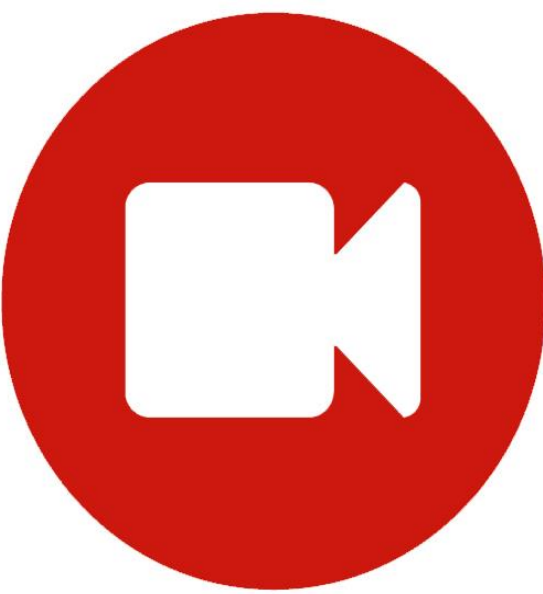


The Body in Pain*: South African Literature Today

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First watch my clip:
*10 Things You
Need to Know
about South African
Literature*

Purpose

My thesis tackles social issues in South Africa head-on in response to the erroneous assumption that literature is superfluous, elite, and detached from the challenges faced by developing countries. The thesis concludes that sustained critical engagement with representations of the body in pain is vital to the project of national reconciliation.

Summary

More than two decades after the fall of apartheid, South Africa remains a land of contrasts. According to 2012’s “Reconciliation Barometer”, almost half of South Africans seldom communicate with individuals from racial groups other than their own. Enduring prejudice across race, class and gender divides complicates the process of reconciling groups that were segregated under apartheid law – and is therefore a critical matter.

In this literary study, “the body in pain” is less the question than it is the answer – the answer to the crucial conundrum: Why do racism and other forms of discrimination persist when South Africans “know better” than to think in black-and-white terms?

Based on South African literature published after 2000, I argue that it is a heightened sense of vulnerability that fuels discriminatory practices after apartheid. South Africans are highly aware of the “wound-ability” of their bodies and well-known statistics (see top right) produce a challenging climate of fear and suspicion.

Because language is central to discrimination, many authors have explored how the “zebra-striped mind” continues to shape social relations in the country. Five chapters – “Sex”, “Skin”, “Blood”, “Taste” and “Tongue” – analyse literary representations of bodies in pain. The additional significance of the primary texts lies in introducing new conceptual strategies by which vulnerability might instil, not fear, but a sense of community instead.

“I know what it feels like to hear your own fear beating in your ear, to bite the insides of your mouth, to bite your nails till your fingertips are raw and sensitive to everything you touch. The streets are roads to hell.
There are things watching us when we sleep.”
– Homeless boy, *Thirteen Cents*, K. Sello Duiker



Chapter	Sex	Skin	Blood	Taste	Tongue
Problem	Sexual violence	Racism	HIV/AIDS	Social inequality and exclusion	Afrikaner complicity in apartheid
Primary text	<i>Like Clockwork</i>	<i>Playing in the Light</i>	<i>Three Letter Plague</i>	<i>Moxyland</i>	<i>A Change of Tongue</i>
Author	Margie Orford	Zoë Wicomb	Jonny Steinberg	Lauren Beukes	Antjie Krog
Genre	Crime fiction	Novel	Narrative non-fiction	Cyberpunk	Creative non-fiction
Text’s concern	Rape and gender	Racial identity and post-apartheid belonging	Men’s refusal of HIV testing and treatment	Consumerism in a neoliberal age	Reconciliation
Essentialised difference	Male perpetrator vs. female victim	Black vs. white	HIV-neg. (“clean”) vs. HIV-pos. (“dirty blood”)	Rich vs. poor	Afrikaner vs. African
Text’s answer	Counter-derivatisation	The gentle touch	Narrative inquiry	Aesthetics of cool	Vocabulary of grace
What does this mean?	Dehumanisation of rapist to vindicate victim (problematic)	Touch (proximity and acceptance) overrules sight (distance and difference)	Culture and metaphor: understand the myth, understand the man	Subcultures: new forms of social belonging	Cross-cultural translation: listening to one another
Key influences	– <i>The Body in Pain</i> (Scarry) – “The Grammar of Violence” (Orford)	– <i>Black Skin, White Masks</i> (Fanon) – <i>The Book of Skin</i> (Connor)	– <i>AIDS and Its Metaphors</i> (Sontag) – <i>Purity and Danger</i> (Douglas)	– <i>Distinction</i> (Bourdieu) – <i>New Urban Tribes of SA</i> (Chang)	– <i>Conditional Tense</i> (Krog) – <i>Language Shock</i> (Agar)

Social Context: At least 1 in 6 is HIV-positive; 1 in 4, unemployed; 50 people are murdered each day; and every 26 seconds a woman is raped.

Type of Study

Methodology: Literary Analysis

Theoretical Approaches: Postcolonial Theory, Phenomenology, Post-structuralism, Feminism

Interdisciplinary: This thesis goes well beyond Literary Studies and includes research in the fields of Medical Science, Criminology, Politics, Sociology, Philosophy, Translation Studies, Media Studies, Women’s Studies and Subcultural Studies.

Future Directions: Xenophobia, disability, drug abuse, poverty

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