Haunted House, Haunted Nation: *Triomf* and the South African Postcolonial Gothic

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Summary

By drawing upon contemporary loci of fear and cultural anxiety, Gothic literature continually reinvents itself across international borders. This article places Marlene van Niekerk's *Triomf* (2004) within the context of the Gothic novel as a uniquely South African development of the postcolonial Gothic mode. In *Triomf*, Van Niekerk reworks the conventions common to Gothic fiction to create a literature of terror that captures the *Zeitgeist* of Afrikaner anxieties – the novel functions as a critique of white South Africa's civil religion of cultural dominion. Specifically, Van Niekerk deploys a hauntology of the Voortrekker tradition that questions the congruence of South Africa's mythologised past and the nation's projected postcolonial claims for the present and future; as Sophiatown's buried past rises to the surface, the Benade family find themselves haunted by the apartheid policies that constructed their suburban home – the haunted house becomes the haunted nation. To illustrate the spectral purpose at work in *Triomf*, I reference Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx* as a framework from which to view the ideological haunting that Van Niekerk uses in her narrative. As the free elections of 1994 draw near in the novel, haunting gives way to the possibilities of a Gothic apocalypse that threatens not only the Benades, but also the self-sustaining colonial ideology that enables Afrikaner cultural and political superiority.

Opsomming

Gotiese letterkunde herskep sigself voortdurend oor internasionale grense heen deur te steun op kontemporêre setels van vrees en kulturele angs. Hierdie artikel plaas Marlene van Niekerk se *Triomf* (2004) in die konteks van die Gotiese roman as 'n uniek Suid-Afrikaanse ontwikkeling van die postkoloniale Gotiese vorm. In *Triomf* hersien Van Niekerk die gebruike wat algemeen in Gotiese fiksie voorkom en skep sodoende 'n letterkunde van terreur wat die *Zeitgeist* van Afrikaner-angst vasvang – die roman is 'n resensie van wit Suid-Afrika se burgerlike geloof in kulturele oorheersing. Meer spesifiek span Van Niekerk 'n skim van die Voortrekkertradisie in wat die bestaanbaarheid van Suid-Afrika se gemitologiseerde verlede en die nasie se geprojekteerde postkoloniale aansprake op die hede en die toekoms bevraagteken. Soos Sophiatown se bedekte verlede na die oppervlak kom, word die Benade-gesin agtervolg deur die apartheidsbeleid wat hul tuiste bepaal – die spookhuis word die spooknasie. Ten einde die doel van die spookagtige in *Triomf* te illustreer, verwys ek na Jacques Derrida se *Specters of Marx* as 'n raamwerk vir die ideologies spookagtige van Van Niekerk se narratief. Wanneer die vrye verkiesing van 1994 in die roman nader kom, maak die spookagtige plek vir die moontlikhede van 'n Gotiese openbaring wat nie slegs die Benades bedreig nie,

maar ook die selfonderhoudende koloniale ideologie wat die Afrikaner se kulturele en politieke meerderwaardigheid moontlik maak.

> *One name for another, a part for the whole: the historic violence of Apartheid can always be treated as a metonymy.*
> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*

1 Toward a South African Postcolonial Gothic

To paraphrase Karl Marx, "There is a specter haunting South Africa – the specter of apartheid." This haunting infiltrates the ideological, the political, the social; it is the past, yet it inhabits the present and promises to be a presence that shapes the future through reaction and mediation. The spectre of apartheid is *Gothic* in character, gesturing to the barbarity of a bygone time implicit in the term's original usage and its later artistic connotations of macabre immediacy. From its inception and through its wild divergences, the textual corpus of Gothic literature has been a repository for repressed cultural fears – here, Gothic haunting deploys itself through South African cultural productions that mine the territory of acute anxiety surrounding the ideology of apartheid policy. Despite its many differences from the original conception of the Gothic novel, Marlene van Niekerk's *Triomf* (1999) functions as a "literature of terror" within this context – the novel's protagonists, the Benade family, are particularly and peculiarly haunted by the spectral mythology that sustains apartheid thought. Though they are a product of apartheid culture, the Benades' encounters with the legacy of South Africa's colonial past are marked with incursions of the grotesque, the uncanny, and the apparitional. Yet, on a surface level, the Gothic mode seems ill-fit for a South African novel. As E.J. Clery notes, the Gothic is "mostly a twentieth-century coinage" that critics have projected backwards to define a range of American and European literatures (Clery 2002: 21). The genre is deeply invested in the capital of European tropes, social pressures, and ideology – how might it account for a South African Gothic?

First, it must be understood that ghosts alone do not a Gothic novel make. The works of the genre's European progenitors established a shared and transmissible language of literary conventions that came to typify the Gothic mode – the genre is a collection of narrative, thematic, and aesthetic elements such as madness, enclosure, monstrosity, the baroque, doubling, incest, discontinuous narrative, sexual predation, ruins, and, of course,

haunting.[1] However, at its core the Gothic possesses an agenda outside of reiterating pseudomedievalisms and unnatural excesses. The conventions of the genre may give it a certain degree of typological stability, but they are simply trappings that enable a mood of fear; the actual seed of Gothic terror is located within the tension between the phantasmagoric and social reference. In the preface to the second edition of *The Castle of Otranto*, the first novel to bear the subtitle *A Gothic Story*, Horace Walpole makes the claim that his text "was an attempt to blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern" (Walpole 1996: 9). In Walpole's estimation, his novel is a synthesis of the improbable romances of the past and the realistic romances of the eighteenth century.[2] While Walpole's success at portraying "the mortal agents in his drama according to the rules of probability" ensnared in what he understatedly calls "extraordinary positions" is debatable, this collision of the imaginative with proto-naturalism set the tone for the resultant genre of Gothic fiction (pp. 9-10). Other examples from the golden age of the Gothic novel such as Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and M.G. Lewis's *The Monk* followed the general pattern set by *The Castle of Otranto* – each of the three canonical Gothic authors juxtapose their psychologically detailed protagonists against tenebrous and supernatural horrors to evoke fear in their readers. Despite often indulging in phantasmal and grotesque imagery, these early Gothic fictions never fully sever their connections to a recognisable depiction of social reality; instead of making a complete break from the fictive "real", the Gothic mode extends reality to include the shadowy and potentially monstrous possibilities that are viewed as backwards and irrational according to modern perceptions.[3] As Linda Bayer-Berenbaum notes:

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1. For a more detailed consideration of the conventions of Gothic literature, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* and George Haggerty's *Gothic Fiction/Gothic Form*.

2. It should be noted that Walpole puts the term "romance" under revision to include all fictive production, as opposed to its accepted modern implications of idealisation and fantasy.

3. Specifically, Gothic literature has often been positioned against the archly rational discourse of the age of the Enlightenment: "The Enlightenment conviction that man can understand his own circumstances has never, indeed, disappeared from the history of ideas; but what the Gothic does is to entertain the fear or rather, to follow Burke, the terror that such an enterprise may not in fact be possible …" (Punter & Byron 2004: 12).

> Gothicism insists that what is customarily hallowed as real by society and its language is but a small portion of a greater reality of monstrous proportion and immeasurable power. The peculiarly *Gothic* quality of this extended reality is in its immanence, its integral, inescapable connection to the world around us.
> (Bayer-Berenbaum 1982: 21)

This is the heart of Gothic fiction's ability to generate fear. The haunting spectres and lurking monsters endemic to the genre are not frightening because they are alien or unknowable; rather, they are terrifying because they are legible reflections of actual objects of dread. Gothic terrors are displacements of crystallised cultural anxiety, shadow-selves intimately connected to the dark underpinnings of the social fabric.

Gothic fiction has proven itself to be a highly malleable form able to adapt to the shifting geography of cultural anxiety. The Gothic survived its eighteenth-century roots because its central theme – the presence of horrors that bear an uncanny resemblance to real fears – is easily reworked to accommodate the frictions of an evolving society.[4] As the anti-Catholic tensions that informed the genre's early texts eased, contemporary morbid preoccupations filled the gaps; for example, conventional readings of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* posit that both novels play upon aspects of social unease prevalent at the time of their publication – *Frankenstein* is generally read within the context of the frightening pace of scientific advancement, while Stoker's titular vampire is often seen as an embodiment of the British fear of increased immigration from the East. By forging continual connections between preternatural horrors and current focal points of anxiety, the Gothic captures the *Zeitgeist* of cultural tension. Cultures, then, breed their own demons necessarily. Since culture is multiple and variable, its demons and spectres tend to be exclusive expressions of a specific troubled social milieu.[5] Unrestrained by social positioning, the spirit of Gothic fiction is migratory; one can speak of a technological Gothic, a Japanese Gothic, or a postmodern Gothic. Gothic

4. Jerrold E. Hogle's comments on the ability of Gothic fiction to remain current and accommodate contemporary terrors is particularly relevant here: "The Gothic has lasted as it has because its symbolic mechanisms, particularly its haunting and frightening spectres, have permitted us to cast many anomalies in our modern conditions, even as these change, over onto antiquated or at least haunted spaces and highly anomalous creatures" (Hogle 2002: 6).

5. Early authors of the genre were frequently accused of merely copying "Germanic" themes in their work. Refuting a critic's assertion that his fiction was merely a pastiche of German sensationalism, Edgar Allan Poe responded, "I maintain that terror is not of Germany, but of the soul" (Poe 2004: 2).

production is not limited by time or place – it is predicated on the unique variance of time and place. As Gothic fiction is a site of ever-expanding possibilities for new literatures of terror, it engenders horrors that are personalised for consumption by specific generations of readers.

One particularity actuated by the literary meiosis of the genre is the formulation of a distinct postcolonial Gothic. Again, the Gothic proved translatable; the literature of terror found a ready home amidst the subtext of European colonialism. Eventually, the traditional terrors that had captivated the British imagination gave way to a new locus of anxiety that played upon fears over the weakening Empire:

> By the 1790s Gothic writers were quick to realize that Britain's growing empire could prove a vast source of frightening "others" who would, as replacements for the villainous Italian antiheroes in Walpole or Radcliffe, bring freshness and variety to the genre. With the inclusion of the colonial, a new sort of darkness of race, landscape, erotic desire and despair – enters the Gothic genre ....
>
> (Paravisini-Gilbert 2002: 229)

The titles usually cited as primary examples of the British colonial Gothic are Charles Robert Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* and H. Rider Haggard's *She*; unfortunately, inquiry into other possible evolutions from this strain of territorial literature too often begins and ends with those novels. Nevertheless, there *are* possibilities created by the intersection of a Gothic view with the global literatures that have reimagined the colonial and postcolonial context – surely the act and aftermath of colonisation opened new vistas for the expression of unparalleled cultural *frisson*? For monsters shaped by the tension between the indigenous and the imperial? By following this line of investigation, it is possible to reveal and recover instances of Gothic fiction that account for the terrors born of the many facets of colonial rule and provide new insights into the spectres that continue to haunt the postcolonial psyche.

In *Triomf*, Marlene van Niekerk follows the pattern set by the British colonial Gothic, yet she invents a uniquely South African postcolonial variant of the genre by substituting the fear surrounding the loss of Afrikaner national identity for the horrors particular to the British Empire. While this new formulation of the Gothic novel entails revising many of the genre's conventions, they remain recognisable under the surface. In the British colonial Gothic as written by Haggard and Maturin, the presence of racial "others" – whose proximity and overwhelming numbers are cause for apprehension in the colonisers' consciousness – portends a fear based on social location. However, this convention is reworked to fit within the

context of South Africa; while other colonial Gothic fictions present the black "other" as wild, untamable, and savage, the black population of South Africa is contained and at least partially controlled by the apartheid policies of the homeland system. Still, though restrained by white political dominance, the African populace still possesses the power to unsettle the Afrikaner imagination, a fact that becomes strikingly apparent as the date of the free elections of 1994 creeps closer in the novel. Therein lies the crux of Van Niekerk's conception of a South African postcolonial Gothic: as the institutions that sustain the Afrikaner cultural identity groan under the strain of the coming elections – a monumental event that threatens an apocalyptic end of white South Africa's national dominion – old fears resurface to question the basis of Afrikaner supremacy. In Van Niekerk's South African Gothic narrative, the haunted house reveals the haunted nation.

This inquiry into the possibilities of a South African Gothic began with a purposeful allusion to Marx. Marx's invocation of spectrality emphasises the haunting quality of ideology. The resultant ideological fear has a place within Van Niekerk's literature of terror, as does Jacques Derrida's reading of the relevance of Marxist and deconstructionist politics in *Specters of Marx*. Of particular use is Derrida's development of a hauntological frame. By making the spectral less ethereal, by dwelling on "the *effectivity* or the *presence* of a specter", Derrida's hauntology fulfils a purpose similar to the drive of the Gothic (Derrida 1994: 10). The presence of the ideological phantasm intersects with the ominous spectres found in Gothic novels; both point toward a return of the repressed. Hauntology, the "logic of haunting", insists upon spectral persistence as a locus of anxiety – "one makes oneself fear too much: *on se fait trop peur*" (Derrida 1994: 10, 173). The hauntological spectre and the Gothic spectre find further resonance in that they both force an intellectual and psychological confrontation with the unseen, yet encompassing, attribute of spectral being. Whether in political academe or Gothic literature, spectrality is a condition that must be dealt with – it signifies a quality that requires consideration outside of ontology: "[I]f we let it be understood that we intend to understand *spirits* in the plural and in the sense of specters, of untimely specters that one must not chase away but sort out, critique, keep close by, and allow to come back" (Derrida 1994: 87).[6] Or, to approach this from the Gothic angle:

6. In Derrida's estimation, hauntology creates ontology rather than being created as a product of ontology: "We will take this category to be irreducible, and first of all to everything it makes possible: ontology, theology, positive or negative onto-theology" (Derrida 1994: 51).

> This "return of the repressed", or emergence of whatever has been previously rejected by consciousness, is a fundamental dynamism of Gothic narratives.
>
> Something – some entity, knowledge, emotion, or feeling – which has been submerged or held at bay because it threatens the established order of things, develops a cumulative energy that demands its release and forces it to the realm of visibility where it must be acknowledged.
>
> (Clemens 1999: 3-4)

Within this framework, the spectral is the sustained opportunity for review and continual evaluation. Because of its "non-present present" – a spectre is a manifestation of the past, yet it haunts the present and occupies a space of potentiality in the future – the liminality of the apparition underlines the difficulty of resolving and stabilising the ideology of the past with its current iteration (Derrida1994: 6). Therefore, inherited ideology – the discursive reality of the political, the social, the cultural as national "truth" – is itself a hauntology; it is both a presence and an absence, a disjointed repetition of conditional moments.

In Van Niekerk's *Triomf* (1999)(hereafter abbreviated as *T*), the uncanny property of being-there-yet-not-there is central to the hauntings that question the binary between past and present, mythology and ideology. The novel begins by locating spectral possibility in a rather ramshackle house in the suburb of Triomf. Though the Benades' home appears a bit too threadbare to make a suitable stand-in for the traditional haunted mansion, the land that the house has been built on is a graveyard where the dead do not rest easily. As Lambert digs through the ground behind the family's house, he uncovers remnants of the world left behind by the black South Africans who were forcibly relocated from Sophiatown to make way for white settlement: "Mol stares at all the stuff Lambert has dug out of the earth. It's a helluva heap. Pieces of red brick, bits of smooth drainpipe, thick chunks of old cement and that blue gravel you see on graves. Small bits of glass and other stuff shine in the muck" (*T*: 1). The Benades live atop what remains of black lives that were destroyed and buried in the name of urban development. However, those lives have not been effaced completely; despite colonisation and relocation under the Group Areas Act that created a stricter, more institutionalised system of apartheid, bits and pieces of those lives rise to the surface as rubble and debris. These pieces are fragmentary, but they still act as subtle reminders that though those lives have been repressed in the name of progress they wait beneath the surface to rise again. Of course, the buried legacy of relocation is not specific to Triomf only; the whole of Johannesburg suffers from the same symbolic potential-of-emptiness:

> Jo'burg's like that. It's hollow on the inside. Not just one big hollow like a shell, but lots of dead mines with empty passageways and old tunnels. Treppie says that's why it's become so expensive to get buried in Jo'burg. There just isn't enough solid ground left for graves. And even if you do get a grave, he says, you still can't be so sure, 'cause most of the corpses fall through after a while. Coffins and all.
>
> (*T*: 214)

The hollows that riddle the ground on which Johannesburg stands connect to the problem of the South African postcolonial condition in two ways: first, the "dead mines", "passageways" and "old tunnels" represent the ways in which Afrikaner industry has looted African land of its material wealth. These hollows also disclose the tensions surrounding the use of black labour to fuel that industry and the subsequent pressure associated with the removal of black presence from those sites. Secondly, these hollows point to a situation of instability created by colonial rule. There is a sense of unease about the land itself, a fear that it cannot sustain the weight of the culture pushing down upon it and that black land will not abide white rule.

Fraught with sepulchral cavities, the land does not even make for a decent burial ground. The image of bodies falling through the soil – perhaps really falling through the gaps left by the legacy of colonisation – re-visions Johannesburg as a city where the unquiet dead rustle beneath the city's streets. Unable to find a final resting place, the spirits of old Sophiatown struggle to the surface in the form of wreckage that the Benades churn up from underneath their home. More so than other fictional modes, the Gothic invests unearthed objects with terrible and often portentous meaning. In Triomf, the continual reappearance of reminders from Sophiatown's past serves to enact a haunting that preys on the colonial anxieties already present in the Afrikaner consciousness. The levelling of Sophiatown and the rearrangement of Johannesburg based on the racial categorisation of apartheid were events that could be effaced, but not forgotten. Though the architecture of Sophiatown could be swept away in the name of urban development, the South African reality of this situation does not match Anthony Vidler's assertion that the '"empty spaces' appropriated or created by urbanism – the clearing of vacant or occupied territory – are paralleled on the phenomenal plane by the tabula rasa imagined by modernist utopias, to the point where both levels intersect in the commonplaces of modern urban development" with equal precision for all parties involved (Vidler 1992: 13).

The empty space created by the Group Areas Act may represent a blank, inscribable utopian ideal for the Afrikaners who planned to erect the white suburb of Triomf in place of the cultural heart of black Johannesburg, but to the people who were forcibly relocated from their homes this act of removal

could hardly be seen in such positive terms. Nevertheless, the space created by relocation is never a true tabula rasa; the debris that drifts to the surface is a constant resurgence of Sophiatown's buried history.

Triomf, then, can never truly be a blank slate on which to inscribe an urban planning ideal. The ground that the new residencies are built on is already compromised; paradoxically, it is comprised of both hollows and rubbish, haunted by presence and absence. Either of these qualities on their own would be enough to taint Triomf, but the suburb's foundation keeps sinister secrets. Triomf coughs up ghosts and bones:

> Even now Lambert finds loose dog bones when he digs. Treppie says that ghosts of those dogs are all over Triomf. Sometimes he wakes up at night from all their barking. It starts at the one end of Triomf and then it goes right through to the other end before coming back again. It sounds like the end of all time. Then she, Mol, waits for the earth to open up and the skeletons' bones to grow back together again, so they can be covered with flesh and rise up under the trumpets.
>
> (*T*: 5)

The dog bones unearthed by Lambert signify a past that should be dead and buried – interred both literally in the ground of Triomf and psychologically in the Afrikaner unconscious. This creates a problematic relationship between the unresolved past and the troubled present that re-enacts the tension between the unsegregated habitation of Sophiatown and the apartheid ideology of the Afrikaner government that designed Triomf. The friction generated by this mirrored relationship challenges the idea of Afrikaner entitlement and questions whether Afrikaners possess the right to refigure the nation's geography. These doubts estrange the myths of national construction from Afrikaner identity by revealing the instability of the present. As Vidler notes, "Estrangement, in these terms, seemed a natural consequence of a conception of history, of the implacable impulsion of time that, while sweeping away the past in favor of the future, was necessarily uncertain only about the present" (Vidler 1992: 5). Though physically swept away by the institutions of apartheid, Sophiatown – and the thriving non-Afrikaner culture that it housed – refuses to be completely erased from the national psyche. The spectral evidence that rises up through the soil of Triomf specifies a conceivable return of the repressed on a greater scale; furthermore, the ghostly re-emergence indicts the Afrikaner hope for the complete erasure of the spirit of Sophiatown. Taking stock of the undetermined mood of the apparitional, Derrida states:

> The specter is not only the carnal apparition of the spirit, its phenomenal body, its fallen and guilty body, it is also the impatient and nostalgic waiting for a

> redemption, namely, once again for a spirit (*auf Erlösung harrt, nämlich ein Geist*). The ghost would be the deferred spirit, the promise or calculation of an expiation.
>
> (Derrida 1994: 136)

This hauntology indicates a refusal of obliteration and a demand for recompense. The anxious residue left by the destruction of the township and the relocation of its occupants finds its vent in the supposed ghostly return of Sophiatown's dogs. The implication is clear: if the dogs can return, what will stop the blacks from returning to reclaim their land as well? The introduction of this possibility forces the Afrikaner mindset to consider a dire question: what if we are not who we believe ourselves to be?

2 Transgressing the Voortrekker Myth

In his essay "Abjection, Nationalism, and the Gothic", Robert Miles suggests that

> [t]he first thing that becomes clear is this general rule of the Gothic: the supernatural arises with the violation of, not the laws of nature, but the "laws" of the nation, by which I mean breaches of the congruence between myths of national origin, and the constitution which is the guarantor of our national identity.
>
> (Miles 2001: 64-65)

While it is questionable whether Miles's assertion is universally applicable to the majority of Gothic literature, a permutation of this idea does help explicate the underlying cultural implications at work in *Triomf*. The postcolonial Gothic, as Van Niekerk utilises it, does not breach the congruence between "myths of national origin" and the documents of national identity as postulated by Miles; instead, she calls attention to the incongruence of the Voortrekker myth – central to the construction of Afrikaner cultural identity – and the reality of how well the spirit of the modern nation meets the expectations set by this spectral past.[7] For much of white South Africa, the roots of national identity can be traced back to the

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7. Tension between an imagined past and the turbulent present is not unique to *Triomf*'s Gothicism; rather, Van Niekerk is reworking a theme already present in the genre's genesis: "Since its inception in 1764, with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, the Gothic has always played with chronology, looking back to moments in an imaginary history, pining for a social stability that never existed ..." (Bruhm 2002: 259).

journey of Boer farmers from the British-controlled Cape to black occupied lands along the Orange River. Though the Great Trek was actually a series of inland emigrations, over the years this movement began to be viewed as a unified cultural event that created the overarching social disposition of South Africa.

Of course, the land that the Voortrekkers came to occupy was often already populated by black Africans. As is the case with most colonial incursions, the friction between the trekboers and the indigenous population led to violent conflict. For example, a broken land treaty in Natal led to a stand-off at the Nacome River. This battle – known as the Battle of Blood River – was pivotal in mythologising the Voortrekkers as the spiritual genesis of Afrikaner national identity. At the Battle of Blood River it is supposed that the Voortrekkers made a covenant with God to deliver them from an overwhelming number of Zulu warriors. Though outnumbered, the Voortrekkers managed to defeat the Zulus and the date of this victory became an honoured holiday of thanksgiving called the Day of the Vow. The doctrinal connotations attached to this event effectively mythologised the Voortrekkers as a spiritually chosen people. As such, it seemed that their God had accepted their covenant and granted them exceptionalist dominion over the land that would be South Africa. The Voortrekkers, then, became the forefathers of a new nation whose existence was likened to the fulfilment of a biblical certainty. Since the pioneering Boers had been triumphant over the black population, it appeared that white supremacy over black inferiority was a preordained, and natural, effect of colonisation. To this mindset, white virtue was shown to be a greater power than the encompassing darkness of Africa and white culture proven superior to black savagery.

The military success of the Voortrekkers led to the creation of Boer republics such as the South African Republic and the Orange Free State. From these seeds the modern South Africa was born. The national heritage supplied by the Voortrekkers became the centre of Afrikaner culture; the Calvinist religious principles and the quasi-spiritual implications associated with the Great Trek informed a sense of both cultural superiority and divine mandate. The values that coalesced around what came to be called Afrikaner culture influenced all levels of later South African political discourse: it is a short jump from the Voortrekkers' unwavering belief that their people were the chosen elect to the policies of "separate development" later upheld by the National Party, the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK.) and the Broederbond. These sociopolitical institutions were unified and sustained by the impetus of the cultural myths that constructed the Afrikaner national identity. The mythology that arose around the Voortrekker "founders" of South Africa and the political machinery that

derived from that common cultural story combined to create a civil religion that enabled and maintained policies of segregation, particularly influencing the ideology of apartheid. Civil religion endows hauntology by repeatedly resurrecting the phantasm of Voortrekker ideology to inform the current and prospective political climate. This ideological haunting reinvests social power in the existing order; as Cecil Ngcokovane postulates:

> Civil religion, therefore, is connected with the use of power and regeneration of the existing social order. In the South African case, civil religion does not only give transcendent justification for the aspirations to sovereign power and the exercise of political sovereignty. It creates racial group distinctions in highly emotional but easily recognisable symbols such as the flag and the national anthem, references to common historical traditions, and a common moral language should be Afrikaans in particular.
>
> (Ngcokovane 1989: 7)

However, when the basis of this civil religion is shown to be fraudulent, the culturally sustaining mythology invented around the Voortrekkers is put into crisis. If the myths that create the Afrikaner worldview are inauthentic, how can the culture imbedded in that view have any claims to authoritative or social congruence? From this point, cultural instability spreads to the artificial nature of the Afrikaner suburb: "For fucking crying in a bucket, Treppie says, how can people lie to themselves like that, with walls full of mock paradise? But that's what happens, he says, when you take a place like this, full of prefab wagonwheels and aloes, rotten with rubble, and give it a name like Triomf" (*T*: 100). Despite Treppie's exasperation with his family's blindness to the farcical nature of Triomf, the Benades participate fully in prefabricated Afrikaner culture: Mol plays the part of the steadfastly loyal and subservient Voortrekker woman, Treppie never questions his family's right to the land they inhabit, one of Pop's fondest memories is the re-enactment of the Great Trek he took part in as a child, Lambert unwaveringly believes in voting for the National Party. The family is thoroughly inhabited by the spectres of the past. However, though the family is comforted by the trappings of the national myth, they are not immune to the effects of Triomf's postcolonial Gothic anxieties.[8] As

8. The double-bind relationship between the ideological mythology that both justifies the Benades and threatens their existence illustrates the hauntological crisis of Van Niekerk's postcolonial Gothic. The Benades are trapped within circumstances common to Gothic literature's protagonists; Hogle refers to this quality as a dual unconscious: "[T]he conflicted positions of central Gothic characters can reveal them as haunted by a second 'unconscious' of deep-seated social and historical dilemmas ..." (Hogle 2002: 3).

Treppie reads from a newspaper, he expands the occurrence of nightly howling – which had previously been attributed to the ghosts of the dogs left behind by the blacks removed from Sophiatown – to an epidemic that infects all of Johannesburg:

> "Just check this out," he says, pretending not to hear. "Pit bull terriers in Triomf. Policeman's cruel game. Illegal backyard betting. Shocked vets keep sewing up mangled dogs," he reads. "So, that's what we keep hearing at night, Mol! It's got nothing to do with Sophiatown's ghosts. It's blood and money – and these two together make a terrible racket. Trapped between walls, with bared teeth and ghost eyes, blood spewing from their veins." ...
>
> "It's worse than ghosts," he says. "Much worse. If I understand correctly, you could say the whole of Jo'burg is one big pit bull terrier fight."
>
> (*T*: 18)

Unfortunately, Treppie only partially understands the situation. Even though he is the member of the family with the most informed and socially critical perspective, he is too ingrained in the Afrikaner context to realise that "blood and money" have everything to do with "Sophiatown's ghosts".

The ghosts of Sophiatown would not exist without the political and economic drive to marginalise the black population of South Africa. By systematically relocating the disenfranchised racial majority to a series of townships that were often situated far away from the farms and factories that employed them, apartheid effectively disrupted the limited economic opportunities available to black workers and reinforced the cultural doctrine of segregation while promoting an agenda that benefited white South African citizens. The severity of this economic disempowerment becomes particularly pronounced when one considers the relocation of 60 000 people from Sophiatown to Meadowlands in Soweto. Soweto was positioned far from the city centre and the seat of the most promising job opportunities and, despite its heavy population, it offered little stability or means of employment. The situation there quickly disintegrated into a mass of desperation and crime. This relocation did not create a disturbance limited to a singular historical moment; today Soweto remains one of the poorest areas of Johannesburg. In Sophiatown the economic prospects of its black inhabitants were ruined – Sophiatown was the only area in Johannesburg where blacks were allowed to own property – but the movement of people into homelands also destroyed a unique and vibrant community. Blood and money, indeed.

The resurfacing of remnants from Sophiatown is not the only way in which Van Niekerk challenges Afrikaner cultural identity through Gothic expression. Her vehicle for disputing the maintenance of Afrikaner myth is the haunted Benade family, most specifically by using their incestuous

relations as a disturbing extension of the apartheid ideal of racial separation. The Benades should be the ideal white South African family: they come from the old stock of South Africa; they are working class, but have claims to the farming life passed down from the Voortrekkers; they vote for the National Party and fear that the upcoming election will change their nation beyond repair. However, if the Benades represent the ideal, then the ideal is a nightmare. The problem with the Benades is that they embody the idea of racial purity taken to a sickening and perverted extreme. Not only do the Benades eschew mixing their strain of the national heritage with other racial identities, they have become horribly inbred, their generative powers turning viscously inward. The incestuousness of the family, a grotesquery that further imbeds Van Niekerk's reformulation of traditional Gothic symbolism, functions as a dark parody of the Afrikaner dream of keeping white bloodlines from mingling with those of the supposedly inferior races.[9] Of course, the concept of interfamily generation is an absurd solution to the problem of insuring racial purity, but its extremity and unsettling perversion of the family-that-sticks-together questions the need to maintain apartheid's strict demarcations of race.

Far from empowering them as paragons of Afrikaner whiteness, the incestuous Benades are shown to be weak of mind and body, a dying breed whose twisted seclusion has robbed them of a vital present and insured that they have no tenable future. To draw a further Gothic parallel, the Benades are a modern, South African version of Poe's House of Usher. The Ushers are a family that finds themselves face-to-face with their own generative demise:

> The exemplary fiction of the House of Usher famously harmonises the terminal involution of the Usher family with the physical crumbling of its mansion: of house as dynasty with house as habitation. In doing so it selects from the prosperities of earlier Gothic writings a characteristic symbolic location (the threatening old building), and derives from it a clear focus of narrative direction, the vanishing point being that of the old family's imminent extinction.
>
> (Baldick 1995: 149)

Like the Ushers, the Benades live in a crumbling house that mirrors their own moral and physical deterioration; the Benade family line seems doomed to expire with Lambert, and their fate is a warning to white South

9. Interestingly, anxiety over racial mixing is conterminous to the Gothic genre: "The fear of miscegenation, with its attendant horror of interracial sexuality, enters public discourse at about the time Walpole began the Gothic novel" (Paravisini-Gilbert 2002: 230).

Africa: this is where your policies will lead you. The Benades and their ruin represent a possible future for all of South Africa that disgusts characters who are able to view the family from the outside:

> "Just look at the house," says the one. Lambert sees how they look the house up and down, with their hands on their sides.
> "Looks like it's falling to pieces," says the other one.
> "Just look at all the rubbish under that roof," says the first one.
> "Bad," says the white constable. "Bad to the bone."
>
> (*T*: 123)

Interestingly, the Benades' inbreeding is not a product of this particular generation; it is also not, as Old Mol supposed, that "[p]eople go rotten from living on a heap like this" (p. 168). Incest is a Benade family tradition that harkens back to the line's inception as the prototypical Backvelt farmers, as Treppie states:

> The Benades were crocks from the moment they first saw the light of day. Pieced together and panel beaten, not to mention screwed together, from scrap. Throw-away pieces, left-over rags, wastewool, old wives' tales, hearsay, a passing likeness from the front and a glimpse from behind.
>
> (*T*: 517)

The family, as Treppie notes, is "screwed" together; they cling to each other for support, approximating the way in which the Voortrekkers stuck together in the face of adversity, yet they are also held together by their incestuous sexual bond. Like the Voortrekker myth, the Benades are not what they appear to be. Though they may resemble a "passing likeness" of the ideal South African family, they are also an "old wives' tale", explicitly the product of South Africa's rampant national myth-making, revenants of the spectre haunting the cultural consciousness.

Triomf is a further reworking of the colonial Gothic in that Van Niekerk redeploys the ominous presence of a monster as a force that destabilises the binary of racial privilege and racial inferiority. The product of the Benades' inbreeding is Lambert, the novel's locus of monstrosity. Though the other members of the family possess grotesque features that project ideas of the fragmented body – the slippage of Mol's false teeth, Pop's dripping nose, the disfiguring scars that run the length of Treppie's body – Lambert far exceeds the sum of their malformed parts. Even his birth is an event that signifies rupture and malignancy, as Mol describes it:

> She says it was a "rough" delivery. He was a "whooper" who refused to budge. Then they brought the forceps and they pulled him out by his head. Yes, by his head. Then she "tore open," she says. "Never again." That's what she's fuckenwell supposed to have said after he came out and the nurses carried him away, with his lopsided dented head.
>
> (*T*: 31)

Lambert is never described in total or as a unified whole. The images Van Niekerk uses to describe Lambert present the monstrous bits and pieces of his body as singular objects of horror, as if the full picture would be too terrible for words. We get a sense of gnarled hands, prodigious girth, and a backside that is positioned too high on his body.[10] Instead of combining the best features of his dubious parentage, Lambert is an abnormal confluence of his family's shameful secret: "His lips are pouting and his cheeks tremble. There's a deep hollow between his eyes. It looks like his face was assembled from many different pieces, as if it's not one face but many faces" (*T*: 296). Lambert's face and body are piecemeal, but the pieces that comprise his physicality do not come together as a coherent, unified identity. Lambert's patchwork bulk marks him as a uniquely South African Frankenstein's monster who calls attention to the binary of race and body that distinguishes white from black and coloured under the policies of apartheid. As David Punter and Glennis Byron note, "Hybrid forms that exceed and disrupt those systems of classification through which cultures organize experience, monsters problematize binary thinking and demand a rethinking of the boundaries and concepts of normalcy" (Punter & Byron 2001: 264). Lambert, a child of apartheid, should be the last great son of white South Africa, but his monstrous hybridity betrays the very idea that preserving the purity of the Afrikaner bloodline is a worthwhile project. Instead, Lambert reveals that his family's line has become too inward and exclusive; inbreeding has turned the Benades' stock foul and polluted. As Treppie tells Mol, "They say inbreeding makes people's bones so heavy they can't even tread water" (*T*: 31). Instead of forging a deep connection to the pioneering spirit of the Voortrekkers, the Benades' corruption illustrates how a narrow conception of race leads to genetic decadence.

Not only has this interbreeding resulted in a deformed and deranged monster, it also seems to deny any hope of revitalising the family's gene

10. Lambert's misshapen body shares many striking commonalities with classic Gothic monstrosity: "A predilection for deformity is unmistakable. Often Gothic villains have huge noses or eyes, elongated foreheads, growths or moles, enormous hands or teeth, scars, cleft palates, or hunched backs. Both caricatures and grotesques are created through exaggeration rather than by a complete departure from normality" (Bayer-Berenbaum 1982: 28-29).

pool. The tangle of race, family, and desire has become so inextricably convoluted that no further intermingling of blood seems possible. When Lambert finds himself alone with his long-dreamt-of prostitute – his first chance to have sex with a woman outside of immediate family – he discovers that Treppie has played a little birthday joke in choosing his companion for the evening: "A darky. So, that's what Treppie was making big eyes about. Well, he's not bothered by a piece of coffee-skirt, if that's what Treppie's idea was. A bit of the dark stuff is no problem for him!" (*T*: 448). As it turns out, a "darky" is a problem for Lambert. Despite fantasising about this day for an entire year, when the moment comes Lambert is unable to achieve an erection. He fritters away his time with Mary by dancing with her, trying to make small talk, and by continually offering her snacks. His nervousness almost seems cute, until it becomes apparent that Lambert is masking the fact that he simply cannot will himself to arousal when presented with a black body. We know that Lambert is capable of sexual intercourse from the staggering number of times he takes his frustrations out on his aging mother, but it seems that when faced with a partner not of his family – both in terms of blood-relatedness and the greater "family" of race – Lambert is impotent. Literally and symbolically diminished, Lambert tries to talk himself into the act by commenting on the lightness of Mary's complexion; to Lambert's eyes, Mary looks like she could pass for white and therefore pass as a member of Lambert's racial family. However, this speculation on Lambert's part is short-lived; here he's gone too far. Mary, enraged at Lambert's comment, turns the narrative of race on its head: "'You bastard! Look at you! Look at this place! Who the hell do you think you are, hey? You're not even white, man, you're a fucken backward piece of low-class shit, that's what you are. Useless fucken white trash!'" (*T*: 448). Lambert may be the product of a white family, but the Benades' inbreeding has pushed him beyond the accepted racial construct of whiteness and into depravity. By focusing their generative powers within such a limited sphere of genetic potentiality, the Benades have given up the privileges of whiteness and somehow ended up even lower – "low-class shit," as Mary points out – than the "kaffirs" they look down upon.

Instead of keeping the critique of incestuousness centralised to the Benade family, Van Niekerk uses it to question the continuance of the South African "white family" and its origins in the Voortrekker myth. As Old Pop warns Old Mol in his suicide note:

> Try to keep them off each other's bodies, Mol, in God's name send them away to different places if you can. So an end can come to you know what. Only a monster will be born from this sort of thing. I've heard from others, more and more such cases are happening among us railway people.
>
> (*T*: 512-513)

Unfortunately, Old Pop's warning comes to nothing. A monster *is* born to the Benade family. As Treppie realises, "Baby Benade, the lamb of our loins, 'cause Lambertus the Third – surprise, surprise! – turned out to be a genetic cul-de-sac" (*T*: 72). Nevertheless, the implication of Old Pop's letter is that the potential for monstrosity is not unique to the Benades; as he mentions, the other railway families also possess the potential to birth the monstrous heritage of South Africa's mythologised past. If the time has come to reap a harvest of violence and sorrow in the face of the return of the repressed, then Lambert may be just one malignant crop among a vast tainted field. Though the return of a mythologised golden era often symbolises a revitalising rebirth of past glories, Van Niekerk's Gothic narrative undermines the Afrikaner identity to make such a move impossible. Because the connection between the past and the present has proven to be inauthentic and spectral, reconnection to cultural "roots" – a platform always espoused by the National Party and the NGK. – will not achieve national revival. In *Triomf*, inability to connect to the past tenders a future that is both dystopian and finite. This cultural impotence references the necessity of the "teleology" and "eschatology" circumscribed within hauntology; the haunted world moves toward its end (Derrida 1994: 10). The anxieties and tensions inherent to this postcolonial Gothic require resolution – however, with no salvation in sight, the only plausible end seems to be an apocalypse of the Afrikaner identity.

3 Apocalypse Deferred

Gothic fiction is frequently synonymous with morbid eschatology; as Bayer-Berenbaum notes, "Death and sickness lead us to acknowledge the extent of the forces that control us, and in the face of death we recognize the omnipotence of time and try to confront our own annihilation" (Bayer-Berenbaum 1982: 26). This reader experience is also based, at least in part, on the jolt of emotional exploitation derived from engaging with sensationalistic literature: "The concept of self-extinction stretches consciousness; we probe the limits of our minds with fear, with caution, and yet with a certain thrill" (p. 26). Markman Ellis states:

> The gothic is particularly interested in exploiting the emotions, both by detailing the protagonist's thoughts and feelings, and by asking that the reader identify with them. The principle of pathos, arousing feelings in the reader, is established as the primary pattern for consumption of these works ....
>
> (Ellis 2000: 8-9)

By employing the Gothic tactic of inspiring pathos through fear, Van Niekerk implicates her readers in the narrative critique of South Africa's spectres. She tests the overtly Christian symbology that colours the Voortrekkers' journey by contrasting it with a future that is decidedly apocalyptic. The incestuous folly of the Benade family becomes an undoing of both the biblical creation myth and the creation myth that maintains the Afrikaner cultural identity:

> "Don't come and moan at me, sister. I told you and that stupid fool of a Pop, long time ago, you must be careful. But the two of you thought you were playing leading roles in *Genesis*. Just like the first fucken batch – Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel – all in the same family, and Lot with his randy daughters, and Noah, whose own sons buggered him. No wonder the whole lot of them drowned in the end."
>
> (*T*: 131)

By referencing their fraudulent, mock-biblical beginnings, Treppie makes a conclusion about his family's place in South Africa's epic narrative of creation: their incestuous breed is not a continuance of the quasi-religious Afrikaner tradition; instead, the Benades' perverted powers of generation have weakened them and made them susceptible to "drowning". For the Benades, the fear of drowning is located in the tides of the repressed black population that surrounds them. Because white South Africans possessed such an enormous share of the country's political and social power it is often easy to forget that they also form a racial minority within the nation. Though a minority, they retained all the privileges and powers of a majority. Despite their power and position, the repressed and dislocated black populace still possessed the strength of numbers – what they lacked in empowerment they made up for in collective mass. This situation re-creates the pitched battle between the Voortrekkers and the Zulus at the Battle of Blood River on a social, rather than militaristic, scale. These cultural tensions cause the Afrikaners to separate black bodies from black land by placing them into the ghettoised homelands that Ngcokovane refers to as "unbearable archipelagoes of misery" (Ngcokovane 1989:138).

The trauma and price of this movement sits heavily on the Benades' unconscious. Though they never question their perceived right to be at the

top of the racial ladder, the problem still becomes an object of fixation.[11] For example, Lambert's mural of a map of Africa discloses the tension between the nation's troubled past and turbulent present. Though distorted in perspective, the symbolic geography of Lambert's damaged mind produces a depiction of the initial Boer settlements that runs contrary to the imagery attributed to the Great Trek by the nationalistic civil religion: "He wanted to know what those arrows were. And when he told Treppie they were the kaffirs and the Afrikaners and history, Treppie said it looked more like piss-pipes and shit-pipes under the ground. Shit from this side and piss from that side" (*T*: 180). This collision of metaphoric shit and piss illustrates the potential for a similar collision on the streets of Johannesburg. As *Triomf*'s plot progresses and the elections draw near, the city is marked by expectations of disruption and ruin: a helicopter's searchlight sweeps the neighbourhood looking for a fugitive, gunfire is heard in the distance, Lambert takes a sudden interest in security fencing, the family finds itself swept along in a political street demonstration. All of these events seem to foreshadow that the elections will entail an eruption of violence and the dissolution of the great Voortrekker tradition. If the blacks "win" the election and establish a plural democracy, what will stop them from dismantling all of the traditions of Old South Africa? What will stop the Afrikaner world from falling apart?

With this uncertainty of future in view, Johannesburg takes on an atmosphere of apocalyptic possibility. The city becomes a World Serpent, waiting to swallow Afrikaner culture whole: as Treppie observes, "Jo'burg's like a big massive iron dinosaur devouring itself, tail first, screws and brackets flying through the air" (*T*: 310). Treppie's anxieties have their basis in historical fact. As the elections of 1994 approached, white South Africans were generally doubtful about their nation's prospects. Lindsay Michie Eades notes that "[b]y 1990 polls indicated strong pessimism among whites over the future of South Africa, and fear regarding their own security" (Eades 1999: 96). Because the elections that threatened social upheaval occurred so close to the end of the century, they recalled both a generalised *fin de siècle* panic and the notion of a millennial apocalypse. However, this apocalyptic movement in the novel possesses none of the positive ideas of rebirth and rejuvenation promised by the biblical judgment. Instead, all that can be hoped for in the coming doom is a violent end to an enervated conception of nation and the myths that sustain it. Treppie feels that nothing

11. As Steven Bruhm notes, "What becomes most marked in the contemporary Gothic – and what distinguishes it from its ancestors – is the protagonists' and the viewers' compulsive return to certain fixations, obsessions, and blockages" (Bruhm 2002: 261).

short of carnage can repair the breach and repay the legacy of blood and misery:

> In fact, he said, Lambert should consider a general culling of the Triomf population while he was at it with his blunt instrument. The blunter the better, he said, like a pestle in a mortar, to stamp some national blood into the soil. A little blood would do the soil in Triomf no end of good, 'cause nothing exhausted a place like old bricks.
>
> (*T*: 366)

For the "old bricks" of Triomf – drained and depleted families like the Benades – there is nothing to be done but wait to be pulverised; their fate is to have their blood spilled on the soil they have excavated. Only their "national blood" will quiet the spectres left by colonisation. Vijay Mishra notes, "Whereas a millenarian end affirms history and our place in a large design, Gothic apocalyptic narratives portray a world exhausted and otiose, anxious about itself and wary of any further participation in the processes of life" (Mishra 1994: 157). The hopelessness of this coming apocalypse reinforces the text's connection to the Gothic milieu; like the House of Usher, it seems that white South Africa must crumble and fall before the curse left by murderous racial discrimination is lifted. This Gothic element also connects back to the Benade family: only by the extinction of their tainted bloodline can room be made for new, healthier families to reclaim the space of Triomf.

Though the fear created by the possibility of apocalypse creates tension for the Benades, they do have a way out in mind just in the case the elections are followed by anarchy:

> "Well, if things don't work out then we've at least got a plan!" Lambert says. "Remember what you said, then we take Molletjie and we load the petrol into the front, and on the roof-rack, and in the dicky, and then we go due north. All of us, even Gerty and Toby. To Zimbabwe or Kenya. Where you can still live like a white man. With lots of kaffirboys and -girls to order around, just as we please!"
>
> (*T*: 65)

The Benades' anxiety, then, is that they won't be able to live like "white men" – a privilege born of their Afrikaner identity and connection to the lineage of the Great Trek – in the new South Africa. This cultural fear was not uncommon among South African whites as a whole:

> In essence, "separate development" policy is just an ideological justification for a racial policy based on fear. There is fear among whites not to be dominated, which is part of the psychology shaping the racial policy of the Apartheid regime. Government officials claim that whites will be "swamped" by blacks if the latter are given rights in a unitary state with whites.
>
> (Ngcokovane 1989: 138)

For the Benades, living like a white man implies mastery over black bodies and over black lives. Their projected escape route will take them to "Zimbabwe or Kenya", where they will still retain power over racial inferiors as posited by the quasi-religious tenets of civil religion. It is essential that their plan ends with reinscribing the cultural politics of apartheid in other places – to the Benades, and the culture that created them, the survival of the ideology of their civil religion is more important than the survival of their country. Again, this draws a deep connection to the conventions of the Gothic genre; as David Punter and Elisabeth Bronfen note, "Submission and the fantasized resumption of power would again be crucial elements of moments in a Gothic Ur-plot, linked to the search for routes out of a situation of helplessness ..." (Punter & Bronfen 2001: 18). Of course, the Benades' escape plan is little more than fantasy: their junk cars are unlikely to make it out of the country, Lambert's scavenged petrol bags leak, and the family itself has no real means of survival outside of Triomf. Only one member of the family is employed, and the nature of Treppie's work for the Chinese is dubious at best – some days he is paid in take-away food and cast-off electronics. The family has no wealth – their daily upkeep is dependent on pensions and disability payments. Their prospect of living as lords of black Africa is nothing more than a daydream that keeps their fear of cultural upheaval at bay. Ultimately, the family's escape is impossible – they have no choice but to wait for the apocalypse to descend upon them.

Curiously, when the day of the elections arrives, the apocalypse that the Benades have been waiting for comes in a form that is more local than national. Throughout the novel, Van Niekerk draws a comparison between the events leading up to the election and the arrival of Lambert's birthday – "Lambert's having a birthday," Treppie says, "it's a birthday for Africa" – yet that *frisson* never amounts to much (*T*: 465). Granted, Lambert is left dejected and sick and the family's house has been laid to waste after Mary's brief interjection into their insular lives, but the Benades surprisingly survive this dreaded milestone event. Nevertheless, the Benades have been too short-sighted about where the real potential for a localised, family apocalypse lies. While the house is being painted, Lambert finally gets access to the drawer that has been kept out of his reach – the drawer that contains the truth about the Benades' history of incest and self-sustaining

family mythology. The documents and photographs inside the drawer are the only real Revelation possible for the family; perhaps more than the refrigerator manual that Treppie passes down to Lambert, these items constitute the real Benade family Bible: "Whatever it is inside that drawer, it's always felt like the part the Witnesses read about the stuff inside the Ark of the Covenant" (*T*: 503). It is the insides of that drawer that unleash the violence that has been buried too long, not the results of the election.

When the End comes for the Benades it is neither conclusive nor in the form they expect. For Treppie, the coming apocalypse was always a projection of his own fear of a black uprising:

> He said he didn't pray for God's intervention, he prayed for the End itself, without any mediation. And when they came and told him the End had hair like wool and a voice like many waters, then all he could say was, no, the End had eyes that were white with fright and it was running down a dirt road with a panga through its back, or it was jumping in the air with a bullet in its head, and pots of ferns and palms in its hands.
>
> (*T*: 199)

For the Benades, the End is supposed to be a life-and-death struggle between the blacks – the panga symbolising violent black rebellion – and the whites who desperately cling to the paradisiacal emblems of "ferns and palms" even as they are overrun. Despite their belief in *that* version of the apocalypse, the violence that threatens to decimate the family erupts from the sum of their own folly. After he discovers the truth of his incest-ridden origins, Lambert transforms into a force more disruptive and chaotic than the racial struggle the Benades have been preparing for. Pop is killed when Lambert breaks the revelatory drawer over his head, Treppie has his fingers mangled, and Mol is stabbed in the side. Lambert's rage even turns upon himself, resulting in a broken foot that later needs to be amputated.

It is the Benades' familial policy of segregation that causes the "biggest Balls Up of all Balls Up that is the Worst and the End of our Story", yet the rest of South Africa fails to reach the explosive apocalyptic ending that Van Niekerk's narrative had hinted at throughout the novel (*T*: 38). As it turns out, the election results in celebration, not tumult. Watching the election festivities on the television, Mol sees that

> Heathens, Jews and Mohammedans were gathered there together, and everyone was quite jolly, without bullet-proofing. Even the aeroplanes didn't shoot. They flew over with rainbows of smoke coming out of their tails. The cannons were shot off, yes, but that was just into the sky for the new president.
>
> (*T*: 22)

This ending takes all of the trappings of the expected cataclysm and transforms them into symbols of goodwill. The military apparatus of South Africa – the aeroplanes and cannons – are changed from weapons of state to objects of jubilation. Still, this image is not without a troubling implication that continues to play into white South Africa's anxiety over the new shape of the nation. Notice that although "Heathens, Jews and Mohammedans" have set aside their differences in the face of this radical shift, the white, Christian segment of South Africa's population – the segment that upholds the Calvinist tradition of the Voortrekkers and the political institutions that engender the civic iconology of Afrikaner culture – seems to be missing from the picture.

Though the world does not end in flames for the Benades, there does not seem to be a place left for them in the new South Africa. In essence, *Triomf*'s primal eschatology calls for a national exorcism that never arrives: "effective exorcism pretends to declare the death only in order to put to death" (Derrida 1994: 48). By switching the fiery image of a national doomsday for a familial self-destruction, Van Niekerk's conjuration of hauntology remains inconclusive; time is still out-of-joint and the spectres of ideology reject finality. Anxiety is not diffused, but deferred. This move also insures that spectral anxiety will remain a destabilising fear that operates under the surface of the national consciousness. For Van Niekerk's audience, this unease is replayed by the act of reading, by indulging in the act of recreation; Van Niekerk's literature of terror places the onus of Gothic hauntology within her readership, charging it with the responsibility of discourse with the spectres of South African postcoloniality.[12] As Derrida states:

> This anxiety in the face of the ghost is properly revolutionary .... And the more life there is, the graver the specter of the other becomes, the heavier its imposition. And the more the living have to answer for it. *To answer for the dead, to respond to the dead*. To correspond and have it out with [*s'expliquer avec*] obsessive haunting, in the absence of any certainty or symmetry.
>
> (Derrida 1994: 109)

However, the attention paid to the phantasmal is never an exorcism – it is a

12. In Gothic fiction, emotional investment on the part of the reader is frequently manipulated to produce a social or intellectual effect that persists after the act of reading is complete; Valdine Clemens suggests that "in frightening us out of our habitual 'wits', Gothic fiction can actually shock us into using them in more viable ways" while Jerrold E. Hogle reads this Gothic mimesis as a "capacity to abject cultural and psychological contradictions for modern readers to face or avoid" (Clemens 1999: 1; Hogle 2002: 14).

vigil: “This watch itself will engender new ghosts” (Derrida 1994: 87). In Van Niekerk’s version of the postcolonial Gothic, fear is never dispelled entirely – it endures to inform the new national characters that will arise following the submersion of the Afrikaner cultural identity.

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