

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

The African e-Journals Project has digitized full text of articles of eleven social science and humanities journals. This item is from the digital archive maintained by Michigan State University Library. Find more at:

<http://digital.lib.msu.edu/projects/africanjournals/>

Available through a partnership with



Scroll down to read the article.

Article

Truth, Telling, Questioning: the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull*, and literature after apartheid¹

Mark Sanders

Now listen very carefully,
because I'm telling you the story now
– Testimony of Lekotse, the shepherd.²

What bearing does the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and its report, have upon literature after apartheid: not only in a restricted sense, in terms of the production of literary and quasi-literary works,³ but also, in a broader sense, in terms of a *thinking* of literature, and of the literary? Does a reflection on the literary help us to understand the activities of the Commission? Does the response of literature to the Commission's work, and its engagement with literature, help to elucidate such questions? The Truth Commission's report, made public on October 29, 1998, includes only one thematic discussion of literature, which is found in the analysis of the concept of truth in its first volume. A tentative dialogue between the Commission and Antjie Krog, hinted at in the course of that analysis, outlines possible answers to my questions. Among the first to add her voice to the debate on the setting up of a truth commission, Krog reported on its work for South African Broadcasting Corporation radio.⁴ *Country of My Skull*, the first book written in English by Krog, an acclaimed poet in Afrikaans,⁵ is her account of that assignment. A hybrid work, written at the edges of reportage, memoir, and metafiction, it can be read to supplement the account of truth in the Commission's report. It does this by remarking and reflecting upon how, in the testimony of witnesses at the public hearings, truths are interlaced with acts of telling and questioning, which are, in turn, implicated in intricate dynamics which come into play between questioner and teller. *Country of My Skull* mimes such elements by

relating its author's own attempts find an interlocutor, an addressee, an other for whom her own story will cohere. Written from a position of acknowledged and troubling historical complicity – its dedication reads, 'for every victim who had an Afrikaner surname on her lips' – Krog's book does not claim any facile identification with victims who testify. But by discreetly miming exchanges before the Commission, *Country of My Skull* measures the bearing of the Commission on literature after apartheid by setting to work, in its own textual conduct, the basic structures which emerge between questioner and witness. Its hospitality to the words of witnesses makes apparent how literature is able to negotiate a bifurcation in public memory between the Commission's report and hearings. If, as Krog suggests, the question of literature after apartheid is a question of advocacy, of its dynamics and its ethics, the Commission shares a set of concerns and conditions of possibility with literary works. *Country of My Skull* demonstrates the extent to which the literary abides upon the same basic structures as the hearings, and thus how, in the final analysis, the report, as it writes what it terms 'the South African story', shares such structures, as conditions of possibility, not just with the hearings, but also with literature.

Truth

The Commission's report distinguishes between 'four notions of truth: factual or forensic truth; personal or narrative truth; social or "dialogue" truth and healing and restorative truth' (Truth 1998, vol 1:110). The first two notions of truth pertain most to individual testimonies, and their handling by the Commission. As one would expect from a body of its kind, a prominence, and even privilege, is accorded to 'factual or forensic truth': 'The familiar legal or scientific notion of bringing to light factual, corroborated evidence, of obtaining accurate information through reliable (impartial, objective) procedures, featured prominently in the Commission's findings process' (1998:111). In accordance with the Act which brought it into being, the Commission both made findings on an individual level – 'adopt[ing] an extensive verification and corroboration policy' – and sought to 'report on the broader patterns underlying gross human rights violations and to explore the causes of such violations'. In order to find global patterns, the Commission adopted what it describes as a 'social scientist's approach'. This implied that, before any individual testimony to human rights violation deposited with the Commission could contribute to its findings, it would have to be verified and corroborated by its investigators, and framed in a socio-historical context established by its research department (see 1998:152).⁶ The report's more than 2500 pages do the latter extremely well; the

reader does get a sense of broader patterns of abuse, and how various 'window cases' allow one to survey these patterns with a greater locality and specificity. Although the Commission insists that its task was not 'to write the history of th[e] country' (1998, vol 5:257), the cumulative effect is of a thorough historical reckoning. This historiographic mode is interrupted briefly in the final chapter, headed 'Reconciliation' (1998, vol 5:350-435), which compiles extracts from some of the most striking testimonies. For the bulk of the report, however, extracts from testimony are illustrative, first-person attestations to the veracity of the historical narrative, written in the third person, which encloses them. In contrast to the Commission's public hearings, its report leaves a relatively limited domain of utterance to the witnesses.

The second notion of truth outlined in the report explains what weight the Commission gave to individual testimonies, capturing the uniqueness of its mandate and mode of operation. Here is where the report – and the work of the Commission – bear most on literature. Acknowledging a form of truth it calls 'personal and narrative truth' makes the Commission a kind of listening- and recording-machine. As Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Chairperson of the Commission, said at one of the early hearings, '[t]his Commission is said to listen to everyone ... everyone should be given a chance to say his or her truth as he or she sees it' (1998, vol 1:112). This reciprocal listening and saying fulfilled the Commission's legislated mandate to 'restore the human and civil dignity of the victims by granting them an opportunity to relate their own accounts of the violations to which they are the victims' (1998, vol 1:112n).

How does the duty to give victims the chance to relate their own accounts carry out the Commission's primary mandate of establishing a verified and corroborated picture of human rights violations? Given the impossibility of verifying (or of falsifying) all testimony collected, is the project of verification discrete, even disjunct, from the task of listening? On the one hand, as the report tells us, individual witnesses 'helped to uncover existing facts about past abuses'. On the other hand, they are said to have 'assisted in the creation of a "narrative truth"'. This particular kind of 'truth' is never quite defined – however unfamiliar it might be to a reader compared, say, to 'factual truth'. Although prepared to listen and record, the Commission appears to draw back from assenting, without reservation, to the veracity of the testimony of individual witnesses. Human and civil dignity will be restored to the teller through story-telling, but, as the report implies, what is important is not so much *what* is told (which has to be verified, and is thus suspect), but rather *that* telling occurs. 'The Commission sought', says the report, 'to capture the

widest possible *record of people's* perceptions, stories, myths and experiences' (my emphasis). With the phrase 'record of', a metalanguage withholds verification; making a record of 'perceptions, stories, myths and experiences', but not committing itself to lending credence to what was perceived, told, handed down as myth, and experienced. Although forensic convention makes it possible for a story to coincide with or depart from verifiable facts, and thus conveys the impression that stories are verifiable or falsifiable in the same way that statements are, strictly speaking, 'narrative truth', the notion of truth the report attaches to story-telling, is truth in a sense not opposed to falsehood. It is something other. The report at once welcomes this other, and distances itself from it, by treating it as if it were something one could oppose to falsehood; or, worse, by treating it provisionally, in effect, as falsehood. It is in this context that the report refers to literature – or, more precisely, in a way which appears to open to the literary in a sense not restricted to books, to orature:

By telling their stories, both victims and perpetrators gave meaning to the multi-layered experiences of the South African story. These personal truths were communicated to the broader public by the media. In the (South) African context, where value continues to be attached to oral tradition, the process of story telling was particularly important. Indeed, this aspect is a distinctive and unique feature of the legislation governing the Commission, setting it apart from the mandates of truth commissions elsewhere. The Act explicitly recognised the healing potential of telling stories. The stories told to the Commission were not presented as arguments or claims in a court of law. Rather, they provided unique insights into the pain of South Africa's past, often touching the hearts of all that heard them. (1998, vol 1:112)

Although this passage begins by referring to 'both victims and perpetrators', the subsection of the Act cited in a footnote refers only to *victims* and their dignity, providing for a 'restoring [of] the human and civil dignity of such victims by granting them an opportunity to relate their own accounts of the violations of which they are the victims' (South Africa 1995, subsec 3[1][c]). What is said about 'personal or narrative truth' is tacitly and fundamentally informed by a necessarily asymmetrical openness, in its weaving of what it enigmatically calls 'the South African story' (which somehow differs from a history), to stories not of perpetrators but of victims. Nevertheless, although it declares itself hospitable to story-telling, it proves more at ease with statements that can be forensically verified or falsified.

This ambiguity can be viewed in terms of a larger picture, as South Africa cautiously joins, or rejoins, the continent of Africa. Most victims testifying are black Africans; listening to them will restore something that has been lost, or

been taken away: human dignity, or ubuntu, which, as the report informs us, is a word which often appears in phrases lamenting its loss (1998, vol 1:127). The Truth Commission wishes to make available a space of telling for the stories of Africans, yet constantly risks dispossessing witnesses of it.⁷ This equivocal logic plays out in the report's single discussion of literature, which occurs, paradoxically, in the pivotal section on 'truth'. It is here that the 'South' in South Africa is put in parentheses, joined and disjoined to Africa: 'In the (South) African context, where value continues to be attached to oral tradition, the process of story telling was particularly important'. Like the notion of 'personal and narrative truth', this reference to an 'oral tradition' which is African, or (South) African, and the 'importan[ce]' of story-telling, is never explained – except in a way that suggests, again, that the report wishes to subordinate stories and literature to discourses of forensic truth, as 'the validation of the individual subjective experiences of people who had previously been silenced or voiceless'. This characterisation of the act of story-telling as 'subjective' implicitly sets it in opposition to 'factual ... evidence', which the Commission will bring to light with the aid of 'reliable (impartial, objective) procedures' (1998, vol 1:111), even though a given act of story-telling is not, in itself, either true or false. The Commission never attaches itself as agent, as the subject of utterance – not even 'subjectively' – to the ethnographic datum that 'value continues to be attached to oral tradition'.

Why accept at face value the report's ill-thought-out and ambiguous gesture, by way of an unexplained allusion to 'oral tradition', at the resources of South African cultural formations? Are there ways of thinking beyond it? To begin to address more fully what is at work here, we will have to attend to the ways in which the Commission's hearings for victims were structured, and to how, as occasions for hospitality, they open to a thinking of the literary that holds literature and orature aside from any opposition of truth and falsehood. As kinds of telling, they are equivalent neither to truth nor to falsehood, nor yet opposed to either. By putting them under the heading of 'narrative truth', the report runs the risk of exposing literature and orature to procedures of verification and falsification that have a limited bearing on what it is to tell a story and, as we shall see, to ask a question, which, for the presiding Commissioner, as for anyone else, is to call forth, and even propose a shape to, a story.

In order to explore what it means for a witness to tell a story before the Commission, and what the implications could be for literature, we will attend to the *mise-en-scène* of the hearings, and to the complex interactions of

questioner and witness. If public acknowledgment of pain, and the achievement of 'therapy' or 'catharsis' for the teller (1998, vol 1:146; cf vol 5:5ff), are compelling goals, as explanations they remain only partial (not to mention, wishful) accounts of what has happened at the hearings.⁸ The exchanges between questioner and witness set in motion a highly mediated dynamics and technics of advocacy, translation, identification, and, in a sense not restricted to psychoanalysis,⁹ of transference – as the questioner figures as, *and in place of*, the one who violated the victim's rights, with the Commission taking upon itself of 'responsibility', on behalf of perpetrators, for the misdeeds of the past (cf 1998, vol 5:170-1).¹⁰ Although it raises matters of advocacy (1998, vol 1:140 and *passim*) and translation (1998, vol 1:146-7, 298-9; vol 5:2-8, 111), the report never draws sustained attention to the actual exchanges at the hearings between witness and questioner. Attention to these exchanges is paramount, however, for the resultant 'story' – of the witness, which is to become part of 'the South African story' – is wrought through such interactions; by, for instance: the relationship of the two parties, the kinds of question asked, the language(s) spoken, the fact of translation and transcription. These elements of testimonial collaboration enable us to discern the historical and discursive conditions of possibility shared by fictional literature and testimony – a relationship recently elaborated by Jacques Derrida with the idea that 'testimony has always been hand in glove with (*a toujours partie liée avec*) the possibility at least of fiction, of perjury and lie' (1998:28). This possibility of fiction Derrida (1998) links to the technological, and to the necessary iterability, if it is to be intelligible, of testimony:

That which I say for the first time, if it is a testimony, is already a repetition, at least a repeatability; it is already an iterability, more than once at once, more than an instant within an instant, at the same time.... As soon as the phrase is repeatable, that is to say right from its origin, at the instant it is pronounced and becomes intelligible, and thus idealizable, it is already instrumentalizable and affected by technology. And by virtuality.... And here insinuates itself perhaps, with the technological, at once as ideality and as prosthetic iterability, the possibility of fiction *and* of lie, of simulacrum *and* of literature, of the right to literature, at the origin itself of truthful testimony, of bona fide autobiography, of sincere confession, as their essential co-possibility (*compossibilité*). (1998:48-49)

To the ability to be repeated – which permits testimony to be reinscribed away from its origin, as in the Truth Commission's report; or to be translated with the aid of its simultaneous translation apparatus – is a function of an originary self-division. The Commission's hearings encourage us to relate this ability to

be repeated to the pragmatics of telling and questioning, and to a structure of address involving, as its possibility, at least two parties. A basic structure of alterity, such duality and partition is also a condition of iterability, and thus of the possibility of difference (see Derrida 1982). And of fiction. By following the testimony at the hearings, Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull* reveals a scene of telling and, more particularly, questioning, which relates to a 'counterfactual' truth not reducible to truth opposed to falsehood. When, as Derrida outlines in another recent text (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 1997), the scene of questioning is also a scene of hospitality, this resonates with what we find in Krog, and invites a conversation between the two writers.

Telling

Antjie Krog accompanies the Truth Commission on its peripatetic journey about the countryside, where it is hosted, on its way, with varying degrees of hospitality by local inhabitants: 'enquiries are made beforehand to see whether the Commission would be welcome. Whether people of all races would be welcome' (Krog 1998:207). Antjie Krog is away from home, from her husband and children, and relies on hotel and guest-house accommodation. She soon becomes a stranger in her own house and home: 'I walk into my home one evening. My family.... seem like a happy, close-knit group.... Everything has become unconnected and unfamiliar. I realize that I don't know where the light switch is.... I enter my house like a stranger' (Krog 1998:47-49). This turning of the authorial self out of its house, at home and away from home, is integral to *Country of My Skull*; it performs, spatially, the reversal that makes the country the 'country' of Krog's skull (cf Krog 1998:130,210). It helps her story to mime, almost in silence, without in any way claiming an identity with apartheid's victims, what takes place at the hearings, when witnesses testify to police or soldiers invading their houses, and to being forced from their homes. This doubling of spatial displacement is part of the phenomenon whereby Truth Commissioners, statement-takers, briefers, translators, data-processors, as well as journalists covering the Commission, begin to exhibit behavior copying that of victims.¹¹ "You will experience the same symptoms as the victims", a counselor sent by the Commission tells the journalists, "You will find yourself powerless – without help, without words". Wordlessness and eviction join as Krog's book mimes and allegorizes the testimony of witnesses. This leaves the 'domain' of utterance to their 'faltering word[s]' (Krog 1998:237), and allows a witness's words to haunt one as a writer even when he or she is not speaking, or represented as speaking. Dramatising the scene of being host to the words of the other, it outlines how the Commission and its

work can be taken up in literature after apartheid. The traits of wordlessness and self-disappropriation connect as much to poetry as to the public hearings of the Commission.

About half way into *Country of My Skull*, there is a brief and cryptic reference to a note left with the key to the author's room in the Nelspruit Hotel, and subsequently to an interlocutor who appears to become her lover (Krog 1998:141-3); or, better, to take up the place of a 'Beloved', whom she addresses in an apostrophe earlier in the book (Krog 1998:27). If we recall JM Coetzee's idea that writing is in a sense possible only when one is free to address the figure of the beloved without having to negotiate the figure of the censor (1996:38), this would indicate her interlocutor as someone who, like the leader of witness's testimony, makes it possible for her to speak or to write. The note waiting with her key contains, is, an excerpt from a poem by Osip Mandelstam: 'This life is terrifying.../One could whistle through life like a starling,/or eat it like your nut cake./But both of us know it's impossible' (Krog 1998:142). Things begin with a letter, and with a lyric poem, which share the basic structure of an implied 'I' addressing a 'you'. Each party depends on this address, but the entire scene of address is haunted by the shadow of impossibility: 'both of us know it's impossible'.

According to the linguist Émile Benveniste (1971), the first- and second-person pronouns:

I and you ... do not constitute a class of reference since there is no 'object' definable as I to which these instances can refer in identical fashion.... What then is the 'reality' to which I or you refers? It is solely a 'reality of discourse', and this is a very strange thing. I cannot be defined except in terms of 'locution', not in terms of objects as a nominal sign is. I signifies 'the person who is uttering the present instance of the discourse containing I'. (218; translation modified)

'I' and 'you' refer, then, to nothing beyond the speaker and addressee, individually or jointly, at the instant of utterance. This basic structure of address is in place in language -- and has to be in order to speak or write -- before it is a matter of truth or falsehood, fact or fiction. The pronouns 'I', and 'you', as 'referents' a "reality of discourse", are interdependent positions in language which can be taken up by any speaker or writer, and his or her addressee: 'I use I only when I am speaking to someone who will be a you in my address. It is this condition of dialogue that is constitutive of person, for it implies that reciprocally I becomes you in the address of the one who in turn designates himself as I' (Benveniste 1971:224-5). This 'polarity of persons [which is] the fundamental condition of language' (1971:225) can be read in

Derridean terms, as an instance the necessary self-division and iterability, at its origin, of any utterance. Lyric poems, with their exchange of 'I' and 'you' – one thinks of the poetry of Sylvia Plath, for instance, and of Krog's own poems – are an exemplary case of how literary and quasi-literary works enable a process of identification and reciprocity, but often dramatize the difficulty, in spite of technics, the disruption, or impossibility of discursive reciprocity, exchange and response: 'your ear with the mole is my only telephone' (*jou moesie-oor is my enigste telefoon*); 'i am so sorry mama/ that i am not/ what i would dearly want to be for you' (*ek is so jammer mamma/ dat ek nie is/ wat ek graag vir jou wil wees nie*) (Krog 1973).¹² The impossibility of dialogue may be figured in terms of translation. A poet in Afrikaans, who cannot always find words in English (cf Krog 1998:167), Krog meets with an analogous problem when the hotel interlocutor, with whom she wants to discuss the day's Truth Commission hearing, does not understand Afrikaans: "Maybe you don't understand the Afrikaans, but he sounded really pious..." / "Yes," he replies, "I picked it up in the translations" (Krog 1998:142).

Explicitly linking the lover, or figure of the beloved, to storytelling, and to how telling relates to truth, *Country of My Skull* draws attention to the act of telling, and reveals how it itself has been constructed. As it does several times throughout the work with reference to testimony and to radio soundbites (Krog 1998:82-9, 131), exposing fictionality at the heart of the book, a 'postmodern' metanarrativity is at work, as Patrick, a colleague, comments on events that have been narrated in the book in which he now appears as a character and is attributed speech:

'Hey, Antjie, but this is not quite what happened at the workshop,' says Patrick.

'Yes, I know ... I'm not reporting or keeping minutes. I'm telling.... I cut and paste the upper layer, in order to get the second layer told, which is actually the story I want to tell...'

'But then you're not busy with the truth!'

'I am busy with the truth ... my truth.... Seen from my perspective, shaped by my state of mind at the time and now also by the audience I'm telling the story to.' (Krog 1998:170-1)

Patrick then asks: "And the affair you describe in here. Is that true?" Her reply links the character of the lover to story-telling:

'No, but I had to bring a relationship into the story so that I could verbalize certain personal reactions to the hearings. I had to create a new character who could not only bring in new information but also express the psychological underpinnings of the Commission.' (Krog 1998:171)¹³

Krog invents a character or characters which allow her to disclose a self that reacts affectively to the hearings, and acts that reaction out. What are the 'personal reactions' to which Krog refers? And what 'psychological underpinnings of the Commission' does she have in mind? At the workshop to which Patrick refers, a psychologist introduces the notion of 'two parallel tracks ... the Truth Commission track and ... your personal relationship track'. According to him:

'Instinctively, you do not want the Truth Commission one to "contaminate" the personal one – you want your friends, your family, your beloved to stay pure, to be protected from what you are experiencing. You find it impossible to convey the totality of the impact to anyone. Most people become totally withdrawn from their families. But to stay sane, you create on this Truth Commission track a substitute for your personal life. You recreate your personal relationships in the Commission – you find a father, a mother, a sister, a beloved, a son. Which is fine in itself, so long as you remember that the one track is coming to an end in eight months' time'. (Krog 1998:170)

Krog takes up, as a structuring device, and as an account for how *Country of My Skull* is written, this idea of defensive splitting of the self, and of the other in the self. The character who assumes the place of the 'beloved' functions not only to convey information, but as a 'substitute' for the one who usually occupies that place: her husband (an architect, incidentally), the one who remains in the house with the children, the one who is not displaced from it. *Country of My Skull* allows us to read the word 'recreate' in terms of a recreation both in actuality and in the realm of writing. The book relates both types of re-creative work – '[w]e are becoming a family' (Krog 1998:47) – but in this context makes it impossible for us to decide between them. Given that the lover is a substitute – either actual or virtual – what is his ultimate function? What can be conveyed when he is in attendance which might "contaminate" the 'personal track'? Krog responds to the psychologist with a question: "Where does violence fit into all of this?" I ask, tasting blood on my lip'. What prompts this question? In another passage, there occurs a scene of physical violence involving Krog and her lover: 'It is only when he cries out that I realize I've sunk my teeth deep into his left shoulder' (Krog 1998:165).

What does it mean, in the dialogue between Krog and the Truth Commission, for someone to invent a character – for her, a figure of the beloved – in order to be able to articulate something that cannot otherwise be articulated? She has no 'framework in which to address' her husband, the one who usually, if indeed conflictually, occupies the place of the beloved. When, in another semi-

metafictional passage in which a character inside the book appears to be reading it, she tries to explain to her husband how '[w]e make sense of things by fitting them into stories', he tells her to '[s]top talking crap' (Krog 1998: 196-7). The process of inventing a proxy figure is precisely what happens when affect – positive and negative – is expressed before, and in a relation of 'transference' with, the Commission. This is essential not only to the process of establishing conditions under which people can relate their stories, but also to its task, little averred to in its report, of assuming responsibility, in the person of the presiding questioner, on behalf of the perpetrator. Its advocacy engages a transference which releases a ripple effect in which statement-taker, questioner and translator all absorb, as proxies for the perpetrator, the violence of the victim's anger, anguish or grief. If those close to the Commission have to find ways to 'recreate [their] personal relationships' in order to protect those relationships from violence, such creation shares its basic structure with what the witness acts out. The Commission tries to make it possible for the victim to express what otherwise is not, and cannot be, expressed: not only a story, but, as a current in that story, affect directed at the perpetrator, who may be absent or unknown; or inaccessible, because of amnesty, to impulses such as revenge.¹⁴ This is some of what *Country of My Skull* mimes when it invokes the proxy figure of the beloved.

I would thus propose reading these references to a 'relationship' as an 'allegory' for the hearings, and what is enacted there between questioner and witness. *Country of My Skull* reproduces and analyses several testimonies, the most striking being that of Johannes Lekotse, a shepherd from Ladybrand in the Free State, Krog's home province (Krog 1998:210ff). The exchange between him and his questioner adds to what Krog has already shown – namely, that testimony depends on an address to an other; to the figure of a beloved, for whom one's story will cohere; to a proxy for the perpetrator, who will absorb violence in his or her place (Krog 1998:216-7). This 'other' in the structure of address is what, in a more general way, Krog refers to as her 'audience'. With her remarks on truth and telling, made to Patrick in a virtual and metafictional zone, Krog dramatises how the I-you dyad, played out theatrically at the hearings in a quest for truth, is also the iterable structure of address presupposed by fictionality. Even if it is strictly prior to any division between fact and fiction, this fictionality, the invention of an 'affair', assumes an affective and effective truth. If this did not happen, there would be no basis, in the practice of psychoanalysis, for transference, and there would be no point in the Commission hearing the direct testimony of victims to human rights

violations. The 'affair' or 'relationship' dramatizes the tenuousness of all 'verbaliz[ation]', and the need for an interlocutor, a 'you' who occupy the place of the beloved (here the lover and not the husband), before whom 'I' can speak, and before whom 'I' can speak my affect. Adding another dimension, the exchange at the Ladybrand hearing between Lekotse and his questioner, Ilan Lax, transports telling, and recognition of the teller's affective truth (with its dynamics of advocacy, identification and transference) into the realm of *questioning*. Here the 'telling' comes from the side of the agent of truth, whose questions, probing for the truth, enter a vein of counterfactuality as they call forth a story.

Questioning

Unable to reproduce Lekotse's remarkable testimony, or all of Krog's provocative analysis of it, I will concentrate on the significance she gives to his questions – or 'counter-questions' – to his questioner. Lekotse is able, as Krog (1998:218) observes, to 'imaginatively transplant ... himself into several other positions'. These positions include those of the police, and of Lax as representative of the Truth Commission. Lekotse testifies that police broke into his house and ransacked it, injuring him when they forced him outside while they did so. His testimony carries with it a dimension of transference, specifically 'negative' transference. When Lekotse speaks, Lax assumes, in relation to him, the position once occupied by the police. As Krog observes, he asks Lax questions, just as he had the police. And then, curiously, he calls upon APLA, the armed wing of the Pan Africanist Congress, the resistance movement to which his son belongs, to replace the door to his house that the police destroyed (Krog 1998:214). This fluidity of positions and temporalities, essential to the working of the Commission if it is to assume responsibility for the past misdeeds of others who are not prepared to do so, is underplayed in the report but is tangible in the verbatim transcripts from the public hearings. At those hearings, witness and questioner interact in a way only partially scripted by the questioner's formula of getting the witness to say something about him or herself and his or her family before proceeding to a gathering of facts of human rights violation (Krog 1998:217). Lekotse does not wait to be welcomed. Turning the tables on the questioner, he begins to ask Lax questions. In so doing, he opens the possibility of turning the Commission and its assumptions in another, unanticipated, direction.

As the Commission's representative, Lax performs his part in a larger drama of advocacy. One dimension of this advocacy – to let formerly silenced voices be heard – involves making it possible for witnesses to testify in the language

of their choice. At the hearings, an apparatus of simultaneous translation makes feasible what is, in a local and a historical sense, an enactment of hospitality; an enactment of hospitality towards strangers, towards those who have been strangers in their own country, and strangers to each other. 'Our kindness has been misused and our hospitality turned against us', Steve Biko (1986:86) once wrote, 'Whereas whites were *mere guests* to us on their arrival in this country they have now pushed us out to a 13% corner of the land and are acting as *bad hosts* in the rest of the country. This we must *put right*' (my emphasis). If it is an exercise in better hospitality, the Commission can, in a sense, be read as the beginning of an attempt (as an adjunct to the Land Commission, which will restitute land) to put things right. This it does, as I have observed, by occupying the place of the perpetrator, and by compensating for his 'misuse' of kindness and perversion of hospitality. If things work as they ought, in a transference that 'returns' the victim to the time of the abuse, the bad host will improve as his proxy behaves differently, making up for his omissions. This displacement may be one reason why black Truth Commissioners and leaders of testimony are, curiously, sometimes given the explanation by witnesses that '[a]s we are Black people, there are certain traditional things that have to be made for that person', in cases where the person in question is deceased or one who has disappeared.¹⁵ It may, as Krog's book suggests, be for this drama of hospitality, and not merely for 'story telling' in the narrow sense, that the Commission uses the unexplained shorthand 'oral tradition'. In that case, '[w]e welcome you here today', the customary word to victim witnesses, would be more than simply a formulaic word of greeting.

Opening a recent seminar, on the 'Question of the Stranger', Jacques Derrida makes some observations about hospitality, the question, and the stranger:

before being a question to be treated, before designating a concept, a theme, a problem, a program, the question of the stranger is a question *of* the stranger, a question coming *from* the stranger, and a question to the stranger, addressed *to* the stranger. As if the stranger was in the first place *the one who* posed the first question or *the one to whom* one addressed the first question.... But also the one who, posing the first question, puts me in question. (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 1997:11)

As Derrida observes, 'in several of Plato's dialogues it is the Stranger (*xenos*) who questions.... [s]ometimes the stranger is Socrates himself, Socrates the man who disrupts with the question and with irony (that is to say, with the question, which is another meaning of the word "irony"), the man of the maieutic question. Socrates himself has the traits of the stranger, he represents,

he figures the stranger, he *plays* the stranger that he is not' (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 1997:11-9). Accordingly, in Plato's 'Apology', Socrates claims to be a "stranger" to the discourse of the tribunal ... he does not know th[e] language of the court, th[e] rhetoric of right, of accusation, of defense and of appeal; he does not have the technique, he is *like* a stranger' (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 1997:19-21). Questions are at the foundation of Socratic irony (*eir neia*); the questioner is an *eir n*, one who disassembles ignorance – specifically, the remediable ignorance of the stranger.

Lekotse himself can be read as dissembling ignorance. Whether this is 'deliberate' or not is unimportant; the *mise-en-scène* of the hearing positions him in this way. He refers to himself, reporting what Whites called him, as 'a kaffer and a dull donkey' (Krog 1998:219). Lax asks him whether it was not his ribs, rather than his shoulder, which he says the police injured; and why he did not report the policemen who assaulted him. His 'counter-questions' (Krog 1998:219), which bring the audience to laughter, are the questions of a 'stranger' who asks that his 'ignorance' – of Lax's and the Commission's ignorance; of a world in which police hold police accountable – be remedied: 'Are you not aware that/ the shoulder is related/ to the ribs, sir?' And then: 'How can you report policemen to policemen?' (Krog 1998:219).

Derrida's account of hospitality and the question resonates with Krog's interpretation of Lekotse's questions. 'This kind of questioning', she writes, 'is the foundation of all philosophy'. When Lekotse's questions to the police are not answered, 'his ability to understand the world around him is taken away' (Krog 1998:218). The implications for hospitality become clearer when Krog cites 'some remarks on the African narrative made by the Zulu poet Mazisi Kunene', who explains how 'When the first white men came ... the elders went to those men and said: "tell us about your world"' (Krog 1998:219). If the exchange between Lekotse and Lax is a *repetition* of that between Lekotse and the police, both exchanges can be read as acting out a much older script of invasion, and the negotiation of hospitality between parties who are, at 'first', strangers to each other. Irony in the Socratic mode is already a re-playing of this exemplary scene of management of violence. It is a hinge between hostility and hospitality.¹⁶ So, perhaps, questioning is not, as Krog's reading tends to suggest, merely epistemological, about 'understanding the world', but also pragmatic; about, in this case, regaining property and propriety, or determining the shape of, propriety: the extent of the space one can call one's own; the extent to which one is at liberty to open that space – domestic or personal – up to, or close it off from, others. Let us recall, in this respect, how Lekotse repeats

the fact that he was turned 'outside' by the invaders of his house, and how the innermost part of his house – his wardrobes – were cut open. *Country of My Skull* humbly mimes this violence in its episodes of violence to the body of the self and the beloved, and by drawing a parallel between the house and the body (cf Krog 1998:91).

How does this relate to literature? To literature after apartheid? Since hospitality is not ultimately a question of true or false, but of questions and of dissembled ignorance, the 'world' the questioner seeks to understand is a contested realm. One can go further, by analysing the pragmatics of questioning. A question to an other presupposes foreignness, or dissimulated foreignness, and thus the projection of a possible world, either of the other or of an alternative to that of the other. Projecting either involves the question in a movement of counterfactuality, or in a movement counter to the facts as presented. Lekotse's 'counter-questions' challenge the facts (or world) that Lax's questions appear to imply. Everything before the Truth Commission takes place in the realm of the counterfactual (even questions which solicit facts), and therefore in the realm of fable and fictionality, since bringing to light facts presupposes this counterfactual structure of questioning. The word 'counterfactual' may, however, be misleading: the structure I have been describing is prior to fact, or to any fact falsifiable in pursuit of 'factual truth', and is, along with the I-you address structure, a condition of possibility for both fact and fiction (even if the Commission's report tacitly assumes that the counterfactuality of 'stories' can be opposed to the facts of 'forensic truth'). Perhaps we could call it invention – even, to borrow from Derrida's 'Psyche' (1989), an 'invention of the other' (in both senses of the genitive). For it is not the witness alone who sets the scene for counterfactuality, but also the leader of his testimony who asks questions, soliciting a story, as is apparent from the implications of Lekotse's 'ironic' counter-questions.

'So also the lies', Antjie Krog (1998:170) tells Patrick, when he asks her about her 'bus[iness]' with the truth. We live, and judge, in history. This history is a history of facts, a realm of truth and lies (as Michael Ignatieff implies, when he writes about reducing the number of lies in circulation [quoted in Truth 1998, vol 1:111]). But facts, and the subsequent division between truth and lies, depend on originating, instituting 'lies' – to which we give such names as 'telling', and, I would also propose, 'questioning'. Is that to say that we should not distinguish between truth and lying, or between truth and fabrication? That criteria of forensic truth are suspect, and ought not to be employed? No, only that, as we live and judge, it may be useful to preserve a sense of what Nietzsche (1989) called truth and lying in an 'extra-moral sense'; for, by attending to the

arbitrary imposition at the foundation of what we hold to be true, that is the sense of truth and lying which watches over lies masquerading as truth in the narrow sense, over lies making history.¹⁷ The gap between the Truth Commission's hearings and its final report can be bridged by locating, through an attention to the former in particular, their shared conditions of possibility in the literary. This is perhaps what, against the wishes of the bulk of its report, the Commission has to tell us about truth and about literature. Telling is not just therapeutic, a restorer of dignity or ubuntu. Along with questioning, it signals an unverifiability which stands watch, at times ironically, over the impulse to verify and to corroborate tales, and so to falsify others, in the interests of fabricating what the report, entering the domain of fable, terms, 'the South African story'. It is in inviting this unverifiability, in seeking to be host to the word of the other, that the soliciting of testimony too partakes with poetry.

Notes

1. A longer version of this essay appeared in *Modern Fiction Studies* 46(1), 2000, a special issue devoted to 'South African Fiction after Apartheid'.
2. Cited by Antjie Krog (1998:211). The Truth Commission's transcript of the hearing refers to the shepherd as Johannes Likotsi.
3. To Krog's book, and Sindiwe Magona's novel, *Mother to Mother* (1998), we can add Jane Taylor and William Kentridge's play with puppets, *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (1998), as well as several other theatrical productions, one involving members of a victim support group (see Kentridge 1998:xiii-xiv).
4. Truth 1998, vol 1:112-3; also see Krog 1995. Parts of *Country of My Skull* were published initially in the *Mail and Guardian* (Krog 1996a, 1996b, 1997a, 1997b). On receiving her radio assignment, see Krog 1998:23-35.
5. Krog's poetry is collected in: *Dogter van Jefta* (1970), *Januarie-Suite* (1972), *Bemide Antarktika* (1975), *Mannin* (1975), *Otters in bronslaai* (1981), *Jerusalemangers* (1985), *Lady Anne* (1989), *Voëls van anderste vere: gedigte vir kinders* (1992). Krog has also published a non-fiction novella, *Relaas van 'n moord* (1995).
6. See the criticism by Lalu and Harris (1996) of the treatment of testimony by the research department, and the response by Verwoerd (1996).
7. For further discussion of the Commission and the legacy of colonialism and apartheid, see Sanders, 1998.
8. Essays by Hamber (1998) and Hayes (1998) provide useful accounts of the achievements and limitations of the Commission in the sphere of psychotherapeutic intervention.
9. 'What are transferences?', Freud asks in the Postscript to the case history of Dora, 'They are new editions or facsimiles of the impulses and phantasies which are

aroused and made conscious during the progress of the analysis; but they have this peculiarity, which is characteristic for their species, that they replace some earlier person by the person of the physician. To put it another way: a whole series of psychological experiences are revived, not as belonging to the past, but as applying to the person of the physician at the present moment' (Freud 1905:157-8). In 'The dynamics of transference', where he distinguishes "positive" (affectionate) from "negative" (hostile) transference, Freud notes that transferences occur not only in psychoanalysis but 'in indifferent forms of treatment (eg in institutions)', where, although 'they have to be recognized as such [t]he breaking out of a negative transference is actually quite a common event' (Freud 1912:105,106). I see no reason why, when one attends to the dynamics between witness and questioner at the hearings, which the Commission's report describes as opportunities for therapeutic catharsis (an 'indifferent form of treatment', if ever there was one), one ought to assume the absence of something akin to transference.

10. For more on these matters, see Sanders 1999.
11. A remarkable account of the experience of the translators is provided by Laufer (1997).
12. Cf Plath's 'Daddy': 'I never could talk to you'; 'The black telephone's off at the root' (Plath 1965:54,56).
13. This passage and the passage I quote at the end of the paragraph (Krog 1998:165) do not appear in the edition of *Country of My Skull* published in the United States (Krog 1999).
14. This applies not only to perpetrators, but also to members of the Commission, and, in certain instances, as Freud's 'Mourning and melancholia' (Freud 1917:256-7) leads us to expect, to the deceased. At a small number of hearings, the buffer of 'transference' was broken, as victims confronted perpetrators directly. The most startling instance was the questioning of police Warrant Officer Jeffrey Benzien, who had been notorious as a torturer, by anti-apartheid activists he had tortured (see Krog 1998:73-8). The 're-entry' of these victims into the position of the tortured, and the manipulation of the situation by the former torturer, raises the question, posed by psychoanalysis, of whether a re-enactment by actual parties can alter the relationship which existed between them in the past. It thus also raises the larger question of whether 'reconciliation' – be it individual or national – does not depend upon a mechanism like the Commission to remove intersubjective dynamics from a situation where, if re-enacted, they would be unlikely to change.
15. One of numerous instances is to be found in the testimony of Xoliswa Ethel Mboya, whose testimony was led by Truth Commissioner, Reverend Bongani Finca, and by East London committee member, Ntsikilelo Sandi:

Mr Sandi: As we are concluding, as you are here today, do you have any request to this Commission?

Miss Mboya: Yes, I do have a request to this Commission because he was

a person who was supporting us at home. As we are Black people, there are certain traditional things that have to be made for that person and up to now, we have no money to do those rituals for him. (Mboya 1997)

16. On hostility and hospitality, see Derrida 1999:85ff.

17. As Krog (1995) writes, regarding the version of Afrikaner history produced by Afrikaner-nationalist historiography (see also Truth 1998, vol 1:113).

References

- Benveniste, É (tr ME Meek 1971) *Problems in General Linguistics*. Coral Gables: University of Miami Press.
- Biko, S (1986) *I Write What I Like*, (ed) A Stubbs. San Francisco: Harper.
- Coetzee, JM (1996) *Giving Offense: essays on censorship*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Derrida, J (tr A Bass 1982) 'Signature Event Context', in *Margins of Philosophy*. Brighton: Harvester Press.
- (tr C Porter 1989) 'Psyche: inventions of the other', in L Waters and W Godzich (eds) *Reading de Man Reading*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- (1998) *Demeure: Maurice Blanchot*. Paris: Galilée.
- (tr P Brault and M Naas 1999) *Adieu: to Emmanuel Levinas*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Derrida, J and A Dufourmantelle (1997) *De l'hospitalité*. Paris: Calmann-Lévy.
- Freud, S (1905 [1901]) 'Fragment of an analysis of a case of hysteria ("Dora")', in *Case Histories I*, Pelican Freud Library, vol 8. Harmondsworth: Penguin. 1977.
- (1912) 'The dynamics of transference', in *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans J Strachey et al. London: Hogarth Press. 1958, vol 12.
- (1917 [1915]) 'Mourning and melancholia', in *On Metapsychology: the theory of psychoanalysis*, Pelican Freud Library, vol 11. Harmondsworth: Penguin. 1984.
- Hamber, B (1998) 'The burdens of truth: an evaluation of the psychological support services and initiatives undertaken by the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission', *American Imago* 55(1).
- Hayes, G (1998) 'We suffer our memories: thinking about the past, healing, and reconciliation', *American Imago* 55(1).
- Kentridge, W (1998) 'Director's Note', in Taylor.
- Krog, A (1973) 'Ma', in *Groot Verseboek*, (ed) D J Opperman, 4th (ed), Cape Town: Tafelberg.
- (1995) 'The South African road', in A Boraie and J Levy (eds). *The Healing*

- of a Nation?* Cape Town: Justice in Transition.
- (1996a) 'Truth trickle becomes a flood', *Mail and Guardian*, November 1.
- (1996b) 'Overwhelming trauma of the truth', *Mail and Guardian*, December 24.
- (1997a) 'The parable of the bicycle', *Mail and Guardian*, February 7.
- (1997b) 'Unto the third or fourth generation', *Mail and Guardian*, June 13.
- (1998) *Country of My Skull*. Johannesburg: Random House.
- (1999) *Country of My Skull: guilt, sorrow, and the limits of forgiveness in the new South Africa*. New York: Times Books.
- Lalu, P and Harris, B (1996) 'Journeys from the horizons of history: text, trial and tales in the construction of narratives of pain', *Current Writing* 8(2).
- Laufer, S (1997) 'The burden of evidence', *Leadership*, July.
- Likotsi, J (1997) Transcript of Testimony before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Ladybrand, South Africa, June 25, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission Website* [Online]. Available: <http://www.truth.org.za/hrvtrans/ladyb/ladyb2.htm> [April 26, 2000].
- Magona, S (1998) *Mother to Mother*. Cape Town: David Philip.
- Mandelstam, O (tr C Brown and WS Merwin 1974) *Selected Poems*. New York: Atheneum.
- Mboya, XE (1997) Transcript of Testimony before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Cradock, South Africa, February 10, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission Website* [Online]. Available: <http://www.truth.org.za/hrvtrans/cradock/mboya.htm> [April 26, 2000].
- Nietzsche, F (tr S Gilman, C Blair and D Parent 1989) 'On truth and lying in an extra-moral sense', in S Gilman, C Blair and D Parent (eds). *Friedrich Nietzsche on Rhetoric and Language*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Plath, S (1965) 'Daddy', in *Ariel*. London: Faber.
- South Africa (1995) Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, No 34.
- Sanders, M (1998) 'Ambiguities of mourning: law, custom, literature, and women before South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission', *Law Text Culture* 4(2).
- (1999) 'Reading lessons', *Diacritics* 29(3), forthcoming.
- Taylor, J (1998) *Ubu and the Truth Commission*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press.
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1998) *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, 5 vols. Cape Town: Truth and Reconciliation Commission.
- Verwoerd, W (1996) 'Continuing the discussion: reflections from within the Truth and Reconciliation Commission', *Current Writing* 8(2).