Negotiating a new cultural space: aspects of fantasy in contemporary South African youth literature

by

Gina Leigh Jansen van Vuuren

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Dr Molly Anne Brown

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DECLARATION

Full name: **Gina Leigh Jansen van Vuuren**

Student Number: **24208362**

Degree/Qualification: **Magister Artium in the Department of English**

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ABSTRACT

Due to its subversive nature, fantasy of various kinds can be seen as opening up a liminal space within its texts. In this study it will be argued that within the postcolonial context of South Africa, this liminal space, which offers the possibility of challenging stereotypes and re-visioning previous misconceptions about both race and gender, a space between the colonial and the postcolonial, may allow young readers to achieve a re-negotiation of identity − both cultural and individual. An attempt will be made to suggest that, in recent years, there has been an increasing trend among South African authors to use fantasy consciously as an instrument of subversion and to unsettle aspects of adolescent identity within the multi-cultural context of post-Apartheid South Africa. Key texts that will be referred to are: *The Genuine Half-moon Kid* (1992) by Michael Williams, *Because Pula Means Rain* (2000) by Jenny Robson, and *Hidden Star* (2006) by K. Sello Duiker.

Because of the radical political changes taking place in South Africa in 1992, Michael Williams's use of Joseph Campbell's hero cycle in his novel *The Genuine Half-moon Kid* (1992) is explored. The main protagonist, Jason Watson, goes on a quest to find a yellowwood box that was left to him by his late grandfather. His quest acts as a catalyst for his personal growth, and using the theories of Campbell and Jung, his process of maturation and coming-of-age is investigated. Due to the interregnum state of the country at the time, the study asks whether the use of a white male protagonist and a Eurocentric hero cycle is wholly successful in renegotiating the South African identity at the time.

In *Because Pula Means Rain* (2000)*,* the narrative is woven around young Emmanuel's search for belonging in his local community. Emmanuel is a young boy with albinism and he

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is ostracized from his black community because of the 'whiteness' of his skin. Emmanuel is thus an interesting site of double Othering – he is neither black nor white, but is stuck in an in-between, liminal place of double negation. It is from this place of ostracism that he begins his journey, and through it Robson opens up a space for counter-hegemonic discourse.

K. Sello Duiker's appropriation of traditional African myths in his novel *Hidden Star* (2006) as an attempt to redress cultural dislocation caused by the urbanisation of traditional South African cultures is discussed. His multicultural perspective and his use of a female protagonist offer a hopeful and subversive interrogation of the South African coming-of-age story.

This study will examine how all of these texts are using the fantastic in novels for adolescents to open up a liminal space – a place in which postcolonial re-dress can take place and in which young adults can begin to reconcile the conflicting messages presented to them by communities in postcolonial flux. All of these novels shed new light on what it means to be a teenager in South Africa today.

KEY TERMS:

Fantasy, adolescent literature, postcolonialism, identity, coming-of-age, Other, liminal space, Michael Williams, Jenny Robson, K. Sello Duiker

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Ever since J.K. Rowling's first Harry Potter book, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, was released in 1997 and became a phenomenal publishing success story, there has been an explosion of renewed interest in fantasy literature for children and adolescents. Overnight, it seems, the general perception of what was once considered the obscure and 'lesser' genre of fantasy literature has become a popular culture craze. By 1998, *Harry Potter* was already being described as "an unavoidable cultural phenomenon" (Heilman, 2003:1). Fantasy books have been flying off the shelves, breaking publishing records across the board. The *Harry Potter* series, for instance, has been read worldwide in over 67 languages (Neal, 2008:x) and over 400 million copies of the books have been sold since 1997 (Dammann, 2008:1). In recent years, film adaptations of fantasy works have also become major cinematic blockbusters, and the *Harry Potter* films are, to date, the highest earning film franchise of all time, having earned more at the box office than the *James Bond 007* series or the *Star Wars* films (Starmometer, 2007:[s.p]). In June 2014, Forbes reported that J.K Rowling "had made $14 million in earnings and is number 84 on the list of the World's Most Powerful Celebrities" (Bessette, 2014:[s.p]).

As a teacher and educator, over the last few years of teaching high school (Grades 8 through 12) English Home Language, I have noticed a definite increase in the amount of fantasy literature read by the adolescents of today. Whether this is simply because our teenagers have become caught up in the pop culture craze over vampires currently sweeping the world (thanks to the success of Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* series and the subsequent blockbuster films), or because they truly have found delight in reading fantasy for adolescents, the fact that teenagers are going crazy for fantasy cannot be ignored.

This global phenomenon has also influenced South African teenagers, and in this dissertation I would like to trace a trend I have noticed among South African authors over the last two decades or so. I will argue that South African authors Michael Williams, Jenny Robson, and K. Sello Duiker are using fantasy literature for adolescents in wonderful new ways in the unique post-Apartheid context of South Africa. These authors are using fantasy for adolescents to interrogate issues of identity and what it means to be a young South African in our continued state of postcolonial flux in the post-imperial and postcolonial context of South Africa.

In the following chapters, I will complete a critical analysis of one text by each author, namely *The Genuine Half-moon Kid* (1992) by Michael Williams, *Because Pula Means Rain* (2000) by Jenny Robson, and *The Hidden Star* (2006) by K. Sello Duiker. Each text will be examined in terms of how fantasy functions within the text using genre and mode criticism; how the text reflects and deals with its specific postcolonial context; and how each text is suited to its adolescent audience.

The three texts I have chosen for this study reflect a diversity representative of the multicultural context of South Africa, but each of these South African authors has used the fantastic in a different way, though for similar purposes, as a mechanism for identity development during the important stage of adolescence.

Fantasy literature has for many years been looked down on as "escapist" (Jackson, 1988:1), and has consequently been dismissed in formal academic circles. Some fantasy writers see this prejudice as a result of the legacy left by the Modernists who, according to Ursula le

Guin, had contempt for anything not "[r]ealist" (2007:83). Le Guin also states that "Edmund Wilson and his generation left a tradition of criticism that is, in its way, quite a little monster". She goes on to say that "the [m]odernists wanted so badly to be perceived as grown-ups that they left a legacy of contempt for children's literature that is barely questioned" (Le Guin, 2007:83,85). Thus, since the turn of the century, no fiction "has been taken seriously except various forms of realism, which are labelled 'serious'. The rest of narrative fiction is labelled 'genre' and is dismissed unread" (Le Guin, 2007:83). This has been specifically true in academic circles, and fantasy literature has rarely been studied at university level. And yet, at a time when one teenage wizard has been able to capture the imagination of the entire world, it seems that fantasy literature has captured something of the *zeitgeist* of teenagers today.

How is this possible for a genre whose critics have accused it of being nostalgic and "transcending reality, escaping the human condition and constructing superior, alternate secondary worlds through a nostalgic, humanist vision" (Jackson, 1988:3)? We could dismiss fantasy literature as purely escapist, and say that teenagers are simply trying to find an alternative to the violent and destructive postmodern world in which they live. However, I believe that the explosion of fantasy in recent years is more than a pop culture phenomenon, and that fantasy literature is now offering teenagers more than merely an escape. Why this has happened, we can only speculate. I would like to argue, however, that the creation of secondary worlds through the use of fantasy, rather than merely offering an escape mechanism, opens up a space that allows the author and the reader to reflect back on their own reality. According to Tolkien, "...fact becomes that which is manipulated by the fantasy writer to produce a keener perception of the primary world and a greater ability to survive in it" (Tolkien, 1992:35). Once immersed in this alternative world, readers of fantasy can look

back on their own world from a new perspective, with fresh eyes. From this place of alienation, the readers can evaluate and understand their own world better.

1. Fantasy Literature

There has been an increasing interest since the eighties in the academic study of fantasy as mode and as genre, especially in the area of children's literature. A leading fantasy critic, Brian Attebery, has said that in recent years there has been "a growing academic interest in literature that violates realism" (1992:vii). Some critics have said that the current popularity of the fantastic in literature and film is "chiefly as a result of a society that yearns to embrace nostalgia and escape to a less complex world" (Ruddick, 1992:1). However, Ruddick, in his book, *The State of the Fantastic,* goes on to argue that true fantasy, in its purest form, is "a far more confrontational impulse" (1992:2). Here, I will attempt to examine exactly what fantasy in its truest form is, as I will be approaching the chosen South African texts from a postcolonial perspective, "[d]e-mystifying the process of reading fantasies will, hopefully, point to the possibility of undoing many texts which work, unconsciously, upon us. In the end this may lead to real social transformation" (Jackson, 1988:10).

1.1 Definitions and uses of fantasy

Fantasy is an overt and unexplained distortion or pure negation of the "real". For me, fantasy should not be defined by what it is, but by what it is not. Fantasy is not a supposition of truth. Joanna Russ argues that fantasy embodies a "negative subjunctivity" – that is, fantasy is fantasy because it contravenes the real and violates it (Russ in Jackson, 1988:22). J.R.R. Tolkien says that one cannot define Faërie stories, "...it cannot be done. Faërie cannot be caught in a net of words; for it is one of its qualities to be indescribable, though not

imperceptible" (Tolkien, 1992:15). However, another theorist, C.N. Manlove, defines fantasy as "a fiction evoking wonder and containing a substantial and irreducible element of the supernatural with which the mortal characters of the story or readers become on at least partly familiar terms" (Manlove in Kroeber, 1926:5).The actual world is constantly present in fantasy by negation, what *cannot* or *could not* happen, constitutes the chief pleasure of fantasy. "Fantasy violates the real, contravenes it, denies it, and insists on the denial throughout" (Russ in Jackson, 1988:22). Fantasy is produced within and by a specific context, but fantasy constantly struggles against this context. Fantasy traces a space in society's cognitive frame, it breaks single, reductive 'truths' and introduces multiple, contradictory truths – fantasy becomes polysemic. Fantasy's function is to subvert the 'real', the 'true', and to offer multiple alternatives, to question social consensus. This study will be examining fantasy specifically as a postcolonial device, which allows for a violation of the 'real' in order to challenge the power hierarchies within the societies in which the fantasy is produced.

Tolkien states that fantasy stories have three faces: firstly, fantasy is mystical towards the supernatural; secondly, fantasy is magical towards nature; and lastly, fantasy acts as a "mirror of scorn and pity towards man" (Tolkien, 1992:28). The three texts I will be examining later have elements of all three of these faces. For Tolkien, the grand effect of a true fantasy story is the "total (unanalysable) effect" of Faërie on the soul of the reader – "one which it cannot spoil or explain; [fantasy stories] open the door on Other Time, and if we pass through, though only for a moment, we stand outside our own time, outside Time itself, maybe" (Tolkien, 1992:32). Thus, the true effect fantasy has on us can be described as a distancing mechanism – as it invites us into an Other world, fantasy allows us a fresh perspective on our own world. According to Tolkien's theory of recovery (1992:19), when readers free

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themselves "from the drab blur of triteness or familiarity," they are able to look at their own

reality with a fresh perspective. For Tolkien, after having journeyed into the secondary,

escapist world of fantasy, one recovers knowledge from the fantasy world, which can then be

applied to the primary world.

This distancing mechanism, then, is reliant on the successful creation of a complete and

coherent secondary world. This secondary world relies on notions of 'unreality', an

unlikeness to the primary world. The secondary world is free "from the domination of

observed fact" (Tolkien, 1992:44). According to Tolkien, "...fact becomes that which is

manipulated by the fantasy writer to produce a keener perception of the primary world and a

greater ability to survive in it" (Tolkien, 1985:35). "A fantasy is a story based on and

controlled by an overt violation of what is generally accepted as possibility; it is the narrative

result of transforming the condition contrary to fact into 'fact' itself" (Irwin in Jackson,

1988:14). Thus, the great advantage of fantasy is its arresting abnormality.

For a fantasy narrative to be successful, the secondary world must have a "strong inner

coherence; its rules are not those of the ordinary world, but it never breaks them" (Le Guin,

2007:85). Creative fantasy is founded on recognition of fact, but not a slavery to it. A true,

created secondary world will have an "inner consistency of reality" (Tolkien, 1992:64) – the

magic of that world is true within that world.

Because of the construction of this secondary world, the fantastic is heavily dependent on the

dialectic relationship between the author and the reader for a construction of a sense of

wonder. Fantasy stands as a "fundamental transaction between writer and reader because it

asserts what both writer and reader know to be false" (Attebery, 1992:15). Fantasy requires

action from the reader – fantasy draws on the conventions of realism and then asserts what is unreal, requiring a "consensual construction of belief" (Mendlesohn, 2008:xiii) on the part of the reader.

This dialectic relationship required by fantasy works is based on the ideas of the theorist Bakhtin, who saw in language provisional and contested attempts to fix meaning. As meaning in language is not fixed, language is seen as a generative social process that has a "multiplicity of meaning". Language is no longer singular and monolithic, but plural and multiple. Bakhtin applied this theory specifically to the novel, which is particularly open to the "dialogical interanimation of socio-ideological languages" (Bakhtin in Rice and Waugh, 2001:254). For Bakhtin, the dialogue of meaning in a novel is a space of negotiation between the author and the reader of the text. This dialogic in the novel is closely linked to his notion of carnivalization – "popular forms that disrupt and relatavized meaning in opposition to the 'official' discourse and its attempt to close down the polysemy of language" (Bakhtin in Rice and Waugh, 2001:254). Bakhtin's notion of carnivalization is closely linked to the subversive drive of fantasy literature.

As can be seen from the above discussion, theorists define fantasy not by what it *is*, but more by what it *does*: "The magic of Faërie is not an end in itself, its virtue is in its operations: among these are the satisfaction of certain primordial human desires" (Tolkien,1992:16). Thus, fantasy literature, or Faërie stories as referred to by Tolkien, are often classified by theorists by the function that they serve.

Many fantasy stories resist classification by their very nature. The previous marginalisation of fantasy in academic circles has led to "the constant redrawing of narrative" within the

genre of fantasy literature (Attebery, 1992:x). Rosemary Jackson goes as far as to say that there is "no abstract entity called 'fantasy' – only a range of different works with similar characteristics and generated by similar unconscious desires" (Jackson, 1988:8).

Brian Attebery, in his book, *Strategies of Fantasy* (1992) investigates fantasy texts of "similar unconscious desires" (1992:2) by suggesting that fantasy be classified, not in specific groups or classes, but rather in "fuzzy sets". In many ways, fantasy works are not classified by theme or structure (although this has been done before), but by their function. Attebery attempted to link different fantasy works by their similarities in supposed purpose, by similar unconscious desires, by what the author wished to achieve, consciously or unconsciously, through the fantasy work. While these similarities can be loosely grouped together, many works resist classification, and while overlap different groups. Thus, Attebery determines that these should not be fixed classifications, but that they should only be used as loose guidelines, fuzzy sets, as he called them, to help theorists find such similar unconscious desires in works of fantasy.

Farah Mendlesohn, in her influential book *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (2008), follows the ideas of Attebery, and attempts to define these fuzzy sets, or "rhetorics" of fantasy, by the common similarities or similar unconscious desires within certain fantasy texts. Mendlesohn then investigates the "genre expectations of certain identifiable rhetorical techniques" (2008:xiv). She argues that fantasy is most successful when these techniques are used to meet reader expectations of that category of fantasy.

In essence, Mendlesohn's "contention is that the failure to grasp the stylistic needs of a particular category of fantasy may undermine the effectiveness of an otherwise interesting

idea" (2008:xv). As the fantastic is heavily dependent on the dialectic between author and reader for a construction of a sense of wonder, the author must understand and wield the stylistic requirements of a specific type of fantasy successfully, in order to enter into a "consensual construction of belief" (Mendlesohn, 2008:xiii) with the reader. To better understand and study the function and purpose of the fantastic, Mendlesohn suggests four fuzzy sets that fantasy literature can be placed into: portal-quest fantasy, immersive fantasy, intrusive fantasy, and liminal fantasy. These sets refer to the "means by which the fantastic enters the narrated world" of the text (Mendlesohn, 2008:xv).

A **portal-quest fantasy** is simply a fantastic world entered through a portal. The best examples of such fantasy are C.S Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950) and Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1864). In a portal-quest fantasy, the fantastic remains on the other side of the portal, and does not 'leak' into the 'real' world. Individuals cross into the 'Other' world and back, but the magic does not. A portal fantasy is also almost always a quest novel, and heavily relies on the idea of destiny. The narrative allows and relies on both protagonist and reader gaining experience and it leads to a point where the protagonist knows his/her world enough to change it, and to enter into that world's destiny. A portal-quest fantasy is about entry, transition and negotiation. There is a movement from mundane life (where the fantastic is far away or unavailable to the protagonist) to direct contact with the fantastic, through which s/he transitions, to a point of negotiation with that world via a personal manipulation of fantastic realm (Mendlesohn, 2008:xvi-xx).

An **immersive fantasy** invites us to share a fully coherent secondary world, and a set of assumptions that govern the existence of that world. There is no explanatory narrative to

explain this immersive world, and immersive fantasy is the closest to science fiction. The fantastic becomes assumed, and this secondary world acquires scientific cohesion, ironic realism, and "sense of wonder negated by an atmosphere of ennui" (Mendlesohn 2008:xxi). The fantastic is "immersive" from the point of view of the characters, and they must take for granted fantastic elements that surround them. The characters are "deeply competent with the world they know" (Clute in Mendlesohn, 2008: xxi). Good examples of such a text are Mervyn Peake's *Titus Groan* ([1946] 2011), or Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* ([1954] 1992).

In an **intrusion fantasy**, the fantastic is the bringer of chaos, the beast in the garden, or the elf wanting help. The intrusion by the fantastic brings horror and amazement, and takes us out of safety without leaving *this* world. The basis of intrusion fantasy is the assumption that reality is organised, and when the fantastic finally leaves, the world returns to normality. The base level of such a fantasy is the normal world, and the narrative uses stylistic realism and relies on explanation. The drive is for the fantasy to be investigated and explained, and as readers we are forced to share the same ignorant point of view as the protagonist. The language used expresses constant amazement and astonishment at the intrusion of the fantastic, and unlike in portal fantasy, the reader and the protagonist are never expected to become accustomed to the fantastic. As a result, escalation is an important part of the rhetoric. In an intrusion fantasy, there is a clear line between contrasted normality and intrusion (Mendlesohn, 2008:xxii). An example of such a text is Alexander Irvine's *A Scattering of Jades* (2003).

A **liminal fantasy** is interesting because it is so rare. The liminal refers to "the point where we are invited to cross the threshold into the fantastic, but choose not to do so" (Mendlesohn,

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2008:xxiii). In a liminal fantasy, the presence of the fantastic is unnerving to the reader, but the protagonist and the characters in the text are not at all surprised by the presence of the fantastic and remain blasé, in fact, the fantastic "barely raises an eyebrow" (Mendlesohn, 2008:xxiii). Two of the South African texts I have chosen, namely *The Genuine Half-moon Kid* (1992) by Michael Williams and *Because Pula Means Rain* (2000) by Jenny Robson, can be classified as liminal fantasies. For me, and I will attempt to prove this with the two texts I have chosen, liminal fantasy is the most subversive of all fantasies, as it is unnerving, and supposes "that magic, or at least the possibility of magic, is part of reality, part of our world" (Mendlesohn, 2008:xxiii). Much liminal fantasy is often referred to as magic realism and the unnerving presence of the fantastic in the text aims to destabilise and question the social understanding of what "real" is. A liminal text will rely on many different techniques, but its creation is often central to the "construction of a point of balance right at the edge of belief" (Mendlesohn, 2008: xxiii). Liminal fantasy casualizes the fantastic within the experience of the protagonist; it estranges the reader. It is our reaction to oddness that is being exploited. Liminal fantasy is the category that overlaps the most with other modes of fantasy. Fundamentally, "liminal fantasies distil the essence of the fantastic" (Mendlesohn, 2008:xxiv).

Mendlesohn describes liminal fantasy as "that form of fantasy which estranges the reader from the fantastic as seen and described by the protagonist" (2008:182). According to Attebery, fantasy texts "ask our continuous assent to what we know to be impossible" (1992:22).   While fantasy usually requires a "consensual construction of belief" (Mendlesohn, 2008:xxiii), in a liminal fantasy, the presence of the fantastic is unnerving to the reader. When the fantastic appears, it should be intrusive and disruptive. However, while the events caused by the fantastic may be disruptive, their magical origins "barely raise an

eyebrow" (2008:xxiii). The protagonist demonstrates no surprise at the presence of the fantastic, and remains blasé. In fact, we as readers place the absurd in different moments in the narrative, but the characters in the story "question whether anything truly fantastical has happened at all" (2008:182).

In a liminal fantasy, the dialectic relationship between reader and text is more complex and more fraught. The protagonist views the fantastic with little surprise, while we as readers are taken aback and hesitate at the thought of the sudden appearance of the fantastic in an otherwise realistic narrative. While the fantastic is heavily dependent on the dialectic between author and reader for the construction of a sense of wonder, this is not the simple relationship found in an immersive fantasy. It is our reaction to oddness that is being exploited. We as readers begin to doubt the truthfulness of the protagonist's account, and a "dissonance" develops. The protagonist sees the fantastic as banal and everyday, while we as readers immediately question the presence of the fantastic. Mendlesohn (2008:182) states that "we could even see this as an immersive fantasy because the protagonists take it all for granted".

Mendlesohn further argues that although the dialectic between text and reader is always central to the process of interpretation, in a liminal fantasy, it is this relationship that is central to the *construction* of the fantastic (2008:184). McHale states that "somebody must experience epistemological hesitation, otherwise there is no fantastic effect at all... then, in the absence of a character to do the hesitating, the reader himself or herself does it" (in Mendlesohn, 2008:183). The irony within a liminal fantasy text creates a lack of synchronicity for the reader, it "distracts our gaze" (Mendlesohn, 2008: 185). We, as readers,

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are positioned ironically, as we see different dissonances from the ones the protagonist perceives. We are "caught in the liminal moment between the mundane and the magical" (Mendlesohn, 2008:188).

This two-way relationship between text and reader relies on a "knowingness", or what Barthes describes as a shared code: "the code is a perspective of quotations, a mirage of structures...so many fragments of something that has always been *already* read, seen, done...the code is the wake of that *already*" (Barthes in Mendlesohn, 2008:183). In a liminal fantasy, this code is constantly re-negotiated, and the liminal is balanced between dichotomies. The liminal is "what it is like to have *fallen into the crack*" (Mendlesohn, 2008:183 emphasis added). The boundaries of magic and illusion remain vague – "we have stepped into liminal space, the tunnel between portal and portal, between world and world" (Mendlesohn, 2008:188).

The third South African text I have chosen, *The Hidden Star* (2006) by K. Sello Duiker, straddles several of Mendlesohn's categories. The *Hidden Star* can be seen, initially, as an intrusion fantasy. When Nolitye first finds the magical stone, she is surprised and frightened by its power. However, she is not at all surprised by her ability to talk to animals, and simply dismisses this as an ability that all children have, that they lose as they grow older. This is an element of liminal fantasy. Later on in the text, Nolitye has to go on a quest down a rabbit hole into the underworld to release her parents, who have been taken captive by an evil spirit. Thus, the text turns into a typical portal-quest fantasy, where she is completely immersed in the secondary world created by Duiker.

As I will specifically be examining texts for adolescents, I would like to examine the function of fantasy texts for adolescents. Critics and theorists maintain that in a modern, dehumanized world, in the absence of fixed rites of passage for contemporary youths, narratives can be used as bibliotherapy (Crawford, 2002; Bettelheim, 1976) – a process that uses narrative to fill the space left by societal and cultural loss due to urbanisation (or in Bettelheim's case, racial persecution). While narratives cannot replace fixed cultural rites of passage, they can guide adolescents through the "process of maturation" (Jung, 1940:32) – the process of finding their own identity. Bettelheim (in Crawford, 2002:14) states that "fantasy helps adolescents develop, understand and commit to their outward reality".

The period of adolescence is a time when the individual is confronted with "the problem of self-definition" (Kroger, 1989:1). During the *sturm und drang* (Erikson, 1971), the upheaval of adolescence, the individual has to undergo a metamorphosis from a child into an adult who is able to successfully function within their society. Janet Frame, a child psychologist, refers to adolescence as an "internal transformation of a sense of 'I'" (Frame in Kroger, 1989:2). As a result, much adolescent literature is concerned with what we have come to call the coming-of-age story.

The unique South African context offers a challenge to the South African author of coming-of-age narratives. In a post-Apartheid, postcolonial South Africa, individuals are reeling from an ugly past and forging an uncertain future. Increasingly since the first democratic elections in South Africa in 1994, contemporary South African authors have been turning to fantasy as a unique space for opening up an interrogation of issues such as identity, purpose, race, religion and culture. This is specifically true of literature for adolescents. Thus, I would like

to maintain that contemporary South African fantasy literature for adolescents fulfils an inimitable postcolonial function.

2. Postcolonial Discourse and the re-negotiating of the Other

2.1 Postcolonial Critical Theories

The field of postcolonial theory is a problematic one, largely because it is, in fact, as diverse as the nations and the peoples that contribute to the theory.   Some critics have stated that this "lack of consensus and clarity is what is wrong with the field", and Russell Jacoby states that "[w]hile postcolonial studies claims to be subversive and profound, the politics tends to be banal; the language jargonized;...the self-obsession tiresome; and the theory bloated" (Jacoby in Slemon, 2001:100). Yet, for other critics and practitioners in the field (and here I would like to include myself), it is this very "lack of consensus and clarity", this fluidity, the ambivalences and the very lack of cohesion and agreement among critics in the field of postcolonialism that is so very "enabling about the field" (Slemon, 2001:100). Homi K. Bhabha, one of the foremost contributors to postcolonial theory, argues that the contemporary postcolonial world has created new forms of social collectivity, and these new forms require new ways of describing and engaging with them (Bhabha in Slemon, 2001:100). What follows is a brief discussion of and an introduction to some of the main postcolonial theories and positions, although it is by no means a comprehensive overview of what Slemon (2001:101) states is "a complex and rapidly changing field of intellectual contestation and disciplinary debate".

The very term "post(-)colonialism", has itself been a major area of contestation and debate. Firstly, the term "colonialism" is controversial as it is associated with and predicated by the

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concept of "imperialism", a concept that is also founded within larger theories of global politics and power hierarchies. While there are different definitions for "imperialism", the most widely used definition is that of Edward Said, who defines imperialism as "the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory" (1993:9).

The problem then comes in with the "post" part of postcolonialism. This seems to imply that postcolonialism simply refers to the time period that occurs after a previously colonised state gains "flag independence" (Slemon, 2001:102) from its colonisers and some sort of political autonomy. However, many will argue that while on the surface these "post-colony" states have gained a semblance of institutional freedom and self-constitution, often these new nations can do nothing about the economic dominance that continues "after empire", and that nothing really changes (Slemon, 2001:102). Nkrumah calls this phenomenon neo-colonialism, and defines neo-colonialism as any state that, in theory, is independent, but in reality is governed (in terms of its economic system – and thus its political policy) by external forces (Nkrumah in Slemon, 2001:102).

Other critics have a problem with the linear assumption inherent in the term "post(-)colonialism". Anne McClintock (1995:10) claims that,

> metaphorically, the term postcolonialism marks history as a series of stages along an epochal road from 'the precolonial', to 'the colonial', to 'the postcolonial' – an unbidden, if disavowed, commitment to linear time and the idea of development. ... [T]he term heralds the end of a world order by invoking the very same trope of linear progress which animates that era.

She further argues that the term postcolonial once again positions postcolonial theory in western historicism with its narrow need for binary oppositions: self – other, metropolis – colony, centre – periphery, colonial – postcolonial. McClintock laments that "...the term

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effects a recentering of global history around the single rubric of European time. Colonialism returns at the moment of its disappearance" (McClintock, 1995:11). Postcolonialism, therefore, "does not signify the demise or pastness of coloniality; rather, it points to a colonial past that remains to be interrogated and critiqued" (Xie, 2000:2)

Therefore, the term postcolonial is problematised from its very conception by a lack of consensus over what exactly "colonialism" means within the concept of "imperialism", and by the lack of consensus over "what it might mean to be 'post' the 'colonial' moment" (Slemon, 2001:103). One postcolonial theorist, Castle, describes the "postcolonial condition" as "that strangely atemporal, strangely historical 'space' of linguistic and cultural development, marked by the violence and ambivalence of colonialism" (Castle, 2001:xv).

The South African context is, thus, a unique and problematised situation. While some other countries have also experienced recent and dramatic changes in their socio-political environment, South Africa has undergone more than a century of different nationalist struggles. Thus, after failed attempts at independence during the Anglo-Boer War(s) at the beginning of the previous century, South Africa can be seen as a post-imperial nation after having left the Commonwealth in 1961. However, South Africa is also a post-nationalist party nation, having recently been liberated from Apartheid. Since South Africa's first democratic election in 1994, South Africa has adopted one of the most liberal constitutions in the world. But as a country still "marked by the violence and ambivalence of colonialism" (Castle, 2001:xv), the South African critic and writer now needs to decide what it means to be "post" the colonial moment in the South African context.

This reappearance of colonialism at the moment of its disappearance can also be described using ideas about mimicry. The colonised subject internalises colonising aspects of the dominant culture, and can be seen to be mimicking the power relations of the colonising power, even after independence. While this is often seen as a negative aspect for colonised subjects, the theorist Homi K. Bhabha argues that mimicry can be an effective means for power discourse. According to Bhabha (1984:234), from the

> epic intentions of its civilizing mission...[the colonised discourse] often produces a text rich in the traditions of irony, mimicry and repetition. In this comic turn from the high ideals of the colonial imagination to its low mimetic literary effects, mimicry emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power.

Bhabha further explains the ambivalence of colonial mimicry, as "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as *a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*" (Bhabha, 1984:235). Thus, the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence: in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference – mimicry is, thus, the sign of a double articulation, that "appropriates the Other as it visualizes power" (Bhabha, 1984:235). The *ambivalence* of mimicry is that it is a place of both mockery and mimicry: for "the very emergence of the 'colonial' is *dependent* for its representation upon some strategic limitation or prohibition within that authoritative discourse itself" (Bhabha, 1984:236).

Mimicry is then forced to work both ways. Colonial discourse, as an apparatus of power, appropriates a representation of the Other (the colonized) as an expression of what the self (the colonizer) is not, thereby defining the self in its opposition and difference to the Other. The Other then, in turn, appropriates a representation of the self to define its own identity as an oppositional force to the self. Bhabha explains that

> [it is] a process by which the look of surveillance returns as the displacing gaze of the disciplined, where the observer becomes the observed and the

> 'partial' representation rearticulates the whole notion of identity and
> alienates it from essence (Bhabha in Young, 1990:147)

It is this mimicry of the self by the Other that at once destabilises the self and gives the self power. Robert Young explains that "the surveilling eye is suddenly [confronted] with a returning gaze of otherness and finds that its mastery, its sameness, is undone" (Young 1990:147).

What is particularly interesting about the concept of mimicry is that it is a discursion on the concept of *agency* – how agency has moved from a fixed point into a process of circulation:

> the colonizer performs certain strategies in order to maintain power, but
> the ambivalence that inevitably accompanies the attempt to fix the
> colonized as an object of knowledge means that the relation of power
> becomes much more equivocal. Mimicry at once enables power and
> produces the loss of agency ... a process which simultaneously stabilizes
> and destabilizes the position of the colonizer (Young, 1990:147-8)

Bhabha also refers to the colonial subject or sign as "*diffèrance*": the ambivalence of the cultural subject contains the identity of both the self and the other as a hybrid – the one is both part of and reliant on the other for its identity. Here, Bhabha uses Derridean *diffèrance* on a postcolonial terrain – he uses the conceptual framework for analysing the grey, ambiguous area of culture (Xie, 2000:3). By doing this, Bhabha is able, to some extent, to mobilise the indeterminacy of colonial discourse into agency for counter-hegemonic resistance. True postcolonial discourse will renew perspectives of self and Other by dealing with the issues of "complexity and multipositionality of identity that challenges us to move beyond Eurocentric, binary structures of knowledge" (Xie, 2000:3).

This important discursion on agency is continued by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her famous and highly influential essay, "Can the subaltern speak?" (1992). She questions the

relationship between imitation and intention in representations of the subaltern (the other), and questions whether the subaltern subject can find a place from which to speak (gain agency) that has not been determined in advance by colonial discourse that is designed to silence her. The representation of society's subaltern "is always a mediated, partial, and imaginative construction, especially by writers who, by the very fact of their literacy, belong to an elite" (Sabin, 2008:177).

There is no such thing as an innocent text, and to try to create one is naive. Representation of the colonised subject as a binary opposition to the coloniser, or as an assimilation of the Other as mediated by the self, is still firmly Eurocentric. We need to be able to move away from the representation of the self through the western colonial gaze, or we need, at least, to recognise such texts for what they are. A branch of postcolonial criticism that challenges Eurocentric historicism is known as colonial discourse analysis and is led by the ideas of Michel Foucault. He argued against the Marxist theories of ideology in favour of the notion of "discourse". According to the discourse analysts, social subjects and social consciousness are not formed through ideology, but through power. Real power is exercised through discourse, and it "circulates in and around the social fabric" (Slemon, 2001:111); there is nothing anyone can do to escape its rule. This line of thought comes from the work of German philosopher Nietzsche, who said that, "ultimately, man finds in things nothing but what he himself has imported into them" (Nietzsche in Selden &Widdowson, 1993:159). This means that we cannot speak of any objective truths or of any objective knowledge – all knowledge is an expression of the "Will to Power" (Nietzsche in Selden &Widdowson, 1993:159). Therefore, it is the political and intellectual members of the ruling elite who recognise a particular piece of discourse as "true". In turn, what is considered normal and rational, and therefore what is considered "true", silences what it excludes.

Following Nietzsche, Foucault denies that we can ever have an objective knowledge of history. Any discourse is "a violence that we do to things" according to our own ideas of power and discourses that are always in flux: "there are no 'true' discourses, only more or less powerful ones" (Selden & Widdowson, 1993:160). We, as writers and critics, thus have a responsibility to recognise the power discourse within a text and the silences or absences inherent in any text, and understand them as products of the power regime of the day. In postcolonial discourse, this has become a valuable tool for analysing colonial texts.

It must also be understood of texts that they are products of the unique context in which they are produced. The postcolonial context is as diverse as the many countries, races and languages that have been colonised by imperial forces. Thus, the production of *locality* within a postcolonial text is very important. The influential postcolonial theorist, Arjun Appadurai (1996:178) describes locality as "primarily relational and contextual rather than as scalar or spatial. [It is a] complex phenomenological quality, constituted by a series of links between the sense of social immediacy, the technologies of interactivity, and the relativity of contexts". In today's globalised world, the constitutive relationship between anthropology and locality is said to have "lost its ontological moorings" (Appadurai, 1996:178). Postcolonialism can thus be described as "the need, in nations or groups which have been the victims of imperialism, to achieve an identity uncontaminated by Universalist or Eurocentric concepts and images" (During in McGillis, 2000:xxii). When in a search for meaning and identity, the felt experience of the local, where it has not been collectivized or sublated – the marginal character – coexists with all universal narratives "challenging that universality by their very existence" (Castle, 2001:xii). Thus, postcolonial criticism should have an emphasis

on *local* responses (both regional and national) to theoretical issues to "reconceptualise and repoliticize postcolonialism's complicit relations with colonial discourse" (Castle, 2001:xii).

The locality of the text is often centred on the history of the area in which the text is being produced. Spivak, for example, maintains that the history of an area should be the starting point for understanding the "felt reality of the subaltern" and should open up a "dynamic and dialogical process by which history is made and by which it might be written as a counter-history" (Spivak in Castle, 2001:xix). In a postcolonial context, the voice of the Other or subaltern may frequently be mediated, whether it is through language, race or the positionality of the author of the text. While colonised individuals by no means form a homogenous group, it is still possible to recognise Adrienne Rich's description of the postcolonial condition as a state of "unsatisfaction" where locality and historical memory must be interrogated "in an attempt to open up an intervening space, a space of translation as transformation particularly apposite to the difficult, transnational world" (in Bhabha 2001:45).

The realm of fantasy opens up, as Homi K Bhabha calls it, a third space, a space between the colonial and the postcolonial, where true interrogation of identity and meaning can take place. For Bhabha, the postcolonial African identity is "fluid, relational and always in flux" (Kalua, 2009:23). In a postcolonial African context, "we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity" (Bhabha, 1994:2). Bhabha describes the third space as an in-between space, which "provides the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity. It is in the emergence of the interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness,

community interest, or cultural value are negotiated" (Bhabha, 1994:2). Postcolonial theory, therefore, ought to be concerned with what we might call "indigenous solutions to colonial problems" (Castle, 2001:xiv).

The three South African texts that I will be examining later are interesting examples of how South African authors are attempting to open up this "intervening space" in order to re-negotiate the construction of the Other and examine the importance of the felt reality of the individual in South Africa as a postcolonial country. These texts, I would like to maintain, are "indigenous solutions to colonial problems" (Castle, 2001:xiv).

The next question that is raised is how do we analyse texts that are aware of their own artificiality, and of their own inherent power relations? How do we analyse texts that truly attempt to give a voice back to colonised subjects? There are several trends within postcolonial practice that have emerged in response to these questions.

2.2 Trends in reading postcolonial literatures

The first trend in reading postcolonial texts is the principle of "reading for resistance" (Slemon, 2001:107). This concept has largely been advanced by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in their influential book *The Empire Writes Back (*1989), and it links to Foucault's ideas of language and discourse as power. As language is a "medium of power", postcolonial literary language has to "seize the language of the [imperial] centre and [replace] it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonised space" (Ashcroft et al. 1989:38). They suggest that this happens through a process of appropriation of the coloniser's language, "appropriately adapted, to the cultural and political ends of the colonised" (Slemon,

2001:107). Reading for resistance focuses on an "inevitable hybridization within, and continuity of preoccupations between, those cultures affected by the imperial process" (Ashcroft in Slemon, 2001:109).

Exactly how textual resistance ought to be theorised, however, remains open for debate. Some critics have focussed on discourse-based models of power derived from Foucault's archaeological theories and Richard Terdiman's ideas of counter-discourse. Other critics have focussed on a culturalist model, where opposition to power is so important for a community that it invades every part of life. Yet, other critics have turned to a psychoanalytical approach that is concerned with the concept of "colonial disavowal" – how colonial power itself creates native resistance through "differential repetitions" through processes such as mimicry, as such processes have the power to exact political change (Slemon, 2001:108).

Postcolonialism in literature refers to a "self-consciousness on the part of emerging peoples of a history, a culture, and an identity separate from and just as important as those of the imperial 'masters'" (McGillis, 2000:xxiii). Postcolonial texts are interested in forming a national identity and pride separate from an attachment to the previous imperial power. In its most basic form, postcolonial texts can be seen as "writing that sets out in one way or another to resist colonialist perspectives" (Boehmer in McGillis, 2000:xxiii).The critical mind's recent turn to postcolonialism aims "to rethink, recuperate and reconstruct racial, ethnic, and cultural others that have been repressed, misrepresented, omitted, stereotyped, and violated by the imperial West…" (Xie, 2000:1).

The second of these trends for reading postcolonial literatures has to do with the "representation of 'realism'" (Slemon, 2001:106). Realism acts as a contract between text and reader, but one of the common arguments against realism (especially in postmodern times) is that at some level, realism is tied to the naturalising drive of language. This immediately raises questions about the use of the English language by colonised subjects in their response to colonialism. How do we locate English language use in a history of imperial expansion? The English language itself can be seen as both the language of the oppressor and as the means to find a voice of opposition. We must always ask then, when dealing with the use of language in colonial and postcolonial texts, whose interests is the use of this language serving? Again, colonialism reappears at the moment of its demise in the choice of the language of the postcolonial writer. While many texts are written in indigenous and local languages, many other writers and critics choose to work in European languages, mostly English, as a way to have a larger audience for their new-found means of expression. The English language thus represents a means of agency for the colonised subject. All the texts studied in this thesis are written in English. Both Williams and Robson are home language English speakers, so their choice to write in English is not that relevant here. Duiker, in contrast, chooses to write in English even though he is not a home language English speaker, but this ensures that his novel will receive a greater readership and his message for the unification of the African tribes will have a greater audience.

The representation of realism is also a contentious issue between the realists, the modernists and the postmodernists. Each group has attempted to represent their own understanding of realism by experimenting with different techniques and styles of narration and representation. The postmodernists, however, who have lived in a poststructuralist world where there is no truth but the truth one constructs for one's self (Nietzsche in Selden et al 1993:158), have

experimented extensively with representation, narrative techniques, symbols, signs and meanings. The postmodernists approach realism with a playful, tongue-in-cheek attitude, as they believe that there is no truth and no reality beyond the reality one constructs for one's self.

It is also out of this tradition of playfulness that the postmodernists often poke fun at the rational seriousness and scientific methods of the modernists; I believe that it is by this interaction that the genre of fantasy has come into its own. Also, in a postcolonial critique, Le Guin states that "realistic fiction is drawn towards anthropocentrism, fantasy away from it" (Le Guin, 2007:87). This destabilising effect of fantasy is what makes it so useful in a postcolonial context.

2.3 Fantasy literature as a site for postcolonial discourse and criticism

"The only thing you can do if you are trapped in a reflection is to invert the image" –Juliet Mitchell (in Jackson, 1988:x)

Rosemary Jackson describes fantasy as the *Literature of Subversion* (1988). For her, the very nature of the fantastic is subversive of what the dominant society considers 'real'. The fantastic is not make-believe, as the realist critics would have us believe, but rather "it reshapes the reality we thought real" (Malekin in Ruddick, 1992:41). Thus, fantasy is the realm of those who wish to question the validity of the social consensus of the ruling power in that society – fantasy has a uniquely postcolonial function.

Jackson (1988:3) describes fantasy as an "attempt to compensate for a lack resulting from cultural constraints: it is a literature of desire, which seeks that which is experienced as absence and loss". Fantasy is produced by and in a social context. The fantasy might struggle against this context, but the fantastic is articulated upon that very struggle. Fantasy cannot be understood isolated from the context in which it was produced. This is specifically true of fantasy texts that are attempting a postcolonial critique.

When expressing desire, fantasy works in two ways: it *tells of* the desire, and manifests or shows the desire (the desire finds expression in portrayal, representation, manifestation, and linguistic utterance); or it *expels desire* – where desire is a disturbing element that threatens cultural order (expression in sense of pressing out, squeezing, expulsion, or getting rid of by force). This expulsion of desire in fantastic literature "points to or suggests the basis upon which cultural order rests, for it opens up, for a brief moment, on to disorder, on to illegality...that which is outside the dominant value systems" (Jackson, 1988:4). Fantasy as a mode constantly questions the presupposition and the existence of the real, and the "extra-cultural fantastic" raises the consciousness of the values unconsciously taken for granted by western readers (Malekin, 1992:42).

When in search of an identity and voice for the previously disenfranchised and marginalized Other, narrative forms are needed that "unsettle dialectical thinking" (Castle, 2001:xiii). As the main aesthetic desire of fantasy is the "making or glimpsing of Other worlds" (Tolkien, 1992:40), fantasy literature offers a unique opportunity for the subversion of dominant ideals. Jackson states that "the fantastic traces the unseen and the unsaid of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made 'absent' ... fantastic narrative tells of

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the impossible attempt to realise desire, to make visible the invisible and to discover absence"
(Jackson, 1988:4).

Fantasy is not inventing another non-human world, and it is not attempting the transcendental,
but it "has to do with inverting elements of *this* world, re-combining its constitutive features
in new relations to produce something strange, unfamiliar and *apparently* 'new', absolutely
'Other' and different." It can be said that the fantastic, and the postcolonial, both represent a
"profound confrontation with existential dis-ease" (Jackson, 1988:9).

In the postmodern world, where the unpredictability of postmodernism has brought about a
"blurring of distinction between fiction and fact" (Attebery, 1992:40), fantasy narratives of
today are not only aware of their artificiality, but they comment on the way we use fiction to
understand the world outside the story. In the postmodern world, fantasy has become self-
reflexive.

McGillis takes the freedom represented by postcolonial fantasy further and says that "[t]o
enter the world of another, we ourselves must become 'Other' than we are. We are always
faced with the 'Other'. We cannot escape otherness"(McGillis in Xie, 2000:2). In the
fantasy world created by the writer, we are the Other – the world is foreign to us and we do
not belong there; yet it is acceptable to us within the created rules of that created world. It is
somehow familiar to us, and this foreign world is acceptable to us through our own
subconscious (Xie, 2000:4). Fantasy can be described as "an artistic experience of
confronting as real what one knows cannot be real – the arousal of belief in the unbelievable"
(Kroeber in Le Guin, 2007:85). Thus, postmodern (and postcolonial) fantasy questions and

challenges our reality and forces us to accept that there is no such thing, while reflecting our own reality back on us. The fantasy narrative offers a "tear or wound in the real, a perception that *opens* up the widest spaces" (Jackson, 1988:22).

In fantasy literature the characters in the narrative often become both determiners of and subservient to the action. This two-fold action of the character gives fantasy literature the "unique ability to investigate the two-fold process of constituting a self" (Attebery, 1992:86). Bakhtin states that here "the fantastic serves not in the positive *embodiment* of truth, but in the search after the truth, its provocation and, most importantly, its *testing*" (Bakhtin in Jackson, 1988:15).

As a literature of 'unreality' or 'untruth', fantasy has altered over the years as the notion of 'reality' has changed. The psychoanalytic approach to literature maintains that it is in the unconscious that social ideas and norms are reproduced and sustained, and "only by redirecting attention to this area can we begin to perceive the ways in which the relations between society and the individual are fixed" (Jackson, 1988:6). The very unreality of fantasy literature provides the adolescent reader with a space in which to interrogate his/her relationship to society and to *test* its truth. Fantasy is hostile to static, discrete units, and contains an inherent resistance to fixity. Rosemary Jackson further maintains that within fantasy

> spatial, temporal and philosophical elements all dissolve; unified notions
> of character are broken; and language and syntax become incoherent....
> Fantasy retains its original function of exerting pressure *against dominant
> hierarchical systems*, it is no longer an escapist form, but the only
> expressive mode (Jackson, 1988:17 emphasis added).

In secular, modern culture, the function of fantasy has changed: fantasy no longer simply invents supernatural regions, but presents a natural world inverted into something strange, something Other. Fantasy has become "humanized, turning from transcendental explorations to transcriptions of a human condition". Our "desire for otherness" is not displaced into alternate regions of heaven or hell, but it is now "directed towards the absent areas of this world, transforming it into something 'Other' than the familiar" (Jackson, 1988:18-19).

Postcolonial narratives (whether creative or critical) open up a space for the reader to see and hear variety – postcolonial activity seeks to open the mind. The very nature of fantasy: its unreality, its untruth, and its constant questioning of the dominant power relations of a society, make fantasy an ideal literature for such postcolonial narratives. McGillis maintains that "tolerance and understanding are the aim of postcolonialism" (2000:xxviii).

I would like to argue that in the three texts I have chosen, the authors are proposing an ideal of "tolerance and understanding". The authors explore the adolescent protagonists' changing contexts and identities, through the shaded glass of fantasy, in order to come to renewed perspectives of self and Other. Within the third space afforded by the use of fantasy, the "complexity and multipositionality of identity" (Xie, 2000:3) can be interrogated. Postcolonial fantasy literature challenges us to move beyond binary structures of knowledge and to test their truth.

One genre that requires the "testing" of its reality is children's literature. While many fantasy texts are not for children but for adults, the prevalence of the fantastic in books for children cannot be ignored. As a space for the investigation and interrogation of the self and the Other, the fantasy text offers a unique space of discovery to young readers. Adolescence

seems to be a time, at least in many technologically advanced western cultures, when one is confronted with "the problem of self-definition" (Kroger, 1989:1). Fantasy literature offers the young reader a secondary world in which to examine and explore this "problem of self-definition". However, children's literature often performs a socialising function, teaching children "how to behave in an adult world" (Hunt, 1991:2). Postcolonial children's literature theorists argue that children have become colonised subjects, as they "are *spoken for* by adults, just as indigenous people are *spoken for* by the coloniser" (Nodelman in Bradford, 2007:6). Thus, while children's literature offers a unique space for the re-negotiation of the Other, it can also become a trap where unassuming and careless adults simply re-teach the power hierarchies inherent in their generation to children.

3. Children's Literature as a site for postcolonial discourse and criticism

As has been suggested in the preceding discussion, colonialism often focuses, whether implicitly or explicitly, on the differences between people of different races, genders and social backgrounds. Significantly, children too are different from adults and from each other, in more ways than just their age. Lynne Vallone argues that

> simply put, without a powerful guiding belief in essential differences
> between adult and child, there would be no 'children's literature'.
> Awareness of 'differences' or acknowledgement of the presence of
> 'others' have been noted and explored in children's literature from its
> earliest inception (Vallone in Grenby & Immel, 2009:174).

However, we rarely have children writing books for children, rather, we as adults are writing and telling children what to read and think. In the case of children's literature, children are the colonised subjects, and we adults are the colonisers; children do not write the books they read; neither do they write commentary on them. The child's literary world is created for him or her, and the child has little power to change the underlying hierarchical structures of this

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world. None of 'us' adults, 'us' writers and critics, can escape the role of the coloniser, as we cannot escape our own "imperial tendencies" (McGillis, 2000:xxviii). Thus, while narratives can perform a socialising function and be used as bibliotherapy, teaching youths how to function in an adult world in the absence of fixed rites of passage, writers of adolescent fiction must be careful not to be moralising – forcing the dominant society's idea of a moral citizen on the adolescent reader. The author of books for teenagers must not, albeit inadvertently, patronise the adolescent reader and force his or her own way of thinking on the reader.

An important aspect of children's literature, one which is often overlooked, is the fact that children's books are written *for* children (not adults). Children's books are unique in the world of books, as children's books are the only genre defined directly by its audience (Hunt, 1991:43; Kneen, 2003:10). It is this reader of the text, the child, whom we so often misunderstand, and into whose mind we cannot see, who is the ultimate interpreter of the text. Distanced by our age and our consequent socialisation, we try, through numerous methods, to account for the process of the making of meaning between text and image within the child's mind. However, these conceptualisations of the meaning-making process remain but theories, as adults cannot fully understand what happens within the mind of a child while reading a text. Peter Hunt (1991:35) maintains that "what children understand from texts is far from clear".

Nikolajeva, however, argues that, in recent years, there has been a gradual increase in the complexity of books for children, evolving towards "a sophistication on all narrative levels" (2001:207). There has been a move away from the standard, simple linear structure of narrative, towards a more ambivalent, open ending, that allows more room for the reader to

incorporate their own meaning and interpretation into the text. Roland Barthes's concept of the death of the author is perhaps useful here – authors writing for an adolescent or child audience must be aware and cautious of the inevitable top-down hierarchy present in any such a text, and must attempt to avoid patronising their readers. Diana Paxon argues "[i]f science fiction proclaims itself 'the literature of ideas' then fantasy might be called 'the literature of ethics'" (in Crawford 2002: 8). Emma Bull, who is also a fantasy author, says

> [f]or the few hours it takes to read a book, you get somebody else's idea
> of what is important, of the moral stance to take, of how one treats other
> people. When you have spent several hours immersed in someone
> else's value system and culture, you will come out looking at yours
> differently… (in Crawford, 2002:9).

The realm of children's literature has thus, in recent years, become an interesting site for postcolonial critique. As children do not have a voice of their own, writers and critics of children's literature should endeavour to create one for them; even while being uncertain whether the child reader understands the text the same way the adult writer intended. Writers and critics of children's literature also need to be careful not to continue a failed civilising mission on the next generation as an Other. Many critics believe that literature is an important site for education in children – but children's literary critics (Hunt, 1991; Nikolajeva, 1996) now argue that adults cannot simply use children's books as a way of socialising them into a western, adult world.

A postcolonial issue raised by the discourse on children's literature, however, is the language used to describe children. Hunt's assertion that "what children understand from texts is far from clear" (Hunt, 1991:35) would not be well received if it read "what black people understand…" or "what women understand…". Too often, children are described as a homogenous group. For example, a rural, township-dwelling twelve-year-old's experiences would be vastly different from those of a city-dwelling fifteen-year-old from an affluent

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family. While acknowledging this discrepancy, I would, however, like to raise the issue of the universality of literature. Each reader will bring to the text their own experiences and the dialectic relationship between the reader and the text in the meaning-making process will take place regardless of the differences in context between the writer and the reader of a text. Children will also come to the text at different ages. I use the term 'children' here, not to define a homogenous grouping, but simply to indicate a loose grouping of young readers who engage actively and idiosyncratically with texts, but are by and large excluded from the adult-governed worlds of publishing and authorship.

Many South African authors (such as Michael Williams, Jenny Robson, and K. Sello Duiker, to name but a few) seem to be "aware of the artificiality" (Attebery, 1992:40) of their fantasy, and examine their narratives as sites of "ambivalence which def[y] hegemonic control" (Bhabha in Bradford, 2007:20). Given the unique South African context, in which post-Apartheid society is grappling with new societal expectations, many works for adolescents emphasise transformation, hybridity and transculturation, and this imbues these texts with a positive optimism. Many contemporary authors are doing wonderful things in texts written especially for children and adolescents, as their focus is on the reader of the text. As Barthes maintains, the text's unity "should lie, *not* in its origin, but in its *destination*" (Barthes in Hunt, 1991:9 emphasis added).

The destination for the texts I have chosen is, ultimately, the adolescent reader. Thus, as they have been written in a postcolonial context, it is important that these narratives be seen as "writing that sets out, in one way or another, to resist colonialist perspectives" (Boehmer in McGillis, 2000:xxiii). In order to do so, the third space provided by the subversive quality of fantasy literature opens up a place of counter-hegemonic resistance, a place where a re-

examination of the identity of the Other can take place. The fantasy narrative is therefore used by Williams, Robson and Duiker as a distancing mechanism that allows the adolescent reader to re-evaluate his or her primary world. From the fresh perspective offered by the secondary world, the colonised subject can forge for itself a new identity, in an attempt "to rethink, recuperate and reconstruct racial, ethnic, and cultural Others that have been repressed, misrepresented, omitted, stereotyped, and violated by the imperial West…" (Xie, 2000:1).

As the texts I am going to be dealing with are aimed more at adolescents than at children, I believe that books for adolescents fall into an interesting grey space between the innocence and enjoyment of childhood and the responsibility of adulthood. Generally, books for adolescents tend to deal with themes such as coming into one's own identity and finding a place and purpose in this world (Hunt, 1991). Crawford (2002:12) argues that books can be an important site of "bibliotherapy" for teenagers. In the absence of fixed rites of passage in an urbanised society, books can guide teenagers through the process of maturation, as the tribal myths once did. While a book can never fully take the place of a ceremonial act, narratives offer the adolescent help and guidance through the storms and angst of adolescence. Crawford maintains that

> [a]dolescents have to overcome obstacles and cross thresholds and increase their capabilities throughout the years of puberty. If these achievements are not recognised, the adolescent may not think that they are of worth and turn to other activities which will garner them attention— good or bad. When adolescents have been acknowledged as capable of taking care of themselves and functioning within the community, they may feel that their life becomes worth something because it is regarded as useful. In reading fairy tales, fantasy stories, and myths, adolescents can realise that the recognition they get in reality for achieving progress may be minimal, but that they are progressing. The stories can become their teachers (Crawford, 2002:12).

Postcolonialism is a discourse that allows for greater variety in versions of history and social and cultural constructions – "the young reader now has the opportunity to choose between narratives that force questions and choices upon him or her" (McGillis, 2000:xxviii). If postcolonialism denotes a liberty in recognition of uniqueness, then adolescents themselves should be viewed as unique postcolonial subjects. Postcolonial narratives (whether creative or critical) should open up space for the reader to see and hear variety. Postcolonial activity seeks to open the mind, and postcolonial texts for children and adolescents should create a space where the reader is offered choices and variety; a place of freedom where they can choose for themselves without a specific ideology or way of thinking being forced down their throats by the colonial adult.

I will here attempt to show how the South African authors I have chosen to explore are using the fantastic in novels for adolescents to open up such a third space – a place in which postcolonial redress can take place and in which young adults can begin to reconcile the conflicting messages presented to them by communities in postcolonial flux.

CHAPTER 2: The persistence of memory and the quest for identity in *The Genuine Half-moon Kid* (1992) by Michael Williams

"The searching is sometimes more important than the finding..."
(Williams, 1992:108).

Michael Williams studied at the University of Cape Town, taught drama in Nepal and worked at the New Sadler's Wells in London. He has written many books for teenagers, *Into the Valley* (1990) being his first. His second novel, *The Genuine Half-moon Kid* (1992) was published to critical acclaim and won the 1992 Sanlam Prize for Youth Literature. Many schools, even today, twenty-two years after its publication, prescribe this text as a setwork, which is where I first encountered it. Williams's other novels for adolescent readers, *Crocodile Burning* (1998), and his famous Jake Mulligan series, *Who Killed Jimmy Valentine?* (1997), *Hijack City* (1999) and *The Eighth Man* (2002) were also published to critical acclaim. *Who Killed Jimmy Valentine?* is also often prescribed in schools for Grades 7-9. Williams has also written musicals, full-length plays, a comedy drama, numerous radio plays and three operas for young people. He has been the Managing Director of the Cape Town Opera for the last ten years.

The first thing that struck me about *The Genuine Half-moon Kid*, and the other texts that I will be dealing with in this thesis, was its optimism. Williams does not shrink from confronting the difficult issues – issues of racial tension, violence, poverty, the dissolution of Apartheid and a society in flux are all there, however (and most importantly, I think, in a

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novel written for teenagers in contemporary South Africa), it is full of hope. Williams looks

at the changing state of South Africa in 1992, when the book is set, but does not prophesy

violence and the gradual destruction of the South African economy, as so many of his

contemporaries did at that time. Instead, he preaches hope and acceptance. As the novel is set

in 1992, the context is perfect for the feelings of change and bewilderment experienced by

Jason, the young protagonist, and it offers us the experience of viewing South Africa at a time

of turmoil and revolutionary change, just as Apartheid was breathing its last and

transformation was sweeping the country.

At first glance, *Genuine Half-moon Kid* is a realist text. Williams portrays the South African

context of the novel very realistically: it is 1992; the ANC has been unbanned; Nelson

Mandela has been released from prison; and racial tension is on the increase. The

government is in negotiation with people whom they have previously declared terrorists. Jay,

as a young white male about to leave Matric, worries about his future in a country in such

political turmoil. Jay describes the current politically fraught context and says:

> South Africa was shedding its old ways, and to many it was a bewildering
> place. What had once been clearly defined was all confusion. ... Change
> was everywhere. Cape Town had the feel of a city preparing for either a
> carnival or a blood bath. How did you change your point of view
> overnight? How did you readdress issues that were once as clear as day
> and which had become as clear as mud?" (Williams, 1992: 20-21).

Other events that Jay has to deal with are the taxi violence in the Cape Flats, and 'black'

people moving into his (previously 'white') neighbourhood for the first time.

The novel, in many ways, inhabits a liminal space: not only is Jay an adolescent, perched as

he is on the cusp of adulthood about to finish high school, but the country of South Africa at

the time is also experiencing a liminal space. To use the words of Antonio Gramsci, used by

Nadine Gordimer in the epitaph for her novel *July's People* (1981:i), "the old is dying and the new cannot be born". South Africa is in the interregnum, as Gramsci calls it, the period "between rulers", and it is often a "disorienting and sometimes threatening period" (Folks, 1998: 115) and is "a force field of political and cultural contestations" (Masilela, 2009:17). Gordimer viewed the power struggle in South Africa as "one between an oppressive and unjust old order outstaying its historical moment and the new order of liberty and democracy, still uncertain about its scheduled hour of arrival" (Masilela, 2009:17).

The Genuine Half-moon Kid is a difficult and problematic text, because it is highly allusive and contains many intertextual references and sources, not all of which are always helpful to the meaning-making process. It seems as if Williams is searching for a text that will help him better understand and internalise the changes happening in his country at the time of the novel's composition. The ambivalence and uncertainty resulting from the various layers of allusion colouring the narrative are thus perhaps indicative of the period in which it was written, mirroring feelings of confusion within both the protagonist, and possibly, the author as well. Written during a period of interregnum as it is, the text seems to show that the old ways of shaping meaning (in this case the allusions to the Classical myth of *Jason and the Golden Fleece* and the biblical story of Leah and Levi) may no longer be sufficient. While new forms of expression may be required, they "cannot [yet] be born" (Gramsci in Gordimer, 1981:i). Possibly, the allusions that Williams uses may be his way of trying to find meaning in relation to old cultural modes that the writer is not yet ready to abandon[1].

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[1] It must be stated here, though, that while this is true of *The Genuine Half-moon Kid,* Williams's first novel, it is not at all true for his later texts, such as *Crocodile Burning* (1998). His later novels show a deep and meaningful understanding of his country and its people and he can effectively integrate many different modes and tropes from African folklore and oral tradition, as well as western motifs. Williams can also authoritatively represent characters from all walks of life (such as the taxi driver in *Who Killed Jimmy Valentine?* (1997)). The

In his search for meaning in the period of interregnum, Williams draws on the Classical myth of *Jason and the Golden Fleece*. This is a plausible strategy, as myths have been used for many centuries, in the absence of fixed rites of passage in western societies, to aid adolescents on their journey of self-discovery. Segal (2000:14-15) argues that

> whoever invents or uses the myth to deal with the unconscious is the true hero. Yet the true hero is also every human being. ...Most of all, who the hero is becomes some third party, a historical or legendary figure, rather than either the creator of the myth or anyone stirred by it. Identifying himself with the literal hero, the myth maker or *reader* vicariously revels in the hero's triumph, which in fact is his own. *He* is the real hero of the myth.

While myths cannot completely take the place of rites of passage, they may well be able to guide the adolescent reader through the process required to gain a deeper understanding of self – the "process of individuation" as Jung called it (1939, 1953). Many teenagers probably will not even be consciously aware of this understanding, but through the process of the hero myth, it may help the individual teenager to negotiate the *sturm und drang* of adolescence.

There are two overlapping meanings of "individuation" in Jung's work. Firstly, individuation is a process in which one becomes increasingly undivided against oneself, complete rather than perfect (Jung, 1953:159), and a "separate, indivisible unity or whole" (Jung, 1939:275). Secondly, "individuation is a process in which one becomes separate from identification with the collective—both the collective unconscious of childhood and the collective consciousness of one's culture, to the extent that this is merely the collective unconscious made visible" (Brooke, 2008:39).

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ambivalence and uncertainty prevalent in *The Genuine Half-moon Kid* is thus, truly, a manifestation of the period of the interregnum in which it was written.

Jung understood better than most of his psychoanalytic contemporaries that "our models of mind and human development are infused with cultural assumptions of which we might be only dimly aware. Culture is the eye that sees before we know *what* we see" (Brooke, 2008:38). Jung's model of individuation reflects the imperatives of 20th-century existentialist ethics: autonomy, integrity, authenticity in relation to the self.

Using the taxonomy set out by Mendlesohn in *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (2008), I would define *The Genuine Half-moon Kid* as a liminal fantasy. This dissonance and hesitancy created in a liminal fantasy must be tightly controlled to avoid the text spinning out of control; instead of being anti-structural, however, liminal fantasies are highly structured – the balance between dichotomies is delicately kept by forcing the narrative into a very fixed structure. Jay, a young white man, describes his context as "bewildering" and "all confusion" (Williams, 1992:20-21). He is also in a period of political interregnum and a period caught between boyhood and manhood. Jay uses his submersions in the water tanks in the fish emporium as an escape, but this strange habit of his at first estranges the reader, especially as it happens in the opening chapters of the book. While his immersions in the fish tanks and the fantasy worlds he creates help him find a momentary reprieve from his confusion, these worlds are self-created and not productive. On the journey he must go on to retrieve his grandfather's box, Jay is forced to confront reality. For an adolescent to move on in the process of individuation, he must move outward and return, in order to achieve a deeper understanding of the self. The structure that Williams uses in *The Genuine Half-moon Kid* to keep this pervasive liminality from spinning out of control is the hero cycle.

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In his influential book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* ([1949] 1972)*,* celebrated mythologist Joseph Campbell argues that the uniform meaning of all hero myths is both psychological and metaphysical: "Hero myths describe not the outward, physical adventures of legendary or historical figures, but the inward, mental adventures of adherents to the myths" (Campbell, 1972:27). Campbell maintains that the hero myth is a journey of "rediscovery of a lost part of both the human personality and of the cosmos. Hero myths originate in encounters with the lost dimensions of the mind and the world. They function to enable others to encounter those dimensions themselves" (Segal, 1990:28). The journey of the hero is both an *outward* journey into an unknown world, and an *inner* journey into the previously ignored or separated unconscious of the individual. Myths are, today, taken as "progressive rather than regressive, and as abetting adjustment to the world rather than flight from it" (Segal, 1990:13).

Segal, a leading theorist of mythology and a keen scholar of Campbell, writes that "The distinctiveness of *theories* of hero myths is that, as theories, they claim to know the nature of *all* hero myths" (Segal, 2000:12). Obviously, not all hero myths fit into the patterns proposed by the above theorists, but for the purpose of this thesis, I would like to argue that Williams is fully aware of and makes use of the theories of Campbell and Jung in his text, *The Genuine Half-moon Kid*. Throughout the text, Williams makes extensive use of the hero cycle – in structure, process and meaning. The "already read" quality of *The Genuine Half-moon Kid* is a product of the close intertextual references between this text and the ancient Greek myth of *Jason and the Golden Fleece* (or *The Argonautica)*.

In the Greek myth *Jason and the Golden Fleece,* Jason (the son of Aeson) escapes being imprisoned when Pelias usurps Aeson's throne. Jason is smuggled off to the centaur Chiron, who raises him secretly. Later, Pelias promises that he will return the throne to Jason, the rightful heir, if Jason manages to bring back the golden fleece.[2] Jason assembles a team of the bravest heroes in all of Greece and sails off in their ship, the Argo. On their epic journey, the Argonauts defeat monstrous creatures, are buffeted by storms and are seduced by beautiful women. Finally, the blind prophet Phineus tells them how to make their way safely to the place the fleece is kept, Colchis. When they arrive, the king of Colchis, Aeëtes tells Jason that before he can take the fleece, he must perform three difficult tasks: he must yoke together two fire-breathing bulls, plough the field of Ares and then sow it with dragon's teeth. Medea, Aeëtes' daughter, falls in love with Jason, and gives him magical protection to complete the tasks. In return, Jason swears fidelity to her and promises to take her back with him to Greece.

Even though Jason completes the tasks, Aeëtes still refuses to surrender the fleece. Medea tells Jason where the fleece is hidden and she drugs the dragon guard. After capturing the fleece, the Argonauts flee Colchis. In one version of the story, Absyrtus, Aeëtes' son, pursues them; Medea tricks him into an ambush and Jason kills him. Jason and Medea, after being cleansed of the murder of Absyrtus, get married.

When they return to Greece, Pelias refuses to relinquish his tyrannical rule. Through trickery, Medea convinces Pelias's daughters that they can revive their father's body by boiling pieces

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[2] The fleece is the magical golden fleece of the winged ram that saved the children of Nephele, Phrixus and Helle. The ram flew to Colchis with the children, but Helle fell into the water. When Phrixus arrived safely, he sacrificed the ram and hung its fleece in a forest guarded by a dragon.

in a special brew. Thus, Pelias is murdered by his own daughters, and Jason takes over rule of the city. Later, the son of Pelias expels Jason and Medea, and they are forced to flee to Corinth, where Medea has rights to the throne. Jason becomes king and rules for many years (Columbia Electronic Encyclopaedia, 2011:[s.p.]).

The text of *The Genuine Half-moon Kid* is divided into three parts: Departure (p1), Quest (p63) and Transformation (p167), which is a direct allusion to Joseph Campbell's theory of the structure of the hero cycle. Campbell makes use of James Joyce's term 'Monomyth' to describe the standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero as:

> a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: separation – initiation – return: ... a hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man (Campbell, 1972:30).

Prometheus ascends to the heavens and manages to steal fire from the gods, and descends to bring it to man. Jason sails across the treacherous sea, circumvents the dragon that guards the golden fleece, and returns with the power to defeat the usurper of the throne. Frodo journeys through Middle Earth to Mount Doom to destroy the evil ring and saves mankind. He and his friends then return to save the Shire from Saruman. Harry Potter eventually manages to destroy Voldemort, having sacrificed himself to save those he loves. Ancient and modern stories are littered with similar examples of this same pattern. Hollywood insiders will even confirm that the hero cycle "has become the go-to guide for how to write a commercial studio movie" (Soloway, 2011:162). Many modern film producers and directors are clearly well versed in Campbell's theory and this pattern can be seen in many films, from *Star Wars*

Episode IV: A New Hope (1977), to *The Matrix* (1999), to *Thor* (2011), or even to *The SpongeBob Square Pants Movie* (2004). Campbell hypothesizes that "these similarities regarding character types, plot structure, and themes" in many of the myths he examined, regardless of the storyteller's "location in reference to time period, geography, religious belief, level of education or socio-economic factors, are representations of various archetypes that exist in the unconscious of all humans" (in Duffy, 2010:5).

Campbell (1972:35) argues that in all myths, whether from the Greek, the Orient, or biblical narratives, "the adventure of the hero normally follows the pattern of the nuclear unit above described: a separation from the world, a penetration to some source of power, and a life-enhancing return". Jason receives his 'quest' from his grandfather's former work associate, Bob Lo, and he leaves on his journey to find the yellowwood box. In the process of his travels through South Africa, he is drawn into the 'unknown'. Once he has found the box, the writings of his grandfather help him to find his own agency, and he finds a will leaving him the "lion's share in the Watson pet empire" (Williams, 1992:175). Thus, Jason's victorious return is 'life-enhancing'. Campbell argues that myths are "models for understanding your *own* life" (Segal, 1990:18). Campbell contends that stories emanating from the

> unconscious structures of archetypes contain certain elements that serve to help people navigate life. In fact, these stories are microcosms or maps of the fundamental human life process, telling the story of all people. Campbell believes that these stories are necessary for human existence in that they instruct people about themselves, guide them, and teach them about life (in Duffy, 2010:5).

For Freud, heroism deals with what the Jungians call the first half of life – birth, childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood. The first half of life "involves the establishment of

oneself as an independent person in the external world" (Segal, 2000:13). According the Freud, independence and maturity are attained when one secures a job within the community and a mate. In order to attain this, one has to be separated from one's parents and one has to master one's instincts. This does not mean the rejection of one's instincts, but control over them – "it means not the denial of instincts, but the rerouting of them into socially acceptable outlets" (Segal, 2000:13). For Jung, in addition, heroism in the first half of life involves relations with the unconscious. Heroism here means "separation not only from parents and anti-social instincts but even more from the unconscious: every child's managing to forge consciousness is for Jung a supremely heroic effort" (Segal, 2000:17). Myths are a search for contact with the lost recesses of our own subconscious. An understanding of our own subconscious brings us to a better understanding of ourselves as a whole. Campbell refers to the subconscious as:

> the inconvenient or resisted psychological powers that we have not
> thought or dared to integrate into our lives. ...These are dangerous because
> they threaten the fabric of the security into which we have built ourselves
> and our family. But they are fiendishly fascinating too, for they carry keys
> to open the whole realm of the desired and feared adventure of the
> *discovery of self* (Campbell, 1972:8).

The hero's journey can be described "as a dynamic process that can serve as a conceptual metaphor for understanding and accessing individual development" (Lawson, 2005:136). Individual development, and thus maturity, for Jung, involves seeking a balance between the internal and external worlds. Jung was more concerned with "reconnecting humans to the inner, unconscious world, with which they have invariably lost contact" (Segal, 2000:17). The ideal outcome of heroism is thus a balance between consciousness of the external world and consciousness of the unconscious – and many have argued that storytelling and myths can help in this process of maturation.

We meet Jay, the protagonist, for the first time when he is on his way to the fish emporium where he works. He has had an argument with his mother, and he is angry with his father for leaving them – a typical trait of the hero myth is the absence of a father figure. Jay is also a slightly awkward boy and seems to have a low self-image as he resents his curly, unruly red hair and his lanky figure. Jay does not seem to have many friends at the beginning of the novel and resents Levi, a nine-year-old boy from the neighbourhood who constantly seeks Jay out, for recognising him as such: "[i]t seemed as if Levi had no friends of his own age, but preferred the company of those of his elders who were also not accepted by their peers" (Williams 1992:28).

As mentioned previously, Jay has a strange habit of submerging himself in the fish tanks. The "submersions" (as Jay calls them) calm him down, and he retreats to the "rainbows and bubbles" of the fish tanks as an escape mechanism. The first submersion we witness is one of "bubbles, sunlight, fish, rainbows, and monkey leaves[;] the world outside [ceases] to exist for Jay" (Williams, 1992:11). While he is floating, immersed in a trough filled with tropical fish, he claims that

> [h]e no longer thought of his father somewhere in Africa, or the creditors repeatedly dunning for payment, or his mother and her boyfriends, or the old woman who swallowed spoons, or the pressure of writing his matric examinations, or – this, the most serious of Jay's anxieties – the hollow, fearful, sick-making feeling that engulfed him when he thought about next year, when he would have to become an adult (Williams, 1992:11).

Arguing with a parent is something that teenagers can relate to, but Jay has other, less familiar problems. The reason he needs this particular submersion is because he has been

fighting with his mother over who is going to take his grandmother to the hospital, since she has swallowed some more of the family silver. This has become a regular event in the last few months, but this time his grandmother has graduated from the teaspoons to a soup spoon (Williams 1992:12). The crazy antics of his grandmother, while exasperating to Jay and a source of irritation, do not really receive much notice from him. Jay does not understand why his grandmother would swallow silverware, but he also does not make an effort to discover her reasons, and simply dismisses her as senile. This can be seen as the first incident in the novel where something strange has taken place, and Jay does not respond to it in the way one would expect. This is a typical characteristic of a liminal fantasy, as discussed in the previous chapter. Here, our reaction to the oddness of this habit is being exploited, but Jay has almost begun to accept it as normal.

Jay's submersions in the tanks also introduce a space in the text for the fantastic, the subconscious – water comes to represent the subconscious, the liminal and the persistence of memory. With his affinity for water, and his 'submersions', Jay is often linked to the water. Water is often linked to the womb or the foetus, and Jay's submersions represents an unwillingness on his part to face adulthood – these submersion can be seen as a wish to regress into the safety of the womb. Jay later says "the desire had come again, as powerfully as ever before, the desire for the safe, watery *womb* … because, outside, the real world was dangerous and bewildering" (Williams, 1992:95-96 emphasis added). At the start of the novel Jay is reluctant to face the reality of his dawning adulthood, and the fantasy water world he creates for himself offers him an escape from his reality.

The imaginative world Jay actively creates for himself while he is underwater in the fish tanks is fanciful and escapist. In fact, later in the novel when he sees the difficult situation at Eventide and hears some of the children's life stories, he is embarrassed and chastises himself: "I sit in a fish tank and dream of rainbows and fantastic lands with tropical fish princesses and goldfish kings. I sit in a fish tank and complain about life" (Williams, 1992:114). While it is escapist, the water world that Jay creates for himself acts as an introduction to the fantastic: his stories open up a space for the fantastic in the text. Through the quest for the box, Jay also finds his own voice and gains agency by writing his own stories. Jay is inspired by the stories his grandfather wrote, and decides to follow Chuck's dream of becoming a published author.

It is interesting to note, though, that the stories Jay writes find him returning to realism, and he says that now he has "*real* stories...not fantasy wisps of princesses and kings, but *real*, hurting, alive stories about people [he] knows" (Williams, 1992:192 emphases added). Once again, Williams's ambivalence in this regard is significant: which is the more successful genre to capture the process of meaning-making of the time, realism or fantasy? The unresolved lacuna within the text and Williams's use of liminal fantasy within the text (which can be seen as a mixture of the two genres) are manifestations once again of the uncertainty of the period of interregnum in which the novel was written.

Because water is linked to the subconscious, it is also linked to the persistence of memory, and we realise that Jay has a childhood memory which he has been repressing all these years. Throughout the novel, Jay keeps trying to remember the rhyme "Peter, Peter Pumpkin Eater..." but he can never remember how it ends. Peter is his half-uncle who lives in Camps

Bay, but the family has had some sort of argument in the past and they do not have anything to do with Uncle Peter any more. The original version of the nursery rhyme is:

> Peter, Peter Pumpkin Eater,
> Had a wife and couldn't keep her.
> Put her in a pumpkin shell,
> And there he kept her very well.

But this is not the version Jay remembers, and throughout the text he keeps trying to remember the correct version. It is only at the end of the novel, when Jay has matured and he is ready to consider and understand what has really happened that he can remember the rhyme correctly. He once walked in on his mother having sex with Uncle Peter (his father's half-brother). That night at the dinner table, Jay made up a rhyme of his own and announced it in front of his father:

> Peter, Peter, Pumpkin Eater,
> Kissed Mommy and was a cheater,
> Put her in a Pumpkin shell,
> And then they took off all their clothes (Williams, 1992:188).

Throughout the text we see that the repressed memory is trying to surface, but Jay is not yet ready to confront the reality of it. Jay says that "there's something else crawling out of the bottom of my mind. I grope, I strain forward, look over the edge of the abyss, down into the swirling chasm. Something lies at the bottom" (Williams, 1992:40). This can be described as "the unconscious from which [he has] become severed" (Segal, 2000:18). The process of Jay's quest, his hero cycle, enables him to finally remember what happened and make peace with it.

Bob Lo is the one who gives Jay his quest. He tells Jay that his grandfather left him a yellowwood box when he died and that Jay must go to his uncle's house in Camp's Bay, an upmarket area of Cape Town, and fetch it. Jay is initially angry because he is only hearing about this now, and yet his grandfather died six months before. Jay is reluctant to go and visit his half-uncle Peter, but Bob is insistent that Jay must go in person to his uncle to get the yellowwood box, and that he must go that same day, "now the time is right," insists Bob Lo (Williams, 1992:25). Bob Lo thus acts as the 'oracle' delivering the 'call to adventure' that sends Jay on his quest to find the yellowwood box.

On his way there, he has a strange encounter with an old woman on the bus. He is helping her down the stairs when she grabs his arm and tells him "You're the one!" (Williams, 1992:29). This is the first of several strange things that happen in the text, and yet, Jay merely shrugs his shoulders and moves on. The liminal here intrudes on the text in the form of the old woman proclaiming he is "the one" (Williams, 1992:29), but Jay's blasé response shows that as protagonist, the fantastic does not surprise him. As Mendlesohn (2008:xxiii) argues, in a liminal fantasy, the fantastic "barely raises an eyebrow". In the process of helping the old lady, Jay loses one of his slip-slops (sandals), and thus arrives at his uncle's house with only one shoe – just as Jason arrives to confront Pelias shod with only one sandal, after he loses his other shoe crossing a river. This coincidence should also surprise Jay when his uncle later shows him the tarot card depicting the myth *Jason and the Golden Fleece*, but it does not. Jay's failure to respond to the liminal fantastic elements in the text shows us that fantasy is 'real'. In a liminal fantasy, a "rhetoric of contrastive banality" (McHale in Mendlesohn, 2008:182) develops, and our amazement as readers is "reinforced by the naturalization of the fantastic" (2008:182).

Jay's encounter with his uncle is also strange. While he is waiting for his uncle to be summoned by the helper, he notices a large aquarium. However, unlike the products of the selective breeding Bob Lo undertakes in his quest to breed the perfect goldfish, all the fish in his uncle's tank are deformed in some way (Williams, 1992:34). They are all hybrids – the product of inter-breeding.

A parallel that can be drawn here is to the racial segregation of the Group Areas Act during Apartheid rule. Considering the political context of the novel, it is significant that the Chinese man, who could not study under his own name during Apartheid rule because of his race, is obsessed with breeding the perfect goldfish and keeping the gene pools clean. On the contrary, the villain of the story, Uncle Peter, has a tank full of genetically modified and inter-bred hybrid goldfish. Uncle Peter is not concerned with the mixing of different species, or if you will, 'races' of goldfish, while the Chinese man is obsessed with clean genetic breeding. Perhaps Williams himself, in 1992, was also struggling to come to terms with the extreme political and social change happening in South Africa at the time, and this extended metaphor of the breeding of the perfect goldfish is an attempt to deal with his own conflicting feelings regarding racial segregation. Williams's comment is open-ended and inconclusive, and this, another unresolved lacuna in the text, represents the complexities of the issue. While Peter's fish can be "gross and unnatural", they can also be "uniquely beautiful" (Williams 1992:35). At the end of the novel, just when Bob Lo has created the perfect goldfish after years of selective breeding, his rivals break into the Fish Emporium and smash all the tanks, killing the perfect goldfish. After the break in, Bob Lo seems a defeated and broken man, and chooses to leave South Africa. Bob Lo could thus represent many South Africans who were

unwilling to weather the change and paradigm shift happening in the country at the time, and who, in fear, instead chose to emigrate overseas.

Uncle Peter then tells Jay that he knew he would come to challenge him one day and that in a way he has been expecting Jay; he has been told Jay would be coming by the tarot cards. He has the tarot cards laid out on the table and shows Jay a card. It is a picture of the hero Jason, from the Greek myth, *Jason and the Golden Fleece.* The card shows a young man with wild red hair, wearing only one sandal, and carrying the golden fleece in his hand. Peter then asks Jay to choose a card, and he chooses the Moon card. Peter tells Jason that the card represents "the element of feeling and is a symbol of the mysterious watery depths of the unconscious" and that Jay is

> in contact with the ancient goddess of the underworld, Hecate, ruler of the moon, magic and enchantment... The card of the moon is the card of gestations, suggesting confusion, anxiety, bewilderment, and auguring a time of uncertainties. [Jay is] in the thrall of the unconscious and is helpless (Williams, 1992:38).

Again, the mystic intrudes on the text, but Jay barely acknowledges it here. He says, "This is very interesting, but all I came for was the box" (Williams, 1992:39). Jay only realises later the significance of the card. Once again, the liminal fantasy elements in the text are largely ignored by the protagonist.

The title of the novel, *The Genuine Half-moon Kid,* while a strange title at first, now makes sense. The title is a reference to the ancient Greek myth of *Jason and the Golden Fleece*, and to the moon card and Hecate, goddess of the underworld. The term 'half-moon' is also taken from the symbolism Jung uses to describe the different stages of life, since the half-moon is the stage of adolescence; the liminal stage between two wholes. Jay also notices the letters

GH-MK painted on several things throughout the text. The reappearance of these letters foreshadows the story Jay writes at the end of the novel called 'The Genuine Half-moon Kid'. The recurring letters hint at Jay's fate as a writer and their recurrence traces his journey to agency.

His uncle informs him that he does not have the box, but gives Jay the address of the person who bought it when Jay's grandfather's possessions were auctioned. The address is in Khayelitsha, a huge township on the outskirts of Cape Town. After leaving his uncle's house, Jay is feeling confused, and his normal escape is to submerge in the water. At the beach in Camp's Bay, he runs into the sea. However, the second submersion that we witness is vastly different from the first one; this submersion is in the turbulent sea and the waves crash down on Jay and he can see nothing. Jay says to himself that "I have entered the oceanic realm where confusion reigns... I cannot survive there" (Williams, 1992:44). Again, this shows Jay's reluctance to enter into the process of maturation – Jay tries to regress by returning to the womb of safety he knows from the water world of the tanks, but something has changed: now the water world does not offer Jay solace, but turmoil. Jay's regression will no longer work – he is now being forced to confront what he has been trying to avoid.

Throughout the text, the water world acts as a "[t]ransliminal moment, which brings us up to the liminal moment and then refuses to cross the threshold, has much greater potential to create fear, awe, confusion – all intensely important emotions in the creation of the fantastic" (Mendlesohn, 2008:xxiv). Jay has to acknowledge and deal with this dark and confusing part of his unconscious if he wishes to gain maturity.

Jay now needs a way to get to Khayelitsha and he decides to fix the old van that his grandfather used when he was first starting his pet shop business. In the process, Jay assembles an odd group of friends or 'helpers' around himself: Andy, who helps him fix the van; Lungile a new boy in the neighbourhood who will show them the way; Mr Lottee, a man from the neighbourhood who will drive; and Levi, who paints the van and names it. Levi is a small boy who lives nearby with his young mother and Jay notices that he often has bruises on his face and body (already there are hints of abuse in the Bam household). Levi is a strange child, and asks Jay to take him to the cemetery. Jay calls Levi 'Old Man' because he says Levi has old eyes and describes Levi's face as "unnaturally adult" (Williams, 1992:5). At the cemetery, the young boy searches through the gravestones until he finds what he is looking for. He then tells Jay that "When I die, I want to be buried here" (Williams, 1992:46), indicating the small grave of a "David Leviticus Howard, 1920-1929" (Williams, 1992:47) that has a small statue of the boy. The boy in the statue is about the same size as Levi and has the same middle name. The child buried there was also nine years old when he died. Jay tries to cheer Levi up by saying that he is still young and has a long way to go before he dies. The boy, however, simply replies that "people can die at any time" (Williams, 1992:47). Levi's strange obsession with death is eventually shown to foreshadow his death at the end of the novel.

The setting and context of *Genuine Half-moon Kid* is of significance to the process of the hero cycle. Jay, who has previously lead a rather sheltered, white middle-class life, is forced to encounter new people and contexts on his journey and he realises the huge socio-economic differences between himself and other people from different socio-economic and racial

groups. Campbell maintains that the hero must "march forth to a strange, new world, which the hero has never visited or even known existed" (Segal, 2000:18).   Jay has to journey to Khayelitsha and then on to Mossel Bay, and finally to Knysna in his search for the box.

When he is in Mossel Bay, Jay is very surprised to learn that his grandfather helped May Eventide start the orphanage where the group spend the night, and that Chuck spent much of his time there over the years. He also feels close to his grandfather for the first time, and says "Gramps, I feel you around me. This is your place, you built it, lived here, you were loved here, and it's probably the closest I'm ever going to get to you" (Williams, 1992:130). Jay is still trying to deal with the confusing feelings he is having regarding his family, and many of his questions come to a head when he is at Eventide. He says

> [s]urrender to the powers of the moon card and the under-world goddess
> Hecate and her three-headed dog, Uncle Peter Pumpkin Eater said. ...
> Uncle Peter said to give myself over to the powers of the moon. That
> something I felt trying to get through to me, that sense of waiting, as if
> being spoken to, a sense of something, something being around me...
> (Williams, 1992:116).

Williams has cleverly called the woman who runs the orphanage, a maternal figure in the text, 'May Eventide'. The orphanage is a place of refuge for the children, but it also comes to mean a lot to Jay. Eventide represents a peacefulness in 'even' and a constancy, like the 'tides' of the ocean, which are controlled by the moon. Eventide also means evening and the grandfather spends the evening of his life there.

The box is, however, not at Eventide and the group has to journey further to Knysna. Jay finally finds the yellowwood box he has been searching for with Klasie – an old and rather deaf man living in a run-down cabin in the middle of the forest – but when he discovers what

is in the box, he is disappointed. Inside the box are the stories that Chuck was writing about his life. Many of them are unfinished. Klasie tells Jay that Chuck believed "there is nothing after you die but the story of your life, and what good is a story if it is not worth telling?" (Williams, 1992:149). Jay has not been sure what to expect to find in the box, but he is angry at his discovery and thinks that their journey has been in vain. He calls the papers "the unfinished tatters of a useless life" (Williams 1992: 150). Despondently, the group heads back to Cape Town.

Once at home, Levi starts acting very strangely and refuses to climb out of the van. Jay eventually tells him that he will go with Levi to explain to Jenny, Levi's mother, about their unexpectedly extended trip. Here it is obvious that Levi is trying to escape his situation and avoid going home. Jay realises that Jenny had locked Levi in his room on the morning they had set out and had gone fishing all day with her boyfriend. Jenny only discovered late Monday that Levi was missing. Levi and Gary (the boyfriend) start fighting, and Levi runs at Gary with a pair of scissors. Gary hits Levi and pushes him back into the table, where Levi hits his head and falls unconscious. Jay helps Jenny get Levi to the hospital, and sits with her through the night, but Levi dies.

As Jay tries to deal with the pain of Levi's death, he turns to his grandfather's box, and starts reading all of his grandfather's stories. Jay now takes up his grandfather's dream of being a writer, and writes a story about a young boy, Levi, spending time with his grandfather. In the box Jay also finds a copy of his grandfather's will, which bequeaths 40 per cent of his grandfather's pet shop business to Jay. It also tells of a trust fund for Jay, that his Uncle Peter, his father's half-brother, was to administer.

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After his second encounter with his uncle when his uncle refuses to admit any wrongdoing and denies Jay's claim, Jay leaves his uncle's mansion depressed and walks to the beach. Upset, Jay thinks of swimming, returning to the world, where he has previously always found solace, "but something [holds] him back from the water" (Williams, 1992:186). He opens the box and his eye falls on a story entitled *Betrayal on a Tuesday Afternoon* which he has somehow missed up to now. It is almost as if Jay has had to wait until he is ready to read this story. As he reads, slowly Jay starts to remember what happened. The story speaks of two brothers who are in business together, but the older brother keeps coming to visit the younger brother's wife. Eventually Jay realises the truth – we are told that "he did not have to read what he already knew. The words reactivated images which thrust to the forefront of his mind" (Williams, 1992:188). The story acts as a tool to access the unconscious. Jay then remembers for himself what happened one afternoon when he was seven years old: he walked in on his mother and Uncle Peter having sex.

> I open the door. A naked woman is sitting on the chair in my mother's bedroom. Her back is towards me. I wonder who she is. She wears a floppy hat on her head. Uncle Peter is there. He is white-naked, eyes closed. The woman turns round. I can't move. The woman is my mother (Williams, 1992:188).

Jay then also finally remembers the rhyme that has been bothering him throughout the text. That night, after he had seen his mother and Uncle Peter in the bedroom, Jay remembers that he chanted this:

> Peter, Peter, Pumpkin Eater,
> Kissed Mommy and was a cheater,
> Put her in a Pumpkin shell,
> And then they took off all their clothes (Williams, 1992:188).

Jay feels guilty for what he did: "[a]ll those pinpricks of pain came later. The routine slighting and the cruel allusions that followed my rhyme. And my forgetting. For me it had never happened" (Williams, 1992:189). Jay has been forced to grow up. He now has a deeper understanding of his family and he no longer has a nagging sense that he has forgotten something – he has remembered it all and it has released him to become reunited with his mother. Through the process of the hero cycle, Jay has reached maturity in the Jungian sense. Jay is now "reconnect[ed] ... to the inner, unconscious world, with which [he has] invariably lost contact" (Segal, 2000:17).

Through the process of the text, we see Jay enter the water three times, just as the hero cycle has three steps. His final submersion, however, is vastly different again from the previous two. Firstly, his final submersion is done at night, and he strips down completely and goes into the water naked (Williams, 1992:192). Initially he enjoys the coolness of the water, but then "the underwater world assume[s] a menacing aspect... slowly he [is] understanding that the once so familiar fantasy world [has] gone forever. In its place [is] something dark and threatening" (Williams, 1992: 193). While he is submerged, he realises that somebody has broken into the Fish Emporium, and that they are systematically breaking the tanks.

> Feeling anger rise within him, Jay gingerly adjusted his position as he waited for the figure to appear in front of him. His hands searched the bottom of his tank for the brick that weighted down the water pipe and the rock he had shifted earlier. He found and grasped them both. Within the dark shadows of the water he waited: a figure approached his tank and towered over him, hammer raised.

> Arms held high, Jay erupted from the tank.

> Water surged across the floor. Spitting out his snorkel, he hurled the brick and the rock. The brick hit the intruder on the shoulder and the rock struck his face. He dropped his hammer, clutched his face and stared horror-struck at the bellowing apparition risen from the water: for Jay, naked and draped with monkey fern, was howling out his rage at Levi's death, the

> forced recall of dreaded memory, his uncle's labyrinthine machinations,
> and the complexities of Chuck's legacy. Stunned by the advent of a
> naked, raucous, begoggled water creature, the intruder yelled in terror
> (Williams, 1992:194).

Jay's re-emergence from the water, naked, acts as his symbolic and spiritual rebirth; in

Campbell's terms his emergence from 'the belly of the whale'. He says, "at the moment

when he rose from the water... he had experienced a unique feeling, a revelation. He had

known, without a shadow of a doubt, what he was going to do" (Williams, 1992:195).

The Genuine Half-moon Kid can be described as a coming-of-age story. Kroger (1989:1)

defines adolescence as "a time, at least in many technologically advanced western cultures,

when one is confronted with the problem of self-definition." Jason, who expresses a fear of

the future at the beginning of the novel, finds a peace at the end of it, even though he is still

unsure of what the future will hold. Erikson argues that identity formation during

adolescence involves conflict, and an individual must go through a period of development

during adolescence and youth when "biological endowment and intellectual processes must

eventually meet societal expectation for a suitable display of adult functioning" (in Kroger

1989:14). The quest for the yellowwood box allows Jay the opportunity to experience such

an "intellectual process" and opens a space for the development of his own identity.

By extension, an adolescent reader goes through the experience with Jay, and thus the

experience of reading the book acts as bibliotherapy, allowing the adolescent reader a space

in which to interrogate issues of their own identity. Eric Micha'el Leventhal writes that

"[t]he closer you come to knowing that you alone create the world of your experience, the

more vital it becomes for you to discover just who is doing the creating" (in Leighton, 2014:7). McCallum (2013:68) explains:

> [t]he commonplace notion of "finding one's self" underlying the idea of the formation of subjectivity as a quest for a stable identity has clear ideological and teleological representations....The disparity between the object of the quest and its representation within the narrative discourse implies a dialogue between the idea of selfhood of an individual as constructed within a series of provisional subject positions via specific social and discursive practises, and the self as unique and essential entity which exists prior to and in opposition to society.

This disparity creates an interesting position for the character of Jay, as his search for a "unique, singular and essential self" with "a stable personal identity within, and in relation, to the world and to others" (McCallum, 2013:68) is done in a context where the world itself (South Africa at the time) is poised in the liminal space of the interregnum.

In contrast to Jay, who returns the triumphant hero, Levi becomes something of a tragic hero. Levi is unable to escape his reality. While Jay manages to transcend his circumstances and emerge victorious, all of Levi's attempts to escape his reality and leave home are thwarted. As a nine-year-old boy, Levi has very few options available to him; he even begs Jay to not make him go home. Jay, not fully understanding the gravity of the situation, forces Levi to go home, but offers to accompany him. When his attempts to escape his abusive reality are thwarted, Levi seems to deliberately provoke his mother's boyfriend. In a sense, he thus chooses the final escape route offered by death rather than the prolonged experience of suffering his life has become. The tragic story of Levi acts as a warning that it may not always be possible to escape the trap of reality or simply rewrite the narrative that has been handed to one. Jay shows transcendence when he gains agency and starts to write his own story, but Levi instead retains only the power to run at Gary with a pair of scissors; he is then fatally injured − effectively ending his own story.

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As stated earlier, *The Genuine Half-moon Kid* is a highly allusive text, with many different intertextual references and sources throughout. Levi is a biblical name: Levi was one of the twelve sons of Jacob, son of Isaac. The story is told in Genesis 29 that Jacob works for his uncle, Laban, for seven years to win the hand of Rachel, Laban's youngest daughter, whom he loves dearly. However, on the wedding night, Laban tricks Jacob into marrying the older daughter, Leah, instead of Rachel. The next morning, when Jacob realises what Laban has done, he is furious and confronts him. Laban explains that he could not give the younger sister in marriage before the older one is wed. He tells Jacob that he will give him Rachel as well in return for another seven years' labour. The Bible then says, "Jacob lay with Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah. And he worked for Laban for another seven years. When the Lord saw that Leah was not loved, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren" (Gen. 29:30-31 NIV). Leah then bears Jacob two sons, each time hoping that this would win her husband's love. Levi is the third son that she bears Jacob, and the Bible says she named him Levi because she hoped that "Now at last my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons" (Gen 29:34 NIV). The name Levi sounds like and may be derived from the Hebrew word for "attached" or "united".

The twelve tribes of Israel were later named after the twelve sons of Jacob, and the Levites held a place of honour in Israel as they served as the priests in the tabernacle, and later in the temple of God. Leviticus is also the book in the Old Testament (which is also part of the Jewish Torah) where God gives many specific instructions to the Levites on the ceremonial and sacrificial rites to be carried out in the tabernacle, without which the Israelites could not hope to approach the holiness of God. It is said that Levi's descendants were blessed with the honour of serving in the temple when Levi paid tithes to the priest Melchizedek. Jesus Christ,

in the New Testament, is also linked to the priesthood, as He is considered the "Great High Priest" (Hebrews 4:14- 5:10) and God said of Jesus: "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek" (Hebrews 5:6 NIV). In the New Testament, Levi is also another name given to the tax collector, Matthew, whom Jesus Christ calls as a disciple even though tax collectors were largely despised by the Israelites, as they were seen as part of the oppressive and corrupt Roman Empire.

It could be argued that in *The Genuine Half-moon Kid,* Levi is a sacrificial character. In the interactions between mother and son, we see that there is little love lost between the two of them. Levi is moody and manipulative, while Jenny is stubborn and uncaring. Levi also states: "My grandfather wanted to kill me... I know he wants me dead. I'm in the way. He called me an embarrassment and the ruin of Jenny's life" (Williams, 1992:101). As opposed to Chuck, who leaves Jay an inheritance and, we later find out, specifically orchestrated it so that Jay would be forced to go on the 'quest' to find the yellowwood box and get to know more about his life; Levi's grandfather is an obvious absence in the boy's life. Levi says "I don't ever want to get to know him. I hate him" (Williams, 1992:101).

Like Leah who was unwanted by Jacob, Levi is unwanted by his mother and grandfather. Leah names her third son 'Levi' in the hope that her husband will give her affection, and Levi does not receive much affection from his mother, which is why he seems to form a strange attachment to Jay. Jay also says that Levi has become his best friend, and Levi's death truly affects Jay. It is almost as if Levi has to die, in order to complete Jay's journey to self-discovery and acceptance. In a way, Levi becomes Jay's redemption.

However, the allusiveness of *The Genuine Half-moon Kid* becomes problematic because of the texts that Williams references. Like Jung's model of individuation and Campbell's hero cycle that Williams uses, Williams's narrative reflects the imperatives of 20th-century existentialist ethics: autonomy, integrity, authenticity in relation to the self. Only recently coming into critical focus is the extent to which Jung's model of psyche and individuation also reflects his European colonialist assumptions. Segal (1999:151) also states that Campbell seeks "only the similarities among myths and does disregard the differences". One of the main criticisms of Campbell's work is that it leaves no room within its structure for heroes who are not male based on "the assumption that only a male character can stand for the full range of human experience, moving through action and quest to achievement or failure" (Heilbrun, 1981:88). As will be discussed later in Chapter 4, the pervading assumption that all heroes are male is truly problematic.

When Williams appropriates the Greek myth of *Jason and the Golden Fleece*, he uses what Stephens and McCallum (1998:3) refer to as a "retold" story:

> [u]nder the guise of offering children access to strange and exciting worlds removed from everyday experiences, [retold stories] serve to initiate children into aspects of social heritage, transmitting many of a culture's central values and assumptions and a body of shared allusions and experiences. The existential concerns of a society find concrete images and symbolic forms in traditional stories of many kinds, offering a cultural inheritance subject to social conditioning and modification through the interaction of various retellings.

While the retold story will then become "infinitely intertextual", it is also arguable that

> the processes of retelling are overwhelmingly subject to a limited number of conservative metanarratives – that is, the implicit and usually invisible ideologies, systems and assumptions which operate globally in a society to order knowledge and experience (Stephens and McCallum 1998:3).

Stephens and McCallum also take issue with the language used by Campbell: "the appeal of Campbell is not just because his account of myth points toward a universal story spanning epochs, places and cultures, but because it is a thoroughly transcendent vision consistently expressed in *hieratic* register" (1998:15 emphasis added). Brian Attebery in his book *Stories about Stories: Fantasy and the Remaking of Myth,* also takes issue with Campbell's colonial point of view and says that "Campbell's theory of the monomyth rests on shaky folkloric and ethnographic grounds" (2014:119). Campbell's comment to his student Maureen Murdock that women do not have a hero journey because they are the prize, "all she has to do is realise that she's the place people are trying to get to" (in Soloway, 2001:162) reveals "patriarchal society's dismissal of a woman's right to a hero journey" (Leighton, 2014:56). Carol Pearson and Katherine Pope (1981:vii) argue that patriarchal society "views women essentially as supporting characters in the drama of life. Men change the world, and women help them". Williams's text is thus, admittedly, too one-sided and patriarchal to address issues such as these.

Nadine Gordimer, in her famous essay 'The Essential Gesture' (1983), grapples with the question of the writer's responsibility as it pertains to her situation. Understanding along with Barthes that a writer's choice always faces two directions – toward society and toward the literature – Gordimer "wrestles with the problem of how to reconcile those demands from without to be socially responsible with those demands from within concerning artistic integrity. She makes it clear that the problem is a particularly complicated one when the society one is writing in is South Africa" (Hewson, 1988:55). For her it is, as described earlier, "living in the interregnum", which is "the space between two social orders and two

identities, the one known and discarded, the other unknown and undetermined" (Gordimer, 1983:21). The interregnum allows for a break with the past and a period of transition, a period of limbo where there is little clarity. This extreme period of social and political change introduces new frames to make the old frames obsolete, but these new frames are still in design. In this uncertain situation, the question of a writer's responsibility becomes even more complex. "For how, as a writer, does one put oneself into a meaningful relationship with a society that is not yet born?" (Hewson, 1988:55). Williams also grapples with this question, but due to the time in which this novel was written, his answers are insufficient.

In a period of extreme social change and uproar, it is problematic to me that Williams does not reach forward to the future for a new mode of framing reality, but rather reaches back, into ancient archetypal tropes, into a familiar and well used hero cycle, to frame his narrative. His indiscriminate appropriation of the Greek myth and his overt use of Campbell's monomyth sits somewhat uncomfortably from a postcolonial perspective, as these tropes bring with them all the Eurocentric assumptions of what Campbell calls "higher cultures" (1972:142). Williams valiantly attempts to frame the process of meaning within old modes of representation, but when these fail, there is nothing yet available to him to frame these new experiences of identity.

In an interview in 1993, Homi K. Bhabha turns his liminal gaze towards South Africa. He admits that his position is one of "an outsider... a bystander and consumer of the media" (in Jamal, 2002:64) but he invokes an interesting reading of the state of the nation and its cultural predicament which, even so many years later, remains astute. Jamal argues that

during a charged historical time when South Africa forges what will prove to be an ongoing process of disinterring itself from a legacy of oppression, Bhabha's eschewal of a saving *telos* and his insistence on turning and returning to 'the semiosis of the moment of transition'. For Bhabha this moment is not the Gramscian interregnum between two states of governance. ... Rather, *between* the renunciation of a past and the proleptic fulfilment of a future, Bhabha proffers a more enabling conception of the moment of transition; one which, having 'overcome the given grounds of opposition...opens up a space of translation: a place of hybridity, figuratively speaking, where the construction of a political object that is new, *neither the one nor the other*, properly alienates our political expectation, and changes, as it must, the very forms of our recognition of the moment of politics (Bhabha in Jamal, 2002:64 emphasis in original).

I would like to think that Williams is aware of the shortcomings of his text, and, as stated earlier, his later novels represent a much more successful means of meaning-making in the post-Apartheid context of South Africa, where he as author speaks more comfortably from a place of "hybridity" (Bhabha in Jamal, 2002:64). The next chapter will examine another text, Jenny Robson's *Because Pula Means Rain* (2000) with reference to Bhabha's idea of this "space of translation" and "hybridity" (Bhabha 1994:25).

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CHAPTER 3: Double negation and liminality in *Because Pula Means Rain* (2000) by Jenny Robson

Jenny Robson has written many books for children, including such titles as *Mellow Yellow* (1994), *Dark Waters* (1995), *Don't Panic Mechanic* (1995), *One Magic Moment* (1996), *Savannah 2116 AD* (2004) and *Praise Song* (2005). Her books have gradually made use of more and more fantasy, with *Savannah 2116 AD* being her first Science Fiction text. I believe, however, that it is in her book, *Because Pula Means Rain* (2000) that she has best used the fantastic as a site for postcolonial critique and discourse.

While *Because Pula Mean Rain* is set in Botswana, I would like to argue that it is still very much relevant to the South African context and that for the purposes of this study, the issue of its precise *geographical* setting is not sufficiently pertinent to exclude it from analysis. *Because Pula Means Rain* is written by a South African author, all of whose other novels are set in South Africa. It is also published by a South African company and it is frequently prescribed in South African schools, as it addresses issues that South African youth are facing. The conflict and tension between traditional African cultures and the loss of those cultures because of the westernisation and urbanisation of Africa's peoples are highly relevant to the South African context, as will also be seen in Chapter 4.

The fact that the text is set in a small village in Botswana can very cleverly act as a distancing mechanism: because the reader is slightly removed from the setting of the text, the text invites the reader into an 'Other' world, which offers a fresh perspective on the primary world. The distancing mechanism of the setting "open[s] up the space between signified and signifier,

across which multiple meanings and plural identities roam" (Wilkie-Stibbs, 2002:24). I am by no means saying that the text cannot also be claimed as a Botswanan text because of its setting – the very nature of both fantasy and postcolonial literature is its plurality of meanings and interpretations. While the *setting* of the text is in Botswana, the *locality* of the text, according to Appadurai (1996:178) is "primarily relational and contextual rather than as scalar or spatial. [It is a] complex phenomenological quality, constituted by a series of links between the sense of social immediacy, the technologies of interactivity, and the relativity of contexts".

In *Because Pula Means Rain* (2000), we meet Emmanuel, the protagonist, on a hot August day as he is walking home from the shop with the warm Spar bread he has bought for his grandmother tucked under his shirt. As the wind blows, we are introduced to the very real world in which Emmanuel lives. Emmanuel opens the narrative by saying:

> I always liked the August wind. It blows across the Village from the smart houses of Kedia Heights, down the single tar road where it flings litter up into the air, then on along the dry riverbed towards the huts of Ward Twelve, past Motsumi Bar where Masego's father drinks too much now. And it sighs round the curve of Cemetery Hill, skimming the dusty sand between the goats and the thorn trees towards Kotsi Corner (Robson, 2000:1).

The physical place Emmanuel inhabits is fully realised. Having lived for many years herself in a small village in Botswana much like this one, Robson is able to describe the setting of the novel in great detail and with authority. Like *The Genuine Half-moon Kid* in the previous chapter, the gritty realism of the text is so fully realised, that when the fantastic intrudes on the text, it is truly surprising to the reader. The characters however, remain blasé about the sudden appearance of fantastic elements.

Because Pula Means Rain (2000) by Jenny Robson can thus be classified as a liminal fantasy. In a liminal fantasy, Mendlesohn (2008) suggests that the presence of the fantastic is unnerving to the reader, but the protagonist and the characters in the text are not at all surprised by the presence of the fantastic and remain unsurprised by it, the fantastic "barely raises an eyebrow" (Mendlesohn, 2008:xxiii). Emmanuel is not at all surprised by the fact that he can see and talk to Masego's ghost, and he is also not surprised that she later visits him in his dreams. He even calmly accepts the rumours in his village that the Ngaka, the *sangoma* of the village, can fly on a loaf of bread, and he tries to use the power of witchcraft to change his skin.

Liminal fantasy is the most subversive of all fantasies, as it is unnerving, and supposes "that magic, or at least the possibility of magic, is part of reality, part of our world" (Mendlesohn, 2008:xxiii). Liminal fantasy casualizes the fantastic within the experience of the protagonist, it is used to estrange the reader. It is our reaction, as readers, to oddness that is being exploited. The unnerving presence of the fantastic in the text thus aims to destabilise and question the social understanding of what 'real' is.

When Emmanuel arrives home, there is a red car parked outside his grandmother's house. It is Sindiso, a young man from his village. Sindiso has come to ask if Emanuel can come with him to Gaborone. He is on his way to visit his girlfriend and his excuse for taking Emmanuel with him is that he wants company on the long drive. Emmanuel's grandmother is initially sceptical. She does not want them driving in the dark, especially not around Kotsi Corner – a treacherous corner on the road close to the village where many people have died in car accidents. It is the curse of this small town. Emmanuel begs his grandmother to let him go. It is evident that Emmanuel feels trapped within his ostracising rural world, and longs for an

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escape. Emmanuel thinks that the city space will make him feel more accepted, but this does not turn out to be the case.

At first, we do not understand Emmanuel's need to be allowed to go with Sindiso on his trip to Gaborone. However, as the text progresses, we realise that Emmanuel is a young Setswana boy with albinism, a *leswafe* (to use the Setswana word). In traditional African cultures, across the continent, there is much discrimination against people with albinism. Today we understand that albinism is a genetic condition that results in a lack of melanin in the skin, hair and eyes. However, many African cultures view albinism as a curse, or a sign of witchcraft in the family, and many albino babies are drowned at birth. The mother of the baby is often accused of sleeping around with white men, and her albino baby is seen as a punishment for her sins, while others say it is because the mother drank alcohol during her pregnancy (Nduru, 2006:[s.p]). Emmanuel tells of some of the stories that are whispered about him behind his back – that an albino does not wash like a normal person, but their skin flakes off like a snake's; that an albino does not die, but they simply go out into the desert and crumble into dust. Emmanuel is teased by his friends at school, and they call him "white monkey". Emmanuel says that "it is a name that makes [him] tremble with anger and shame" (Robson, 2000:19) and he "can feel the coldness rise up inside [his] chest, even on the hottest October day" (Robson, 2000:24). Emmanuel's albinism is an interesting site of racial liminality, and Robson uses the complexity of Emmanuel's skin colour to interrogate issues on the white/black binary.

In the previous chapter, Jay, the hero of the story, does not fit in either. Jay's "not fitting in" is more of a historical situation – he is a young white man at a time in South Africa when being white was shifting from being a marker of power to being one of political

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disempowerment. Emmanuel's "not fitting in" is a more personal and hopeless situation, but his albinism also functions metaphorically in the text. His white black skin acts as metonym and symbol for a racially-charged society.

Emmanuel wants to go to the city with Sindiso to close the "circle of loneliness" (Robson, 2000: 33) around him. He says that "maybe among all those people my circle of empty dead space would be squeezed to nothing" (Robson, 2000:6). This is the central conflict of the text: Emmanuel is a black Setswana with white skin. As a result, he is ostracised by his local community because of his 'whiteness'. He is neither black nor white, and thus, from his colonised position of isolation, he interrogates different ways of dealing with his double negation.

European colonisation is represented by the figure of Mrs Turner, a British woman who comes to their village to open up a bookstore. Mrs Turner gives Emmanuel a small prayer plaque in an attempt to help him deal with his difference. Emmanuel refers to the prayer plaque as the "God-grant picture" and it becomes a central motif in the text. The prayer on the plaque is the well-known Christian prayer that reads: *"God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; the courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference"*. The "God-grant picture" embodies the philosophy of coming to a place of acceptance, which Emmanuel needs to do in order to accept his white/black skin.

As readers, our first encounter with the "God-grant picture" is when Emmanuel finds it smashed and lying under a blanket. Emmanuel then relates in flashback how he smashed the plaque off the wall in anger when his grandmother had forced him to read it the night before during an argument. Emmanuel quickly puts the broken plaque back under the shelf – where

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it stays until the very end of the novel – because he says he "[does] not want to remember the one terrible, terrible moment when I longed to pick up a shard of glass and stab it into my flesh because my flesh was so wrong" (Robson, 2000:8). Emmanuel often thinks of the words of this prayer throughout the text and he later uses the prayer as an incentive to try to change his skin. Emmanuel's gradual understanding of this prayer charts his character growth throughout the novel, but while it offers him some hope in dealing with his difference, it does not help him find his own identity. The limited usefulness of the Eurocentric motif in a traditional Africa setting shows the slippage of its ideas.

Eventually, Emmanuel's grandmother relents and lets him go with Sindiso, so Emmanuel finds himself on his way to Gaborone for the first time. However, the trip is a disaster. When they get to Gaborone, Sindiso wants to buy a present for his girlfriend, Gracie. While he is doing this, Emmanuel enters a bookstore, a place he feels comfortable due to the influence of Mrs Turner. In an attempt to close the "circle of loneliness" around him, Emmanuel sits on the floor next to a young white boy, and asks him if he is enjoying the book he is reading. In a moment of intertextual genius, Robson makes the book in question the famous children's picture book, *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963) by Maurice Sendak. Emmanuel describes it as "a book about strange monsters on a desert island, except in the pictures the monsters looked funny, not frightening. And I was feeling so good" (Robson, 2000:38). Emmanuel asks the boy, "no one can ever be scared of monsters like that, can they?" (Robson, 2000:38). The little boy, however, screams in fright at the sight of the albino Emmanuel, and Emmanuel runs from the bookstore terrified and deeply shaken. He begins to realise that he will always be different, no matter where he is – he is the 'monster'.

When he and Sindiso arrive at Gracie's house, they find her with another man. Angered by this and feeling rejected, Sindiso immediately heads back to the village. He is furious and is driving recklessly; Emmanuel tries to soothe Sindiso with the words of the "God-grant picture" since, after all, Emmanuel understands rejection very well. Sindiso, however, can only think of how he is going to win Gracie back. As they approach the dangerous Kotsi Corner, Emmanuel becomes nervous. He remembers all the horrible accidents that have taken place there and he recounts the story of the day he watched his best friend, Masego, die in a car accident. As they round the corner, there is a goat in the road, Sindiso loses control of the car and Emmanuel is flung from the vehicle.

It is as Emmanuel lies bleeding on the hill of Kotsi Corner, that fantasy invades the narrative for the first time. Emmanuel sees the ghost of his friend Masego, who is the only true friend he has ever had. While the reader is disturbed by the sudden intrusion of the fantastic into the text, Emmanuel does not seem at all shocked by the unexpected appearance of his friend, he is just happy to see her: "Still, another sound was reaching me now. A voice shrill and high through the moonlight. *More real* than the slope stretching towards the skyline. And so very familiar..." (Robson, 2000:62 emphasis added). Emmanuel also says that "in that moment it seemed right and natural that Masego should be with me, breaking through the barriers of her spirit realm and into mine" (Robson, 2000:63).

Masego tells Emmanuel that she cannot cross over into the light, and that she is caught between two worlds – the real world and the supernatural, spiritual realm of the ancestors. Masego is, thus, also stuck in an in-between, liminal space like Emmanuel. She tells Emmanuel "[w]hen the other people come here, the Light opens up wide for them. But when I try to get in it closes up. And I have to stay in the darkness. All by myself" (Robson,

2000:66). Emmanuel tries to comfort the crying spirit of six-year-old Masego with the first line of the "God-grant picture": "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change" (Robson, 2000:67), but Masego only gets angry with him for speaking English to her. She says that he should know that she does not understand him when he speaks *Sekgowa*, "that English", to her. This shows the first "slippage" of the "God-grant picture". As a western motif in the local context of Emmanuel, the prayer is unable to offer Emmanuel the resolution he seeks. Masego tells him that she has been chasing the goats into the road to cause the accidents, as she is unable to pass into the light. Instead, she is stuck in a spiritual realm between two worlds, where a baby is relentlessly crying. She begs Emmanuel to help her find the baby and stop the crying. She says that the baby "...cries and he cries. On and on. But when I look for him, I cannot find him. I want to pick him up and rock him so that he will stop. ...It is the baby who makes me chase the goats onto the road...it is the only time he stops crying, for just a little while" (Robson, 2000:69).

Emmanuel is rescued, to Masego's despair, and is taken to the hospital with a broken leg. While he is at the hospital, he learns that his friend from school, Keshia, is also in the hospital because she has tried to commit suicide. Keshia has a German father and a Setswana mother. Before Keshia's father left to go back to Germany, he told her that he would send for her one day, so that she could come and live with him in Germany – this is the hope that Keshia has been clinging to all her life. Eventually Keshia receives a letter from her father's German wife, telling her that they already have a family, and that she must not write to her father again. Thus, the Eurocentric, colonising world has once again failed the local community. Emmanuel tries to soothe Keshia with the second line of the "God-grant picture": "God, grant me the courage to change the things I can..." (Robson, 2000:81). Keshia gets angry with Emmanuel and tells him he does not understand because he is nothing but a "freak" (Robson,

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2000:81). Emmanuel, however, has a personal epiphany and realises that he does not want the "serenity" offered by the prayer, but simply wishes *not* to be an albino anymore.

Emmanuel then attempts to focus on the second line of the "God-grant picture", "grant me the courage to change the things I can". When he returns to the village, he sets about trying to change his white skin. He first tries to go to Mama Jay, the local witch of the village, but she refuses to help him. Next, he attends an evangelical church service, where Brother John prays for him and he falls over under the "power of the Spirit", but, to Emmanuel's disappointment, prayer does not work for him. The next day when he wakes up, he is still an albino. In Emmanuel's case, neither the traditional culture nor the colonial ideology is effective. Lastly, he goes to the Ngaka, the *sangoma* of his village. She gives him *muti* or traditional medicine to smear on his skin before he goes to bed. This does not work either. When Emmanuel wakes up the next day, his skin is burning. In his desperation and despair, he runs out into the rain and onto the hill by Kotsi Corner. Here, in his moment of deepest despair, he discovers the small skeleton of a little baby that the rain has exposed.

Ever since Emmanuel watched his best friend Masego die, he has been totally revolted by dead things. Yet, he still wishes to help his poor Masego who cannot cross into the light, and he realises this skeleton is the baby that has been crying and tormenting Masego. Emmanuel has been told the history of his village by RrePitlo, one of the oldest villagers, who has also been ostracized by the community because he had an aunt who went mad. RrePitlo has told him that his village was started one night, when some of the villagers wished to escape their previous chief and his ruthless son. They ran away during the night, and RrePitlo's aunt carried her baby with her. The chief's men came to kill the villagers who had tried to escape. The baby was fussing and in an attempt to silence the child, RrePitlo's ancestor held the

infant tightly to her bosom. Without realising it, she smothered her baby. Fearing the wrath of the baby's grandparents and family, the mother buried the baby's body under the rocks and fled.

Emmanuel realises what he must do.   He takes the bones of the little baby and buries them under RrePitlo's chair, as it is Setswana tradition that a baby be buried under the floor of the family's home, so that he or she can still be with the family in the afterlife. Emmanuel fulfils his gruesome task, at much personal cost, knowing that he has to free Masego, so that she can pass into the light. Without realising it, Emmanuel has also broken the curse of Kotsi Corner. That Christmas and New Year, there are no more accidents on that piece of road.

Through his gradual understanding of the Eurocentric "God-grant picture", and the local oral history of his village, Emmanuel is able to break the horrible curse of Kotsi Corner, which has terrorised his community. By creating a synthesis of two warring belief systems, Emmanuel opens up a third space of identity where he can come to terms with the whiteness of his albino skin. Through his burial of the baby's bones, Emmanuel manages to find value for himself, even if the rest of his village does not recognise this. Jung (1940:32), in his discussion of the 'process of individuation', states that "[f]or us, the integration of the personality waits upon the challenge which, willingly or unwillingly, we offer to ourselves". It is by Emmanuel's completion of his personal challenge – the burial of the baby's bones – that Emmanuel 'comes of age' and finds his place within a society that has rejected him because of his otherness.

Because Pula Means Rain can be categorised a postmodern text, as it characteristically allows for a "blurring of distinction" (Attebery, 1992:42), not only between what is real and what is

unreal, but also between what is truth and what is not. Emmanuel experiences something like a "nervous condition" (Fanon, 1965). He does not want to anger his very devout Christian grandmother by questioning her beliefs, indeed, Emmanuel himself believes in the power of the "God-grant picture", and it is significant that even his name is from the Christian tradition – Emmanuel is the name given to Jesus by the angels, and means "God with us". However, Emmanuel also believes in the power of the oral tradition and the customs of his community and village – he consults the *sangoma* or witchdoctor of his village in an attempt to make his skin 'normal'. In addition, it is only by burying the baby under the floor of the family home as "the old ways demand" (Robson, 200:50) that he frees the village from the curse of Kotsi Corner.

Significantly though, neither the Christian worldview of his grandmother and Mrs Turner, nor the traditional customs and beliefs of Emmanuel's community offers him a space in which to "close the circle of emptiness" (Robson, 2000:26) around him and end his ostracism. It is only when Emmanuel consciously creates a synthesis of both the colonising hierarchies of power in his life that he is able to find his niche within his community. It is only from the re-negotiated third space that is made possible by the presence of the liminal fantasy in the text that Emmanuel is able to make peace with his white/black skin.

Emmanuel thus engages with his double-negation, through the subversive qualities of liminal fantasy, in order to create a synthesis of the two belief systems. Emmanuel's quest is a personal, inward journey of discovery. It is only when he has made peace with who he is and come to terms with the 'whiteness' of his skin, that he is able to find a niche for himself in his society. When Emmanuel's grandmother has heated debates with her friend across the river, MmaZacharius, about the merits of Christianity versus the traditional beliefs of the Setswana

people, Emmanuel's response is this: "But why can't it be that both these things are true? In such a wide and open land, spread out under such a wide and open sky, surely there is space enough for both versions?" (Robson, 2000:55).

Jenny Robson was born and raised in Cape Town, but she now lives in a small diamond mining town in Botswana, where she teaches music. As Jenny Robson is a white woman, her positionality as a white female speaking for a young black albino boy from a traditional Setswana community needs to be examined.   Is she simply another self trying to look with an Other's eyes, or does she have the authority and self-reflexivity to speak with conviction on Emmanuel's behalf?

Clare Bradford, in her book *Unsettling Narratives: Postcolonial readings of children's literature* (2007), states that "most representations of indigenous peoples and cultures in settler societies have been and continue to be produced by non-Indigenous writers and artists..." and this can be explained by the fact that "in these nations it is white, Eurocentric cultures whose practices, perspectives, and narrative traditions dominate literary production and representational modes" (2007:71). The same is still true for Southern Africa. While much development has taken place in the last few years, and more and more so-called Indigenous writers are being published and are finding their voice, much of the publishing industry is still governed by Eurocentric or western practices. Bradford argues that "works of fiction present a different set of issues, enmeshed within the complex politics of representation and discursive practices" (Bradford, 2007:71).   While I do not want to suggest that non-Indigenous writers should not and cannot represent Indigenous people, it is often difficult to "distinguish speaking *about* from speaking *for* in all cases" (Bradford, 2007: 71 emphasis added).

Bradford further argues that "representation does not work as a simple operation whereby an author delivers the truth of others, but incorporates advocacy and judgements and acts of valuing as well as information" (2007:71). Bradford also warns that "non-Indigenous authors should recognize the privileges they enjoy as members of majority cultures, and (crucially) the subject positions they construct for Indigenous and non-Indigenous readers" (Bradford, 2007:71-72). In her representation of Emmanuel and in the telling of his story, Robson does incorporate advocacy and make judgements. While what she is preaching is acceptance of others' beliefs and a theory of multiculturalism, it can be argued that she is a little too 'preachy'. Her position as a white woman, speaking from outside, is reflected in her postmodern ideal of acceptance and multiculturalism. Xie argues that

> [e]very time consciousness breaks with its past, it renews itself through identifying with an "other's" thought. To speak from an other's thought is to redefine and renarratavize the world. The critical mind's recent turn to postcolonialism aims to rethink, recuperate and reconstruct racial, ethnic, and cultural others that have been repressed, misrepresented, omitted, stereotyped, and violated by the imperial West (Xie , 2000:1).

Robson is an expatriate in Botswana, but as she has lived in a small Botswana town for several years now. It could be argued that she is not a completely non-Indigenous voice in that she can speak with authority, because she is very familiar with the traditions of a small Setswana community. Jenkins (1993:2) argues that "stories written in English by black writers about black children… bring an authenticity to their portrayals which whites, no matter how well-meaning, have not [yet] been able to achieve". White writers can also deal with the themes and issues raised by black writers, "but they take a risk in doing so" (Jenkins, 2012:156). Robson is aware of this risk, but tackles it effectively because of the self-reflexive nature of her text.

In her essay, "The Problem of Speaking for Others" (1991), Linda Alcoff says that those

speaking for others should be "cognizant of the power relations embodied in discursive

practices and should interrogate the positions from which they speak", that they should take

responsibility for what they say, and that they should "analyse the probable or actual effects

of the words on the discursive and material context" (Alcoff in Bradford, 2007:71). I would

like to argue that Robson is very "cognizant of the power relations" inherent in the dialectic

of fantasy fiction. Eagleton's interrogation of "the immemorial relationship between speaker

and audience remains absolutely critical to postcolonial theory, a working definition of which

should surely foreground the difference between *those who have the privilege of speaking,*

and those who have access to hearing" (in Wright, 2002:68 emphasis added).   Wright also

states that Eagleton argues that

> invoking an ethical obligation on the part of the intellectual to speak for,
> but also *to*, those whose consciousness lags behind whatever Hegelian
> discourse of utopian progress is being espoused. There is plenty of worthy
> rhetoric to support such a position, most of it centring on the idea of giving
> a voice to the voiceless Other, and nearly all of it to be found within texts
> which would be considered exemplary of postcolonial theory (Wright,
> 2002:69).

As she is writing for an adolescent audience, the didactic message of Robson's novel is meant

to have an effect on the audience and teach adolescents to be more accepting of others'

differences. Bradford et al. (2011:2) argue that children's literature is "a field of cultural

production highly responsive to social change and to global politics, and crucially implicated

in shaping the values of children and young people". Maria Nikolajeva (1996) also argues

that children's literature is more didactic, and performs a socialising function. Therefore,

children's literature should be "marked by a pervasive commitment to social practice, and

particularly to representing or interrogating those social practices deemed worthy of preservation, cultivation, or augmentation, and those deemed to be in need of reconceiving and redeeming" (Bradford et al. 2011:2). Robson embraces the didactic nature of literature for adolescents, and the message of the novel is one of multiculturalism and acceptance; she deems these qualities "worthy of preservation, cultivation [and] augmentation" (Bradford et al. 2011:2). Here, her didacticism is positive. As Jenkins says, Robson shows a "willingness to explore new paradigms of human relations in Southern Africa" (1993:3).

Does this allow Robson to speak for the Other? I would like to argue, because of the nature of Emmanuel's Othering – he is a white boy in a black community, just as Robson is a white woman in a black community – this unique space of double negation allows Robson to speak with some authority on the subject, as she herself may have experienced some ostracism because of her race. We can also see that the Tswana culture has worked on Robson; her narrative rejects the ideology represented by the "God-grant picture" as wholly correct as she recognises its slippage in the rural community in which she lives.

What makes Robson's narrative so compelling, and what lends her story an air of truth is that the narrative is so firmly set in its location. She describes the rural setting of the small village in which Emmanuel lives in great detail, and the reader can see that she as author is familiar with what life is like in rural Botswana. The place and location of the novel is important to the story, and the 'space' of the novel is significantly mapped. John Stephens argues that "cognitive mapping is the process by which the everyday life of the individual is experienced in relation to larger conditions of existence the individual may find impossible to conceptualise" (Stephens, 2012:[s.p.]). In a cognitively mapped space, the space becomes

the mental model of spatial relations and the space acts as a stage for narrative events. As discussed in Chapter 1, Spivak, maintains that in a postcolonial context, the voice of the Other or subaltern may always already be mediated, whether it is through language, race or the positionality of the author of the text. In this way, the narrative of Emmanuel as a young black boy living with albinism is already mediated by Robson as author, but it is then mediated again by us as readers in the South African context. This does not necessarily mean that the message of the text loses its validity.

For Emmanuel, the rural space in which he lives offers only loneliness. He is ostracised from his community because of his white black skin and he is constantly teased and made fun of. Emmanuel does not have any friends, except for sad Keshia, and Emmanuel justifies her tolerance of his company because she is always looking down, so she does not have to look at his ugly skin and malformed teeth and mouth. The only girlfriend he has ever had was poor blind Pearl, who could not see him. However, her parents stop the relationship when they realise who it is she is spending time with. Emmanuel is always looking for someone "to break the circle of emptiness around [him]" (Robson, 2000:26). He truly misses his friend, "my poor lost Masego" as he calls her (Robson, 2000:26), who was probably the only true friend he ever had. When Sindiso asks Emmanuel to go with him into the city, Emmanuel jumps at the chance to leave the lonely space of his rural community, and experience what he thinks will be the crush of the city; he hopes that "maybe in Gaborone I would feel the way I had felt with Masego. Maybe among all those people my circle of empty dead space would be squeezed to nothing" (Robson, 2000:6).

When Emmanuel does arrive in the city, his hopes are not realised. The city offers him further alienation. He is still ostracised and he is still different, too different to fit into his black community. When he tries to talk to a young boy in a bookshop, the boy bursts into tears and starts screaming when he sees Emmanuel's face. The loneliness of the rural community is contrasted with the alienation of the city space for Emmanuel. Emmanuel, as many teenagers do, simply longs for a space where he can fit in, a space where he can belong. He longs for an open space and says "But why can't it be that both these things are true? In such a wide and open land, spread out under such a wide and open sky, surely there is space enough for both versions?" (2000:55).

As with most books written for adolescents, *Because Pula Means Rain* is a coming-of-age story, in which the focal point is the development of the identity of the protagonist. Bradford et al. (2011:12) argue that "adolescent fiction is pivotally preoccupied with the formation of subjectivity – that is, the development of notions of selfhood. Fictions are typically concerned with questions like: who am I, why am I here, where am I going, and what does it all mean?" Stephens argues that the process of identity formation is a process that depends on the preconceived mapping of the layout and the function of the landscape in the text. Space and identity share a metonymic relationship. In a metonymy, where a part stands for the whole, there is an overlap of literal and figurative meanings. Metonymy accesses the shared cognitive maps and makes tangible the relationship of the everyday life of the individual subject to the larger condition of existence. While Emmanuel is never able to truly escape his loneliness, by burying the baby's bones and by lifting the curse of Kotsi Corner, he is able to find a purpose and an identity. No one else knows of Emmanuel's sacrifice to lift the curse, but he knows what he has done for his community, and that is

enough to help him find a purpose and live with the ostracism he experiences because of his albinism.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, Adrienne Rich describes the postcolonial condition as a state of "unsatisfaction" where locality and historical memory must be interrogated "in an attempt to open up an intervening space, a space of translation as transformation particularly apposite to the difficult, transnational world" (in Bhabha 1994:45). As the main aesthetic desire of fantasy is the "making or glimpsing of Other worlds" (Tolkien 1992:40), fantasy literature offers a unique opportunity for the subversion of dominant ideals and a realisation of this state of "unsatisfaction". Jackson states that "the fantastic traces the unseen and the unsaid of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made 'absent' ... fantastic narrative tells of the impossible attempt to realise desire, to make visible the invisible and to discover absence" (Jackson 1988:4).

Thus, fantasy literature, by its subversive nature, opens up the margins of, not only reality, but of identity as well. Thus as is noted in the introduction to my dissertation, the fantasy narrative offers "a tear or wound in the real, a perception that *opens* up the widest spaces" (Jackson, 1988:22). The realm of fantasy opens up, as Homi K Bhabha (1994) calls it, a third space, a space between the colonial and the postcolonial, where true interrogation of identity and meaning can take place. For Bhabha, the postcolonial African identity is "fluid, relational and always in flux" (Kalua, 2009:23). In a postcolonial African context, "we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity" (Bhabha, 1994:2). Bhabha describes the third space as an 'in-between' space, which "provides the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular

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or communal – that initiate new signs of identity. It is in the emergence of the interstices –
the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjective and
collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated"
(Bhabha, 1994:2).   It is this creative space that Emmanuel comes to embody.

CHAPTER 4: The appropriation of African myths and postcolonial (dis)location in K. Sello Duiker's *The Hidden Star* (2006)*.

Kabelo Sello Duiker was born in 1974 and grew up in Soweto and London. He studied at Rhodes University and graduated with majors in Journalism and Art History. While at Rhodes, he started a poetry society with a few friends. He then studied copywriting in Cape Town, and went on to work in advertising. He later worked as a script writer for eTV's daily soap *Backstage* and became the commissioning editor for SABC 1. His first novel, *Thirteen Cents* (2000), was published to critical acclaim and won the 2001 Commonwealth Writer's Prize for Best First Book, Africa Region. His second novel, *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* (2002), was awarded the 2002 Herman Charles Bosman Prize for English Literature. Duiker participated in many literary events in England, Holland, Indonesia and Germany. He also spent six months in Holland on a prestigious fellowship (Mzamane, 2005:1,5).

Duiker, the only author I have chosen to study who is a black South African, is said, like Robson's Emanuel, to have suffered from what Tsitsi Dangarembga refers to as a "nervous condition". The term, borrowed from the introduction to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* for the title of her novel, *Nervous Conditions* (1988), is used by Dangarembga to refer to the unquiet state of her female protagonist after receiving a western education, which is largely at odds with the traditional way she was brought up in the small village in which she lives. While her western education opens doors for her, it also makes her realise the hopeless situation she, and the other female members of her family, find themselves in as disenfranchised Others in a

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man's world. In the same way, Duiker is an Other in a white man's world. He grew up in the

townships of South Africa but later spent much time overseas. He is, to use the words of Dr

Molly Brown, "a writer who straddles two worlds" (Brown, 2012:198). He stated once in a short

piece on the Commonwealth that his time abroad had "allowed me some healthy distance from

South Africa to consider my place in the country and in the world" (in Mzamane, 2005:10).

At the time of Duiker's tragic suicide in January 2005, the manuscript for *The Hidden Star*

was completed, but was still in unedited form. A close friend of Duiker's, Annari van der

Merwe, who also published his novel *The Quiet Violence of Dreams,* posthumously edited

and published *The Hidden Star* (2006). During a tribute at Duiker's funeral, Lewis Nkosi

observed:

> [w]riters who take their vocation seriously know how much blood and
> tears are spilled in the process of mastering the craft of writing. A lifetime
> is usually required to master the craft of writing; the miracle is that Sello
> should have achieved so much in such a short time; the tragedy is that his
> life was cut so brutally short when his best work probably, almost
> certainly, still lay ahead of him (in Mzamane, 2005:xi).

The main thing one notices when first encountering *The Hidden Star* is how completely

different it is from Duiker's other works. Firstly, it is a novel written for children, whereas

his other works are aimed at adults; and secondly, it is a fantasy story, as opposed to the

unequivocal realism of *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* and *Thirteen Cents.* However, while

The Hidden Star is a fantasy story, Duiker by no means shrinks from the stark circumstances

portrayed in his other novels. Duiker was often referred to as "the chronicler of the new

South Africa, of the existence of young people in the great city" (Mzamane, 2005:13).

McQueen Motuba argues that "New writers are not writing about Apartheid, the system, but

about how it still affects a now-free South Africa" (in Mzamane, 2005:xiii), and I believe this

is exactly what Duiker was trying to achieve. *Hidden Star* talks of hope, despite poor

circumstances, despite the legacy left by Apartheid.   In *Hidden Star,* Duiker looks forward to

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find a way for young South Africans to move beyond the discrimination of the past. Thus giving substance to Thabo Mbeki's utterance when he says: "Those who have eyes to see let them see. The African renaissance is upon us. As we peer through the looking glass darkly, this may not be obvious, but it is upon us" (in Mzamane, 2005:i).

Another difference between Duiker's other texts and *Hidden Star* is the age of the protagonists. While the earlier novels have teenage protagonists, Nolitye is only eleven years old. This may suggest to the casual reader that the novel is intended for younger readers. However, Nolitye is forced to take on adult responsibilities because of the absence of her father, and later we discover, her mother too. Eleven is also generally considered to be the age at which significant numbers of contemporary girls reach puberty, so I would argue that *Hidden Star* can certainly be considered an adolescent text. The story traces Nolitye's movement away from her mother figure, her process of maturation, the successful completion of her quest and her triumphant return to her township with the 'boon' of the experiences and maturity she has gained; all of these are traditional, coming-of-age issues. Furthermore, Fred Khumalo, in his review of *Hidden Star* for *The Sunday Times,* clearly feels that the novel is not aimed at pre-pubescent readers, stating that while it has a young protagonist, "*Hidden Star,* like *Thirteen Cents* before it, is so *disturbingly adult* in its message that [he] got goosebumps reading it" (in Brown, 2008:171 emphasis added).

As a teacher, I work with teenagers every day, and need to be aware of what books adolescents are likely to enjoy. I would not hesitate to prescribe *Hidden Star* for a Grade 8 or 9 English Home Language class (in fact, I plan to do so next year), as I believe the novel has so much to offer these readers. On the other hand, while *Thirteen Cents* (2000) and *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* (2001) have adolescent protagonists, they are so violent and deal so

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explicitly with sex and other controversial issues that I do not believe they would be at all suitable for study in a classroom. I would even go so far as to argue that they are not suitable reading for most adolescents. In addition, I have many adult friends who have enjoyed Rowling's *Harry Potter* series and Riordan's *Percy Jackson* series. These novels trace their protagonists' lives from as early as the age of 11 up until about 18. It seems axiomatic, then, that while the age of the protagonist may give an indication of a novel's intended readership, it would be a mistake to feel that this is an infallible guide to the age appropriateness of any individual work.

The Hidden Star begins with a Preamble that sets the scene for the novel. It describes Phola, the township in which the characters live. The township of Phola is a dirty, impoverished shanty town full of pollution and violence – a recognisable, average township. People live hand to mouth and struggle to survive, and hunger is a common friend. But the Preamble is also a little hopeful: it describes how the shacks all face the morning sun, and how the children play in the streets while their parents work in "the big City of Gold" (Johannesburg) (2006:1) to bring home some money. The Preamble also gives a warning: children have been disappearing from their homes, and none of the residents want to talk openly about what is happening. The Preamble ends with the ominous warning, "Of late, Phola is no longer an ordinary place to live in" (2006:1).

In Chapter One, the setting is further mapped for us, and Duiker describes the township of Phola in great detail. He presents the very realistic setting of the township at night: the tiny shacks packed together, the mosquitoes buzzing around, a pack of stray dogs chasing a cat and the children playing between the shacks. The text again gives an ominous warning

though, as the children have been very strictly told not to stray too far from their homes, "because of late their parents have become very strict about that" (2006:3).

We meet a young girl, Nolitye, the main protagonist of the novel, as she is trying to finish her homework before the last candle burns out. Her mother, Thembi, is already asleep, and we realise that they have become estranged of late. Nolitye has a habit of collecting stones, which annoys her mother. Thembi says it is Nolitye's grandmother's fault for giving Nolitye her strange name, which means "Keeper of the Stone, Keeper of Knowledge" (2006: 5).

Nolitye finds a beautiful purple stone, and soon discovers that it is magic. She uses the power of the stone to help her sell fatcakes at the market, and to defeat The Spoilers, a gang of bullies led by Rotten Nellie – a masculine girl who rules the school with fear by bullying everyone. Later, the Spirit of the Stone appears to her and explains that this is the heart of a larger stone, made by Nkulukulu of the heavens, who created the earth, as a way of giving wisdom to the tribes and to create unity among the people. The tribes, with their thirst for power, quarrelled over the stone and it was broken up into pieces. Nolitye has been chosen by the Spirit of the Stone and she is tasked with finding and reuniting all the pieces of the stone, thus bringing unity to her people once again.

As Nolitye gradually finds the different pieces of the stone, it becomes stronger, and Nolitye has to defeat the forces of evil wishing to steal the stone to harness its power. Nolitye learns that the woman who is her mother is not actually her mother at all, but a Night Rider, a powerful dark witch, who has taken the form of her mother to steal the stone from Nolitye. Nolitye must learn the woman's real name in order to break her spell.

Nolitye's parents also appear to her in a dream, and explain to her that they are being held captive in the underworld. Once Nolitye has found all the pieces of the stone, she goes on a quest, with her two friends, Beki and Four Eyes, to save her parents from the underworld.

In the underworld, Nolitye and her friends meet and are helped on their quest by many different animals, including the trickster hare and the hippopotamus.   They manage to rescue the children who have recently been taken from Phola, and they manage to defeat the Zim – a cannibalistic beast who lives in the underworld and who has been kidnapping the children from Phola to make them work as slaves (and then later eat). In order to save her mother, Nolitye has to dive down into a river. She meets an old woman, whom she helps by licking her wounds. This acts as a test for Nolitye, as the old woman turns into the beautiful spirit of the river. Because of the girl's compassion, the spirit of the river releases Nolitye's mother. The two are finally reunited, and then are told how to save Nolitye's father, who has been turned into a tree. They smear mud from the river on the tree, and eventually Nolitye's father emerges from its trunk.

The family is finally united. Nolitye has succeeded in her quest, and the stone is whole once again. As Nolitye, along with her mother, father and friends, returns to Phola, she says how she has missed the township. She returns triumphant and with a renewed sense of faith in herself.

The use of the township setting in *Hidden Star* is very important. The urban, polluted space is realistic, and many young South African adolescents, the target audience of this novel, would be growing up in very similar conditions to those of Nolitye. She is familiar to her readers because of her daily struggles – she must fetch water from a communal tap, share a

mobile toilet with "two hundred other people in her area" (Duiker, 2006:22) and do her homework by candlelight. One hopes that adolescents reading this book in more affluent areas will come to a new understanding of the conditions in the townships. Kwame Anthony Appiah, in his introduction to Tsisti Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988), states that:

> [e]ach novel is a message in a bottle cast into the great ocean of literature from somewhere else (even if it was written and published last week in your home town); and what makes the novel available to its readers is not shared values or beliefs or experiences but the human capacity to conjure new worlds in the imagination. A fully realized novel provides readers with everything they need for their imaginations to go to work (in Dangarembga, 1988: xi).

Certainly, the reason *Hidden Star* is so compelling is because the world of Nolitye is so "fully realized". The stark realism used to portray the setting is, one feels, at least partially intended to educate those not accustomed to such harsh circumstances. The unflinching realism is also a powerful criticism of the legacy of Apartheid, even so many years after democracy. Certainly, Duiker never "glosses over the social and economic legacies of Apartheid" (Brown, 2008b:165).

The city setting is also a stark reminder that this is a young generation growing up cut off from their cultural heritage. Urbanisation has produced a (dis)location of society. The movement of people into the city has resulted in many of the traditions of African cultures being lost. For example, when Nolitye is told by Noka to follow the "healer of the road" to find her way home, she does not know that this is "Nqonqothwane", the dung beetle. Incredulous, her guide says, "I can't believe there are places where children grow up without the knowledge of the Healer of the Road… But never mind.   All the better that you learned something new child. The road holds many lessons" (Duiker, 2006:212). Similarly, Vundla the hare dismisses Nolitye and her friends as "city slickers" (2006:191) cut off from their ancestral roots (Brown, 2008b:165). Ashcroft et al. argue that

> [a] major feature of post-colonial literatures is the concern with place and displacement. It is here that the special post-colonial crisis of identity comes into being; the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place. Indeed, critics such as DES Maxwell have made this the defining model of post-coloniality. A valid and active sense of self may have been eroded by *dislocation*, resulting from migration, the experience of enslavement, transportation, or 'voluntary' removal for indentured labour. Or it may have been destroyed by *cultural denigration*, the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model. The dialectic of place and displacement is always a feature of post-colonial societies whether these have been created by a process of settlement, intervention, or a mixture of the two. Beyond their historical and cultural differences, place, displacement, and a pervasive concern with the myths of identity and authenticity are a feature common to all post-colonial literatures (Ashcroft et al. 1989:8-9).

The urban space of the city seems to heighten this feeling of *dislocation* and *cultural denigration* as the city acts as a place of "thickening connections" (Simone in Samuelson, 2007:247). Bhabha (1994:2) states that "it is in the emergence of the interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated." The urban space of the city is just such a space where "the social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorise cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation" (Bhabha, 1994:2).

In *Hidden Star*, Duiker uses the space as a cognitive map which allows for a metonymic relationship between the reader and the space and allows for a transacting with the text. The metonymy of the township space accesses shared cognitive maps and makes tangible the relationship of the everyday life of the individual subject to a larger condition of existence (Stephens, 2012:[s.p]). In this way, Nolitye is not just a girl growing up in the township of Phola; she is every girl growing up in a township. The township space acts as a stage for the narrative events of the novel, but the metonymy of this space allows for an interesting

transaction with the text for the reader. John Stephens (2000:56) further argues that "there is a central preoccupation in children's literature with the nature of selfhood and its relationship to place". As Clare Bradford points out, in *Unsettling Narratives: Postcolonial Readings of Children's Literature* (2007), the colonial child's complex negotiations with colonised spaces is absolutely crucial to his or her formation of identity (in Brown, 2012:198).

But what is the solution to this cultural (dis)location? Duiker seems to suggest by his appropriation of different traditional African myths and folktales throughout the story that a move towards multiculturalism will create a new spiritual wholeness, better suited to the modern urban context.   Because of the strict segregation and pass laws enforced by the Apartheid government, South African cities in the post-Apartheid context "concretise some of the worst excesses of Apartheid rule – its divisions, exclusions and inequalities. [...] But today the city also underpins our imagination of being *one nation*" (Robinson, 2003:273 emphasis added).   Nomakhosi is Nolitye's spiritual guide on her quest, and appears every time in a different traditional dress of one of the tribes of South Africa: "the black-braided white skirt and wrap of the Xhosa woman" (2006:82); "a fiery red Xhosa skirt with thin bands of black binding round the bottom" (2006:100); "the sparkling beads and bright cotton of the Swazis (2006:98); and the traditional blue-and-red-striped skirt of the Shangaans (2006:185)" (Duiker in Brown, 2008b:165).   Just as the city space represents a coming together of different cultures, races and languages, Duiker seems to say that the way forward is through an acceptance and appreciation for each other's cultures.   Duiker once wrote in an essay,

> But are we ever going to move beyond tolerance? Is it ludicrous, even
> naive, to suggest that we might ever go beyond tolerance and appreciate,
> even admire each other's cultures? That seems to be what we're really
> dealing with in South Africa (in Mzamane, 2005:10).

This striving towards multiculturalism is also evident in Duiker's other works. In *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*, the main character, Tshepo, "rejects narrowly defined racial identities in

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favour of identification with Africa, and beyond" (Samuelson, 2007:255). The novel's final call is for a world beyond borders; "Perhaps the future of mankind lies in each other, not in separate continents with separate people. We are still evolving as a species, our differences are merging" (Duiker, 2001:456). Similarly, in *Thirteen Cents*, Duiker's first novel which follows the life of a street child, Azure's act of walking the streets "becomes the very modality through which physical and social boundaries are transgressed" (Samuelson, 2007:255). Azure says, "In everyone I pass, I can see a little of myself. I carry a little of everyone I know in me" (Duiker, 2000:102).

Tolkien once stated that *The Lord of the Rings* was intended to act as a creation myth for the United Kingdom (in Carpenter, 1981:181) – a demonstration of the coming together of the different peoples and races in times of trial and the eventual triumph over evil. Similarly, I believe that *Hidden Star* could perhaps act as Duiker's own version of a creation myth for a new South Africa, one that would foster a renewed unity amongst peoples despite the violence of the past.

Evident in *Hidden Star*, also, is the stark contrast between the realism of Nolitye's urban existence, and the rural pastoral underworld to which she must journey. These leaps into myth and magic, as Samuelson (2007:256) calls them, are also present in *Thirteen Cents* and *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*, to a lesser degree. However, Samuelson states that the use of myth and magic are emblematic of attempts to make sense of a lived reality in present day city space. Simone (2004:9) further argues that "if a discernible future and a life outside of incessant misery have become unthinkable for many, then Africans must operate through various forms of the spectral in order to proffer some counter reality". Interestingly, *Hidden Star* is written entirely in present tense, a deviation from the generally accepted norm of the narrative past tense. Duiker's

use of the present tense, while awkward at times, gives a sense of immediacy to the text which mirrors the rat race nature of city living. Nolitye does not live "once upon a time in a country far, far away", but in the present tense in a present context. Also, Duiker never contextualises the novel within a specific time frame, so *Hidden Star* will always be read as 'now' (and by extension, 'always') by the reader.   To use the words of Terdiman, Duiker's counter-discourse contains "a corrosive irony concerning the here-and-now" (Terdiman in Bradford, 2007:25).

Articulating the most hopeful vision in Duiker's oeuvre, *Hidden Star* adds a "new resonance to the sorceral features of the earlier novels' city spaces" (Samuelson, 2005:256). Nolitye must journey into the pastoral underworld to rescue her parents, so she does experience something of a portal-quest fantasy (Mendlesohn, 2008), but in a way the underworld is constantly present too. Samuelson (2007:256) argues:

> [t]he subterranean world haunting and underpinning the city has multiple referents: it speaks both of a spiritual plane, associated here with a rural landscape, that the city needs to recover in order to manage its dangerous realities, and of a chillingly realistic rapacity symbolized in the gold mines on which the city is built.

Nolitye believes her father was killed in a mining accident, and the constant references to money (or lack thereof) all reiterate what is said in the opening Preamble of the novel: "children run idle in the streets while the parents labour in the big City of Gold to bring home food and hope for a better tomorrow" (Duiker, 2006:1). As has previously been noted, Nolitye later discovers that her father is not dead; he appears to her and tells her that he is being held captive in the underworld. She also discovers that the woman she thinks is her mother is not, but is in fact an *umthakathi* or witch. Significantly, the false mother attempts to bind Nolitye to her using a bracelet of cowry shells and beads, items traditionally used as currency for bartering in African cultures. Samuelson argues that "thus are monetary and

spectral economies persistently drawn into a shared narrative frame amidst a sustained interrogation of (post)colonial modernity" (Samuelson, 2007:257).

The constant juxtaposition between the city space and that of the rural underworld can be related to our own constant battle between conscious and unconscious, the self and the Other, the anima and the animus. The underworld seems representative of the collective "as the symbols encountered have the numinous and memorable power of archetypal contents" (van Straten, 1996:39). As a place where mythic creatures live, the underworld represents fairy stories and folktales which speak to the unconscious. As discussed earlier in Chapter 2, Jung argues that during the process of individuation, the unconscious needs to be discovered, acknowledged, and integrated in order for maturity to take place. A mature adult should be a fully realised individual (Jung, 1953:159).   As mentioned in Chapters 2 and 3, this process of individuation can take the form of a quest, as seen in the theory of the hero cycle by Joseph Campbell (discussed at length in Chapter 2). The hero's journey is an outward one. Just as Jason has to leave the confines of his small, blue collar neighbourhood and journey into South Africa to find his grandfather's box in *The Genuine Half-moon Kid* (Chapter 2), Emmanuel also leaves his small village and journeys into the city of Gaborone in *Because Pula Means Rain* (Chapter 3). Both Jason and Emmanuel return with a deeper understanding of themselves. Jason finds his own agency by discovering his grandfather's box; while Emmanuel's accident and encounter with Masego allow him to begin to come to terms with the whiteness of his black skin. Being the only female protagonist I have chosen to study, however, Nolitye's journey is a little different. Instead of journeying out of her city space, she journeys deeper into it, into the underworld which underpins the city. Hers is not an outward journey, but an inward one.

Brian Attebery (1992:87)argues that

> [a] strength and a weakness of fantasy is its reliance on traditional storytelling forms and motifs. By making its conventional basis explicit and primary, rather than submerging traditional tale types or character functions beneath a surface of apparent reported reality, fantasy is empowered to reimagine both character and story, as we have seen. But a willingness to return to the narrative structures of the past can entail as well an unquestioning acceptance of its social structures.

As Colin Manlove (1980:287) recognises, "Fantasy is a profoundly conservative genre. It usually portrays the preservation of the status quo, looks to the past to sustain the nature and values of the present, and delights in the nature of created things". The societies from which we derive our western legacy of myths and fairy tales use the coming-of-age story as a process of situating oneself within a strictly defined social role. The traditional coming-of-age was marked by rituals that "not only marked the individual's transition but also at the same time reaffirmed the hierarchical order in which the newly adult member was to find a place" (Attebery, 1992:87). However, as Le Guin (1993:9) observes, in the "hero-tales of the western world, heroism has been gendered: The hero is a man". As a result, the majority of figures in fiction are male, and ethnologists have even gone so far as to argue that women do not come of age. Carolyn Heilbrun suggests that women have no coming-of-age ritual and that they pay a psychological penalty for the lack:

> [a]ll societies, from the earliest and most primitive to today's, have ceremoniously taken the boy from the female domain and urged his identity as a male, as a responsible unfeminine individual, upon him. The girl undergoes no such ceremony, but she pays for serenity of passage with a lack of selfhood and of the will to autonomy that only the struggle for identity can confer (Heilbrun in Attebery, 1992:91).

Attebery (1992:91) further argues that

> [f]ew women even today can find in their own lives any analog of the male hero's freedom of movement or his expectation of power and rank at the end of his quest. An effective female initiation fantasy should be, at least at the beginning, more recognizably grounded in the biological and social reality of a woman's life, but in the course of events it should somehow transcend that reality.

As suggested by Attebery, the realism of Nolitye's context as established by Duiker in the opening pages of the book, grounds Nolitye's story in her "biological and social reality". Because coming-of-age is so important in folktales and fairy tales, the fundamental pattern of the hero monomyth – displacement, transformation and return – has become a central motif in many modern fantasies "as characters move from childhood and a state of fluid potential towards the achievement of individuation and relatively stable adult identity. Nolitye in *The Hidden Star* undergoes just such a process but Duiker is careful to endorse past norms only when these are empowering for his heroine" (Brown, 2008b:168). Annis Pratt (1981:139-143) has analysed a number of women's stories, and suggests an alternate pattern for female coming-of-age: separation from family (Nolitye is separated from her true parents); being provided with 'green world' tokens or guides (Nolitye has the Spirit of the Stone as a spirit guide), taking a 'green-world' lover (not relevant here[3]); confronting parental figures (which Nolitye does when she discovers her imposter mother's true name and defeats her, and when she rescues both of her parents), and a descent into the subconscious (Nolitye journeys into the underworld to recover her parents) that leads ultimately to social integration.

Because folktale as a narrative pattern is so powerful, women fantasy writers have devised strategies to "regain it as a tool for the exploration of their own experience" (Attebery, 1992:94). Diana Wynne Jones argues that she and many of her contemporaries wanted rather "a narrative structure which did not simply put a female is a male's place" (Jones 1989:135). According to Brown (2012:112), Jones's novel *Fire and Hemlock* ([1985] 2000) "remains probably the most satisfying and complex exploration of female heroism in adolescent fiction".

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[3]Compared to Duiker's two other works, *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* and *Thirteen Cents*, which both deal quite explicitly with sex and sexual orientation, the complete absence of anything remotely sexual in *Hidden Star* is telling. While one could argue that this is simply because of the younger target audience of this text, one could also argue that it is evident from Duiker's message that personal maturity should take place before sexuality is examined.

In order for a text to truly transcend the limitations placed on the young girl in many societies, writers need to invent "original stories drawing on the motifs and structures of the traditional tale but introducing reversals of expected character roles" (Attebery, 1992:94). In order to "transcend the reality" of Nolitye's existence, Duiker borrows discriminately from African myth and folklore, and his treatment of gender roles within the text opens up a space for Nolitye to renegotiate these roles.

Nolitye is eleven years old and her "relative immaturity [at the beginning of the novel] is evidenced by the extent to which her mother, Thembi, still governs her life" (Brown, 2008a:168). Mother and daughter share a single bed, and Nolitye snuggles up to her mother at night. However, Attebery (1992:95) argues that the relationship between mother and daughter is one of "nurturing only until the girl grows close to womanhood and then it changes to rivalry". Nolitye has noticed a change in her mother of late, and Thembi has become very harsh with her. When Nolitye later discovers that Thembi is not her real mother, she is able to assert her independence without taking on a "crippling burden of guilt" (Brown, 2008a:169). She severs all ties with her mother and gains complete independence when she learns the interloper's name, Sylvia. As Brown (2008a:169) observes in this context, "it seems entirely appropriate that that the deceiving *umthakathi's* real name should not be an indigenous one since the novel repeatedly confirms the value of cultural as well as personal integrity".

Even when Nolitye does rescue her true mother from the underworld, it is as if she has surpassed her mother, both spiritually and emotionally. She is now the leader and takes her mother's hand to show her the way out of the river (Duiker, 2006:212). Nolitye is the

proactive one, taking charge in their search for their father; the mother is passive and follows Nolitye's lead. *Hidden Star* can thus be said to be a coming-of-age story, as it traces the process by which the young girl removes herself (emotionally and spiritually, and possibly even physically) from her previous intimacy with the mother figure.

The animosity of MaMtonga is also evidence of Nolitye's maturation, and Attebery further argues that "maturation for girls is accompanied by shame and the hostility of older women" (1992:95). The image of older women as threatening rival rather than as mentor is familiar to us from stories such as 'Hansel and Gretel' and 'Snow White'. Like the witch in 'Hansel and Gretel', MaMtonga also displays cannibalistic tendencies. When Nolitye follows her one night along the riverbank, she is shocked when MaMtonga claims to be able to smell young flesh and licks her lips as if she wishes to eat it (Duiker, 2006:151). As Bettelheim observed, the witch represents "total surrender to untamed id impulses and self-preoccupied greed" (1976:163). MaMtonga thus stands in apposition and opposition to Nolitye; she embodies the evil that Nolitye must fight to defeat, both within her own psyche and without.

The schoolyard bully, Rotten Nellie, is another example of female animosity towards Nolitye. In contrast to the protagonist, Nellie is purposefully rejecting the gender role forced on her by society, and her notoriety on the playground is gained by her denying her own femininity. She models her behaviour on dominant male behaviour – she "is the only girl in the school who refuses to wear a gym dress like the other girls. She insists on wearing a shirt and shorts like the boys. Even her school shoes are meant for boys" (Duiker, 2006:24). Nolitye, on the other hand, takes great pride in her appearance and, while she is poor and only has the one dress, she makes sure that it is always neat and clean, and irons her shirt every day (Duiker 2006:15, 41). Nolitye does not seem to mind the everyday domestic chores she needs to do, while Nellie's derisive nickname for Nolitye, "Mop", indicates her disdain for what she sees as "female domestic

subjugation" (Brown, 2008a:167). Nellie also uses anger and violence to maintain control of her gang, The Spoilers. Bheki is afraid of Nellie because he once saw her punch a Grade Seven boy in the face and she "bellowed with laughter" (Duiker, 2006:24) when the boy's nose started to bleed. As Brown argues, Nolitye never responds in kind, but

> persistently appeals to Nellie's better nature. Her calm patience is finally rewarded when Nellie unexpectedly gives her the last piece of the stone rather than allow it to fall into the hands of MaMtonga, Ncitjana's agent. Nellie makes it clear that she is doing this out of altruism and a desire to protect the children of Phola, but, sadly, even at this crucial juncture, she remains embarrassed about rather than proud of her own nurturing impulse (Brown, 2008a:167).

Duiker's positionality as a male author writing for a female protagonist becomes problematic here. Just as Robson, as a white woman, needs to be careful when speaking for and about Emmanuel; so too does Duiker, as a black man, need to be careful when speaking for and about a young black woman. The fact that the heroine (situated as the most desirable character to emulate for young people being socialised by an adult author) is so neat and pretty in her habits compared to the not so sympathetic character of the 'masculine' bully can be seen as a perpetration of a particular ideal of girlhood, which may be coloured by Duiker's own male preferences. The fact that Nolitye does not seem to mind household chores is a perpetration of the stereotype that women are responsible for all domestic duties. Duiker seems to say: 'Go and save the world, girls, but for heaven's sake, do it clean and in an ironed shirt and skirt'. This is, however, the only time where Duiker's representation of his female protagonist feels problematic to me. His deep understanding of the mother-daughter relationship and his careful plotting of the young woman's journey to self-discovery is astute and sensitive.

Nolitye's two male companions on her quest are also an inversion of the patterns one would expect to find in fantasy works. Bheki is a plump, lazy boy, who is constantly coddled by his

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mother, a relationship in contrast to the strained relationship Nolitye is currently experiencing with her own 'mother'. Four Eyes, a former Spoiler who rejects Nellie as a leader because of her menacing ways, joins their little group. He is very much a passive character, who simply follows where Nolitye leads. Nolitye is much more independent than her companions, probably due to her absent parents, and she makes decisions with much more ease than they do. While both Four Eyes and Bheki are kind to Nolitye and support her in her quest, neither of them are of paramount importance, and Nolitye would have fared just as well without them both. They are not Hermiones to Nolitye's Harry Potter.

In fact, the most crucial part of her quest, Nolitye must undergo alone. Her spirit guide, Nomakhosi, cannot join her in the underworld, and when Nolitye has to dive beneath the waters of the river to rescue her mother, she must do so alone. Here Nolitye must rely on her own resources and "capacity for independent action" (Brown, 2008b:169). In a cave under the water, she discovers an ugly old woman whose "right arm and left leg are missing... the old woman's skin is wrinkled and cracked, peeling at the elbows and knees" (Duiker, 2006:207). Van Straten states in her research on fairy tales that the motif of "the aged and repulsive crone who squats, pitiful and yet potent, in the path of the questing protagonist" is a prevalent motif found in tales all over Africa. "Frequently the old crone has pus oozing from her eyes as well as sores on her body and the maiden is enjoined to lick these clean with her tongue" (Van Straten, 1996:133). When Nolitye encounters the old hag, she says

> "I know I am ugly and old, my child... You may laugh, I will not blame you."
> "Dumela, Mama," Nolitye answers. "How can I laugh when my heart goes out to you?"
> "If the sight of me doesn't put you off, my child, then let the balm of your kind healing tongue heal me by licking my wounds," the old woman says.
> Nolitye doesn't hesitate and she does as she asks. The old woman starts shivering and shaking. Fascinated, Nolitye watches as she changes. First she grows an arm, and them a leg. Her face takes on a youthful beauty and

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clothes start covering her body. She stands before Nolitye, an elaborately patterned woollen Basotho blanket draped elegantly over her left shoulder, her head covered by a conically shaped hat of woven grass. Her neck and wrists are decorated with beads only queens wear. She holds a staff with an intricately carved elephant's head at one end – the sign of royalty.

"I am Noka," she introduces herself. "Queen of the River Sprits, and I show myself only to deserving souls. You have a compassionate heart, my child, and have passed the test. How can I reward you?" (Duiker, 2006:207-208).

Nolitye's compassionate heart reaches out to the old hag, and she helps her, thus initiating the hag's transformation into the beautiful Noka. Importantly, the Queen of the River Spirits is dressed in the traditional dress of the Basotho, just as Nomakosi, the Spirit of the Stone and her guide, is always dressed in one of the traditional outfits of the South African people. Noka is now able to help Nolitye recover her mother, and tell her where she can find her father. This story is remarkably similar to many other African fairy tales, notably the story of "Selekane", a Tswana version of the same motif. Selekane is tricked into throwing her finery into the river. When she descends to find it, she encounters an old hag

Who bounded towards her in enormous hops, and Selekane saw with horror that the poor creature's right arm and leg were missing.
Three hops brought the old hag to the girl's side, "*Ngwanaka*," she whined, "is not the sight of one as old and repulsive as I, distasteful to you? Come, laugh at me misfortunes!"

"*DumelaMma*," the girl answered. "How can I laugh when my heart is full of anger against those who have brought such trouble upon you?"

"If the sight of me does not repulse you, my child, then let the balm of your softly spoken tongue heal my wounds by licking them," the old crone begged.

Selekane did as the woman requested, whereupon the old woman caressed her saying, "Child, you have a compassionate heart as well as a lovely face; I will reward you. I have been imprisoned in this cave for many years by the cruel *Kwena*, in order that I should care for him and do his bidding. So that I shall not escape his crutches he has maimed me thus, but I shall save you from him... (Savory in Van Straten, 1996:134).

The remarkable similarities between this story and the version used in *The Hidden Star* are evidence that Duiker was familiar with the traditional African fairy tale. Despite having spent time abroad and having a western education, Duiker was never wholly "dislocated" (see

discussion of Ashcroft et. al above) from his traditional roots. In many ways, he is offering Nolitye's story to young South Africans who may not have been as fortunate. In this manner, the novel can be seen as offering them a way back to a lost heritage.

Notably, there are two major differences between the traditional story and the version in *The Hidden Star*. Firstly, when the old hag invites the young girl to laugh at her pain, Selekane's answer is that she cannot because she has *anger* in her heart against those who have done this to the old woman (Savory in Van Straten, 1996:134), whereas Nolitye's response is "my heart goes out to you" (Duiker, 2006:207). Selekane's response is fuelled by anger at a third party who is responsible for the current pain, but Nolitye's response is fuelled by compassion and empathy. In the same way, Duiker never points fingers or casts blame on the Apartheid government for current suffering; he simply accepts it for what it is and tries to find a way to give Nolitye the agency to take ownership of her current situation. As mentioned earlier, a telling absence in the text, is the absolute omission of any white South Africans. The novel clearly only takes place within the world of the black South African. Brown argues that

> [t]his lacuna subtly emphasizes the way in which, even twelve years after South Africa's first democratic elections, the lives of the inhabitants of Phola continue to be firmly distanced from those of Apartheid's prime beneficiaries, but, by this telling omission, Duiker also manages to suggest that the responsibility for redeeming the future lies unequivocally in the hands of Apartheid's most obvious victims (Brown, 2008b:165).

The second major difference between these two versions of the same story is that when Selekane licks the old woman's wounds, she does not transform; she stays as she is – a maimed old woman. She explains to Selekane that she has been maimed so that she cannot escape this world of suffering the Kwena has forced upon her, but she promises that she will help Selekane escape to a better fate because she has shown her kindness. In this traditional tale, the older generation has accepted its fate, but there is still hope for the younger generation who may still hope to

escape. By contrast, when Nolitye licks the old woman's wounds, she heals and transforms into the mythical figure of Noka, Queen of the River Spirits, elegantly clothed in traditional dress, who empowers Nolitye to recover her parents, the 'lost generation' of this story. Nolitye's respect and empathy for the older woman empower her to defeat the Kwena (the crocodile imprisoning her mother) through her own wit and intelligence by correctly solving his riddle and setting her mother free. Here, Duiker is saying that there is hope for Nolitye, and notably for the older generation as well; they can escape this world of suffering through the power of myth and an assimilation of other cultures. Maria Tatar (1992:230) argues that "Our cultural stories are the products of unceasing negotiations between the creative consciousness of individuals and the collective sociocultural constructs available to them. These negotiations may be smooth of they may be troubled, but they always leave a mark on each version of the tale". Duiker has negotiated with the traditional story and left his mark on the traditional tale; he has appropriated the myth for his own use, yet the meaning remains clear – there is hope for our country yet.

Another important layer of meaning in Duiker's text is Nolitye's name, which means "Keeper of the Stone, Keeper of Knowledge" (Duiker, 2006:5). She is given the name by her grandmother in honour of the 1956 women's anti-pass protests, "in which South African women spectacularly refused the restrictions of mobility and an urban presence that the Apartheid state was imposing on them" (Samuelson, 2007:257). As the women marched to the Union Buildings, they sang the traditional song: "*Wathint' abafazi; wathint' imbokodo* [You strike the women; you strike the rock]" (Brown, 2008b:166). Nolitye bears the legacy of this long history of women's urban resistance and their claiming of city space as their rightful domain. Nolitye invokes this image when she defends her name to her mother by saying: "My name is not stupid. Gogo said: you mess with a woman, you mess with a stone" (Duiker, 2006:6). When the Spirit of the Stone appears to Nolitye, she reiterates these words and says "[l]ike your grandmother said, you strike a

woman, you strike a rock. I'm the child of the rock just like you are the child of a woman" (Duiker, 2006:55). Thus, the Spirit of the Stone is equally "the Spirit of Women's Strength" and she urges Nolitye to "grow up and hear some difficult things" (Duiker, 2006:82). Like South Africa, Nolitye's stone has been violently fractured and she must strive to make it whole again. Once upon a time, the stone that was "used to keep the people together" was stolen because of man's greed, but the chief's sons, exceeding him in greed, broke up the stone into five pieces and they were scattered across the earth: "But wisdom and wealth do not enter this way. The power of the stone was lost. And that, child, is why there is so much fighting among the different groups and individual people today" (Duiker, 2006:83-84). Having found the heart of this magic stone, Nolitye is tasked with gathering the fragments of the stone and restoring it – and thus the world – to its previous unity. In the closing pages of the novel, all the animals gather in the elephant graveyard, and the Spirit of the Stone leaves them with the following message:

> [n]ow that you have come together as it was meant to be from the beginning of
> time, Nkulunkulu the Great One wishes for you to return to your tribes and deliver
> this message to them. Grow and be strong, for the light of wisdom has been
> shown to you again. Knowledge that had been obscured, like a hidden star, has
> been restored to you. But those dark days are to be no more. The ancestor gods
> have spoken: the tribes shall once more gather and live in peace (Duiker,
> 2006:231).

When Nolitye succeeds in reuniting the stone and in recovering both her parents, she thanks the Spirit of the Stone, to which Nomakosi replies, "You took up the challenge and found what your heart was aching for... And I am whole again. Now it is time for the different tribes to come together as it was meant to be from the beginning of time" (Duiker, 2006:230). This, I believe, is what Duiker's heart was aching for – unity between the tribes, the "way it was meant to be" – and his journey towards such a possibility is through Nolitye.

Crucially, the novel concludes with Nolitye and her friends and family returning to their familiar urban world:

...most of all they can't wait to be in familiar surroundings again. They've missed the township with its dusty streets. They've missed MaMokoena's spaza shop, the shebeens and other small corner shops with their dilapidated roofs.... They've missed the squeezed-in shacks that leave little space for anything else, and the train that makes the tracks hum as it passes by. They've missed the township, because it is home. And home is never far away when you believe in it (Duiker, 2006:233).

Physically and materialistically, nothing has really changed for Nolitye, besides the fact that she has her parents back. She returns to the same township and its harsh realities. And yet, she is different, because her quest has brought her a deeper understanding of her situation, a spiritual maturity. Her boon is not an outward one, as it often is in male coming-of-age stories; her boon is an internal one. Duiker's final statement is both hopeful and realistic, here there is no fairy godmothers to wave a magic wand and everything will be better – there are no easy fixes for the fractured society of contemporary South African; and yet, Nolitye returns home to the township willingly and happily, "*because it is home*" (Duiker, 2006:233 emphasis added). This, then, is Duiker's closing argument. We must return to our roots, without jeopardising our new urban identity. Fantasy, by its very nature, emphasises the difference between fiction and life; however, "[i]ndigenous fantasy shows that fiction and life are not only separate but complimentary" (Attebery, 1992:141). Samuelson states that

> Duiker is able both to accommodate elements of the 'traditional past' in his urban worlds (going so far as to render them necessary to urban survival) and to create imaginative space for women (and children) in the city. Thus does the novel deconstruct the gendered binaries of rural and urban, 'tradition' and 'modernity', in provocative new ways: far from being sundered from a cultural past, Duiker's urban worlds are infused by otherworldly inflections, while women's political past in the city grants them a spiritual authority over its present (Samuelson, 2007:258).

Bhabha argues that, in postcolonial writings,

> [t]he borderline work of culture demands an encounter with '*newness*' that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as *an insurgent act of cultural translation.* Such art does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent 'in-between space' that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present (Bhabha, 1994:7 emphasis added).

Duiker's vision in *Hidden Star* is "newness", brought on by the assimilation of different cultures, and I believe that his work is "an insurgent act of cultural translation". Brown (2012:225) concludes that "[i]t is writers like Duiker... who have the capacity to help marginalized children recover their own displaced mythical truths and so dream the dreams proper and necessary for damaged societies, which only they and their readers can hope to return again to wholeness". Duiker offers his adolescent readers a way forward from the dislocation of their current urbanised situation; a hopeful narrative so necessary in the South African context.

CHAPTER 5: Conclusion

Ashcroft once wrote: "the written text is a social situation…it exists in the participations of social beings whom we call writers and readers, and who *constitute* the writing as communication of a particular kind as 'saying' a certain thing" (in Bradford, 2007:15). The text thus operates as a site where meaning is negotiated by readers who bring their own cultures and languages to the act of reading. This "dialogic situation of reading" (Bradford, 2007:15) invites the reader into the text, and as examined in the previous chapters, in the case of adolescence, the text can act as a space for a renegotiation of identity in the coming-of-age story.

According to Terdiman, the object of counter-discourse is to "represent the world differently," to "detect and map" the "naturalized protocols through which dominant discourses maintain their purchase on power, and in so doing to subvert them" (in Bradford, 2007:24). In a postcolonial context, there is a constant need for a postcolonial interrogation, a self-consciousness that allows true interrogation of identity. All three of the texts discussed in the previous chapters are self-conscious, and their postcolonial message to adolescents is invaluable. However, when we critically analyse the text chosen, from the point of view of fantasy (genre) criticism, postcolonial criticism, and their function as texts aimed at adolescents, each author has achieved success to a varying degree.

Michael William's intentions with his text *The Genuine Half-moon Kid* are noble, but insufficient to deal with the postcolonial state. His 'retelling' of the myth of *Jason and the*

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Golden Fleece and his indiscriminate use of the hero cycle is problematic. Stephens and

McCallum argue that

> [c]ertainly, the underpinning assumptions about cultural capital have largely
> disappeared, but quite modern retellings still often lack any apparent
> awareness that the corollary production of subjective wholeness attributed
> to the influence of classical mythology is *radically flawed* by the
> individualism, imperialism, masculinism, and misogyny which pervade that
> mythology (Stephens and McCallum, 1998:63-64 emphasis added).

Stephens and McCallum (1998:117) further state that

> [r]egardless of whether the retelling of a hero's career orients it towards
> exemplary sociality or exemplary individuality, it is still apt to be
> symptomatically patriarchal. Actions are performed by male characters,
> but female characters, insofar as they have a presence, have a passive
> relationship to events, responding rather than initiating.

A harsh criticism of the text would be that it is still a white man writing about white fears in a

time of political change, though many would argue that, as a white man living in South

Africa, Williams is simply writing what he knows, so his authorial voice and positionality is

at least authentic. The ambivalence and allusiveness of the text is evidence of Williams

attempting to find a way of making-meaning of the extreme changes convulsing his country

at the time of the novel's composition. However, due to the nature of the period of the

interregnum: the fact that the old ways are dying, but the new have not yet been designed,

Williams is unable to successfully resolve several lacunas in the text. I would like to think

that Williams is aware of this, though, and attempts to rectify it in his later novels. Once the

interregnum had past, new ways for framing meaning and identity could be designed and

discovered. Williams's later novels are significantly more successful in broaching a wider

range of issues raised by the new South Africa, and his texts have become increasingly more

fantastical.

Certainly, though, *The Genuine Half-moon Kid* is not without merit. The text inhabits an interesting liminal space: Jay, the hero of the story is a teenage boy about to finish high school, and is stuck in a liminal space between boyhood and adulthood. So too is the country caught in the liminal space of what Gordimer defined as the interregnum (using the term as Antonio Gramsci does), a space of limbo and uncertainty between two political powers. Williams's use of water throughout the text to symbolise the unconscious shows a reaching towards a collective unconscious, a unifying force. Jay also manages through his quest to gain agency and he learns a great deal about the country in which he lives, things which he would not have otherwise learnt. The message of *The Genuine Half-moon Kid* is essentially hopeful. Jay learns that we cannot simply forget the past and pretend it did not happen, but it is better to bring the hurtful and dark secrets into the light. We need to confront and deal with our painful memories in order for us to be able to move forward.

The second text studied, *Because Pula Means Rain* (2000) by Jenny Robson, also makes use of liminal spaces to open up an interrogation of identity. Her main protagonist is Emmanuel, a young Tswana boy with albinism. Emmanuel is thus an interesting site of double negation. As McCallum (2013:99) explains

> [i]n general terms, alienation [or Othering] in its various aspects – powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, social isolation, self-estrangement and cultural estrangement – denotes the radical, perceived or actual, separation of self from the social world, the inverse of intersubjectivity.

Unfortunately for Emmanuel, his alienation is radical, and he feels incredibly lonely. He tries several things throughout the text to make his white skin black like that of the other members of the village, but, obviously, none of them work. As Jenny Robson is a white woman

writing for a young white black boy, the issue of authorial positionality is complex. Just as Emmanuel is not black but also not white, Robson is also a 'straddler' as she has been living in a small black community for many years. There is evidence in the text which proves that the local Tswana culture has acted on her too, and her intimate understanding of such a community allows her to speak for and about Emmanuel with authority.   Thus, Robson speaks, to use Attebery's (2014:172) term, as a "border crosser". Robson is "someone who moves freely among cultures and whose fictions frequently transgress genre boundaries. ... They reserve the right to combine metafictional techniques with postcolonial politics in a way that reveals the critical power of traditional worldviews" (Attebery, 2014:172).

Robson makes use of a liminal third space to introduce the fantastic into the text. Attebery (2014: 169) argues that fantasy's "relationship to sacred traditions and oral entertainments made it a natural platform for new cultural formulations and critiques". By making use of fantastic elements borrowed from non-western mythic traditions, Robson, as a border crosser, "challenge[s] readers to find new patterns, new motivations, and new outcomes in the master narratives" (Attebery, 2014:173).

It is here, then, at the border, in the third space as Bhabha termed it, where "we find ourselves in the moment of transit, where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion" (Bhabha, 1994:2). These 'in-between' spaces "provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity" (Bhabha, 1994:3). "A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which *something begins its presencing*" (Martin Heidegger in Bhabha, 1994:1).

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Emmanuel, in his search for identity, manages to finally come to terms with his 'whiteness' when he finds his purpose and buries the baby's bones, thus releasing his village from the curse of Kotsi Corner. While no one else knows of his personal sacrifice and triumph, the whole village reaps the benefits. In the process, Emmanuel engages with the Christian tradition represented by the "God-grant picture", as he calls it, and the oral traditions and rituals of his village, but neither of them solely offers him a solution. The message of Robson's narrative, then, is one of plurality and multiculturalism. Hybridity, Bhabha argues, "subverts the narratives of colonial power and dominant cultures. The series of inclusions and exclusions on which a dominant culture is premised are deconstructed by the very entry of the formerly-excluded subjects into the mainstream discourse" (in Ben Beya, [s.a]:[s.p]). Bhabha (1994:4) further argues,

> the borderline work of culture demands an encounter with 'newness' that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such art does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent 'in-between space' that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present.

Emmanuel's narrative teaches the reader to appreciate the value of others' beliefs and the acceptance of this value brings a destabilization to former binaries.

The third text studied, *The Hidden Star* by Sello K. Duiker, is the most truly successful in interrogating what it means to be post the colonial moment in contemporary South Africa. Duiker is himself a "border crosser" as he understands "what it means to be black and educated" (in Brown 2008b:163). Duiker speaks to a new generation and offers hope despite the harsh realities of everyday life. His message, like Robson's, is also one of

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multiculturalism and the assimilation of different cultures. Nolitye's journey allows her to adapt to modern society and the city space which has caused a cultural dislocation, without becoming cut off from her traditional roots. In Duiker's text, the young generation is the hope for the future and Nolitye thus saves her parents from a position of cultural denigration. Duiker's narrative acts as a creation myth for the creation of a whole and unified South Africa, where evil has been defeated, and unity has been achieved.

By his appropriation of different traditional folktales and myths, Duiker shows that fantasy, by its very nature, emphasises the difference between fiction and life; however, "[i]ndigenous fantasy shows that fiction and life are not only separate but complimentary" (Attebery, 1992:141). Lutz Rohrich also claimed that "The fairy tale is the first poetic form with which people come into contact in their lives. For most of us it is one of the deepest and most enduring childhood impressions" (Rohrich in Bottigheimer, 1986:1). As discussed in Chapter 1, fairy stories play a didactic, socialising role, teaching children how to act in an adult world. However, the imaginative liberty that is learnt through stories stays with us into adulthood. It has also been discussed how fairy tales tap into our collective unconscious, and during the process of individuation and coming-of-age, it is important to experience and acknowledge this in order to become a fully realised self.

All three of the authors I have chosen to study have used the fantastic as a distancing mechanism which allows for a subversion; a subversion particularly important in the postcolonial context of contemporary South Africa. Semiotically, texts of the fantastic "open up the space between signified and signifier, across which multiple meanings and plural identities roam" (Wilkie-Stibbs, 2002:24). In our fraught and fractured society, the fantastic

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is especially useful, described as it is by Rosemary Jackson (1981:20) as the "literature of subversion". Fantasy is the fiction of:

> all that is not said, all that is unsayable through realist forms.... it is a literature of desire, which seeks that which is perceived as absence and loss. The fantastic traces the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made absent.

Because the very nature of the fantastic is polysemic and plays upon ambivalences,

> fantastic literature is *the* material expression of the unconscious: the unsaid and unsayable of the repressed.... In these terms, the fantastic speaks in the gaps and silences that are present in literary Transference: it is the literature of alterity, the literature of the '(m)other', the 'non-thetic'... the pull towards all that is opposed to dominant signifying practice (Wilkie-Stibbs, 2002:24).

Bradford et al. (2011:17) state that a "dominant preoccupation of much adolescent fiction is with how notions of identity are formed within specific contexts and shaped by larger social structures and processes".

It is thus here, in the interstitial space, at the borders, in the "tear or wound of the real" (Bataille in Wilkie-Stibbs, 2002:24) where the authors I have chosen to study have investigated what it means to be young and South African. Speaking as a teacher in South Africa today who works with our future generation on a daily basis, my hope is that they will find themselves, even if it is in the interstitial space, and find each other, so that we can move forward into a brighter future for our country tomorrow.

> *"We have delivered you from evil, but the evil that is inside men is at the last a matter for men to control. The responsibility and the hope and the promise are in your hands – your hands and the hands of the children of all men on this earth. The future cannot blame the present, just as the present cannot blame the past. The hope is always here, always alive, but only your fierce caring can fan it into a fire to warm the world ..."*
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> *(Cooper, 1984:783).*

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