Author Accepted Version
Not for Quotation or Citation. Please see published text at:
https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/eia.v50i2.2

"Doing very well in South Africa": Fiona Melrose, Karel Schoeman, and the Intertextual Afterlives of Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*

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In Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), Clarissa Dalloway's childhood friend Hugh Whitbread, dandy courtier and connoisseur of the surface, never lunches with the Mayfair hostess and convinced eugenicist Lady Bruton (the reader learns) without asking her secretary, Miss Brush,

> after her brother in South Africa, which for some reason, Miss Brush, deficient though she was in every attribute of female charm, so much resented that she said "Thank you, he's doing very well in South Africa," when, for half-a-dozen years, he had been doing badly in Portsmouth. (Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* 88)

This brief vignette, emblematic of the novel's engagement with missed opportunities, miscommunication, and failures of empathy across lines of class and gender, is also a reminder of the ubiquity of Britain's empire in Woolf's novels. Later, as Lady Bruton struggles with a letter-to-the-editor on her pet subject (a plan to encourage emigration to Canada), the reader learns that "one letter to *The Times*, she used to say to Miss Brush, cost her more than to organize an expedition to South Africa (which she had done in the war)"– implicitly the Anglo-Boer conflict of 1899-1902 (92).

Colonies and dominions serve frequently as a kind of background in common for many Woolf characters, a place to which characters disappear or from which they return, sites less often of exotic adventure than of failure or misadventure. In *Mrs Dalloway*, Clarissa's erstwhile suitor Peter Walsh has just returned from India, to which he decamped after Clarissa's rejection and where he had "come a cropper" (90). In *The Waves* (1931), Percival's service and death in India drift frequently into the consciousnesses of the remaining

childhood friends. South Africa features less frequently than India in Woolf's fiction, and even when it does is sometimes not directly named.

In *The Years* (1937), for example, while Martin Pargiter goes to India, his nephew North returns – in the narrative's present – from a farm in Africa that bears more than a passing resemblance, from the briefest glimpses we are afforded it, to the karoo landscape of *The Story of an African Farm* (1883).[1] Significantly, the African landscape resists narrativization and confounds North's cousins' expectations: "no one came for months at a time", he tells them; he would sit "on the verandah listening [….] [t]o sheep"; it was "very silent", "[b]lazing hot at midday", and at night, "in the moonlight", he was alone amidst the "mountains and plains", "looking at the stars" (*Years*, 290-94). These echoes are highly suggestive – and while Jade Munslow Ong is correct that individual Schreiner works "cannot be clearly identified as source or origin when interpreting Woolf's texts" (34),[2] Woolf was certainly *au fait* with Schreiner's work. Indeed, she published a review of the 1924 collection of Schreiner's *Letters* in *The New Republic* in March 1925, just two months before *Mrs Dalloway* appeared. In the same year, the Woolfs published William Plomer's explosive *Turbott Wolfe* at their Hogarth Press. South Africa was very much on Woolf's radar.

This is not an essay about the representation of South Africa *in* Woolf's fiction, however much the preceding paragraphs might serve as an introduction to such a project. Rather, it considers how South African writers have responded *to* Woolf, and in this case specifically to *Mrs Dalloway*, which has elicited multiple instances of creative response in late-twentieth-century literary fiction in English.[3] These include: Michael Cunningham's *The Hours* (1998), with its famous (if controversial) 2002 film adaptation by Stephen Daldy (screenplay by David Hare); a queer return to the Dalloways set in 1927, *Mr. Dalloway: A Novella* (1999), by Robin Lippincott;[4] and, most recently, Australian novelist Michelle Cahill's *Daisy & Woolf* (2022), which, like *The Hours,* shifts amongst several temporalities as it gives a voice to a marginal character in *Mrs Dalloway*, Daisy Simmons, Peter Walsh's Indian paramour.

What is it about *Mrs Dalloway* that has fascinated later writers? Is it Woolf's fourth novel's magisterial balancing of free-indirect discourse, omniscient narration, and direct speech across multiple narratives and temporalities? Its meditations on memory, ageing, regret, or that which haunts us, our disappointments –the missed appointments with that which we glimpse as having been promised? Might it be its own implied writing back to Joyce's more sprawling and more determinedly masculinist circadian novel, *Ulysses*, which, like *Mrs Dalloway*, is set on a day in June and manages to elevate bathos and domesticate the

sublime? It is surely all of these characteristics, as well as the novel's moving engagement with the unpredictable after-effects of societal trauma, for the Great War is seldom out of view in *Mrs Dalloway*, its lingering impacts (along with those of the 1919 influenza pandemic) coming to Clarissa's mind in the novel's opening pages (5). The war also remains ever-present for Septimus Warren Smith, the PTSD-afflicted veteran whose suicide punctuates the otherwise ordinary day on which Clarissa prepares for the party with which the novel closes. The suggestive resonances in and for the South African context, with its history of societal trauma both during and after the apartheid period, are noteworthy. In what follows, I consider two species of response – direct or correlational, and allusive, patterning – through examples drawn from writers Lady Bruton might have regarded as representing empire and its other, indeed opposite sides in the Anglo-Boer War, for it is not only in anglophone work that debts to Woolf might be discerned.

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In Fiona Melrose's *Johannesburg* (2017), the conversation with *Mrs Dalloway* is evident from the start. Like the narrative strand set in present-day Manhattan in Cunningham's *The Hours*, character and plot are patterned directly on Woolf's 1925 text (with allusions to Woolf's biography, and possibly to other reworkings of *Mrs Dalloway*, too). Gin Brandt, an expatriate artist named for her artistic aunt Virginia, a suicide (11), has returned from New York City to Johannesburg, the place of her birth, and is organising a party to help celebrate her mother Neve's eightieth birthday on the evening of the single summer's day charted in the novel. As Gin drives around Johannesburg, she considers the unreasonable demands placed on her by men, including her spurned suitor, Peter Strauss, the novel's analogue for Peter Walsh. This Peter is a lawyer who had worked for the mineworkers' union, though now represents a mining company, his abandonment of youthful political idealism matching Peter Walsh's apparent decline after Clarissa's rejection. In Melrose's novel, it is Gin who shares something of Peter Walsh's complicated relationship to a home city not seen for some years, alternately fascinated and repelled by the changes it has undergone. Where Peter Walsh reflects (in *Mrs Dalloway*) on journalists writing openly about water closets, in *Johannesburg*, it is Gin who reflects on her home city's crass commercialism, detesting its "noise, edge, vulgarity": "commerce was the new colonizer and all else that had come before was diminished and expunged", Gin thinks (Melrose 7).

Melrose replicates certain qualities of Woolf's use of free indirect discourse as, like Woolf, she moves effortlessly amongst characters, also managing to focalize the thoughts and speech of Black South African characters in a way that feels mostly cautious and necessary to the novel's formal conceit. Neve's party is a success thanks to the Brandts' trusted domestic workers, Mercy and Dudu, though before the novel's close, a series of encounters between genteel (white) northern-suburbs characters and another Black figure, a "hunchback" first seen begging on a traffic island, brings suffering and death into view – exactly as news of Septimus Warren Smith's suicide figures death's intrusion into the Dalloway soirée.

Sechaba, called September (who, it transpires, is Dudu's brother), protests each afternoon outside the headquarters of the mining company at which Peter Strauss works, and which is engaged in significant damage-control activities following the shooting of striking mineworkers, the action in which Sechaba was disabled. The incident is modelled on the August 2012 massacre at Lonmin's Marikana platinum mine. Sechaba's death at the end of the novel symbolizes not only the after-effects of specific catastrophes (Marikana for the Western Front), but of ongoing marginalization and deprivation, legacies both of colonialism and apartheid's structural violence, kept – mostly – safely at bay in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg. Nonetheless:

> Death was always so close, the possibility of it, especially in this city. [….] The vacant threat that sat licking its teeth behind every door.
>
> For Gin it was the place too. The denial of death by replacing it with near permanent newness. Johannesburg was a relentless rush to rebirth and rebuild so that in the end it was all built on a pit of bones. Each year another layer was added. Other people's lives, their great and pitiful histories, were piled deep beneath the incandescence of commerce. (151-52)

Here those traces of imperial adventure recognized by Woolf as overreach (in a generous reading, and one noting the anticolonial work published by the Hogarth Press), are re-animated – trenchantly – in Melrose's novel's contemporary setting in a way that renders the revisioning at least in part allegorical. We might note how Sechaba/September's names carry a significant charge in the South African context: *Sechaba* (the people) was the African National Congress's mouthpiece journal from 1967, during the anti-apartheid Struggle; September, while evoking *Mrs Dalloway*'s Septimus, also surely suggests Dulcie September,

noted ANC activist assassinated in Paris in 1988.[5] The use of both names signals the complex nature of ongoing injustice in South Africa through a figure who is allegorically both the masses triumphant, and betrayed.

But what is gained from the very clever and careful patterning in which we are, if we know *Mrs Dalloway*, always conscious of the links *and* diversions? Does a novel about inequality and complicity and the legacies of racism and extractive capitalism in a contemporary metropolis in the Global South *require* the framework of patterning on the plot, character, and style of another and much older work? Is it only for a certain kind of reader, invested in specific hierarchies – which elevates writing from the Global North, or appreciates difficulty as marker of aesthetic value – that awareness of such indebtedness offers rewards?

Some of these challenges to what had been construed as a modernist canon by the 1960s are at the centre of the response of the "New" Modernist Studies that has emerged over the past quarter century in an effort to expand the archive of work considered under this label along temporal, spatial, and vertical axes (Mao and Walkowitz 737, Wollaeger 9).[6] This expansion, however much it has brought work from a slightly expanded period, from more diverse writers, and from places regarded hitherto as regional or marginal to modernism's cosmopolitan centres, into consideration as "modernist",[7] does not always suggest straightforward ways to recuperate energies that might have been anti-elitist, nascently anti-imperial, or subversive in relation to the portrayal of gender or sexuality (for example) in its time, for present readers – and especially in places grappling with their own social problems. Thus, while Woolf arguably only entered the canon through the efforts of feminist critics in the 1970s (Hugh Kenner famously *dis*counted her in his canonising criticism; see Wollaeger 8), her work has struggled to shrug off association with relatively ideologically conservative positions that were markers of her class and education such that we should still ask what her work's relevance might be to South Africans in the present.

This indeed is a question posed by Sofia Kostelac in a reflection on her experience of teaching *Mrs Dalloway* in Johannesburg during the #FeesMustFall moment in 2015. Kostelac's gambit is to accept the fact of a "critical schism" between those who argue that Woolf was elitist, and those countering such an argument, "as a foreseeable outcome of the structurally contradictory position that Woolf occupied in relation to her economic and intellectual class by virtue of her gender" ("Recontextualizing" 9). As Kostelac observes, anti-elitist diatribes against the reactionary quality of difficult modernist works have, since the rise of the New Modernist Studies, been displaced by attempts to "rethink the spatio-

temporal politics of modernism away from the periodized version" to one from which it is not modernism *itself* but "the prevailing definitions of modernism that have been too exclusionary and Eurocentric to acknowledge the pluralistic modernist practices that have occurred across geo-political and historical boundaries" (Kostelac, "Recontextualizing" 8-9).

Kostelac charts her own use of cognitive approaches to understand student responses to Woolf, working to legitimize their "feelings of alienation that her work often engenders" ("Recontextualizing" 10), before effectively convincing the students of the "enactive and transforming" value of difficulty, of what is otherwise "rarefied and inaccessible" ("Recontextualizing" 18).[8] There are ways to emphasize *Mrs Dalloway*'s social critique at the level of plot and characterization, focused particularly at the self-righteous doctors Bradshaw and Holmes, the awful, dim and dangerous eugenicist Lady Bruton, and the sycophantic Whitbread, representative (according to Clarissa Dalloway's special friend Sally Seton) of "all that was most detestable in British middle-class life" (Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* 62), even if Woolf's representation of servants remains problematic for modern readers – and perhaps especially for students in a context in which race and class were linked in overdetermined ways under apartheid.

This point is revisited by Kostelac in a subsequent article on *Mrs Dalloway* (the only one to date that reflects on Melrose's novel's conversation with Woolf's novel[9]), though she argues here that such marginalization in the novel was likely less "a matter of authorial neglect" than something Woolf might have felt *unable* to represent or that was adequately noted by the narrative's "sufficiently ironic distance from the burden of labour" the servants bear (Kostelac, "Homage" 48). Melrose learns from this critique of *Mrs Dalloway*, Kostelac suggests, offering readers the "subjectivities of the domestic workers" whose presence in middle-class white homes remains a marker of "the persistence of apartheid's deep structural inequalities" ("Homage" 47). Indeed, such foregrounding of servants' presence – allowing them their own consciousness and in a spirit of generosity not afforded, for example, Miss Brush in the extract from *Mrs Dalloway* with which this essay began – could even be regarded as constituting an "[act] of extended literary redress which invite[s] us to read back into the silences of Woolf's novel", Kostelac continues, "in order to denaturalize its omissions" ("Homage" 48).

This is an appreciative reading of both *Johannesburg* and *Mrs Dalloway.* It goes some way towards approaching the question of what the patterning of Melrose's novel on Woolf's lends the later text by turning from an assessment of Melrose's representation of Black characters to claim that *Johannesburg* withholds epiphanic and empathetic self-transcendence

from its white characters. “Mercy, Dudu and September [...] are all granted the self-awareness so painfully lacking in Gin” – Kostelac avers – and so “provide evidence of an authorial consciousness in search of points of connection which exceed Johannesburg’s segregated history” (“Homage” 52). Melrose’s novel “provides no echoes of the epiphanic denouement which marks Clarissa’s transformative identification with Septimus” (“Homage” 55), then, but instead

> re-inscribes, through Gin’s unyielding disapproval of Johannesburg and longing for New York, the binary between a cosmopolitan North, imagined as the artist’s haven, and a retrograde South that apparently lacks the conditions for intellectual and creative ferment. (Kostelac, “Homage” 50)

While Gin is certainly critical of Johannesburg, it would be unwise to conflate the character’s imputed afro-pessimism with the author’s, as Kostelac appears to be doing here, consigning the whole book (like “so much post-apartheid fiction”) to “a state of aversive suspension; by turns too resentful, guilty, self-pitying or fearful to cross the thresholds of the self”, perhaps even revealing “an authorial consciousness searching for ways to traverse Johannesburg’s apartheid-era grid and privilege perspectives that are not its own” but “caught between the contradictory impulses of revision and reversion” (Kostelac, “Homage” 56).

While there is much to admire in Kostelac’s close reading, it remains undecided about the merits of an insightful engagement with contemporary Johannesburg (Melrose’s novel) relying on close patterning on a modernist classic (*Mrs Dalloway*), however recuperatively read, as proximate impulse in the first place. This is not to insist that any author needs to make a compelling case for creative response of this nature, nor on account of the location in which the response is set, though if we are to take the New Modernist Studies’ concern with redress seriously, such a question might well be considered within the ambit of their critical project and therefore one (at least) to be ventured here. It might well be that, with Raymond Williams’s call – in “When Was Modernism?” – for a recovery of the idea of the modern from the ideological constraints of the label “modernist” in mind, we simply describe Melrose’s use of the structure (not to mention the style) of Woolf’s novel as a way of signalling her text’s engagement with similar dilemmas and discontents of her present.[10] There is a certain elegance in the use of something whose canonicity perhaps weakly approximates the work of myth in some modernist texts themselves (most famously in *Ulysses*), which T. S. Eliot memorably described in his review of Joyce’s novel in *The Dial*

in 1923 as having helped to make the "world possible for art" (Eliot 175). It might be, too, that we bear in mind Simon Gikandi's challenge to the received idea of modernism as necessarily Eurocentric or ideologically aligned with empire or colonialism, or, in Neil Lazarus's paraphrase, that "in Africa at least, modernism and anticolonialism must be understood not as oppositional, but as mutually enabling and mutually entailing discourses" (Lazarus 238, citing Gikandi 19).[11]

Kostelac's argument about Melrose's debts to Woolf (specifically in relation to labour) relies on a claim that Melrose "is reluctant to represent Johannesburg as metropolitan and modern", that it is "perpetually excluded from the narratives of cosmopolitan modernity" because of its "insoluble divisions", when this in fact might be said to confirm precisely those descriptions (Kostelac, "Homage" 47). Here the novel's precise temporal setting amplifies *Johannesburg*'s critique of the discontents of modernity (and scepticism of nationalist ideology, surely evident in *Mrs Dalloway*). Where Woolf's text is set on a hot June day in 1923, one that could be *any* day in this period (the events are imagined; there is no patterning *à la* Dublin on 16 June 1904 in *Ulysses*, no action that is not in some ways generic), *Johannesburg*'s temporal setting is precise – December 6, 2013 (also a hot summer day) – chosen for its coincidence with an historical event: the announcement of Nelson Mandela's death. The novel's conceit is that this occurred in a house on the same street as Neve Brandt's home. Mercy first gets news on her phone that Madiba has passed (22). Later, Neve Brandt sits at her vanity, Clarissa-like, reflecting on her "[d]ark hair, still, with bolts of gunmetal and ash streaked through it", before running a line of "thick, white, paste-like cream across one cheek first and then the other" in a manner that reminds her of the traditional adornment of Xhosa women, which returns her to Mandela ("Shame about Mandela"), who was Xhosa: "The father of the nation. He was ninety-five" (24). The novel ends with Gin leaving the party and walked to the Mandela residence, feeling unity with the mourners (258).

Choosing this date, the announcement of Mandela's passing, does its own kind of work to bring the legacy of the complicated (amnesiac) hopefulness of the first five years of South Africa's new era (Mandela's presidency) into conjunction with the disappointments of the Mbeki and Zuma eras, disappointments that offer a critique of the neo-liberal present. If, in Woolf's novel, the time of authority, government, patriarchy, the law (also medicine), is represented by Big Ben's leaden-circle chimes, which cleave the charged atmosphere of the novel ("dissolving into air"), in Melrose's novel it is police, press, and VIP helicopters hovering over the former president's compound that produce an analogue, sending a "voop

voop voop" (93), into the air throughout the day, as if combining *Mrs Dalloway*'s signwriting aircraft and the clock chimes into a single symbol of authority (*and/as* commerce).

Whether employed as mythic echo or authorizing framework, Melrose's novel is perhaps usefully regarded as an adaptation of Woolf's text, in the broadest sense of a term that no longer implies fidelity. Earl Ingersoll suggests that a relationship of productive intertextuality comes to operate amongst all texts that rely on a common source, including the text itself, engagements with which are necessarily changed for any reader or viewer of the intertexts: attending to the relations finds "each text at least subtly altered" (Ingersoll 111). But what of a response that evades the structure of adaptation (which inevitably struggles with descriptions that must acknowledge original and subsequent)? What, for example, of a work that suggests – or for which there is external evidence of – merely a memory of "source"?[12] This sense of kinship with an admired model that is not overt, knowledge of which seems entirely unnecessary for an appreciation of the text's own form, style, plot, and politics, is evident (I want to argue) in the second example of a South African response to *Mrs Dalloway*. This is a text whose language of composition challenges the assumption that a study of the legacies of English-language texts in South Africa might only feature anglophone examples.

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"The greatest literary discovery of my last year at school in Paarl," wrote Karel Schoeman (1939-2017) in his 2002 memoir, *Die laaste Afrikaanse boek* (The Last Afrikaans Book), "and perhaps the greatest single literary influence of my life without exception, was […] the novels of Virginia Woolf" (218).[13] The Paarl municipal library had acquired the novels as they were published in the 1920s and 1930s, the town most associated with the development of Afrikaans as a language – home indeed to an apartheid-era monument to the language (the only to a language in the world) – investing in the avant-garde in a perhaps unexpected way. Schoeman continues (my translation):

> I remember the four titles that gripped my imagination so intensely when I came upon them, *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, *The Waves* and *The Years*, but not *Orlando, Flush* or the literary essays, because the library was more selective with the acquisition of non-fiction. (218)[14]

Despite a great deal of recognition from the Afrikaans literary community, including the award of all the major literary prizes in Afrikaans, and even a (post-apartheid) national honour for service to literature, Schoeman's work remains relatively unknown to English-speaking readers both inside South Africa and internationally. Always something of an outsider and not nearly as widely known as his perhaps more formally avant-garde peers, including André Brink (also J. M. Coetzee), Schoeman was prodigiously productive: 34 biographies and histories, 11 travelogues and memoirs, and 18 novels (only four of them published in English translation[15]). The conversation with Woolf's novel in one of these untranslated novels, *Die noorderlig* (1975; the northern lights), is less obvious than Melrose's, but no less interesting both for a consideration of *Mrs Dalloway*'s afterlives and for any story about South African – but here specifically Afrikaans-language – literature's engagement with modernisms.

Like *Mrs Dalloway*, *Die noorderlig* is a short novel about a character apparently in control of their life, capable and charming, walking through a city accomplishing minor tasks, but dealing with an unexpected sense of disquiet precipitated by the arrival of an old friend and the memories of early adulthood friendships it elicits. As in Woolf's text, a suicide punctures the surface tension of the urbane main character's ostensibly placid life, though it is a suicide in the past, and one that is implicitly compared with Woolf's herself. Over the course of a single spring day in the early 1970s, Paul, an émigré South African working as a designer at an advertising agency in Amsterdam (where Schoeman himself lived between 1968 and 1973), has a series of conversations—in his office, in restaurants, while walking the streets, in the living room of his comfortable bourgeois apartment—with: a co-worker, an old university friend, a former literature professor, and a small group of acquaintances, including another former (in this case, exiled) countryman, a ballet dancer who would have been classified Coloured under South Africa's apartheid-era classificatory laws, and one expressly coded as queer. And here is one of the key differences from Melrose's *Johannesburg*: Schoeman's engagement with *Mrs Dalloway's* queer energies – recall that Clarissa remembers her late-adolescent desire for Sally Seton (*Mrs Dalloway* 28-30), Clarissa suspects Doris Kilman's interest in her daughter Elizabeth throughout, Septimus longs for his dead comrade Evans (e.g. 59), and Peter suspects Hugh Whitbread's designs on another olive-skinned youth at a party (147).

The account of Paul's progress around the city and through the day, offered in a focalized third-person narrative, is interrupted, as in *Mrs Dalloway*, by memories of early

adulthood. In particular, he reflects on an enigmatic young poet, Estelle, the daughter of a leading member of the ruling National Party, whose suicide catalyzed a growing disaffection with the country of his birth and hastened his emigration. Finding himself stirred up by his conversations with Ina and with a former professor (who had been Estelle's nemesis, yet now presumes to write a short book about her life and work), Paul reflects on his distance from the self he felt he had left behind when he "consciously and intentionally [….] obliterated his memories and destroyed old photos and letters, to be able to begin a new life unencumbered" (Schoeman, *Die noorderlig* 24).[16] Paul, Ina, and Estelle had been close friends at university in Bloemfontein (standing in, perhaps, for Clarissa's Bourton). Estelle's father is perhaps *Die noorderlig*'s Bradshaw and Richard Dalloway rolled into one. In the sunroom of their home, Estelle enlists her friends in mocking all that the patriarch stands for and encourages them to question what they have hitherto taken for granted: "Open your eyes, look around yourselves, ask *why*. [….] Away with the cobwebs! Away with darkness! Away with the old men!" (36).[17] The old men in question remained in power for another twenty years, though cracks in apartheid's façade began to appear shortly after Schoeman's novel was published, in June 1976, when black school pupils in Soweto protesting at being taught in Afrikaans unleashed a new wave of black consciousness politics.

Estelle's poetry—the little of it that we see—is *not* politically charged, even as her life had tended towards activism. (There is perhaps some self-knowledge on Schoeman's part, here; it is noteworthy that none of Schoeman's novels was ever banned by South Africa's censors.) In the midst of her final depression, we are told, she saw clearly that it was "a whole network of injustice that we're all a part of" and that everyone was "contaminated" (95).[18] The moments in which the question of the role of the artist comes most pointedly into view is in the contrast drawn between Estelle's poetry and her activism, and in discussions of the kind of the poetry taught to the three friends by Professor Dreyer, nicknamed Bakkies (no doubt for large or bowl-shaped ears, *bakore*), the former lecturer with whom Paul has lunch on this Amsterdam day. This was poetry that, at least in Dreyer's interpretation, exemplified art for the sake of art rather than engaging with the realities of the present.

There is extensive quotation (in Paul's memory) from this poetry by leading figures in Dutch literature's *Beweging van Tachtig* (Movement of the '80s), a group of avant-garde poets who came to prominence in the 1880s and whose work reacted against what they saw as a stifling tendency to formalism and artificiality in mainstream writing of the day. Leading figures included Jacques Perk, Willem Kloos and Herman Gorter, who all attempted to match style to content, tending to intimate lyrical address and evocation of visceral feeling,

atmosphere, and mood (decidedly modernist preoccupations), and drawing inspiration from comparable contemporaneous movements including Naturalism in the French novel and Impressionism in painting. The poet whose work comes most frequently to Paul's mind is Gorter (1864–1927): he recalls Estelle's puzzlement at lines about a sofa (as she riles up Bakkies, with relish) (40), and later remembers another quotation from the same poem (78-9). Both references are to a book-length poem, *Mei* (May), first published in 1889, which confirmed Gorter's reputation as one of the leading young writers of his day; the lines all speak of the fragility of youth and innocence, of spring turning to summer, with the autumn migration of birds soon to follow.[19]

There is another layer to the intertexual reference here, as Gorter later disavowed his early work and became successively a founding member of the Dutch Social Democratic Party, a theorist of the council communist movement, and a committed Marxist.[20] Bakkies would have ignored this turn, focusing on the boldness of the youthful work, verse whose apolitical celebration of nature, art and love is undemanding and politically non-provocative during these years of high apartheid, but the buried radicalism is perhaps in conversation with aspects of Woolf's novel's social critique.

In *Die noorderlig*, it is not Estelle's poetry but the manner of her death that is ultimately her most potent political performance, Paul's friend Ina claims. Ina says to Paul during one of their meetings during the day (in the novel's present):

> Haar gedigte? Dis nie wat ek bedoel nie—dink jy dan ek stel nog belang in die Afrikaanse letterkunde? Dis haar dóód wat belangrik is. Sy't geweet wat sy doen, sê ek vir jou, Paul: haar doon was 'n daad […] dit was haar eie antwoord op alles, heeltemal besonne en oorwoë. (Schoeman, *Die noorderlig* 106)

> Her poems? That's not what I mean—do you think then I still have any interest in Afrikaans literature? It's her *death* that's important. She knew what she was doing, I'm telling you, Paul: her death was an action [….] it was her own answer to everything, entirely considered and deliberate.[21]

Here we might recall Clarissa's thoughts about the death that intrudes on her party with news of Septimus's suicide.

> Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate, people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded; one was alone. There was an embrace in death. (Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* 156)

There is something bleaker, more melancholic, also more political in what we might call Schoeman's creative transformation of Septimus (a poet of a kind, after all) into Estelle, and this is because Estelle is clearly intended to evoke a particular – and definitively activist – South African poet.

Both the manner of Estelle's death (she drowns herself) and her relationship with her father would very likely have reminded contemporary readers of the celebrated Afrikaans poet Ingrid Jonker, who committed suicide by drowning herself at Three Anchor Bay in Cape Town in July 1965, aged 31, with only two volumes of poetry to her name (another appeared posthumously).[22] Nelson Mandela, newly inaugurated as the first post-apartheid President of South Africa, introduced Jonker to a wider public when he quoted her poem "Die kind wat doodgeskiet is deur soldate by Nyanga," translated into English as "The Child" (but more accurately "The child shot dead by soldiers at Nyanga," a reference to an event in a township outside Cape Town on 1 April 1960), in his address at the opening of parliament on 24 May 1994. Mandela described Jonker at the time as "an Afrikaner woman who transcended a particular experience and became a South African, an African and a citizen of the world" (Viljoen, *Jonker* 11-13).

Jonker's father, Abraham, had been a National Party parliamentarian instrumental in framing South Africa's strict censorship legislation, and in company with the likes of the young novelist and academic André Brink (with whom she had a relationship), Ingrid Jonker had vociferously opposed the regime's curtailment of freedom of speech.[23] While the differences between Estelle and Jonker are sufficient for us to read Schoeman's novel as something other than simply a roman à clef (Jonker was born and raised in Cape Town not Bloemfontein, was married and had a daughter, was dark-haired where Estelle is blonde; nor was Schoeman an intimate of the writer or her circle), the allusion allows *Die noorderlig* to resonate with the pathos of Jonker's life and death and to stage as a question the problem of politics for the writer in a time and place like South Africa in the 1960s and early 1970s. Behind Jonker's, too, Woolf's death raises the spectre of a writer's choices in the shadow of a looming fascist threat. (It's worth noting, perhaps, that Melrose's novel's echoing of Woolf's

suicide in the suicide of Gin's Aunt Virginia draw on events that are closer to the manner of Ingrid Jonker's death than Woolf's.[24])

Paul is, tellingly, also an artist, but of a somewhat less pure variety, a graphic designer working in advertising, whose clients include dog-food manufacturers (Schoeman, *Die noorderlig* 103); "I don't know if it's comic or embittering", "busy making a living from dog food" (12), he remarks to the student intern Geert-Jan, who devotes time to protesting global injustice, reading Marx, Feuerbach, and Mao, and hoping for revolution.[25] The mockery of advertising nods to *Mrs Dalloway*'s signwriting airplane (hawking commercial products – toffee? milk powder? – in lettering that fades quickly and is not always legible). Paul's whittling of a small crown logo out of balsa wood might also remind the reader of Peter Walsh's association with knives in Woolf's novel.

The invitations to remember Estelle throughout the day induce in Paul a feeling of vertiginous instability: he feels himself drawn "down into the whirlpool, […] so quickly […] that his breath is knocked out of him" (24).[26] This gives way in fleeting moments to intimations of a "long and dark tunnel", and at its end, a version of himself with which he might finally be reacquainted (24). One might here compare Woolf's association of tunnels and caves with her process of composing *Mrs Dalloway*; she wrote in her diary in August 1923, while working on the draft text then titled "The Hours":

> I dig out beautiful caves behind my characters; I think that gives them exactly what I want; humanity, humour, depth. The idea is that the caves shall connect, & each comes to daylight at the present moment. (quoted in Starck 332)

In *Die noorderlig*, tunnels and references to looking back or away recur and allude not only (I believe one can argue) to Woolf, but also to the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice.[27] When the climactic events that precipitate Estelle's suicide reveal what lurks beneath the crust of civility, she declares it is as if "the ground has suddenly opened before my feet and I've seen"—as Persephone sees into Hades—"something evil" (Schoeman, *Die noorderlig* 95).[28] Persephone was allowed to return once a year, bringing new life each spring: Schoeman's novel pairs opposite seasons in northern and southern hemisphere as analogues for world and underworld, the lustre of the northern lights versus the glare of the southern sun, the promise of spring in Europe versus the metaphorical autumnal stasis of apartheid-era South Africa.

Schoeman remained committed to a realism that accommodated some of the lessons learned from Woolf and others, eschewing the more formal experimentalism of his peers,

writers like Etienne Leroux, Breyten Breytenbach, and André Brink (amongst others), who came to prominence in the 1960s and received more widespread attention abroad. There is an argument for considering Schoeman's oeuvre as tangential to the work of the *Sestigers* rather as the work of Graham Greene and Evelyn Waugh (like Schoeman, at one time, also converts to Catholicism) sets them at an angle to that of their late-modernist peers.[29] The non-overt kinship with Woolf's work I have traced in *Die noorderlig* is, I am suggesting, significant for its confirmation of a wider reach for Woolf's fiction than only anglophone writing (which stands to reason, of course, but might remind readers of this journal of the value of thinking comparatively). In relation to Schoeman's work more particularly it serves to highlight this author's ongoing (and, in my view, wholly unjustified) critical neglect in anglophone critical circles in South Africa, and to reiterate a case for Schoeman's work as a key exhibit for any account of the tension between experimentalism and realism in South African letters, a tussle that extends beyond writing in English.[30]

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If Melrose's conversation with *Mrs Dalloway* is closer to the tenor of Michael Cunningham's treatment in *The Hours*, Schoeman's is perhaps more usefully compared with more recent allusive engagements, including Ian McEwan's *Saturday* (2005), where Woolf's novel is remembered within the novel – alerting the reader to the ways in which several of its characters, and points of plot, loosely echo that earlier London novel (see Starck 339). What spoke to Schoeman, he claimed in his 2002 memoir, was that Woolf modelled that

> there did not need to be a "story" or intrigue in a novel in the sense that I had hitherto encountered in all fiction […]; or rather, that it was not explicit external dealings that are as important as internal developments, that it too constituted appropriate matter for literature and it too could be conveyed in words and through language. (*Laaste Afrikaanse boek* 220)[31]

The story of Woolf's reputation in South Africa, both amongst writers in her own time and since, and as a body of work cast as model of a particular aesthetic, formal, or indeed political orientation, in schools, universities, and for general readers, is one yet fully to be told. When Woolf's impact on South African writers is considered, it will need to think about acts of writing-back as much as the more subtle conversations that occur, for example, in Zoë

Wicomb's work,[32] and – as I've suggested above – in Schoeman's, which is to say not only in works written or read in English.

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Notes

This paper has benefitted from audience responses on three occasions: to a colloquium paper on Karel Schoeman and genealogies of queer writing in Afrikaans at a meeting of the Fay Gale Centre Research Seminar, the University of Adelaide, September 2022; to a conference paper on "Virginia Woolf, Karel Schoeman, Fiona Melrose: Hauntings and Disappointments" at a conference on *Feminist Experiments in the Miracle Year of Modernism* at the University of Queensland, Brisbane, in August 2022; and to a paper on translation and the politics of creative practice delivered online to the Salford University Arts Research Seminar in November 2020. My thanks, too, to Eben Venter, Carrol Clarkson, NB publishers (Schoeman's estate), Patrick Flanery, David Attwell, and the journal's two anonymous readers.

[1] A *South* African setting would be appropriate contrast to the world – one of polar opposites (more people, more noise) – that the character *North* encounters back in England.
[2] Only "lingering impressions of kinship between the writers remain", Munslow Ong argues. Though she does not canvas *The Years*, the allusiveness I am suggesting remains suggestive as no precise location is noted for North's "ranch" (*The Years* 294), nor precise reference to the source made in Woolf's reflections while composing *The Years*.
[3] I have not undertaken an exhaustive survey but speculate that *Mrs Dalloway* might be matched only by *Orlando* (1928) for number of creative adaptations, responses, or reinterpretations.
[4] Henry Alley offers a thoughtful reading of Lippincott's text as the more daring enterprise, compared with Cunningham's more famous novel, on account of his "remaining true to Woolf's use of the compassionate past tense, as well as the more inclusive omnibus perspective" (Alley 412).
[5] In circumstances that have never fully been explained. September is the basis for Zoë Wicomb's murdered activist character in *David's Story* (2000).
[6] See also the work by Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel to expand the global range of work considered modernist.
[7] Mark Wollaeger – after Dipesh Chakrabarty and others – considers the significant value of continuing to think, in materialist vein, with ideas of "core" and "periphery" (6).
[8] For a recuperative reading of "difficulty" as the ethical challenge of modernist style, see Mahaffey and Diepeveen (the latter also cited by Kostelac). Kostelac admits that any "activist reading of Woolf's difficulty overlooks the significant point that, for it to perform its counter-hegemonic work, aesthetic difficulty requires readers to have access to a 'nexus of attitudes and scripts' (Diepeveen 224), without which a difficult text often remains entirely unapproachable" (Kostelac, "Recontextualizing" 21).
[9] An essay that came to my attention only after a first version of my own essay was drafted.
[10] See Wollaeger 10-11, and Williams.
[11] See also Peter Kalliney's work. The extent to which the work of modernist writers shared anti-colonial energies or enabled their expression by later writers is, of course, a significant consideration. Joyce's sympathies for anti-imperial politics is more easily evidenced than Eliot's, or, for that matter, Woolf's.
[12] I am here adapting Starck's description of the process of "imagining the source text as a 'memory' embedded in the heart of the adaptation" such that one is able to "restore a measure of autonomy and agency to the adaptation: it is the text that is *doing* the *remembering*" (Starck 330).

[13] All translations from the Afrikaans are my own. Original: "Die grootste literêre ontdekking van my laaste jare op skool in die Paarl, en waarskynlik die grootste enkele literêre invloed in my lewe sonder meer, was egter die romans van Virginia Woolf" (Schoeman, *Die laaste Afrikaanse boek* 218).
[14] Original: "Ek onthou die vier titels wat my verbeelding so intens beetgegryp het toe ek op hulle afkom, *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, *The Waves* en *The Years*, maar nie *Orlando, Flash* of die literêre essays nie, want met die aankoop van nie-fiksie was die biblioteek heelwat meer selektief" (Schoeman, *Die laaste Afrikaanse boek* 218).
[15] *Promised Land* (1978, translated by Marian Friedman from the 1972 *Na die geliefde land*), *Another Country* (1991, translated by David Schalkwyk from *'n Ander land*, 1984), *Take Leave and Go* (1992, translated by Schoeman himself from *Afskeid en vertrek*, 1990), and *This Life* (2005, translated by Elsa Silke from *Hierdie Lewe*, 1993).
[16] Original: "doelbewus en opsetlik […] sy herinnerings uitgewis en ou foto's en briewe vernietig het, om onbelemmerd 'n numew lewe te kan begin."
[17] Original: "Maak julle oë oop, kyk romdom julle, vra hóékom. [….] Weg met die spinnerakke! Weg met die donker! Weg met die ou mans!".
[18] Original: "'n hele netwek van onregverdigheid waarvan ons almal deel uitmaak, [….] [o]ns is almal besmet."
[19] I elaborate on the intertextual allusions in other forthcoming work.
[20] See Vincent (online), and Vincent, "Introduction", further.
[21] As before, translation my own.
[22] There are echoes of Woolf's suicide too, in the act of drowning.
[23] Jonker was also involved romantically with the older English-language writer Jack Cope, and aspects of the affairs with both men inform Schoeman's characterization of Estelle's entanglement with François in Schoeman's novel.
[24] Melrose has Virginia appear to Neve as "notorious anti-apartheid writer and activist" (*Johannesburg* 167) who "drowned herself in the sea" (11), a "madwoman who walked into the waves" (50).
[25] "Besig om 'n bestaan to maak van hondekos [...]. Ek weet nie of dit komies is nie of verbitterend" (Schoeman, *Die noorderlig* 12).
[26] Original: "af in die draaikolk, so vining afgetrek in die donker dat sy asem wegslaan."
[27] Here—perhaps a little imperfectly—Estelle might be Eurydice, but so is South Africa, an object of love that must be left behind and that is inevitably relinquished when (and because) Paul finally allows himself to remember. That Orpheus is associated with song and poetry (his art being that of commemoration) also makes this allusion fitting in a novel about mourning, or perhaps it is melancholia, and about the duties of the poet or of the artist more broadly.
[28] Original: "dat die grond skielik voor my voete oopgeskeur het en ek iets boos gesien het".
[29] Greene and Waugh share something else with Schoeman in having been converts to Catholicism (unusually for a leading writer from a community marked by its Calvinism, Schoeman entered a Catholic seminary in Ireland in 1961, though swiftly abandoned plans to become a priest, in part because of his acceptance of his own homosexuality). I have more to say about Schoeman's homosexuality, and the queer subtexts in *Die noorderlig,* elsewhere.
[30] I am grateful to one of this essay's two anonymous readers for helping me to formulate the essay's payoffs thus.
[31] Original: "dat daar in 'n roman geen 'storie' of intrige hoef te wees in die sin waarin ek dit tot dusver in alle fiksie teëgekom het [...]; of liewer, dat dit nie soseer uiterlike handeling is wat belangrik is nie as innerlike ontwikkeling, dat ook dit geskikte stof vir letterkunde uitmaak en ook dit in woorde en deur taal weergegee kan word". It is perhaps also noteworthy that Schoeman also claimed that, in later years, "[o]nly *Voss* [...] had an influence on me [...] that can in any sense be compared with that

of Virginia Woolf" (*Laaste Afrikaanse boek* 286). ["Slegs *Voss*, sê ek hier, het in latere jare 'n invloed op my gehad wat enigsins met dié van Virginia Woolf en ander skrywers uit my skool- en universiteitsjare vergelyk kan word."] Patrick White thus serves, too, as a complicatedly queer writer model.

[32] This is not the place to elaborate on the question of Wicomb's ongoing conversation with Woolf, but I note two moments of interest. In a 1993 essay entitled "Culture Beyond Color?", Wicomb augments Woolf's memorable argument for a "room of her own and so many pounds per year as a necessary condition for writing" with, in the South African context, necessary attention to "the question of literacy and education" (Wicomb, *Race, Nation, Translation* 60). More recently, Wicomb's 2020 novel *Still Life* appropriates the character of Nicholas Greene from Woolf's *Orlando* in order (inter alia) to suggest a kinship with Woolf's genre-busting biography's exploration of "the form, the unreliability of surviving documentary evidence of the life, the range of opinions on [any] subject" (Van der Vlies, "Zoë Wicomb's Angels of History" 60). See also Constance Richards's work on Woolf and Wicomb (with Alice Walker) as three significant feminist writers (at least partially in intertextual conversation).