

Retraction Note

Retraction: Danielle Faye Tran, Post-TRC South African writing and the trauma of apartheid, *Polyvocia*, vol. 4, (2012), 53-69. The author was required to acknowledge an external source regarding the phrasing of a few of the sentences in the article. Moreover, in a small number of cases the author, while properly citing the source, should have used quotation marks around material written verbatim from that source. Although this was found to be in honest error, rather than issue a correction, the author has decided to retract the article.

Danielle Tran

POST-TRC SOUTH AFRICAN WRITING AND THE TRAUMA OF APARTHEID

(A PROJECT IN PROGRESS)¹

This paper explores the post-apartheid cultural production of South Africa through trauma theory. Trauma is often studied in relation to the Holocaust or World War I. I expand the focus of trauma studies by exploring the effects of apartheid in recent South African writing in the larger context of works filmed and performed during the transition and post-TRC – I assess the extent to which these post-apartheid texts create a space for mourning through writing, helping to reconcile a broken society. By examining the representations of trauma and questioning any partial closure within selected writings, I examine whether these writings aim to resist having to experience any further trauma by imposing neat endings. As Cathy Caruth comments, trauma itself may provide the very link between cultures: not as a simple understanding of the pasts of others, but rather, within the traumas of contemporary history, as our ability to listen through the departures we have all taken from ourselves.

Furthermore, I underline the importance of taking into account the specific context of a trauma in an effort to resist the trauma of apartheid from being subsumed into generalized modes of trauma theory. Another major dilemma I face is the problem of language itself as I grapple with the concept of a limitation in language in order to assess whether the story of apartheid can be told? Can anyone tell it? By relating my discussion of the unspeakability of trauma to the social dynamics of current South African society, I also explore how the trauma of apartheid poses questions for South

¹ This article was presented to the SOAS Research Students Conference on June 3 2011. It is an overview of my doctoral thesis. My fieldwork research will take place in Cape Town during July 2012. It is important to note that discussions with leading scholars in the field of South African literature along with interviews with other relevant persons will inevitably expand my research focus and may change some of the assumptions/comments I have made in this article.



Africans today in relation to identity and coming to terms with their legacy. In some cases, the trauma of apartheid is analysed as a pathological symptom in order to discuss how the traumatized carry the impossible history within them, often causing them to become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess. This article will outline the contextual background of my research as well as the theoretical framework. I also situate my thesis within the critical discussion debates concerning post-apartheid South African literature and offer a summary of the main topics of concern discussed in my thesis.

The social, political and economic concerns which affect present day South Africa are also prominent in other African countries which have been victims of colonial and political oppression such as Zimbabwe and Rwanda. All three countries have had their racial, ethnic and political conflicts publicized on an international level. The increasing discontent of Zimbabweans which led to strikes against the government during the 1990s and the Rwandan genocide of 1994 are just some examples of the traumas which Africans have had to overcome. The cracks in state and society which remain in these countries need to be addressed, both for the political and economic development of the countries and the social well-being of their people.

The trauma of apartheid came to the forefront of the world's attention in 1996 when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) founded in Cape Town and chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu began hearings on human rights crimes committed by former government and liberation movements during apartheid (Wilson, 2001: 20-21). The TRC was portrayed by the government as having successfully laid the past to rest. However, a detailed exploration of South Africa's post-TRC writing and post-apartheid cultural production is required to examine whether the TRC should be seen as having resolved the country's volatile relationship with its past or rather as a major contributing factor and catalyst to an on-going process of healing. The study of trauma theory in a non-western context is a burgeoning field attracting increasing critical attention. My thesis focus seeks to expand the focus of trauma studies by

examining post-TRC South African writing (primarily novels) through trauma theory.² My central texts are J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*, Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit*, Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* and Deon Meyer's *Thirteen Hours*.

On approaching the discussion of 'trauma', one is immediately faced with the difficulty of defining the term. 'Trauma' has been referenced in a variety of fields and used in so many different ways that its meaning can often become blurred. In classical medical usage 'trauma' refers not to the *injury* inflicted but to the *blow* that inflicted it, not to the *state of mind* that ensues but to the *event* that provoked it (Caruth, 1991: 3). By focusing solely on contextualising the traumatic event, the latter understanding of trauma fails to discuss the victim's experience of the trauma. In 1980, the now familiar broad umbrella term 'Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder' was assigned by the American Psychiatric Association by way of acknowledging the need to recognize and understand the after effects of trauma (Caruth, 2003: 192).

When attempting to explain both the experience and aftermath of trauma, most critics (Duggan 2007; Anker 2009) refer to Caruth's definition of trauma 'as a catastrophic experience in which the response to the event is delayed and occurs through uncontrolled repetitive appearances of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena' (Caruth, 2003: 192). Caruth's arguments on trauma theory have significantly extended the clinical view of trauma by introducing its ideas into the field of the humanities. Whilst I also focus on the relationship between trauma theory and literature, my thesis expands the focus of trauma studies by engaging with the developing field of study which explores the effects of traumas experienced during apartheid due to legislated discrimination and state violence in the works of South African novelists. As a result, I do not feel that Caruth's definition of trauma as an arguably singular 'catastrophic experience' can account for the vast number of complexities and paradoxes in relation to the history of apartheid.

² As trauma theory has been developed in a specifically western framework, I intend to extend the field of study through an exploration of South African texts (written and visual). I argue that the inherent tension within Eurocentric theory can be resolved somewhat by its application and adaptation for more specific and non-Western contexts. I discuss the latter issues in greater detail later in the article.

To accurately explore the trauma of apartheid in current South Africa, one must move beyond this notion of 'event theory' and extend the focus of trauma studies (Rothberg, 2008: 8). In the past fifty years, the majority of the world's violent and political conflicts have taken place outside of the West (Miller et al. 2006: 423). However, contemporary criticism surrounding trauma tends to focus on World War I or the Holocaust. The current western model for treating trauma therefore falls short of considering non-western trauma in light of their local and contextual experiences. I believe that to enforce the dominant framework surrounding trauma theory on to my exploration of the trauma of apartheid would act to exclude the particular historical, social, cultural and political contexts of South Africa. By emphasising the significance of the particular context of a trauma, I attempt to retheorize and expand notions of 'trauma' within a framework that is coherent with a specific non-western culture, stressing specificity to a South African context (Whitehead, 2010). Shining a spotlight on a non-western country dealing with trauma helps to broaden our understanding of trauma across different cultures, opening up innovative ways of dealing with trauma. Commenting on the need to acknowledge traumatic experiences in non-western settings, Stef Craps states:

instead of promoting solidarity between different cultures, trauma studies risks producing the very opposite effect as a result of this one-sided focus: by ignoring or marginalizing non-western traumatic events and histories and non-western theoretical work, trauma studies may actually assist in the perpetuation of Eurocentric views and structures that maintain or widen the gap between the west and the rest of the world (Craps et al. 2008: 3).

Mairi Emma Neeves similarly comments that the failure of trauma studies to examine non-Western and postcolonial contexts of trauma means 'it has become guilty of the same kinds of omissions and forgetting that its own theory argues is detrimental to the processes of recovery and healing'. Neeves further comments that trauma studies must move beyond its focus on Euro-American events and experiences in order to 'transform [the field of trauma studies] from a mono-cultural discipline into a mode of enquiry that can inform the study of memory within a changing global context' (Neeves, 2008: 109).

I align myself with the latter critical paradigm by casting doubt on the ability of universalized Eurocentric models of trauma (located within a specific history and set of cultural practices) to account for the South African trauma of apartheid without suppressing the heterogeneity of experiences and responses to trauma in that locale (Miller, 2008: 146). I realize that there is a contradiction between my declared interest in non-Eurocentric theory and my reliance on it in the thesis. The conflict is due to the lack of academic research concerning non-Eurocentric theory.³ My decision to reference largely from critics that have published extensively on western trauma theory thus helps to underline the need for greater critical attention surrounding trauma in non-western settings.

Kai Erikson in *A New Species of Trouble: Explorations of Disaster, Trauma and Community* broadens the hegemonic definition of trauma by arguing that ‘trauma has to be understood as resulting from a constellation of *life experiences* as well as from a discrete happening, from a persisting condition as well as from an acute event’ [emphasis added] (Erikson, 1994: 3). I agree with Erikson that trauma can issue from a prolonged exposure to battle as well as from a moment of numbing shock. Erikson’s definition of trauma supplements the event based model of trauma which has become dominant over the past decade with a model that can account for on-going, everyday forms of traumatic violence too (Rothberg, 2008: 10). I understand ‘trauma’ from Erikson’s perspective as his definition is evident when we turn to assessing the current state of South Africa, a country whose relationship with history remains problematic as a result of years of oppression.

³ Although there is some literature on this context in relation to post-apartheid and trauma, there has been a lack of theorisation thus far.

THE SOUTH-AFRICAN CONTEXT AND ITS PRODUCTION OF TEXTS OF TRAUMA

In 1996, Ingrid De Kok evocatively described the transitional moment as one of 'standing in the doorway'. De Kok's description perfectly encapsulates the weariness many South Africans have of the future. Arrested on this threshold, literature of the transition stood transfixed, 'vigilant of the past, watchful of the future' (De Kok, 1996: 5). To be aware of South Africa's post-apartheid trauma and dismiss the issue as one which should be left in the past or cannot be resolved would be to ignore the suffering of millions, inevitably leading to greater repercussions for the country's government and people. The dominant critical perspective in relation to South African literature and trauma pays attention to the rise in post-apartheid plays based upon the testimonies of the TRC.⁴ The first critical standpoint examines how theatre productions grapple with the issue of 'unspeakability' surrounding trauma by creatively dramatising the process of 'telling'.⁵ By focusing on the medium of theatre, this approach to South African trauma stresses 'the need for imagination in reconstructing and bringing closure to the past' (Graham, 2004: 219). Although I agree that it is important to consider how different genres discuss the trauma of apartheid, this first perspective often approaches the issue of closure too simplistically. Whilst I consider my selected South African writings in the larger context of works filmed and performed during the transition and post-TRC, it is important to question any partial closure and explore the extent to which a complete achievement of closure can ever be achieved.

⁴ This information is based upon the results from the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* annual survey 2005-2009 and database searches conducted through the National English Literary Museum. My own exploratory reading has also informed these results.

⁵ Theatre has also become a popular medium for tackling the Rwandan genocide too. Jennifer Capraru, Director and Producer of *The Monument*, which depicts the role of a mass murder during the Rwandan genocide comments, 'I think perhaps more needs to be done before true reconciliation is achieved. And the theatre is a fitting forum in which to tell those stories, and to learn how to think about civil society in a creative way'.

Quoted from: Arne Doornebal, 'Theatre Play May Help Erase Rwandan Trauma', September 2010 (<http://www.arnedoornebal.com/isoko2.php>) [accessed: 4 August 2011].

The second leading critical approach to South African literature and trauma endeavours to offer readers a broad overview of some of the most prominent post-apartheid authors and their works which tackle the issue of trauma.⁶ For example, Annie Gagiano's 'South African Novelists and the Grand Narrative of Apartheid' refers to authors Antjie Krog, Gillian Slovo and J.M. Coetzee, exploring works such as *Country of my Skull*, *Red Dust* and *Disgrace* amongst others (Gagiano, 2006: 97-109). Whilst the latter approach successfully introduces the reader to a range of writers, texts and key themes relating to the discussion surrounding the trauma of apartheid such as narrative, history, the TRC and violation, the reader is unable to gain a detailed understanding of any of the issues covered. As a result, such a text is limited to '*sketch[ing] something of the complex interplay between fiction, social reality, and moral-political understanding at the hand of six novels*' (Gagiano, 2006: 97).

I develop the critical discussion concerning the trauma of apartheid and literature by exploring the traumatized state of South African society through an examination of post-apartheid South African fiction. In comparison to other genres such as plays and poetry, South African fiction deals with a wider range of social concerns. South African novelists are also exploring the tenuous relationship between memory and forgetting and healing and forgiveness in order to respond to the greater challenges posed by the limits of empathy and sympathy (Thomas 2009; Nkosi 1998). The changing mood of post-TRC fiction thus reflects South Africa's shifting social mood as the country endeavours to work through its trauma. The mood of post-TRC fiction also changes to reflect South Africa's shifting social mood as the country endeavours to work through its trauma. For example, in 2008, fiction portrayed the discontent felt by South Africans due to the lack of change since the fall of apartheid. The words 'bleak' and 'dark' are terms that recur in the reviews. Whilst some authors that year set their novels in the future, this was without much lightening of vision (Warren 2008, 183). Post-apartheid literature can therefore be seen to challenge Mbeki's

⁶ This information is based upon the results from the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* annual survey 2005-2009 and database searches conducted through the National English Literary Museum. My own exploratory reading has also informed these results.

attempt to portray an idyllic South Africa by conversing with Mbeki's dialogue.⁷ However, in 2009, fiction became slightly more optimistic as the texts depicted a greater sense of hope and the possibility of reconciliation and redemption (Warren et al. 2009, 187).

My thesis also refers to Saul Friedlander's definition of 'working through' as a process which tries to achieve a balance between confronting the traumatic emotion recurrently breaking through the mind's protective shield and the numbness that protects this very shield (Friedlander 1992: 51). The latter understanding of 'working through' helps develop my exploration of the extent to which post-apartheid fiction helps create a space for South Africans to come to terms with their traumatic past and construct a successful future. In this way, authors can be said to use post-TRC fiction as a way of portraying the anticipation and possibility of a more stable future, a hope which is reflective of South African emotions as a collective.

CENTRAL CONCERNS OF MY PROJECT

In this section I will briefly discuss some of the main issues and topics that have arisen in my research so far, including rape and the trauma of women, HIV stigma, and crime, in order to begin to draw together some of the threads that are important when considering trauma in the South African post-apartheid and post-TRC context. My discussion surrounding rape focuses on J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* and Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit* and can be understood as being separated into two sections. My exploration of rape explores the literary representation of post-rape silence from the victim's perspective.⁸ From a theoretical viewpoint, Lucy and Lydia's silence acts to resist closure as they seemingly refuse to 'work through' their trauma. In

⁷ By this I mean that recent post-apartheid literature depicts a picture of South Africa which contradicts the image of the country as actively resolving all traumas stemming from the apartheid era such as crime, rape and AIDS.

⁸ The critical discussion of rape is usually centred round the female body as a sexualized object, thereby approaching the issue of rape from a gender theory point of view. As a result, my choice to discuss male on female rape in a novel which has been written by a male may seem anti-feminist. But my research focus is not on gender but on race. My decision to select *Disgrace* for my chapter on rape is thus based upon its complex and thought-provoking dramatization of black on white rape in post-apartheid South Africa.

opposition to this view, the first chapter argues that Lucy and Lydia's refusal to narrate their trauma may come from an understanding that to do so would mean opening up their narrative to interpretation, inevitably situating their story within the racially divided context of the period – which in Lucy's case would lead to a perpetuation of the unjust image of the black stereotype.⁹ Lucy's silence can therefore be seen as a challenge to the political systems that produced the violence in the first place through the creation of a racial hierarchy during apartheid. Rather than perceiving Lucy and Lydia's silence as a desire to ignore their traumatic event, I interpret their silence as a conscious method to resist the hegemonic power of trauma narratives which act to locate one's narrative within the racial, social and political context of the time.

The capability of language to successfully express one's trauma is further questioned in the consideration of how the singular trauma of Lucy and Lydia's rape affects those around them. The second section thus shines a spotlight on the efforts made by David and Silas (along with Michael)¹⁰ to come to terms with their familial and personal trauma. During this exploration, the chapter pays attention to how the victim's rape is appropriated by those around them in terms of self-serving scenarios. For David and Silas, the frustration over their loved one's refusal to comment on their rape lies in the belief that the victim's silence acts to acknowledge, however unwillingly, the successful domination of their rapists. Like David and Silas, many critics associate Lucy and Lydia's silence with passivity and fear, imposing a story upon their silence in order to form an explanation as to why they refuses to speak of their rape (Boehmer 2002: 342). Consideration also falls upon how the trauma of apartheid can manifest itself as a pathological symptom, causing the traumatized to carry the impossible history within them, which often leads them to become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess as they find themselves unable to work through their trauma (Caruth 1995: 5). Consequently, this

⁹ The image of the black stereotype has its roots in colonialism and the apartheid era, during which black South Africans were unjustly portrayed as racially inferior, sexually promiscuous, violent and barbaric.

¹⁰ These three male characters, not themselves subjected to rape, suffer a great deal of second-hand trauma.

leads many of the characters to actively detach themselves from the memory of oppression in an effort to cope with trauma in a post-apartheid world.

I often focus on the trauma of women in South Africa, whether this is in connection to rape, violence or psychological trauma. In doing so, I question and consider if in traditional terms, silent women-in-pain remain the ground on which a new society is brought into being? (Boehmer 2002: 302). By concentrating on female trauma, do I help to marginalize male trauma? Post-apartheid literature often engages with the trauma of women in relation to issues of silencing and double colonisation. The latter themes are also often found in regards to the portrayal of black South Africans in apartheid literature. The previous analysis of race during the apartheid era thus shares similarities with arguments concerning gender and sexuality in the post-apartheid era. Whilst the apartheid era located black South Africans as inferior in the social hierarchy, post-apartheid South Africa seemingly situates women in this position. My choice to underscore the trauma of females, I believe, helps to illuminate the voice of women in the new South Africa, emphasising the place of women in reference to men, black or white, in the new South Africa. Although narratives of gender and sexuality underpin all my selected writings, I choose to integrate the discussion of these topics into my thesis in a fluid manner, rather than emphasising the issues as central aspects of my thesis. By doing so, I do not risk digressing from the actual focus of my thesis – being South African literature and trauma studies.¹¹

Another important topic in the thesis is AIDS – a central concern of recent South African fiction, evident from the explosion of AIDS literature since the fall of apartheid. AIDS literature is becoming more inventive as fictional representations contribute enormously to our understanding of the impact of HIV and AIDS on communities and individuals, providing a much-needed basis for ‘humanizing’ an epidemic that has reached such unimaginable proportions (Attree 2006: 151). Such literature touches upon the stigma surrounding AIDS which creates a blanket of

¹¹ For a more in depth discussion of post-apartheid texts in connection theories of gender and sexuality, see: Lucy Valerie Graham’s thesis ‘State of Peril: Race and Rape in South African Literature’ (Oxford University, 2010).

shame and silence around the disease, not helped by Mbeki's failure to provide anti-retroviral treatment. HIV is stigmatized in Africa not only because of its association with sex, but because of its association with visible illness and an unpleasant death. Although the relationship between AIDS and traumatic stress is still under considerable debate, (Kaminer et al. 2010: 127) the loss of a parent or parents to AIDS is clearly a serious stressor that is affecting increasing numbers of South African children under the age of eighteen with estimates of 1.15 million maternal orphans by the year 2015. Research into the psychological well-being of sixty Cape Town-based African children orphaned by AIDS indicated that 'seventy three per cent scored above the cut off for Post-traumatic Stress Disorder' (Cluver et al. 2006: 8).

In connection to my discussion of AIDS, I examine Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* and Darrell James Roodt's motion picture *Yesterday*.¹² Consideration of these texts focuses upon the trauma of HIV/AIDS as a trauma of the new country and considers AIDS as a venereal embodiment of post-apartheid trauma. The chapter explores how AIDS is perceived and dealt with through the country's post-apartheid cultural production and post-TRC literature. Topics discussed include witchcraft, stigma and the battle of belief between traditional methods of healing versus western medication.

I also analyses Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* by way of exploring how Mda engages with the opposing standpoints concerning the historical cattle killing¹³ in order to analyse how historical trauma was negotiated by post-apartheid social formations. The exploration of the novel is used to compare the anxiety concerning the uncertain future of South African culture during colonialism with the concerns of today. Consideration then falls upon how the opposition between the Believers and

¹² Phaswane Mpe's novel portrays interconnecting relationships which are damaged by the trauma of AIDS. Roodt's movie *Yesterday* dramatizes the journey of a mother diagnosed with AIDS who fights to see her daughter start primary school.

¹³ The cattle killing occurred in mid nineteenth century when a young Xhosa girl called Nongqawuse claimed she had been given prophecies by the village elders stating that if the Xhosa villagers slaughtered all their cattle then the ancestors would rise from the dead, bringing new grain and cattle in abundance with the world also returning to its original unspoiled state.

Unbelievers continues to rage on even in current South Africa between those who desire a return to tradition in contrast to those who opt for western economic development. In doing so, the chapter assesses how Mda uses the conflicts of the past to point to the contemporary issues in South Africa today.

Another issue of concern in my thesis is the trauma of rising crime in the rainbow nation. I analyse Deon Meyer's novel *Thirteen Hours* by way of interrogating the police force's failure to help resolve South Africa's alarming crime levels. I also explore the topics of police corruption and on-going racism and discrimination within the police force. In addition, I examine recent South African crime films *Tsotsi* and *Gangster Paradise: Jerusalema* by way of engaging with the visual reception of crime and how different mediums portray and perceive the increasingly rates of criminality.

I examine how my chosen novels depict everyday traumatic stressors such as a sudden intrusion of memory and the breakdown of personal relationships by way of structuring the trauma of apartheid within a narrative frame, thereby transforming the text into a 'traumatic narrative'. According to Cathy Caruth, a 'traumatic narrative' is one which oscillates 'between a crisis of death and the correlative crisis of life, between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival' (Caruth 1991: 7). In order to further explore the mechanisms of a traumatic narrative, I consider whether my chosen texts exhibit a language of telling (a cathartic retelling of a trauma) or whether the language of each text acts to preserve the history of apartheid within the gap of trauma (Caruth 1991: 7). Such an approach leads to a consideration of whether the process of discussing the trauma of apartheid can be re-traumatising.

Furthermore, I interrogate whether my selected novels attempt to gain freedom from trauma through imposing neat endings on their works. Friedlander comments that a central aspect of 'working through' is to resist the temptation of giving into 'closure' (Friedlander 1992: 52). Closure in this case would represent an 'obvious avoidance of what remains indeterminate, elusive and opaque' (Friedlander 1992: 52). Through resisting closure, one is able to test the limits of necessary and ever defeated imagination. 'Working through' is thus also a confrontation with the starkest factual information which loses its historical weight when merely taken as data (Friedlander

1992: 52). The act of interrogating non-closure has connections with Jacques Derrida's notion of 'deconstruction' which makes an effort to show that texts do not have definable meanings and determinable missions; they are always exceeding the boundaries they occupy (Caputo 1997: 31). In this way, 'deconstruction' is the relentless pursuit of the impossible and instead of being wiped out by its impossibility, is actually nourished and fed by it (Caputo 1997: 31). Commenting on the process of 'deconstruction', Nicholas Royle describes the experience as an exploration of 'what remains to be thought' (Royle 2007: 7). By considering Derrida's technique of 'deconstruction' during my textual analysis, I question what my selected novels choose to silence in order to analyse what is unsaid. Also that by virtue of what is said, every other deferred and different meaning is present, thus the absent is always present, even if silenced.

The notion of 'impossibility' at the core of deconstruction also lies at the heart of trauma theory acting to invite a deeper critical exploration into the workings of trauma whilst simultaneously preventing one from ever truly understanding a victim's traumatic experience. It is in the nature of trauma to defy representation, to confound language altogether. Elaine Scarry has described the relationship between language and trauma as mutually incompatible, 'the survival of each depends upon its separation from the other. To bring pain into the world by objectifying it in language is to destroy one of them. For pain has the ability to destroy language in all its forms' (Scarry 1985: 84). But by taking on a textualist approach which insists that all reference is indirect, Caruth argues that one can gain a unique access to history. Indeed, the rethinking of reference which it invites aims not at 'eliminating history' but at 'resituating it in our understanding, that is, at permitting history to arise where immediate understanding may not' (Caruth 1991: 118).

Some texts communicate the pain and suffering of living in post-apartheid South Africa without any sign of overcoming such grief. The text may thus be said to be possessed by the trauma, which may present itself to be 'an on-going emotional and intellectual challenge' (Caruth 1991: 55). When such is the case, I discuss how even approaching the issue of trauma from the most imaginative and original of standpoints may not necessarily act to unveil the solutions and dispel all of the

hidden memory of a traumatic past. 'Working through', may ultimately signify, in Maurice Blanchot's words, 'to keep watch over absent meaning' (Blanchot 1986: 42).

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