *outside* the text – in the text's construction and consumption. As Lehman argues, the reader of a text is "engaged" with "both [the] inside and outside" of that text.[97] And, as Heyne points out via Searle, "the distinction we commonly make between factual and fictional statements is based, not on any characteristic of the statements themselves, but on our perception of the kind of statement being intended."[98] In Searle's words, "What makes […] a work of fiction" – or non-fiction, one might add – is "the illocutionary stance that the author takes toward it, and that stance is a matter of the complex illocutionary intentions that the author has when [they compose] it."[99] An 'illocutionary stance' can be thought of what the creator of a text intends the text to do prior to composing it, or during its composition. In a sense the illocutionary stance exists *outside* of the text; it is not the text itself, much the same as how the illocutionary act of a piece of speech – its intention, whether it is "making statements, [asking] questions, giving orders", etc.[100] – is distinct from the locutionary act, that is, the act of the piece of speech itself.

This introduces the concept of the *paratext*. Gérard Genette introduces the concept of the paratext as an integral part of the production and accompaniment of any given "literary work", which are "rarely presented in

[97] Lehman, *Fact*, 3.

[98] Heyne, "Toward a Theory", 480.

[99] Searle, "Factual Discourse", 326.

[100] *Ibid.*, 319.

an unadorned state."[101] Such texts are necessarily accompanied and reinforced "by a certain number of verbal or other productions, such as an author's name, a title, a preface [and/or] illustrations."[102] These "accompanying productions" constitute a work's paratext, which aims to inform and guide the reader in their consumption and reception of the text;[103] so-called "liminal devices and conventions, both within and outside the [text], that form part of the complex mediation between [text], author, publisher, and reader".[104] Paratexts, Abbott argues, thus "have the capacity to inflect the way we interpret a narrative, sometimes powerfully."[105] Philippe Lejeune in fact goes one step further, stating that a paratext constitutes "a fringe of the printed text which in reality controls one's whole reading of the text".[106]

There exist two kinds of paratexts, both of which greatly influence a reader's interpretation of a text. Firstly, paratexts that are physically attached to a text – tables of contents, credit rolls, titles – are known as "peritexts".[107] Paratexts that are not physically attached to a text, but are rather "connected by association" – reviews, word-of-mouth, textographies of a text's producer or producers – are known as "epitexts".[108] While paratexts – both peritexts and epitexts – imbue and/or surround all texts, different paratexts surround different formats and genres of texts. A film's paratexts may be constituted of advertisements, posters, playbills, and even the "notoriety of the actors" who appear within it.[109] Genette stipulates that

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[101] Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1.

[102] *Ibid.*, 1.

[103] *Ibid.*

[104] *Ibid.*, abstract.

[105] Abbott, *Narrative*, 239.

[106] Philippe Lejeune, *Le Pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), in Genette, *Paratexts*, 2.

[107] Abbott, *Narrative*, 239.

[108] *Ibid.*

[109] *Ibid.*

"something is not a paratext unless the author or one of his associates accepts responsibility for it",[110] but this is arguably more true with regard to peritexts than epitexts.

These kinds of paratexts are the means by which readers will come to know of and read a text as a non-fiction text. This brings us to what I might term the first maxim of the reading of non-fiction texts: readers only definitively know that a non-fiction text is non-fiction *if they are told so*. A book's paratexts, similarly, may consist of an introduction to the text, speeches given at the book's launch, visual and textual signifiers on the dust jacket and so on. But the most obvious of non-fiction-signifying paratexts is the title and/or sub-title of a text, in which there may be carried obvious generic signposts. In the canon of South African non-fiction, there exists a wide array of these signposts: in addition to more obvious markers such as "A True Story"[111], "A Biography",[112] "True Confessions",[113] or "A Memoir",[114] some texts carry more ostensibly innocuous signifiers, which indicate how the narrative will unfold, such as a "Story",[115] an "Inside Story",[116] a "Chronicle",[117] a "Portrait",[118] a "Search"[119] or a "Journey".[120]

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[110] Genette, *Paratexts*, 9.

[111] McIntosh Polela, *My Father My Monster: A True Story* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2011); Tim Couzens, *Tramp Royal: The True Story of Trader Horn* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1992).

[112] Anthony Sampson, *Mandela: The Authorised Biography* (London: HarperCollins, 2000).

[113] Breyten Breytenbach, *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* (Emmarentia: Taurus, 1983). In this text's case, however, "True Confessions" is used somewhat ironically.

[114] Thabo Jijana, *Nobody's Business: A Memoir* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2014).

[115] Jacob Dlamini, *Askari: A story of collaboration and betrayal in the anti-apartheid struggle* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2014); Redi Tlhabi, *Endings & Beginnings: A Story of Healing* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2012).

[116] Peter Harris, *In a Different Time: The inside story of the Delmas four* (Cape Town: Umuzi, 2008).

[117] Jonathan Kaplan, *The Dressing Station: A Surgeon's Chronicle of War and Medicine* (New York City: Grove Press, 2003).

[118] Ivan Vladislavic, *Portrait with Keys* (Cape Town: Umuzi, 2006).

The author may attest to being a "Witness"[121] to something, or equate their life's journey with a "Safari".[122]

Other paratexts may be found in a text's packaging (or, increasingly in digital contexts, its metadata.) Generic signifiers may be found in blurbs, or under signposts in physical or online bookstores. In certain situations, such as contexts in which legal restrictions – such as when the subject of a book involves pending court cases – inhibit a non-fiction text to explicitly assert its truthfulness, writers and producers of texts have to resort to more implicit paratextual strategies. One example is *Behind the Door: the Oscar Pistorius and Reeva Steenkamp Story*, written by Mandy Wiener and Barry Bateman, a text that contains a number of appeals to truth, even when it cannot purport – due to its coverage of a contested legal case, in which "perception vacillated from version to version" – to be a 'true story'.[123] On its physical dust-jacket alone the text purports to be "compelling" and "authoritative", containing "exclusive content" such as "phone messages", "affidavits" and "photographs" – some of which are graphic crime-scene pictures taken soon after Steenkamp's death by Pistorius' gun.[124] It also contains a shout from the "bestselling crime novel" writer Deon Meyer, in which he describes the book as "definitive" and "brilliant", and pays tribute to Bateman's "first-journalist-on-the-crime-scene insight", which gives the book "a huge boost".[125] It is, in sum, "*the* book to read on the Oscar and

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[119] Jonny Steinberg, *The Number: One Man's Search for Identity in the Cape Underworld and Prison Gangs* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2004).

[120] Jonny Steinberg, *Three-Letter Plague: A Young Man's Journey through a Great Epidemic* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2008).

[121] Edwin Cameron, *Witness to AIDS* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2005).

[122] Adam Lewin, *Aidsafari: A Memoir of my Journey with AIDS* (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2005).

[123] Dust jacket of Mandy Wiener and Barry Bateman, *Behind the Door: The Oscar Pistorius and Reeva Steenkamp Story* (Johannesburg: Pan Macmillan South Africa, 2014).

[124] *Ibid.*

[125] *Ibid.*

Reeva story".[126] The overwhelming feeling on reading such an onslaught of buzzwords – so the publishers of the book might hope – is that the book is as close to the truth as one might be able to get.

Of course, paratexts can only do so much, and we will examine their strengths and limitations with regard to imbuing a text with authority in Chapter 6. But, because "we can never know purely on internal evidence whether the story is meant to be taken as true",[127] we must rely on paratexts to guide our *initial* perceptions and expectations of the text. As much as Searle's concept of how the creator of a text necessarily adopts an 'illocutionary stance' toward the text – and that this stance is necessarily complex – a paratext, which can be thought of a kind of illocutionary stance, does not act on its own. In the context of non-fiction, additional factors come into play, ones that surround the veracity and corroboratability of the text.

Paratextual paralysis and failures

> "The death of the author comes the moment a reader picks up a book."
> – Jacob Dlamini, *Native Nostalgia*[128]

Once a reader is paratextually informed that a text purports to be non-fiction, they will, either consciously or subconsciously, test the veracity of the text, to see if the information presented in the text lives up to the promises embedded in such a paratext. Even though the paratext is the sole determinant of whether a text should be seen as non-fiction, it alone cannot

[126] *Ibid.*, emphasis included.

[127] Heyne, "Toward a Theory", 480.

[128] Jacob Dlamini, *Native Nostalgia* (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2009), 23.

be taken to mean that everything presented in the text is factual. John D'Agata argues that a non-fiction paratext should be "popularly defined" as a "*promise* to not purvey fiction";[129] a promise that is made implicitly in the text's paratext. And because readers do not lack agency in their reading of a text, the value of this promise will likely be tested.

Lehman argues that while "the circumstances of […] research, writing, publication, and consumption were, and are, deeply intertwined with what literary critics traditionally have called the 'text'", a non-fiction text's "full power and problems cannot be understood until the discursive relationships among author, subject, and reader that undergird nonfiction are read as closely as the words and images that make up the narrative itself".[130] In this way we can say a non-fiction text is "implicated".[131]

Abbott explains that a more "common expression" for the critical undergirding of discursive relationships "is that nonfiction narrative is *falsifiable*", which he terms as "a somewhat misleading way of saying that it makes sense to test the accuracy of such a narrative as a representation of what actually happened":[132]

> Nonfiction accounts are tested by seeking corroboration, that is, additional evidence that supports the narrative, just as lawyers hope to find more than one witness of the same series of events. The narrative and the narratives that are offered in support could still be all wrong, of course. But the point is that testing for this kind of validity is the heart of the historical enterprise.[133]

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[129] D'Agata, "Mer-Mer". Emphasis added.

[130] Lehman, *Fact*, 4.

[131] *Ibid.*

[132] Abbott, *Narrative*, 146.

[133] *Ibid.*, 147

Abbott goes on to explain that this stands in contrast to fictional narratives, which are "not falsifiable", for the sole reason that "the story [they tell] is neither true or false": "When and if a fictional narrative goes out of date, it is for reasons other than having been falsified as history."[134]

We will come back to Abbott's argument that fictional narratives are "neither true [nor] false" later, in Chapter 4. For now, let us focus on the idea that a non-fictional narrative is falsifiable by the reader. D'Agata is right in saying that "claims of authenticity in nonfiction have long been the form's selling point," to the extent where "these texts are sold, read, and primarily judged based on information that's contained in them."[135] To go one step further, one could say that these non-fiction texts are sold, read, and primarily judged on the *veracity* of the information that's contained in them. Readers will even "forgive", in Abbott's words, "failures of art and even lapses of narrative suspense in the delivery of this kind of truth."[136] But there is a "trade-off" to this, as "too much art and narrative drive can make the truth suspect".[137] We will come to see this later, as the missteps and fabrications of James Frey's *A Million Little Pieces* and Redi Tlhabi's *Endings & Beginnings* will show us.

There is a tension, inherent in non-fiction texts, between the promises made by the text's paratext and the testing of the reader of those promises. Jonny Steinberg, a writer familiar with these kinds of promises, would extend this tension into a "sort of triangular structure that exists between writer, subject and reader",[138] which includes a particular tension "between what a reader expects and what the writer's obligations [are]", to both reader and subject: "Whether they know it or not," he adds, "what most readers of narrative non-fiction demand is […] to peer over [the author's]

[134] *Ibid.*

[135] D'Agata, "Mer-Mer".

[136] Abbott, Narrative, 145.

[137] *Ibid.*

[138] Mulgrew, "Rummaging", 65.

shoulder as he rummages through his subject's private world.[139]" In his first book-length text, *Midlands*, Steinberg notes moreover that "a person who agrees to open his world to a journalist is not simply inviting a crowd of innumerable strangers into his life": the reader is "a vicarious and hungry animal" that "intrudes greedily, from the shelter of its own invisibility".[140]

In *The Journalist and the Murderer,* Janet Malcolm renders this tension in a kind of domestic metaphor: "The writer of fiction is entitled to more privilege," she says, for "he is the master of his own house and may do what he likes with it; he may even tear it down if he is so inclined."[141] But, she notes, "the writer of nonfiction is only the renter, who must abide by the conditions of his lease".[142] What are the conditions of this 'lease'? Malcolm imagines that the conditions of writing non-fiction constitute a "contract to the reader" in which the writer must limit "himself" and their narrative "to events that actually occurred and to characters who have counterparts in real life and he may not embellish the truth about these events or these characters."[143]

The consequences of defaulting on the conditions of Malcolm's 'lease' are severe for both the text and its producers. But just as it is impossible to tell that a text is non-fiction from the text itself, it is difficult to judge whether a text has not falsified or embellished information from the text itself. (Unless, of course, there are obvious inconsistencies or contradictions within different fact claims made in the text.) Generally, mistakes or embellishments in a text cannot be *proven* without corroboration, whether it be from a reader's personal experience or, more likely, from other sources. As such, Abbott argues that, like our knowledge of whether the text is non-

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[139] *Ibid.*

[140] Jonny Steinberg, *Midlands* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2002), x-xi.

[141] Janet Malcolm, *The Journalist and the Murderer* (New York City: Vintage, 1990), 153.

[142] *Ibid.*

[143] *Ibid.*

fiction", the "news of our mistake" of reading a faulty non-fiction text as a factual text "generally comes from outside the text".[144]

[144] Abbott, *Narrative*, 148.

CASE STUDY 1

Paratextual failures in *A Million Little Pieces* by James Frey and *Endings & Beginnings* by Redi Tlhabi

> Lying became part of my life.
> – James Frey, *A Million Little Pieces*[145]

It was reader corroboration that lead to probably the largest scandal in international publishing of the early 21st Century. James Frey's *A Million Little Pieces*, a debut 'memoir' of drug addiction and recovery, was exalted by *Publishers Weekly* as a work of non-fiction comparable in quality to those of David Shields, Dave Eggers and David Foster Wallace.[146] Despite a "major publicity campaign"[147] and healthy industry interest,[148] the book more or less left the public eye after its publication by Nan Telese's Random House imprint Doubleday in April 2003:[149] its "combination of

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[145] James Frey, *A Million Little Pieces* (London: John Murray [Publishers], 2004), 351.

[146] *Publishers Weekly*, "A Million Little Pieces", *Publishers Weekly*, 10 March 2003

[147] *The Smoking Gun*, "A Million Little Lies: Exposing James Frey's Fiction Addiction", *The Smoking Gun*, 8 January 2006.

[148] Foreign rights for the book were sold to eight countries, and the book was selected by numerous U.S. bookstore chains for their monthly promotions. (Charlotte Abbott, "One in a Million", *Publishers Weekly*, 24 February 2003.)

[149] A review in *Kirkus* (1 February 2003) called the book "at times pretentious in its self-regard, yet ultimately breathtaking". *Publishers Weekly* (10 March 2003) called it "deeply flawed", "too long", yet "difficult to put down". In the New Statesman (26 May 2003) Julian Keeling called Frey's style of writing "irritating", and said the book "confirms the widespread belief that addicts are selfish, self-centred and self-obsessed". Lastly, in the Russian magazine *Exile*, (29 May 2003) the poet John Dolan simply called the book "the worst thing I've ever read".

upper-middle-class entitlement, street credibility garnered by astronomical drug intake and PowerPoint-like sentence fragments and clipped dialogue" received mixed reviews.[150]

In May 2005, however, the text was unexpectedly promoted by Oprah Winfrey,[151] with substantial consequences: by the end of 2005, Frey's two 'memoirs' – *A Million Little Pieces* and its sequel *My Friend Leonard* – sold in the region of 3.8 million copies;[152] *A Million Little Pieces* rose to the top of the *New York Times'* Best Sellers list.[153]

This was a feat given the text's origins. *A Million Little Pieces* was initially rejected by 17 publishers before it was picked up by Doubleday. It turned out, however, that these rejections all occurred when the text was being marketed as a work of fiction[154]. "Presumably", said one journalist, "all the fake stuff" had been "excised"[155] from the text before its publication as non-fiction. However, with greater exposure and greater riches for Frey[156] came greater scrutiny for the text; in particular the lengthy litany of misdemeanors and crimes of which he claimed he was guilty. These 'facts' include the assertions that he had

> Blacked out for he first time at fourteen. At fifteen got arrested three times. […] Three more arrests at seventeen. Got first DUI. Blew a .36, and set a County Record. […] Two arrests at eighteen. […] Twenty-one. Three arrests. Assault with a Deadly Weapon, Assaulting

[150] *Publishers Weekly*, "A Million Little Pieces".

[151] It was the first book by a living author to be promoted by the U.S. talk show host in more than three years. (Laura Barton, "The man who rewrote his life", *The Guardian*, 15 September, 2006.)

[152] Edward Wyatt, "Several Million Little Dollars", *The New York Times*, 12 March 2006.

[153] Abbott, *Narrative*, 146.

[154] *The Smoking Gun*, "A Million Little Lies".

[155] *Ibid.*

[156] Wyatt, "Several Million Little Dollars".

> an Officer of the Law, Felony DUI, Resisting Arrest, Attempted Incitement of a Riot, Possession of a Narcotic with Intent to Distribute, Felony Mayhem. Skipped bail on everything.[157]

After a lengthy investigation, investigative website *The Smoking Gun* published an exposé on *A Million Little Pieces* titled "A Million Little Lies", detailing through "police reports, court records, interviews […] and other sources" how Frey "fictionalized his past to propel and sweeten [the text]'s already melodramatic narrative".[158] Among other things, *The Smoking Gun*'s investigation revealed how Frey "wholly fabricated or wildly embellished details of his purported criminal career, jail terms, and status as an outlaw 'wanted in three states'".

Although Frey says in an author's note to *A Million Little Pieces* that he "used supporting documents" in the writing of the book "when [he] had them and when they were relevant",[159] *The Smoking Gun* revealed how Frey took steps to "legally expunge" a number of court records revolving around an alleged confrontation with police in Ohio.[160] This confrontation – in which Frey describes how he "hit a Cop"[161] with his car while high on crack cocaine, with a blood alcohol level of "point two nine" and in front of "thirty witnesses"[162] – serves as "a narrative maypole around which many other key dramatic scenes revolve and depend upon for their suspense and conflict".[163] While in *A Million Little Pieces*, Frey relates how he was kept in jail in Ohio for 87 days (less than the threatened sentences of, variously,

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[157] Frey, *Million Little Pieces*, 111-112.

[158] *The Smoking Gun*, "Million Little Lies".

[159] Frey, *Million Little Pieces*, v.

[160] *The Smoking Gun*, "Million Little Lies".

[161] Frey, *Million Little Pieces*, 296.

[162] *Ibid.*, 333

[163] *The Smoking Gun*, "Million Little Lies".

"three years in State Prison"[164] or eight-and-a-half years in maximum security[165]), *The Smoking Gun*'s investigations showed that he had only been in jail for a matter of hours, and that none of the relevant authorities "had ever handled a case against the author."[166]

The fallout from the investigation was not immediate. But while Oprah "[voiced] her own defense of the memoir" for a fortnight after *The Smoking Gun*'s allegations, she eventually dragged Frey onto her show and "publicly excoriated a shame-faced […] Frey for having 'betrayed millions of readers'".[167]

The word 'betrayed' is significant here, as it brings insight into the reader's relationship with a text they have been told is non-fiction. Mark Doty argues that "memoirs are to some degree loyal to history": "they operate under the sign of truth, and we wouldn't be interested in them in the same way if they were constructed out of whole cloth".[168] As such, a reader's interest in a memoir – or a piece of non-fiction generally – comes inherent with a strict contract of trust between reader and writer. If this contract is impinged upon – whether by embellishment, falsification or otherwise – the text is compromised. The reader may dismiss the text in different ways, depending on the severity of the impingement. As Frey's lapses were severe – he also admitted later to making up a graphic episode about receiving root canal treatment without anaesthetics, among other tough-guy fantasies[169] – the reader's reaction is severe. This could lead to the reader dismissing the book's illocutionary thrust, whether entirely or partially, and rendering it untrustworthy – thus, unauthoritative.

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[164] Frey, *Million Little Pieces*, 332.

[165] *Ibid*., 333

[166] *The Smoking Gun*, "Million Little Lies".

[167] Abbott, *Narrative*, 146.

[168] Mark Doty, "Bride in Beige", in *Truth in nonfiction: Essays*, ed. David Lazar (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2008), Kindle edition.

[169] Abbott, *Narrative*, 146.

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Seven years after *A Million Little Pieces* became the non-fiction publishing world's ur-scandal, South Africa had its own, similar controversy of corroboration. This time, however, the memoir didn't just implicate its already-prominent author, but also a long-lost friend.

Published by Jacana in 2012, *Endings & Beginnings: A Story of Healing* is a fusion of memoir, biography and socio-historical study, written by popular radio talk-show host and newspaper columnist Redi Tlhabi about her childhood relationship with a notorious gangster, named in the text as "Mabegzo".[170] Mabegzo operated in the Sowetan suburb of Orlando East, where Tlhabi grew up, and where rumours abounded of his violent and theatrical vigilante exploits;[171] he was, to residents, "a legendary, almost mythical figure who could walk through roadblocks and taunt the police who were 'too scared' to arrest him".[172]

Tlhabi meets Mabegzo when she is eleven years old, two years after her father was stabbed to death by an unknown assailant, who afterwards dug the knife into her father's eye, "gouging it out and leaving it hanging on his cheek".[173] Unsurprisingly, this traumatised Tlhabi, and stories of her father's death "followed" her,[174] transforming through rumour and suspicion, thus making her both outwardly and inwardly vulnerable to the harassment of older boys in her neighbourhood – specifically, one sweaty-

[170] Tlhabi, *Endings & Beginnings*.

[171] Including, variously: killing policemen and doing "wheel spins in the police car" to "amuse" crowds; forcing a rapist to "have sex with his own mother and sister" at gunpoint; and shooting the owner of a liquor store at point-blank range when he wouldn't give him alcohol for a party (*Ibid*, 38.)

[172] *Ibid.*

[173] *Ibid.,* 3.

[174] *Ibid.,* 5.

handed boy named Siphiwe.[175] One day after school, having had just "escaped" Siphiwe's clutches, another young man – a, "polite", "decent" and immediately likable stranger – walks up to Tlhabi and starts speaking to her.[176] Having gained her trust, however, the young man kisses Tlhabi on the lips, in front of her friends.[177] She is shaken by this transgression, more so when she realises later that the young man is Mabegzo.

Following this, Mabegzo regularly meets Tlhabi on a street corner on her walk home from school, and although she is initially anxious about the potential of being sexually assaulted by him,[178] he becomes her platonic protector. They grow close: they speak "endlessly" about Tlhabi's late father,[179] while Mabegzo confides in Tlhabi that his conception was the result of a gang rape,[180] and that the trauma of that knowledge had eventually come to define his troubled life. Tlhabi eventually describes Mabegzo as her "brother":[181] "He may have been a criminal," she opines, "but that's not all he was. And I know. Better than all of them."[182]

One day, however, Tlhabi indirectly experiences Mabegzo's violent streak, after she tells him that her old tormentor Siphiwe had threatened to rape her and pulled down her pants in the street.[183] Mabegzo is visibly "appalled at such cruelty",[184] and Siphiwe is found murdered the following Saturday. While she suspects Mabegzo is the perpetrator, Tlhabi figures that "if he had just committed murder, he'd be on the run".[185] Although

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[175] *Ibid.,* 46.

[176] *Ibid.,* 48-49.

[177] *Ibid.*

[178] *Ibid.,* 55.

[179] *Ibid.,* 57.

[180] *Ibid.,* 74.

[181] *Ibid.,* 76.

[182] *Ibid.,* 3.

[183] *Ibid.,* 98.

[184] *Ibid.,* 63.

[185] *Ibid.,* 65.

Mabegzo doesn't confess to killing Siphiwe, he does later confess to Tlhabi that he killed two of his fellow gang members, a crime for which he expected to be killed in return.[186] In their final moments together, Tlhabi and Mabegzo stand in a rain shower under an umbrella, Mabegzo holding it so that "I didn't get a single drop on me, while he was exposed to the downpour".[187] The next day, on her walk home from school, Tlhabi comes across Mabegzo's corpse on the street corner – "our corner"[188] – at which they would usually meet. "For the second time in [her] short life," Tlhabi looks at the corpse of a paternal figure: "There's blood coming out of this mouth, just like with Papa two years ago."[189]

This scene serves as both the beginning and ending of *Endings & Beginnings*'s first section, and is referred back to throughout the rest of the narrative. In all, *Endings & Beginnings* is split into three sections, as Tlhabi first narrates her memories of Mabegzo, then searches for and interviews members of Mabegzo's extended family – during which she learns Mabegzo's real name, "Mahlomola", meaning "sorrow"[190] – before finally finding Mabegzo's mother Imelda, and inviting her to stay at her house for a week, during which time they share stories and bond. In all, Tlhabi spends "months" visiting Mabegzo's "family, friends and neighbours", in hope of "unravel[ing] layers of a complicated life and secrets that tore families apart".[191] In writing her story, she hopes to "offer some insights on the effects of trauma and how often it morphs [a] child into a hardened adult".[192] Her "fervent belief", and the book's hypothesis in sum, is "that

[186] *Ibid.,* 97.

[187] *Ibid.,* 98.

[188] *Ibid.*

[189] *Ibid.,* 1.

[190] *Ibid.,* 104.

[191] *Ibid.,* viii.

[192] *Ibid.*

social conditions create the monsters who terrorise our lives and make us prisoners in our own country".[193]

In reviewer Sikhumbuzo Mngadi's estimation, Tlhabi's placement of Mabegzo in a "social and historical context" allows her to "perform two seemingly mutually incompatible acts within two seemingly incompatible narrative frameworks": while "Tlhabi's personal narrative seeks a symbolic exorcism of the 'ghost' of Mabegzo", the other "seeks to explain the broader socio-historical context that shaped him".[194] Indeed, Tlhabi's main concern throughout each of the book's three sections is the steady construction of a layered, socially-contextualised biography of Mabegzo, and an analysis of the tumultuous circumstances that led to his becoming "a bully, a murderer and a rapist".[195] This includes a broad historical profile of Orlando East, as well as an oral history of her neighbourhood, constructed from memories and information gleaned from her father by "badgering [him] with questions" when she was "a little girl."[196] She also portrays the gangs that operated in her neighbourhood, as well as the "trail[s] of bullets and bodies" left by the police,[197] thus invoking the texture of Sowetan civic life under late apartheid, a society in which "there was too much death in our midst, and no time to be paralysed by it".[198] She lingers especially on an archetypal description of a necklacing she witnessed one day on her way home from school:[199]

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[193] *Ibid.*

[194] Sikumbuzo Mngadi, "The struggle to know a dark mind", *Sunday Independent,* 14 April 2013, 18.

[195] Tlhabi, *Endings*, 76.

[196] *Ibid.,* 7.

[197] *Ibid.,* 35.

[198] *Ibid.*

[199] *Ibid.,* 31.

> Children were told to go home, but it was too late. […] They'd beaten the man to a pulp. While he bled and begged for mercy, they stoned him, placed a rubber tyre around his neck and poured paraffin over him before setting him alight.[200]

"Nobody quite knew what he'd done", Tlhabi relates: "The story kept changing, depending on who was telling it."[201] In this way, along with the morphing stories that followed her around her father's death, Tlhabi establishes Sowetan society as one of hearsay, rumour, menace and even ambivalence; a place in which a "sadistic killer" like Mabegzo "could come to be viewed as a hero" or even "a messianic figure."[202]

Before setting off to find Mabegzo's family many years after his death, Tlhabi formulates her quest as a series of questions that try to make sense of the contradictions of her childhood and her memories of Mabegzo:

> How could anyone be so evil and yet so gentle and loving? Is it possible that he was simultaneously human and psychopathic? Can a single human being possess a soul so worthy of admiration and condemnation in equal measures?[203]

As her investigation continues, however, she is continually forced to revisit and – in Mngadi's words – "revise" her "thesis".[204] For example, after

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[200] *Ibid.*

[201] *Ibid.*

[202] *Ibid.,* 37.

[203] *Ibid.,* 104.

[204] Mngadi, "Dark mind", 18.

discovering from one of Mabegzo's friends that Mabegzo had indeed killed Siphiwe – and that he had killed him in a manner identical to how Tlhabi's father had been murdered[205] – she feels that "the Mabegzo I knew and care for has finally died" and "has exhausted all the sagacity my heart will allow".[206] "At long last," she says, "I have to let him go".[207] [208] She then instead becomes "burdened" by the "behaviours of the adults toward Mabegzo while he was growing up" and how they were "unaware that [they] ultimately gave rise to a monster."[209]

Tlhabi states in a 2013 interview with Anthony Altbeker that, in trying to answer questions about Mabegzo's life, she wanted "to find a way to come to terms with what had happened because I was haunted by it."[210] Although she didn't intend at first to write a book about her relationship with Mabegzo, she says that "the fact that the world is still so hostile to women, to young girls and to the poor persuaded me that I should share my story".[211] Similarly, Tlhabi says elsewhere that although she initially believed the text would be "just a personal journey",[212] it also constituted an attempt to use her status to create social "accountability" for crime:

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[205] Magbezo had "stuck the knife right into Siphiwe's eye and literally dug it out" (Tlhabi, *Endings*, 130).

[206] *Ibid.,* 162.

[207] *Ibid.*

[208] But of course, she doesn't really get round to letting him go until the book's epilogue, in which Tlhabi – in a fit of artistic freedom – imagines an encounter with Mabegzo on the Kuzwayo street corner, during which he apologises for his crimes, accepts his apologies, and gives to him the "gifts" that he had found his mother and that she loves him (*Ibid.,* 288).

[209] *Ibid.,* 175.

[210] Antony Altbeker, "Orlando Ordeal: Antony Altbeker Talks to Redi Tlhabi About Endings and Beginnings", *Sunday Times (Lifestyle* supplement), 16 June 2013.

[211] *Ibid.*

[212] Alexander Matthews, "Loving a Tsotsi", *Business Day* (*Wanted* supplement), 10 May 2013, 44.

> Every day that I read a newspaper about rape, murder, crime, I thought about [Mabegzo]. I thought: 'Who are these people doing this and how does it happen that somebody I knew and loved could be that kind of person? […] I don't have this dispassionate interaction and distance with the topics I deal with: [My role puts me in] a very powerful position [because I] can actually change the psyche of a nation based on the information that is out there.[213]

These illocutionary functions are rendered in the text itself. After the revelation of Mabegzo's murder of Siphiwe and the 'revisiting' of her thesis, Tlhabi writes that she "ache[s] for all the other Mabegzos roaming the streets of my home town," and how, as "they graduated into hardened criminals, everybody claims not to know where it all started".[214] The insinuation, of course, is that Tlhabi herself is claiming to be searching for, and coming to know, how such a hardened criminal may come into being – a project that led *Business Day*'s Sue Grant-Marshall to call the book "important" – a "sociopolitical account" that "reads like a movie script".[215] Likewise, Rob Gaylard of the *Sunday Argus* deemed it "accessible, warm and intimate",[216] while the *Star*'s Diane De Beer lauded its "scorching" take on "an issue that should be addressed radically."[217] Propelled by such reviews, as well as Tlhabi's strong media presence, *Endings & Beginnings*

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[213] *Ibid.*

[214] Tlhabi, *Endings*, 175.

[215] Sue Grant-Marshall, "Degradation on the streets of Soweto", *Business Day*, 5 March, 2013, 7.

[216] Rob Gaylard, "Investigating soft spot in criminal's armour", *Sunday Argus*, 27 January, 2013, 19.

[217] Diane de Beer, "A strong voice worth listening to", *The Star*, 4 December 2012.

sold 10 000 copies within a few weeks of its release.[218] It eventually won the *Sunday Times* Alan Paton Award in 2013, with later reports that it would be turned into a film.[219]

In April 2014, however, *Endings & Beginnings* was exposed by Phindile Chauke of the *Citizen* as being at least partially fabricated. Responding to a tip-off, Chauke tracked down the relatives of a "notorious gangster of the eighties in Orlando East" called "Mahlomola 'Mabegzo Tlhapi' Mapitse".[220] Mabegzo Mapitse's family described Tlhabi's text as "a complete lie",[221] refuting that Tlhabi had traced, approached, or spent any time at all with them.[222] While it was initially the claim that Mabegzo was a product of sexual assault raised the alarm,[223] Mamiponi Mapitse – Mabegzo's mother – stated that Tlhabi had also misrepresented Mabegzo's birthplace (Soweto, not Lesotho); the identity of his father (Mapitse's husband, not a rapist); and his primary caregiver as a child (his mother, not his grandmother.[224]) Mabegzo's mother went on to describe Tlhabi as "evil"[225], while his sister said elsewhere that what Tlhabi's text "had opened wounds of all those people that Mabegzo hurt".[226]

This led to a back-and-forth between Tlhabi and the Mapitses (via Chauke's reporting) that played out in the *Citizen*. A few weeks after the first article, Tlhabi published a response to the Mapitses' assertions,

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[218] Phindile Chauke, "'Evil' Tlhabi 'lies' in her gangster book", *The Citizen,* 21 April, 2014. Also see Charl Blignaut, "Redi's book ends, but a film begins", *City Press*, 26 May 2013. http://www.news24.com/ Archives/City-Press/Redis-book-ends-but-a-film-begins-20150430

[219] Chauke, "Evil".

[220] *Ibid.*

[221] *Ibid.*

[222] *Ibid.*

[223] Phindile Chauke, "No rape; I raised him – angry mom", *The Citizen,* 21 April 2014.

[224] Chauke, "No rape".

[225] *Ibid.*

[226] Chauke, "Evil".

claiming that the names she had used for her characters were fictional, and these contradictions were purely co-incidental:

> I was completely stunned when I learnt there was a family laying claim to my protagonist, Mabegzo. I could not countenance that such a strange, unusual name, which I had imposed on my childhood gangster friend to protect his mother, could turn out to belong to another person.[227]

In *Endings & Beginnings*, Tlhabi does state that she took the "liberty" of changing "some" names in her text; in her official response, she clarifies that she did not have the permission of her subject's mother to use his real name, so she "chose a synonym" to use in its place.[228] The Mapitse family disputed this, in turn, stating that it could not be "true that she made up the names", pointing out the strict correspondence between the names used in the text and the names of people living in the area at the time.[229] Mapitse added:

> It seems this woman does not realise what she has done with her lies. I am the one who has to walk in my community under a cloud that I was raped and abandoned my child because of this.[230]

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[227] Redi Tlhabi, "I told the truth as I know it", *The Citizen*, 13 May 2014.

[228] Tlhabi, "The truth".

[229] Phindile Chauke, "Angry mother's reaction to Redi Tlhabi comments", *The Citizen*, 29 April 2014

[230] Chauke, "Angry mother".

While some commentators, like columnist Kay Sexwale, stated that it could be technically possible that this was a case of "mistaken identity",[231] Tlhabi revealed on her talk radio show that "arrangements were underway to bring people from Lesotho," including the textual Mabegzo's mother, "to corroborate her facts."[232] However, in a later statement, Tlhabi said the "Lesotho family [had] refused to come out and speak".[233] The mother, who Tlhabi claimed was now in her mid-sixties with a large family, reportedly did "not want to tell the world about the most humiliating experience of her life."[234]

Whether or not the textual Mabegzo is Mabegzo Mapitse, one fact in the book remains uncorroboratable by external sources; possibly even falsified. Like *A Million Little Pieces*, *Endings & Beginnings* was written around a "narrative maypole", a scene "around which many other key dramatic scenes revolve and depend upon for their suspense and conflict".[235] In the latter text, this scene is Tlhabi coming across Mabegzo's corpse on her way home from school.[236] The Mapitse family, however, contend that Mabegzo Mapitse was killed and his body found in Dube, about five kilometres away from Orlando East.[237] It might have still been factual that Tlhabi's protagonist (not Mabegzo Mapitse) had died as the scene depicted, but another investigation by Chauke renders this unlikely: "residents who have lived on Kuzwayo Street for about 50 years," she writes, "disputed that there was ever a body left for dead on any of the

[231] Kay Sexwale, "A case of mistaken identity?", *The Citizen*, 20 May 2014.

[232] Chauke, "Angry mother".

[233] Phindile Chauke, "Redi Tlhabi speaks out about book", *The Citizen*, 13 May 2014.

[234] Tlhabi, "The truth".

[235] *The Smoking Gun*, "Million Little Lies".

[236] Tlhabi, *Endings*, 98.

[237] Chauke, "Evil".

road's intersections in 1989".[238] This could again be explained by Tlhabi taking artistic license with her story, but until she proves otherwise, it remains a indictment on the veracity of her story and, in turn, her claims to understand how a "hardened criminal" may come into being.[239] Just like the tales surrounding Mabegzo in her text, "the story [keeps] changing, depending on who [is] telling it."[240]

Tlhabi, however, still believes the burden of proof does not rest on her: even though she says she is "confident" that the Mapitses are not the "characters" in the text and that she has "related" her experiences "to the best of [her] ability", she will "not hesitate" to apologise if she is "proven wrong".[241] Given the evidence stacked against her, one might take a cynical reading of such a pre-emptive apology. (Notwithstanding the equally-troubling fact that, if she is not lying, she has, by her own admission, asked "a rape victim to come out, leave her life and defend me", thus showing "very little regard for [her] pain".[242]) Unlike Frey, however, Tlhabi is not *persona non grata* in her local literary circles, and is still a prominent public figure. Impinging upon paratextual promises is therefore not enough in itself to destroy the reputation of a writer; which asks the question, are different writers of non-fiction (and different sub-genres of non-fiction) held to different standards? And if so, why?

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[238] Phindile Chauke, "Cops have no files on gangster's book murder", The Citizen, 23 April 2014. This information was supported both by the local police's 1989 crime occurrence registers, as well as Soweto police spokesperson Kay Makhubela, who said that "there is no such a case in our files [for] that street or the nearby areas", neither for the date on which Tlhabi claims Mabegzo died, nor any of the days that preceded it. (*Ibid.*)

[239] Tlhabi, *Endings*, 175.

[240] *Ibid,* 31.

[241] Tlhabi, "The truth".

[242] Tlhabi, "The truth".

CHAPTER 3

The problem with memoir

Whether or not Tlhabi ever fully clarifies the questions that surround *Endings & Beginnings*, her text (like *A Million Little Pieces*) is an excellent example of how any non-fiction text is – to borrow Lehman's words – a 'socially implicating' act. In particular, it shows how non-fiction "draws in its writers and readers as both historical agents and producers and consumers of texts".[243]

One could even say that, when a reader reads a non-fiction text, they become (implicitly) implicated in a contract of expectations with the writer. Different readers, of course, have different expectations for different non-fiction texts by different writers, but generally these expectations are all based on the assumption that the text is purporting to tell a narrative that has an analogue in reality outside the text. This reality may be modified by any paratextual concessions made up-front by the writer – such as conceding that the names of characters or place names in the book have been changed, or that a record of sources may be incomplete – which the reader may accept in continuing to read the text.

Paratextual modifiers aside, when a text does not live up to its reader's expectations of it – when the continually-negotiated 'contract' of non-fiction is impinged upon – the reader will usually react negatively. Again, different readers will have different reactions. They might write a bad review, or complain to the text's producers or other readers, thus changing the nature of the text's paratext. They may simply put the book down, or disregard the book's illocutionary functions.

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[243] Lehman, *Fact*, 7.

As Lehman posits, the response of a reader who has "specific experience" of a text's story "off the page" will likely be "unmanageable".[244] In the case of *Endings & Beginnings* in particular, the incongruencies between the Mapitse family's experiences and Tlhabi's narrative led the former to take their own story to a newspaper with the aim of discrediting Tlhabi's text and character. But one need not be a family member of a character in a text to have a 'unmanageable' response to a text. Someone may be implicated in a non-fiction text by virtue of the text's story happening within the physical or temporal space in which one lives, or has lived, or is at least familiar. One who reads a text that is physically or temporally proximate to themselves often "recognizes [that text's] ability to construe [their] experience off the page"[245]: "In ways less applicable to fiction," Lehman argues, such a reader "becomes an actual character in the very document she is reading".[246] And whatever reaction that reader has, as "unpredictable" as it might be, certainly "makes a material difference to the text".[247]

And, one may add, how other readers will interpret the text. Lehman warns that "what one sort of audience believes to be real may be flatly rejected by another", and therefore the task of weighing up reactions to texts in order to find some kind of consensus of reality is "slippery at best, if not impossible".[248]

Readers will have different standards or expectations for every text they read. Moreover, some readers have different standards or expectations for texts that fall into different genres of non-fiction.

Memoir is a case in point; a genre that engenders the most unmanageable and inconsistent sets of reader expectation. Unlike other

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[244] *Ibid.,* 27.

[245] *Ibid.*

[246] *Ibid.*

[247] *Ibid.*

[248] *Ibid.*

kinds of non-fiction texts, memoir – the paratextual genre under which both *A Million Little Pieces* and *Endings & Beginnings* were originally placed – is widely seen as a genre in which discourse can overshadow story, and in which the illocutionary intent of the text is viewed as more important than its accuracy. Arguably, the exceptional way in which memoir is written and received has much to do with its history and etymology – in particular its close association with the concept of memory. John D'Agata notes that the English term 'memoir' "comes directly from the French for memory, *mémoir*, a word that is derived from the Latin for the same, *memoria*".[249] He notes that the term "has been so stable" that "even Caesar's personal history of the Gallic wars was referred to as *memoriae* upon its publication" more than fifty years before the Common Era.[250]

Memoir, it is thus argued, is inescapably written with the ingrained limitations and faults of memory. These features – such as "invention, compression" and "use of the imagination" – may become appropriate "practices", even "necessities", in the writing of memoir.[251] The memory, it is argued, is not the domain of watertight fact, nor of objectivity, nor non-stop photographic recollection – so why should a text based on one's memory, however faulty, be held to such standards? The fact that *A Million Little Pieces* remained a brisk seller long after the allegations of Frey's embellishments and falsifications were proven – remaining even a *New York Times* best-seller for four months after Oprah publicly humiliated Frey on her talk show[252] – is arguably "proof" for Abbott's argument that "the art of

[249] D'Agata, "Mer-Mer".

[250] *Ibid.* To make things even more interesting, Caesar's memoir, *Commentarii de Bello Gallico*, is written in the third person (*Ibid.*)

[251] David Lazar, introduction to *Truth in nonfiction: Essays*, ed. David Lazar (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press), Kindle edition.

[252] Abbott, *Narrative*, 147.

marketing narratives includes factors that complicate any clean binary distinction between the 'rules' for fiction and nonfiction".[253]

It might be seductive, then, to argue that memoir may be its own special case; a grouping of texts, contained within their own mimetic and cognitive contexts, that falls into some slim crack between fiction and non-fiction. I would contend, however, that this argument – that memoir is a special genre of non-fiction, in which facts are acceptably less important than they are in other genres – is at its best capricious, and at its worst blind to the social implication of texts that present themselves as non-fiction.

In her essay, "Truth in Personal Narrative", Vivian Gornick argues that "memoirs belong to the category of literature, not of journalism", and as such "it is a misunderstanding to read a memoir as though the writer owes the reader the same record to literal accuracy that is owed in newspaper reporting or historical narrative".[254] Instead, the reader must be "persuade[d]" to believe "that the narrator is trying, as honestly as possible, to get to the bottom of the tale at hand".[255] Gornick expands on this rather asinine assertion by saying that the purpose of memoir is for "the reader to feel and understand what the narrator feels and understands", and that this empathetic experience "is the 'truth' that the writer is after".[256] To Gornick, this constitutes "a definite distinction between what the writer of personal narrative does, and what the writer of biography, newspaper writing, or literary journalism does":[257] "not the literalness of the situation, but the emotional truth of the story."[258]

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[253] *Ibid.*

[254] Vivian Gornick, "Truth in Personal Narrative", in *Truth in nonfiction: Essays*, ed. David Lazar (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press), Kindle edition.

[255] Gornick, "Truth".

[256] *Ibid.*

[257] *Ibid.*

[258] *Ibid.*

In this argument, which I will term "memoir exceptionalism", memoirs are allowed a certain amount of laxness in terms of accuracy of facts, because each memoir operates in its own discrete, self-explanatory context.[259] This makes sense if one is to consider memoir strictly as a textual extension of one's memory as it operates as a subjective experience. Memoir, however, is seldom completely detached from social context. Moreover, a memoir text is seldom wholly shielded from the operations of other genres – such as social study, history or biography – within its bounds. Gornick's assertions are naive, or at least short sighted, not least because they draw an unhelpful and arbitrary distinction between the imaginary monoliths of "literature" and "journalism", and not just because it ignores the fact that many non-memoir narratives contain a narrator who is honestly trying "to get to the bottom of the tale at hand".[260] Gornick's argument also fails because most texts do not draw upon the conventions and rules of one genre only. In South African non-fiction alone – and particularly in the texts I will be examining in later chapters – texts are often generically hybrid, implicating not just the writer and reader in the construction of meaning, but also the subject.

This leads us to the second maxim of non-fiction texts: the designation 'non-fiction', as Lehman argues, "signifies narrational operations on an *actual body or bodies* rather than on imaginary characters."[261] Memoir is not exempt from this, whether it is tied up with other genres or not – as the reactions of readers who read memoirs with falsified information in them will attest.

Paul Lisicky asserts that "once we hold memoirists to the standards of journalism and privilege agreed-upon truths to emotional interpretation,

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[259] Gornick asserts that a memoir's context is self-contained: that it "is itself clarifying" and "composed […] out of a mass of fragmentary memories." (*Ibid.*)

[260] *Ibid.*

[261] Lehman, *Fact*, 9. Emphasis added.

the whole genre falls apart – it loses its reason for being." But it is ludicrous – evasive, even – to complain that subjecting a memoir to corroboration nullifies a text's *raison d'être*, whatever that may be: a text, a memoir, has many reasons for being and many reasons for being read. A writer may write it for catharsis; a reader may read it for guidance. Indeed, D'Agata maintains that the "foremost purpose" of memoir, "at least in terms of traditional interpretations of the form", is "to report to readers about one's suffering and to instruct them how to overcome theirs."[262] Frey, for his part, argued in the aftermath of the *Million Little Pieces* scandal that he had wanted to "change lives", to "inspire" and "help people who were struggling" with addiction by writing a book "that would detail the fight addicts and alcoholics experience" and "detail why that fight is difficult to win".[263] But what use does a memoir have if this report of suffering or experience is not actually moored in the world outside of the text? A memoir, like any and all non-fiction texts, is at least minimally implicative, and, as Lehman argues, this implication has real world consequences for even the most ancillary subjects in a text.

Lisicky does add a caveat to his argument, by stating that memoir exceptionalism does not apply to "best-selling memoirists who pass off wholly invented episodes as experience": "conscious manipulators of facts" like Frey are "an entirely different matter".[264] He doesn't state *how* they are a different matter, though, other than saying, again, that it comes down to the intention of the author alone: whether the writer is making an honest mistake, or is intentionally subverting the contract of expectations implicit

[262] D'Agata, "Mer-Mer".

[263] Frey, *Million Little Pieces*, v. This author's note was added to editions of the text after *The Smoking Gun*'s revelations.

[264] Paul Lisicky, "A Weedy Garden", in *Truth in nonfiction: Essays*, ed. David Lazar (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press), Kindle edition.

in a non-fiction text.[265] This is an undesirable idea, for it asks too much of the reader. What to do with texts like Tlhabi's, for example? The reader cannot divine the reasons for her falsifying information in *Endings & Beginnings*, and Tlhabi won't let on whether her inaccuracies were intentional. Most non-fiction texts would be summarily dismissed as unauthoritative by the reader if they were not factual; if one grants memoir an exceptional status, however, the reader is theoretically stripped of their interpretative rights.

If one were cynical, one might argue that the proponents of memoir exceptionalism are acting selfishly. Gornick's case for memoir exceptionalism, for example, is based on her experiences of the aftermath of a reading she gave from her text *Fierce Attachments* at a college, after which she had "casually said that on a few occasions" she had made "a composite out of the elements of two or more incidents – none of which had been fabricated – for the purpose of moving the narrative forward".[266] To her "amazement", her words were taken as a "confession", and a student "rushed off to send the scandalous news to an online magazine", whereafter she was "denounce[d]" as a "liar".[267] She recounts, incredulously, how she could be "compare[d]" to frauds like Binjamin Wilkomirski, who "invented" a Holocaust survival memoir, or Jayson Blair, a journalist who had "made up" many of his stories for the *New York Times*.[268]

"Now, look at this," Gornick writes: "I, a memoirist who had composed (composed, mind you, not invented) a narrative drawn entirely from the materials of my own experience, was being compared with a psychopath [and] a dishonest newspaper reporter".[269] Such "inappropriate analogies are

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[265] Paul Lisicky, "A Weedy Garden", in *Truth in nonfiction: Essays*, ed. David Lazar (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press), Kindle edition.

[266] Gornick, "Truth".

[267] *Ibid.*

[268] *Ibid.*

[269] *Ibid.*

proof" to Gornick, "if proof be needed, that memoir writing is a genre in need of an informed readership".[270]

Is 'uninformed' readership an excuse for such apparent misreadings? Or is the risk of reader backlash a necessary part and parcel of the production of memoir? No doubt that Gornick's situation is unfortunate, but it was arguably avoidable. A cynic might remark that what Gornick means by an 'informed' readership is a docile one. Either way, does the fact that she was offended – by her own readers' readings of her remarks, no less – mean that memoir should be taken as a special case? Or is it really readers' duties to be 'informed' about some special rules regarding memoir?

At the risk of sounding glib, it comes down to the reader. The tension between the writer's intent and the reader's expectations has to be negotiated on a text-to-text, reader-to-reader basis. Crucially, it's a tension that resolves itself with results that – to Gornick's chagrin – writers have little control over.

Non-fiction is a game of power. As much as a writer has complete power over how they present events and characters, and which peritextual information is presented to a reader, a reader has complete power over how they react to that presentation or representation, and how any epitextual information is modified. I would argue in this case that Gornick misread and mismanaged her readers' expectations. As we will see in Chapter 8, specifically with regard to the work of Jonny Steinberg, the use of composite characters need not be a death knell to a text's claims to authority as long as the use of a composite is sufficiently signposted and justified to the reader.

Many falsehoods, after all, can work in a writer's favour. David Lazar argues, for example, that "marks of self-deception", "forms of psychological manipulation, the drawing of conclusions, and epiphanies that seem labored, unworthy, unbelievable [or] false" can, in fact, be

[270] *Ibid.*

"useful" if the writer is seen to catch themselves "in the act" and display "the insight and ability to self-correct"; this is "among the rare pleasures of different forms of memory writing".[271] Likewise, it may be permissible to use a composite, make uncorroboratable claims, or even say patently untrue things, as long as the reader's expectations and potential reactions to these devices are managed within the text.

This is especially important, given how readers with no connection to the story of a text can also become implicated if its discourse is sufficiently resonant to them. In *A Million Little Pieces*, for example, James Frey champions a method of overcoming addiction that eschewed 'traditional' addiction recovery techniques – such as so-called '12-step' programmes. His assertions that he, for example, "consider[ed] addiction a weakness, not a disease",[272] would have significant consequences for readers who empathised with his text but did not know yet that the story of his recovery – which "hing[ed] on his ability to continually surmount temptation"[273] – was embellished,[274] *The Smoking Gun*'s initial report remarked that "Frey's tall tales would […] be pretty funny if so many people didn't actually believe them" and if the text hadn't "emerged as a source of inspiration and guidance for countless substance abusers".[275] Maia Szalavitz, a health journalist, wrote that *A Million Little Pieces* perpetuated the "destructive" myths "that addicts cannot safely receive compassionate medical care" and "that compassion is riskier to their health than brutality."[276]

Abbott notes that "when Frey's narrative hovered between success and failure" – after the *Smoking Gun* allegations but before its skewering by Oprah – that "there were a number of efforts to formulate some kind of

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[271] Lazar, introduction to *Truth*.

[272] *The Smoking Gun,* "Million Little Lies".

[273] *Ibid*.

[274] Mala Szalavitz, "The Case Against James Frey", *The Fix*, 1 May 2011.

[275] *The Smoking Gun,* "Million Little Lies".

[276] Szalavitz, "Case Against James Frey".

hybrid status for it that would allow it to maintain its prestige".[277] While those efforts on publishers' and promoters' parts have fallen away, current editions of *A Million Little Pieces* contain appeals by Frey to memoir exceptionalism, in defense of his book and its arguably harmful lies:

> There is much debate now about the respective natures of works of memoir, nonfiction, and fiction. […] I believe […] that memoir allows the writer to work from memory, instead of from a strict journalistic or historical standard. It is about impression and feeling, about individual recollection. This memoir is a combination of facts about my life and certain embellishments.[278]

This statement finds resonance with some critics, like Doty, who argues that memoir is generically "allegiant to memory, not to history", defining history as "that which can be corroborated [or] the collaborative work of saying the story of the past."[279] In some memoirs, "it sometimes feels that memory itself is a form: associative, elusive, metaphoric, metonymic" and that a writer's memory "arranges sequences, heightens moments, makes the duration of some events vast or twinklingly brief, changes the colours or soundtrack or lighting to a scene in order to heighten emotion".[280] This, in part, accounts for how a writer's memories of an event may differ from other people's memories, or the "corroborated" and "collaborative" story of the past. It accounts for how memory differs from document.

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[277] Abbott, *Narrative*, 146.

[278] Frey, *Million Little Pieces*, vii.

[279] Doty, "Bride in Beige".

[280] *Ibid.*

But crucially, Doty adds, "all memoirs are to some degree loyal to history": "they operate under the sign of truth, and we wouldn't be interested in them in the same way if they were constructed out of whole cloth."[281] This seems a fair middle ground: memoir may work from memory, or under the sign of memory, but as it is still produced as a genre of non-fiction, it still is subject to the contract to which all non-fictional texts are subject. Non-fictional texts purport to tell the truth, and while a memory may be truthful or factual to a memoirist, it may not be truthful or factual to any given reader. It is a memoirist's prerogative to display or represent their memory in any way they want; it is the reader's prerogative to want corroborate this information – just like any information in any non-fictional text – and react in any way they want should the memory not be congruent with either their experience or what Doty might term 'history'.

[281] *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 4

Side-stepping the nomenclature of 'truth'

Short of conceding that memoirs are exceptional cases, what can we do with texts like *A Million Little Pieces* and *Endings & Beginnings* – texts that purport to be non-fiction, but fail to live up to the expectations that most readers have when they read something labelled as 'non-fiction'? A knee-jerk reaction by some readers is to brand such faulty non-fiction texts as 'fiction', with 'fiction' being equated to 'false' or 'made up'. "Not a few readers," argues Emile Brugman, "will believe that fiction is make-believe and non-fiction tells the truth" – an assertion that "is obviously not true, if only because all writers are subjective, whether they write fiction or non-fiction".[282]

As texts like *A Million Little Pieces* and *Endings & Beginnings* show us, the distinction between fiction and non-fiction has little to do with what is factually accurate (or adequate) and what is factually inaccurate (or inadequate). These texts remain non-fiction texts despite their embellishments and falsifications. Nothing can change that: as I will re-iterate in both this chapter and the next, fictionality is a designation entirely imposed upon a text by its producers.

Further, as shown to us by the attitudes toward memoir discussed in the last section, distinctions of factual accuracy or adequacy have little to do with whether a text seems 'true' (i.e. reflective or emblematic of actual lived experience outside the text) or not. It is just as possible for a non-fiction text to be factually inaccurate but nevertheless seem 'true', as a fiction text to be factually accurate but seem 'true'. A non-fiction text can be factually accurate, but present those facts in a way that does not seem 'true'. A fiction

[282] Lehman, *Fact*, 17.

text can be factually inaccurate in its story, but in other ways in its discourse seem 'true' to the reader.

This 'truth' that readers may feel in reading a text is difficult to define or measure. It is a common problem in literary studies: as Lubomír Doležel opines, "literary critics have not hesitated to use the concepts of fictionality, of truth in/of literature, truthfulness to life" even though the "theoretical standard" of such usage is "rather low."[283] Part of this is due to the fact that "the exchange between logical and literary semantics has been a one-way communication," as philosophers and logicians are more hesitant to pay attention to or "show any interest in the traditions and recent advances of literary study".[284] This stunted exchange in ideas has, in Doležel's estimation, stunted critical cross-disciplinary formulations of truth, to the point that "the concept of truth in literature has met with much skepticism."[285] Most popularly, this skepticism has manifested in two ways: firstly, by asserting that literature and literary sentences are neither true nor false, and thus fall into a special category between the binary of truth and falsity; or secondly, as structuralists are wont to do, by ignoring the question completely.[286] As an example of the latter approach, Doležel invokes the opinion of the aesthetic theorist and structuralist Jan Mukařovský, who stated "bluntly" that "the question of truthfulness does not make sense at all in poetry".[287] ('Poetry' here being used in the Aristotelian sense, meaning 'fiction'.) Both of these approaches, unhelpfully, impose a myopic – usually

[283] Lubomír Doležel, "Truth and Authenticity in Narrative", *Poetics Today*, 1, 3, *Special Issue: Narratology I: Poetics of Fiction* (1980), 7.

[284] *Ibid.,* 8.

[285] *Ibid.*

[286] *Ibid.*

[287] Jan Mukařovský, English translation of *Kapitoly z ceské poetiky,* Vol. 1 (Prague: Svoboda, 1948), in *The Word and Verbal Art*, eds. and trans. J. Burbank & P. Steinger (New Haven-London: Yale University Press 1977), in Doležel, "Truth and Authenticity", 8.

fiction-centric or fiction-exclusive – view of what "literature" is. And even then, as Doležel argues,

> Literary theoreticians […] have treated the problem of truth in fiction rather nonchalantly. On the other hand, the extensive attention which the problem has received in philosophy and logical semantics has been directed predominantly at purely philosophical and logical problems, such as the problem of reference, the problem of classification of sentences, the ontological problem of existence […] etc.[288]

One might posit that the reason for this nonchalance is a lack of separation and definition of terms and concepts that are often used synonymically in probing specific questions of mimesis, fictionality, and so on. To bring up the case of memoir again, John Doty remarks that "memoir is after truth, while nonfiction […] tends to be after accuracy."[289] This is a useful phrase, not because it itself is accurate, but because it forces us to clarify the difference between a number of terms that are often confused for each other.

Writers and critics both tend to tangle up all sorts of notions of 'truth', 'reality', 'factuality', 'fictionality', 'authority', 'accuracy', and so on without ever explicitly explaining what each term is, and how they relate to each other. This again brings us to a problem of nomenclature; this time surrounding the conflation and compression of the aforementioned terms into synonyms or near-synonyms for each other.

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[288] Doležel, "Truth and Authenticity", 8.

[289] Doty, "Bride in Beige".

Particularly problematic is the conflation between terms like 'truth' and 'non-fiction', when, as was argued earlier, a text's paratextual designation as 'non-fiction' might have nothing to do with whether the text is actually factually accurate or necessarily reflective of any one perspective and/or experience of reality. And as we have just seen, some writers and critics believe that certain genres of non-fiction, such as memoir, can be exempt from objective corroboration. The only function of the label 'non-fiction' is to allow a producer of a text to *purport* that the text is factually accurate or reflective of someone's actual perspective and/or experience. That isn't to say that such a designation doesn't have other functions: such a distinction is necessary in marketing the text to readers, for example. But even then, non-fiction, like fiction, should be thought of as top-down designations – in other words, they are designations that are negotiated and imposed upon a text by the text's producers, and inform a reader's expectations of a text up-front.

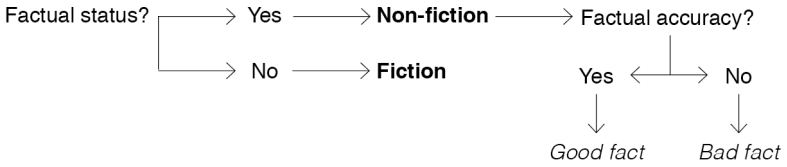
Fact and fiction

Heyne makes a useful distinction between fictionality and factuality, two mimetic spectra that are often confused for – or conflated with – each other under the banner of 'truth'. In his view, it is the author who is the "sole determinant of whether a text is fact or fiction, whereas the reader must decide for herself whether a work is good or bad fact."[290] Heyne unpacks this further by distinguishing between 'factual status' and 'factual adequacy', where 'factual status' relates to fictionality, and 'factual adequacy' relates to factuality. A fictional text, Heyne asserts, does not have factual status, and as a consequence, cannot have factual adequacy, whereas "a nonfiction text

[290] Heyne, "Toward a Theory", 480.

has factual status, but readers would have to resolve individually or by debate the question of its factual adequacy"[291] – whether it is 'good fact' or 'bad fact', according to the rules set out by a text's generic designation, as well as any modifications to these conventions made by the text's producer within the text itself (such as the use of pseudonyms).

Heyne's model of factuality finds resonance with the structuralists á la Mukařovský, in that, for Heyne, factual accuracy is a function of factual status – in other words, a text can only be factually accurate if it first has factual status. One may render the theory as the following diagram:



Crucially, one may see from it that a non-fiction text cannot simply be rendered fiction if it has elements in it that are uncorroboratable – or false, even. As Heyne argues, "for the purposes of literary criticism, do we really want a definition of fiction that includes discredited narratives of fact, such as lies, misguided histories, and unethical journalism?"[292] More realistically, Heyne argues that the "modern reader", upon encountering a contestable non-fiction narrative, often "decid[es] that a story is more or less true, rather than just true or false":[293] "when we are challenged by a narrative that presents itself as fact, but includes dialogue or events that we may doubt,

[291] *Ibid.*

[292] *Ibid.,* 482.

[293] *Ibid.*

our response is usually to challenge the text and determine its worth, not throw up our hands and surrender".[294]

Heyne's model provides a good explanation of how fictionality and factuality are distinct, and, importantly, how fictionality is producer-driven and factuality is reader-ratified. It does not go far enough, however. It, for example, does not take into account texts that are marketed as non-fiction and have faults in accuracy, yet are considered by the reader to be on the whole 'truthful', such as the kind of text James Frey would hope *A Million Little Pieces* to be: a text marketed as memoir, full of embellishments, yet useful to people struggling with or interested in the physiology of substance addiction. Heyne does attempt to "tentatively identify" a "different kind of truth" in addition to fictionality and factuality – that of "meaning", which he defines as a "much more nebulous" function of a text, covering "virtually everything one does with 'the facts' once they have been given an accurate shape".[295] This could be seen as a concept similar to a text's illocutionary thrust: what the text hopes to accomplish in its presentation of facts after they have been ratified as accurate by the reader. Heyne admits though that, practically, "there is seldom any convenient way to distinguish a fact from its meaning", chiefly "because facts are verbal models that always already participate in the infinite connotations of language".[296] Moreover, he states "facts can be variously broad, complex, and controversial, just as meanings can."[297]

In a sense, Heyne defeats his own attempts at distinguishing between accuracy and 'meaning'. And, indeed, as Lehman observes, "[c]urrent literary theory in large part agrees that it is difficult indeed to separate 'what happened' from how it is told or experienced."[298] Lehman, however, does

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[294] *Ibid.*

[295] *Ibid.*, 486.

[296] *Ibid.*

[297] *Ibid.*

[298] Lehman, *Fact*, 18.

appreciate the "value of Heyne's distinction of 'status' and 'adequacy'", especially in how it "begins to account for the differing effects produced by many fictional and nonfictional texts" and how "it creates room for author-reader negotiation at the factual-adequacy stage without erasing the unique status of the nonfictional narrative".[299]

While praising Heyne's model as helpful, Lehman identifies two kinds of non-fiction texts that it cannot address: first, texts in which "authors or publishers deliberately blur their generic intent";[300] and second, "the sorts of texts in which the text's referentiality flows from its depiction of actual bodies". While Heyne dismisses texts of blurred generic intent as uncommon enough to not justify engagement, Lehman doubts that "blurred authorial intent is not as experimental or marginalized as Heyne thinks", adding that "our increasing confrontation with just this sort of blurred reality/textuality in our extra-literary lives accounts for some of the disturbing power of contemporary nonfiction".[301]

Indeed, such 'blurred' texts have become increasingly common in South African literature, with J.M. Coetzee releasing a trilogy of fictionalised memoirs in the 2000s, and Ivan Vladislavić's *Portrait With Keys* ushering in, in Patrick Lenta's estimation, a new kind of "hybrid genre"[302] into the South African non-fiction space – one which Karen Ferreira-Meyers describes as an "expert mixture of autobiographical, factual information and clever fictional strategies" – in an exploration of contemporary

[299] *Ibid., 20.*

[300] *Ibid.*

[301] *Ibid., 21.*

[302] Patrick Lenta, "Everyday Abnormality: Crime and In/security in Ivan Vladislavic's *Portrait with Keys*", *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 44, 1, (2009), 117.

Johannesburg.[303] Coetzee and Vladislavić's "autofictional"[304] bent initially presents a conundrum that is not addressed by Heyne's model: what to do with texts that intentionally split the fictional binary, when a text's producer produces a text by a reader's understanding of the conventions of one side of fictionality, but presents the text as belonging on the other side of the binary? In *Portrait With Keys*' case, this would be a text that a reader might, given understanding of the producer's intention in producing the text, readily understand as 'fiction', but which is nevertheless presented by the producer as a work of non-fiction.[305]

I would argue, however, that the perceptions or non-perceptions of a text's reading audience should have nothing to do with deciding that text's fictional status. Moreover, the norms and practices of the globalised modern publishing industry do not allow such binary-splitting texts, such as Vladislavić's, to fall in between the cracks, otherwise the book would be unmarketable, and thus would not be able to justify their being published and sold. While Lehman rightly notes that texts of blurred generic intent are not as uncommon as some critics think, they are by necessity not produced or marketed as being generically blurred. Coetzee's *Scenes From Provincial Life* is marketed by his publishers as fiction; *Portrait With Keys* is non-fiction. The fact that they have been identified as being generically blurred is a product of reader reaction. The perception of the books as generically hybrid is a concurrent paratextual modification made on the part of the reader; one that is significant, yet does not override the original paratextual designation of fiction or non-fiction given to the text by its producer.

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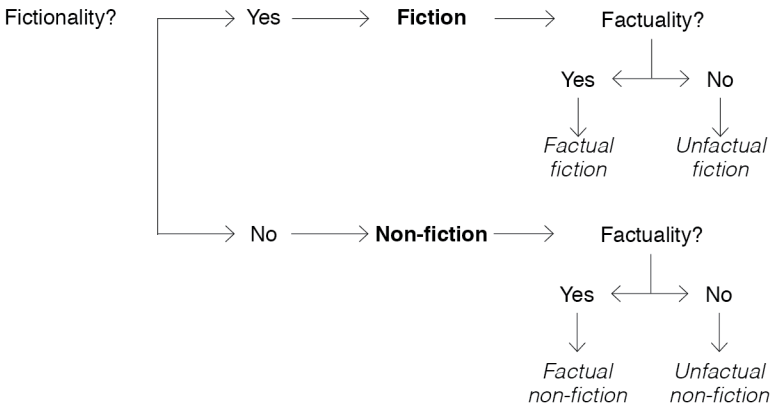
[303] Karen Ferreira-Meyers, "Second Nature and Autofictional Strategies in Ivan Vladislavić's *Portrait with Keys: Joburg and What-What*", *Manutsat Paritat: Journal of Humanities*, 3, 1 (2013), 2.

[304] *Ibid.*

[305] *Ibid.*

While both the intent of the text's producers and the reaction of a reader to the text can both be thought as paratextually significant, and may influence one's understanding of the text, one should be careful not to confuse one for the other. The producer of the text is the *sole* determinant of the text's fictionality. Whether this fictionality is backed by factuality is another thing entirely.

If one is to understand that texts cannot practically fall between the fiction/non-fiction binary, one might then be able to add another layer to Heyne's original model of fictionality and factuality:



Designations like "factual fiction" and "un-factual non-fiction" might seem like oxymorons to the layperson, but if one is to understand fictionality as a function of a text's producer, and factuality as something that is concluded by the text's readers, then there is no confusion.

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This leaves us, however, with another problem, one similar to that which we started off with at the beginning of this chapter: while a text – regardless of fictional status – might not be factual, it may still seem "true" or otherwise authoritative. This may be because its facts might make sense within the constructed world of the text, even if they don't make sense in the world outside of the text. A fictional text about anthropomorphic talking unicorns might not contain a lot of facts pertaining to the world outside of the text, but the unicorns' interactions may be otherwise logically sound, their dialogue convincing, or the reader may find the moral lessons learned by the unicorns applicable in or relevant to the world outside of the text, as well as the text's internal world.

Similarly, while a text may be factual, it might not seem 'true' or authoritative, due to the way in which its facts are used in the narrative. A non-fictional text in support of Namibian genocide denial, for example, might contain lots of facts, but these facts may be used within the narrative to argue that the German settlers of South-West Africa did not murder tens of thousands of Nama and Herero people – an argument that many readers would not find authoritative or 'true', even if the individual facts used in the argument are congruent with the world outside of the text, and logically follow in the world constructed by the text (either by the omission of facts contrary to the argument or the twisting of the facts that were used.)

These two examples, apart from being intentionally jarring, serve to make three points: firstly, textual authority exists on a spectrum; secondly, it has many components; thirdly, that authority is gauged individually by the reader of the text. We'll expand on these points more in the next chapter.

At this juncture, however, it is probably a good idea to let go of any ambitions to find a workable definition of 'truth', at least for the purposes of this book. This is not an argument about the existence of truth, but rather an assertion that 'truth' is too slippery to use as a meaningful concept when

discussing texts, non-fictional or not; especially so when there are many more exact words and concepts that we can use or invent instead. Too often is "truth" used by critics in a way that is synonymous with factuality, which in turn is synonymous with non-fictionality. These are all discrete phenomena. And even if they were not, moreover, using 'truth' as synonymous with 'fact' or 'non-fiction' would still present us with a great problem: as we will see with the South African narrative non-fiction texts we will examine later in this book, often there is no empirical standard, nor an objective place, from which readers can evaluate the facts purportedly present in a narrative. As such, there is no way that we can judge such a narrative to be 'truthful' solely by its adherence to conventions of factuality.

'Truth' is not exact enough, not because it cannot be defined, but because it can be defined to mean – and typically used in place of – too many other concepts. Instead of speaking of whether or not a text is 'true', we need to further unpack the way people read texts, and in which discrete ways a producer may market the texts they produce, and in which ways a reader may evaluate the texts they read. We can then think of 'truth', like 'narrativity', as a do-it-yourself toolkit: it has many components and can exist, but it has no completely set or universal criteria with which to judge how, or in which ways, it exists and operates in texts.

CHAPTER 5

Fictionality, factuality and authority: an analytical framework

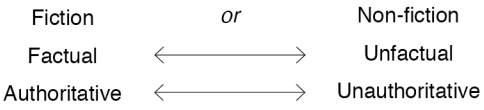
Taking all the arguments in the previous four chapters into account, I will now propose a three-tiered approach to delineating and understanding how producers produce and how readers read texts. This is chiefly to provide a framework that will inform my own readings of authority in narrative non-fiction texts later in this book, but also to attempt to provide a much clearer framework than the ones that have been offered by other theorists and scholars. It is not all-encompassing, but it is expandable, so the following framework should be taken as a first, tentative step to providing a coherent and comprehensive model. Even so, I believe that by considering the following elements in the following way, one can have a better understanding of how fictionality, factuality and authority broadly operate in texts, and how readers and producers relate and respond to each.

In order to avoid the tangle of nomenclature surrounding 'truth', I propose that the way in which readers approach and read texts – and specifically non-fiction texts – might be better conceived as a three-level framework, where each level is related to each other, but ultimately operate discretely. These levels are: i) the binary distinction between fiction and non-fiction; ii) the spectrum between factual accuracy and inaccuracy; and iii) the spectrum between narrative authority and non-authority. This framework thus takes Heyne's formulation of fictionality and factuality and expands it to encompass all texts, and to allow the application of the concept of factuality to all texts, regardless of fictional status.

Additionally I will bring in the concept of *authority*, in order to address the question of whether a text can seem 'true' – if it has *verisimilitude*, is

true-seeming, or has value – independent of its fictional and factual statuses.

This three-level interpretative framework can be visualised as such:



All texts can be understood to simultaneously sit on some part of all three of these levels: fictionality, factuality, and authority. On which side of the binary between fiction and non-fiction a text sits is decided solely by the producer(s) of the text. On which part of the spectrum between factuality and unfactuality a text sits is ratified by the (sometimes collective and sometimes collaborative) corroboration of readers. On which part of the spectrum between authority and unauthority a text sits is negotiated by the reader.

Fictionality

Many of the specifics of how fictionality works has already been covered in previous chapters. To recap its most basic functions, however, fictionality is a status binary between fiction and non-fiction; a text can only be fiction, or it can only be non-fiction. It cannot be partially fiction and partially non-fiction, as some of the critics of the autofictional works of Coetzee and Vladislavić claimed on behalf of those books in Chapter 4. Similarly, a text cannot be simultaneously both fiction and non-fiction. It is not impossible that a third option, something not fiction nor non-fiction, may potentially exist; as discussed in Chapter 4, however, the norms of modern commercial

publishing and bookselling does not typically allow it at this point in time, so there's little practical point in theorising about it here.

The main function of fictional status is to indicate whether a text purports to be factual. To expand, the main function of the label 'non-fiction' is to allow a producer of a text to purport that the text is factually accurate or reflective of someone's actual perspective and/or experience. The main function of the label 'fiction' is to signal to readers that the text does not purport to be factually accurate or reflective of someone's actual perspective and/or experience, *although it may still actually be so*. In laypeople's terms, labelling a text 'non-fiction' can be said to be a claim to factuality; 'fiction', a disavowal or lack of any such claim.[306]

The producer of the text is the sole determinant of the text's fictionality. It is a designation that is imposed upon a text, with a view to moulding a reader's expectations of a text up-front. As such, the reader has no claim to determine or impose a fictional status upon a text. As such, reader reaction to a text cannot change the text's fictional status. For example, a non-fiction text cannot become a fiction text if it is found by readers not to be factual. (As such, *A Million Little Pieces* remains a non-fiction text.) Conversely, a fiction text cannot become a non-fiction text by crossing some imaginary threshold of factuality. (In this sense, Coetzee's *Scenes From Provincial Life* incontestably remains fiction, no matter how closely it may resemble the author's actual life.)

Lastly, the fictional status of each edition, iteration, or even copy of a text is discrete. In rare cases, reader corroboration and paratextual modification – such as negative reviews, market pressure, exposure of embellishments, etc. – may convince the producer of the text to change the

[306] This definition, interestingly enough, addresses the protestations of Hartsock *et al* in Chapter 2 with regard to the use of 'non-fiction' instead of 'journalism'. In this understanding of the fiction/non-fiction binary, it might be argued that non-fiction is the unmarked option in this binary, and fiction is the deviant option, which is defined by its lack of a factuality claim. Of course, it would probably be more helpful to drop this kind of argument altogether, so I will.

text's fictional status in future releases, but this cannot retroactively change the fictional status of previous editions of the text. The fictionality of a text may change between different editions of the text. The same text, in addition, may be marketed differently by different publishers, for example, a holy text or religious scripture may be published as referential non-fiction by an educational or religious publisher, but as fiction by an atheist press.[307]

Factuality

A classical definition of factuality, as given by Heyne, is that factuality ("factual adequacy", in his terms) is a function of whether a text or portion of text "can serve as an adequate representation of real events".[308] Lehman rightly notes, however, that this "assumes both that the audience can determine what is real and that it can establish a standard by which it can judge an adequate representation of the real".[309] I would argue, though, that readers are in theory capable of determining this, by corroborating information in a text against the source that the producer of the text implicitly or explicitly references in providing that information. Factuality is thus reader-ratified; in Lehman's terms, it "relies on the cognitive powers of the reader rather than the intent of the author".[310]

As we have seen in the examples given in previous chapters, collaborative corroboration is the most effective method of determining a text's factuality. However, as Lehman notes, "[w]hat one sort of audience believes to be real" – or factual, one may add – "may be flatly rejected by

[307] The fictional status of holy scriptures or other texts that paratextually make claim to being divine, unassailable, the literal word of a god (or otherwise factual) without making a fictionality claim might be fruitful ground for further study into the nature of fictionality as I propose it here.

[308] Heyne, "Toward a Theory", 480.

[309] Lehman, *Fact*, 21.

[310] *Ibid.*

another".[311] This is an especially pertinent in the context of biography and memoir, genres in which information often has no reference other than the memories of a character (or the narrator themselves), and thus cannot be referenced as one might reference a document. That said, the fact that the corroboration of a memory can be more complicated than the corroboration of a document does not discount memory from being regarded as a legitimate reference for a fact.

Taking this all into account, it is more accurate to say that factuality relates to whether information in a text has reference to the world outside of the text, or if the text is factually accurate or reflective of someone's actual perspective and/or experience in the world outside of the text. Factuality, thus, can be seen as being analogous to reference.

Saying that something is a fact, or that a text is factual, is not the same as saying that it is accurate, or correct, or true. It simply means that the information offered by a text has a verifiable reference or references. Further, factuality doesn't take into account whether the reference referenced for the information by the text is itself accurate. What matters is that the reference to the source is accurately *made* or *performed*, not that the source itself is accurate.[312] In this way, factuality can be said to be something that is textually performed.

The factuality of information through reference can be determined by readers either singularly or collaboratively. In cases where references are documents or conventional sources for research, collaborative corroboration

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[311] *Ibid.*

[312] This is especially important to note in the context of post-colonial, de-colonial, postmodern and post-structuralist debates about the nature of knowledge and knowledge production. What is an adequate reference for a knowledge claim in the eyes of a reader in one knowledge context may be inadmissible for a reader in another knowledge context. To re-iterate: what matters, then, is not the admissibility of the reference, but the performance of reference itself. For the purposes of this study, factuality cannot be taken to be an objective judgement of the appropriateness or viability of any given reference.

by readers – as was practiced in the exposés of Frey and Tlhabi's texts – is a relatively straight-forward matter: it involves comparing one text with another. In cases where references clash or contradict each other, however, or where no reference for information can be found or corroborated, or in instances in which no reference is offered or can be offered by the text's producer, "the standard of factual adequacy remains slippery at best, if not impossible."[313]

As such, no piece of information can be assumed to be impeachable, nor can it be assumed to be unimpeachable. In cases where information has no reader-corroboratable reference, information cannot be assumed to be either factual or false – it is simply unfactual, or unreferenced information. (However, a reader can, as we will see, judge such information to be authoritative or unauthoritative.) In other words, information has to be corroborated in order to qualify as a fact, or as false information. Saying that something is unfactual, or that a text is unfactual, is not the same as saying that it is false, or misleading, or inaccurate – it simply means that the information offered by a text has no verifiable reference. Information can thus only be false if it is proved as being so during a process of corroboration.

Thus, the factuality of information and the factuality of a text is not a binary. There is no metric nor unit to measure exactly how factual a text is, nor will counting the amount of corroborated facts (or non-facts) in a text give a reliable indication of its factuality.

[313] Lehman, *Fact*, 21.

On the surface, defining factuality as it operates in fiction is more complicated than explaining how it works in non-fiction. Factuality in non-fiction operates in a relatively intuitive way: things are either proven to be factual, or they are proven to be not factual.

In opposition to the assertions of Heyne *et al*, who assert that fiction is neither fact nor fiction, Doležel argues that, classically, "[p]hilosophers and literary scholars have always been aware of the fact that in some sense we do give truth-value to fictional sentences".[314] Such "truth", however, can usually only be found within the fictional worlds of fictional texts, in which there exists "a possibility of valuating statements *about* fictional texts and their worlds".[315] These statements, he argues, take the form of such "ersatz-sentences", defined as "statements which are paraphrases of original literary sentence[s]":[316] for example, "David Lurie works at the Technical University of Cape Town", or "The character Azure in K. Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* has blue eyes", or "Jane Eyre is a woman". "A fictional ersatz-sentence is true," Doležel writes, if it faithfully describes "a state of affairs existing in the fictional world of the text; it is false if such a state of affairs does not exist in the fictional world of the text."[317]

Doležel's concept of the ersatz-sentence, however, has a number of shortcomings that render it unusable for the purposes of this framework. Firstly, it invokes and defines 'truth' purely as a synonym to 'reference';[318] specifically, reference to the world constructed by the text. Such 'truth' can only apply to sentences spoken *about* the text, or about the world constructed by or within the text – not the world outside of it. Ultimately, Doležel – like Heyne – side-steps the question of fictional factuality if it is defined as something that might have relation to a world outside of the

[314] Doležel, "Truth and Authenticity", 9.

[315] *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

[316] *Ibid.*

[317] *Ibid.*

[318] *Ibid.*

text: he argues instead that fictional sentences "cannot be assigned truth-values, since they do not *refer* to a world, but rather *construct* a world."[319]

But of course, fictional texts can and do refer to the world outside of the text. To follow on from my argument in Chapter 4, although a fictional text does not purport to be factually accurate or reflective of someone's actual perspective and/or experience, it may actually still be so. Fictional texts can contain facts about the world outside of the text: for example, in historical fiction, where the characters and events in the narrative have reference in characters and events in the world outside of the text. Moreover, a writer may (and usually does) implicitly import entire factual and epistemological frameworks into a fictional text from the world outside of the text: causality, physics, chemistry, and so on. Laurent Stern likewise argues that "[n]ot all sentences in fiction are fictional sentences":

> Some merely state explicitly logical truths, the connotation of words, empirical generalisations, empirical laws of human nature, regardless whether they are universal or proportional, and assumptions of all sorts that are taken for granted in our world and which we ordinarily have to provide in order to understand the literary work of art. That "7 is a prime number" and that "All men are mortal" is true even if "uttered" by a character in a novel. [320]

[319] *Ibid*., 14.

[320] Laurent Stern, "Fictional Characters, Places and Events," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 26 (1965), 213, in Seymour Chatman, S*tory and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, (Cornell University Press, London, 1978), 244.

Apart from his problematic definitional alignment of fictionality with factuality, Stern offers an excellent exposition of how factuality operates in fiction, and in particular how implicit and often invisible it is. Although fictional texts need not have a claim to factuality, writers of fiction embed into their texts networks of facts that provide epistemological and causal frameworks that tacitly inform every event in the text. Conversely, readers expect these frameworks of factuality to exist within any text they read, as they orient their reading and interpretation of the text. As David Foster Wallace rather un-academically argues, when a writer writes fiction they are, in some ways, telling a "convincing" lie: a writer, in telling this 'lie', must get the facts that underpin their story "straight", otherwise "the story will never take off in the reader's mind."[321]

To complicate matters further, writers in turn expect readers to expect these factual frameworks to exist, and thus can exploit them for uncanny effect, as George Orwell does in the opening sentence of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, when "It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen."[322]

As such, one can argue that factuality operates identically in fiction texts as it does in non-fiction texts, as factuality only concerns whether truth-claims in a text, regardless of fictional status, have reference in the world outside of the text.

Authority

Authority relates to whether a text seems plausible or valuable to an individual reader, partially or wholly independent of its factual status. It is a

[321] Bill Katovsky, "David Foster Wallace: A Profile", McSweeney's Internet Tendency, 7 November 2008.

[322] George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1949), 1.

function of paratextual and intratextual strategies, including, but not limited to: the reliability of narration; narrative positioning, credentialing and narrative voice; paratextual positioning and packaging; and facticity.

The effectiveness, relevance, reliability and/or convincingness of a text is related to its authority, and is felt and negotiated by the reader chiefly on an individual level. Education researcher Richard Winter constructs this aspect of authority as a question a reader may ask themselves, for fiction and non-fiction texts alike: "Is this narrative shaped and moulded in such a way that we feel it is trustworthy", or "does it persuade us that we might helpfully rely on the insights it presents about that particular situation to guide our thinking about other situations?[323]" As such, authority in a text is not necessarily static, and the level of authority in a text may fluctuate not only between different readers, but also within the text itself.

The factual status and authority of a text may be related, but they cannot be taken as being the same thing. As the paratextual failures of *A Million Little Pieces* and *Endings & Beginnings* show us, the effect of other readers' paratextual modifications may affect how effective or convincing a text may seem to an individual reader. Moreover, in the absence of set factual status – for example, when a text's fact-claims cannot be corroborated – authority can and will still function independently.

Authority operates differently, not only between fiction and non-fiction texts, but also in different genres of narrative. Strategies of authority that are important or foregrounded in one genre of text may be absent from texts of another genre. This is because the strategies of authority used in a text will vary from text to text, from producer to producer, and from imagined reader to imagined reader. The historical, social and epistemological contexts in which a text is written will effect which strategies of authority a producer of a text can and will employ. Producers

[323] Richard Winter, "Truth or fiction: problems of validity and authenticity in narratives of action research", *Educational Action Research*, 10, 1, 2002, 145.

of texts will vary and tailor which strategies of authority they use in their texts in order to convince or appeal to their text's imagined readers. To put it in marketing terms, the way in which a producer will attempt to make their text seem authoritative will depend on their envisioned 'target market' for the text. All texts are thus, in the words of Barbara Hernstein Smith, "constructed […] by someone in particular, on some occasion, for some purpose, and in accord with some relevant set of principles".[324]

So, as with factuality, there is no metric nor unit to measure exactly how authoritative a text is. While it is possible for an individual to judge how authoritative a text is compared to another, as authority is solely an individual's judgement, no objective consensus on the authority of a text can ever be theoretically achieved – it can only be negotiated.

The ramifications of negotiations about authority and authority-claims – between reader and text, writer and text, reader and reader, and so on – inform the remainder of this book, which will expand upon how authority specifically and practically functions within South African non-fiction texts. In the next four chapters, I will identify and thoroughly examine four components of authority, as it manifests itself within recent prominent South African non-fiction texts. What follows is not to be considered an attempt at an exhaustive inquiry into all or even most components and potential functions of authority – in South African narrative non-fiction or otherwise.

[324] Barbara Bernstein Smith, "Narrative Versions, Narrative Theories", in *The Narrative Reader*, ed Martin McQuillan (London: Routledge, 2000), 141.

What I do aim to do, however, is to pick out some of the most obvious and interesting components of authority that a reader can identify and observe in most narrative non-fiction texts, and to detail exhaustively how they operate in one (or a few) texts each. This is to give a template of how case studies into the operation of authority in texts may be conducted, as well as to elucidate the particular narrative strategies of different producers, narrators and texts – the value of which should hopefully be self-evident.

What follows might also seem quite segmented: it may seem as though I do not want to fully investigate the intersections of these different components of authority as they function within one text. This is not the case: rather, I believe it is more important (and probably wiser) to first classify each discrete component of authority – in this book's case, packaging, narrative positioning, narrative reliability and facticity – before attempting to apply the theory of each to one text simultaneously. Such a reading, in which one reads all the components of authority in one text, is an undertaking beyond the scope of this book, but should be encouraged in further study.

CHAPTER 6

Packaging: peritextual and semiotic positioning

> The paratext may become the story.
> – Blaise Cronin[325]

The easiest way to tell a reader that a book is authoritative, simply enough, is to tell them just that. As such, the first component of authority that this book will examine is also the most obvious. Through packaging a text and employing visual and textual paratextual cues – such as cover design, blurbs, shouts, quotes of reviews, sub-titles, and so on – a text's producer can manage and influence a reader's perception of a text before they read it.

As we saw in Chapter 3, the producer-created paratexts and metadata of a text (whether physical or electronic) do not exist simply to inform readers of a text's genre or fictional status, but also to convince readers that the text they are reading or are about to read is authoritative. (And as we will see, certain genre claims or claims of non-/fictional status may be, in certain cases, claims to authority in themselves.) To once again invoke Philippe Lejeune, such paratextual signifiers constitute "a fringe of the printed text which in reality controls one's whole reading of the text".[326]

More practically, as Desrochers and Apollon note, the paratext "provides the reader with cues and clues about the text itself and both the

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[325] Blaise Cronin, foreword to Nadine Desrochers and Daniel Apollon, *Examining Paratextual Theory and its Applications in Digital Culture* (Hershey, PA: Information Science Reference, 2014), xxxiii.

[326] Philippe Lejeune, *Le Pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), in Genette, *Paratexts*, 2.

author and publisher's intentions [as] a way of priming and presenting" what Genette refers to as the "naked text".[327] Such "ancillary elements", which "coexist and comingle with the text proper", allow readers "to fully appreciate a text" when they are "engage[d]" with.[328]

The paratextual elements, which in literary texts constitute (and are usually but not necessarily contained by) what is commonly known as the 'cover' and 'front matter', are usually the first things with which a reader or potential reader will engage when they encounter the text. These elements thus present the first opportunities for the text to make claims to authority to its reader; such "material […] serves to influence the reader's impressions prior to coming to grips with the text *qua* text".[329]

Not all paratexts, however, can be controlled by the producers of a text. Remember: the paratext of a text consists of "*all* those elements that frame or surround a particular text […] and impact understanding of it".[330] Many – perhaps most – aspects of a text's paratext are not producer-created, including reviews and word-of-mouth; those things which Abbott says are "connected" to a text "by association".[331] These *epitexts* cannot be controlled, and thus their functions and relation to readers and potential readers cannot be controlled.

Producers of texts, therefore, have to pay special attention to crafting the elements of their texts' *peritexts* – that is, those paratexts that are attached or otherwise more specially proximate to the text – so as to

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[327] Gérard Genette, "Introduction to the paratext" (M. Maclean, trans.), *New Literary History*, 22, 2 (1991), 261–272, in Desrochers and Apollon, *Paratextual Theory*, xvi

[328] Desrochers and Apollon, *Paratextual Theory*, vxi.

[329] Blaise Cronin & La Barre, "Patterns of puffery: An analysis of non-fiction blurbs", *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science* 37, 1 (2005), in Desrochers and Apollon, P*aratextual Theory*, vxi.

[330] Dan Machlin, "Paratexts", in *Selected Essays About a Bibliography*, ed. Tan Lin (USA: Tan Lin, 2010), 20. Emphasis added.

[331] Abbott, *Narrative*, 239.

semiotically position their texts in a manner which they deem appropriate to their – and the texts' – ends.

Burke and Christ propose that the purposes of such peritexts are "trifurcated":[332] they exist in order to manage three stages of the reader's interaction with the text, namely their "purchase, navigation and interpretation of the text".[333] In other words, they help "the reader understand the text", to help the reader "orient [themselves] and move through the text", and to "[signal] value to the reader".[334] Desrochers and Appolons argue that these three functions are "discrete",[335] but, as we will see, they are in fact intermingled, with various elements of a text's peritexts (and paratexts, more generally) able to perform more than one function. More broadly, however, we are going to look at how certain peritextual elements allow certain texts to present, or potentially present, performances of semiotic authority when they are engaged with by the reader.

First, we need to identify what these main peritextual elements are. This is a tricky enterprise, as the digitisation of texts has complicated and broadened the differences between different formats of texts – and the conventions and packaging associated with each format. "The format discussion", as Dan Machlin argues, was "traditionally focused on the impact of different print formats".[336] But in the early 21st century, the discussion has shifted to become "one of print vs. web, web vs. e-reader, tablet vs. mobile device".[337] This, as Machlin notes, raises a number of issues:

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[332] Dorothee Birke and Birte Christ, "Paratext and digitized narrative: Mapping the field", *Narrative*, 21, 1 (2013), 68, in Desrochers and Apollon, *Paratextual Theory*, xvi.

[333] *Ibid.*

[334] Desrochers and Apollon, *Paratextual Theory*, xvi.

[335] *Ibid.*

[336] Machlin, "Paratexts", in Lin, *Selected Essays About a Bibliography*, 20.

[337] *Ibid.*

> [What is] the shift in how the traditional paratextual material associate[d] with a text inhabits an impersonation and extension of its original physical self, when it is written specifically for digital formats, or when its content flows into an entirely new type of container? [What] happens when the lines between paratext and metadata blur and paratext becomes little more than any other bit of associated data?[338]

These are valid questions to ask, especially as "a similar shift in paratextual understanding" must have occurred during the "gradual shift from oral to written works and in their peculiar coexistence at many points in history".[339] (And, I would add, their current coexistence.) In the online space, however, texts don't just shift: they are "framed and reframed in real time, constantly changing readers' or content consumers' understanding of them".[340] While our "once fixed" conception of the paratext only "evolve[d] with new printings or editions", they can now be thought of "a constantly evolving fabric".[341]

Within all of these shifts and evolutions, however, paratexts (and peritexts in particular) have remained "an important element that establishes textual fidelity"[342], and in literary texts, the most prominent peritextual elements with regard to establishing textual fidelity and authority are still roughly the same between digital and physical formats of texts. Apart from the conventions and physical restrictions imposed between different reading formats, most literary texts currently exist with

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[338] *Ibid.*

[339] *Ibid.*

[340] *Ibid.*

[341] *Ibid.*

[342] *Ibid.*

mostly the same peritexts attached to them, whether they exist in an e-book format (such as an ePUB or MOBI) or a printed book. These peritextual elements may not be attached to the text in the same way between different formats – a blurb may be on the inside flap of a hardcover book, or the back cover of a paperback, or within the metadata of an e-book – but they do still exist and function in much the same way.

It could also be argued that different peritextual elements differ in relative importance to a text's producers between formats.[343] That argument, moreover, can be extended to different genres of texts, e.g. a cover could be argued to be more important to a trade paperback crime novel than to an academic monograph. This is, more than anything, a long-winded riposte to the argument that the question of peritextual function has become over-complicated by the increasing digitisation of literature. Simply put: the function and importance of different peritextual elements already differ and have always differed from text to text.

In general, paratexts cannot ever be said to be attached to or associated with a text in perpetuity, but only to a specific version or production of a text, or even to individual copies of a text. Genette makes this point by example of the "please-insert", which he describes as "a printed insert that contains information about a work and is attached to the copies addressed to critics".[344] (The please-insert is thus somewhat analogous to an advance information sheet, or "AI"; Genette states that a more "appropriate" name

[343] An ISBN code – the identification code given to a publication by a national library or other issuing authority for the purpose of cataloguing and registering a publication – is a good case in point. With regard to printed texts, ISBNs are important for the databasing of texts as well as various point-of-sale uses (purchasing, pricing and so on), usually through the use of barcodes generated from ISBNs. With e-books, however, the use of an ISBN is likely to be restricted to the metadata of such a text, rendering it useful only for cataloguing, databasing and allowing readers to find certain editions of e-texts within an electronic library. In both cases, ISBNs remain highly important for librarian and archival purposes. (See more about ISBNs later in this chapter.)

[344] Genette, *Paratexts,* 104.

for the please-insert might be the "please-review".[345]) "Like many other elements of the paratext", Genette argues, the please-insert, "even when printed on the cover, has a very transitory mission and can disappear when the book is reprinted, when the series changes, when a pocket book comes out", and so on.[346] A text's peritexts, therefore, may reappear in a different form, be replaced, or left off altogether in between different formats, different editions or even different individual copies of the text. Furthermore, that has *always* been the case. The slippery paratext is not an invention of the digital age.

That said, as Machlin admits, even though we are ensconced in a "paratextual cloud with seemingly limitless possibilities and framing options at our disposal", it remains that certain peritextual elements, such as the author's name, "may remain unchanged […] no matter what form they appear in".[347] [348]

So, although the transitory nature of individual peritexts – and paratexts as a whole – can be complicated *ad infinitum*, it does not mean that certain peritextual conventions cannot be identified. In fact, current peritextual conventions and conventional peritextual elements can be easily identified. In both physical and digital literary texts, the peritextual elements that are most regularly present and most regularly make claims to authority on behalf of the text are:

- *Title*. The most obvious paratextual element of a text is its title and, if applicable, its subtitle. Apart from identifying a text, titles

[345] *Ibid.*, 105.

[346] *Ibid.*, 104.

[347] Dan Machlin, "Paratexts", in Lin, *Selected Essays About a Bibliography*, 20.

[348] This is, of course, not always the case, as the authorial names associated with texts can change in certain circumstances. Classically, one need only think of the Brontë sisters, some of whose texts were originally published under masculine names: "Acton Bell" for Anne, "Currer Bell" for Charlotte, and "Ellis Bell" for Emily.

provide clues and cues as to what the content and context of a text is. The importance of the title and subtitle as paratext is addressed by Genette himself with the question: "Limited to the text alone and without a guiding set of directions, how would we read Joyce's *Ulysses* if it were not entitled *Ulysses*?"[349] [350] In non-fiction, as we will see later, the title and sub-title of a text present the first and most obvious opportunity for a text to make a claim to authority for itself.

- *Cover image.* Most literary texts are accompanied by an image that seeks not only to make it look valuable (or, in certain contexts, purchasable), but also to offer a visual representation of what the text contains and refers to. In printed texts, this visual representation most often takes the form of a cover, which contains and protects the physical text within it. Although digital books have no physical need for a cover, so strong is the cover convention that most e-books for purchase will nonetheless have a digital cover or representation that performs the same function as a printed one. A cover image presents many powerful opportunities for authority claims, including the use of evocative typography (*see below*), visual metaphor, symbolism, claims to authority by using certain genres of images – photographs in particular – evocative colour schemes, spatial association between different objects, and so on.
- *Author biography.* Most literary texts will contain a biography of its producer or producers as part of its epitext. The function of these biographies – usually no longer than a few hundred words at most

[349] Genette, *Paratexts,* 102.

[350] Of course, whether or not the title '*Ulysses*' itself will make sense to a reader – without any other paratextual information about the text, such as reviews or word-of-mouth – would have a lot to do with how familiar the reader is with the names of Homeric epics and their characters. The point, however obliquely made it is, still stands.

– is almost wholly to make a claim to authority, by listing the text's producer's experience, knowledge and credentials with regard to the text's subject matter and/or genre. By elucidating and making explicit the text's author's authority and expertise with respect to the contents of the text, and then connecting it to the text via an epitext, a text's producer makes a claim to authority by association. For example, a biography might list the author's experience in the field or fields in which the text hopes to be situated; any awards or accolades the text's producer may have won that are germane to the content or genre of the text; or other circumstantial information that may be likely to make a reader view the author or producer of a text as an authoritative source of information with regard to the text's subject matter or genre. (For example, a science textbook may make mention of its author's teaching experience or degrees; a work of crime fiction may mention its author's prior awards or publications within the genre.)

- *Author photo.* In addition to an author biography, some literary texts will feature a photograph or image of the author. This image may depict the author in a manner which suggests they are authoritative with regard to the text's subject matter or genre. For example, a reportage text may depict its author in a newsroom or in appropriate dress or posture, in order to indicate their credentials as a reporter.
- *Blurb*. Like the cover image, a blurb is a representation of the text, usually rendered as a textual précis that identifies the text's subject matter and thus situates it in "various generic and […] intertextual networks" and contexts.[351] The blurb can be said to "intersect and penetrate" the text: that which is in the blurb can be found in the

[351] Rachel Malik, "Blurb", in Lin, *Selected Essays About a Bibliography*, 10.

text, and vis versa.[352] As such, the blurb can function as marketing for the text, through its employment of descriptive terms such as "page-turning", "haunting", and "magical"[353]. Concurrently, however, it can also make claims to authority for the text, through its description of the text as 'definitive', 'authoritative', and so on.

- *Shouts and reviewers' quotes.* Another textual element of the peritext that functions as both marketing and as a claim to authority are shouts and quotes from previews and reviews – both paid-for and ostensibly independent – of the text. While shouts and quotes differ in origin – the former are generally from solicited sources; the latter from unsolicited sources – both start as epitexts and then, by their connection or being made proximate to the text by the text's producer, become peritexts. By quoting a favourable preview or review in the text's peritext, a text's producer can appeal to an ostensibly independent source to vouch for the book's utility and authority. Moreover, quoting from a high-profile reviewer, peer of the text's producer, or other figure of authority with regard to the book's subject matter or genre, will increase the efficacy of any such utility or authority claim.
- *Sales figures and awards.* Mentions of sales figures for a text, as well as awards and accolades won by either the text or the text's author, are direct claims to canonical authority, as well as a marketing appeal to the reader. Mentions of awards or accolades, or appellations such as 'bestseller', may intersect with other elements of the peritext, such as the blurb or author biography, or may be rendered as its own visual or textual element entirely.
- *Publisher/imprint name and logo.* A subtle claim to authority is made by the listing or depicting of a text's publisher – by its name,

[352] *Ibid.*

[353] *Ibid.*

logo or brand identity – on or alongside the text. Different publishers carry different amounts of institutional authority and reputation with regard to certain subjects and genres of text, or a certain calibre of writer. Publishers thus attempt to imbue their texts with institutional authority by branding them. This can also be achieved by branding a text under a certain reputation- or authority-claiming imprint, such as 'Penguin Classics' or 'Vintage Modern Classics'. For example, Jonathan Ball Publishers, according to their website, "specialise in South African history, politics and current affairs";[354] Penguin Random House South Africa's "stable of writers includes more than 70 Nobel Prize laureates and hundreds of the world's most widely read and best-loved authors".[355] Both of these publishers' texts become associated with their reputations by their being branded as one of these publishers' books.

- *Generic tag*. Literary texts will be given a tag indicating genre or fictional status – either on the cover or in the front matter of a printed text, or in the metadata of a digital text – to aid their placing and selling in a retail setting, or their positioning in a library setting. These tags also aid in helping the reader interpret the book's purpose, and can therefore also be a claim to authority. These tags may be general – such as "fiction"[356] or "non-fiction" –

[354] "About us", Jonathan Ball Publishers. Accessed 1 June 2016 at http://www.jonathanball.co.za/index.php/about-us

[355] "Penguin Random House", Penguin Books South Africa. Accessed 1 June 2016 at http://penguinbooks .co.za/penguin-random-house

[356] A generic tag can also contain an embedded claim to authority via the publisher's reputation if the publisher inserts their name into the generic tag. For example, the generic tag of the paperback edition of Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (London: Penguin, 2001) is listed as "Penguin fiction" – presumably an implicit claim on Penguin's behalf that fiction books published by them are of a higher calibre than 'non-Penguin fiction'.

or more specific, such as "world affairs", "short stories", "reference", and so on.

- *ISBN and barcode.* Literary texts published as commercial books or e-books will be assigned an International Standard Book Number, or ISBN, which is a "unique international identifier for monographic publications", which "replaces the handling of long bibliographic descriptive records", and enables the efficient handling, ordering, sales and organisation of commercial texts in one worldwide system.[357] Each form and edition of a text is given a unique ISBN – issued in each country by a different issuing authority[358] – and, if applicable, a unique barcode based on the ISBN's 13-digit version. By assigning a text an ISBN, the text's publisher is not only making the book easier to sell and distribute, but also because – as the International ISBN Agency argues – "people will assume that the [texts] do not exist" or are not published by a reputable publisher if they are not assigned an ISBN.[359]
- *Front matter.* Front matter is the general name given for the first few pages of a printed text, including the title page and imprint page. The front matter, and its equivalent metadata in a digital text, will necessarily intersect with other elements of the peritext,

[357] "Benefits", International ISBN Agency. Accessed 1 June 2016 at https://www.isbn-international.org/ content/benefits

[358] In South Africa, the issuing authority for ISBN and ISSN numbers (which are, simply put, a kind of ISBN for serial publications) is the National Library of South Africa. ISBNs and ISSNs are issued for free in South Africa.

[359] "Benefits", International ISBN Agency.

such as the ISBN, title and publisher's identifiers, and thus intersects with and potentially takes on their functions.[360]

- *Contents/bookmarks*. A contents page in a printed text or bookmarks in a digital text enable the reader to efficiently navigate through the text. Efficient and well-designed content pages and bookmarks organise the text, and are therefore a illocutionary claim to authority, by way of giving the reader the impression that the text was carefully and expertly produced.
- *Headers and footers.* Headers and footers, placed either on individual pages in a printed text or at the top and bottom of displays of digital text, enable efficient navigation through the text. Headers and footers may also intersect with other peritextual elements, such as the title and contents, and thus intersect with and potentially take on their functions.
- *Typography.* The typesetting and typography of a text's cover, body type and header type allows efficient navigation and reading of the text. The choice of typeface and font in body and header type, moreover, can be seen as subtle claims to authority: certain typefaces and fonts carry certain meanings, implications and intertextual references, which are then transferred to the texts that are set in them. For example, a text set in a Caslon-designed or -derived type is visually situated and connected to texts and documents socially perceived as historic or authoritative, such as the United States' Declaration of Independence, the *New Yorker* magazine and the *Harvard Crimson* newspaper, all of which are set in Caslon fonts.[361] A text may also be set in a striking or unique

[360] Further, the front matter on a text's imprint page may also list a text's editor, the specific office and address of the text's publisher, copyright notices, the person or institution responsible for the text's design and cover, and other intersecting and potentially authority-giving paratextual information.

[361] As is this book.

font, in order to invoke other impressions. For example, the publishers of the *Guardian*, Guardian News and Media Ltd, uses a font family of over 200 variants – the Guardian family – which draws on various typographic cues from Egyptian and sans serif traditions to strike a visual note that is, in the words of one of the family's designers, "classical and traditional, but sharp and modern at the same time".[362]

- *Preface, foreword, introduction, postscript and coda.* Texts of all formats may have a preface, foreword, introduction, postscript or coda, written either by the text's author or an external source, attached to them. These textual elements make claims to authority on two levels. Firstly, they are peritexts that seek to contextualise and/or grant authority to the text by corroborating the text's subject matter or value in the world outside of the text. Secondly, and more subtly, their proximity to the text – as well as they way that they are generally packaged in a way that makes them look identical to the text itself in both visual composition and format – gives them the semblance and authority of a primary source (i.e. part of the text itself), when they are in fact secondary sources in relation to the text and its subject matter. Like blurbs and shouts/quotes, forewords and introductions may also contain explicit appeals to authority on behalf of the text, but they may also participate in the same strategies of authority-claiming – in terms of narrative positioning, facticity and so on – that the text itself engages in. These peritextual elements, therefore, may amplify the authority claims made by the text in both direct and implicit ways.

[362] Mark Porter, "Journalism, design, and user experience", in Francesco Franschi, *Designing News* (Berlin: Gestalten, 2013), 157.

- *Glossary.* A glossary, placed at either end of a text, can provide a reference and explanation for readers for unusual or subject-specific terms or phrases used within the text. The words contained in such a glossary may indicate to the reader the level of expertise performed by a producer of a text, or reflect the assumed knowledge of the text's target audience as imagined by the text's producer. A glossary can thus impose on the reader that the text and its producer are authoritative on the text's subject matter.
- *Acknowledgements and references.* Texts of all formats may have acknowledgements or references attached to them, which are necessarily written by the author and/or producer of the text. Unlike most other peritexts, acknowledgements and references are peritexts that may intersect and closely overlap with the text: references, for example, may be embedded in the text in the form of in-line references or footnotes. Acknowledgements and references are explicit appeals to authority. The ways in which they make these appeals to authority are various, but, in non-fiction texts, they operate in much the same way as the text itself does. Firstly, acknowledgements and references work to situate the text in a network of other texts and sources, and the producer of the text in professional, institutional and personal relationships. In this way, these peritexts may seek to credential the text's producer, and to otherwise make them seem more reliable by relating them to the world outside of the text as well as within it. (Credentialing and narrative positioning is covered in Chapter 7; narrative reliability in Chapter 8.) In certain cases, where certain truth-claims are given reference, these peritexts may also be an appeal to authority by way of facticity – the situating and asserting of a truth-claim as a fact by relating it to other truth-claims in the world outside of

the text, which may be generally regarded as facts. (Facticity is covered in greater detail in Chapter 10.)

This list of peritexts is not – and does not intend to be – exhaustive,[363] nor does it show the many ways in which different peritextual elements may interact, intersect or overlap. Semiotic and peritextual claims to authority will necessarily change from text to text (even differing between different editions of texts), due to generic convention, the epistemology of various imagined audiences, regional contexts and so on. In order to get a better idea of the ways in which these elements *may* interact and relate to each other, it is necessary to look closely at how the peritexts of one format of one text function, and how they co-ordinate in helping the text bolster its claims to authority.

[363] Other peritexts less commonly found in narrative non-fiction texts include internal photographs, illustrations, diagrams, appendices, order forms, and advertisements for other books.

CASE STUDY 2

Peritextual and semiotic positioning in Mandy Wiener's *Killing Kebble*

Earlier, in Chapter 2, I used the example of Mandy Wiener and Barry Bateman's 2014 non-fiction text *Behind the Door: the Oscar Pistorius and Reeva Steenkamp Story* to illustrate, in the most basic manner, how paratexts broadly operate with regard to the packaging of non-fiction texts. To illustrate more specific ways in which *peritexts* – in packaging and metadata – can work to convince readers of the authority of a text, I will use the hardcover and paperback editions of Wiener's first work of narrative non-fiction, 2011's *Killing Kebble: An Underworld Exposed*.[364] What will follow is, in a sense, a descriptive and forensically semiotic reading of the text's paratexts, in an attempt to explain how the operations of paratexts may be read in isolation from the text itself; in essence, an emulation of how a reader will first address such a text without significant prior knowledge of the text. This knowledge will be taken over into my more textural textual readings in later chapters. Before we go any further, however, it is most important to consider how paratexts can be seen to discretely operate and influence one's perceptions of authority of a text.[365]

Killing Kebble focuses on the events leading up to, and the court cases following, the murder of the mining magnate Brett Kebble, who was fatally shot in his car on a "quiet suburban street in Johannesburg" in 2005.[366]

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[364] Mandy Wiener, *Killing Kebble: An Underworld Exposed* (Johannesburg: Pan MacMillan, 2011).

[365] Not least because such in-depth semiotic readings of paratexts within the context of South African literature are lacking.

[366] Cover of Mandy Wiener, *Killing Kebble: An Underworld Exposed* (Johannesburg: Pan MacMillan, 2011), hardcover edition.

Although Wiener is a radio journalist by background,[367] she decided to write the text because, in her words, "the story I wanted to tell was so remarkable, and so multi-faceted that people had struggled to follow it" through broadcasts alone,[368] and because the case itself had become an important illustration of the "nexus of business, politics and organised crime in South Africa".[369] Her main sources for the text, apart from her and her colleagues' reportage, are the three men who assassinated Kebble: Mikey Schultz, Nigel McGurk, and Fiazal 'Kappie' Smith.

The published text is what many would call a text of 'long-form journalism', in that it reads as an extended piece of conventional journalism, broken up by liberal smatterings of verbatim Tweets from various Twitter users connected to the case, along with passages of monologue from her main sources. The dryness of the text is understandable, perhaps, because it is a distillation of Wiener's reporting on the murder and case for radio and Twitter while she was an employee for the news service Eyewitness News: it was written in only "three or four months",[370] a process Wiener has since described as "terrifying".[371]

Nevertheless the text was well-received by readers and was released in a paperback edition after its original hardcover publication. Both the hardback edition and paperback "Revised & Updated"[372] editions – published in 2011 and 2012 respectively, and subsequently digitally – contain a number of peritextual visual and textual signifiers that work, both in isolation and in combination, to attempt to convince the reader of the

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[367] Mandy Wiener, *Killing Kebble: An Underworld Exposed* (Johannesburg: Pan Macmillann, 2012), paperback edition, 411.

[368] Nick Mulgrew, "How did we get here? An interview with Mandy Wiener", *Rhodes Journalism Review,* 32 (2012), 72.

[369] *Ibid.*

[370] Wiener, *Killing Kebble*, paperback edition, 411.

[371] Mulgrew, "How did we get here?", 72.

[372] Cover of Wiener, *Killing Kebble*, paperback edition.

text's authority before they begin to read the text itself. Some of these peritexts differ between the print editions and their respective digital editions. In all versions of the text, however, the most obvious paratextual signifier – and thus the strongest peritextual claim to authority – is the text's same title and subtitle, with its outright promise that it "expose[s]" an "underworld", rendered on all editions' covers in bold, stark, monocolour, condensed sans-serif type.[373]

The hardcover edition of *Killing Kebble* depicts an tonally-dark portrait of a shirtless, tattooed, shaved-headed man – ostensibly an archetypal denizen of the underworld. The man's face obscured by the type, overlaid with blood-esque red drips and splotches.[374] The images on this version of the cover is a gritty, literal, trope-laden representation of an archetypal underworld; an underworld that may or may not have anything to do with the underworld Wiener ostensibly "exposes" in her text. Regardless, each of these visual elements makes a claim to authority on behalf of the text, by way of establishing a visual tone and using tropes relevant to the promise made by the text's title and subtitle.

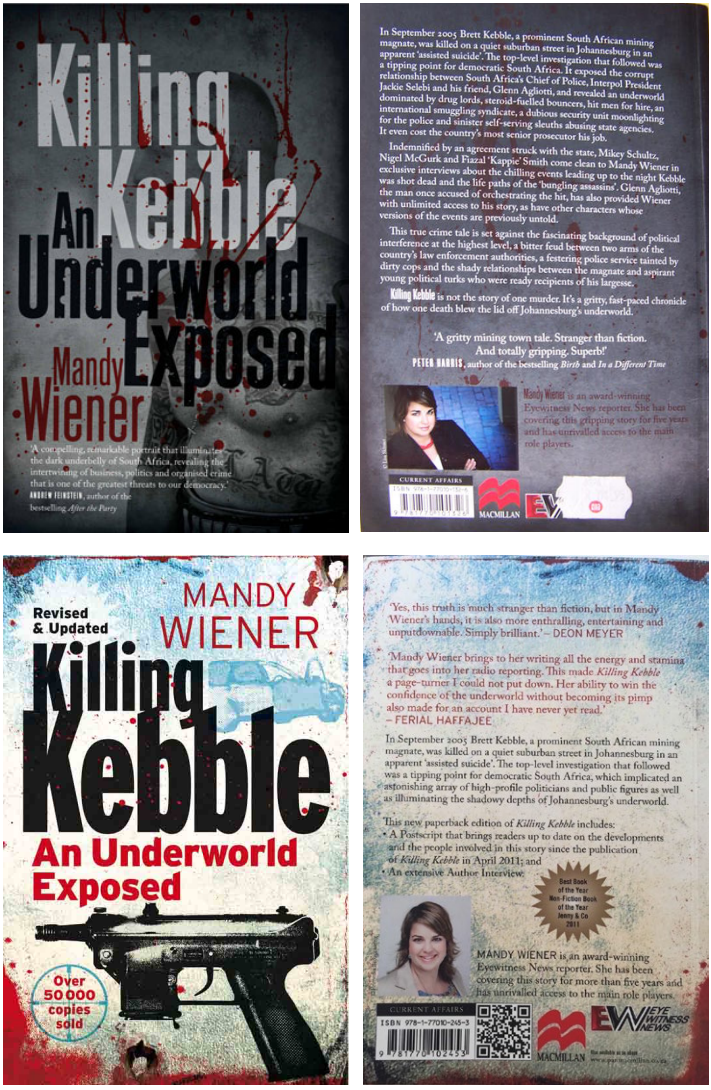
The front cover of the hardcover expands on this promise by use of a front-cover shout from the "bestselling" author Andrew Feinstein,[375] who states that the book "illuminates the dark underbelly of South Africa, revealing the intertwining of business, politics and organised crime that is one of the greatest threats to our democracy".[376] This claim to societal relevance and efficacy is again shored up by the blurb on the back cover, which conflates the events that "this true crime tale" references – a "top-level investigation" which was "a tipping point for democratic South Africa" – with the text itself: the perpetrators "come clean" to Wiener in "exclusive

[373] *Ibid.*

[374] Readers learn later that the man depicted is Mikey Schultz, one of Kebble's killers, and who was at one time a professional boxer. He is shirtless in this portrait because he is in boxing attire.

[375] The use of the word 'bestselling' itself being a claim to authority.

[376] Cover of Wiener, *Killing Kebble*, hardcover edition.



Front and back covers of 2011 hardcover edition (top left and right) and 2012 paperback edition (bottom left and right) of *Killing Kebble*.

interviews", while "the man once accused of orchestrating the hit [provides] Wiener with unlimited access to his story", along with "other characters whose versions of the events are previously untold".[377] Such claims hope to convince the reader that this is *the* definitive narrative rendering of events – a kind of authority claim by way of exclusivity, extrapolated to the point where the text becomes not just "the story of one murder", but "a gritty, fast-paced chronicle of how one death blew the lid off Johannesburg's underworld".[378] Beyond these claims to factuality and veracity, the text also markets itself as authoritative and perceptively rendered with an avalanche of descriptors for itself and its subjects: "prominent", "chilling", "tainted", "shady", "bitter", and so on.[379]

Wiener's biography for this edition makes several claims to authority, by way of detailing her experience, expertise and credentials: she is "award-winning", has "cover[ed] this gripping story for five years" and "has unrivalled access to the main role players".[380] In the print edition this is accompanied by an author photograph, in which Wiener is dressed in a blazer, leans against a wall in a casual manner and maintains eye-contact with the viewer.

Also in close proximity to the biography on the cover are the logos of MacMillan – a multinational publishing company with offices and imprints in the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia and dozens of other countries[381] – and Eyewitness News – a news service that chiefly provides content for major radio stations[382] – thus making claims to authority for the text by way of institutional support and reputation.

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[377] *Ibid.*

[378] *Ibid.*

[379] *Ibid.*

[380] *Ibid.*

[381] "About MacMillan", MacMillan Publishers. Accessed 1 June 2016 at http://us.macmillan.com/about

[382] Tshepiso Seopa, "24 hours of eyewitness news online", *BIZCommunity*, 14 January, 2009.

Lastly, the print edition is labelled with the authoritative generic definition of "current affairs" above the barcode and ISBN.[383]

As would be expected, the paperback edition makes a number of additions and subtractions to the peritextual content of the text. The semiotic content, tone and visual elements of the cover, however, is markedly different. The most obvious change is the colour palette used. While the hardcover used a dark and gritty tone, the paperback edition uses a cobalt, blood-red, off-white and black palette, one markedly similar to that which had been used on the cover of Anthony Altbeker's *Fruit of a Poisoned Tree: A True Story of Murder and the Miscarriage of Justice*, another South African narrative non-fiction text which, as can be gleamed from the title, focuses on a controversial murder trial.[384] Also similar to Altbeker's cover is the paperback *Killing Kebble*'s use of monotone renderings of images germane to and iconic of the murder: in *Poisoned Tree*'s case, a footprint taken from the crime scene and the hammer used in the murder; in *Killing Kebble*'s, an automatic pistol similar to the one used in the shooting, and a crime-scene image of the car in which Kebble was shot.

Interestingly, this heavily visually situates the book in a specifically South African network of other texts that focus on murders, court cases and forensics, or that can be otherwise categorised under the generic definitions of 'true crime', 'crime fiction', 'whodunnit' or 'murder mystery'. Tonally- and thematically-similar covers can be found connected to texts released by different publishing imprints and written contemporarily to *Killing Kebble,* including: Chris Karsten's trio of novels *Face-Off*;[385] *The Skin Collector*[386] and *The Skinner's Revenge;*[387] Amanda Coetzee's *Bad Blood*,[388] H.J.

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[383] Cover of Wiener, *Killing Kebble*, hardcover edition.

[384] Altbeker, *Fruit of a Poisoned Tree.*

[385] Chris Karsten, *Face-Off* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 2014).

[386] Chris Karsten, *The Skin Collector* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 2012).

[387] Chris Karsten, *The Skinner's Revenge* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 2013).

[388] Amanda Coetzee, *Bad Blood* (Johannesburg: Pan MacMillan, 2012).

A collection of visually-similar covers for true crime and crime fiction texts.

Golakai's *The Lazarus Effect*,[389] Marida Fitzpatrick's *Die Staat Vs Oscar*,[390] and David Klatzow's *Justice Denied*.[391]

This visual intertextual linking instantly signals to readers the subjects, connotations and conventions of each book, making claims to authority by borrowing or invoking the authority of other texts that look similar.

As such, the second cover of *Killing Kebble* shows a significantly different approach to semiotic authority-claiming and positioning to the hardcover edition: instead of promising to expose the underworld via the people who work in it, this version of the cover speaks to Wiener exposing the underworld via the authority of the court system, forensic science, policing, and other more traditional sources of societal authority and truth-telling. This visually links the book to a different form of story-telling authority, shifting from the authority gained from using the stories of the main actors in Kebble's murder, to pinning its authority claims to the authority wielded by the apparatus of law: forensic scientists, the justice system, and so on. This makes a significantly different kind of authority-claim on behalf of the text, and primes the reader differently for the text's content: a reader of the hardcover edition may expect a more gritty exposé of the underworld, while a reader of the paperback may expect more court and forensic drama. The different expectations set by these different visual paratexts will likely flavour the readers of each book's interpretations, enjoyment and judgements of what is otherwise the same text.

The paperback cover's textual claims to authority do not deviate as much as the visual elements. The blurb and Wiener's biography are shortened, however, in order to fit in approving shouts for the text from the crime fiction writer Deon Meyer and the newspaper editor and journalist

[389] HJ Golakai, *The Lazarus Effect* (Cape Town: Kwela, 2011).

[390] Marida Fitzpatrick, *Die Staat Vs. Oscar* (Jeppestown: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2014).

[391] David Klatzow, *Justice Denied* (Cape Town: Penguin Random House, 2014).

Ferial Haffajee – sources of authority in their respective fields.[392] Both shouts are explicit appeals to authority: in a strain of superlatives, Meyer argues that "This truth is almost stranger than fiction, but in Mandy Wiener's hands, it is also more enthralling, entertaining and unputdownable"; Haffajee praises the text as "a page-turner I could not put down", alongside Weiner's "ability to win the confidence of the underworld without becoming its pimp", which constitutes a strong claim to objectivity and journalistic nous.

There are numerous other textual and textual-visual additions to the paperback cover, all in service of making the text seem authoritative by way of public popularity and acclaim. On the front cover, the phrases "Revised & Updated", and "over 50 000 copies sold"[393] are added, in bold type.[394] On the back cover, *Killing Kebble* is named as the "Best Book of the Year Non-Fiction Books of the Year Jenny & Co 2011" in a golden-gradiented star splash graphic.[395] The back cover also notes that the "new" edition includes a "[p]ostscript that brings readers up to date on events and the people involved in this story" since the first edition was published, along with "an extensive Author Interview that explores the author's background, people's reactions to the book and its impact on the author's life" – two more significant claims to authority.[396]

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[392] The full hardcover blurb, however, is still present elsewhere – it has been re-appended to the internal peritexts of the paperback edition.

[393] Wiener, *Killing Kebble*, paperback edition.

[394] *The Guide to Publishing in South Africa*, published by the Publishers' Association of South Africa (PASA) in 2012, stated that 10 000 copies of a book sold in South Africa made it a bestseller; thus, this figure identifies *Killing Kebble* as a South African bestseller five times over.

[395] Wiener, *Killing Kebble*, paperback edition.

[396] There also exists a QR code which, at time of writing, links to the Facebook page of Pan MacMillan – the imprint under which the book is published. Perhaps this can be seen as an appeal to authority by way of being technologically relevant, although one gets the feeling that QR codes of this useless nature will soon be obsolete.

Working together, such textual and visual cues aim make an unimpeachable semiotic appeal to authority. This almost overwhelming array of authority claims is carried over to the textual peritexts that are traditionally held next to the text itself within the covers of the printed text, or within the data file of the digital text.

The most obvious of these peritexts are the eight reviews and shouts quoted in the front pages of the paperback print edition of *Killing Kebble*. This edition contains a list of eight shouts and reviews under the header "Praise for Killing Kebble", from positive reviews from national newspapers such as the *Mail & Guardian* ("a riveting bestseller", "insightful and accessible") and *The Times* ("[I] ended up klapping the thing in three days"); smaller publications like *Cape Community Papers* and *Classic Feel*; and shouts from radio DJs – and thus colleagues of Wiener's – Gareth Cliff and Jenny Crwys-Williams.[397] These shouts are not just for marketing purposes and convincing a potential reader to buy the text: they are also appeals to authority by way of approval from media experts and figures of public authority and acclaim.

Such multi-faceted appeals to authority are the norm in *Killing Kebble*'s internal peritexts. Even the imprint page and frontmatter of the text contains an upfront claim to authority. In between the copyright notice and editing, proofreading and design credits is a notice that details how the "content" of the text "is based on numerous interviews, court documents, newspaper reports, author experiences and other sources", and that "every attempt has been made to ensure the accuracy if the details, facts, names, places and events mentioned in these pages".[398] It also details how the producers confidently "welcome feedback" on the veracity of the text.[399] It is part-legal disclaimer; part-journalistic genuflection. Both editions of *Killing*

[397] "Praise for *Killing Kebble*", in Wiener, *Killing Kebble*, paperback edition.

[398] Imprint page of Wiener, *Killing Kebble*, paperback edition.

[399] *Ibid.*

Kebble also contain a foreword and acknowledgements. The foreword is given by Katy Katopodis, the Editor-in-Chief of Eyewitness News, and reads as a reference letter in support of Weiner's growth and expertise as a journalist, as well as the veracity of the text; a recapping of Weiner's growth in the Eyewitness News newsroom from a "young intern" into a "phenomenal journalist".[400] The text, in Katopodis' opinion, "reflect's [Wiener's] brilliant journalistic instinct", and positions Killing Kebble as a direct by-product of her quotidian reporting: "she has taken her work in the newsroom and turned it into […] an outstanding book".[401] This foreword also offers the text institutional backing, through the placement of the Eyewitness News logo, as well as Katopodis' assertion that "Eyewitness News is extremely proud to be represented by [Wiener]".[402]

The acknowledgements, which span six printed pages after the text, are written by Wiener herself, and act to situate herself within networks of colleagues, sources and experts outside the world of the text. She introduces these notes by stating – again, as if the reader could have missed this assertion the many times it is made in more immediately-apparent peritextual claims – that she "personally covered the evolution of this story from the day Brett Kebble was murdered in September 2005".[403] She does, however, also want to "acknowledge the work of my colleagues who were filing alongside me", and whose reports she used "fill the inevitable gaps in my memory and corroborate my reports and notes".[404] This acknowledgement – as well as her noting that she "relied solely" on some colleagues' work "where they have broken exclusive aspects of the story"[405] – are not just referential in nature, but also serve to credential Wiener as a

[400] Foreword of Wiener, *Killing Kebble*, paperback edition, x.

[401] *Ibid.*

[402] *Ibid.*

[403] Wiener, *Killing Kebble*, paperback edition, 423.

[404] *Ibid*

[405] *Ibid.*, 424.

journalist who follows professional process and conduct. Such credentialing work is also done by her admiration of the "formidable journalistic work of […] the *Mail & Guardian*", her sourcing from "reports in the *Star* and *Sunday Independent*" and the "search function on www.iol.co.za", which she termed to be "a remarkable resource".[406] (Credentialing is covered more throughly in Chapter 8.)

Name-dropping publications and colleagues who work at different news organisations, moreover, may be seen as a strategy to protect against potential misgivings about her youth and inexperience as a reporter: she is displaying and locating herself within the professional journalistic milieu of South Africa. A similar job is done by her acknowledgement of the "authors and organisations that have generously given me permission to use excerpts of their publications":[407] she is implicating her text intertextually, within a network of other texts and producers of texts in conversation with herself and her own. (Such establishing of points of reference can be seen as a claim to authority by way of facticity, which we will cover in greater detail in Chapter 10.)

The prologue of the book stands in stark contrast to the other peritextual elements, as it consists mostly of a passage of uninterrupted reported speech given by Mikey Schultz, who explains the meanings of the tattoos on his "lean, ripped body", which "reads like a memoir of his turbulent, hell-raising life."[408] It makes no explicit claims to authority, but can be seen to reference the degree to which Wiener claims she gained inner access to – or even transgresses into – her sources' lives and thoughts in her acknowledgements. The three self-confessed killers of Kebble, she says, "allowed me into their inner circle and their lives".[409] It was "a rare

[406] *Ibid.*

[407] *Ibid.*

[408] *Ibid.*, 1.

[409] *Ibid.*, 424.

privilege", she notes, as the three men "transgressed [their] fundamental beliefs" by speaking to her.[410] Such closeness with her sources, textually invoked from the prologue, confirmed to her "the inherent value of the concepts of loyalty and trust"[411] – concepts which, it could be argued, she and the rest of *Killing Kebble*'s producers try to inculcate in the reader toward the text through their peritextual wrangling.

The two editions of *Killing Kebble* are archetypical of the ways in which producers of texts imbue the packaging of texts with appeals to authority. This peritextual information, in contrast to Desrochers and Appolons' assertions, are grounds in which different illocutionary functions – such as authority claiming, marketing, advertising, legal positioning and navigation – will intersect. Peritexts thus cannot be argued to serve discrete functions.

The differences between the two editions of *Killing Kebble* also prove Genette's observation that the functions of peritexts – and their relations to their respective texts – are transitory, and may vary not only from text to text, but from edition to edition. One might be able argue that peritexts are only necessarily physically attached to and metaphorically related to specific copies of specific editions of specific texts – but such an investigation is beyond the scope of this paper.[412]

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[410] *Ibid.*

[411] *Ibid.*

[412] Answers to such enquiries, as Andrew van der Vlies notes, may be found within the field of book history:

> To the bibliographer and scholarly editor's question "how is this text different from this one?", critics attuned to what was coming to be known as book history added such questions as "how has each instance of publication changed the text and affected the meaning" Also: how has this text–with or without variation– been rendered a different *work* by virtue of textual variations, but also through changing format, typography, and different co- or paratexts: those "fringes" or margins of text, images, or other apparatus […] that constitute, [as Genette] argues, "a zone not only of transition but also of *transaction?"* (Andrew van der Vlies, "Print, Text and Books in South Africa", in *Print, Text and Book*

Regardless of how these facets might and *do* change, the peritextual and semiotic packaging of texts is a multifaceted tool, which can be used by producers of texts to influence readers of texts with regard to – but not exclusively with regard to – the authority that the text wields over its subject matter. And, as we have seen, the nature and composition of the components of such peritexts are greatly influenced by producers, perceived audiences, actual audiences, a text's eventual reception, its cultural context with regard to visual and textual tropes (and otherwise), the texts with which it is brought into conversation, and myriad other difficult and unpredictable factors that can and will impact the understanding of a text. And, as we have begun to see, these peritextual elements intersect with and overlap the text itself with regard to other intratextual components of authority. We will now begin to discuss these other components.

Cultures in South Africa, ed. Andrew van der Vlies [Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2012], 6-7.)

CHAPTER 7

Narrative genuflection: narrative positioning and credentialing

> Who was I to write their story? How dare I?
> – Janice Warman, *The Class of '79* [413]

As the last chapter hopefully made clear, an important facet of making a narrative text seem authoritative to readers is for its producer to establish their position and credentials with regard to the text's subject matter, usually by positing its producer as authoritative within various paratexts: the blurb, the author biography, the foreword, introduction, and so on. For these authority claims to be effective, however, it is necessary for this work to continue within the text itself. From the outset of a narrative non-fiction text especially, the narrator of the text must establish the reasons why their narrative should be seen as authoritative – or relatively authoritative – by the reader, in order for the subsequent events and information related in the text to be perceived as having any value to the reader.

This is the first – and most vital – intratextual strategy employed by the producer of a text to give a convincing answer to the questions all readers implicitly ask of a text: 'Why should I read this narrative out of the many narratives available to read?' and, having addressed that, 'Why should I *value* this narrative?'

As was noted in the first half of this book, the acts of producing and reading a text is the beginning of a number of para-, inter- and intratextual relationships – between reader and text, reader and narrator, narrator and

[413] Janice Warman, *The Class of '79* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2014), xxiv.

text, writer and narrator, writer and subject, narrator and subject, and so on – which are all differently predicated. The biographer Judith P. Zinsser argues that, in order to effectively address readers' concerns about the value of a text, producers and/or narrators of texts "must effect a pact with our readers to identify not only with our subject, but also with us and our enterprise".[414] One might argue further that a reader's valuation of the subject of a text is partially or entirely predicated on the reader's valuation of the text's narrator. This does not mean that the reader must necessarily agree with, like, or respect the producer-narrator of a text, but rather that the narrator of the text must be regarded as a figure of potential authority over the text's subject matter.

The relationship between the narrator and reader – or what Zinsser terms a "pact"[415] – is a "delicate creation" into which "different groups of readers […] enter […] for different reasons":[416]

> Some are dazzled by [their] academic status and the scholarly apparatus displayed. Some are lured by the appeal of the views expressed both explicitly and implicitly, or the skill demonstrated in telling [a] story. Others are seduced by such intangible factors as the narrator's tone.[417]

In this chapter, we will be looking at the first reason for which Zinsser argues readers will view a text's narrator as authoritative: the narrator's establishment of an expert (or otherwise qualified) status over a subject –

[414] Judith P. Zinsser, "Why Believe Me? Narrative Authority in Biography", *Journal of Women's History*, 21, 4 (2009), 165.

[415] *Ibid.*, 164.

[416] *Ibid.*, 165.

[417] *Ibid.*

their *credentials* – and the *position* from which they will engage with the text's subject.

How a narrator positions and credentials themselves intratextually mostly comes down to how the producer of the text preempts the reader's response to the text.[418] They look to predict which questions a reader may ask of the narrator with regard to their qualifications, experience, understanding or worldview with regard to their text's subject; questions like: 'How does this narrator know what they're talking about?'; or, 'What is the narrator's relation to the events and experiences portrayed in this narrative?'; or, "How can this narrator be trusted to interpret these events?'; or, 'Does this narrator understand the full context of these events'; or, simply, 'Why should I trust this narrator?'

Crucially, however, explaining one's position in a narrative and/or being seen as having narrative credentials is not the same as actually being seen as authoritative, or as being seen as creating a factual narrative or text. Rather, being credentialed and positioned are the first conditions of being seen as reliable or authoritative. (Factuality, of course, is a different thing entirely to authority, as we discussed in Chapter 5.) In other words, one must be sufficiently credentialed in a subject or in a specific epistemic role – e.g. journalist, memoirist, researcher – in order to be a reliable or authoritative narrator on the subject. This in itself does not certify such reliability, though: Redi Tlhabi may be sufficiently credentialed to talk about her Soweto youth, for example, but her text does not automatically become reliable as a result. Credentialing and positioning are predicates; not guarantees.

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[418] Susan S. Lanser, *The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose Fiction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 116, in Zinsser, "Why Believe Me?", 165.

Positioning

Positioning is arguably the less subtle of the two narrative strategies we will discuss in this chapter. Generally, positioning is a matter of identifying the degree of involvement the narrator has with the events and experiences that they narrate (apart from the obvious fact that the narrator narrates the narrative.) A narrator may position themselves outside of the experiential ambit of the narrative – as one is most likely to do in historical texts – or they may position themselves as partially or directly involved in the narrative's events and experiences, as one is mostly likely to do, respectively, in investigative journalism (like *Killing Kebble*) or memoir (like *A Million Little Pieces*).

As such, positioning also dictates the amount and kind of credentialing that a narrator has to do in order to be seen as being able to narrate the events and experiences of the narrative in a reliable or authoritative way. This does not mean that a narrator who is positioned further away – spatially, temporally or epistemologically – from the events and experiences of their narrative has to do more credentialing work than a narrator who is more involved. Nor is the opposite true. Instead, positioning functions on a text-by-text basis, as no two narrative positions can ever be the same: each narrative should be seen as discrete in terms of its ambit, source, producer and imagined reader, and thus the narrative strategies enacted in each narrative should be seen as discrete phenomena.

What positioning *does* affect, however, is the kind of credentialing work that a narrator should be seen to do in the narrative. For the purposes of this paper, I will explore two kinds of narrative credentialing.

Firstly in cases in which narrators are wholly positioned within the narrative, and are actively involved with the events and experiences narrated, narrators may credential themselves by relating their personal experiences to the broader subject matter of the text. I will term this

strategy – which is most common in memoir and texts which incorporate aspects of autobiography – as *self-credentialing*.

Secondly, in cases in which narrators are positioned either only partially (or are absent) in relation to the events and experiences narrated, narrators may display other forms of knowledge, expertise or qualifications with regard to the text's subject matter. They can do this either by showcasing the research they have done on the subject, or to present themselves in a way that makes them seem capable of attaining some semblance of authority over the subject as the narrative unfolds. I will term this strategy – which is most apparent in texts whose narratives are dependent on journalistic, reportage or ethnographic modes and techniques – as *external credentialing*.

As we will see, self-credentialing narrators do not credential themselves solely by their personal experience; likewise, externally credentialed narrators do not just have to prove their familiarity with their epistemic roles and the subjects of their text. Rather, it should be understood that 'self-credentialing' relates to a narrator being seen, not only to narrate and interpret about their own experiences, but to be *authorised* to narrate and interpret their own experiences. Likewise, 'external credentialing' relates to a narrator being seen to be *authorised* to narrate and interpret experiences and subjects with which are either partially or wholly uninvolved. Having to do one kind of credentialing does not rule out that one has to do the other – they are not mutually exclusive narrative strategies. Indeed, a narrator may negotiate a number of experiences and events with which they may have different degrees of involvement during the course of a single narrative.

In the sections that follow, I will demonstrate how each form of credentialing works by examining a number of narrative non-fiction texts that strongly and explicitly exhibit either self-credentialing or external credentialing.

Self-credentialing

Self-credentialing may seem like an obvious phenomenon: the intratextual extension of paratextual signifiers such as 'memoir', 'autobiography' or 'a true story'. Surely one does not have to credential oneself in order to tell one's own story?

But as was argued in Chapter 3, a text that self-identifies as 'memoir' does not exist in a space of its own. Just as one's experiences are intertwined and related to the experiences of other people's, a memoir can and usually does intersect with other textual genres; most critically, it necessarily intersects with the lived experiences of " *actual* […] bodies rather than […] imaginary characters."[419]

Even when a narrative text is written based solely or mainly on the experiences of its narrator, it is still necessary for the narrator to establish their credentials with regard to being able to interpret their experiences and, by extension, the experiences of other people and subject matter with which their experiences intersect.

Of course, a narrator managing to sufficiently credential themselves to write about their own experiences does not mean that a reader will not attempt to further corroborate the veracity of the experiences presented and the interpretations offered for these experiences. As we saw in Chapter 2, with regard to *A Million Little Pieces* and *Endings & Beginnings*, sufficient self-credentialing cannot make up for a lack of factuality, or a lack of reliability in narration. It is, however, a necessary process that needs to be undergone by the narrator of a text in order for the reader of the text to even consider corroborating the experiences and interpretations offered by the narrator in the first place. A promise of authority has to be made first in order for that promise to be found empty.

[419] Lehman, *Fact*, 9. Emphasis added.

The degree to which self-credentialing is employed depends on the degree to which the narrator's experiences intersect or overlap with the experiences of other people. In cases of lesser experience-intersection, a narrator may not have to do much work at all to convince a reader they are sufficiently credentialed. For example, in *Stones Against the Mirror*, the Alan Paton Award-winning memoir of anti-apartheid activist Hugh Lewin states that, although "it's been a struggle, writing about the Struggle",[420] he experiences few moments of doubt within the bulk of the narrative, which recollects his betrayal by his closest friend and his subsequent time in custody. He does, however, reflect in the text's epilogue that

> It's not going to please, this book. Some people will feel I've said too much; others that I haven't said enough. A few […] will say my memory has betrayed me. It just wasn't *like* that.[421]

To get around his anxiety about the text's reception, Lewin glibly "advises" that his readers should "treat" his narrative "as fiction".[422] [423] However, this doubt fades in the light of the paragraphs that follow this advice, in which Lewin quotes an email sent to him by his "old friend and cellmate",[424] Jock Strachan, a member of Umkhonto we Sizwe[425] and an

[420] Hugh Lewin, *Stones Against the Mirror: Friendship in the Time of the South African Struggle*, (Cape Town: Umuzi, 2011), 187.

[421] *Ibid.*

[422] *Ibid.*

[423] This advice is only rhetorical, of course: this is a memoir, and its entire illocutionary thrust is for it to be read as non-fiction, in the strict sense in which fictionality operates in this paper.

[424] *Ibid.*

[425] South African History Online, "Harold 'Jock' Strachan". Accessed 1 June 2016 at http://www.sahistory. org.za/people/harold-jock-strachan

artist who Lewin describes as "the Jackson Pollock of prose".[426] Such a hyperbolic description of his friend – by an award-winning author and experienced journalist, no less[427] – serves to make him a figure of authority, and more specifically an authoritative contemporary of the events described in his book. This characterisation is vital, as Strachan assures Lewin against his misgivings about his own narrative: "You don't in fact have any material other than your own recollection", he writes.[428] By using this email in his epilogue, Lewin backs up his claims of authority by subtly inserting an appraisal of the restrictive conditions in which Lewin has written his narrative. It is a reference letter, of a sort, an intratextual mirror in the form of an ostensibly intimate piece of communication: an outside source testifying the unimpeachability of Lewin's text, held within the text itself. It is a subtle sleight-of-hand, and an effective moment of self-credentialing by Lewin that shores up his narrative's authority claims, all within a few sentences.

More contested contexts than this, however, require more self-credentialing work, especially in cases in which a narrator's experiences are part of larger, more urgent, more culturally relevant or more socially interconnected phenomena. In these cases, the authority of the narrator must be bolstered by their being seen to understand the context in which their experiences happened and the context in which their narrative is being narrated.

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[426] Lewin, *Stones Against the Mirror*, 187.

[427] *Ibid*., dustjacket. In particular, Lewin is feted as the winner of the 2003 Olive Schreiner Prize for his hybrid-genred prison diary *Bandiet out of Jail* and a journalist for the *Natal Witness*, *Drum* and the *Golden City Post*.

[428] *Ibid*., 187.

CASE STUDY 3

Degrees of self-credentialing in early South African AIDS memoirs: *Witness to AIDS* and *AidSafari*

An excellent example of the different degrees of self-credentialing needed in different autobiographical narrative non-fiction texts can be found in a comparison of the two Alan Paton Award-winning AIDS memoirs of 2006, Edwin Cameron's *Witness to AIDS*,[429] and Adam Levin's *AidSafari*,[430] which each detail their narrator's life journeys after contracting HIV and developing AIDS. The two books share superficial similarities – chief of which being that they are both written by white, gay, affluent South Africans – but also that they "[document] people's experience living with rather than dying of AIDS" and thus grant valuable insights into the lives of people, who, from the earliest Western HIV/AIDS memoirs in the late 20th century, were usually literarily represented in "terrifying" and "depressing" so-called "chronicles of dying".[431] Apart from these, the two memoirs take very different approaches to their subject, reflected by their very different lives: Cameron is one of the most decorated and lauded judges in South Africa, and an acting judge in the Constitutional Court;[432]

[429] Cameron, *Witness to AIDS*.

[430] Levin, *AidSafari*.

[431] Craig Demner, "AIDS memoirs from South Africa", *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, 12 (2007): 295-296.

[432] Constitutional Court of South Africa, "Judges: Justice Cameron". Accessed 1 June 2016 at http://www. constitutionalcourt.org.za/site/judges/justicecameron/index1.html

Levin is an art journalist, socialite and self-described "fashionista and occasional cultural terrorist".[433] [434]

Neither of these men are an archetypal South African living with HIV and AIDS. They are educated men of privilege, and this reflects in their respective memoirs. Cameron's memoir details his struggles to find adequate treatment for his condition while working his high-power, high-stress job: "I was dealing with AIDS as a judge," he writes, "chairing a committee, making public statements and important public recommendations. But I was also dealing with AIDS within myself."[435] Where *Witness to AIDS* details Cameron's efforts to secure adequate treatment – for example, his decade-long search for an effective cocktail of antiretroviral drugs,[436] or to have his medical insurance scheme stop "discriminating against AIDS as a chronic medical condition"[437] – Levin's memoir describes polite dinner parties,[438] writing a book of tips for African art shoppers,[439] and launching that book at a suburban shopping centre.[440]

These two texts, in HIV/AIDS researcher Craig Demner's words, "do not represent the face of AIDS in South Africa".[441] Certainly, they do not fit the profile of the person whom the epidemic "mostly affects": people who are usually black, poor, financially insecure, and contract the virus through heterosexual intercourse.[442] Both text's producers, however, actively acknowledge their privilege. Cameron writes that "I didn't 'look' like

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[433] *Ibid.*, frontmatter.

[434] Neither Levin or his publishers clarify exactly what an 'occasional cultural terrorist' is, however.

[435] *Ibid.*

[436] *Ibid.*, 38-39.

[437] *Ibid.*, 35.

[438] Levin, *AidSafari*, 152.

[439] *Ibid.*, 211.

[440] *Ibid.*, 215.

[441] *Ibid.*, 296-297. Emphasis added.

[442] Demner, "AIDS memoirs", 296.

someone with AIDS", at least according to "media stereotypes":[443] "I was not in bed. I was not emaciated."[444] Levin's memoir echoes the disjuncture between his identity and mediated depictions of people living with HIV and AIDS, noting that although he is part of the "four to five million South Africans [who] were HIV-positive" and potentially one day part of the "eight hundred people [who die] of Aids each day[445]", he cannot feel "solidarity" with "these people": while they were technically Levin's "brothers and sisters in this disease", in reality they "shared nothing else."[446]

How, then, can either of these two texts be said to be important and illuminating *vis-a-vis* the South African AIDS epidemic, as they have been by a majority of reviewers and the literary awards bodies of South Africa? In Jonny Steinberg's estimation, Cameron's memoir is "among the most substantial contributions to the concepts of national identity, community and solidarity we have had" in South Africa.[447] HIV/AIDS activist Zachie Achmat, co-founder of the Treatment Action Campaign, likewise praises Cameron's text for "address[ing] the taboo questions of race, sexual orientation, poverty and stigma[448]" where others yet had not. Levin's book, likewise, was lauded in reviews as an "important part of the canon of literature on HIV/AIDS in South Africa",[449] and elsewhere as "a glorious celebration of life" and a primer on "the physical horrors of AIDS".[450]

Part of the positivity surrounding the books' receptions might have something to do with the fact that the writers' "self-conception[s]" are

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[443] *Ibid*., 19.

[444] *Ibid*.

[445] *Ibid*., 44.

[446] *Ibid*.

[447] Jonny Steinberg, quoted on back cover of Cameron, *Witness to AIDS*.

[448] Zachie Achmat, quoted on back cover of Cameron, *Witness to AIDS*.

[449] Jennifer Crocker, review of *AidSafari*, *Cape Times*, 12 September 2005, 12.

[450] "D.B.", review of AidSafari, Pretoria News, 22 August 2005, 8, in Judith Lütge Coullie, "Recently Reviewed South African Life Writing Publications V", *AlterNation*, 13, 2 (2006), 301.

similar to the reading audiences':[451] the majority of these books' reviewers are, like the authors, relatively well-educated and financially secure.[452] That said, both memoirs represented, at the time of their publication, "important attempt[s] to crack the institutionalized silence that surround[ed] the HIV/AIDS epidemic in South Africa",[453] written about or near the apex of former president Thabo Mbeki's AIDS denialism.

It would be churlish, however, to reduce these texts' (mostly) positive reception strictly to a contextual or epitextual level. Putting context and epitext aside, and looking at the texts on a purely textual and peritextual level, both these memoirs exhibit subtly effective – and significantly different – approaches to narrative credentialing, which seek to expand the texts' significance outside of their relative, presumed epistemic boundaries.

Witness to AIDS has a much wider topical ambit than *AidSafari*, and, notably, much of the credentialing work in Cameron's memoir is done peritextually. The book has a foreword by Nelson Mandela, who calls Cameron "one of South Africa's new heroes", and calls his memoir "a further major contribution" toward his "quest for a better life for all".[454] It is also, as Ellen Grünkemeier notes, "academically footnoted and indexed, with various references to political speeches, court cases, articles, statistics and studies".[455] *Witness to AIDS*, unlike Levin's text, is organised "thematically", and not chronologically, and discusses "several topics linked with the [greater] epidemic", such as "the spread of the virus in Africa, governments' responses to HIV/AIDS, [and] access to and costs of

[451] Ellen Grünkemeier, *Breaking the Silence: South African Representations of HIV/AIDS* (Martlesham, Suffolk: James Currey, 2013), 174.

[452] As Demner rightly argues, "the majority of poor people living with HIV/AIDS in South Africa [don't] have the money to purchase any of these books" ("AIDS Memoirs", 297).

[453] *Ibid.*

[454] Nelson Mandela, foreword to Cameron, *Witness to AIDS*, 7-8.

[455] Grünkemeier, *Breaking the Silence*, 174.

antiretroviral treatment".[456] Cameron thus anchors his personal experience to issues, incidents and loci of greater social significance. "The text", Grünkemeier argues, thus "challenges exclusive features of the autobiographical genre in that Cameron provides diverse perspectives, many of which gave frequently been eclipsed from dominant fields of knowledge".[457] Due to his high social standing, academic expertise, political connections, and involvement with many aspects of HIV/AIDS activism and work in tandem with his personal experience with the virus, the amount of self-credentialing that Cameron must undergo in his narrative is minimal: he is about as credentialed as a topical memoirist can come.

Levin's book is more interesting with regard to the amount of self-credentialing the narrator must undertake. *AidSafari* is not as academic as Cameron's memoir: it holds no great insights about the scale of the epidemic in South Africa, nor about the machinations of the pharmaceutical industry. Levin is not a particularly powerful or populist figure. Although he would like to help "chip away at a single brick of that immense wall of silence" that surrounded HIV and AIDS in South Africa at that time, he openly doubts the usefulness of his words.[458] "Often while writing this memoir," he notes in the prologue, "I lost faith in its process. I wrestled with the egotism of writing sixty thousand words about myself, and I doubted its value."[459] He also admits to "struggling" with "fears of personal exposure and worthlessness", and that his story was "unextraordinary".[460]

His story is also one of privilege. When he is diagnosed, he moves in with his parents. He has access to specialist healthcare when he develops Karposi's sarcoma. He has supportive employers who allow him to work a

[456] *Ibid.*

[457] *Ibid.*

[458] Levin, *AidSafari*, x.

[459] Levin, *AidSafari*, xi.

[460] *Ibid.*

pace that takes his condition into account, and a publisher who gives him work that he is able to do from home. In sum, he does not have to "struggle with numerous hardships on a daily basis", as the majority of people with HIV/AIDS do in South Africa, and thus his memoir is in danger of being dismissed by readers as one of privilege in the face of misfortune.[461]

The biggest obstacle to Levin writing his story, therefore, is himself, and in order for this narrative of self-redemption and healing to be seen as valuable – and not just what Demner calls a "skewed [view] of an epidemic by a privileged group"[462] – Levin must credential himself as being aware enough of the intersections of his mediated experiences with the greater significance of the phenomenon about which he writes.

The way in which this manifests in *AidSafari* is in the underpinning of the text's main narrative with a metatextual sub-narrative. Levin's not-so-typical narrative of survival runs in tandem with the narrative of Levin coming to terms with the worth of his narrative, even as the narrative is being seen to be produced. This is a narrative strategy that Leon de Kock might recognise as a manifestation of the South African tradition of "rhetorical genuflection" – that is, a moment in which one considers the impossibility of representing something while one is representing it.[463] An example of this comes near *AidSafari*'s commencement, when Levin states that he has made diary entries on his laptop computer "every couple of days" since he was first diagnosed with HIV.[464] Although he states that he wrote these entries for himself as "solace",[465] it is implied that these entries are the eventual building blocks of *AidSafari*'s diary-esque narrative. Later, after being asked by a friend to participate in a photoshoot of people living with HIV/AIDS – "to show that the disease affected middle-class people as

[461] *Ibid.*

[462] Demner, "AIDS Memoirs", 297.

[463] De Kock, "Global Imaginary", 263.

[464] Levin, *AidSafari*, 46.

[465] *Ibid.*

well as the poor"[466] – he considers how he might turn his experience into something useful: "Perhaps, I might publish a book about all this, I figured – a simple memoir, detailing the daily trials of the disease that so few people seemed at all familiar with. […] Maybe it could be useful."[467] In this way, Levin begins to identify *AidSafari* as a personal journal that has just so happened to become a published text: a Mobius Strip-esque feat of metanarration and self-identification.

Each of these moments of constructive self-doubt act not only as signals to the reader that Levin knows that he is a person of privilege – someone who could never "feel a true sense of empathy" with most other people in the country with HIV/AIDS[468] – but also as a person who has the uncommon ability to articulate their experiences. He needs to be seen to convince himself – and thus his audience – that he is aware of both the limits and the usefulness of what he is writing. Ironically, for his book to be seen as authoritative, he needs to openly understate the value of his narrative: "Who cares?" he writes at one point. "I'm just another one of so many million people in the world with Aids[.] What makes this story worth reading?"[469]

With such credentialing markers, Grünkmeier argues that Levin signals that he "does not purport to speak for others, but represents the infection in one of the many ways and voices possible".[470] As such, Levin manages to navigate a tricky rhetorical maze: on one hand, he wants to bear witness to HIV/AIDS; on the other, he understands that his witness may be dismissed by readers in a society where most people with HIV/AIDS do not have access to the resources that he does. He doesn't side-step the question of his privilege, but rather tackles it head-on. Most crucially, however, Levin

[466] *Ibid.*, 77.

[467] *Ibid.*, 77-78.

[468] *Ibid.*, 44.

[469] *Ibid.*, 108-109.

[470] Grünkemeier, *Breaking the Silence*, 174.

makes it a major component of the narrative: instead of writing it in search of "universal profundities" or "literary satisfaction", Levin chooses to write the memoir "on the off-chance that someone else might benefit from the information it contained – information that would have helped me immeasurably."[471]

By choosing this path – and, most crucially, being *seen* to choose this path by the reader – Levin subtly manages to position himself to write about his own experiences in a context where sharing such experiences without qualification may be looked upon unfavourably. This allows his narrative to be seen, not as a privileged person trying to bear witness to a sprawling epidemic that most greatly affects the poor, but as a valuable contribution to HIV/AIDS literature, to help "creat[e] an audience for stories and voices from Africans living with HIV/AIDS" and to send "a small but important message that they shall not be ignored."[472] By suitably credentialing himself to share his experiences in a socially volatile context, Levin can be seen to help open up a space that, Demner notes, will soon contain voices from "other parts of the social spectrum."[473]

In *AidSafari*'s prologue, Levin states something that could be retrospectively read as greatly ironic. "In the end," he writes, "there is nothing simpler than telling a story when it is yours alone."[474] Given the amount of self-credentialing work and displays of self-doubt and self-reflexivity in *AidSafari*, one might argue that telling your own story is anything but simple. For only when a story is seen to be yours *alone* – that is, meticulously shown to find, address and resolve the intersections of your experience with the experiences of other people – can it be read solely by its own merits.

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[471] Levin, AidSafari, 108-109.

[472] Demner, "AIDS memoirs", 301.

[473] *Ibid.*, 297.

[474] Levin, *AidSafari*, xi.

External credentialling

But what happens when the story is not yours alone, or cannot be seen to be yours at all? Credentialing a narrative becomes more complicated when a narrator is narrating the events and experiences of someone other than themselves. In one way, this is the basis of more traditional concept of 'credentials', as it is used in a journalistic or academic sense. In narrative non-fiction texts that focus on events and experiences other than the narrators' own, the narrator must be shown to the reader to be suitably qualified to report, interpret or present these events and experiences.

There are many ways to perform this kind of credentialing, and many of these ways begin – as we have seen in previous chapters, especially with regard to Mandy Wiener in Chapter 6 – with peritextual information and packaging: biographies, blurbs, and so on. Peritexts alone, however, cannot be trusted to sufficiently credential a producer or narrator of a text is that text's subject matter is in contested epistemological terrain, or if the subject matter is show to be – or assumed to be – far outside the ambit of the producer or narrator's professional or personal experience.

Beyond *having* credentials, the narrator must also be *shown* to be sufficiently credentialed in the narrative itself, by way of using suitable credentialing markers, or performing the kinds of narrative and extra-narrative acts that any sufficiently-credentialed narrator may be expected to use or perform. For example, a narrator of a journalistic narrative text should be seen to use the journalistic method; a narrator of a historic narrative text must be seen to show familiarity with the norms of conducting historical research; a narrator of an anthropological narrative text should be seen to engage in participant observation, and so on. Credentials should thus be performed.

A potent example of the performativity of external credentialing can be found in the work of Judith P. Zinsser, who was referenced at the

beginning of this chapter. In an article written for the *Journal of Women's History*, Zinsser explains how she positioned and then credentialed herself as a historian and researcher during the production of her biography of the much-biographised French mathematician, Emilie du Châtelet:

> To keep the reader from rejecting my whole version of Du Châtelet's life […] I wrote seven pages that established me as outside and above all previous biographers. I took the ultimate historian's position, the god-like narrator. I then invited the reader to join me at my pinnacle of authority […] to be a party to the enterprise. But it was a "set-up," like asking students if they want the test on Tuesday or Wednesday. I give them no choice about the test itself. […] I had structured the context, decided the outcome.[475]

Zinsser characterises the act of credentialing herself in her narrative as a "game":[476] a strategic back-and-forth between producer and reader, with the producer having to predict and pre-empt the potential reactions a reader may have to the text. Complicating this is the fact that the producer has to predict reader's reactions *while the text itself is being produced*, and thus has to work in their positioning and credentials with regard to the text's subject matter as an integral, inseparable part of the narrative. The context and text are thus intertwined and structured.

Zinsser's introduction to the biography itself is, in effect, a primer on the postmodern historical narrative process. Crucially, however, it is also a show of credentialing – the opening of herself and her process to the reader – which not only positions herself but also shows herself to have done the

[475] Zinsser, "Why Believe Me?", 164-165.

[476] *Ibid*., 164.

reading and the research required of a competent historical biographer *as she simultaneously defines what is required of a competent historical biographer*. She shows the reader the textual context in which her own text is situated, through a literature review that at once acknowledges and co-opts – but ultimately rejects – other popular texts written about Du Châtelet: whether they "minimized or dismissed her intellectual accomplishments"[477] or portrayed her as "foolishly passionate [and] semihysterical".[478] Zinsser then opens up the creative process of the biographer to the reader, detailing the "three possible introductions" – each "a 'true' [or] 'real' account", based "on the historical record"[479] – that she could use for her text. "As her biographer," Zinsser continues, "I can choose the time, the place, when and where to begin a narrative". She thus highlights the constructedness of historical narrative. Each construction brings its own challenges, she writes, as no one perspective can be "complete":[480] "The more we study the historical record", she observes, "the more spaces appear."[481]

Nevertheless, Zinsser's open consideration of secondary and primary sources – which give "a wide range of often contradictory images and disparate accounts"[482] of Du Chatelet's work – includes the reader on a journey of contextualisation, to intertwine narrative and narrative context, and reach (or hope to reach) the "pinnacle of authority":

> I intended [the reader] to believe that they, too, knew the facts better than my predecessors and had become as engaged as I in presenting this new, more informed, more

[477] Judith P. Zinsser, *Émilie du Châtelet: Daring Genius of the Enlightenment*, (London: Penguin, 2006), Kindle edition, location 327.

[478] *Ibid*., location 303.

[479] *Ibid*., location 268.

[480] *Ibid*., location 303.

[481] *Ibid*., location 327.

[482] *Ibid*., location 281.

> openly crafted, and thus, because of my honesty and their acquiescence, more authoritative biography.[483]

This is a seductive strategy, but contrary to Zinsser's argument, the producer cannot guarantee the acquiescence of the reader, no matter how smooth the sleight-of-hand. The reader's agency can never be revoked. To expand on Zinsser's first metaphor: a teacher might give a student a choice about the day of the week on which a test is to be taken, but there is nothing stopping that student from refusing to turn up for the test.

[483] Zinsser, "Why Believe Me?", 165.

CASE STUDY 4

Collapsing credentials in Anton Harber's *Diepsloot*

Anton Harber's first book-length work of non-fiction, *Diepsloot*, is an archetype of external credentialing within the context of South African narrative non-fiction. The text chronicles the attempts of Harber – an experienced journalist, academic and former editor of the *Mail & Guardian* – to profile the eponymous Johannesburg settlement, a place with a "torrid reputation" of poverty and violence.[484] Harber conducts his research "over a period of months"[485] in order "to get beyond the parachute reporting that shapes most of what we think we know about the place."[486] At the time of writing the text, Harber believed "there [was] a gap in South Africa in reporting on places like Diepsloot"; it seemed to him that "we can't understand this country fully or where it is headed unless we have a better understanding of what people in a place like Diepsloot are saying and thinking."[487]

The main problem about trying to understand Diepsloot, in Harber's estimation, is that "the white stereotype is that people [who live there] are helpless victims and that these are places of crime and violence":

> Yes, life in Diepsloot is tough, but in the book I try to give readers a sense of the individual experience. I've tried to break away from mobs and generalisations, and rather

[484] Verashni Pillay, "Diepsloot: The book", *Mail & Guardian*, 26 May 2011.

[485] Anton Harber, *Diepsloot* (Jeppestown: Jonathan Ball, 2011), 229.

[486] Pillay, "Diepsloot: The book".

[487] Mandy De Waal, "Anton Harber's *Diepsloot*, a slayer of township stereotypes", Daily Maverick, 14 July 2011.

> to engage with individuals, their lives, hopes and aspirations.[488]

As such, *Diepsloot*'s insights are narratively predicated by the many ways in which Harber – an affluent, white reporter – credentials himself in order to ostensibly gain insights into (what is in his words) a "vast" settlement;[489] a place that is "densely populated" by "the cast-offs or refugees of other areas";[490] and a place that exists within "a cloud of dangerous myths and rumours".[491] Through content analysis, he credentials himself as a trope-dodging media researcher; through visibly following news gathering processes, he credentials himself as a insight-gleaning journalist; through literature reviews, he credentials himself as a myth-dispelling contemporary historian.

What makes *Diepsloot* especially noteworthy for our purposes is that these performances of authority are easily understood as mere artifice. Upon its release, Harber's text attracted public derision from a number of prominent black commentators. Eric Miyeni, actor and once-columnist for the *Sowetan*, argued that the text "perpetuat[ed] the idea that black Africans are nothing but a reservoir of miseries, pain and failure."[492] [493] Likewise, Andile Mngxitama, a writer and one-time Member of Parliament, accused Harber of "transgressing into the black condition",[494]

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[488] *Ibid.*

[489] Harber, *Diepsloot*, 7.

[490] *Ibid.*, 9.

[491] *Ibid.,* 218.

[492] Eric Miyeni, "Defining Blacks by Past Misery is Unfair", *Sowetan*, 27 June 2011.

[493] Curiously, Miyeni formed this idea of the book, by his own admission, without reading it – not a great basis for forming a critical opinion of a text, but an excellent portrayal of the kind of reactions a writer might have to pre-empt when writing a text whose subject is contested or sensitive.

[494] Andile Mngxitama, "Whose story is it anyway?", *Mail & Guardian*, 22 June 2011.

arguing further that *Diepsloot* is part of a "post-1994 'townships-are-not-that-bad' genre", constituted by "anthropological forays into black townships to give the reading public a sense of 'how the other half lives'."[495] Mngxitama does however commend Harber for "seek[ing] to rescue the township from the negative image perpetuated by the media";[496] the image, as Harber states in the text, of Diepsloot "as a haven for criminals, a place of street justice, and a focal point of [outbreaks] of xenophobic violence".[497] [498]

Suitably, *Diepsloot*'s opening salvos bemoan the media's stereotyping of the settlement. One of Harber's first gambits to credential himself as a reporter who does not rehash the same tired images of setting and subject. His opening expositions are heavily sensorial, visually, aurally and olfactorily establishing Diepsloot as chaotic and noise-filled: there is

> a dense forest of shacks[,] crowds of unemployed people milling on the streets, and attempts by some at small-scale commerce in makeshift shops. Men cluster in groups, throwing dice or playing cards. The place has the dull metal glow of zinc housing, the chaos of unpaved roads, the noise of a life lived in packed public areas, the smoke of smouldering braziers and the stench of sewage spilling into the streets.[499]

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[495] *Ibid.* It is interesting to note, too, Mngxitama's use of the term "the reading public", which posits that most readers of this book would not be black or familiar with the kinds of trials the human subjects of Harber's text go through.

[496] *Ibid.*

[497] Harber, *Diepsloot*, 3.

[498] Interestingly, Harber never refers to Diepsloot as a 'township' in the text; only a 'settlement'. This is because, in his words, "it had sprung up [in the years] since 1990" and as such "does not have the same history as townships". (Anton Harber, "Event 78: Diepsloot", panel discussion with Gaye Davis, Franschhoek Literary Festival, Franschhoek, Western Cape, 13 May 2012.)

[499] Harber, *Diepsloot*, 2.

"This," he punctuates, "is Diepsloot".[500] Harber then launches into a review of the many – to his mind lacklustre – attempts by outsiders to understand the place. This is a rather blatant appeal to authority: by negatively reviewing the work of other (usually overseas-based) journalists, Harber – like Zinsser – attempts to position himself 'outside and above all' previous biographers of his subject. He is of course aware – and openly admits – that he is an "outsider" to Diepsloot,[501] but by establishing himself outside and above other people's narratives, he can attempt to position himself as an outsider who is ostensibly closer to the inside than his international colleagues.[502]

At the text's outset, Harber opines that, apart from two *Daily Sun* journalists, there is only one reporter "who spends time in this place" – the *New York Times*' Barry Bearak,[503] who, Harber notes admiringly, uses Diepsloot "as his way of keeping a finger on the pulse of that element of the country which doesn't often feature in the local media".[504] (Still, as Mandy De Waal notes in a review of *Diepsloot*, most reports published by the *NYT* on Diepsloot focus on a single "mob murder story".[505]) As such, depictions of this place – a settlement that is unusually emblematic of South Africa's transition – are "partial", "one-sided" and reinforce "traditional African stereotypes".[506] [507] The most egregious examples of media missteps, in

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[500] *Ibid.*

[501] *Ibid.*, 7.

[502] This is, interestingly enough, metaphorically emphasised by the print book version of *Diepsloot*, whose back cover consists solely of a bird's-eye-view photograph of the settlement taken by a local town planner. (Harber, "Event 78: Diepsloot".) Thus the text's packaging neatly re-inforces the text's claims to getting a figurative overview of the settlement, of figuratively penetrating its borders, and figuratively positioning itself above other narratives written about the place.

[503] Andrea Pitzer, "Barry Bearak on vigilante murder: 'I had to find out why this man was killed'", *Nieman Storyboard*, 22 July 2011.

[504] Harber, *Diepsloot*, 7.

[505] De Waal, "Anton Harber's *Diepsloot*".

[506] Harber, *Diepsloot*, 4.

Harber's opinion, come from the BBC, who "featured Diepsloot as a place of rough justice and rampant crime" in late 2008, as well as from journalists looking to "convenient[ly] […] tackle the issues of crime and security" in the build-up to the 2010 Fifa World Cup.[508]

Harber views this kind of journalism with contempt. In an interview with Mandy De Waal, he argues that

> in an ideal world the media would cross [into places like Diepsloot] and take people across those lines with it, both ways. But our media tends to reinforce the suburban bubble we live in.[509]

At the time of Diepsloot's release, Harber noted that "there has been a spate of coverage on Diepsloot [recently] and that is because of The *New York Times*' piece"; in other words, South African newspapers only report on stories in places like Diepsloot when an "edifice of power" does so first.[510]

In *Diepsloot*, Harber goes to particularly great lengths to discredit one particular piece of distastefully "convenient" journalism, which he finds on YouTube from "Euronews" – an institution Harber condescendingly calls a "news operation".[511] (It is fact a multi-national, multi-lingual news agency.) This video, which Harber labels as "one of the crudest pieces of international journalism I have seen", is "filled with horrifying pictures of unstated provenance" and "murky night-time scenes with Hitchcockian

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[507] Harber also attempts a deft grammatical trick here to claim consensus on his opinions of other reporters' work. He does not merely state that these media depictions *are* partial and one-sided, but that they are 'seen to be' so – by whom exactly is never noted.

[508] Harber, *Diepsloot*, 4.

[509] De Waal, "Anton Harber's *Diepsloot*".

[510] *Ibid.*

[511] Harber, *Diepsloot*, 4.

sound effects, all shot from inside a Mercedes-Benz."[512] He also accuses the piece's journalist, Chris Cummins, of relying on an informant "who shows no credential [sic] and gives no suggestions of how he knows what he says", and who rehashes the same Diepsloot talking points of "people taking the law into their own hands", of "dangerous nights" and "rampant xenophobia."[513]

The intention of this savaging is obvious: before launching into his own narrative, Harber signals to the reader that his text does not and will not fall into the same traps as its predecessors. He, the journalist who is not just some fly-by-night reporter, is a much more authoritative source: whereas the Euronews journalist "does not talk to one single resident",[514] Harber interviews "hundreds" of Diepsloot residents, as well as "experts who have done work there".[515]

Interesting for our purposes, however, is how these authority claims crumble under scrutiny. It turns out that the 'mysterious' journalist' with 'no credentials' in the Euronews piece is Golden Mtika,[516] the exact same informant upon whom Bearak, the *New York Times* journalist, relies for his own contemporary reports on Diepsloot.[517] Even more curious is the fact that, in *Diepsloot*, Harber relates how he spends a day "chasing bodies" with two reporters with a Diepsloot beat: *Daily Sun* reporter, Kola Alli, and "freelance photographer" Golden Mtika.[518] Seeing as Harber makes much noise about his journalistic stringency in Diepsloot, it seems unlikely that he would have missed the fact that he, Bearak and the Euronews journalist

[512] *Ibid*., 4-5.

[513] *Ibid.*

[514] *Ibid.,* 5.

[515] *Ibid.,* 229.

[516] Chris Cummins, "South Africa 2010: Township justice", Euronews, television news report.

[517] Barry Bearak, "Watching the Murder of an Innocent Man", *The New York Times Magazine*, 2 June 2011.

[518] Harber, *Diepsloot*, 212. Emphasis added.

all share the same informant. Harber's choice to not explicitly identify Mtika as the Euronews informant – and, further, to demean him as a 'township journalist' with no credentials – might be taken by a cynical reader as a mean-spirited bluff.

Contrast this with Bearak's positioning and credentialing, especially with regard to Mtika, a person Bearak calls a "friend".[519] Bearak, who considers himself "a reluctant practitioner of first-person journalism",[520] mentions in the piece that he lived in Dainfern, an affluent suburb ten minutes from Diepsloot, at the time of writing it. Yet, this does not seem to hamper Bearak, who accepts his position as an American journalist who "sometimes" has to hire Mtika "to translate for me and help with introductions".[521] Because Mtika is both Bearak's fixer for Diepsloot generally, as well as playing a pivotal role in Bearak's *New York Times* piece, Bearak deems it necessary to profile him at the outset: Mtika is a Mormon; he is "reliably plugged in, able to connect me with [Diepsloot's] devils and angels"; he has "two cellphones"; he is a "Good Samaritan".[522] The embedded focaliser for Bearak's story is thus neatly credentialed; what flows, beyond his explanation to the reader of his own living conditions in Johannesburg, is free of handwringing – even though he might be assumed to be far more of an outsider to the geographic area than Harber.

It is worth considering if Bearak's piece requires less credentialing due to it being paratextually authorised by the stature of the publication in which it appears, the piece's relatively shorter length, and the potential audience for the piece, most of whom reside outside South Africa. Written as *Diepsloot* is by a South African, published by a South African publisher, and written for a South African audience, Harber's narrative may be said to

[519] Bearak, "Watching the Murder".

[520] Pitzer, "Barry Bearak".

[521] Bearak, "Watching the Murder".

[522] *Ibid.*

carry more psychic baggage, which results in a fundamental flaw in his positioning: his narrative, despite its protestations, exists within the same system of knowledge production it protests, retracing the same master narrative.

Harber's inability to extricate himself from an epistemology into which he knowingly (or, worse, unknowingly) enters, arguably results in other crude moments of external credentialing at another professional's expense. Harber notes, for example, that Diepsloot was briefly present in the national news cycle when the Minister of Human Settlements, Tokyo Sexwale, attempted to spend a winter's night in a resident's shack, "to learn about conditions at first hand".[523] Harber notes with distaste, though, that Sexwale only stayed for four hours before "[fleeing] back to the suburbs".[524] Contrast this with Harber's first foray into the "direst poverty" of the settlement, during which he is chaperoned by a local care-giver, who asks Harber if he had at any point of the visit felt "threatened": "Not for a minute," Harber is "happy to concede".[525] This short exchange, which is related to little else in *Diepsloot*'s narrative, attempts to establish Harber as more hardy than the former-guerilla Sexwale, who is spoken of "contemptuous[ly]" by local residents later in the text.[526]

The irony in Harber's attempts to position his narrative as contrary to the "burst[s] of publicity" by which Diepsloot is usually known[527] is that, as Mngxitama notes, even as Harber "tries to sustain [his] happy narrative, page after page we are confronted with blood, gore and the hellish existence of people in Diepsloot."[528] Harber bemoans Euronews for focusing on a narrow and gory ambit, but himself makes ready and graphic mention of

[523] Harber, *Diepsloot*, 5.

[524] *Ibid.*

[525] *Ibid.*

[526] *Ibid.,* 78.

[527] *Ibid.,* 3.

[528] Mngxitama, "Whose story?".

the difficulties of policing, of the proliferation of vigilante justice, of beheadings,[529] and of a community "with little faith in the justice system" and who sort out issues "decisively and brutally, with the help of a bit of paraffin and the hysteria of crowds".[530] Harber covers roughly the same subjects as the media he criticises – substituting the "Hitchcockian sound effects" of the Euronews piece for images of disorientating roads,[531] houses with "sharp bits of metal jutting out" of them,[532] and "stream[s] of sewage" running in the street.[533]

Even for all its failings in its attempts to position itself 'outside and above' prior narratives, *Diepsloot* does show another, more effective credentialing strategy: that of performatively credentialing oneself.

Harber makes it clear in the text that he considers himself an outsider to Diepsloot, and near the outset of the narrative poses the question: "How does an outsider penetrate an area such as Diepsloot?"[534] In tandem with his text's trope-rehashing main narrative, Harber works in a sub-narrative into *Diepsloot*, in which he is seen to credential himself as a journalist and a media researcher, as a means of authoritatively 'penetrating' Diepsloot, as opposed to 'transgressing' into it.[535]

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[529] Harber, *Diepsloot,* 102.

[530] *Ibid.,* 114.

[531] *Ibid,* 99.

[532] *Ibid.*

[533] *Ibid.,* 111.

[534] *Ibid.*, 7.

[535] Of course, both penetration and transgression can both be seen as pejorative acts.

This operates in a similar fashion to Levin's underpinning sub-narrative in *AidSafari*, discussed earlier in this chapter. Although the media review at the outset of *Diepsloot* betrays Harber's ignorance[536] with regard to the nature of other media narratives about Diepsloot, it does succeed in establishing that Harber follows conventional newsgathering processes. Not just a crude authority claim by way of attempted one-upmanship, the media review shows due journalistic process: Harber reviews existing texts about his subject before attempting to produce his own.

This strategy of being seen to follow journalistic process – and thus credentialing oneself as a competent journalist – evolves throughout *Diepsloot*'s opening gambits. To attempt to 'penetrate' Diepsloot, Harber turns to the methods that "journalists do these days":[537] taking a "virtual tour" on the internet using Google Maps, and conducting Google searches for Diepsloot-related topics.[538] As well as being an excuse to describe Diepsloot's topography – "a dense, dark patch in a sea of surrounding greenery"[539] – it also establishes himself as being a modern news-gatherer, who uses up-to-date tools and – so it is hoped – an up-to-date epistemology in analysing and interpreting his subject.[540]

One might question the reason why a journalist might describe such preliminary research in such detail. What is the purpose in describing such a profoundly simple research process? One might argue that it is itself a claim to authority by setting himself up as a clean slate. Indeed, as Harber

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[536] Or, worse, an attempt at deceiving the reader.

[537] *Ibid.*

[538] *Ibid.*

[539] *Ibid.,* 8.

[540] For example, on finding that a Google search on Diepsloot gives him "only 140 000" results, "which is about one for every two people" who live in Diepsloot, he opines that "even in the virtual world, Diepsloot is marginal" compared to its richer, whiter neighbour suburbs. (*Ibid.*, 19.) This ignores, of course, that this kind of strictly quantitative research in a country with developing internet infrastructure is of debatable utility, other than stating the obvious: that underdeveloped areas have underdeveloped levels of technological penetration.

mentioned during the 2012 Franschhoek Literary Festival panel, at the time "I chose Diepsloot [because] I had never been there. I knew no one there. I liked that: I would go in absolutely cold."[541] By being seen in the text to follow the most rudimentary forms of modern fact-gathering, Harber attempts to reveal himself as having no prior preconceptions, ideas or connections with Diepsloot – a valuably neutral position in a context in which public intellectuals will harbour strong suspicions about the purposes of Harber producing this text. In the face of Mngxitama suggesting that Harber harboured a "colonial desire to study and save the native from himself",[542] Harber can point to the strictly textual fact that he shows how he came to the project with no preconceptions or usable knowledge of his subject.

In addition to being pre-emptive, Harber's 'virtual tour' illuminates how he finds trustworthy informants and sources for his narrative. After bemoaning the state of Wikipedia's entry on Diepsloot, for example, Harber comes across a website "set up and run by residents", which shares perspectives, news and other Diepsloot-related media.[543] "I have found a virtual entrance to D-Town," Harber notes on finding the website; and indeed, Harber's first physical foray into Diepsloot is precipitated by his meeting with Philip Makwela, the site's administrator, on the outskirts of the settlement.[544] From there – chaperoned by an connected resident – Harber says that his media- and internet-gleaned ideas about Diepsloot were "simplistic":[545] in interactions with Makwela and others, Harber learns more about the socio-political texture of the settlement.

In following this news-gathering process, and being seen to have his first perceptions of the area change and lead into more nuanced

[541] Harber, "Event 78: Diepsloot".

[542] Mngxitama, "Whose story?".

[543] Harber, *Diepsloot*, 20.

[544] *Ibid.,* 27.

[545] *Ibid.*

understandings, Harber attempts to credential himself as a trustworthy journalist who assesses information as he finds it: a valuable perception for the reader to have of a producer of a text working on a contested subject. More crucially, however, this does not seek only to credential himself, but also his sources and human subjects – something neatly achieved by Bearak, and a fault in journalistic process Harber (erroneously) accuses the Euronews journalist of – by externally credentialing them as experts, journalists or otherwise trustworthy sources. Thus, the cruder appeals to authority (by way of negative media reviews) work in tandem with subtler, more successful forms of professional external credentialing.

This also relates to the second role in which Harber externally credentials himself, namely as a media researcher. Toward the end of *Diepsloot*, Harber increasingly comes to terms with the fact that his narrative can offer few tangible outcomes, noting at one point that, in Diepsloot, "truth is hard to establish, and a sense of justice a hard thing to hold on to", in comparison to other places in which he has worked; in places "where there is the rule of law".[546] On-the-ground journalism here is like fractal theory, Harber admits: for an outsider, working in Diepsloot is like "measuring a coastline":[547] "the length is determined by how you measure it as much as by the reality of the coast itself."[548] In order to find some kind of tangible outcome for his text, therefore, Harber turns to his professional milieu: media analysis. He thus studies eighteen months of Diepsloot coverage "in all the newspapers, local and national", and notes that the settlement only appears "in spates", usually "when there is a violent incident, or when a national politician pays it some attention".[549] In fact, more than fifty per cent of the 244 mentions of Diepsloot are crime-related,

[546] *Ibid.,* 114.

[547] *Ibid.,* 223.

[548] *Ibid.,* 224.

[549] *Ibid.,* 210.

and only six per cent "offer stories about the way people live in the area" (however Harber defines that).[550] For someone from Diepsloot to be mentioned in the paper, Harber theorises, you have to be either a victim or perpetrator of crime, or "either seriously evil or lucky" – there's "little of interest in between."[551] Added to that that there is an absence of "local or community [media] outlets", Harber argues, "rumours abound and infest the political sphere", and "in a volatile situation, a rumour can put a match to the kindling".[552]

In providing sound media analysis of Diepsloot and Diepsloot-related subjects, Harber can hedge against accusations that his narrative is "paternalistic" of its own accord,[553] and can be seen to provide an arguably important contribution to media understandings of South African informal settlements and townships. More crucially, however, by using these insights and matching them with his opinions as gleaned and synthesised from his experiences in the area, Harber may infer some loose, overarching truths about Diepsloot, even if they are as vague as "a cloud of dangerous myths and rumours, and exaggerated numbers".[554]

In the end, however, and rather predictably, all of these authority claims are no substitute for having actual experience and authority with regard to a subject. To be fair, Harber does cover some subjects that other narratives on Diepsloot do not, such as the provision of basic services, and the texture of the political landscape.[555] And, in Mngxitama's words, he does a "fairly impressive job in tracing the history of Diepsloot", as well as providing a "detailed account of the 'pull factors' that bring so many people there".[556] [557]

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[550] *Ibid.*

[551] *Ibid.,* 209.

[552] *Ibid.,* 216.

[553] Mngxitama, "Whose story?".

[554] Harber, *Diepsloot*, 218.

[555] *Ibid.,* 140.

[556] Mngxitama, "Whose story?".

De Waal thus labels Harber "a slayer of township stereotypes"[558] – but given his (perhaps unavoidable) reliance on the same tropes he bemoans, a reader might harbour reservations whether *Diepsloot* succeeds in its purpose – its reliability, in particular, is compromised, and thus its authority. In calling the corroborating reader's bluff, Harber perhaps knows his text is based on less worthy predicates than it hopes to be, and thus hopes to conceal its shortcomings, implicitly (and perhaps unsuccessfully) arguing that at least his text is not as problematic as others written about his subject. Such compromised artifices foreground what is at stake with regard to the positioning of a text and the credentialing of its narrator: fail to do these correctly, and the text becomes unreliable.

[557] There is also, bizarrely, a series of stories about an endangered frog – a "large, ugly, jealous, fussy cannibal" – which is "delaying the building of houses and the provision of services" in Diepsloot. (Harber, *Diepsloot*, 6.) "The story of Diepsloot", Harber rather grandly says, "is also the story of The Frog." (*Ibid.*)

[558] De Waal, "Anton Harber's *Diepsloot*".

CHAPTER 8

Making a narrative reliable

> They then turned to the cameraman and me and started shouting at us. 'You'll re-edit what we say anyway. Why should we trust you?'
> – Peter Poemerantsev, "Propagandalands"[559]

As we just saw, credentialing and positioning are – among other things – two of the predicates of narrative reliability, itself a predicate – among other things – of narrative authority. It is thus important, for the purposes of this book, to consider how narrative reliability generally works. Although reliability of narration is one of the more thoroughly-studied components of literary narrative, its operation in non-fiction texts is under-theorised. As such, this chapter will not seek to provide too in-depth an analysis of narrative reliability as a concept, but rather an example of how it may be seen to function in certain South African narrative non-fiction texts.

Seymour Chatman provides an elegant summation of how reliability works in narrative in his seminal (if slightly taxonomic and synthesised) work on narratology, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*.[560] As we covered in Chapter 1, the classic conception of narrative is that it is made up of two components: story and discourse. These are respectively, the *actual events* depicted in a narrative, and the *depiction of those events* in that narrative. The temporal disconnect between story and discourse, as experienced by the reader, is one of the main things that lends

[559] Peter Poemerantsev, "Propagandalands", *Granta*, 134 (2016), 33.

[560] Chatman, *Story and Discourse.*

a narrative its narrativity. The interplay between story and discourse, however, also brings the question of reliability into play: to what degree does the discourse deviate from the story? In reading a particular narrative, a reader may ask themselves whether there is only a temporal disjunct between story and discourse in the narrative, or if there are other illocutionary intentions also at play.

Chatman argues that a narrative may be seen as "unreliable" if "the narrator's account is at odds with the implied reader's surmises about the story's real intentions"[561]; if the reader "senses a discrepancy between a reasonable reconstruction of the story and the account given by the narrator";[562] or if the story otherwise "undermines the discourse."[563] By corroborating the narrative or otherwise "reading between the lines", a reader may conclude that the events depicted could not have been "like that" and thus might consider the narrator and/or narrative "suspect."[564] 'Suspect', however, might not be the best choice of word, for unreliability is not the function of a narrator's personality or aesthetics: "an unsavoury narrator," Chatman insists, "may give a completely reliable account of a story".[565] To illustrate this point, Chatman uses a curious example of what he considers to be a reliable narrator – Humbert Humbert, of Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*:

> For all his sarcasm […] we feel that [Humbert] is doing his best to tell us what in fact happened. Where he discovers his own unreliability in the telling, he is the first to admit it. Humbert has nothing to lose by being reliable

[561] *Ibid.,* 233.

[562] *Ibid.,* 234.

[563] *Ibid.,* 233.

[564] *Ibid.*

[565] *Ibid.,* 234.

> and a great deal to gain, namely the opportunity to unburden himself.[566]

Although Humbert's reliability status is far from a matter of consensus,[567] this is still a useful example, as it foregrounds the reader's participation in the formation of reliable or unreliable narration. The experienced unreliability – or experienced reliability – of a narrative is always reader-specific, and different readers will have their estimation of the reliability of a narrative affected by different things. For example, in Chatman's estimation, unreliability may be a product of a narrator's "cupidity, cretinism, gullibility, psychological and moral obtuseness, perplexity and lack of information, innocence or a whole host of other causes" – all of which are subject to, or products of, the idiosyncratic interpretation of the narrative on the reader's end.[568] Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, for his part, posits that "the main sources of unreliability are the narrator's limited knowledge, [their] personal involvement, and [their] problematic value-scheme"; the latter being defined as when "a narrator's moral values […] do not tally with those of the implied author".[569] This 'non-tallying' may take the form of contradictions between the events of the story and the narrator's views or opinions; predictions by the narrator about an outcome of the story being visibly proven wrong; a "clash" between other characters' opinions and those of the narrator; or "internal contradictions"

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[566] *Ibid.*

[567] Humbert, as some critics note (as would I), is a manipulative man beyond his unsavoury sexual behaviour. John Wasmuth, for example, argues that Humbert's "admitting to fallible memory" – among many other things – means that he is an *unreliable* narrator. ("Unreliable Narration in Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, dissertation, Lund University [2009], 9.)

[568] *Ibid.*

[569] Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*, 2nd ed., (Abingdon: Routledge, 2003), e-book edition.

in the language used by the narrator.[570] Narrative reliability is – like just about everything else when it comes to narrative – thus unstable: it may "fluctuate", due to the degree of disjuncture between the reader's interpretation of what the story is and how that story is rendered in discourse by the narrator.[571]

Although useful, Rimmon-Kenan and Chatman's theorisations of 'unreliability' lays bare the classically narrow ambit of narrative studies. In fictional narratives – the subject of both Chatman and Rimmon-Kenan's theorisations – an unreliable narrator is an aesthetic choice that may lend a text other illocutionary functions. An unreliable narrator may be a ploy, for example, to establish "a secret communication with the implied reader":[572] by employing such a narrator as kind of (dramatic) irony, the author may "communicat[e] unspoken points over the head of the narrator to readers,"[573] or "emphasise the difference in morals between the narrator [and] author".[574] For example, as Twidle notes, Herman Charles Bosman's stories "trade on the ironic distance between a backward, sometimes bigoted narrator, and a larger, implied authorial meaning that readers must recover for themselves."[575]

In non-fiction it is a different matter. In non-fictional narratives, where both intra- and extra-textual facts can be checked and the story refers to actual bodies, narrative reliability has potentially greater consequences in the world outside of the text. In many cases, the narrator of a non-fiction

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[570] *Ibid.*

[571] Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 234.

[572] Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 233.

[573] Greta Olson, "Reconsidering Unreliability: Fallible and Untrustworthy Narrators", *Narrative*, 11, 1 (2003), 93.

[574] Wasmuth, "Unreliable Narration", 15.

[575] Hedley Twidle, "Half-lives, Half-truths: Svetlana Alexievich and the Nuclear Imagination", PEN South Africa, 18 August 2016.

text operates on the edge of a moral precipice.[576] As such, the burden of reliability sits much more strongly with the producer of the text. Rimmon-Kenan posits that readers of fictional narrative look for "indications" of unreliability, in order to know whether they are "supposed" to trust the narrative.[577] After looking for unreliability flags, the reliability of a narrative "can be negatively defined by their absence".[578] Such a strategy cannot work in analysing non-fiction texts. By their very definition, as used in this paper, non-fiction narratives are narratives that purport to be factually reliable. In contrast to fictional reliability, as formulated by Rimmon-Kenan, there is no *supposition* on the reader's behalf about whether the author intended the narrator to be reliable or unreliable in non-fiction; by definition, non-

[576] Or, for others, over the edge: Janet Malcolm argues that "Every journalist who is not too stupid or too full of himself to notice what is going on knows that what he does is morally indefensible." (*The Journalist and the Murderer*, 1.)

[577] Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction.*

[578] *Ibid.*

fiction narrators, even if they employ devices like sarcasm and dramatic irony, are intended to be reliable – and thus authoritative.[579]

This, I contend, shifts the burden of determining the reliability status of a narrative onto to the narrator. Readers of these narratives thus look for indications of *reliability*, not unreliability, as a mode of establishing authority in the text. For, in the words of Jonny Steinberg, whose texts we will analyse in the rest of this chapter, reliability of narration is a kind of "earned authority".[580]

[579] One may be tempted here to raise the question of texts that seemingly inhabit spaces of muddled generic intent, such as the 'autofictional' texts of Coetzee and Vladislavic that were mentioned in Chapter 4. How do we read narrative reliability in texts that straddle both fictional and non-fictional modes in their discourse? This book contends, though, that fictionality is something that is paratextually signified by the producer of the text, and that it is a binary. Any readings of such texts, by the framework and theorisations proposed in this book, must take that text's definite paratextual fictionality status as its starting point…

…'Autofictional' texts do, however, raise interesting questions about *perceived fictionality*; that is, how a reader, without knowledge of (or certainty about) a text's paratext, might understand the fictionality of a text and thus modify their expectations of the text with regard to unreliability signalling/reliability earning. For example, a non-fiction text ambiguously understood as a fiction text by a reader might result in a very different reliability reading of the text to one that results from a reader with correct understanding of the text's fictionality status.

Such modified expectations will have implications for the reliability and authority of the text as experienced by a reader, and although the authority of a text changes from reader to reader and audience to audience, an investigation of modified expectations with regard to muddled perceived paratexts would likely be fruitful.

[580] Mulgrew, "Rummaging", 66.

CASE STUDY 5

Jonny Steinberg and the gambit of reliability

Jonny Steinberg is the kind of writer who – as the trope goes – is said to need no introduction.[581] The author of seven books[582] and numerous monographs, Steinberg had, by the age of 35, won the *Sunday Times* Alan Paton Award twice – the first writer to do so, and a distinction he, at time of writing, only shares with one other writer.[583]

Employing a narrative style that, in Lehman's estimation, "puts [him] out on the frontier as a nonfiction writer",[584] Steinberg's texts are predicated and underpinned with the visible relationships between himself (a conflated author/narrator) and his human subjects; people who are – by his own admission – unlike the white, middle-class, gay, urban South African he self-identifies as.[585] These characters range from a farmer grieving his murdered son (*Midlands*), to a member of one of South Africa's notorious prison gangs (*The Number*); from a twenty-something rural man navigating AIDS stigma (*Three-Letter Plague*),[586] to urban policemen (*Thin Blue*);[587]

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[581] This has, in fact, been said about Steinberg in public on various occasions, such as during the introduction to a seminar given by Steinberg, titled "The ethics of narrative non-fiction in a voyeuristic age" on 26 July 2011 at HUMA (Institute for Humanities in Africa), University of Cape Town.

[582] Comprising six book-length works of narrative non-fiction and one collection of journalistic columns, opinion pieces and features.

[583] Abbie Sachs, for *Soft Vengeance of a Freedom Fighter* (1991) and *The Strange Alchemy of Life and Law* (2010).

[584] Daniel W. Lehman, "Counting the Costs of Non-Fiction: An Interview with Jonny Steinberg", *River Teeth*, 11, 2 (2010), 31-32.

[585] Steinberg, *Three-Letter Plague*, 289.

[586] Called '*Sizwe's Test*' in the U.S.

[587] Jonny Steinberg, *Thin Blue: The Unwritten Rules of Policing South Africa* (Jeppestown: Jonathan Ball/Open Society Foundation for South Africa, 2008).

from a pair of Liberian immigrants in New York City (*Little Liberia*),[588] to a Somali refugee undergoing an Odyssean transnational journey (*A Man of Good Hope*).[589] Each of these book-length texts are, in their own rights, fascinating studies of the construction of biography across epistemic barriers and gulfs.

Heavily influenced and "empowered" by his reading of Janet Malcolm early in his narrative non-fiction career, Steinberg's works are obsessed with their own credibility and reliability as narratives – especially with regard to Steinberg's "exercis[ing] of power" over his human subjects,[590] who are often socially or financially less well-off than he is. Steinberg himself thinks his texts "trade on […] extremely unequal […] relationship[s]."[591] As a mode of coping with this, these texts employ what I have termed in my previous work as an "at-times overwhelming" narrator-authorial presence,[592] and are predicated in part on individual 'deals' between author-narrator and subject: an exchange of opportunity, obligation, money or intangibles that not only enable the transfer of information from subject to author-narrator (and sometimes vice-versa), but also make that transfer (along with Steinberg's treatment of it) ostensibly ethical and reliable. In speaking to Lehman, Steinberg "hope[s]" that

> I am scrupulous about the fact that there are two adults entering the exchange and no one is being deceived or double-crossed. But the very structure of the relationship

[588] Jonny Steinberg, *Little Liberia: An African Odyssey in New York* (Jeppestown: Jonathan Ball, 2011).

[589] Jonny Steinberg, *A Man of Good Hope* (Jeppestown: Jonathan Ball, 2014).

[590] *Ibid.*, xvi.

[591] Lehman, "Counting the Costs", 37.

[592] Mulgrew, "Unlovable".

> is a deeply problematic one, and that is what makes it, hopefully, material for good writing.[593]

Far from casting himself as an omniscient author-narrator, Steinberg rather foregrounds his foibles as a constructor of narrative, interweaving the more fraught aspects of his relationships with his subjects into the main narrative of the text. He thus pre-empts any accusations that he covers up the clashes of obligations and expectations that necessarily occur in the construction of a narrative about living subjects. This constitutes an appeal to narrative reliability by being seen to be completely honest about the terms and process of constructing the text *as the text is being constructed*, thus narrowing any potential gap or disconnection between story and discourse on the reader's end. By foregrounding the constructedness of the narrative, Steinberg forces the reader to constantly re-evaluate the terms by which they judge the reliability of the narrative, and thus become more implicated in the negotiation of reliability.

This self-styled narrative "habit" stems, arguably, from Steinberg's perception of narrative non-fiction as "fiction's poorer cousin": that, in "borrow[ing] the way fiction elaborates a world", the narrative non-fiction writer "gathers reams of material from the world and twists it pretty violently into the shape of a readable story".[594] To "satisfy" both his implied reader and the "ethical obligations" to his human subjects, Steinberg argues, "is to make the problem itself a part of the story."[595]

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[593] Lehman, "Counting the Costs", 37.

[594] *Ibid.*, 32.

[595] Mulgrew, "Rummaging", 64.

The difficulties inherent in this violent 'twisting' of experience into narrative manifest themselves differently in each of Steinberg's texts. They are perhaps most apparent in his first text, *Midlands*, which, as a result of Steinberg's mismanagement of his relationships in the text, is arguably his most controversial and least reliable.

Midlands is an investigation into a farm murder in the titular, "violated and broken" countryside of southern KwaZulu-Natal.[596] Steinberg had quit his journalist day-job at *Business Day* to write the text,[597] and, in what he described as a "fraught and lonely enterprise in the best of circumstances",[598] reported on the circumstances of the killing of a man he called Peter Mitchell – in particular, the relationship of Peter's father, Arthur Mitchell, with the tenants of his farm. On his arrival in the Midlands, Steinberg initially thought he would be writing a story about the "recent past"; rather it became apparent that the fallout from Mitchell's death and – "subsequent deaths" – would "illuminate a great deal about the early days of post-apartheid South Africa".[599]

In a retrospective article on *Midlands*, written more than a decade later, Steinberg reflects that *Midlands* more accurately shows the "drama of an endgame" involving farm owners and workers that stretched back more than a century.[600] Likewise, with the benefit of hindsight, *Midlands* can be read as an imperfect prototype for what would soon become the conventional Steinberg narrative form: a narrative with the appearance of self-awareness and an ostensible honesty about the difficulties inherent in writing about living people in an ethical and sensitive manner. Steinberg's later narratives, as we will see later in this chapter, maintain reliability by setting the rules and deals – between both subject and author *and* author

[596] Steinberg, *Midlands*, 93.

[597] Steinberg even refers to *Business Day* as "my newspaper" in *Midlands* (248).

[598] Steinberg, *Midlands*, v.

[599] *Ibid*., ix.

[600] Jonny Steinberg, "The Defeated", *Granta*, 126 (2014), 27.

and reader – upon which the narrative is predicated, and being seen to stick (or attempt to stick) to them.

Throughout *Midlands*, however, Steinberg enters into difficult relationships with just about every person he is seen speak to – including, most problematically, Arthur Mitchell, whom Steinberg first meets only a few weeks after Peter's death. There had been no arrests for the murder, and Mitchell saw Steinberg's visit as an opportunity: "He would expose a little of himself to me and I would expose his enemy to the world."[601] Disjuncts between the motivations of narrator and subject become immediately apparent, however: while the murder is *Midlands*' chief narrative concern, Steinberg is seen to distrust Mitchell's versions of the events and his perceptions of the murder. Steinberg keeps his authorial-narrator presence at a distance, for example, when Arthur Mitchell brings him down to his irrigation fields: Steinberg suspects that Mitchell wants "to fill my notebook with the man he [wants to see] in my pages"; with "the image of the good employer", an image Steinberg is seen to distrust.[602] The black subjects of *Midlands* – particularly the tenants on Mitchell's farm, as well as the men suspected of murdering Peter Mitchell – present further problems. Steinberg feels he cannot present their perspective with authority: "Nobody who features in this story allowed me to write about them," nor said "anything" that the police did not already have on file.[603] He is thus forced to gather information from the people living on Mitchell's farm using employed informants and other means that he is not prepared to

[601] *Ibid*., 30-31.

[602] Steinberg, *Midlands*, 92.

[603] *Ibid*., 217. It is interesting to note here that Steinberg is reticent to represent human subjects using only information gathered by the police, even if their files are elsewhere described as "bulging". (*Ibid*.) This shows that Steinberg does not view the police as an unimpeachable source of information, nor a sufficient font of information on their own; a significant signal to the reader that Steinberg does not regard 'official' or institutional narratives as sufficiently authoritative, trustworthy or ethical in themselves.

reveal to the reader.[604] On the one occasion he does speak directly to an (unnamed) tenant on Mitchell's land, the tenant shows direct hostility toward Steinberg, even cursing him "under his breath".[605] Each of these difficult relationships hinders Steinberg's ability to access reliable information: he insists at one point that "I am certain that nobody I spoke to told me a clean or transparent story" and that "everything in my notebooks ranges between propaganda and truth."[606] [607]

Unable to have direct contact with some of the players in the narrative, Steinberg states he was "robbed" both "of some pleasurable ways of telling the story", as well as his narrative reliability:

> [T]here is something more important at stake. It is the question of credibility. […] I smugly tell you of the white men who have gone to Izita to get information and chased their own tails. And yet I am surely one of those white men. […] I am therefore prone to all the failures of my predecessors.[608]

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[604] *Ibid*., 229-230.

[605] *Ibid*., 230.

[606] *Ibid*., 218.

[607] His helplessness is best summed up by a character named Elias Sithole, who soliloquises to Steinberg toward *Midlands*' denouement:

> The problem is that your imagination is not big enough to put you in somebody else's shoes. You come here to the midlands to write about the murder of a white farmer. The farming community opens their arms to you because they want the world to know about their outrage. And you write their book for them. Yes, you go to the other side, with your informers […] and you try to of the blacks justice. But no matter what you say, your book is still about the white man being chased off the land. […] It would be better if you did not come. […] Get on with your own life in Johannesburg (249).

[608] Steinberg, *Midlands*, 217

Most accusations of *Midlands* being unreliable after its publication can be linked to Steinberg's inability to negotiate – and, just as importantly, to be seen to negotiate in the text – his relationships with his human subjects. Most famously, Steinberg became *"persona non grata"*[609] in the southern midlands after a local newspaper carried extracts on *Midlands*' publication.[610] Arthur Mitchell, in particular, was "enraged".[611] Away from the more intimate implications of the text, some reviewers, like Cherryl Walker, criticised Steinberg for his use of anonymised names for his sources, characters, and place names in *Midlands*: she contends, for example, that the label of "investigative journalism"[612] fits uneasily on a study in which so many key elements are fictionalised" or "doctored".[613] Some of these anonymised elements are, I would argue, justified within the text, when Steinberg is seen to worry about the the "[un]easy decision" to accede to requests to anonymise most of the personal and place names used in the book.[614] This "ethical consideration," Steinberg argues, "stems from my understanding that every journalist hurts the person about whom he writes."[615] The offshoot of this rather defeatist attitude – which Steinberg has since described as "hyperbole"[616] – is that, by his own insistence, the text "surely loses some of its authority".[617] (Jacob Dlamini, who we will consider in the next chapter, similarly argues that using a pseudonym should be considered an imperfection.[618]) This, however, can be read as an unspoken

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[609] Lehman, "Counting the Costs", 39.

[610] Steinberg, "The Defeated", 35.

[611] *Ibid.*

[612] Which is bestowed upon the text by journalist and novelist Shaun Johnson on *Midlands*' first printed edition's dustjacket.

[613] Cherryl Walker, review of *Midlands*, *Transformation*, 52 (2003), 96.

[614] Steinberg, *Midlands*, ix.

[615] *Ibid.,* x.

[616] Mulgrew, "Rummaging", 66.

[617] Steinberg, *Midlands*, ix.

[618] Jacob Dlamini, review of *Three-Letter Plague*, *Daily Dispatch,* 28 March 2008, 19.

appeal to the reader: by being shown to be honest about the compromises his narrative is forced to make, Steinberg frames these compromises as an imperfect means to a greater end: namely, "the consequence of writing about an unsolved murder."[619]

By explaining the need for such anonymisations, Steinberg seeks to cushion the gap between story and discourse, and thus maintain narrative reliability. For Matthew Burbridge, a reviewer for the *Mail & Guardian*, such a compromise is justified, as Steinberg still "uncovers more facts about the murder and its possible causes, and about life in the Midlands, than anyone else has managed to do."[620]

More "unsettling" than anonymisation is Steinberg's use of a composite character for two of his sources.[621] Steinberg directly confronts and justifies this device in *Midlands*' preface as a "compromise" to a "dilemma", which stemmed from the fact that some of the "most formative aspects of [his] research" – without which "the book would be horribly incomplete"[622] – came from sources that "helped [him] on condition that they remain not just anonymous but invisible".[623] Walker in particular finds this problematic chiefly because this character – a man named Elias Sithole – is, in her view, "the one voice of political and moral authority to emerge in the book [and who] explains to the reader, through Steinberg, what is 'really happening'".[624] [625] This compromise – which flows from Steinberg's

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[619] Steinberg, *Midlands*, ix.

[620] Matthew Burbidge, "Anatomy of a murder", *Mail & Guardian*, 4 October 2002.

[621] Walker, review of *Midlands*, 97.

[622] Steinberg, *Midlands*, ix.

[623] *Ibid.*

[624] Walker, review of *Midlands*, 97.

[625] Walker might have also mentioned that Sithole also works as a narrative maypole in *Midlands*, for it is Steinberg's factual/non-factual pastiche conversation with him in a Pietermaritzburg pub that confirms to Steinberg that "there is something wrong with the story" told by Arthur Mitchell about his life and his son's murder, and in turn precipitates Steinberg's deeper interest in the socio-political machinations behind the racial tension in the area (129).

inability to be seen to secure a trusting relationship with a knowledgable source – deeply "compromise[s]" the text.[626] [627] Walker senses that the story, both of Steinberg's journalistic journey and the events of the murder, does not match the discourse presented.

Other faults in the text flow from this same gap between story and discourse. More troubling than the composite is that Steinberg – to use Walker's words – is seemingly "capable of giving us verbatim accounts of conversations at which he was not present, some of which he only imagines must have happened as he describes."[628] The stylised and heavily

[626] Walker, review of *Midlands*, 97.

[627] Some might not agree that the use of a composite character for the purposes of providing narrative backbone and ostensibly necessary information will always compromise a text. Perhaps most famously, as Norman Sims relates, Joseph Mitchell's *Old Mr. Flood* series of *New Yorker* articles on the Fulton Fish Market were revealed by the author to be based around a composite character, and other *New Yorker* writers around the time did similar things in the 1940s ("Joseph Mitchell and *The New Yorker* Nonfiction Writers", in *Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century,* ed. Norman Sims [Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2008], 85). Post-New Journalism, composite characters "were roundly condemned" – but, as Sims notes, "not so much on theoretical grounds" as aesthetic, or as a rejection of the New Journalism as a whole (*Ibid*., 104).

Attitudes have seemingly changed, however. Notably, in February 2002, the same year as *Midlands'* release, *New York Times Magazine* staff writer Michael Finkel was "busted" in his creation of a composite character by surreptitiously "combining the stories" of several boys and attributing them to one real-life boy on a 2001 report on malaria in southern Mali (Jack Shafer, "The Return of Michael Finkel, *Slate*, 27 July 2007.) After a lengthy internal investigation – which in turn led to the "verifi[cation] of the accuracy and integrity" of the six other stories he had written for the *Times Magazine* – Finkel was fired from the *Times* for using "improper narrative techniques" (Editors' notes to Michael Finkel, "Is Youssouf Malé A Slave?", *New York Times*, 18 November 2001.)

[628] Walker, review of *Midlands*, 97.

linguistically-characterised reported speech[629] – laden with repetition, emphasis, and so on – is problematic even in the context the rules by which *Midlands* is seen to operate. His use of these speculative scenes is predicated by his inability to access this information in more visibly reliable means.

This brings us to a larger point. What *Midlands* – along with other Steinberg texts – shows is that, in the construction of a non-fiction narrative that contains biographical elements, reliability stems from the tension between two relationships: of that between author-narrator and subject, and that between author-narrator and reader. In order for a narrative to end up being reliable, the author-narrator must adequately satisfy their obligations to – and the demands of – both subject and reader, while making compromises to each party on the other party's behalf. With regard to the subject, the author-narrator must be seen to have compatible (or partially compatible) motives in order for a sufficient flow of trustworthy information and interaction to occur between them. With regard to the reader, the author-narrator must be shown to have their interests at heart – which for Steinberg include "writ[ing] a readable book" and showing them the subject's "private world" at the same time as showing them "how I know what I know"[630] – in order for the reader to forgive any potential lapses or compromises in journalistic or narrative method.

Because of the particular natures of the relationships that predicate his texts, Steinberg shows the compromises in the texts themselves. These depictions – or instances of what Rennie calls a 'laying bare' of "his

[629] One such instance concerns Arthur Mitchell speaking to detectives in his house. Rendered in conditional past tense – containing such passages as "He would have paused a long time" and "The detectives would have leaned forward a little further to emphasise their concern" (Steinberg, *Midlands*, 83) – it contains significant portions of unreferenced, yet highly characterised reported speech: "In nine months I lodged 21 criminal complaints. Twenty-one. And do you know how many were solved? […] None. Not a single one." *(Ibid.)*

[630] Mulgrew, "Rummaging", 66.

authorial heart"[631] – can be read themselves as an appeal to reliability, by presenting the reader with the nature of reliability as it operates in narrative: no one can be completely reliable; no one is likely to be completely unreliable. For Steinberg, compromise is thus the locus of reliability, much as Roberts and Giles attest that in

> actively drawing attention to these subjective processes, literary journalism reveals that narrative is always a matter of rhetoric and always subjective, because the writer is required to select and interpret in order to tell the story, irrespective of how "objective" it appears.[632]

Nevertheless, *Midlands* can be seen to fail in its reliability because it either asks for too many compromises from the reader (anonymisation, composite characters, speculative scenes) or exhibits that the motives of writer and human subjects are too much at odds with each other for those subjects to be represented authoritatively. Steinberg has not fully reconciled or justified the distance between story and discourse; thus the narrative cannot be seen as reliable.

In an interview with Lehman in 2010, Steinberg admits to learning a number of lessons from his first text – chiefly, that "you don't need to know all the answers to write a decent book."[633] Steinberg's textual anxieties over things like "pretend[ing] to know what is happening in a character's head"[634] are, after *Midlands*, gradually replaced by a finely-textured narrative mode in which the story of Steinberg's relationship and

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[631] Rennie, "*The Number*", 609.

[632] Roberts and Giles, "Mapping Nonfiction Narrative", 102.

[633] Lehman, "Counting the Costs", 39. He also states, "In retrospect, I think I was crazy to think I'd get the whole story." (*Ibid.*)

[634] *Ibid.,* 32.

interviewing of his human subjects becomes the discourse itself.[635] The relationship and exchange of information that – in a procedural sense – predicates the text in the first place, becomes the entire ambit of the text: the text is seen to flow directly from the interactions between Steinberg and his human subjects, and the depiction of the research and ethical processes that extra-textually underpins its creation. The gap between story and discourse is thus narrowed: ostensibly, the story aims to *become* the discourse.

No journalist can claim omniscience. Therefore the journalist must delineate for themselves, and for the reader, the limits of knowledge that are imposed on their narrative. That is the locus of reliability in Steinberg's work: the showing off of the deal – both the material *and* epistemic conditions – by which the narrator-subject relationship, and thus the narrative, operates. Steinberg himself argues that

> any non-fiction book has to deal with the question of authority: how it knows what it knows. That question is heightened when you go into a world that is not your own, or at least one that is very different to your own. If I'm ever going to understand that kind of world with any depth or complexity, it's through my personal relationship with people who live in it. I feel that I should show the reader how this relationship evolved and therefore how I know what I know. It is in part a question of earning authority.[636]

[635] In other words, the epistemology and experience of the journalistic process becomes the epistemology and experience of the text.

[636] Mulgrew, "Rummaging", 66.

This narrative technique is much more apparent in his second book-length text, *The Number*, which focuses on the life of a former prison gang member, Magadien Wentzel. Like *Midlands*, there is still the visibility of a 'deal' – or lack thereof – between the author and subject: because Steinberg "did not want to mix money" into the "opaque" motivations of a man such as Wentzel, the two "agreed that there would be no exchange of money between us".[637] Unlike *Midlands*, however, this is a deal they both consent to and understand, to the point that they could even make "little" compromises.[638] Steinberg also discards the awkwardness associated with his imperfect research methodology in *Midlands*. Despite his wariness of potentially "developing a relationship" with a source who may be a "sophisticated trickster",[639] Steinberg also is seen to reconcile with the fact that memory – the main source for both his biography of Wentzel and his historicisation of prison gangs – is "the most unreliable repositor[y] of truth"[640]; and how "during the months of our conversations", in which "Magadien and I revisited his past a hundred times", his recollections would "change on each occasion".[641] Similarly he foregrounds their interview process, in particular the "ritual" of Wentzel changing the tapes in Steinberg's Dictaphone while they converse in a cell in Pollsmoor Prison.[642] Likewise, the warts-and-all approach to depicting his relationship with and relation to his human subjects is also more developed: whereas he "scold[s]" himself in *Midlands* for a "moment of teenage indignation" and "scorn" at

[637] Steinberg, *The Number*, 395.

[638] *Ibid.,* 386. These include Steinberg buying Wentzel meals during their interviews or buying Wentzel's son a pair of shoes. After all, "aside from being a journalist and his subject, we were two human beings together. One had money and the other was penniless. (*Ibid.,* 385-386.)

[639] *Ibid.,* 17.

[640] *Ibid.,* xx.

[641] *Ibid.,* 33.

[642] *Ibid.,* 77.

the expense of Arthur Mitchell,[643] he allows himself to be shown getting unapologetically angry at Wentzel for being unkind toward him, even going as far to say to Wentzel, "Don't fuck with me again".[644] And, conversely, while Steinberg doesn't want to be seen getting too close to subjects in *Midlands*, he shows Wentzel giving him a gift of a "rare" half-cent coin, telling him "I'm fond of you".[645]

The verisimilitude of such biographical or semi-biographical narratives such as Steinberg's depends entirely upon the verisimilitude of the relationship depicted in that narrative. Moreover, in presenting the tensions inherent in those relationships, Steinberg ethically implicates the reader, and, as Rennie argues with regard to Steinberg specifically,

> the ethical tensions resulting from the author's implication of the reader modifies the traditional literary trinity of author–text–reader to become author–subject–reader, who relate to each other as a result of the text rather than to the text. Readers thus implicated as participants both inside and outside the narrative consequently become co-opted as co-owners of those stories.[646]

By inviting the reader to co-opt the story and to implicate themselves in the text by the very act of reading the text, Steinberg claims reliability on his behalf as a narrator and authority on behalf of the text.

Similarly, the construction and constructedness of the text is foregrounded in Steinberg's depiction of the narrator-subject relationship.

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[643] Steinberg, *Midlands*, 93.

[644] Steinberg, *The Number*, 387.

[645] *Ibid.,* 77.

[646] Rennie, "*The Number*", 606.

In most of his texts Steinberg is shown to give his primary human subjects parts of the text while he is in the process of writing it.[647] The motivation for doing so is usually also depicted in the text: in *A Man of Good Hope*, which we will examine closely in the next case study, Steinberg explains to his main subject that he "worr[ies]" about the text's veracity, asking his subject, "What if I've said things that will […] offend you? What if I've said things that are just wrong?"[648] This feature of Steinberg's later texts makes an appeal to authority on many levels: it shows to the reader that he cares about the veracity of information contained in the text; it shows to the reader that his process is ethically sound;[649] it narrows the distance between story and discourse by foregrounding the constructedness of the text; and it introduces an interpretative meta-narrative which positions the main narrative as authoritative.

Further, the visible verisimilitude of narrator-subject relationships – in particular the deals and predicates that underpin the journalistic relationship, as well as the changing dynamics of the relationship as time goes on – become more of a feature of Steinberg's texts' claims to narrative reliability, even when the relationship between Steinberg and his subjects, as in *Midlands* and *The Number*, become outright hostile.[650] Of course,

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[647] He states in a 2011 interview that he has "always" done this and "always write[s] about their response". (Theresa Mallinson, "Jonny Steinberg's *Little Liberia* cossets big ambitions", *Daily Maverick*, 23 February 2011.)

[648] Steinberg, *A Man of Good Hope*, 324.

[649] In particular, that he cares about the emotional wellbeing of his subject, and wishes not to hurt them.

[650] One of the most dramatic relationship-related episodes in Steinberg's oeuvre comes in another text, *Three-Letter Plague*, when Steinberg's main character, a man he calls Sizwe Magadla, confronts Steinberg about his description of the house of a traditional healer who Magadla visits:

> "When you wrote about Mabalane in your book," [Sizwe] says, "Why did you say that the fence around his property was knee-high?"
>
> "I don't remember. Did I say it was knee-high? Is it knee-high?"

Steinberg doesn't have to include an episode such as this, especially when it risks painting him as insensitive – as someone who rubs his subjects' faces in their "misery"[651] – or as a reporter with fallible memory or insight. I would argue, however, that these moments are a deft kind of reliability claim, showing the relationships that predicate the text to be fragile and something to be skilfully negotiated, lest the subject remove their co-operation from the project.

In addition to complicating relationships with subjects, this manuscript-sharing can also result in the visible detriment of the text. In *Little Liberia*, which expounds on the Liberian immigrant experience in New York City by depicting the antagonist relationship between two Liberian men, the reader discovers in the epilogue that one of the two men had requested Steinberg to remove various things from the text: not just "errors of fact", but also "facts that were true, but whose publication would be damaging."[652] This sifting of the text by its subject, "page by page",[653] could be read by the reader as a kind of "betrayal".[654] Steinberg is aware that what "most readers of narrative non-fiction demand is that the writer transgress" into a "subject's private world" – by being seen to hold back, Steinberg might be

> "It is about the height of the stomach. You exaggerated. You wanted to show that the man's place was fucked up. What fool wastes his time and money building a knee-high fence?"
>
> He had said nothing of this when he first read the chapter about Mbabane […] some six weeks ago. Now he is telling me he has seen his world through my eyes, and what he saw was people with useless fences around their gardens and useless bottles of herbs in their rooms. (Steinberg, *Three-Letter Plague*, 224.)

[651] *Ibid.,* 225.

[652] Steinberg, *Little Liberia,* 260-261. This includes "facts that were true but that one ought never to write down" and "facts that I had used inadmissibly." (*Ibid.*)

[653] *Ibid.*

[654] Mulgrew, "Rummaging", 64.

seen to be violating author-reader contract.[655] As in *Three-Letter Plague*, however, Steinberg uses this as an opportunity to foreground the difficulties of writing biography, and thus appeal to the reader's sympathy. Steinberg indirectly explains to the reader that he is in a bind – he shows his subject explaining to him, for example, that he could "just wash [his] hands" of the text and refuse to endorse it[656] – but also reassures the reader that the text might "end up being the better for it."[657] Much more successfully than in *Midlands*, Steinberg holds the balance between respecting the "potentially terrifying" ramifications that publication can bring for his subjects, while not being seen to hold anything back from the reader.[658]

Writing *Little Liberia* in this way, reflects Loes Nas, is a neat way to cut down on speculation within the narrative, adding a "meta-layer" in which, "rather than imagin[ing] what his characters are feeling," Steinberg can instead reflect "on what and why they are holding back."[659] Similarly, Sean Field argues that, in writing about (and being seen to write about) epistemologically different worlds, Steinberg's "self-reflexive approach" is "not only productive but ethically indispensable",[660] especially when – as in *Little Liberia* – his own subjects might accuse his narrative framing of reinforcing "neocolonial" or "racist" norms.[661] More than that, though, the construction of an interpretative 'meta-layer' is both aesthetically and technically significant, as it allows Steinberg to expound upon the craft and

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[655] *Ibid.*

[656] Steinberg, *Little Liberia*, 262.

[657] *Ibid.* Steinberg adds that his subject was merely "scraping away this piece and that, when his personality had saturated everything. He had no means to drain it from the manuscript." (*Ibid.*)

[658] Sean Field, "Review: Reading and Representing African Refugees in New York", *Kronos*, 37 (2011), 125.

[659] Loes Nas, "'Where the Mask Ends and the Face Begins Is Not Certain'": Mediating Ethnicity and Cheating Geography in Jonny Steinberg's *Little Liberia", Journal of Literary Studies/Tydskrif vir Literatuur-wetenksap*, 29, 1 (2013), 39.

[660] Field, "Reading and Representing", 126.

[661] Steinberg, *Little Liberia*, 262.

his idiosyncratic "protocol"[662] of constructing biographical narrative – which, in a neat turn, credentials him as a biographer. Such a narrowing of the gap between story and discourse – by ostensibly rendering the story as the discourse – is Steinberg's deft way around "the constraint of only writing what I know":[663] instead of worrying, as in *Midlands*, about what he doesn't know about his subject, his other texts are much less apologetic about their unavoidably synecdochal nature. More important is his consideration of – as Theresa Mallinson puts it – the "inherent power imbalance when a writer portrays other people's lives" and how to "grant his subjects as much agency as possible." By doing so, the narratives that "typically" frame his subjects' lives can be "challenged and, ultimately, subverted."[664]

[662] *Ibid.*, 261.

[663] Lehman, "Counting the Costs", 39.

[664] Mallinson, "Jonny Steinberg's *Little Liberia*".

CASE STUDY 6

Substituting discourse for story in *A Man of Good Hope*

Steinberg's seventh book-length text, *A Man of Good Hope*, is unusual in his oeuvre in that its narrative narrows in on its single human subject to the exclusion of almost every other human source. Whereas *Midlands* and *The Number* are also biographically-centred, these texts arguably work in the service of a larger project – investigating the circumstances around farm murders and constructing a history of prison gangs, respectively. These texts thus include other human sources – such as experts and professionals related to their fields of study – to broaden the ambit of the text: so that "these stories can resonate far beyond themselves".[665]

A Man of Good Hope is a discourse on transnational migration from the Horn of Africa; however, the text does not seek to portray an archetype of such experience. The entirety of the narrative is instead focused expertly on the unique experiences of Steinberg's human subject, Asad Abdullahi, a Somali man who, as a young child in Mogadishu, became a wandering refugee after his mother's murder by militia and the disappearance of his father. Emboldened by betrayals and with "various conflicts kick[ing] at the foundations of [his] life",[666] Asad becomes part of a "great wartime migration […] throughout sub-Saharan Africa and the world."[667] He "ping-pongs"[668] between refugee camps, becomes a trucker's assistant in the

[665] Mulgrew, "Rummaging", 66.

[666] Steinberg, *A Man of Good Hope*, 133.

[667] Dustjacket of Steinberg, *A Man of Good Hope*.

[668] Michela Wrong, "*A Man of Good Hope*, by Jonny Steinberg – review", *The Spectator*, 24 January 2015.

"endless miles" of Ethiopian desert,[669] then a "broker" between new Somali arrivals and businessmen in Addis Ababa,[670] the city in which he marries his first wife. Seeking a better life, he then travels to South Africa, where, after a number of brief business successes, he – along with most of his family and new business connections – falls victim to the at-times murderous xenophobia that swept through the country in 2008.

A Man of Good Hope was not supposed to be a biography. It was, in fact, conceived of as a social history, much like Steinberg's other texts. When Steinberg met Abdullahi, he recalls in the text, he "had had an idea for a very different book", one about people who had fled Cape Town after the 2008 xenophobic attacks.[671] Abdullahi was to take Steinberg through the "Somali zones of the city", with the goal of writing "a history of Somalis' experiences of a famous episode of violence."[672]

During a meeting several weeks later, however, Steinberg realises – on a "whim" – that Abdullahi should be the real subject of the text, with the social history becoming more ancillary.[673] Steinberg took an opportunity to write a text with more philosophical ends. In early 2012, during the writing of *A Man of Good Hope*, Steinberg told me in an interview that

> What's really exciting me about [Abdullahi is] a paradox. He is a refugee and thus had few choices. And, yet, paradoxically, precisely because he has been ripped out of his context, the choices he does make are much more consequential than the choices you and I make. […] I'm quite fascinated by what it means to be a human being under those circumstances [and how it] begins to shape

669 Steinberg, *A Man of Good Hope*, 121.

670 *Ibid.,* 107.

671 *Ibid.,* x.

672 *Ibid.,* xii.

673 *Ibid.,* xi.

> who and how you love, whether you save money, what you dream about, and so on.[674]

In the text itself, Steinberg's chief claim to authority in biographising someone so completely unlike himself rests on a formulation of basic empathy: "Something momentous can happen to a person we barely know, yet we will understand intuitively what he is going through simply because we, too, are human."[675] Thus, *A Man of Good Hope*, the most biographical of his book-length texts, most brightly highlights the techniques that Steinberg employs in order to imbue his narratives with reliability; a reliability which flows from his textured depiction of his relationship with his human subjects.

Steinberg's is a very different approach to a text that has become perhaps the most prominent recent African migration biography, *What Is The What* by Dave Eggers,[676] a self-described "soulful account" of the life of Valentino Deng,[677] a South Sudanese man who, like Abdullahi, "was separated from [his] family" and spent time between refugee camps, traversing great swathes of northeastern and eastern Africa, before establishing a new life in a faraway foreign country.[678] Unlike Abdullahi, however, Deng travelled to the United States, and his text is predicated by a want to "reach out to a wider audience by telling the story of my life in book form."[679] As he felt he "was not a writer", a third party put Deng in

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[674] Mulgrew, "Rummaging", 66.

[675] Steinberg, *A Man of Good Hope*, 13.

[676] Dave Eggers, *What Is The What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng* (San Francisco: McSweeney's, 2006).

[677] *Ibid.*, xiii.

[678] *Ibid.*

[679] *Ibid.*

touch with Dave Eggers, who would help him write a biography.[680] The two collaborated and "after about eighteen months of struggle" with the narrative, the two decided that the text should take the form of a "fictionalized autobiography, in [Deng's] voice."[681] [682] This innovative format allows the construction of a non-fiction-esque fictional narrative; in other words, a fictional narrative that employs the authority strategies commonly found in non-fiction texts without having the burden of having to purport to be factual. As a *New York Times* review points out, this offers a different way of appealing to authority: it becomes a "persuasive" text through "the lyricism, the detail and, most important, the absolute specificity of [its] sentences".[683] Its narrative enjoys the freedom imparted upon it by its fictional appellation by exhibiting an "elastic" quality, which allows it "to shift back and forth from present to past" in an aesthetically pleasing manner.[684]

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[680] *Ibid.*

[681] Valentino Achak Deng Foundation, "Interview with Dave Eggers and Valentino Achak Deng". Accessed 1 June 2016 at http://www.vadfoundation.org/interview-with-the-creators/

[682] This compromise of adopting fictionality is explained in *What is the What*'s preface:

> I was very young when some of the events in the book took place, and as a result we simply had to pronounce *What Is The What* a novel. I could not, for example, recount some conversations that took place seventeen years ago. However it should be noted that all of the major events in the book are true. The book is historically accurate, and the world I have known is not different from the one depicted in these pages (xiv).

The text thus disavows its claims to factuality, while upholding its claims to authority through 'historical accuracy'. Eggers would explain in an interview later that it would have the added novelty of him being able to ostensibly "disappear" from the narrative "completely", while allowing the reader to have the "benefit" of Deng's "distinct and unforgettable voice" (Valentino Achak Deng Foundation, "Interview".)

[683] Francine Prose, "The Lost Boy", *New York Times*, 24 December 2006.

[684] *Ibid.*

The question *What Is The What* raises is: why not use this hybrid fictional form in other biographical texts in which facts are contested? The hybrid form of *What Is The What*, however, is a product of the fact that the subject *approached* the author-narrator to write the story, and thus the power dynamic between the subject and the producer of the text is – if not inverted – much differently calibrated. Also, it should be noted that *What Is The What* was first published by McSweeney's, the San Franciscan publishing house of which Eggers is the founder,[685] and also that Eggers at the time already had a history in producing innovative biography-type texts.[686]

A Man of Good Hope does not have these luxuries – of either publishing freedom or accepted genre-stretching pedigree – and thus does not have this specific kind of hybridity as an option. Instead, it can be read as the culmination of many different, classically Steinbergian reliability strategies. There is the usual soul-searching on Steinberg's end about the 'deal' of the narrative; about his inability to find "a way of writing the books I do without exercising power."[687] There is also the usual flashpoint of conflict

[685] Dave Itzkoff, "McSweeney's Archive Acquired by Ransom Centre in Austin", *New York Times* ArtsBeat, 31 July 2013.

[686] For example, Egger's memoir and debut text, *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*, contains "fictionalised aspects" and instances in which "characters [break] the fourth wall" (Zeke Jarvis [ed], *Make 'em Laugh!: American Humorists of the 20th and 21st Centuries* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2015), 16.)

[687] Steinberg, *A Man of Good Hope*, xiv. In this case, Steinberg offers Abdullahi a lump sum of money (seven thousand rand, "precisely the amount of capital he needed to open a trading store" in Blikkiesdorp) (*Ibid.,* xii.) and twenty-five per cent of the book's royalties (against which he can take a loan from Steinberg) (*Ibid.,* 311.) in order to "free him to talk" for the purposes of the text, with the potential ethical bind that "the promise of royalties will no doubt see his commitment through to the end […] no matter how deeply into his private life I dig" (*Ibid.,* xiv.)

between Steinberg and his subject, when Steinberg "second-guess[es]" Abdullahi's feelings about his estranged wife and draws his subject's "ire";[688] and, as usual, it is shown to in fact be a revelation of greater insight to his subject: later, Steinberg reassures himself that "I know that it is himself he is rebuking, not me," for "I have brought to the surface a feeling of discomfort with which it isn't easy to live."[689]

More interesting for our purposes in this section, however, are the ways in which Steinberg bases the authority of this text – much more than his other texts – squarely on impeachable media: namely, conversation and memory. *A Man of Good Hope* is not so much a text about Abdullahi, but rather about Steinberg's relationship and interactions with him, leading to a unique textual portrait, one out of many possible depictions. The reliability and authority of this text thus flows from the text's awareness of its own arbitrariness and idiosyncrasies.

From the outset, Steinberg establishes that the narrative is predicated solely by Abdullahi's memory. Although Steinberg signals that he will physically find "places" and "people" who feature in Abdullahi's life story,[690] the narrator establishes that the boundaries of that research are set by the conversation between himself and Abdullahi.[691] This is emphasised by the

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At *A Man of Good Hope*'s denouement, however, Steinberg seems to reconcile himself with this, and realises Abdullahi is not stripped of agency in the transaction that predicates the book: "This book is for me and for those who read it," he states. "It is of no value to [Abdullahi] but for the money that will come his way. He will buy a truck with that money, or a part of a truck. From this book he will fashion another moment when he is the one who decides." (*Ibid.*, 327).

[688] Steinberg, *A Man of Good Hope*, 244-245.

[689] *Ibid.,* 244.

[690] *Ibid.,* xiii.

[691] Likewise, Steinberg will not venture into memories or territory about his subject's life that would make his subject uncomfortable. For example, while Steinberg "considers" asking Abdullahi if he may interview his second wife, but realises that this would be a "foolish" idea and a transgression against his subject: After all, "Asad had studiously left many questions about Sadicya unasked" (*A Man of Good Hope*, 306).

setting in which most of these conversations take place over eleven months: in Steinberg's parked car, outside Abdullahi's shack, with the writer and subject in the driver's and passenger's seat, respectively[692] – a metaphor, perhaps, for the construction of narrative itself. The car is shown to be the locus of information exchange between Steinberg and Abdullah, such that recollective or expository passages are often seen to have been triggered in the car: "Asad's voice brings into my car the anger his younger self had felt";[693] "Sitting in my car, all these years later, he still marvels at what happened to him";[694] "His lightness has filled my car, and we are smiling at each other",[695] etc. The car also functions as a safe space: Abdullahi "insists" on meeting in Steinberg's car so that he might "see danger coming" in the guise of "men with guns", attracted by Steinberg's "recurring presence" outside Abdullahi's new business.[696] The careful establishment of the space of the car as a safe space – both physically and emotionally – emphasises the privileged nature of the access that Steinberg has to Abdullahi, as well as a kind of authority claim by way of delineating and credentialing a specific space as a locus of reliable information exchange. "Our interviews had come to require their own space," Steinberg reflects at one point, "and that space was the interior of a car."[697]

The car is also the space in which Steinberg has an episode in which he felt he could "inhabit" Abdullahi – and vice versa – to the point of ostensibly "understand[ing]" him.[698] In their third week of car-bound conversation, Steinberg and Abdullahi see three "young men, their hoodies

[692] Steinberg, *A Man of Good Hope*, xiv-xv.

[693] *Ibid.,* 24.

[694] *Ibid.,* 67.

[695] *Ibid.,* 86.

[696] *Ibid.,* xvi-xvii.

[697] *Ibid.,* 91-92.

[698] *Ibid.,* xvi.

low over their eyebrows", walking toward them.[699] Steinberg does not see them as a threat, but Abdullahi does, and in time Steinberg feels Asad's fear "as if it is a virus, as if it jumped off him and sank into my skin and is now coursing through my veins."[700] In this physical space and in this relationship, such an episode brings forth a possibility for profound empathy.[701]

These are obvious claims to reliability and authority. Less obvious is how deeply infused the text is with conversational tropes, which seek to emphasise the text's predication on conversation and memory. This can be – unlike most things in this book – tallied through quantitative discourse analysis, as well as through more obvious qualitative aspects, such as scenes of expository narrative being seen to take on Somalian vocabulary, such as "mira" for 'khat', "responsa" for 'sponsorship', and "Islii" for 'Eastleigh', a suburb of Nairobi with a sizeable Somali population.[702] Take, for instance, the following conversational markers, which appear regularly in the text:

"Asad/he says": 144 times
"Asad/he tells me": 80 times "
"Asad/he asks": 34 times
"Asad/he recalls": 78 times
"Asad/he does not recall": 6 times
"Asad/he does recall": 3 times
"Asad/he remembers": 49 times
"Asad/he does not remember: 6 times
"Asad/he is not sure": 10 times
"Asad/he knows": 12 times
"I ask" : 93 times
I say": 19 times
"I say nothing": 1 time
"I press": 3 times
"I try to imagine/press/tease": 7 times
"I tell him/Asad": 11 times
"I interrupt": 1 time
"I recount": 1 time

[699] *Ibid.,* xv-xvi.

[700] *Ibid.,* xvi.

[701] Steinberg insists, even, that "part of him is in my blood", suggesting a more intimate relationship with Abdullahi than with any of his previous subjects (*Ibid.)*

[702] *Ibid.,* 40.

"Asad/he thinks": 16 times

"Asad/he sees": 5 times

"Asad/he has no memory/idea": 5 times

"Asad/he wonders": 17 times

"Asad/he looks back": 5 times

"Asad/he recounts": 1 time

The first edition of the printed text of *A Man of Good Hope* is 333 pages in length; there are 602 conversational markers tallied in these two columns alone. On a simple textual level, this shows how this text is predicated on conversation between Abdullahi and Steinberg. More subtly, however, it also emphasises the roles the two men take in the conversation: Steinberg the interrogator and 'driver' of the conversation; Abdullahi the conversant and 'passenger' of Steinberg's "relentless badgering", as Michaela Wrong describes it, "as interview is piled on interview, memory upon memory."[703]

Just as interesting, moreover, are the conversational markers that do *not* appear in the text. The risk of Steinberg's interlocution being seen as overbearing is dampened somewhat in the lack of the conversational marker "Asad/he answers", which only appears once in the text. This suggests that Steinberg's role is more catalytic, and not catechetic; a kind of prompted retelling, not interrogation. Steinberg is also not seen to stray away from the boundaries of the conversation: "I imagine" and "I suspect" appear only three times each; "I presume" only twice. Likewise, the words "speculate", "reveal" and "my opinion" are absent. The overwhelming bulk of information and interpretation in the text is thus seen to come from Abdullahi.[704]

[703] Wrong, "*A Man of Good Hope*".

[704] Abdullahi, moreover, is never shown to 'claim' or 'insist' – his memory and opinion is seen to be exacting.

Abdullahi also has an interesting verbal tic. On 104 occasions, Abdullahi refers to Steinberg in his reported speech as either "brother" or "my brother", something that he is very seldom seen to do with other characters. (Once a Somalian family member,[705] and once a neighbour.[706]) This tic functions both as a claim to verisimilitude (by means of Steinberg depicting his subject's speech as-is), as well as an obvious claim to reliability by way of depicting a closeness between the men. This closeness means that Steinberg has access to privileged information, an access emphasised by Steinberg's inclusion of a scene in which Abdullahi tells "a carefully crafted story about his life" to humanitarians in a camp for xenophobia victims in Cape Town:

> He did not lie; he described faithfully and in great detail the incidents of violence to which he had been subject since coming to South Africa. The power of his memory surprised him; it was as if he had recorded each act of violence and was replaying the very worst of his life in slow motion. […] But nor did he really tell the truth. For the fuel that burned inside him and that made him Asad Hirsi Abdullahi was drained from the story he related. […] The story he crafted whittled away at the flesh of his being, leaving only a stick figure, a hapless refugee.[707]

The inclusion of this scene credentials Adbullahi as an exacting, self-aware interlocutor who is aware of potential interpretations of his life narrative – someone able to, but not always willing to, give his interior away. The scene

[705] Steinberg, *A Man of Good Hope*, 173.

[706] *Ibid.,* 297.

[707] *Ibid.,* 200.

also serves as a comparison to the narrative underpinning *A Man of Good Hope*, itself. Abdullahi did not tell the humanitarians "the truth" in this narrative because he left out certain facts of his life, like how "life in Addis had been pretty good when he chose to leave" and how he chose "to remain in South Africa when Foosiya [his first wife] left with their toddler and their unborn child".[708] Because Steinberg's narrative *does* have these facts – their existence in the narrative predicated by the conversations in the car – then it follows that his narrative is 'the truth'. (Or, at least, the most truthful.[709])

But there is an even more profound effect brought about by this conversational underpinning of the narrative, namely that Steinberg manages to narrow the gap between story and discourse – and thus increase the reliability of his narration – by means of substituting the traditional notion of the 'story' (i.e. the events depicted in the narrative as they were experienced by his subject in the time and space in which these events occurred) with a different one that foregrounds the mediated nature of his research (the events of his subject's life as his subject portrays them to him in their conversations.) In other words, the story of *A Man of Good Hope* is not the story – the exact events – of Asad's life: the story of the text is actually the *discourse* of that life as it is narrated to Steinberg by Abdullahi in a car.

This is backed up by the pronounced influence that the warp and weft of Abdullahi's memory has on the narrative; the "meditative artery that runs through the book", in Wrong's words, affected by "reflections on the

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[708] *Ibid.,* 300.

[709] English, of course, is not Abdullahi's first language, so his level of expression cannot be taken – and indeed, is not shown – as being adequate at all times: at one point, for example, he tells Steinberg, "I do not have the words in English to tell you what happened inside me. I don't think I have the words in Somali. I would have to sit down alone for a long time and write a poem, and, even then, maybe it won't come out right" (*A Man of Good Hope*, 171).

shifting nature of memory."[710] The words "maybe" and "guess" with relation to Abdullahi's memories appear 100 times in total,[711] while "memory", "recollection" and their plurals appear 58 times.[712] More qualitatively, however, the arbitrariness and contradictions inherent in the operation of memory are especially evident in the texture and depiction of Abdullahi's overland odyssey from Addis Ababa to South Africa's Eastern Cape, via Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Johannesburg.[713] In relating this uncomfortable journey – during which he loses his diary and photographs of his family[714] – Steinberg notes that the "stability of the story Asad is telling me begins to give way": often, Abdullahi's memories come in "flashes and scenes and spectacles, the connections between them not entirely clear".[715] He, for example, remembers arbitrary details about various traumas – such as the fact that he was one of exactly 28 people on a bus who did not have a Kenyan identity document[716] – but then recalls self-described "impossible" experiences,[717] such as "being very cold throughout" a bus journey from Johannesburg to Port Elizabeth. ("Odd," Steinberg notes, "since it was February, an unfailingly warm month."[718]) In other narrative circumstances, there might be seen as affronts to the reliability of Abdullahi's narrative – a widening between story and discourse – but in this case they are the natural product of a narrative that appeals to verisimilitude by means of being seen to function by the operations of memory; again, in which one narrative's discourse is the other's story.

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[710] Wrong, "*A Man of Good Hope*".

[711] "Maybe" appears 91 times; "guess", nine times.

[712] "Memory" or "memories" appears 51 times; "recollections", seven times.

[713] Abdullahi's journeys are helpfully (paratextually) signposted in *A Man of Good Hope*'s printed text by route maps (140).

[714] Steinberg, *A Man of Good Hope*, 158.

[715] *Ibid.*

[716] *Ibid.,* 141.

[717] *Ibid.,* 147.

[718] *Ibid.,* 179.

The narrative thus faithfully recalls the effects of trauma on memory and expression. In corroborating Abdullahi's descriptions of parts of his life that were relatively pleasant, Steinberg finds his subject reliable: arriving in Dire Dawa with an "aim to find whatever traces remain of the footprint Asad has left there" sixteen years later, the narrator finds the town "just as Asad had described" – he is "quite literally walking in his footsteps".[719] But, with regard to episodes of trauma, such as the murder of his cousin Kaafi, Abdullahi's answers take "the form of a series of short reports";[720] "a series of vignettes" so disconnected that Steinberg was forced to "supplement" his subject's information with the records of a police station and the regional court in Grahamstown.[721] (This, as it turns out, is one of the very few times Steinberg goes out of his way to "fill in" or flesh out his subject's narrative.[722])

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[719] *Ibid.,* 57.

[720] *Ibid.,* 226.

[721] *Ibid.,* 227.

[722] The other times, which require an ethical consideration beyond the reaches of this chapter and this book, concerns Steinberg tracking down a relative of Abdullahi's in London – a cab driver in White City named Sheikh Hussein, whose father had grown up with Abdullahi's grandfather (*Ibid.,* 92) – who fills Steinberg in on what happened to his subject's missing father and family; specifically that Abdullahi's parents were married in the area he worked in as a truck driver's assistant, and that his family "were among the nearly one million Ogadeni who fled Ethiopia in 1978" (*Ibid.*). This is information that Abdullahi does not know, and is revealed to the reader a full chapter before he is seen to reveal this information to his subject. This could be read as an attempt to give the reader the impression that the consequences of sharing of this information – "a slippery, difficult gift" from Steinberg to Abdullahi (*Ibid.,* 91) – was something that Steinberg deeply considered. It could also be read as an appeal to authority by way of seeming omniscient, or credentialed as a researcher or investigative reporter. Regardless, this information is subsequently revealed to him by Steinberg for the purposes of the narrative, to arguably traumatic effect on his subject: "This is the first time I am hearing my story like this," Abdullahi says. "I am finding it very sad […] To hear that my parents were refugees and that the place I fled to was actually home: it is a very sad story" (*Ibid.,* 94). Further study should consider these moments of potential transgression.

Having established the vagaries of memory, as well as the erstwhile reliability of his subject, Steinberg is able to enter narrative modes that can composite Abdullahi's recollections with expository passages – as well as his own interpretations of these recollections – in an ostensibly convincing and reliable way. The passage depicting Abdullahi meeting his first wife on her arrival in the Eastern Cape is indicative of how Steinberg creates a pastiche of different degrees of recollection to create a verisimilitudinous scene:

> Asad woke a neighbour before dawn to take him to Queenstown to meet Foosiya's bus. Of the journey, *he recalls that* the grass plains were gray in the pre-dawn light and that he felt anxious. But *he has no memory* of Queenstown that morning. He *does not recall* waiting for the bus or seeing Foosiya get off it. *He no longer knows* what they said.[723]

Importantly, Abdullahi is not shown to be unsure about the validity of individual memories: he either knows what he knows or he does not; he does not speculate on what he remembers. This offers an opportunity for Steinberg to emphasise his understanding of his subject's character, and thus his reliability. In the face of inconsistent recollection of a prominent and important scene in the text, Steinberg tries to paint the scene for the reader, albeit in a heavily caveated way; predicated only by what he has been seen to know about his subject, but also showcasing the depth of questions and the level of detail he asks of his subject. Imagining Abdullahi and his wife's seating arrangements in a taxi after their reunion, Steinberg writes:

[723] Steinberg, *A Man of Good Hope*, 210. Emphasis added.

> I am guessing freely, for all I have is my imagination. I see him in the front and her in the back, and throughout the half-hour journey they barely exchange a word. To swivel in his seat far enough to face her is a gesture that imparts import, weight. He is not sure that he has anything weighty to say. It is safer to start straight ahead. He is about to introduce his wife to her future; there will be plenty to talk about soon enough.[724]

The middle ground that Abdullahi does not fill in is instead for Steinberg. In addition, however, passages such as this foreground the constructed-ness and pastiched nature of the text, even when the information of the text comes mostly from a single source. (We'll see what a text pastiched from many different texts looks like in the next chapter, when we discuss facticity as a strategy of imbuing authority into texts in which there are no reliable narrators.)

A non-fiction text composed mostly of biography or extended profile is at the mercy of the nature and reliability of the recollections of its human subject – that much is unavoidable. Other techniques and moral considerations aside, what *A Man of Good Hope* does effectively is to surrender to these vagaries of memory and to foreground its constructedness and predication on a single relationship with a large number of variables acting upon it. As it occurs to Steinberg near the text's denouement:

> [If] I had spoken to [Asad] about [his flight from Mogadishu] on another morning, a morning on which different thoughts were passing through his mind, a

[724] *Ibid.,* 210.

> morning after a night during which he had dreamed different dreams, he would have told me another version of the story of his flight from Mogadishu, a version connected to the one he did tell me, but different[.]
>
> If I began to interview him again from scratch, I thought, this book would be very different. […] It would not be the same book at all.[725]

It is the summation of the narrative gambit Steinberg is most prominently seen to understand in the text: that the only way for this text to be read as an authentic record of Steinberg's subject's life is to substitute wholesale the discourse of his subject's life narrative for the story of the text.

In general, such a strategy of story-discourse substitution might be indispensable for South African writers attempting to write with reliability and authority about subjects that are rife with epistemological or mimetic gulfs. Instead, one may make these gulfs and problems themselves the story of the narrative and, with careful positioning, create a narrative that is reliable within its own self-defined context; moving away from macro- or master-narratives (such as the ones *Diepsloot* attempts to address) to micro-narratives.

But as we will see in the next chapter, with regard to Jacob Dlamini's *Askari*, substituting story for discourse might be said to work only when there is a coherent existing discourse to transplant into another narrative as its story. What happens when the story of a narrative non-fiction narrative is a transplanted pastiche of different fragmentary discourses?

[725] *Ibid.,* 307.

CHAPTER 9

The web of facticity

> There is no one truth, but there are an awful lot of objective facts. The more facts you get, the more facts you collect, the closer you come to whatever truth there is.
> – Robert Caro[726]

Just as how not all narrators can be reliable, neither can every source and human subject. Unreliable narrators and sources are, as we discussed in the last two chapters, often a death-knell to a text's claims to authority. But is there a way to imbue a narrative with authority, even when it sources, subjects or narrators are demonstrably (or even intrinsically) unreliable?

As we saw in Chapter 8, there is sometimes no way in which a narrative can claim that its narrator is unimpeachably reliable. But does it follow, then, that the illocutionary thrust of that narrator's entire narrative be viewed as impotent? Is unreliability necessarily fatal to a text's claims to authority?

Instinct tells us that this is not necessarily the case. Take Anton Harber's *Diepsloot*, in which (as was shown in Chapter 7) Harber might be viewed as unreliable narrator both due to his epistemological distance from his subject and due to his ignorance (or dishonesty) with regard to the figure of Golden Mtika and competing narratives about Diepsloot. The text itself, however, might still be seen, even by its harshest critics, to be seen as authoritative in other ways: even Andile Mngxitama admits that

[726] James Santel, "Robert Caro: The Art of Biography 5", *Paris Review,* 216 (2016).

Harber makes a not-insignificant contribution to the study of modern South African townships and settlements.[727]

Unauthoritative or unreliable narrators do not always make unauthoritative or unreliable texts – just as, conversely, a reliable narrator does not promise a reliable text. A text may be equally authoritative in one aspect and not authoritative in another – but where does that leave the concept of authority, and the concept of an authoritative text, if the same text may hold and lack authority?

This brings us to the final aspect of authority, as it generally functions in texts – and specifically in South African non-fiction texts. A text may both hold and lack authority because a text can (and will) hold within itself many kinds of authority, which will be individually assessed by different readers in different ways. In the eyes of one reader, Harber may be too "limited" to be effective as a township journalist; but the same reader might admit that he does pass muster as a township historian.[728] Just as texts – and especially narrative texts – may commonly have more than one illocutionary component or function, they may commonly have different sorts of authority (or levels of usefulness or value) linked to each one of those components or functions.

Authority is not a binary. Neither is it a sliding scale. It is not contradictory to say that a text is authoritative in some ways and unauthoritative in others; nor is it critically inconsistent for a reader to highlight areas in which a text can be seen to be unauthoritative, but for that same reader to judge the text authoritative as a whole or in parts.

This might seem like a strange thing to argue at this point of this book, seeing as I have been somewhat treating authority as an either/or binary in the previous chapters: either a text is sufficiently packaged or not; either a text's producer is credentialed sufficiently or not; either a narrator can be

[727] Mngxitama, "Whose story?".

[728] *Ibid.*

seen to be sufficiently reliable or not. The problem with this binary, of course, is that the idea of 'sufficiency' can, must, and will change from text to text, reader to reader, producer to producer, subject to subject, lived experience to lived experience, and so on. Each one of these different components of a text – the parts which constitute both the text and the peritext – introduce different predicates and functions upon which the text's authority may be judged. While the authority of the narrator of Redi Tlhabi's *Endings & Beginnings* might be seen as unauthoritative due to peritextual accusations of falsity, the text may still be seen by readers as an authoritative depiction of the "casually misogynistic milieu" of Tlhabi's hometown;[729] or, even with a "paucity of empirical facts", readers may value the text's inquiry into "the thematics of masculine power [and] entitlement".[730]

Literature is not an empirical science, and its study is a locus of collaboration. As Lehman notes (via Heyne), the study of non-fiction requires the foregrounding of "the reader [as] an important partner in the negotiation of truth"[731] – or better, textual authority. The epistemological contexts in which many texts are written – such as the ones I am about to discuss in this chapter – mean that the producers of these texts have to be seen to cede any claims to authority to the reader, and to let the reader alone decide whether or not these texts are authoritative. This might occur when the subject matter of a text exists in an epistemic isolation, or where credentialing oneself as an expert on this matter is simply not possible, due to a failure of imagination, a lack of reliable sources, or the lack of a reliable narrator. Further, it might occur whenever a text focuses upon, in Lehman's words, the "increasing" amount of modern texts that have "only themselves

[729] Matthews, "Loving a Tsotsi".

[730] Mngadi, "The struggle to know a dark mind".

[731] Lehman, *Fact*, 19.

as a point of reference",[732] or when a text delves into experiences or "play[s] of images that no longer refer to anything, that no longer function as models, but are equivalent to nothing but themselves."[733]

The creation of these kinds of quasi-authoritative, self-referential texts is very common practice for a certain kind of text producer: namely journalists (and other newsworkers) who practice within the deadline-constricted industry of daily or weekly news. This might seem strange, initially: surely journalists are sufficiently externally (professionally) credentialed to have their texts seen as authoritative as a *sine qua non* of their production? And if not, then why would a writer such as Anton Harber choose to portray himself as a newswork-savvy journalist in his own text as a means of authority-claiming? In practice, though, most newsworkers who work in news organisations have their work packaged (and have their work externally credentialed) only by way of their being part of or being published by that institution. It is arguably not the newsworker who themselves are credentialed; rather, they *borrow* credentials from the institution to which they are affiliated. Newsworkers generally do not credential themselves intratextually in hard news narratives.[734] In lieu of the outward performances of journalistic credentialing – as seen in texts, like *Diepsloot*, which are not connected to a journalistically-credentialed news organisation – newsworkers employ another mode of authority-claiming in

[732] *Ibid.*

[733] *Ibid.*

[734] Two caveats here. Firstly, journalists may be credentialed by their byline or listed position in the news organisation, such as 'editor' or 'senior reporter'. Some reporters' texts may also be granted authority if they are known by readers to be generally reliable in their reportage. This, however, is *paratextual* information. Secondly, newsworkers might have to intratextually credential themselves, though, if they are not creating hard news narratives, but opinion pieces or other texts with different illocutionary functions to hard news narratives. These kinds of texts, however, are not part of the main news cycle, but are rather react to it: traditional opinion pieces arguably do not define the news cycle; they may only be seen to influence it as a reactive ancillary to hard and feature news.

order to imbue their texts with authority above and beyond their professional credentials.

The nature of the news cycle, Barbara W. Tuchman argues, means that newsworkers must "cope" with the problem of "nonverifiable facts":[735] in the construction of journalistic narratives, she argues, newsworkers are forced to use "facts that could be verified in theory but not in practice – and certainly not in time for deadlines", and thus have to be shown to be verified by other means. In news texts, facts are presented as having reference in the world outside of the text, even where that reference cannot be immediately or practically accessed for corroboration by the reader: in other words, the news report that is the first description of a phenomenon is its own reference. The first text written about a subject-phenomenon thus has only *the phenomenon itself* as a reference, even though a transient phenomenon cannot practically be a reference for a text as we understand it in this book, chiefly because it cannot be corroborated by a reader. In this way, Tuchman argues, newswork is much like science: "having witnessed an occurrence," she argues, "is not sufficient to define one's observation as factual."[736] As such, a journalist must demonstrate the existence of the phenomenon to the reader by presenting other facts surrounding or related to the phenomenon that can be practically corroborated. Reportage of phenomena, therefore, is not reportage of phenomena *themselves*; rather, it is the reportage of facts which are the result of or related to phenomena. A text about a fire, for example, is not about the fire itself, but is in fact built up of corroboratable reference *related to* the fire, such as eyewitness report, statement or exposition; the things by which, in Tuchman's nomenclature, phenomena are *known*.[737] [738]

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[735] Barbara W. Tuchman, *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1978), 80.

[736] *Ibid.*, 83.

[737] *Ibid.*

This is not only applicable to hard news texts. As Tuchman notes, "other sorts of inquiry, such as philosophy and science, are also concerned with the relationship between phenomena and knowing."[739] Unlike philosophy and science, however, newswork is "a practical activity geared to deadlines", in which "facts must be quickly identified"[740] and – as I would argue further – be related to the phenomenon in order for the texts resulting from such newswork to be seen as authoritative. A described phenomenon or fact "taken by itself […] has no meaning",[741] Tuchman argues: "It is the imposition of a frame of other ordered facts that enables […] attribution of meaning".[742]

This process of attributing meaning and conferring authority on a text can be broadly defined as the process of creating what is known as *facticity*. Facticity was first introduced as a term by the German philosopher Martin Heidegger, who broadly defined it as the "underivable givenness" of a thing or event.[743] Tuchman does not mention Heidegger in her conception of facticity; nevertheless, her description of newswork does point toward the creation or construction of a sense of 'givenness' of events within a news story. Within the modern news process, Tuchman argues, newsmakers create 'webs' of facts:

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[738] As Tuchman argues, newsworkers professionally and "explicitly recognize the mutual embeddedness of fact and source": rather than recognising "a nonverifiable statement as fact" in and as of itself, newsworkers instead "intermesh fact and source" (*Ibid.,* 90).

[739] Tuchman, *Making News*, 82-83.

[740] *Ibid.*

[741] *Ibid.*, 88.

[742] *Ibid.*

[743] *Brockhaus Enzyklopädie*, 17th edition, 6 (Munich: F.A. Brockhaus AG), 28, in Theodore Kissel, "On the Genesis of Heidegger's Formally Indicative Hermeneutics of Facticity", in *Rethinking Facticity*, eds. François Raffoul and Eric S. Nelson, (New York: SUNY Press, 2008), 42.

> To flesh out any one supposed fact, one amasses a host of supposed facts that, when taken together, present themselves as both individually and collectively self-validating[,] establishing themselves as cross-referents to one another: a fact justifies the whole (this story is factual), and the whole (all the facts) validates this fact (this particular referent).[744]

I find this an excellent starting point for our discussion of facticity, but I do not believe this definition is quite specific enough for our discussion here. This is mostly because of her treatment of the word 'fact', by which she means a piece of "pertinent information gathered by professionally validated methods specifying the relationship between what is known and how it is known".[745] This definition is too slippery for my liking, and for the purposes of this book, in which a fact is defined as a truth-claim that has reference. A claim cannot be a "supposed fact": it is either a fact (with reference) or not a fact (without reference).[746]

So, for the purposes of this book, I shall define the employment of facticity as *the process by which non-facts are made to appear fact-like by the imposition of frameworks of facts around them*. (This is thus another departure from the original Heideggerian concept of facticity.) The operation of this web of facticity – to retain Tuchman's term – depends on the assumption that if a text uses a majority of facts that are provably authoritative, it makes logical sense to a reader that the minority of facts, which are not provably authoritative, are also authoritative.

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[744] Tuchman, *Making News*, 90.

[745] *Ibid.*, 82.

[746] Again, a reminder that a 'fact' has nothing to do with whether the reference is correct or not. Facts can still, as Heyne argues, be split into 'good facts' and 'bad facts'.

Facticity also creates other opportunities for authority claims, often by providing strategies that counteract potential reactions to a text on behalf of its reader. For example, by knitting together different sources – such as "quotations of other people's opinions" – one can create a "web of mutually self-validating facts" with which a text's producer "may achieve [authorial] distance from the story by getting others to express desired opinions".[747] The text may thus make an authority claim by way of narrative neutrality.

Of course, a text that exhibits facticity is not necessarily authoritative. To re-cap: although a non-fact is by definition unable to be authoritative in itself, it does not follow that a fact is necessarily authoritative in itself. (In other words, the authority-status of a fact depends on the nature of the fact's reference.) But by building a web of authoritative facts – by using facts that have authoritative reference, or are from sources with "proven reliability" or "met through institutionalised beats",[748] or have been seen to be corroborated or otherwise validated – around a non-fact, one can make the non-fact *seem* like a fact, or, at the very least, prevent the non-fact's unauthoritative nature from ruining a narrative's veneer of authority. This making a non-fact seem fact-like is important, for as Tuchman argues, "the professional assumption [is] that facts are mutually self-validating", and "the more facts one has access to, the better one's chances of knowing what is going on".[749]

Just as facticity is not restricted to the news cycle, it is not guaranteed to be found in any specific kind of text, including those, such as narrative non-fiction, which may use newswork strategies. As Kristiane Larssen and Harald Hornmoen argue, in the case of narrative non-fiction – much of which takes place outside of institutionalised newswork environments –

[747] Tuchman, *Making News*, 95.

[748] *Ibid.,* 90.

[749] *Ibid.,* 93.

"hard-and-fast professional norms may not be appropriate" for every producer to employ.[750]

Facticity may thus be found in any text whose producer might lack (or feel they might lack) credentials or reliability with regard to its subject matter, yet still aims to be authoritative with regard to it. Additionally, it is a means by which producers of texts can create, demonstrate and enforce the rules and epistemology by which their text operates. In fiction,[751] using

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[750] Kristiane Larssen and Harald Hornmoen, "The Literary Journalist as Fellow Human Being", *Literary Journalism Studies*, 5, 1 (2013), 94.

[751] It is worth digressing here to discuss how facticity can function within fictional texts. As discussed in Chapter 5, the concept of factuality (as it functions separately from fictionality and authority) only concerns whether truth-claims in a text, regardless of the text's fictional status, have reference in the world outside of the text. Facticity, as a component of authority, works differently to factuality. A fictional narrative, regardless of whether it has reference to the world outside of the text (or in other words, whether it is factual or not), may use facticity to build webs of non-facts *that act as facts within the world the text constructs*. In other words, fictional narratives may use facticity to make the fictional world of the text seem *factual within itself*, even when that world operates by non-facts.

Facticity may thus be seen as a function of authoritative world-construction within such a text. Earlier, also in Chapter 5, we briefly discussed Doležel's argument about the truth-status of the "fictional ersatz-sentence": in sum, a narrative that constructs and takes place within a fictional world may be seen as authoritative (or "true") by the reader "if it expresses […] a state of affairs existing in the fictional world of the text" ("Truth and Authenticity", 9.) This seems like an obvious point: for a narrative world to be seen as believable or authoritatively-constructed by the reader, the rules and epistemology of that world must be shown and seen to be logical or consistent, either by the standards of the world outside of the text, or sufficiently explained within the fictional world to account for any deviation from 'real-world' logic. For example, a character who lives in one area of a fictional world cannot suddenly be shown to be living in a different point of that world without explanation. Likewise, a dead character may not suddenly come back to life without explanation of their resurrection by the logic of the fictional world. And certainly, a protagonist in a realist novel may not suddenly cast a magical spell at the narrative's denouement without sufficient narrative-world explanation, lest the reader's value judgement of the narrative risk turning negative. Fictional narratives are thus subject to the existence of what Doležel calls "narrative facts" – claims that can be seen "as participating in the formation of the narrative world", but are "beyond the scope of truth values" (*Ibid.* 14.) (In other words, narrative facts are functional as facts within the world of the text, but might not actually be facts in the world outside of the text.)

facticity – through expository passages or otherwise – is necessary in the construction of a world in which a fictional text may operate and be seen to be authoritative on its themes or subjects, even when it is constructed in part by non-facts. Similarly in non-fiction, facticity can construct a version of the world outside of the text that is epistemically unique to that text, whose visibly and demonstrably established rules will guide the reader in their interpretation of that text.

CASE STUDY 7

Facticity in Jacob Dlamini's *Askari*

We shall see how world-construction through facticity practically works with an examination of Jacob Dlamini's second narrative non-fiction text, *Askari: A Story of Collaboration and Betrayal in the Anti-Apartheid Struggle*,[752] which can make very few traditional claims to authority.

Broadly, *Askari* is an attempt by Dlamini to address a "need to think critically about collaboration and complicity in South African history",[753] by way of profiling a notorious apartheid collaborator, Glory Lefoshie Sedibe, also known as 'Mr X1'. The text details "his conversion from freedom fighter to apartheid agent", and his subsequent "career" as a turncoat.[754] Sedibe – whose birth- and death-dates span almost the entirety of formal apartheid – was a significant anti-apartheid figure: he joined the ANC in his mid-20s; went under "special intelligence training" in East Germany; and was subsequently appointed the head of Military Intelligence for the then-Transvaal operation of the ANC's armed wing, uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK).[755] In August 1986, at the age of 33, Sedibe was captured from hiding in Swaziland by an apartheid 'death squad', in an operation disguised as an MK jailbreak. He was then tortured at the squad's base at Vlakplaas until he gave up information about his MK comrades and various operations.

However, after this episode, and seemingly of his own volition, Sedibe then continued to collaborate with apartheid forces "with apparent

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[752] Dlamini, *Askari*.

[753] *Ibid.,* 8.

[754] *Ibid.,* 1.

[755] *Ibid.,* 20.

relish",[756] becoming a witness for the state, and operating as one of many "askaris"[757] in a violent, state-ratified anti-insurgency programme. Sedibe "helped hunt down and kill people pursuing the beliefs he claimed to believe in himself"; "How do we explain that?" Dlamini asks.[758]

At the time of his death in 1994, Sedibe had been a member of the ANC for nine years, then an employee of the apartheid Security Branch and Military Intelligence for "almost eight years".[759] This symmetry of resistance and counter-resistance complicates any potential profile of Sedibe; as such, *Askari* is laden with textual caveats about its own reliability, possibly giving the reader the impression that *Askari* is a text that might have been best not written. As we have discussed, non-fiction narratives operate on "an actual body or bodies," and this introduces a number of moral considerations above and beyond considerations of textual authority.[760]

That said, Dlamini likes to work in contested terrain. His first book-length text, *Native Nostalgia*,[761] elicited both critical acclaim and disdain with its attempts to "understand the question of what it means for a black South African to remember his life under apartheid with fondness."[762] That premise alone brought out condemnatory statements from certain black intellectuals and critics. Eric Miyeni – who we will remember from Chapter 7 for his wholehearted criticism of *Diepsloot* despite never having read the book – assumed *Native Nostalgia* would depict township

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[756] *Ibid.,* 151-152.

[757] Swahili for "police" (*Ibid.,* 36); now colloquially used in South Africa to mean "traitor" (*Ibid.,* 40).

[758] *Ibid.,* 151-152.

[759] *Ibid.,* 31.

[760] Lehman, *Fact,* 9.

[761] Dlamini, *Native Nostalgia*.

[762] *Ibid.,* 2. This included asking a number of extremely contentious questions, including, "What does it mean to say that black life under apartheid was not all doom and gloom and that there was a lot of which black South Africans could be, and indeed were, proud?" (*Ibid.*)

childhoods as "fun", an idea "so sickening" that Miyeni also "decided never to read it" either[763].[764] Eusebius McKaiser was more measured in his criticism, arguing that *Native Nostalgia* fails because it "never quite arrive[s] at an actual answer" for its main line of inquiry.[765] But – despite its shortcomings and its unfortunate tendency to invite "lazy" accusations "that the writer wishes apartheid had never ended" – McKaiser still praises the book's complexity: in its argument "that not all aspects of life in townships were hell, *Native Nostalgia* humanises township residents".[766] This, as Dlamini states plainly at *Native Nostalgia*'s outset, is what he wanted: to create

> a modest contribution to ongoing attempts to rescue South African history and the telling of it from […] the distorting master narrative of black dispossession that dominates the historiography of the struggle, [which] would have us believe that black South Africans, who populate struggle jargon mostly as faceless "masses of our people", experienced apartheid the same way and fought the same way against apartheid.[767]

Native Nostalgia's impulse to complicate the narratives that "[blind] us to a richness [and] complexity of life among black South Africans",[768] is the

[763] Miyeni, "Defining Blacks".

[764] Thus also making Miyeni possibly the only book reviewer in South African journalism to be paid to review books without opening them. For his part, Andile Mngxitama called *Native Nostalgia* an "insult of a book" in a Twitter post on 4 November 2014. (Talk about pre-empting the reader.)

[765] Eusebius McKaiser, "Remembering apartheid with fondness", *PoliticsWeb*, 29 November 2009.

[766] *Ibid.*

[767] Dlamini, *Native Nostalgia*, 18.

[768] *Ibid.,* 19.

same that drives *Askari*. But instead of an attempt to 'rescue' history from an overarching post-apartheid master narrative, *Askari* attempts to destabilise a specific part of that narrative, namely "the 'political understanding' of apartheid that [black people] assume bound us together".[769] For most, Dlamini argues, "the face of apartheid" – constituting the people who implemented quotidian apartheid, from policemen to clerks – was usually black itself.[770] But considering the whole spectrum of collaboration – from the level of schoolteachers forced to teach the curricula of Bantu education, up to those, like Sedibe, who actively turned against the anti-apartheid movement – upset "our beliefs about who we are",[771] revealing that social and political conflict in South Africa "has always been a racially promiscuous affair".[772]

Like *Native Nostalgia*, *Askari* attempts to counter a master narrative with a contradictory biographical narrative, one that eventually expands into an exploration and problematisation of various subjects of social import. In *Native Nostalgia*, Dlamini chose himself and the residents of his hometown as a biographical starting point; in *Askari*, he chooses Sedibe.

This decision had deep consequences for the potential reliability of Dlamini's text, most of which stem from the admissions that "the story" of Sedibe's life "does not have a reliable narrator".[773] Firstly, not only had Sedibe been dead for more than two decades at the time of *Askari*'s composition, Dlamini also admits that his subject "told so many lies" in his public and private utterances "that he cannot be trusted."[774] To make matters worse, the primary materials on which *Askari* "relies [cannot] be

[769] Dlamini, *Askari*, 12.

[770] *Ibid.*

[771] *Ibid.*

[772] *Ibid., 9.*

[773] Dlamini, *Askari*, 2.

[774] *Ibid.,* 2.

trusted",[775] either because they were created by irreconcilable sources (such as the intelligence services of both apartheid and anti-apartheid forces) or they are based on the testimony of people rendered unreliable by fear or sycophancy, including "individuals from both sides of the political divide who knew and worked with [Sedibe]."[776] "Equally suspect" to Dlamini are "many of the books and newspaper articles" about his human subject, which, despite being written by notable "activists, scholars and reporters", all contain "factual inaccuracies" that "call into question their worth".[777] Most profoundly, however, Dlamini states that even he cannot be trusted as a narrator:[778] not just because he "was not 'there'", but also because he believes he has not "achieved the balance between explaining and understanding that these events require" to be shaped into a trustworthy narrative.[779] All Dlamini has – by his own admission – is "a skeleton of facts": all he can do is "to flesh it out" by drawing "on many lives".[780]

These caveats are significant in the context of this book: for Dlamini, facts in themselves do not have worth; it is only good facts that may have authority or be 'trusted'. It is thus imperative for him to define the value of facts and use them in relation to each other – as a framework or 'skeleton' – to construct an authoritative portrait of a seemingly un-portrayable man, and an authoritative text on a highly-contested subject. To do this, Dlamini is seen to gather as much information about his subject as possible; showing the research epistemology and rules by which the world of the text operates;

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[775] *Ibid.*

[776] *Ibid.,* 3-4.

[777] *Ibid.*, 4.

[778] *Ibid.*, 2.

[779] Frustratingly, Dlamini does not hint at what "the balance between explaining and understanding" required to be a reliable narrator might entail, but one assumes from the caveats loaded into *Askari*'s introduction that that balance is predicated in part on being able to rely on contemporary sources.

[780] *Ibid.*, 17.

interrogating the authority of individual claims and facts; being seen to discard unauthoritative facts; and connecting authoritative facts with narratively-necessary non-facts. He thus creates a web – or, given the amount of different kinds of sources used in the text, *webs* – of facticity around his subject, who, in the relative absence of unimpeachable facts about him, becomes a carapace that holds all of the different strands and crossbeams of the text together. Despite the text's protestations about not being able to be trusted, this construction of facticity creates opportunities for the text to be viewed as potentially authoritative about certain aspects of Sedibe's life, his collaboration, and collaboration more generally. Taking the text's illocutionary function into account, this is all that is needed for the text to be successful: Dlamini does not hope to erase the master narrative, only to "rescue" a part of South African history from it.

The web of facticity that Dlamini employs is best exhibited paratexually by the scale – self-described as "extensive"[781] – of information-gathering and referencing work seen to be done in the text. Much like Harber in *Diepsloot*, Dlamini anchors his narrative with a wide and critical review of the literature previously written about his subjects. Dlamini reviews these sources for a different reason to Harber, however: instead of pointing out their flaws in order to ostensibly make his narrative seem superior by comparison, Dlamini uses the inconsistencies and untrustworthiness of sources to emphasise the void of authoritative facts that surrounds his subject. Close attention to the reference list shows that Dlamini includes reviews of certain individual references: he expands on points raised in certain texts; identifies "borrowings" of ideas and notions;[782] points readers to where information might be "requested"[783] or otherwise physically

[781] *Ibid*., 2.

[782] *Ibid*., 261, footnote 7.

[783] *Ibid*., 272, footnote 84.

accessed through public institutions;[784] refers the reader to texts for further reading;[785] and even corrects errors of fact in other texts, such as the incorrect reporting of Sedibe's date of death in Elias Masilela's *47 Trelawney Park*.[786]

In all, there are 34 pages of references in *Askari*'s first printed South African edition, constituted by 967 footnotes that appear throughout the text,[787] which the reader is free to (and encouraged to) corroborate. Dlamini references dozens of sources, many of which were found by his research assistants in various archives,[788] consisting of various media and provenances, including: personal interviews; novels, including Patrick Flanery's *Absolution*, itself a text about betrayal;[789] essays; letters in library collections;[790] film reels;[791] public trials;[792] testimonies from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), as well as the TRC's final reports;[793] personal letters between human subjects;[794] "confidential sources", including "a Vlakplaas document [that] lists the askaris' pager numbers"[795] as well as other (unidentified) documents;[796] declassified portions of Sedibe's

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[784] Even if these footnotes are not specific enough to assist the corroborating reader: for example a claim is referenced as being contained within the ANC's second submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Committee and that that document may be found at "www.anc.org.za" – not exactly a helpful pointer.

[785] Dlamini, *Askari*, 261, footnote 13.

[786] *Ibid*., 261, footnote 14.

[787] More footnotes than appear in this book.

[788] Dlamini, *Askari*, 298.

[789] *Ibid*., 263, footnote 58.

[790] *Ibid*., 265, footnote 39.

[791] *Ibid*., 264, footnote 21.

[792] *Ibid*., 265, footnote 1.

[793] *Ibid*., 266, footnotes 15 and 17.

[794] *Ibid*., 266, footnote 10.

[795] *Ibid*., 267, footnote 47. He does not mention how he acquired this document.

[796] *Ibid*., 273, footnote 37.

Directorate of Security Legislation file;[797] Sedibe's security police file;[798] excerpts from the Parliamentary archives of the apartheid government;[799] and seminars that Dlamini may or may not have attended.[800] Even though such an esoteric range of reference will contain sources of wildly differing authorities, the scale of such research invokes the mutual self-validation that is the hallmark of a collection of related facts.[801]

This mutual self-validation comes through most strongly in Dlamini's use of various sources to situate apartheid collaboration within a global context, with the aim of attempting to solve the intratextual "dispute" over why Sedibe chose, after his initial betrayal, to become a career collaborator.[802] In one chapter alone, Dlamini references by name fifteen collaborators with stories similar to Sedibe's, along with other examples of historical collaboration, from Guatemala, Argentina, French colonies, British colonies, East Germany and so on.[803] Through this linking of stories, Dlamini hopes that some things about South African collaboration and Sedibe's motivation can be gleaned from contemporary, already-analysed cases; that by considering "the reports of others who underwent similar experiences", one can "imagine what Sedibe went through".[804] With regard to Sedibe's torture by the South African Police, for example, Dlamini can point readers to the fact that "SAP had extensive knowledge of torture, drawn from […] the Argentine military junta [and] the French army",[805] thus underpinning the web of stories with real-world exchanges of

[797] *Ibid*., 272, footnote 84.

[798] *Ibid*., 283, footnote 85. This is another unexplained "confidential source".

[799] *Ibid*., 282, footnote 41.

[800] *Ibid*., 284, footnote 99. This includes one given by Jonny Steinberg at the University of Barcelona in 2012 on some "insightful and excellent", presumably then-unfinished, work.

[801] Tuchman, *Making News*, 88.

[802] Dlamini, *Askari*, 98.

[803] *Ibid*., 99.

[804] *Ibid*., 75.

[805] *Ibid*., 74.

information, creating webs of context, action, and reference. Most crucially, by being shown to broadly understand the phenomenon of collaboration as it has manifested in other contexts – and by building a web of facts shared between these manifestations – Dlamini opens the possibility that he would also be able to understand collaboration in his home context, and interpret Sedibe's collaboration by referencing the decisions of other collaborators.

The creation of this possibility is crucial, as *Askari* is – and this is unsurprising, given the amount of references in the text – almost completely predicated by and reliant on its sources. Dlamini shows himself not to be interested in doing much original reporting on the subject – other than interviewing human subjects in order to flesh out his 'skeleton of facts'. At one point, Dlamini accounts how an askari offered to take him to "a border area to show [him] where she would ferry insurgents across", but "never take[s] her up" on it.[806] As a reporter, this is a significant and puzzling omission, and an admission that is potentially damaging to Dlamini's authority. This refusal to travel to the borderland, however, can also be read as an attempt by Dlamini to establish himself as a narrator who is more reliant on established sources and not his own description; to act pre-emptively against accusations of bias or faults in perspective by working, in his words, "without assuming a position of innocence or objectivity, whatever that may be."[807] Just as importantly, it foregrounds Dlamini's interrogations of the value of the information about apartheid collaboration that already exists – he states outright that "there is nothing new about the history presented"[808] in his text – and thus "demonstrate", in words borrowed from the Hungarian scholar Istvan Rev, "the inherently uncertain character of any representation of the past".[809]

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[806] *Ibid*., 40.

[807] *Ibid*., 5.

[808] *Ibid*., 255.

[809] *Ibid*., 5.

Like Dlamini's work, "the work of askaris was driven by information",[810] with the value of the work reliant on the value of the information. This brings us to the next way in which Dlamini constructs facticity: by being shown to interrogate the authority status of the facts and sources he uses. Throughout the text, Dlamini is seen to obsess over the original illocutionary functions of his source texts. Drawing chiefly on the practice of Hugh Trevor-Roper, Dlamini shows himself to ask three questions of any source – "Is it genuine?", "Did someone knowledgeable write it?", and "Why does it exist?"[811] – to determine which sources might be "innocent",[812] have "narrative clarity",[813] or otherwise contain signals of narrative reliability (or unreliability). Dlamini argues, for example, that Sedibe's 152-page security police file was "intended […] for internal use, making it unlikely they would have stuffed it with inaccuracies",[814] while other files are described as being "salvaged" by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, thus also subtly marking them as holding privileged information.[815]

Dlamini's approach to his human sources is similar. As the text's scope widens – from focusing solely on 'known' facts about Sedibe, to exploring "beyond the contents of his file"[816] – Dlamini becomes more present in the narrative, being seen to interview askaris and actively analysing their stories against archival record. Much as Steinberg does in *A Man of Good Hope*, Dlamini is shown to test the reliability of human subjects, such as

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[810] *Ibid*., 47.

[811] This can also be taken as an authority-claim by way of Dlamini professionally credentialing himself as a historian. This cannot stand for an authority claim on behalf of the narrative itself, but does help Dlamini position himself as a person capable of producing an authoritative narrative on the subject, having established what would be considered an authoritative narrative on the subject earlier in the text, through caveating and rhetorical genuflection.

[812] Dlamini, *Askari.*, 217.

[813] *Ibid*., 177.

[814] Dlamini, *Askari*, 116.

[815] *Ibid*., 6.

[816] *Ibid*., 130.

Goodman Twala, one of the few askaris who had not "refused" a request for an interview for extra information on askaridom.[817] Dlamini is seen to test Twala's reliability by asking him in which trials he had been used as a collaborator by the state; when Twala acts in a "less than candid" way toward Dlamini, he is seen to discard Twala's contemporary utterances in favour of transcripts of his court appearances.[818]

Dlamini thus demonstrates which sources and references are authoritative – or authoritative to certain ends. By establishing 'good facts' from demonstrably or arguably authoritative sources, Dlamini avoids simply presenting the reader with as much information as possible on Sedibe and collaboration and forcing the reader to corroborate everything. More importantly, in creating webs of good fact around his subject – whose public utterances are demonstrably shown to be unreliable – Dlamini employs facticity to present his version and analysis of events and the phenomenon of collaboration, even while he simultaneously denies that his narrative is attempting to be definitive (or "the last word on Mr X1".[819]) Similar to the ways in which newsmakers "may achieve [authorial] distance from the story by getting others to express desired opinions",[820] Dlamini instead gets his sources to express desired opinions or analysis by elevating them above other sources, by means of giving certain values to some sources, and labelling others as valueless. Far from being overwhelmed by

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[817] *Ibid*., 205.

[818] *Ibid*., 209. Not that these transcripts can be understood as 'innocent', either. Indeed, we are shown that the transcripts of askari state witnesses were often "scripted": in Dlamini's analysis of Sedibe's court appearances as Mr X1, Dlamini recounts how Sedibe gave a false, rehearsed account "of how he changed from an insurgent to a counterinsurgent" that does not say "a word" about his abduction and torture, an episode which was proven in other sources (*Ibid.,* 171-173). This, in Sedibe's case, renders unauthoritative his other public utterances about his (state-directed) "story of disillusionment, defection and conversion" (*Ibid*., 178).

[819] *Ibid*., 17.

[820] *Ibid*., 95.

the lack of authoritative information about his subject, Dlamini is empowered by the vacuum.[821]

This empowerment becomes most visible in the few passages of *Askari* in which Dlamini uses a descriptive mode, one into which he enters only if emboldened by authoritative sources. At the text's outset, for instance, Dlamini seeks to dispel the mystery brought about by his question-, supposition- and caveat-laden introduction by establishing some of the barest of facts about Sedibe. This includes Sedibe's "family background", which, Dlamini argues, "is key to understanding Sedibe and the enormous moral, political and geographic distances he covered in his journey from schoolboy to revolutionary to heretic".[822] This passage is emblematic:

> Mr X1 was Glory Lefoshie Sedibe. He was born on 16 May 1953 in the historic gold-mining town of Pilgrim's Rest in what was then the Eastern Transvaal. Sedibe's parents were Ephraim Sedibe, a schoolteacher-turned-mining company clerk, and Lillian Mmaoedi Sedibe, a housewife. Sedibe was the second son and third-born of Ephraim and Lillian's nine children. The parents had a fondness for the letter G: they gave each one of their children a name beginning with this letter, starting with Georgina (born in 1947) and ending with Gift (born in 1971).[823]

[821] Sometimes deliciously so. Dlamini recounts at one point that, during his research, "I established the real identities of X2, X3 and X4" – people who were also anonymous collaborators used as state witnesses – and that he even met one of them, X2, "for a chat", without X2 "know[ing] that I knew he had been Mr X2" (*Ibid*., 96). A great piece of dramatic irony it itself; but, in then deciding to "keep my knowledge to myself", Dlamini also makes an appeal to authority by way of invoking omniscience on the subject of collaboration (*Ibid*.)

[822] *Ibid*., 20.

[823] *Ibid*., 19.

Note here the lack of visible reference: one must dig in later footnotes to discover that this information has been gleaned from a personal interview with Sedibe's father.[824] Note also the use of the simple past tense in this recollection of fact; the repetition of "was" and "were", especially, which are used to cement narrative fact. Even in the analysis of children's names, Dlamini is exact, leaving out conditional tense and supposition; the parents did not *seem* to have a fondness for the letter G, they *had* it. The entirety of the biographical portions of *Askari*'s first chapter is written in this style, setting up the most minimal web of facts – the simplest of skeletons – from which he may begin to work.

Later in the text, however, Dlamini uses the same style to override narratives that contest his own, as well as to dramatise events he did not witness, and had to have been pieced together from a patchwork of sources. This manifestation of facticity is often (but not always) marked in the text by Dlamini's use of the royal 'we', which conflates the narrator with the implied reader. The 'we' pronoun is sometimes used when Dlamini attempts to impose the epistemology of facticity on the reader: for instance, when he argues that "we can reconstruct Sedibe's life […] from several sources",[825] or that "we can consider the reports of others who underwent similar experiences" in order "to imagine what Sedibe went through."[826] More importantly, though, it also signals moments of dramatisation enabled by their basis on ostensibly 'good' facts: "We know Sedibe was still a detainee because [his handler] bought [his] daughter a tricycle [while he] was being interrogated";[827] "we picture the 24-year-old Sedibe, paperless and stateless, jumping over the border fence to begin his military training";[828] and so on. This rather unsubtle tactic attempts to conflate the

[824] *Ibid*., 263, footnote 2.

[825] *Ibid*., 28.

[826] *Ibid*., 75.

[827] *Ibid*., 84.

[828] *Ibid*., 137.

reader's epistemology with that which has been established by the text: after all, "Sedibe is not here to answer our questions" and "in his absence, *we* are left to wonder."[829]

Elsewhere, facticity operates in subtler ways. In some other passages of dramatisation, Dlamini's web (or webs) of facticity bring together non-facts to form a coherent and ostensibly authoritative narrative passage. For example, *Askari*'s third chapter provides a history of Vlakplaas and apartheid death squads, in tandem with a portrayal of Sedibe's abduction and transfer to the farm. The dramatisation – or what Dlamini calls a "reconstruction"[830] – of Sedibe's experiences in this chapter, are similar in style to other factually-emboldened passages of narrative, such as the one quoted above. Take this excerpt:

> When Sedibe entered the stage – the farm – his face was bloody, his lips parched, and he had lacerations and abrasions on his body. He was also shell-shocked. […]
>
> Freek Pienaar, commander of the Security Branch in Piet Retief, had rented the nondescript farm for use as what he called a 'safe house'. It had a farmhouse and, about 30 metres away, a pump house that served as a detention cell. This contained an army-issue steel bed-frame. Sedibe, naked, was handcuffed to the bed-frame and put in leg irons. It was here that [Eugene] De Kock tortured Sedibe and later attended to his wounds.[831]

One can easily notice the stylistic similarities between this passage and the previous one, especially the use of simple past tense, which attempts to

[829] *Ibid*., 152. Emphasis added.

[830] *Ibid*., 67.

[831] *Ibid*., 72.

cement narrative fact. There is no speculation of intention. Images, such as that of the naked Sedibe, are presented without qualification. Measurements like 'about 30 metres away' – while not exact – are specific enough to seem authoritative. Dlamini's sourcing of this information is mostly absent in the third chapter's dramatisation, save for the description of Sedibe as specifically 'shell-shocked', which is inferred from an utterance by De Kock referenced later in that paragraph. In this chapter, reference is mostly kept at a distance, with sources indicated through footnotes, and the presence of human sources (such as De Kock, who Dlamini interviewed for this text) minimised.

Given the stylistic similarities between the two, one would assume that the authority statuses of the sources used in the second passage are as strong as the ones used in the first. They are not. As in the first excerpt, the sources for the dramatisation of Sedibe's abduction and torture may be found in the footnotes. Far from being an authoritative source, however, Dlamini bases his "reconstruction" on a web of facts from a pastiche of sources, namely:

> personal interviews with two of the participants, Almond Nofomela and Eugene de Kock [as well as] three primary sources: […] Nofomela's affidavit to the Harms Commission of Inquiry; the court records of the treason trial *State vs Maseko and two others*; […] and the record of a special three-day hearing by the TRC's Amnesty Committee into the abduction of [Sedibe] from Swaziland.[832]

[832] *Ibid*., 270, footnote 2.

This is an interesting conglomeration of sources, of wildly varying authority statuses.[833] How can this reconstruction be taken as authoritative as the other passage? Some of these are less-than-authoritative sources, and are visibly so elsewhere in the narrative; but, *in this instance*, because Dlamini has been seen by the reader to be able to interrogate the authority of facts in other parts of the text, to stylistically present unassailable facts in a certain way in other parts of the text, and to use webs of facts and sources to create insights into contested aspects of other subjects, this kind of reconstruction has the appearance of and – crucially – the function of fact in the context of the larger text. Most importantly, this passage also seems to carry the same authority of a narrative passage compiled from one authoritative reference.

Facticity works similarly, and more blatantly, in Dlamini's ability to "reconstruct Sedibe's life in Angola, his time in East Germany and in the Soviet Union from several sources", using another pastiche of reference, and using different timelines from both apartheid and anti-apartheid forces to plug holes in each other's timelines.[834] These webs of facts, moreover, form another part of a broader web of facts, which allows Dlamini to shift into analytical modes that also carry a vestige of authority: after all, one must know what happened in Sedibe's abduction and interrogation in order to analyse his subsequent defection. (Facticity thus is not just a means to create authoritative ends; it is also a means to create other means of creating authoritative ends.)

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[833] Elsewhere, for instance, Dlamini refers to De Kock as an "unreliable narrator" with regard to his other recollections (*Ibid.*, 177). Dlamini also shows, in the same chapter as the second passage, that "the most senior officer by rank involved in the abduction" had lied to the TRC Amnesty Committee about the use of violence in the "questioning" of Sedibe (*Ibid.*, 73). (To emphasise this lie, Dlamini again immediately shifts into his fact-establishing simple past tense tone: "But there was violence. Sedibe was assaulted" [*Ibid.*, 217]). Indeed, placed in many of these commissions and committees, it turned out that "men who had spent years making it their business to know everything about their enemies suddenly could not remember the most spectacular details of their operations" (*Ibid.*, 181).

[834] *Ibid.*, 28-30.

Ultimately, by employing facticity throughout the text, and by using webs of linked facts and sources as the visible epistemology by which analysis and exposition on the text's subject will occur, Dlamini pre-empts and even negates suggestions that any of his reconstructions are non-factual or unauthoritative. In this way, *Askari* is similar to *A Man of Good Hope*: in depicting his research and interrogation process in such detail, Dlamini at times substitutes the discourse of his creation of the text for the story of Sedibe's actual life and collaboration. The important distinction between the texts, however, is that Dlamini's substitution of discourse with story is enabled by the visible operation of facticity in his text; Steinberg's is predicated by the visual operation of memory.

Building webs of facticity also allows Dlamini to make educated – but non-factual – contentions: for example, against the idea that Sedibe's death was the result of an assassination. (Dlamini thinks it "possible" that his death resulted from alcohol poisoning, or something similar resulting from an established "drinking problem".[835]) Whether or not these suppositions are actually correct, however, is not important in the context of *Askari*. The very fact that these suppositions and reconstructions *could* be correct is evidence itself of the power of facticity in creating authority in a narrative in which non-facts abound and in which authority, by the text's own estimation, is not easy to come across.

Dlamini concludes his text by saying that, when it comes to collaboration, "many […] stories exist in a world of shadows that has yet to be explored" and there exist a multitude of "stories that continue to refuse to be told".[836] This, often, is the challenge of creating a text of narrative non-fiction: how does one tell a story that refuses to be told; that seemingly offers no authoritative ways of being told, despite the potential value that that telling might bring? Sedibe's story – in its subject's physical absence

[835] *Ibid*., 32-33.

[836] *Ibid*., 255.

and unreliability, and in the extreme contestation that exists around its most important parts – logically should also be one of those stories. But in the use of facticity – the gathering, interrogation and linking of many kinds of fact from many kinds of sources – Dlamini can give the illusion that the story has sufficient reference, not only to be told, but also to be told authoritatively. Dlamini thus, in this instance, finds a way to overcome narrative resistance. Thus, facticity can be viewed as a component of authority that does not promise incontestably authoritative narratives, but at least allows the injection of authority into a narrative that by technical rights should have little or none. This promises a way, again, to trace South Africa's scenes of difference; irreconcilable narratives that, as time goes on, will become more numerous – and, concomitantly, more important to explore.

CHAPTER 10

Some concluding remarks

In the conclusion to her book, *Settling the Borderland: Other Voices in Literary Journalism*, Jan Whitt opines that narrative non-fiction (or what she calls literary journalism) is seen to be too encumbered with subjectivity for people to take it seriously. The genre, she argues,

> alienates some readers and scholars because it relies upon personal point of view and because it employs techniques that many of them consider to be the particular province of literature.[837]

To which accusations I might advise Whitt to respond: Is narrative non-fiction not literature? And, if not, why not? There is not one good argument against the inclusion of narrative non-fiction in that too-subjective, too-nebulous ambit of 'literature'. Still, I understand the perception against which she is resisting: the persisting perception, outlined in this book's introduction, that narrative non-fiction is fundamentally different to other narrative texts – that there might actually be a justified "belief" in the so-called "higher truths of non-fiction"[838] and the Wolfean idea that the New Journalists and their predecessors and successors might "wipe out the novel as literature's main event".[839]

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[837] Whitt, *Settling the Borderland*, 159.

[838] *Ibid.*

[839] Tom Wolfe, "The feature game", in *The New Journalism*, ed. Tom Wolfe and E.W. Johnson (London: Pan Books, 1990), 22.

This might explain why narrative non-fiction is still an emerging field in literature studies, both in South Africa and in general: grandstanding is too often substituted for theorisation. What does a 'belief in a higher truth' mean? How can one define 'literature's main event'? There is an understandable reticence to theorise narrative non-fiction, because some texts seem too hybrid, or because other texts – like memoir – are allowed to operate by exceptional means. As I noted from the very beginning of this book, reviewers, commentators and academics are given to strange generalisations and confusions over terms, creating a study as individually subjective as the texts it attempts to study. This might seem like a good thing – a "new direction", as Wolfe put it, for literature and literary studies.[840] But such subjectivity, without some kind of basic understanding of the mechanics of narrative non-fiction, is arguably fatal to any attempt to grow its study.

The thing is: even Wolfe knew, among all his hyper-hyphenated eccentricity[841], that there were "specific devices" that underlie all of what he terms the "most powerful prose, whether fiction or non-fiction."[842] This book should be taken as a modest attempt to help contribute to the understanding of the devices that makes certain non-fiction narratives seem 'powerful' – or, as I would put it, authoritative – in a South African context.

As this book has hopefully shown, authority is probably the most important topic of inquiry with regard to South African non-fiction at the moment, as it is the phenomenon that enables the perception that narrative non-fiction is "South Africa's most dynamic, inventive literary genre" in the first place;[843] the phenomenon that, as I have argued in my previous work, provides a "fruitful means for delineating the contours" that South Africa's

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[840] *Ibid.,* 15.

[841] This, remember, is the man who started an article with the reported phrase, "Hai-ai-ai-ai-ai-ai-ai-ai-ai-ai-ai-ai-ai-aireeeeeeeeee!" (Tom Wolfe, "Like a novel", in *The New Journalism*, 30.)

[842] Tom Wolfe, preface to *The New Journalism*, 11.

[843] *Ibid*., 31.

"multiplicity of disconnected realities" run along – a function that most narrative non-fiction enthusiasts[844] argue is socially important or valuable.[845]

As I stated in my introduction, this book introduces a basic framework and a way of thinking about the operation of narrative – and one component of narrativity in particular. The relations between the three different operations of narrative – fictionality, factuality and authority – should, I hope, now be obvious to anyone who has taken the trouble to read this book. But this, I should add here, is not in a bid to strictly standardise all studies of narrative non-fiction, but rather to rationalise and to attempt to lessen the imaginary gap between studies of fiction and studies of non-fiction, by delineating exactly how I see narrative texts to function. In providing a three-layer framework for the reading of narrative texts – informed by a study into how fictionality works on the level of text, paratext and reader – I hope I have shown that all narrative texts are informed by certain concerns, which are not just common to all narrative texts; they are essential. As Steinberg and Dlamini's texts in particular show to an elevated degree, texts in general have to pre-empt the response of their implied reader, and this pre-emption is enhanced and made a moral issue in non-fiction texts, by virtue of their acting on actual people and events.

By predicating my study of authority in South African non-fiction texts on this framework, I hope I have provided a basic, yet strong theoretical basis – which may be modified by further study and criticism – for further, more rational studies of narrative non-fiction texts. Note that this study is not meant to be definitive or exhaustive, either on the nature of non-fiction, the vagaries of fact and epistemology, or even on authority in South African non-fiction. It is a starting point.

As such, perhaps I may end this book by suggesting ideas for further study. The richest of these might be a consideration of reader perceptions

[844] Myself included, obviously.

[845] Mulgrew, "Tracing the Seam", 25.

of fictionality, especially with regard to texts that, despite having been definitely labelled as either fiction or non-fiction by their producers, are nonetheless understood to be something different than their fictional status by their reader. (This can occur either by paratextual stripping (i.e. a text being presented without conventional paratextual information) or even by a misunderstanding or misreading on the reader's part.) In other words: how does a reader's *perception* of fictionality – as independent of the text's actual fictional status – potentially modify that reader's understanding of the text, as well as the operation of authority in that text? And, further, is there a way to foreground the reader with regard to fictionality in the same way in which the reader is foregrounded with regard to questions of factuality and authority?

Related to this inquiry, it would be interesting to examine the *specific* ways in which epitexts become peritexts, and whether these transformations are reader- or producer-driven. How do epitextual reviews or perceptions of a text – or full-blown paratextual failures, as we saw in *A Million Little Pieces*' case – *actually* end up becoming peritexts and, subsequently, modifying or transforming the paratext of a text as a whole?

There are many ways in which the theoretical basis of this book can be – and, I hope, will be – modified, deconstructed and complicated, much as there are various ways in which narrative non-fiction texts have modified, deconstructed and complicated the conventions of its own genre in this country over the past few decades. This is what is so exciting about narrative non-fiction studies, and what I hope I have shown throughout this book: that the excitement that so many readers encounter upon reading these texts can only be heightened by greater knowledge of how they can be seen to operate.

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ABOUT THE TEXTS USED IN THIS BOOK

This book draws upon a wide range of texts from what might loosely be termed the 'canons' of South African and United States narrative non-fiction. Due to the racist histories and literary industries of both countries, the compositions of these canons are skewed toward books written by authors holding hegemonic power in their respective societies; in both cases, predominantly male and/or white authors. The texts used in the case studies in this book reflect these demographics. I acknowledge that this is not ideal, both for myself and for my imagined reader of this text.

The purpose for me sticking to these non-representative bodies of texts is for two reasons. Firstly, as will become apparent, the epistemological disjuncts – which are the catalyst for most of this book's arguments – are heightened in texts in which bodies of hegemonic power transgress into physical or psychological terrain which is not theirs to travel into. Chapters 7, 8, and 9 should bear this fact out.

Secondly, these texts are used for accessibility's sake: these are the texts that are – for better or worse – the ones that are most easily accessible for the audiences by which this book is most likely to be read, and thus, the texts that are currently most easily accessible for study in tandem with this text. As this is meant to be a general study of authority in the *current*, demographically-skewed canon of South African narrative non-fiction, it is hoped that the main arguments and hypotheses of this book may be carried over and translated into other, more representative bodies of narrative non-fiction texts – both by other scholars and by myself – in further study.

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– N.M. Cape Town, 2016