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“Growing scar tissue around the memory of that day”: Sites of Gendered Violence and Suffering in Contemporary South African Literature

By Kate Every¹

Abstract

In the words of renowned criminologist Antony Albeker, South Africa is suffering from a “crisis of crime.” The outworking of tensions from the perceived inadequacies of South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission have seen an explosion of violent crime, which has little improved in the two decades since the end of the Apartheid-state. Contemporary South African literature has spoken to this violent reality in myriad ways, from the violence of South Africa’s most written about novel, J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*, to the more recent trends in crime fiction and true-crime genres. The novels considered here, *Disgrace* and Margie Orford’s *Like Clockwork*, work together to form an aesthetic of violence. Where Orford’s work is bounded by generic convention to solve crime and seek restitution, Coetzee leaves us in a state of uneasy non-resolution. The growing popularity of the “crime-fiction” genre then, speaks to a desire to make sense of a violent reality. If protagonist Clare Hart can restore order and enforce clear boundaries within the space of 300 pages, can readers feel assured in “a country at war with itself”?

Key words: South Africa, violence, rape

As a genre, crime fiction is flourishing in contemporary South Africa. Books about murder and rape have formed a large part of the country’s literary output since 1994, and their popularity is growing (Titlestad and Polatinsky 270). These fictions speak to the social reality of crime in South Africa, but, as Stone notes, “the distinctive feature of crime in South Africa is not its volume but its violence” (qtd. in Albeker 48). J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace* (2000) and Margie Orford’s *Like Clockwork* (2010) are concerned with violent crime, more specifically, violence against women. Despite legislation which promotes the rights of women, the incidence of rape and sexual violence in contemporary South Africa are similar to those in a war zone (Graham, *State of Peril* 194). Rautenbach notes the irony of such prevalence of crime and corruption within the context of post-apartheid South Africa, which has adopted “such hyperbolic tropes as ‘the rainbow nation’ and ‘the truth will set you free’ (one of the slogans for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission)” (154). In *Disgrace* in particular, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), as Barnard notes, “features as a marginal yet activating presence” (659). The texts do not engage with it directly, but the TRC forms part of the contextual framework for the narratives which interrogate issues such as land rights, rights of women, and the importance of being permitted to maintain silence rather than testify about trauma, all of which were contentious issues surrounding the TRC. This piece will address the ways in which crime has been a constitutive narrative in the “new”

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South Africa from the immediately post-Apartheid era work of Coetzee, to the recent trend in crime fiction, typified by Orford's work. It considers the work of two white authors, who choose to write in English, one of the eleven official languages of South Africa. What draws these works together in this analysis, however, is the violence that women endure in the narratives. Whilst both authors explore the role of race, to varying degrees,² this consideration is beyond the scope of this essay, which focuses on the implications of gendered violence.

Disgrace opens with David Lurie, a 50-something professor who pursues sexual relationships, initially with a prostitute, and then with one of his students, Melanie Isaacs. This liaison is problematic for its coercive nature: although Lurie denies that it is rape, it is certainly uncomfortable. He is brought before a disciplinary committee, where he refuses to give a public apology, and instead resigns and moves to live with his daughter Lucy on a smallholding in the Eastern Cape. He starts to adjust to farm life, but one day the farm is attacked and he is injured and Lucy is gang-raped by the three assailants. There is no retributive justice, and Lucy chooses to remain silent about the attack, refusing to report it. As a result of the rape, Lucy falls pregnant and the novel ends with the pair living in the Eastern Cape, awaiting the birth of the child. This briefly addresses the key points in the novel's plot, although as Attridge notes, this sort of summary "inevitably gives a false impression of a novel whose most potent effects are achieved by means other than plot developments" (316).

Orford's *Like Clockwork*, published 7 years later, takes up the themes of gendered and sexual violence. Clare Hart, the novel's criminal profiler protagonist, pursues a serial rapist and murderer of young women. The plot culminates in the arrest of the perpetrator, Otis Tohar, a local businessman whose ventures are spreading throughout the Cape Town setting of the novel. The narrative also explores other forms of female subjugation: depicting female victims of human trafficking, and Clare's own sister, Constance, who is brutalised in an attack that took place some 20 years before. The first in a series of novels that follow Clare Hart, Orford's fiction has been seen as part of the wave of crime fiction which is sweeping the South African literary scene.

Disgrace was published directly after the TRC, and Orford's text some years later; her Clare Hart series which continues the themes of violence against women and children bring us right up to 2013. What does the ongoing trend in representations of gendered violence in literature tell us about South Africa in the decades since apartheid? My study will focus specifically on the locations of violence and what they reveal about the texts, and more broadly, what they reveal about contemporary South Africa. Section one will focus on the "the torture room," (Coetzee) the room where violence takes place. This necessarily leads to a discussion of ethics and aesthetics in the representation of violence. What are the ethical implications of taking us inside "the torture room" to witness violence in literature? The novels take differing approaches to this question. Following on from a discussion of depicting violence, I will look at the act of voicing violence, and the way the texts explore silence as a response to violent attack. The next section will explore the most intimate site of violence, the female body itself. *Disgrace* and *Like Clockwork* portray bodies that bear the lasting effects of violence somatically as well as psychologically. This section will look at how women's bodies are represented in the text: be they disfigured and maimed; or portrayed in the guise of a sexy corpse; or as powerful agents, forming and transforming their own narratives.

² Coetzee explores the racial nature of male-on-female violence in both the coercive relationship between Soraya and David, and the rape of Lucy by three young, black men; whilst Orford's victims and perpetrators are racially ambiguous.

Ultimately, the essay will question what these texts tell us about violence in the context of South Africa now. I will discuss the ways in which violence in these texts is part of an outworking of tensions that arose from the perceived inadequacy of the TRC. Attwell and Harlow have posited that

A great deal has been said about the so-called “miracle” of the South African transition. The corollary to the notion of miracle is the continuing legacy and discomfort of compromise: the effort to rebuild a society whose underlying social relations and even attitudes remain substantially unchanged (2).

Disgrace and *Like Clockwork* help us to understand and appreciate the inevitability of this legacy and discomfort, but also give us strategies for managing the persistent social realities of violence.

“Freedom to speak, freedom to remain silent”: Writing violence or keeping silence

The fact that the torture room is a site of extreme human experience, accessible to no one save the participants, is a ... reason why the novelist in particular should be fascinated by it (Coetzee, “Dark Chamber”).

Coetzee’s concern with “the torture room” has been a recurring theme in his writings. His 1980 novel *Waiting for the Barbarians* describes the fascination with what goes on behind the locked doors of the torture chamber through the eyes of its protagonist, the magistrate. Coetzee furthers his interrogation of the topic in 1986, in *The New York Times* in an article entitled “Into the Dark Chamber: The Novelist and South Africa”. He cites the writer’s challenge as “not to allow himself to be impaled on the dilemma proposed by the state, namely either to ignore its obscenities or else to produce representations of them.” This ethical dilemma of how to (or not to) depict what goes on inside the torture room is a primary concern for both Coetzee and Orford. Firstly, I will look at how they problematize the act of representing suffering as it is happening: should we linger outside the dark chamber, or be taken in as witnesses? Then I will look at who owns the narrative *after* the act of violence has occurred. This will necessarily lead us back to the TRC to discuss why testimony and bearing witness to violence, or choosing to remain silent, are such pre-eminent concerns for writers in contemporary South Africa.

In Dawes’ article “Human Rights in Literary Studies”, he cites Adorno’s famous dictum: “To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric” (Dawes 408). He goes on to relate this to the act of bearing witness to suffering: “In giving voice to suffering we can sometimes moderate it, even aestheticize it. As Adorno argues, the artistic depiction of pain, ‘contains, however remotely, the power to elicit enjoyment out of it’” (Dawes 408). This quandary is amplified where the portrayal of rape is concerned, which runs the “risk of turning violence into a pornographic spectacle that threatened to implicate the viewer” (Graham, “Reading” 441).

In *Disgrace*, Coetzee seeks to ameliorate this problem when writing the rape of Lucy. During the attack, Lurie, through whom the novel is focalised, is either blacked-out or trapped in the lavatory: “He batters the door. ‘Lucy!’ he shouts. ‘Lucy! Speak to me!’” (*Disgrace* 94). The fact that both the reader and Lurie are trapped outside of “the torture room” enables Coetzee to forge a third course between the ignorance/representation dichotomy that he presents in “Into the Dark Chamber”. Instead, we know of Lucy’s suffering, we bear witness to the horrific trauma that

she is subjected to; it is not ignored.³ Boehmer responds to this, claiming that the “truth of suffering therefore is acknowledged through the refusal to represent it,” employing instead a “redemptive ethical unawareness” (345). Orford, too, has discussed this “refusal to represent,” reading in the blank cover of the US edition of *Disgrace* a metaphor for the “level at which violence is impossible – or too disturbing – to represent” (Orford, “Grammar” 224). But it was to the omission of Lucy’s story, that “narrative lacuna”, that she was drawn: “I wanted to write into that silence, that imaginative blind spot” (Orford, “Grammar” 225). Orford’s novel engages in the aestheticization of sadistic violence and pain from the outset:

Two strides take him to the room where they have brought the new consignment. She looks at him, terrified. He finds this provocative. He holds out his hand to the girl. Conditioned to politeness, confused, she gives him hers. He looks at it. Then he turns the palm – secret, pink – upwards. He looks into her eyes and smiles. He stubs the cigarette out in her hand. (*Like Clockwork* 1)

This episode highlights the vulnerability of the victim: she is merely a “consignment”, one of many, treated as a commodity. She is “terrified”, and infantilised, describe only as “the girl” – her identity stripped from her, reducing her to her sex. The erotic overtones of the scene are unmistakable. The attacker gains pleasure from the terror of his victim, finding it “provocative”. The description of her palm as “secret, pink” has sexual allusions, and the mutilation of it foreshadows the sexual violence of women dealt with later in the novel. The problem presented here is the complicity of the reader, who is implicitly a voyeur to the suffering of the victim. This is emphasised by Tohar’s words to his last victim, “No one is going to come. Nobody. It’s just us here” (*Like Clockwork* 291-2). Of course, it is not just Tohar and his victim present, the reader is there too, partaking of the experience. The sexualised, voyeuristic representation of the victim-perpetrator binary makes the reader complicit in the viewing of her pain.

But, for Orford, investigating this violence, as Clare Hart does, is “the only way we have of honouring and avenging the dead – indeed, of bearing witness”, even if it is “ethically fraught in its representation of violence” (Orford, “Grammar” 226). Whereas Coetzee’s victim’s torture room is left inaccessible, Orford’s is exploded open, literally, as Clare Hart frees the victim by blasting open the door (*Like Clockwork* 305). The torture chamber is opened up to the outside world, and loses its violent potency; it is just an opening onto the beach, the danger is overcome.

Not only do the narratives scrutinise the “unrepresentability” of rape (qtd. in Graham “Reading” 441), they are concerned with the way violence is “unspeakable”, in the aftermath. As Graham notes, “[i]n canonical literary narratives of the West, rape is often depicted as ‘unspeakable’, as severed from articulation” (439). The texts explore the physical, psychological and linguistic incapability of narrativising one’s suffering, and also the ethical implications of speaking *for* a victim, which is “both a way of rescuing and usurping the other’s voice” (Dawes 394). *Disgrace* devotes a lot of space to Lucy’s silence, but it is important to note that most of the primary characters either refuse to speak, or are silenced, after perpetrating, or being victim of, suffering. David refuses to give the University hearing a satisfactory version of events concerning Melanie; and Melanie herself is entirely absent, her written testimony ignored by David, who essentially silences her narrative. Later, David finds himself frustrated by Petrus’ refusal to give an explanation as to why he was absent during the attack, a fact into which David reads Petrus’

³ Barnard notes a similar move in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, as the novel “finds ways to represent torture on its own terms.” (Barnard 202)

complicity. Lucy reminds David however, “Petrus has offered no explanation for his absence ... he is entitled to his silence” (*Disgrace* 116). Of course, the focalisation through David leads to a necessary occlusion of the inner discourses of Lucy, Melanie, and Petrus.

The novel makes reference to the inadequacies of language, and the silencing which this, in turn, leads to. David ponders on Petrus’ own story: “He would not mind hearing Petrus's story ... But preferably not reduced to English. More and more he is convinced that English is an unfit medium for the truth of South Africa” (*Disgrace* 117). During the attack, language restricts David, as he tries to cry out to his daughter’s attackers: “He speaks Italian, he speaks French, but Italian and French will not save him here in darkest Africa” (*Disgrace* 95).

These instances indicate where specific linguistic codes are not suitable. It seems that for some stories, stories of suffering and pain, language itself is not enough. Lucy refuses to put her suffering into words, despite her father’s insistence that she tell “the whole story” (*Disgrace* 110). She opts instead for silence, continuing to keep the reader outside of her private torture room:

This is my life. I am the one who has to live here. What happened to me is my business, mine alone, not yours, and if there is one right I have it is the right not to be put on trial like this, not to have to justify myself – not to you, not to anyone else (*Disgrace* 133).

She chooses control over her own story rather than the retributive justice that might be achieved through resorting to legal recourse.

Critical readings of *Disgrace* have discussed the lacuna of Lucy’s rape, as a silencing which is ultimately damaging. Boehmer sees the silence as “a continuation of subjection which it would be preposterous to propose as redemptive” (345), and Graham notes that “refusal to speak about her experience certainly does not empower her” (442). Whilst this may be true, and Lucy’s silence may contribute to a wider endemic of silencing victims, the alternative – giving testimony to her pain – is perhaps more pernicious for a victim of violence. In their discussion of testimony at the TRC, Schaffer and Smith have noted that “For some witnesses, testimony before the TRC had salutary effects; but for others, the act of personal storytelling exacerbated rather than assuaged their experience of traumatic suffering. Telling reopened wounds and triggered further suffering” (69).

The linking of confession with torture, as Foucault does – calling them “the dark twins” (59) – provides further insight into the desire to keep silent. Bearing witness to her own torturous experience, in confessing what happened to her, would take Lucy back into the torture chamber; silence, for her, is infinitely more desirable.⁴ As Saunders points out, Lurie himself would prefer punishment to testifying, (“I would prefer simply to be put against a wall and shot” (*Disgrace* 66)), than to participating in the hearing, and in so doing “he tacitly contends that the interrogation itself is more punitive than the penalty” (104). In *Like Clockwork*, the choice of speaking about their suffering is largely taken away from the victims, who are not only murdered, but have their throats symbolically sliced post-mortem. Whitney, however, survives her ordeal, and chooses, like Lucy, to keep the details to herself: “They kept asking me,” said Whitney. “They kept asking me what they did to me. They wanted to know the details” (201).

Like Clockwork explores the way in which a story of suffering might spread beyond the victim, and the implications of this. This, too, is gestured to in *Disgrace* as Lucy herself refuses to

⁴ Anker discusses other possible reasons for Lucy’s silence – such as the desire to avoid “fuel[ling] interracial animosity” (Anker 235).

speak, it became “[n]ot her story to spread but theirs: they are its owners” (*Disgrace* 115). Orford is concerned with stories being taken away from their owners, Whitney is distraught by the filming of her abuse:

“Why did they film it? That’s what makes me feel sick. That they did that to me and now it’s there for anyone to watch. It feels as if what happened is happening over and over and over. I can never stop it now because it’s there on their tape” (*Like Clockwork* 203).

This taps into concerns about the commercialisation of the victim narrative. Whitney, along with other victims in the story, have their pain filmed and then distributed for profit or sexual gratification. Clare dismisses the bloodthirsty nature of the media, who “clearly relished the sales spike the murder of a beautiful girl would result in” (*Like Clockwork* 111). Yet, Clare herself releases a book about the abhorrent rape of her sister, profiting from the story. The message here is ambiguous. It seems that the representation of suffering cannot be escaped, and that silence cannot be maintained.

Witnessing is problematic. Tohar’s own violence began as a result of his sister’s witnessing his abuse at the hands of his father; she became his first victim. He reinforces the idea that violence shouldn’t be witnessed by slicing the cornea’s of his victims, even as he commits the violence. But why is the nature of witnessing, and control of one’s own narrative, so significant in the post-TRC era of South African literature? Lucy’s refusal to be “put on trial”, and David’s experience of the hearing are evocative of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The TRC was built on enabling narrative, “explicitly recognis[ing] the healing potential of telling stories” (TRC 112) and “granting them an opportunity to relate their own accounts of the violations of which they are victims” (55). In many cases, however, this desire to narrativize became problematic. Schaffer and Smith’s discussion of narrated lives in this cultural context explicates the issues surrounding “personal storytelling”, commenting that “[A]lthough victims gained some forms of limited agency over their lives and their stories as a result of testifying before the Commission [...] When republicized in the media or in other people’s writing witness stories became commodified trauma narratives” (69). This goes some way to helping us understand the importance for maintaining one’s own narrative in *Disgrace* and *Like Clockwork*. The TRC testimonies led to both “rescuing and usurping the other’s voice” (Dawes 394), and our texts seek to ameliorate this, allowing victims to maintain their silence should they wish to. Orford’s particular worry about trauma narratives being commodified in the media perhaps finds its source in these concerns raised about the TRC.

Most importantly, these texts critique a narrative of closure, and the homogeneity of victim experience. Saunders notes the wisdom of the TRC report for emphasizing that it is only one small step in moving toward understanding, but part of the danger was that the TRC “enacted a closure of sorts” (Smith and Schaffer 71), eliding the individual experiences of victims. Instead, expressing stories like these, of violence and suffering requires “narrative fragmentation, disequilibrium, and inconclusiveness” (Anker 241). It is this counter-narrative to the closed nature of TRC that Coetzee and Orford enact.

The novelists utilise different methods for negotiating the representation of suffering. Coetzee resolutely leaves us outside of the dark chamber, whilst Orford takes us inside. Coetzee “confront[s] the ethical problem of aestheticization ...by representing [suffering] as untranslatable” (Durrant 434), he recognizes that there is no way to represent pain within language,

so instead he leaves us with silence. Orford, on the other hand, attempts to “transform pain into language...to exert control over it, to undo pain’s original theft of our autonomy” (Dawes 408). Even as she does this, she acknowledges that “writing about violence – especially against women – is deeply problematic” (Orford, “Grammar” 227). It is to women which we next turn, the “damaged female body” (Orford, “Grammar” 227), the most immediate site of violence.

“[U]nspent violence was sublimated into a war against women. A war in which there are no rules and no limits” (*Like Clockwork* 22): Violence and the female body

The final, most intimate locus of violence is the female body. In these texts, the abuse of females is rampant, even outside of the primary narrative threads. Before we encounter Lucy’s story, *Disgrace* depicts David’s “not quite” rape of Melanie, and his uncomfortably controlling encounters with Soraya, a prostitute. Alongside Clare Hart’s search for the femicidal rapist in *Like Clockwork*, we catch glimpses of other abused women like Clare’s sister, Constance, who has been brutally attacked years before; and women who have been victims of human trafficking. Firstly, this section will look at the significance of gendered violence in a post-TRC context. It will go on to consider how the (often damaged) female body is depicted in the texts, and discuss whether females can also be agents of redemption amid this horrific and pervasive gendered violence.

In her discussion of women and the TRC in *Cultured Violence*, Rosemary Jolly notes that “the Commission appeared ‘deaf’ to the centrality of women’s narratives, according key importance instead to men’s experiences as ‘frontline’” (83). The Commission initially treated women as auxiliary, as Seroke has pointed out: “the voices of women were not being heard; [...] their real stories were not being told. Women were being cast as secondary victims of apartheid – as the mothers, the wives, the sisters and the aunts of the primary victims who were almost all men” (qtd. in Jolly 83). However, this disregard for (largely) women’s abuses, such as rape, is not a specifically South African problem. As Anker notes “Rape and other forms of violence against women were not widely acknowledged as human rights abuses until the 1980s, and Amnesty International did not issue its first report on rape until 1992” (268).

Our texts foreground the suffering of women, bearing witness to stories which were not (at least initially) foregrounded by the TRC. But these texts go beyond the post-TRC dispensation: *Like Clockwork* was published a decade after the Commission was set up. This speaks to the ongoing nature of this violence. Meg Samuelson notes that the “new Constitution drafted during the transition years is one of the most women-friendly constitutions to be tabled” and yet contemporary South Africa still hosts of the highest rates of violence against women globally (11). Moffett reads in these rates, “an unacknowledged gender civil war” (130), which tallies with Clare Hart’s central thesis in her PhD that “because we averted a civil war in South Africa [...] the ‘unspent violence was sublimated into a war against women. A war in which there are no rules and no limits’” (*Like Clockwork* 21). Whether or not Clare’s thesis is true, clearly violence against women taps into ongoing social anxieties, and the lasting effects of violence is explored in the texts themselves, through the bodies of the victims. Ross notes that sexual violation (in South Africa) is attached to a “general stigma” because it is viewed by the society as “private” (23). An etymological look at ‘stigma’ offers an interesting perspective when it comes to raped and abused bodies. Jolly notes that:

The origin of the word 'stigma' in fact reflects bodily violence. Its range of archaic meanings include predominantly the scar left by a branding iron [...] Its contemporary meanings are telling: a mark of shame or discredit (95).

If rape inheres 'stigma' in its modern sense, in *Like Clockwork* it is also imbued with the significance of the archaic version of the noun. The bodies that we encounter in *Like Clockwork* are indelibly marked by the suffering that they have gone through. In the case of Whitney, she has been literally stigmatised with the branding iron of the definition. Other bodies are marked by mutilation; in the case of Constance, the evidence of her attack is literally inscribed onto her body: "Criss-crossed with scars, her thighs and breasts carried the knife emblems of the gang that had used her to initiate two new members. On her back, illegible now, were brutal signatures where they had carved their initials" (*Like Clockwork* 45). Her maimed body is starkly contrasted with the body of her identical twin, Clare, which was "whole, unblemished". The way in which pain and suffering can permeate the surroundings of a victim, their family and their society is personified in the image of Clare, "under a scalding shower, trying to erase the ghost scars imprinted on her body when the real scars had in fact been carved onto Constance" (*Like Clockwork* 45). The lasting effects of violence on the victim, and on society, is emblematised in these marks of scarification. Whilst the mutilation is fresh in the young victims of the novel, Constance's "lumpy mass of scar tissue" (230) shows that 20 years after the attack, the effects of the violence are still present.

In the case of Lucy, her silence ensures that any physical marks made by the attack are left shrouded for the reader, and her father, who notes that "over the body of the woman silence is drawn like a blanket" (*Disgrace* 110). The novel explores the way in which Lucy's body will be changed through the violence, in the resultant pregnancy (and eventual childbirth). David's concerns about the repercussions for Lucy's body and health are expressed quite soon after the attack when he announces "'There's the risk of pregnancy,' he passes on. 'There's the risk of venereal infection. There's the risk of HIV'" (*Disgrace* 106). Lucy's body is transformed through the pregnancy, her breasts now "heavy, rounded, almost milky" (*Disgrace* 207). More than that, her body has become a metaphor for the nation in transition, if we are to accept Samuelson's claim that "raped women are transformed into mothers, who, through the 'mixed race' issue of rape, procreate the 'rainbow' nation" (122). By examining the bodies of these women, it is clear to see that the trouble is not "finished" after violence is over, as Petrus suggests. Contrarily, David's response to Petrus is particularly pertinent here for the legacy of violence as a whole: "...It is not finished. On the contrary, it is just beginning. It will go on long after I am dead and you are dead" (*Disgrace* 202). In a literal sense, the effects of the violence "will go on" after David's death in the body of his grandchild. Figuratively, Coetzee predicts a bleak, but realistic, future in which violence, and particularly violence against women, "will go on long after [David is] dead" (*Disgrace* 202).

In contrast to the disfigured bodies that are so abundant, in our stories and in real life, Orford raises another issue through the young and beautiful dead bodies that appear throughout *Like Clockwork*. In a recent online article, Charlotte Otter, South African crime writer, decried "the number of corpses in crime novels that are naked, female and sexy." She laments, "I'm so tired of the sexy corpse," branding it "tired, [...] boring, and [...] very, very disrespectful" (qtd. in Malec). *Like Clockwork* portrays a wide-range of female protagonists, who fill the spectrum from crime-fighting Alpha female to vulnerable and abused young woman. But the main narrative

follows victims who are young and beautiful, and could certainly be read as “sexy corpse[s].” The first corpse we encounter is described thus:

She lay spread-eagled on the promenade in full view of anyone who cared to look. Her face was child-like in death, dark hair rippling in the breeze ... Her exposed breasts gestured towards womanhood. One slender arm was lifted straight above her head; the fingers of the left hand were extended, like a supplicant’s (*Like Clockwork* 3).

She is sexualised, “transformed into a bizarre fetish. [Her hand] had been placed coquettishly on her hip [...] Her boots were so high that she would have struggled to walk” (*Like Clockwork* 9). An intertextual reference gestures to the universal nature of the fetish for the beautiful, female corpse: Clare reads the story of Bluebeard to her niece. Choosing a seventeenth-century French folktale intimates the all-encompassing, unhistoricizing, unlocatable nature of gendered and sexualised violence. Orford is broadening her scope, although she acknowledges that violence against women is a particular problem in South Africa, she does not wish to elide the experience of other women globally and historically. Orford herself notes the pervasiveness of the image of “the damaged female body,” citing “Edgar Allen Poe’s formulation that the most poetic subject is the death of a beautiful woman”, which she believes “holds true” (Orford, “Grammar” 227). It seems inescapable, from seventeenth-century France to nineteenth-century America, to contemporary South African culture. In the aftermath of the murder of Reeva Steenkamp, (an example of intimate partner violence, so prevalent in the country), British newspaper *The Sun* ran the story with a full-sized front page image of Steenkamp in a bikini, accompanied inside by further images of the murder victim in lingerie (Lewis). The paper omitted to even mention her name, referring to her instead as the “lover” of Pistorius. It seems that the lure of the beautiful, dead female transcends medium, era and location. Orford’s corpses gesture to this trope, but her women go far beyond that, they are active agents in their own survival.

In both texts the female protagonists are very often victims of extreme, sexual violence and brutalisation. Yet females also act as agents of redemption for themselves and for others. Clare Hart puts her own life in danger to discover who the perpetrator of the serial murders is, and rescue Theresa. Theresa is instrumental in her own survival, she does not cower and await death but keeps Tohar talking, and even manages to incapacitate him in order to give her time to make an escape. Constance and Whitney are victims of violence, scarred and maimed in the process, but they choose to enact their own retributive justice, shooting Kelvin Landman in the novel’s epilogue. Their scarred bodies are not just reminders of the violence that befell them, they also create a community amongst victims. Whereas Clare can never understand her sister’s pain, and is often puzzled by the pattern that Constance draws onto Clare’s back – it is the shape of her own scars – Whitney can share in Constance’s pain through her shared experience:

Whitney took the older woman’s thin shoulders and turned her around. She pulled down Constance’s white shift, exposing the lumpy mass of scar tissue across the width of her back. Whitney wet her finger on her tongue and traced the marks like an artist tracing a pattern she knew by heart (*Like Clockwork* 230).

Lucy achieves no retributive justice - in itself a critique of the inefficacy of the police service - but she instead seeks her own kind of peace: “I am prepared to do anything, make any

sacrifice, for the sake of peace” (*Disgrace* 207). She chooses to respond to her own experiences in her own way, through silence and sacrifice. Jolly, paraphrasing Ross, notes that “women’s silence can be seen as a marker of agency, despite the TRC’s reading of silence as ‘unhealthy’ and/or purely a symptom of oppression;” and it is important to note that “women’s quotidian lives exceeded the constitutive parameters the TRC ‘set’ for them” (Jolly, 83). Our final image of Lucy is a peaceful one, the pastoral serenity of the farm as “refuge” has been restored:

There is a moment of utter stillness which he would wish prolonged for ever: the gentle sun, the stillness of mid-afternoon, bees busy in a field of flowers; and at the centre of the picture a young woman, *das ewig Weibliche*, lightly pregnant, in a straw sunhat (*Disgrace* 218).

The marks on the female body echo the changes that are taking place inside. Following violence, the victim is maimed somatically and psychologically. As the scars begin to heal and fade, this might track the process of internal healing of the victim, one hopes. But just as the scars will remain for life, the victim will be marked by the violence that they suffered, their body and their selves forever changed. David considers this about Lucy, as he cannot track the physical healing of her body without visible, outward scars: “Presumably Lucy is healing too, or if not healing then forgetting, growing scar tissue around the memory of that day” (*Disgrace* 141). In the novels, the lasting presence of scars, and the child born of the violence, mimics the lasting effect that violence has on the victims themselves, but also that violence has on society as a whole.

Conclusion

In their temporal proximity to the TRC, *Disgrace* and *Like Clockwork* speak to some of the tensions that arose from its perceived inadequacies. The sites of violence discussed above are clearly informed by these tensions. The “torture room” makes us question whether giving testimony to horrific acts of violence, as was promoted through the Commission, is really an effective way of bearing witness to trauma. Finally, the violence waged directly against the female body reminds us that violence against women was not initially foregrounded by the TRC, and that this violence remains with victims forever through the lasting marks it leaves.

However, the TRC, whilst immediately prior to Coetzee’s novel, is somewhat further in the past for Orford and the issues still remain. Ettinger in *Disgrace* advocates protecting oneself with a weapon as “the police are not going to save you, not any more, you can be sure” (100). A similar despondency is felt in *Like Clockwork* when Florrie Ruiters remarks of the criminals: “‘It makes no difference [...] If they get convicted they just run things from inside [...] And heaven help you when they get released’” (200). The reality is that violence has not decreased in the years since the TRC, and the rape and murder of women is as prevalent as ever.

Our texts cannot change the social realities of violence, but what they do offer is strategies for managing it, at least in literature. *Disgrace* promotes agency through Lucy’s character. In the areas of violence discussed above, she chooses to remain author of her own narrative. She chooses to remain silent, keeping her testimony to herself; and she decides what to do with her own body after the attack, deciding to keep the baby even when David begs her not to. In *Like Clockwork*, Orford makes use of the generic conventions of crime fiction to provide a resolution and retributive justice for the characters. She takes, as Warnes notes, “the threat and uncertainty that many feel to be part of South African life,” and enacts “fantasies of control, restoration and maintenance” (986).

The victim-survivors of these narratives negotiate the social realities of gendered violence in contemporary South Africa and give at least a glimmer of hope in an enduringly dangerous climate.

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