Hospitality in Karel Schoeman's *Promised Land* and Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull*

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Summary

This essay places Karel Schoeman's representation of an ethically stunted and uncompromising Afrikaner community in his novel, *Promised Land* (1978) in counterpoint to Antjie Krog's efforts, in *Country of My Skull* (1999), to inaugurate a new ethics of representation in response to the demands and opportunities of the post-apartheid dispensation. We relate the two texts by reading them through the lens of Derrida's seminar on the ethics of hospitality. First, we discuss Krog's version of hospitality as an implicit response to the dynamics of moral myopia captured so vividly in Schoeman's dystopian portrait of Afrikanerdom. Second, we address the purported plagiarism in *Country of My Skull* in the context of the protocols for hosting the voice of the other in those works defined as "creative non-fiction". In our concluding discussion we shift our attention to the ethical implications of various practices of citation.

Opsomming

In hierdie essay word Karel Schoeman se uitbeelding van 'n etnies agtergeblewe en onversetlike Afrikanergemeenskap in sy roman *Promised Land* (1978) gekontrasteer met Antjie Krog se poging in *Country of My Skull* (1999) om 'n nuwe etiek van verteenwoordiging uit reaksie op die eise en geleenthede van die postapartheids-bedeling in te wy. Ons bring die twee tekste met mekaar in verband deur hulle te lees deur die lens van Derrida se seminaar oor die etiek van gasvryheid. Eerstens bespreek ons Krog se weergawe van gasvryheid as 'n implisiete respons op die dinamiek van morele bysiendheid wat so helder vasgevang word in Schoeman se distopiese portret van die Afrikanerdom. Tweedens ondersoek ons die beweerde plagiaat in *Country of My Skull* in die konteks van die protokolle waarvolgens daar uiting gegee word aan die stem van die ander in werke wat as "skeppende niefiksie" gedefinieer word. In ons slotbespreking verskuif ons die aandag na die etiese implikasies van verskillende sitaatpraktyke.

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1 "The Economy of the Circle" in Karel Schoeman's *Promised Land*

Karel Schoeman's *Na die geliefde land* (1972), translated by Marion V. Friedmann as *Promised Land* (1978),[1] tells of the return of an exile, George Neethling, to an imaginary post-revolutionary South Africa. At a practical level, his return is to put his parents' affairs in order following the death of his mother, Anna Neethling. In particular he intends to organise for the sale of the family farm, Rietvlei. The farm has figured centrally in his mother's nostalgic memories of her life in South Africa before "the troubles". At an emotional level, George is driven to confront the difference between a changed reality and his mother's memories, as well as to explore the combination of affiliation with, and alienation from, the country in which he was born and in terms of which his exilic situation is defined.

George's father served in the diplomatic service of the apartheid government. Their Swiss exile, which began when George was five years old, was facilitated by connections he had established abroad. The politically demoted Afrikaans community that remained in the country following "the troubles" is of a very different order from the privileged émigré circles in which George was raised. It is his discovery of the anachronism and paranoia of this claustrophobic community that *Promised Land* centrally concerns.

In the first scene of the novel, George, driving in a hired car from "town" towards Rietvlei, is stopped by a gun-wielding stranger.

> "Who are you?" the man called out.
> Blinded by the sudden light, George shielded his eyes with his hand. "I'm looking for the road to Rietvlei", he answered.
>
> There was no immediate response. Then, from where he was standing at the top of the steps leading to the house, the man moved forward a pace and the light of the torch he was gripping danced across the empty farmyard. "Who are you?" he asked again. "Where do you come from?"
>
> (Schoeman 1978: 1)

Desperately searching for "a password or proof of identity [that] would satisfy the suspicious old farmer" (p. 2), George recounts visiting his grandparents at Rietvlei when he was a child. His memory of the past, expressed

1. Michael Green argues that the sense of the Afrikaans title is lost in translation: "'*Promised Land*' reduces the richly ambiguous potential of the Afrikaans '*Na die geliefde land'*, in which 'na' is able to resonate with its twin sense of 'after' and 'towards'" (1997: 246). "*Promised Land*', though, does capture a longed-for Utopian future and the country from which one has always already been exiled (which is a nostalgic erasure of the realities of the present).

in halting Afrikaans – he is accused of speaking Afrikaans "like a foreigner" (p. 2) – satisfies Hattingh and he is invited to stay at their farm.

George's entry into the house is inauspicious. Hattingh announces George's credentials, consisting in his genealogy: "This is Anna Neethling's son .... She was the daughter of Oom George and Tant Lottie" (p. 3). Without this proof that he is one of them, we realise, he would not be welcome. Despite Hattingh verifying George's identity, his three khaki-clad sons remain suspicious; they stand "shoulder to shoulder as if offering resistance to his entry" (p. 3). This combination of hospitality and suspicion marks all of George's subsequent encounters. The same questions posed initially by Hattingh – "Who are you? Where do you come from?" – are asked, in turn, by each person he meets.

As George begins to discern the details of his surroundings, two things strike him. First, the worn clothes, the ill-lit room, and the fact that, as a guest, he is given "special plates with gold rims ... relics of an old, lost dinner service" (p. 5), all impress on him the "poverty-stricken appearance of everything" (p. 5). Second, the portraits of "national leaders and politicians whom he recognised from history books" (p. 5), Mrs Hattingh's obsession with the titles of those who once held positions of importance ("Senator Lindeman ... Professor van den Heever" (p. 11)), and the icons (pictures of ox-wagons, superseded flags and so on) all indicate a society that, unable to engage the present, relentlessly drives itself back into the past. "The whole system of reference had collapsed long ago, but still they clung to their titles and their old familiar framework, on the steep dark stairway of reality, as one might cling to a railing" (p. 12). Significantly, several of the families we encounter in the novel fled from the city to the platteland during "the troubles", seeking on the farms both protection ("we thought it safer to be on the farm" (p. 15)) and the symbolic sanctuary of an ancestral claim to the land ("It's family land, an inheritance from my great-grandfather" (p. 9)). Rather than an established farming community, they have sought refuge in remaking themselves in the image of their pastoral forebears.

Gradually, George comes to understand something of the political intrigue in the community. While they represent themselves as subject to arbitrary detentions, assaults and deaths in custody, they are in fact waging an insurgent war against the new government. George discovers that Rietvlei, which has been razed to the ground, was destroyed by the police after it had been used as a base for Afrikaner militia fighting against the government. Gerhard Snyman, a leader in the community and the armed resistance against the government, and two of Hattingh's sons, Hendrik and Johannes, are arrested at the novel's conclusion for their part in a military conspiracy.

By the time George returns to Switzerland, he is disillusioned by the actual and psychological violence of this narrow-minded cultural enclave. Prior to his departure, though, he attempts to convince Hattingh's daughter,

Carla, to accompany him. In a moment of rather unmotivated sentimentality, she embraces a future orientation, declaring that, unlike everyone else in her community, she refuses to be "trapped in memories" (p. 220), but wants to make a contribution to the world in which she lives. "I want to achieve something; I want to live ..." (p. 220). Carla, then, embodies hope for a future that is not utterly determined by an attachment to the past. Her imagination extends to a world that is neither static nor moribund.

Michael Green describes *Promised Land* as a dystopian "future history" based on "a simple act of reversal" (1997: 246) that sees the Afrikaner community subject to "the kind of oppression they once imposed on other groups" (p. 246). The new government, a "shadowy yet ubiquitous regime" (p. 247) that Schoeman refuses to name, is a mirror image of Afrikaner nationalism at its worst. This dystopian reversal of political and cultural fortunes (written in 1972) begs a range of questions. Are we meant to understand its prolepsis as cautionary? In other words, does it draw our attention to the potentially retributive consequences of Afrikaner nationalist oppression? Alternatively, as with many utopian or dystopian narratives, is the future projection in fact orientated to the "present", revealing in a hyperbolic form, the nostalgic and anachronistic dimensions of Afrikaner society at the time of the novel's composition?

Various critics have identified the novel as not only dystopian in general terms, but as a dystopian revision of the *plaasroman* in particular (see Wasserman 2000: 5; Coetzee 1996: 128; Pordzik 2001: 178). J.M. Coetzee characterises these Afrikaans novels of the 1930s as, among other things, literary responses to the waning fortunes of a community subjected to "the phenomenon of strife over inheritance (brother against brother, father against son, widow against children), conflict between farmers and land speculators, the hardening of class boundaries between the landed and the landless, the migration of impoverished rural Afrikaners to the cities ..." (1988: 82). The *plaasroman* can be understood at its origins as an ideological response to the social and economic decline of Afrikaner agrarianism under the dual impact of modernisation and the entrenched practices of inheritance which saw the subdivision of farms into economically unviable units. The genre arises, in other words, as a symbolic compensation, which we might understand as the fabrication of nostalgia for an ordered, hierarchical, agrarian world in which the community is inextricably tied to the land.[2] The rise of Afrikaner nationalism consolidates this pastoral

2. Ampie Coetzee (1996) and Herman Wasserman (2000) both argue that the genre of the *plaasroman* is best understood as a tradition of revision. In Coetzee's reading, the *plaasroman* represents a varied enquiry, a "quest for meaning" (p. 138), into the changing relation between land and identity during a time when the Afrikaner nation faced an irreconcilable tension between a symbolic (ideological) pastoralism and the emerging economic logic of a modern capitalist state. It is reductive, in his view, to read the

version of belonging, this Romantic schema, seeking to ossify its connotations in the symbolic language of the emerging nation.

Interestingly, *Promised Land* invokes the genre directly when Carla reads a section of a typical *plaasroman* to George and her lonely effeminate brother, Paul, in their secret loft retreat. Reminiscent of Lyndall, Em and Waldo's box of books in the attic in Olive Schreiner's *Story of an African Farm*, their reading opens a gateway to a world beyond the narrow confines of their context. The passage Carla reads begins:

> Drowsily the old farmhouse lay sheltering behind the kindly shadows of its trees in the heat of the summer noon. The family had withdrawn, after lunch, to the cool of their rooms, and the farm labourers, who had been busy watering the orchard and vegetable garden, had taken advantage of the opportunity to disappear silently, so that the yard lay deserted under the fierce rays of the midday sun ….
>
> (Schoeman 1978: 116)

As Carla reads this account of a rural idyll and the rather saccharine descriptions of the protagonist ("She was a lovely young girl, in the springtime of life ... and with her laughing red lips and dreamy blue eyes which could on occasion sparkle so provocatively ..." (p. 119)) she cannot resist an increasingly parodic tone. The world of this conventional, sentimental version of the *plaasroman* is so patently at odds with their lived reality that even evanescent escape into its logic proves impossible.

J.M. Coetzee points out that an important aspect of the *plaasroman* is a nostalgic celebration of "the memory of old rural values" (1988: 83). Based on the general ideology that the farm is an ancestral site in which the wilderness was subdued through a fortitude buttressed by a righteous Calvinism, these values celebrate loyalty to the community, obligation to the land, religious devotion, a robust and autonomous identity, an ethnically conceived patriotism and a sense of historical entitlement. In *Promised Land* these values are evident as clichéd moral precepts in the speech of characters. Much like the icons, portraits and titles integral to the community's nostalgic self-fashioning, these precepts seem to be relics of a

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genre as the uncomplicated expression of a limited range of ideological proclivities. Rather, one should read for the ways in which the novels construct or subvert an epistemological framework linking property, ownership and ontology. In a similar vein, Wasserman (2006) uses the postcolonial axiom of "writing back" to characterise the long tradition of literary responses to the novels of D. F. Malherbe, C. M. van den Heever, Jochem van Bruggen, Johannes van Melle, Mikro and Abraham Jonker. These responses, he argues, represent a history of "rewriting" ("herskrywing") that constitutes an ongoing investigation into the changing relationship between Afrikaans identity and the farm, and represent a significant barometer of the socio-historical development of Afrikanerdom (p. 4).

former social and ethical dispensation. We are concerned here with the community's attachment to "hospitality", a signifier that it elevates to a transcendental status and which, in their understanding, expresses an ethical axiom.

Soon after George's arrival, Hattingh declares: "We live simply, as I've told you, ... but that's because circumstances are difficult. We haven't forgotten how to be hospitable" (Schoeman 1978: 7). Later, in one of several attempts to get George to stay longer, he says: "There's after all still such a thing as hospitality …. There are still traditions which must be maintained" (p. 13). Throughout the novel, George is hosted in ways that, given the diminished resources of the community, are lavish. A sheep is slaughtered for the gathering at the Snyman's farm, Kommando Drift, the women have prepared their specialities and the men ply George with their best homemade brandy. We realise, though, that the hospitality of the community is contingent on George's historical affiliation and that it is linked to a range of expectations.

How might we conceive of this conditional hospitality? Derrida (*Of Hospitality* 2000) begins his account of hospitality by distinguishing an absolute, unconditional ethic from its prudential and particular manifestations. Proper hospitality ("The Law" (p. 79)) is a hyperbolic ethic in which an unconditional welcome is extended to the stranger, the *arrivant*. Derrida characterises the affirmation on which this ethic depends.

> Let us say yes *to who or what turns up*, before any determination, before any anticipation, before any *identification*, whether or not it has to do with a foreigner, an immigrant, an invited guest, or an unexpected visitor, whether or not the new arrival is the citizen of another country, a human, animal, or divine creature, a living or dead thing, male or female.
>
> (Derrida & Dufourmantelle 2000: 77)

This unlimited and unconditional welcome is captured by the Afrikaans word for hospitality, *gasvryheid*. Literally "the freedom of the guest", the word implies both that no restraints or limits are placed on the visitor, and that this freedom is unreservedly and unconditionally granted by the host. It is a gift given without the expectation of reciprocation; without, that is, instituting an economy that leaves the recipient, the *arrivant*, obliged to the host. This hyperbolic ethical injunction requires one "to give to the new arrival all of one's home and one's self, to give him or her one's own, our own, without asking a name, or compensation, or the fulfilment of even the smallest condition" (p. 77).

This "aneconomic" hospitality is, in Derrida's terms, aporetic. As with many key Derridean tropes, the aporia resists definition. It is conceptually affiliated to the paradox, but is (un)marked by the symmetries of the antinomy on which paradox depends; that is, "there is not yet or there is no longer a border to cross, no opposition between two sides: the limit is too

porous, permeable, and indeterminate" (*Aporias* 1993: 20). Let us consider the aporia of proper, hyperbolic, hospitality. To give unconditionally of oneself is to eliminate the distance that separates self from other. Identity formation, in its robust sense, depends on the inscription of borders around the self, which are subsequently policed in the interests of the subject's – existential and cultural – coherence and sustainability. The logic of hospitality turns on the existence of these borders: they are connate with the identity of the host, as well as with the definition of the other (the *arrivant*) who is the actual or potential recipient, across such a border, of the host's magnanimity. Were one (hypothetically) to conform to this (paradoxical) law of hospitality, the borders of identification, these circles around the self, would be erased, and along with them the identity of the host, defined in terms of her difference and distance from the guest. In other words, were one a perfect host, one would lose the power to host at all; if one's guest was absolutely free, he or she would not, by any definition, be a guest.

The second version of hospitality Derrida describes is economic, prudential and relative. Here hospitality is proscribed by "the laws" that govern social and political formations. These laws, which are historically specific and arise from particular political contingencies, anxieties and aspirations, are the limits and conditions of the hospitality extended or refused in any context. They represent, in their various manifestations, the host's efforts to exert control over the potential disruption, the excesses, which the *arrivant* potentially embodies.

This diminished, economic order of hospitality is also aporetic. In order to be hospitable, economic logic dictates, one has to retain something of one's own, something that encapsulates one's self in the world. But to close the circle around oneself in this way is to deny the very possibility of hospitality, for it implies that one eschews an unconditional welcome and, therefore, imposes limits on the freedom of the *arrivant*, the prospective guest. This conditional hospitality, in imposing limits, is a process of othering, of reasserting the distance between the host and the *arrivant*. It reiterates the very gesture of distancing the other, of difference, that it seems intent to counter. In the hyperbolic logic of The Law, this is not hospitality as all, but its pragmatic erasure in the interests of the self.

One cannot, of course, construct The Law and the laws of hospitality as alternatives. First, we cannot, Derrida argues, imagine The Law existing (in the world) without the laws. "In order to be what it is ... the law needs the laws, which, however, deny it, or at any rate threaten it, sometimes corrupt or pervert it. And must always be able to do this" (*Of Hospitality* 2000: 79). Deconstructive logic dictates that the seeming binary, the juxtaposition of the hyperbolic and the prudential, be collapsed; they comprise an indissociable pair whose very identity is constituted in their interpenetration. They are not alternatives in that they cannot exist independent of one another, nor, for this reason, can they be constructed as antinomical.

Secondly, if we consider that both the aneconomic and economic versions of hospitality are aporetic, we face, in attempting to devise an applied ethics of hospitality, an aporia of the aporia: not only is it impossible to enact either version of hospitality, it is also impossible to choose one over the other, for one is choosing between two paradoxes that lead us to the same point of impossibility.

Even our cursory consideration of Derrida's rumination on the aporetic nature of hospitality is incomplete without mentioning the links he asserts between hospitality and the "question of the foreigner". In the first of two seminars comprising *Of Hospitality*, "Foreigner Question: Coming from Abroad/from the Foreigner", Derrida presents a dense digression in relation to exactly this formulation, "the question of the foreigner".

> But before being a question to be dealt with, before designating a concept, a theme, a problem, a program, the question of the foreigner, addressed to the foreigner. As though the foreigner were first of all the one who puts the first question or the one to whom you address the first question. As though the foreigner were being-in-question, the very question of being-in-question, the question-being or being-in-question of the question. But also the one who, putting the first question, put me in question.
>
> (Derrida & Dufourmantelle 2000: 3)

The foreigner, or in other Derridean arguments "the figure of the stranger", places our being (that is, our social and political ontology) in question in that she reminds us of who, in the act of welcoming or ostracising her, we consider ourselves to be. She is the interrogative presence that, in a process of conjunction, relation or refusal, reveals us in the world and, in rare reflexive moments, to ourselves. Her arrival holds out the promise or threat of unsettling our complacency. Since she is our excluded other, she promises or threatens – depending on the measure of one's fear or hope – to challenge or reorientate our being-in-the-world.

This potential reorientation has implications for our knowledge of the world as much as for our sense of selfhood; it has, that is, in addition to an ontological dimension, epistemological implications. To exclude the foreigner (the stranger, the other) is to refuse to confront unsettling questions; it is to settle for an established range of meanings and the version of social, political and existential being to which they have already given rise. To settle in this way, to refuse to contend with the strange or foreign (and here we might like to distinguish between actual and seeming engagement with the other), is to resist the possibility of change. Further, if we are self-reflexive, the strange reveals us to ourselves in that it demonstrates what it is that we bring to bear on the world in the process of our cognition. To exclude the foreign, given the potential of this self-reflexivity, is to silence not only the stranger in the world, but also, to allude to the psycho-political work of Julia Kristeva (1991), the stranger within ourselves.

Derrida is well aware that relations with the foreigner depend on the practicalities of language and its translation. "Inviting, receiving, asylum, lodging go by way of the language of address to the other. As Levinas says from another point of view, language *is* hospitality" (2000: 135). The primary ethical obligation in relation to the foreigner is to make oneself understood and to strive to understand. This is because language is "not only a linguistic operation. It's a matter of *ethos* generally" (p. 133). Language is the medium through which being is extended in relation to the other.

Towards the end of the seminar, "Step of Hospitality/No Hospitality", Derrida returns to the aporia of hospitality and considers their implications for language. Following his restatement of the Levinasian perspective (that "language *is* hospitality"), Derrida hypothesises a hyperbolic ideal of the way in which one might *not* address the foreigner.

> [W]e have come to wonder whether absolute, hyperbolical, unconditional hospitality doesn't consist in suspending language, a particular determinate language, and even the address to the other. Shouldn't we also submit to a sort of holding back of the temptation to ask the other who he is, what her name is, where he comes from, etc.? Shouldn't we abstain from asking another these questions, which herald so many required conditions, and thus limits, to a hospitality thereby constrained and thereby confined into a law and a duty? And so into the economy of a circle?
>
> (Derrida & Dufourmantelle 2000: 135)

Interrogation ("Who are you?" "Where do you come from?") imposes limits on the freedom of the stranger. These limits arise in that questions imply a conditional welcome; who you are and where you are from *make* a difference. The moment this difference becomes evident in our dealings with the foreigner, we are inscribing, through and in our discourse, the circle that divides the self within from the other without, "us" from "them". On the other hand, an unconditional welcome – which, as we have seen, is aporetic – would not seek to establish, and thereby fix, the identity of the other, domesticating the threat or promise of her presence.

How might one relate Derrida's deconstructive logic to the representation of, and engagements with, hospitality in literary texts (like *Promised Land* in this section and *Country of My Skull* in the next)? This is far from simple. Given their interpenetration, one cannot seek to identify an unadulterated manifestation of aneconomic or economic versions of hospitality. The border between the hyperbolic and prudential is too "porous, permeable, and indeterminate" (*Aporias* 1993: 20) for the difference between them to function as an analytical distinction. Further, given that they are indissociable, one cannot advocate, or even choose, one over the other. What one might do, though, is read representations of hospitality as engaging (in different situations and cultural formations) those dynamics of the paradox traced by Derrida. That is, one might read texts and cultural histories as facing up to,

or evading, through one rhetorical turn or another, the aporia of hospitality. Such a reading would not deploy Derrida's texts as the basis of an interpretation but would make the text one is reading host Derridean terms.

"You [may] speak Afrikaans like a foreigner" (Schoeman 1978: 2) but "you're not a stranger" (p. 44). If any one thing defines the community in *Promised Land*, it is the glaringly conditional nature of their hospitality. Resolutely committed to "the economy of a circle", the community extends a welcome to George Neethling only because they can identify him as one of their own. His acceptance as a guest turns on their understanding that he is returning like a prodigal son; he is not a "foreigner" in any substantive sense, only, in their understanding, infected by foreign ways. The recuperation of George, both in the sense of regaining and recovering (as if from the illness of exile), sets out to erase his difference, his strangeness, and to neutralise any impact that his "otherness" might have on a community that militantly refuses to change. Hattingh's initial interrogation of George on the road to Rietvlei foreshadows the encircling of identity that characterises all subsequent interactions and events. Schoeman's vision of this declined and desperate manifestation of Afrikanerdom is based in their denial of relations with the other. They do not wish to be other than they are and so cannot bear to know things that are, even potentially, strange.

Another economic proscription of hospitality consists in the community's hope that George's presence will benefit them, either practically (in that he might organise military or political support for their rebellion) or symbolically (in that his presence implies that their struggle is legitimate in the eyes of the émigré Afrikaans community in particular and possibly their peculiar ideal of the white Christian West more generally). Their hospitality depends on the understanding, the hope, that they will earn some direct return.

We might conclude that *Promised Land* dramatises the aporetic logic of economic hospitality to satirical ends. The community's self-fashioning in terms of an old pastoral ethic of unconditional hospitality proves to be nothing other than a hyperbolic process of self-deception and hypocrisy. While the community constantly announces its own hospitality, its political narcissism, expressed in the entirely conditional and contingent welcome it extends to George Neethling, negates any possibility of a (proper) ethical gesture. As we have seen, in its dependence on limits, borders and boundaries, economical hospitality is always already aporetic. In the novel the aporia of economic hospitality takes on almost burlesque proportions; it becomes a distorted and grotesque version of itself, drawing the reader's attention to its historically monstrous manifestation in the dynamics of *verkrampte* Afrikaner sentimentality. It is this monstrosity, the obviously self-serving "hospitality" of the community that announces the ethical catastrophe consisting in its myopic refusal to host the other.

The aporia of an economic version of hospitality derives from the paradox that one cannot draw a circle around one's own (which is, as we have seen,

the necessary condition of hosting) and then claim to offer unconditional freedom to the guest. In Schoeman's ethical vision of a dystopian Afrikanerdom, the circle inscribed around the self is the *laager*.

2 Ubuntu in Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull*

F.W. de Klerk's momentous announcement of 2 February, 1990, which unbanned the African National Congress and the Pan African Congress, initiated a process of political liberalisation and reform that culminated in the ANC's electoral victory in April 1994, and the inauguration of Nelson Mandela as President in an authentically democratic South Africa. Elaborating aspects of the constitution on which this new order was founded, the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act (No. 34 of 1995) proposed the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). In addition to "the rehabilitation and the restoration of the human and civil dignity of victims of violations of human rights", the act advocates, through the mechanism of the TRC, "the pursuit of national unity" and the "reconstruction of society".

Historically, the TRC was considered to be one of the prerequisites for the realisation of a new society. It envisaged a process of bringing the perpetrators of apartheid crimes and injustices into an encounter (not a confrontation) with many of their victims, whose experience of suffering, persecution and oppression had been aggravated by an official refusal to acknowledge that such events were even occurring, and by an official determination to suppress any attempts to articulate them. Anger and despair were compounded by an enforced silence, which deprived the victims of even this demeaning status and identity. The Commission proceeded on the assumption that a process of official acknowledgement that these injustices had been perpetrated, simultaneously providing a number of victims with the opportunity to express the extent of their suffering and trauma, would create a cathartic process of mutual recognition, curtailing the desire for revenge and retribution, and creating the possibility for reconciliation and peaceful coexistence within a post-apartheid South Africa. Any act of collective forgiveness, with its concomitant commitment to peaceful coexistence, could only be effected if the historical reality of inflicted suffering was acknowledged by those who had perpetrated it – victims could move beyond this status once this public recognition had been accorded to them. The truth sought by the Commission was a collective assent that the apartheid era had been characterised by systematic injustice, whose consequences were ultimately immeasurable suffering, remorse about which, and forgiveness for which, would be a prerequisite for a reconciled future – a peaceful coexistence in a shared future would only be attainable if the collective memory of hatred, resentment and fear

(experienced by both the powerful and the impotent) could be alleviated (if not erased), and the politics of retribution could be superseded by a politics of mutual recognition and acknowledgement.

Country of My Skull is a layered text. Framed as a memoir of Antjie Krog's (née Samuels) experiences as a journalist covering the TRC for SABC Radio, it includes: her personal "testimony" (which dwells on her family's history and present circumstance; agonises over her complicity, as an Afrikaner, in apartheid; and details the emotional effects of witnessing the TRC process first-hand); a detailed narration of the beleaguered emergence and daily functioning of the TRC; verbatim testimonies of victims and perpetrators; narrative descriptions of apartheid atrocities and their aftermath; and, digressions enquiring into the nature of truth and the possibility of genuine reconciliation. Rather than reportage in any simple sense, the text has a postmodern inflection: it represents events, interprets them and then proceeds to cast doubt on both its practices of representation and interpretation. As if this is not complex enough, *Country of My Skull* resorts to fictional devices at various points: among others, Krog invents a rather torrid affair ("He devours my face" (Krog 1999: 250)) in order to dramatise her alienation from her family; she is accused by her fellow journalists of fictionalising an account of a workshop (to which she retorts "I am busy with the truth ... *my* truth" (p. 259)), and she develops composite characters like Prof. Kondlo who speaks with something resembling the generic voice of academia.

We are concerned here with the ways in which *Country of My Skull* addresses the "economy of the circle". First, we present Mark Sanders's (2000) characterisation of the text as staging a particular version of hospitality. Using his subsequent elaboration of the ethical precepts expressed by the notion of ubuntu in *Complicities: The Intellectual and Apartheid* (2002), we discuss Krog's version of hospitality as an implicit response to the dynamics of moral myopia captured so vividly in Schoeman's dystopian portrait of Afrikanerdom. Second, we address the purported plagiarism in *Country of My Skull* in the context of the protocols for hosting the voice of the other in those works defined as "creative non-fiction". In this discussion, which concludes our argument, we shift our attention to the ethical implications of various practices of citation, reading these in terms of the Derridean aporia of hospitality.

Mark Sanders (2000) suggests that *Country of my Skull* "can be read to supplement the account of truth in the Commission's report" (p. 16). Before we proceed, let us consider that account. In her analysis of the *Report*, Deborah Posel (2002) considers its enquiry into what it describes as "the problem of truth". Taking cognizance of a postmodern hermeneutics of suspicion, the report differentiates between "four notions of the truth: factual or forensic truth; personal or narrative truth; social or "dialogue" truth ... and healing and restorative truth" (Posel 2002: 154). Posel demon-

strates that, given the subsequent attempts at distinguishing these four varieties of truth in the report, this proves to be "a very wobbly and poorly constructed conceptual grid" (p. 155). Some of this conceptual fuzziness is evinced by the fact that, having introduced these central philosophical debates, the remainder of the report "proceeds to take a conventionally positivist stance on the source of its own authority as the official, objective version of the past" (p. 156). "If the impact of varying and competing subjectivities is felt in oral testimony (the realm of the hearings), the written text gives expression to an objectivity that is seemingly divested of subjective intrusions or contaminations" (p. 156). The authoritative historiography of the report uses the "discourse of factual, forensic truth" (p. 157) to the constitutive exclusion of contesting versions. A plurality of individual suffering, in other words, is reduced to an endorsed and sanctioned singularity, a grand narrative.

There were obvious reasons for striving for this clarity. Bonner and Nieftagodien (2002) argue that the mandate of the TRC emphasised "catharsis and expiation" above any other concerns. "All too often ... any deeper understanding of what happened was sacrificed at the altar of these other concerns" (p. 173). Simpson (2002) bears out the sense that the complexities of historical representation were compromised in the interests of the TRC's place in the negotiated settlement that marked the end of apartheid. "The Commission was largely defined by the fact that it was a statutory product of this delicate political process, and was implemented during a period of social transition, when the embryonic South African democracy appeared extremely vulnerable" (p. 226). The strategic version of recovering historical truth on which it settled – the factual and forensic – could be seen as one of these compromises.

Country of My Skull, which exploits the latitude we grant literary memoir or creative non-fiction, is less inclined to this compromise. Krog responds to an accusation by a fellow journalist that she is "not busy with the truth" (p. 259).

> I'm not reporting or keeping minutes. I'm telling .... I cut and paste the upper layer, in order to get the second layer told, which is actually the story I want to tell. I change some people's names when I think they might be annoyed or might not understand the distortions …. I am busy with the truth ... my truth. Of course, it's quilted together from hundreds of stories that we've experienced or heard about in the past two years. Seen from my perspective, shaped by my state of mind at the time and now also by the audience I'm telling my story too. In every story there is hearsay, there is a grouping together of things that didn't necessarily happen together, there are assumptions, there are exaggerations to bring home the enormities of situations, there is downplaying to confirm innocence. And all of this together makes up the whole country's truth.
>
> (Krog 1999: 259)

This implies that in *Country of My Skull* forensic truth is routinely subordinated to narrative truth, but that this narrative truth is both communally derived (it is "quilted together from hundreds of stories")[3] and orientated towards the need for reconciliation (what the *Report* calls "a healing and restorative truth"). Krog, in other words, casts herself as shamanic. She is a "wounded-healer"[4] able to narrate the history of the sickness afflicting the nation (South Africans' loss of humanity) and, through that narration, reach deep into the heart of the past ("the second layer") to guide us towards reconstituting the future. At one level this appears to be based on the rather strident claims of high-modernism; the author, possessed of clarified insight, is capable of tearing through the veil of the superficial to grasp a more fundamental truth about our existence. At another, it imitates the staging of the Commission as an immense writing machine able to rework the plurality of individual suffering into the coherent (that is, teleological) logic of revelation and reconciliation.

If truth *is* narrative and dialogic, as Krog claims, then the protocols of interaction (in particular, between self and other) become constitutive. Sanders explores the ways in which the Commission sought "to create conditions under which the formerly 'silenced' could speak and to help them do so" (2000: 22). Referring to Derrida's seminar, "Step of Hospitality/No Hospitality", the seminar we discussed in relation to *Promised Land*, he identifies these attempts – simultaneous translation, a facilitative language policy, counselling, the highly mediated dynamics of the hearings, the ceremonial staging of testimony, and so on – as gestures of hospitality. The Commission's "enactment of hospitality towards strangers, towards those who have been strangers in their own country and strangers to each other" (p. 31), was not only an effort to be a good host (to the excluded other), but also presented "the New South Africa" with a model of welcoming the stranger (the "one who dissembles ignorance" (p. 32)). In other words, the TRC was staged as an ethical and epistemological paradigm, founded on initiating and sustaining a relation between self and other that was intended to redress the past and direct the future. Not only would it provide us with occluded knowledge and so usher in a more complete history, but it would also teach us how to behave in the new dispensation. The Commission, Sanders implies, set out to displace apartheid's "economy

3. For a trenchant analysis of the ethics of the trope of quilting in Krog's text, see Ashleigh Harris's "Accountabilty, Acknowledgement and the Ethics of Quilting in Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull*".

4. This formulation is taken from the definitive work by Mercia Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (1964). Krog repeatedly stages herself as wounded by complicity in apartheid and cultural association with oppression.

of the circle" by affirming the indissoluble relation between black and white South Africans.

In Sanders's estimation, *Country of My Skull* "humbly mimes" (p. 33) the hospitality of the Commission. It welcomes a variety of voices without appropriating or subordinating them ("Krog's book makes itself host to testimony" (p. 14)); it goes to remarkable efforts to translate testimonies into English language narratives using appropriate diction and register (see, as the most obvious instance, the testimony of the shepherd from Ladybrand (pp. 320-327)); it refuses to write off even the most brutal perpetrators; and it is deeply aware of the need to identify the perpetrator within the self, rather than seeing the horror of apartheid as existing only in a demonised other.

Apart from hospitality in this general sense, Sanders characterises Krog's text as exploring the "conditions under which people can relate their stories" (p. 29). The coherence of testimony depends, he argues, on the existence of an interlocutor who is invested in the potential of listening. Sanders reads Krog's invented "relationship" in this light. He considers it "an 'allegory' for the hearings and what is enacted there between questioner and listener" (p. 29). The figure of the beloved is, in the model of reciprocity he identifies and defends, the one "for whom one's story will cohere" (p. 29). Krog's "beloved" in *Country of My Skull* is the interlocutor, the "you", for whom her testimony, despite its evident agonised fragmentation, is a coherent and cogent representation of her state of mind and the state of the nation. Metaphorically cast out of her home by the effect of the TRC hearings, she constructs a presence in the world that compensates for her alienation. In doing so, Sanders argues, "she plays out, at the intimate level of a relationship" the "I-you dyad, played out theatrically at the hearings" (p. 29). She is, in the terms we employed earlier, investigating the intersection of collaborative (dialogic) and narrative meaning; what it means, in other words, to respond to the ethical imperative "to be host to the word of the other" (p. 34).

In his recent work, *Complicities: The Intellectual and Apartheid* (2002), Sanders investigates the provenance of the notion of ubuntu that emerged as the key ethical injunction in post-apartheid discourse. He identifies a "major departure" in the work of Archibald Campbell Jordan gathered as the collection of essays, *Towards an African Literature: The Emergence of Literary Form in Xhosa* (1973). In one of the essays, Jordan presents a trenchant analysis of the journalism of Tiyo Soga[5] published in *Indaba*, a

5. Williams (1983: 1) catalogues Soga's importance in the South African historical imaginary: He was "the first [black] ordained minister; the first black missionary among Africans; the first black translator of an English classic into an African language; and the first to formulate a philosophy of Black consciousness and even negritude". His life, captured at the time in the narrative of imperial missionary romance as that of the "model Kaffir" (see de Kock's discussion (1996: 171) of Chalmers's biography, *Tiyo Soga: A*

"Xhosa-English newspaper issued by Lovedale" (de Kock 1996: 179). Jordan's characterisation of Soga's dilemma, which consists in the urgent political and existential need to elaborate a hybrid of Christian orthodoxy and Xhosa tradition, turns on the importance of ubuntu but not in the narrow theological sense in which it had hitherto been peddled. In Jordan's account of Soga's dilemma, Sanders suggests, ubuntu "expresses a relation to the stranger, to the one not one's own, to the one not of one's own, to the one who has come to be treated as one not one's own" (2002: 125). Hospitality is necessary in this relation because commonality has already been denied; ubuntu is known primarily in and through its loss, as an acknowledgement of a complicity (in the "extra-moral sense" defined by Sanders) that has been and is being denied. Inasmuch as ubuntu might be considered a general ethical imperative (an ethics of responsibility) it is also an "ethics of human reciprocity that shows there is no ethics that is not also against apartheid" (p. 125). "To identify a loss of ubuntu is thus to identify the evil, the untruth even, of apartheid in all its forms" (p. 125). Sanders develops the argument further: ubuntu is, in incorporating the excluded, a way of managing transition from one structure of difference (or differen-tiation) to another (p. 128). "If the disasters of the past are to be avoided", he cautions us, "the figure of the stranger must be continually reinvented" (p. 129).

Let us summarise Sanders's endorsement of the texts' commitment to the principles of ubuntu. First, he argues, *Country of My Skull* acts on the imperative to be hospitable to "strangers" (those who have been made strangers in their own land). It mimes the protocols of the Commission: it welcomes, it frames the testimonies, it translates and it interprets their import and significance. Second, Krog explores, in the dynamics of her alienation from the (Afrikaner) world embodied by the perpetrators of apartheid atrocities, what it means to be (like) a foreigner in your own milieu. This position, the inside-outsider (the one who becomes a stranger to her culture and her family), is based in the recognition of the other in the self, of the tenacity but ultimate instability of the "I-you" dyad. We have seen that, exiled from the settled, she invents an interlocutor, a stranger who understands her desires. This is not some desperate alienated fantasy. It indicates a subject position, an orientation, that allows Krog to engage the "strangers" she encounters in the course of the hearings, not only "those who have been made strangers in their own land" but also the (historical, ethical and emotional) knowledge that has been excluded and suppressed during apartheid. In other words, she opens herself to the potentially disruptive impact of alterity, and struggles with the implications of her hospitality, both at a personal level and in terms of its consequences for

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Page of South African Mission Work, published in 1877), instantiates the tension between the precolonial Xhosa community of meaning and the version of Christian modernity that Scottish missionaries had brought to the seam of the Eastern Cape frontier.

writing. Sanders concludes his argument by suggesting that her struggle to write in this new ethical mode is potentially paradigmatic for post-apartheid South African literature, which will inevitably grapple with this range of concerns.

How do the accusations of plagiarism, first made by Stephen Watson and then by others, relate to Sanders's endorsement of the text's ethics? Let us rehearse the key moments in this flurry of accusation and defence. "The Annals of Plagiarism: Antjie Krog and the Bleek Lloyd Collection" by Watson appeared in *New Contrast*, a literary journal edited by Tom Eaton. Watson's accusations against Krog centre on her volume of poetry, *the stars say "tsau"* (2004), which "presents verse adaptations of some three-dozen extracts from the Bleek Lloyd collection of Bushman narratives, first transcribed by these remarkable linguists in Cape Town in the latter part of the nineteenth century" (Watson 2006). In Watson's opinion, Krog "has lifted the entire conception of her book from [his volume of verse] *Return of the Moon* – and a few other things besides" (p. 1). Further, Krog is held to present sentimental transcriptions of the Bushman narratives that, far from alchemical transformations into poetry, achieve nothing other than repetition or, at worst, simplification. It is beyond our scope to consider the import and accuracy of Watson's claim that *the stars say "tsau"* represents "a blatant act of appropriation and a no less obvious case of personal opportunism" (p. 8).

Of importance to us is that he supports his case against Krog by arguing that there are plagiaristic precedents in her writing, including a paragraph in *Country of My Skull* that uses the "insights, theories and words" (p. 8) of Ted Hughes's essay, "Myth and Education" published in 1976 (included in *Winter Pollen* 1994). There are irrefutable similarities between the two paragraphs he cites. Various attempts were made to explain these away. Eve Gray, the Random House spokesperson, accuses Watson of "(deliberate?) distortion" in editing down the full length of the Hughes's passage (p. 5); Rosalind Morris identifies Claude Lévi-Strauss as the common source of the ideas used by Hughes and Krog (p. 4); and Stephen Johnson, the managing director of Random House, Johannesburg, accuses Watson of an "inability to grasp the nuances of Krog's writing about myth" (p. 1). As is evident from the tone of these responses, scholars, critics, publishers and "lay readers" rushed to Krog's defence. Watson's comments were labelled "vituperative", "personal" and "egotistical" and, if the contributors to the literary website, LitNet (convened by Etienne van Heerden) were to be believed, his "diatribe" is nothing other than "altogether unreasonable, venomous and academically shallow" (Johnson 2006: 1).

On 3 March 2006, Colin Bower wrote in the *Mail & Guardian* that an email circulating among academics in the English Department at the University of Cape Town (where Watson is Head) pointed to Krog's close borrowing from University of the Witwatersrand academic, Isabel Hofmeyr.

The new allegation concerned a paragraph from Hofmeyr's "*We Spend Our Years as a Tale That Is Told": Oral Historical Narrative in a South African Chiefdom* (1993) which, with minor changes, is attributed to "my friend Professor Kondlo, the Xhosa intellectual from Grahamstown" (p. 56). This act of ventriloquism, on which Krog's camp has been more or less silent,[6] begs a range of questions. A letter, written by the Grahamstown poet and academic Chris Mann, appeared in the *Mail & Guardian* on 10 March 2006. Mann states that Professor Kondlo is "unknown to me, to academics who have lived in Grahamstown for decades and to others in the field who live elsewhere" (p. 22). In a contribution to LitNet, which Krog titled optimistically, "Last Time, This Time" (22/03/2006), she claims that she "knows Professor Kondlo well" (p. 2), and then, in an impish footnote, explains that this "is not his real name" (p. 2). We must assume then that either her friend "Professor Kondlo" has passages from Hofmeyr's book by heart (in which case, perhaps *he* should have acknowledged the origin of his comments), or he is the fictional version of Hofmeyr, whom Krog interviewed in the course of writing *Country of My Skull*. If the second case is true, one might have reservations about the practice of the fictional masking of a white female academic as a "Xhosa intellectual from Grahamstown".

In "Last Time, This Time", Krog asserts that *Country of My Skull* is not a "journalistic or factual report of the Truth Commission" (p. 1). Claiming a version of ubuntu, she argues that, in the course of writing, she desired to respect an "equality of input [that] would have been undermined by a bibliography, as it would have foregrounded various texts as 'established' truth while perhaps implicitly relegating the testimonies of victims to some-thing 'less'" (p. 1). She concludes her defence by suggesting that she names her fellow "textmakers" throughout the text, "often under alternative names to protect their identities" (p. 1). Krog sees herself, then, as striving for a new democratic ethics of composition that divests established authority of its ownership of truth and empowers the contribution of the previously marginalised to the national narrative.

This assumes, of course, that the text is, as Sanders argues, hospitable to difference; that it opens itself up, as a textual host, to the voices of others, particularly those formerly silenced and excluded from the public discursive sphere. We are led to consider, if we take this to be the defining ethical turn of *Country of My Skull*, its protocols of hosting, and, consequently, to ask whether the accusations of plagiarism detract at all from their ethical aims. This brings us back to the aporia of hospitality. It is arguably impossible to conceive of an aneconomic process of citation that does not impinge, at all, on the meaning of the words, the points of view, which one hosts within one's text. The cogency of a text – "... *my* truth ... my perspective, shaped

6. Ingrid de Kok, for instance, who presents an impassioned defence of Krog (*Mail & Guardian*, 17-23 March 2006: 4), sidesteps the issue.

by my state of mind ... I'm telling my story ..." – depends on a writer exerting some measure of ownership over the opinions it incorporates. Its very identity as a text depends on the rhetorical inscription of borders around itself, even though we know these to be porous and even, in the face of the endless dissemination of meaning, chimerical. To welcome others into one's writing is simultaneously to limit their freedom of dissemination and to impose one's own conditions. Given this, there is no such thing as an unconditional citation (although the uninterrupted and unmediated presentation of other(s') texts comes closest to the aneconomic). It follows that hospitality, of the ethically redemptive order suggested by both Krog and Sanders, is impossible. This is not to accuse *Country of My Skull* of anything other than an inevitable and unavoidable paradox of citation; it is not to blame Krog in any respect. It should, though, make us suspicious of hyperbolic claims made in the name of *Country of My Skull* (by Sanders and others), and must make us guarded about presenting the work as an uncomplicated remedial template in the post-apartheid dispensation.

If we concede, given Derrida's aporetic reading of ethics, that no proper (citational) hospitality is possible, how might we compare the various ways in which texts fail as hosts? Krog has repeatedly defended *Country of My Skull* by arguing that her critics have inappropriate expectations of the work given its genre. "I find myself in the bizarre position of having to account for why a fork is not a spoon. Put differently: Why was a non-fiction text not written like a factual report?" (p. 1). She defends its personalised account, its inventions and its metafictional dimension on the basis that these are the conventions of "creative non-fiction". She is correct. But the question that remains is whether this genre is adequate to the ethical undertaking of *Country of My Skull*. Here one has to consider the protocols of citation in "creative non-fiction". It is beyond our scope to discuss these exhaustively: the debates regarding the ethics of the writing of Truman Capote, Bruce Chatwin, Ryszard Kapuściński, Ivan Vladislavić and others would, though, be pertinent to such a discussion. Suffice to say that creative non-fiction, driven as it is by a literary purpose and logic, has a fuzzier sense of attribution than both journalistic writing and academic exegesis. Clearly, this rather more flexible approach to citation might be considered an exacerbated transgression of an ethics of hosting in certain contexts. In South Africa, for instance, where the genealogy, ownership and historical appropriation of ideas (and experience) have such fraught histories, the protocols of citation are (ethically and politically) constitutive. The TRC itself was well aware of this.

Further, creating "spokespersons for ideas" (Krog 2006: 1) (such as Kondlo, the "representative" academic) suggests a particular practice of representation that elides histories of debate and dispute and affirms a range of established positions in a context in which emergent, even unpredictable, possibilities are a priority. The "representative" individual, in other words,

confirms the existence of an establishment, a settled scheme (in which he or she is typical or indexical), rather than heralding a potential, prospective order. If one is concerned to invoke (or at least gesture towards) a new dispensation, a new order of things, it is necessary that particular and irreducible voices be invited into dialogue and be recognised as possessing at least the promise of the unexpected. In welcoming the stranger one has to avoid a practice of representation that habituates the unfamiliar. Gathering a range of individual voices into the mouth of the spokesperson is one way in which we fail the disruptive potential of alterity. There seems a detrimental (ethical) compromise in creating individual strangers, such as the beloved, at the same time as one occludes the particular alterity of other voices.

In his comment on Watson's "sensational" claims, Shaun de Waal suggests that it is "tempting to see in this spat an example of the split between modernist and post-modern aesthetics" (2006: 4). This is a more interesting line than the personal attacks that have coloured proceedings or the reductive depictions of the English-Afrikaans tensions within the literary institution (see, in this regard, Tom Eaton's "Koeksusters vs. Cream Pies" 2006). Watson, who lavishes praise on T. S. Eliot's transformative borrowing (p. 7), is quite evidently modernist in his aesthetic proclivities, while Krog, as we have argued, is in salient respects a post-modernist. We considered above, for instance, her scepticism regarding the possibility of recovering forensic truth and her commitment to fictional narrative and poetic language as epistemological vehicles.

But the matter might be more complex than the binary de Waal suggests. In fact, *Country of My Skull* wants it both ways. Its creative (personal) truth, which Krog claims emerges from the pastiche of autobiography, testimony and fiction, is underpinned by a thoroughgoing modernist teleology, namely its desperate longing for a movement towards reconciliation and the ethical imperative of ubuntu. A modernist ethical teleology, in other words, is presented and advocated using a range of postmodern textual devices. One could argue that the accusations of plagiarism testify to this fissure; that they stem from the text's hybridity.

In the new dispensation, the power to confer forgiveness resides with the formerly oppressed. This forgiveness entails an asymmetry of generosity: any hospitality extended by black South Africans to their former oppressors has to be set against the history of their being denied hospitality in apartheid South Africa. In the face of this asymmetry, white South Africans, especially those most directly identified with apartheid history, can only appeal for forgiveness, demonstrate their contrition and ask for expiation. Hospitality is no longer theirs to give; it is that for which they must appeal.

Country of My Skull lodges such an appeal. It acknowledges complicity, both in the common sense of shared moral accountability and Sanders's extra-moral sense of "folded-togetherness", performs a process of confession and contrition, and requests that forgiveness be extended. It

identifies ubuntu as the domain of this appeal. The legendary hospitality of Afrikanerdom – confined as it was to the economy of the circle – faces the capacity of ubuntu to cut across the logic of alterity and affirm interdependence. It follows from these ethical ambitions that *Country of My Skull* has to be a (proper) host. But the aporetic logic of hospitality haunts every citation, revealing to us just how complex are the dynamics of ethical redress and transformation.

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