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## **Between the Horror Show and the Wall of Silence**

*Reflections on fiction and truth in the transition processes of South Africa and Argentina*

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This paper is a kind of partial summary report from a four-year research project that I have just concluded, called *Writing Transition : Fiction and Truth in South Africa and Argentina*. That is, an investigation of the role of fiction in the recent social transformation processes of South Africa and Argentina.

My formation is basically that of a writer and journalist and one of the premises of my investigation has been to apply the writer's perspective rather than that of a researcher in comparative literature – which I am not. My informants have mainly been fellow literary writers and critics in South Africa and Argentina, and more than informants, they have actually been participants in the process.

But for this paper, I am concentrating on my findings – not the methodology or the form of my presentation. And I'm looking specifically at literature as a medium of interrogation in a specific historic moment of transition from a traumatic near past; in South Africa from the system of racial segregation known as Apartheid and the culmination of violence in the "interregnum years"; in Argentina from the latest military dictatorship and its "dirty war" on the militant left, which took the character of extermination.

The experience of trauma and society's subsequent challenge of dealing with the memories of violence and abuse could be applied to most parts of the world. My reason for choosing the seemingly very dissimilar cases of South Africa and Argentina is that they are two extraordinarily rich cultural environments to which I have a long-time relationship, as a fiction writer and as a journalist.

### **Transition and Truth**

First, a few words on the very notion of *transition* – a complex and contested concept, with different connotations in South Africa and Latin America. South Africa's virtual makeover in the 1990s and early 2000s is a period of radical transition in almost every sense. It had many similarities with the simultaneous restructuring of the former socialist states of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, yet with more far-going cultural implications. In Argentina, the transition from military dictatorship to democracy in the 1980s had the formal character of reinstatement, since there was a tradition of democracy –though weak and interspersed by a parallel tradition of military coups. This created a condition of mutual inability and an uncertainty as to

whether the return to democratic rule really marked a definite break with the past, or if it was just another phase in the recurrent cycle. The Argentinean case clearly demonstrates that a transitional process is neither linear nor irreversible.

If the emphasis is put on the economy rather than the political process, the post-dictatorial transitions to democracy in South America may even be regarded as simply a progression in the larger-scale process of “transit from the modern national state to the transnational post-state market” (Avelar 1999). The real “work” had already been done by the military.

A transition, hence, does not necessarily imply a move from a closed society to an open one, but the transition period itself is often, if not always, a period of opening, with a flourishing of artistic and intellectual creativity. The transitions of the late and post-Cold War have, moreover, been intrinsically connected to the concept of Truth through the proliferation of *truth commissions*, with immense implications for cultural and intellectual production. Truth, in its political implementation, is closely linked to the concept of Human Rights, which became “the archetypal language of democratic transition in the 1990s” (Wilson 2001). Nearly all transitions from authoritarian rule adopted the language of human rights and the political model of constitutionalism – in Latin America as well as in Eastern Europe and, most notably, in South Africa, whose *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (1995 – 97) is arguably, to date, the most ambitious and transparent of them all. Its main contender would, in fact, be the Argentinean *CONADEP*, the National Commission on the Disappeared, headed by writer Ernesto Sábato, which preceded the South African *TRC* by more than a decade.

The start of South Africa's transition is usually set to 1990, with the release of Nelson Mandela and the un-banning of the ANC and other political organizations. It could be dated earlier, encompassing the liberation struggle of the 1970s and '80s, and references to the transition often include these crucial decades of prolific literary and artistic expression. But for my purposes here it makes sense to choose the starting-point in the process which acquired momentum with the 1994 elections and Mandela's installation as South Africa's first democratic president. In Argentina, the very term ‘transition’ is contested, and usually confined to a period of three to four years in the mid 1980s. Although the *Conadep* had a momentary impact comparable to that of the *TRC*, it was however not until the late 1990s that the traumatic experiences of the dictatorship and the preceding armed political struggle turned into a major theme in literature and other forms of mediated fiction. The time frames of my two case studies therefore curiously correspond, with one culmination in the years before the turn of the Millennium and a second one in the last few years, during the time of this investigation.

Memory and, increasingly, *postmemory* (Hirsch 1997) are crucial elements in truth-seeking and reconciliation processes at both individual and national levels, and tensions between testimonial and fictional accounts of the violent past has been a prominent feature in public debate, especially in Argentina where a “memory boom” in the late ‘90s coincided with the coming-of-age of the children of the disappeared. The current memory discourse in the humanities and social sciences has, to a large extent (although indirectly) informed my investigation and provided a theoretical frame. Explicitly or not, discussions and representations of the recent history of South Africa and Argentina have a common reference in the Holocaust debate; “the modern fact of extermination being the point at which the human becomes permanently unrecognizable to itself” (Herwitz 2003:7). To speak about the unspeakable is one of contemporary literature’s major challenges, and the differing attempts in South Africa and Argentina to look the horrific past in the face and take possession of history are at the core of my comparative study.

### **Conceptual repertoire**

Arjun Appadurai (1996: 58) refers to Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* (1988) as an example of fiction’s ability to move its readers to intense action. It is an insidious but not very convincing example. One could question whether the social impact of *The Satanic Verses* had to do at all with any persuasive power in Rushdie’s prose. Like the more recent mobs that burned Danish flags in protest against the caricatures of Muhammad in the newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*, the people instigating riots were driven by the mere rumour of the contained blasphemy. The classic CBS radio broadcast on 30 October 1938 of a dramatization of H. G. Wells’ science fiction novel *The War of the Worlds* (1898) would have been a better illustration of fiction’s *imaginative* power. *Reading* literature rarely – if ever – has that instigation to “intense action” or immediate change. It works more complexly, as South African writer and critic Michael Chapman suggests, “filtering into the literary consciousness of people who start to think things through and see other possibilities”. But Appadurai is certainly right in claiming that fiction is part of the conceptual repertoire of contemporary societies and that fiction writers often contribute to the construction of social and moral maps for their readers (Ibid.). Literature was a principal medium for modernization and the construction of national identities, in Europe as well as in the newly independent former colonies of Africa, Asia and the Americas. Many post-colonial writers, not least in Africa, actively contributed to the nation-building process. Others, like V. S. Naipaul, inadvertently played a pivotal role, as analysed by Anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen.

Although it was not the intention of the author, [*A House for Mr. Biswas*] has been instrumental in the forging of a genuinely Indo-Trinidadian identity. It has

contributed to raising a certain historical consciousness, and in its time, it gave expression and articulation to hitherto muted concerns (Eriksen 1994: 184).

Eriksen does not produce any evidence for these strong statements. There simply is no way to quantitatively measure such intangible impact on something equally ethereal as a *collective imaginary*. Yet hardly anyone will dispute that some specific works of fiction do play decisive roles in history, sometimes to the extent of even becoming turning points (Patton 2006). But if we reduce fiction to its common understanding in English as prose literature, I believe it is pertinent to assume that its position in terms of communication power has been substantially weakened in the last decades. With the possible (improbable) exception of some newly established or re-established nation-states like Kosovo or Montenegro, proto-nations like Palestine, Kurdistan or Southern Sudan, or repressive states in processes of political struggle like Burma or Iran, it is hard to imagine that any *novel* anywhere today would have a social and cultural impact that even faintly compares to that of Naipaul's *A House for Mr Biswas* (1961), Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1968), or, for that matter, Gabriel García Márquez' *Cien años de soledad* (1967; *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, 1970). Yet, marginal as it may be, the transformative potential of the literary imagination should not be underestimated.

Of the writers that I have interviewed, Ronnie Govender is the only one who can be said to have a *broad* audience, extending beyond the intellectual middle class, and a firm local base. Antjie Krog has a fairly wide international reputation, after the formidable success of *Country of My Skull* (1998), and a relatively large readership in South Africa, although the two sequel books in her "transition trilogy" have not received nearly as much attention in the public debate. Ricardo Piglia is a literary celebrity in Argentina, but not widely read – with the singular exception of his novel from the dictatorship, *Respiración artificial* (1980; *Artificial Respiration*, 1994). Of the other writers that I review, only J. M. Coetzee and, to a lesser extent, Zakes Mda, Marlene van Niekerk and Fogwill, can be regarded as well known outside literary circles in their respective public spheres; in Coetzee's case, of course, globally. Coetzee excluded, we are talking books with relatively small circulation, and writers who necessarily combine their literary profession with other forms of more lucrative activities; in other words, the conditions of the vast majority of writers in the world who are not in the bestseller circuit.

Fiction's contribution to knowledge-production in society has little, if anything, to do with numbers, and the importance of a single work may only be fully apprehended in retrospect. In South Africa, during the infamous State of Emergency, the culmination of resistance and repressive violence in the 1980s, art and literature were largely subordinated to the imminent political agenda, but the outstanding

novel from this period is to my mind not anyone of those that had clear affiliations with the on-going political struggle, but Coetzee's allegorical *The Life & Times of Michael K* (1983). The humbled, meek and yet defiant Michael K is certainly part of the conceptual repertoire of contemporary South Africa, just as David and Lucy Lurie, the protagonists of Coetzee's controversial post-apartheid novel *Disgrace* (1999) - one of the most intriguing (and disturbing) explorations of the New South Africa, as the new democratic state was referred to in the early transition period. In Argentina, the two outstanding literary works from the military dictatorship are Manuel Puig's premonitory *El Beso de la Mujer Araña* (1976; *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, 1979) and Piglia's *Respiración artificial*. The homosexual Molina in Puig's novel, counterpart to both the military warden and his fellow prison cell interlocutor, the militant Valentín, is one of the most resilient characters in Argentinean literature, and undoubtedly still present in the conceptual repertoire.

But which are the lasting literary works of the transition? That is a much more intricate question, for various reasons. Literary accounts are usually written in the past tense, metaphorically speaking, and require a certain "incubation" time, even though there are significant exceptions to that rule. Any assessment of the near-present is moreover constrained by the lack of distance, and will inevitably be preliminary, in addition to partial. Another complicating factor is the permeable nature of transition itself. Whereas "writing the resistant subject" (Helgesson 1999) is a quite clearly-defined assignment, regardless of whether the ultimate goals of the resistance struggle are shared or not, writing transition is a devious task of conflicting challenges. White South African intellectuals with affiliations to the old regime wondered what writers would write about after apartheid. Argentinean intellectuals with affiliations to the crushed guerrilla would not even admit to having been defeated. To many of them, the struggle continued - and continues to this day.

In my inventory of the literary production of the transition I distinguish between *reactive* and *proactive* expressions with regard to the disputed near past. The first category applies to most of the books and films that were produced in the aftermath of the truth commissions. Like the contemporary media coverage of the *Conadep* and the *TRC*, many of the early narrations had a sensationalist tinge and contributed to *el show del horror*, as it was called in Argentina (Lorenz 2006). In South Africa, the horrors were to be played down for the reconciliatory purpose, in accordance with the over-arching New South Africa conception, whereas Argentina soon sealed the contested near-past with a Wall of Silence - the title of Lita Stantic's film (1993) and an apposite metaphor for the Menem era's stunning disinterest in the dictatorship years. Argentinean society may still have to come to terms with what Avelar calls the *truth of defeat* (1999: 67).

The reactive expressions basically reproduce the fictions that are circulating in the society, to speak in Piglia's terms. Not necessarily the prevailing "State narrative"; they may voice diverging and oppositional stories, but rarely in a daring or provocative way. The disputed history is signaled by common markers that tend to turn into clichés; in Argentina the Mother come Grandmother of Plaza de Mayo, the adopted orphan come adolescent in search of his/her disappeared parents, and, as counterpart, the distinguished gentleman next-door with a shady past as torturer and murderer; in South Africa the disillusioned former freedom fighter come drug addict and petty criminals vs. the incompetent affirmative action beneficiary or the *nouveau riche* black businessman in his conspicuous BMW. Generally speaking, these narratives are *mirroring* the transition in a way that may be interesting from an ethnographic point of view, but neither as art nor as social critique, and I have paid them sparse attention in this study.

My focus is on the *proactive* literary strategies, by which I don't mean an *activist* stance or commitment of "writing back", nor even necessarily an awareness of any alleged "master narrative", be it national ('Peronism', 'African Renaissance') or global ('Neocolonialism', 'Globalization'). Proactive simply implies an *interrogation* of society and history by means of fiction (or documentary forms with fictional elements). As I claim to demonstrate in my study, both South Africa and Argentina abound with examples of such interrogations that arguably have played a proactive role in the transition process, displaying public lies and self-deceptions, deconstructing prevailing myths rather than forging new identities. There are fundamental disparities between the two cases, primarily due to the diametrically opposed outcomes of the political militancy. The demise of the apartheid state was conceived, and boosted by the ANC, as the victory of the liberation struggle, whereas Argentina's return to democracy was in a way the result of a double defeat; the annihilation of the guerillas in the dirty war and the subsequent humiliation for their vanquishers in the Malvinas disaster. But given the dissimilar historical contexts and diverging literary traditions, I find the experiential correspondences and the complementariness in cultural production the more striking.

### **Literary Capital**

In South Africa I wish to highlight two tendencies in particular. Firstly, the exploration – and reclaiming – of the urban space. Writing the post-Apartheid Johannesburg (and, to a much lesser extent as yet, Cape Town or Durban) is imagining the most resilient physical legacy of apartheid and the most dramatic social and cultural transformation at the same time; the remaining divisions and mental barriers and the emerging *Afropolis*, to use Achille Mbembe's and Sarah

Nuttall's catchy term (2004; 2008). In the Literary City, diverging stories map the new territory, over-lapping and shedding light on each other, making the metropolis unfold in an exploded view of all its gruesome splendour. In order to know and understand South Africa's transformation, it is compulsory to read for example the Hillbrow novels by Phaswane Mpe and Ivan Vladislavić (2001). The exploration of the urban space is moreover an area where the literary imagination works in exemplary conjunction with the social sciences (Mbembe and Nuttall 2004; 2008; Morris 1999).

Here, the discrepancy from Argentina is noteworthy. In contrast to the elusive Johannesburg, the city of Buenos Aires has a solid standing as one of the literary world capitals. Even though it has also undergone dramatic change in the last decades, the prevailing image is rather that of timeless continuity. The literary (mythical) city is inscribed in the real, to the extent that it may even conceal the on-going real transformation. Buenos Aires' metamorphosis is certainly not as spectacular as that of Johannesburg, because the urban topography has never been as obscenely segregated. But the lines of division are there nevertheless, and yet they are largely invisible in literature. The rewriting of Buenos Aires hence remains a compelling challenge for Argentinean writers. Carlos Gamerro is partly doing it in his novels *Las islas* (1998) and *La aventura de los bustos de Eva* (2004), and he reflects on this significant blind spot in a more recent essay ("Lost in the City", 2009), where he suggests that the city in Argentinean (and Uruguayan) literature is the territory of the *fantastic* and the magical, whereas the rural small town is a thoroughly realistic space. That is why *magical realism* never gained a foothold around Rio de la Plata, although this generic term is often mistakenly attributed to the fantastic literature of Borges, Cortázar, Onetti and others.<sup>1</sup> Gamerro also explains the difference between Argentinean and Brazilian literature in this respect by contrasting the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro, that are climbing the hills and always visible from every part of the city, to the *villas miserias* of Buenos Aires, that are extending in the lowlands of the city outskirts and rendered invisible, sometimes literally behind walls. Two of the infamous villas, which I have visited, are expressively named *Bajo Flores* (Lower Flores) and *Ciudad Oculta* (The hidden town).

The second thematic strand, which is not yet as clearly articulated, is the challenging of the still prevailing racialized conception of society and subsequent search for alternative (creolized) histories and identities. Zoë Wicomb's fiction, particularly her novel *David's Story* (2000), is certainly articulating hitherto muted

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<sup>1</sup> For example by Appadurai, in his otherwise illuminating reading of Cortázar's short story "Nadando en la piscine de gofio" (Swimming in a pool of grey grits), from the collection *Un tal Lucas* (1979; *A Certain Lucas*, 1984), as an illustration of the increasingly deterritorialized link between the imagination and social life (1996, pp 58-61).



concerns and, potentially, enhancing historical consciousness. Examining South Africa's fragmentary and largely unwritten history would seem particularly apt for the literary imagination, since it implies reinvention. One could have assumed that many writers, endorsing the new democratic government, would be tempted to contribute to the making of a new national narrative, as explicitly called for in the TRC process. But the illusory "Rainbow Nation" never received any substantial literary underpinning. Neither did, as yet, the "African Renaissance". Yet, a truly non-racialist South African identity – the suggested *hybrid of in-betweenness* (Chapman 2006) based on *the complex configurations of hybridity and syncretism* (Nuttall and Michael 2000) – is still to be imagined. The persistence of the black-white dichotomy is partly due to the continuing predominance of white intellectuals in the public sphere. But the obsession with race is a legacy from colonialism and apartheid that clearly also resonates with divisions and identity politics among the black majority, rearing its head in the raging ethnically motivated violence in the interregnum years, and in the current outbursts of vile xenophobia vis-à-vis immigrants from other African countries. The unembellished writing of the city does also reflect these ugly sides of the transition.

In Argentina, by contrast, one may talk about blindness to race – or to the correlation between skin complexion and class division. Bolivians, Paraguayans and mestizos from the northern Andean provinces are indiscriminately classified as *negros* and they are largely as invisible in literature as the suburbs and shantytowns where they live.<sup>2</sup> This negligence, to put it mildly, may seem paradoxical, given Argentina's history as an immigrant nation and the successful acculturation of the huge influx of newcomers from Europe and the Middle East in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. But inclusive as it may be in comparison to *Afrikanerdom*, *Argentinity* was equally forged on the idea of European civilization as opposed to barbarity, and its conception coincided with the annihilation of the remaining Indian population in the so called Campaign of the Desert.<sup>3</sup> Beatriz Sarlo (2009) demonstrates how the

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<sup>2</sup> In 2006, a novel by the name *Bolivia Construcciones* actually won the Nobel prize of the newspaper *La Nación* and the publisher Sudamericana. It tells the story of the daily strife of two Bolivians in the suburb of Bajo Flores. The author, Sergio DiNucci using the pseudonym Bruno Morales, was however accused of plagiarism, having copied large parts of Spanish writer Carmen Laforet's novel *Nada*, and the prize was withdrawn in 2007, shortly after the publication of the novel. Bruno Morales, who defended himself by evoking "intertextuality", has published a second novel on the same theme, *Grandeza Boliviana*, in 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Juan José Saer makes a wonderful recapitulation of the Argentinean Genesis in his "imaginary tractate" *El río sin orillas* (1991; *The river without shores*). The first Spaniards who arrived at the banks of what is now Buenos Aires, believing that they had rounded the Southern tip of the continent, were killed and devoured by starved nomadic Indians in front of their companions who had stayed on the mother ship. The first colony to settle soon succumbed to starvation and sickness in the inhospitable wilds. Only the horses survived; five mares and seven stallions that bred and spread to what was to

attitude towards the strangers were always selective, accepting the cosmopolitanism of the elite while fearing the effects of mass immigration, but also how acceptance gradually grew as the object of scorn shifted. Once the Italians and the Jews had ceased to be strangers, the city had to accustom itself to the Syrian-Lebanese, whom writer Roberto Arlt described in the most flagrant racist and orientalist terms as childishly gay and clumsy, speaking guttural tongues that didn't resemble anything else.<sup>4</sup> Arlt, one of the great social critics of Argentinean literature, was N. B. in favor of exoticism and affirmed what others regarded as a serious threat to the national culture. The fear that the city would be contaminated by strangers was rampant in the early years of Peronism, when concerns turned from the immigrants of “bad” European origin to the *cabecitas negras* of internal migration. The latter were eventually to be replaced as principal target of discrimination by the immigrants from the neighbouring countries (Sarlo 2009.: 101-102).

### **The Notion of the Nation**

Argentina's history is not less turbulent than that of South Africa in terms of clashing modalities; violent class conflicts and a deep-rooted antagonism between Buenos Aires and the rural oligarchy. Competing political projects have taken turns at power, and one could speak of an unresolved disparity between politics and economy, or a lack of congruency between myth and reality. Yet the notion of the nation is fundamentally shared by most Argentines, regardless of political inclinations, and the national history is a natural and abundant source of literary inspiration and interpretation. This is a fundamental difference from South Africa, which becomes apparent in the disturbing parallel between Desmond Tutu's vision of South Africa as a sick body in urgent need of healing (Wilson 2001: 15), and the Argentinean Junta's image of the deadly sick national body, in need of instant surgery – literally implying the amputation of the limbs infested by the alien virus (Piglia 2001: 105-106).

This is also where I see the decisive contribution of literature in the Argentinean transition. Whereas in South Africa one may foresee – and welcome – attempts at forging a shared transcultural narrative that never existed, the principal challenge for Argentinean writers appears to be the dismantling of the still pervasive national mythology. The particular case of Malvinas (The Falklands) condensates the complex of complicity, revealing the ambiguous yet intimate relations between the dictatorship and civil society. Two key examples in the Argentinean case study are

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become known as the most fertile soil on earth, the *Pampa*. The Argentinity succession order was hence The Horse, The Indian, The Gaucho and, lastly, The Immigrant.

<sup>4</sup> “Sirio libaneses en el centro”, in *Aguafuertes porteñas* (1933; Buenosirean etchings), quoted in Sarlo 2009, pp. 99-100.

precisely the two Malvinas novels; Fogwill's *Los pichiciegos* (1983; *Malvinas Requiem*, 2007), written in a creative trance during the culmination of the war, and Carlos Gamerro's *Las islas*. *Los pichiciegos* is one of the most remarkable examples of fiction's truth that I can think of. Its all-imaginary story of a subterranean colony of Argentinean deserters, who survive by trading with both sides and building a rude and ruthless free-market economy literally under the war, is not only the most truthful depiction of what was really happening on the barren islands, but also a chilling prophesy of post-dictatorial Argentina (Zimmer 2006). *Las islas* is the story of that prophesy materialized; a tragicomic hyperbole of the grand illusion of the 1990s.

The prevalence of satire and irony in Argentinean literature stands out in the comparison. Although many leftist intellectuals do endorse the present popular government, in a way that corresponds to their South African colleagues' (initial) support of the ANC administration, there is a strong Argentinean tradition of fundamental distrust and cynicism with regard to the state. Borges and Fogwill were both anarchists, although of different affiliations. The other striking feature in Argentinean cultural production of this century's first decade is the generic dialogue and interplay between literary fiction and documentary film in works like Albertina Carri's *Los rubios* (2002) and Nicolás Prividera's *M* (2007), both made by children of disappeared parents and breaking taboo lines in their reinterpretations of the past.

### **Time and Distance**

Due to the fundamental political change and the massive momentary cultural impact of the TRC, it may seem at a first glance that South Africa has made a thorough revision of its brutal past, whereas Argentina has gladly abided to former president Carlos Menem's motto of looking forward and not turning back and only recently, and by government decree, initiated a proper examination of the virulent 1970s. But let us not be fooled by appearance. The *Conadep* and the TRC worked under completely different conditions. While the TRC had the mandate and authority of a brand new constitution, and the resources to assemble a much larger material, it can be argued that it also more effectively closed the book on the past, in the name of national reconciliation. The judicial process in Argentina that led to the trial of the Junta leaders had potentially far more deep-going consequences for society. It was interrupted, by Menem's indemnity policies, and when the Kirchner government reopened legal process against perpetrators in subordinate positions, the accused had grown old and were mostly retired. Yet the legal process is proceeding, whereas the apartheid perpetrators who were pardoned by the TRC remain protected from prosecution.

The time factor may also be crucial from the literary point of view. In Argentina, the *maturity* of memory – and postmemory – plays a significant role. The

'70s are at more than 30 years distance, and a second generation with only mediated memories of the traumatic events has come of age. The entire apartheid era has a much wider historical frame, but the culmination of the violent clashes lays a decade later than in Argentina, and one may assume that the most penetrating stories about the state of emergency and the interregnum years are yet to be written. As the black-white dichotomy eventually fades away, one can also expect that other conflicts come to the foreground in the rewriting of the present and near past. But spatial distance is also a crucial element, as demonstrated by the exile experience's essential role in literature. Many, not to say most, of the South African writers in this study are living fully or partially in voluntary exile. In Coetzee's case, the rupture appeared to be terminal, and many of his readers feared that the move to Adelaide, South Australia, of all places, would be devastating for his writing. As it turns out, it has on the contrary provided new creative impetus and a more relaxed relationship to his South African experience, as manifested in his two latest books, *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007) and *Summertime* (2009), which fascinatingly intermesh public and personal voices, fiction and memoir, in *novel* forms – giving the term its original meaning, as Michael Chapman notes in one of his recent essays. Again, Coetzee is ahead of his critics and pointing a way forward, also for literary criticism, beyond the seeming dead end of *Disgrace* (Chapman 2010).

South Africa is apparently only in the beginning of its transformation. It may prove to be one of the most interesting exponents of emerging global modernity. A modernity which – if I may propose a provisional definition – is free of the constraints of a national imaginary, yet firmly grounded in a local transcultural context. But it may just as well move in other directions. Argentina, like Latin America as a whole, seems to be doing well in the global economic competition. But whether it will finally break out of its vicious circle or not remains an open question.

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