



universität  
wien

# DIPLOMARBEIT / DIPLOMA THESIS

Titel der Diplomarbeit / Title of the Diploma Thesis

„Representations of Male Homosexualities in Selected  
Novels by Michiel Heyns“

verfasst von / submitted by

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angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Magistra der Philosophie (Mag. phil.)

Wien, 2017 / Vienna, 2017

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt /  
degree programme code as it appears on  
the student record sheet:

A 190 344 347

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt /  
degree programme as it appears on  
the student record sheet:

Lehramtsstudium UniStG UF Englisch UF Französisch

Betreut von / Supervisor:

Univ.-Prof. i.R. Dr. Ewald Mengel



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# 1 Introduction

Over the past decades, homosexuality has become the subject of studies in various academic disciplines. With medicine and psychology having been the first disciplines working on homosexuality, the field has broadened over the years to social science, the humanities, and the arts. Furthermore, the attention of study has shifted from the isolated individual to the interaction of the gay person with society (cf. Dynes & Donaldson vi). These interactions, according to Foucault, depend on the power relations in existence in the respective time and place of occurrence. In the nineteenth century, the homosexual became a species, “a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology” (Foucault 43), while before “the sodomite had been a temporary aberration” (Foucault 43). Furthermore, the homosexual as a species is no absolute category but comprises various forms of homosexuality, hence the plural term “homosexualities”, which are closely linked to different concepts of masculinities.

In apartheid South Africa, hegemonic masculinity was synonymous with white heterosexual masculinity in a patriarchal society. Homosexuality was marginalized and criminalized. Accordingly, many writers of that time such as Mark Behr, Stephen Gray, or Damon Galgut, to name but a few, reflected these attitudes in their works in which they foregrounded the sexual transgression and exploited the tragic potential of the topic. After the fall of the apartheid regime and the adoption of the new Constitution in 1996, homosexuality has been legalized and unfair discrimination by the state on grounds of sexual orientation forbidden. Ever since, homosexual writers have been able to come out of the closet and write openly about homosexual desire and relationships. However, since “prejudice persists and in practice the discrimination against and the marginalisation of the gay community continues in most spheres of society” (Du Pisani 170), homosexual writers deal with the topic in different ways. The openly gay contemporary South African novelist Michiel Heyns shows stereotypical portraits of different homosexual characters only to deconstruct the stereotypes, resulting in various portraits of homosexuals as ordinary people who try to find their identity and live up to it while fighting their internalized repression and facing the oppressions encountered in everyday life.

While the majority of the scholars have concentrated in their analyses of Heyns’s novels on formalities and narrative structure (cf. Scherzinger on *The Typewriter’s Tale* and Wessels on *The Children’s Day*), the field of research regarding the representation of male homosexualities in Heyns’s novels has hardly been covered, except for Jacobs and Wessels.

However, while both of them provide in-depth analyses of the gay narrators in *A Sportful Malice* and *The Children's Day* respectively, other homosexual characters and the particular aspects of homosexuality they represent have not been analysed in greater detail.

With the settings of the three novels analysed in the diploma thesis ranging from apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa of *The Children's Day* and *Lost Ground* to the more globalized setting of *A Sportful Malice* and with the stories being told from the first-person perspectives of the homosexual protagonist-narrators, the question arises as to how the homosexual self of the narrator is represented in the novel and how other homosexual characters represent homosexualities in relation to the power relationships of their specific contexts.

Following Foucault's argumentation that sexual relationships are determined by the power relations in force at the particular time and place, special emphasis will be placed on the analysis of the narrative settings to reveal those power relations. Examples taken from three of Heyns's novels will be analysed with regard to various aspects of these power relations and their influence on the concept of male homosexuality and with particular emphasis on the issues of male same-sex relationships and the interaction of male homosexual characters with mainstream society. As the stories are told from the first-person perspective of the homosexual protagonist-narrators, increased emphasis will be put on the narrator as well as the narrative technique in order to analyse the representation of the narrator's homosexual self in the particular contexts. In addition, the analysis of the narrative situation and the use of particular narrative techniques, such as irony and ingénu perspectives in order to deconstruct the stereotypical views of male homosexuals, will give insights into various forms of literary representations of homosexual characters facing the struggles of everyday life and identity formation in heteronormative society and the influence of the particular kinds of representation on the reader's perception of those characters in particular and the topic of male homosexualities in general.

## **2 The Children's Day**

### **2.1 Story Time and Setting**

The dual time scheme of the novel connects the present chronology of the story set in 1968 via flashbacks to the past of 1962 to 1966, thus linking the childhood of the protagonist narrator Simon in the fictional South African town of Verkeerdespruit to his adolescence at Wesley College in Bloemfontein. The present of 1968, set at Wesley College, is interrupted by ten chapters representing flashbacks to the past set in Verkeerdespruit, with each chapter being

dedicated to one person or event crucial to Simon's development, resulting in an episodic rather than a linear style of the novel. The episodes of the flashback-chapters are embodiments of the absurdity of the apartheid era and the impact of the political on the personal situation. Those memories, forcing Simon to relive his past, are triggered by Fanie's presence at Wesley College.

The small town of Verkeerdespruit, literally "the wrong creek" (Heyns, *Children's Day* 14)<sup>1</sup>, offers an isolated setting with "familiar small town characters" (Brown para 6) and is characterized by the "established order of church and state [that] seem to keep the town in an iron grip" (Rubin para 1) of tradition and prejudice. It provides the social setting for various outcasts struggling in vain to liberate themselves from societal oppression, such as the chinless telephone operator Betty Brand, who refuses to answer the switchboard in Afrikaans first instead of English, much to the chagrin of the town burghers, or the homosexual Steve, who uses Betty to pass as normal and steals the money she has been saving up for chin surgery to go on a joyride with Fanie. Just as Verkeerdespruit provides an isolated setting with the familiar small town characters, Wesley College does so for school scenes and the usual characters of student life such as bullies, role models, and authoritative teachers. The school's snob's hierarchy implies a superiority to Afrikaans and technical schools (cf. 7), reflecting the attitudes and inequalities typical for apartheid society.

While the plot set in 1968 reveals the real nature of Simon's relationship with Fanie, for Simon eventually realizes that he loves Fanie and finally acknowledges his homosexual orientation, the flashbacks represent salient childhood experiences that play a crucial role in Simon's identity formation. Three main factors can be identified as pivotal to his coming of age. The first would be the historical background of the apartheid era as such, the second would be his own sociocultural background, and the third would be his initiation into sexuality.

## **2.2 Historical Background**

Published in 2002, the novel is set in 1960s apartheid South Africa and provides a critical view of an era in which prejudices such as racism and homophobia were institutionalized in numerous laws. While laws such as the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (1949) and the Immorality Act (1950) "created legal boundaries between the races by making marriage and sexual relations illegal across the colour line" (Thompson 185), the Urban Areas Act (1923), the Group Areas Act (1950) and pass laws, to name but a few, were designed to guarantee racial

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<sup>1</sup> Page numbers here and in the following referring to Heyns, *The Children's Day*.

segregation. They helped maintain white supremacy and served white economic needs by prohibiting Africans from living in or even visiting urban areas without a special permit and for purposes other than to work there, or otherwise having them arrested or removed to reserves.

### **2.2.1 Racism**

This context is evident within the novel in several passages, one of which being that of the black woman Mary, who works at the only hairdresser's of the predominantly white Verkeerdespruit. Mary loses her job "[a]s a result of the prejudices of a community informed by the public discourse of apartheid, where the women do not want their hair to be washed by a black person" (Wessels 60). Despite the fact that she has a husband and a family life in Verkeerdespruit, she is "repatriated" to a reserve euphemistically called "homeland", another oppressive act of racial segregation in order to maintain white supremacy, which dates back to 1880, when British colonial government "corralled the African inhabitants into reserves, thereby freeing land for white speculators" (Thompson 127). Mary's "homeland" is a place called "Elukhanyweni in Ciskei, where her mother had been born" (105) and to which Mary had never been before, "but no amount of common sense or compassion can save her from the apartheid state's ideological discourse which terms the distant and unknown Ciskei her home" (Wessels 60).

### **2.2.2 Homophobia**

As regards homophobia, Acts such as the Immorality Act (1927) and the Sexual Offences Act (1957) contained provisions which discriminated against homosexuals, although "sodomy" was already illegal under the common law. However, homophobia was not only enshrined in criminal and common law, but was also institutionalized in church, school, and society as such. From the fourth century onwards, homosexuality was declared a sin by Christianity (cf. Fone 62), whose "new asceticism preached a dichotomy of flesh and spirit, denigrating the flesh and its uses, and glorifying the spirit" (Fone 71), and asserted "that procreation was the only justification for sexual desire" (Fone 71). This religious doctrine consolidated the rejection of homosexual behaviour as unnatural and was founded on the Old Testament story of Sodom in Genesis 18 and 19 and the writings of St. Paul (cf. Fone 8).

The strong influence of the Church in the discourse of homophobia even in the sixties of the twentieth century is represented in several passages of the novel. One example would be Klasie, the postmaster, who was made a deacon in the Dutch Reformed Church because



“Dominee Claassen and the church council were probably worried about Trevor’s influence and thought that by making Klasie a deacon they could exercise more authority over Ebenezer and its inhabitants” (109), as is being explained by Simon’s father. However, when Klasie, despite being a deacon, does not refrain from his relationship with Trevor and even admits loving him, Dominee Claassen accuses Klasie of living in mortal sin and demands that he get rid of Trevor, resign as a deacon, and pray for forgiveness (cf. 112). Being told by the Dominee that her son is a sodomite, Klasie’s mother now fears that God will destroy her house “with fire and *sulfur*” (113, emphasis original), as suggested in the Old Testament story of Sodom.

Another example serving to illustrate this point might be Simon, who, brought up under the influence of the Dutch Reformed Church and its doctrines, is consumed with guilt and shame after his engagement in mutual masturbation with a stranger on the beach, even more so after he finds out that he “had put [his] hand on the dong of a man of the Lord” (196). He considers his behaviour to be “a sin so enormous that there wasn’t even [...] a name for it” (196) in the Ten Commandments, “a list of sins that [Simon] had been used to regard as exhaustive” (196). And indeed, mutual masturbation between men was regarded as a form of sodomy, with the latter often having been referred to as “the vice not to be named among Christians” (Fone 245). However, after having recognized the visiting prominent *dominee* from Pretoria to be his stranger from the beach, Simon questions the authority of the *dominee*, whom he catches “using the moment of silent prayer as an opportunity to pick his nose” (195). The *dominee*’s behaviour, the pederasty as well as picking his nose, weakens the moral authority of the Church, and Simon even finds “pity for the poor man for having to represent in his fallible person the infallible God whom he had chosen to serve” (197). Even the authority of God, “the great Inventor of all Sin” (196) is questioned by Simon when the Sermon on the Mount leaves him wondering how Abraham, Isaac, and God felt about each other’s actions and why God does not show “[h]is true love by not requiring the sacrifice after all” (197).

However, homosexuality was not only a sin, it was also a crime back then and as such it was punishable as shows the example of Steve, who is convicted of child molesting after having kissed Fanie. He is sentenced to two years in prison where he, the convicted child molester who is at the bottom of the inmates’ hierarchy, is murdered by a fellow prisoner. As a child molester he is seen as a deviant and pervert, even more so because he is into boys as shows the following passage:

Jesserina Schoeman giggled when she told us that her father had said she was not allowed to talk to “the ducktail”. “I told him that I wished I could, but that Steve only talked to the boys, and he said worse and worse,” she told us. “What did he mean?” “I

think he meant that Steve is a pervert,” I replied, remembering the term Mrs. Opperman had spat at Steve. (40f)

The fact that Steve was interested in boys was considered to be even worse, since same-sex desire was declared unnatural and homosexuals to be deviants and perverts. Of the same opinion are Mrs. Opperman and Simon’s mother in the scene at the Modder River, where the two women come searching for Simon after Mrs. Opperman saw him and Steve speeding out of town on Steve’s motorbike. Simon’s mother expresses her worries about Steve’s behaviour:

“[Y]ou can’t just go off with our sons on the back of that thing.”  
“Why not?” he asked, as if he really wanted to know. “I bring them back, don’t I?”  
“Yes, but it ... it’s dangerous,” my mother said “They could fall off.”  
“No chance,” he said. “I tell them to hold on tight and they hold on tight.”  
“Anyway,” my mother said, and I could see she was coming to her real point, “I don’t think it’s right for a grown man to drive around with little children.”  
“Why not?” he asked again. “I like little children.”  
At this Mrs. Opperman could no longer keep her countenance. She turned down her window all the way – it had been open just far enough for her to hear what was happening – put her head out, and hissed at Steve: “Pervert!” (38f)

While Simon’s mother is beating about the bush, trying to find a diplomatic way to address the delicate matter of “sodomy” and child molesting by employing deliberate vagueness, Mrs. Opperman is more outspoken about the taboo and the prejudices and hostility towards Steve, whose behaviour they consider to be unnatural, wrong, and dangerous according to their moralistic judgment, a judgment informed by the religiously and legally institutionalized homophobia typical for that era. When Steve shows no signs of remorse or insight, Simon’s mother resorts to the threat of reporting him to the police should he not stay away from her son.

The phenomenon of tremendous fear of and hostility towards homosexuals and their association with abnormality is not a new one, but is deeply rooted in societies. According to the philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), the hostility to sodomy and to sodomites, as it was called back then, “was rooted in religious asceticism and in the associated fear of sexual pleasure” (Bentham 95-98, qtd. in Fone 256). The term “homosexual” was coined only in 1868 by the journalist Karl Maria Kertbeny to contrast same-sex desire with the “normal” heterosexual desire, but the term was soon used in a psychiatric context to define homosexuality as abnormal and in a medical context to define homosexual desire as “inverted sexual feeling” (Fone 4) and has since been used to express an abnormality and dichotomy between same-sex desire and heterosexuality, as if they were opposing and “mutually exclusive” (Fone 61). Another reason given to explain the extreme and deep-rooted hostility towards homosexuals is

the imagined threat to state and society. While in former times, local calamities such as famines, earthquakes, and pestilence were attributed to divine wrath over sexual promiscuity (cf. Fone 141f), from the sixteenth century onwards, when Luther defined sodomy “as the absolute antithesis of marriage, which he considered essential to the maintenance of Christian society” (Fone 188), homosexuals were seen as corrupters of boys, “predators who molest children [and] seduce young people” (Fone 11). They were considered a threat to marriage and heterosexual family values, causing “depopulation and decline” (Dowling 29) and, consequently, endangering the state (cf. Fone 59) and civilization itself (cf. Fone 230).

However, the concept of the homosexual as child-molesting monster is, at least partially, deconstructed in the novel, when Simon wonders why Mr. de Wet, the sadistic teacher who broke Simon’s jaw, does not have to appear in court for molesting, while Steve was sent to prison just because he kissed Fanie. When his father, the magistrate, explains that Steve is sent to prison to protect other people, Simon does not quite understand why other people should be protected from being kissed, while Mr. de Wet, who hits children, is just transferred to another school where he might continue to abuse his students (cf. 87f).

Even the *dominee* at Blesshonderbaai deserves a more detailed analysis. At first glance, he is a serial child molester who cruises the beach for sex with boys and seduces first Simon and at the end of the year an even younger boy (cf. 199) by appealing to their intellect by speaking to them about the books they are reading. Simon is flattered because he is spoken to as an equal (cf. 183) and, while being shy at first, the thirteen-year-old boy eventually seeks him out, looking for an excuse to linger in the dressing room (cf. 185 and 186) and he even regrets having pulled on his shorts in confusion, as he “couldn’t very well take them off again” (187). Furthermore, Simon does not reject the stranger’s sexual advances (cf. 186ff), hence the question might arise as to who is cruising whom and the myth of the innocent child is challenged. However, other than Steve, who is first denied job and housing by the Verkeerdespruit moralists and finally is sent to prison, the *dominee* is protected by his unquestionable God-derived authority and by the fact that he is smart enough to keep his behaviour secret.

Another interesting phenomenon is the fact that homosexuals seem to apply the model of heterosexual marriage to characterize their relationship, for example, when Trevor refers to Klasie as his husband (cf. 106), or when, in *A Sportful Malice*, Michael suggests a custody arrangement after his separation from J for the dogs Beatrice and Benedick, who could be seen as substitutes for children (cf. Heyns, *Sportful Malice* 247). The dogs are personified by

Michael when he sends them his love in his emails to J (cf. Heyns, *Sportful Malice* 45) or when he suspects J's new partner of having already alienated the dogs' affections (cf. Heyns, *Sportful Malice* 247). Although Trevor does not represent the stereotypical effeminate homosexual, he has certain effeminate features and is recognizable as a homosexual by his style and gestures. He has bright yellow hair and a long golden fringe which he flings back with a toss of his head whenever he wants to emphasize a phrase, just as girls with long hair usually do. Trevor is portrayed sympathetically and humorously, and his insight into the psyche of other characters also shows great depth, as for example when he flirts with Klasie's mother to win her trust, or when he comments on the homophobic Afrikaners: "The mealie-crunchers are a funny lot, aren't they? One day they beat you up and the next day they just about *adopt* you; and the funniest thing is the ones who beat you up perhaps understand you better than the ones who adopt you." (109, emphasis original), alluding to the fact "that homophobia is frequently a perverted redirection of a suppressed homoerotic impulse" (Heyns, *A man's world* 109).

Trevor is English and detests the Afrikaners who, in his opinion, are "fucking up the country with their notion that they were the chosen people" (97). However, being English in the predominantly Afrikaans society of Verkeerdespruit is not the only thing marking him as an outsider. The colour pink is considered to be "unmanly" (Fone 244), as is the shirt Trevor wears "tied in a rather bunchy bow under his midriff" (103). His style, wearing a pink shirt and dying his hair, make him the victim of verbal and physical abuse by three Afrikaners (cf. 98) who interpret his outward effeminate appearance as a "sign of the inward perversion" (Fone 173), a phenomenon already described in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, where the Pardoner's weak, falsetto voice, his long, yellow hair, and his clothes of the latest fashion (cf. Chaucer, *The General Prologue* 675-690) leave no doubt about his effeminacy which was synonymous with lechery and homosexuality (cf. Fone 172f). Six hundred years later, antipathy to difference is still a topic covered in literary texts. Trevor is an admired hairdresser and is accepted by Klasie's mother as long as he and Klasie stay in the closet. As soon as Klasie speaks openly about his gay relationship with Trevor, society turns against him and reacts in a hostile way. A tender and mutually satisfying homosexual relationship offends conventional sensibility (cf. Dunton 438) and "threatens the credibility of a naturalized ideology of gender and a dichotomized sexual world" (Connell 248). Klasie has to resign as a deacon and even his own mother declares him "to be all sorts of Old Testamenty bad news" (115). She accuses him of "polluting the house of his ancestors" (116) and wants to kick him out of said house. When Trevor refuses to openly admit his love for Klasie and takes recourse to saying he loves Klasie as a brother in order to calm down Moeder, Klasie feels betrayed and ends the relationship

immediately. He throws Trevor out of the car in the middle of nowhere and hits him. However, this is not the end of Klasie's story. Three years later, with the memories of the betrayal apparently still haunting him, he slits his wrists and commits suicide (cf. 182f), an ending typical of many homosexual characters in literature (cf. Fone 10f). However, his suicide seems to be just a footnote, only mentioned by Simon because he is asked if anything ever happens in Verkeerdespruit, the middle of nowhere. Other than having been a bit of news that relieved the boredom of the local community for a little while, it seems to have had no emotional impact whatsoever on Simon.

It is a curious paradox that homosexuals are regarded as weak and dangerous at the same time (cf. Fone 242). Condemned by state, church, and citizenry for being different and for disturbing the accepted order of a heteronormative patriarchal society, they are the victims of an institutionalized homophobia reminiscent of a witch-hunt, the origin of which lies in a fear that borders on paranoia. The hostility resulting from the fear was transferred into laws allowing "the judicial repression of sexual and social deviance" (Fone 214) of a sexual minority for the good of the heterosexual majority in apartheid South Africa. While homosexuality provokes a hostile response from the generality of the people, Betty and Fanie's mother are not affected by the popular panic. Being marginalized themselves, Betty for having a receding chin and Fanie's mother for being a poor white, they rate the individual's happiness above the hateful ideology of an oppressive regime that rejects tolerance (cf. 41).

The historical background is closely linked to Simon's sociocultural background, one of two main factors which can be identified as pivotal to his coming of age. The other would be his initiation into sexuality.

### **2.3 Sociocultural Background**

With the protagonist being the son of an English-speaking magistrate and an Afrikaans mother, Heyns provides a white middle-class perspective on South African apartheid society, "an all-white society with a few blacks on its periphery, allowed into the town only because they have work to do there" (Rubin para 3) or, as in Mary's case, not even allowed into town anymore after having lost her job. Already marginalized because of her black skin colour, Mary is now further victimized by pass laws, which, from 1961 on, were also applicable to black women (cf. Thompson 209). Those inhumane laws met white economic and capitalist needs and helped maintain white supremacy, for, on the one hand, they ensured cheap labor force, while, on the other hand, they helped keeping Africans out of the towns, with the only exception of working

there or seeking work there (cf. Thompson 166). The fact that those laws are “insane” (105), leads to an argument between Simon’s rather liberal-minded and critical mother and his law-abiding father, the magistrate, who has to administer the laws of the country, “even if the laws are against the law” (105), as he says. In that scene, Heyns shows the dilemma of unquestioning obedience to authority, which is a prerequisite for any oppressive regime.

The indoctrination into unquestioning obedience to authority starts at home and is continued at school. Even the sadistic teacher, Mr. de Wet, is accepted as a God-sent doom, because “[a] system of education based on the belief that all authority is derived from God does not encourage its victims to complain about the treatment meted out to them” (76), as Simon puts it. The authority derived from God is represented in symbols, the meaning of which is clear to everybody, as can be seen in the passage where the headmaster of Wesley College, Mr. Robinson, welcomes the students from the Technical School. “Mr. Robinson himself appeared, his clerical dog collar looking reassuringly authoritative: surely even a Clutch Plate would not dare to defy such a potent symbol.” (90)

Another reference to the topic of unquestioning obedience can be found in the scene of the *dominee* delivering the Sermon on the Mount, in which “Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his own son proved not only his love of God but also his love of his son, in that he was not deterred by a shortsighted and sentimental notion of love from dedicating his son to the will of God” (197). In that scene, “[t]he sermon was tailored to the preoccupations of a fair section of the congregation: a new intake of recruits to national service was about to depart, and it was the last shared church service for a number of families” (197), who had to be reminded of the necessity of sacrifice and unquestioning obedience to the authority not only of God but of the regime. The story and thereby the concept of unquestioning obedience is questioned by little Simon, who “wonders what Abraham and Isaac talked about on their way down the mountain” (197).

Nationalism is another important part of apartheid South Africa’s ideology, institutionalized not only in the military but also in the school system. When Simon’s parents are looking for a College for their son, his mother is appalled to find Youth Preparedness on the curriculum of the Free State College. In her opinion, Youth Preparedness is just another word for indoctrination and brainwashing (cf. 203), as the curriculum explicitly states that “[t]he child should be taught that freedom lies in the acceptance of restriction” (204), expressing a clearly anti-liberal attitude. Thus, Simon’s mother decides that he should go to a private school. When his father asks his opinion, Simon’s mother is surprised at her son’s response. “I

don't want to be a little Nationalist, but I don't want to go to school with ... Bantu children either" (204, ellipsis original). His mother concludes, "You see [...] He's a little Nationalist already." (204) Simon's response proves that "he is by no means immune to the prevailing social pressures" (Wessels 59) and brainwashing despite the "healthy and subversive scepticism" (Wessels 59) demonstrated by his liberal minded and educated parents.

Of course, the most prominent part of the apartheid regime's ideology, racism, is also rampant in schools. However, while racism towards black people is institutionalized in numerous laws and restrictions, racism between Afrikaner and English people is expressed in a more subtle way, as for example, in the segregation of the two in schools or in the influence of organizations such as the Broederbond. With Simon being the son of an English-speaking father and an Afrikaans mother, he belongs to neither group and is therefore subject to name-calling such as "Half-Ball" (200) by his class-mates at Wesley College, the English of which employ pejorative names such as "Hairyback Rockspiders", "Ball-Bearings" and "Buses" (7) to express their dislike for and superiority to Afrikaner men and women in the predominantly Afrikaans Free State. However, racism at the all-white Methodist Wesley College, "one of those relics of an English presence in the predominantly Afrikaans Free State, testimony to good intentions and reparations after the Boer War" (206), spreads beyond English and black people and comprises Germans and Jews as well. Gottlieb Krause, "the son of a German cherry farmer from Bethlehem who had sent his son to Wesley College on the assumption [...] that Methodist meant Methodical" (207), is referred to as "the Jew Killer" (207) by "the more devoutly Methodist of the boys" (207), while David Levy, the son of a Jewish chemist, who is sent to the Methodist school because his father said "it was where [he] was least likely to find Germans or Afrikaners" (207), is referred to as "the Christ-Killer" (207). The latter's "more secular" (207f) school-mates favor "Filter-Tip" or "Cavalla" as a nick-name for him. These names are "based on a perceived resemblance between the circumcised penis and a two-tone cigarette" (208), with "Cavalla" being a popular brand of cigarette (cf. 208), and can be seen as an expression of the adolescent boys' obsession with sexuality as such and the penis in particular. Homosexuality was a constant concern at an all-boys boarding school. Homosexuality was seen as contagious and dangerous at a school, the role of which would be the preparation of masculine future husbands and businessmen, ready to defend family and country in the patriarchal society of apartheid South Africa. Therefore, mutual masturbation, a common phenomenon among adolescent boys exploring their sexuality, was widely feared as it was perceived as an act of homosexuality. However, mutual masturbation would be seen as a mild form in the hierarchy of homosexual acts as is expressed by the liberal headmaster, who explains to Simon, who is

telling on his class-mates about their act of mutual masturbation at the chapel, that “there are various kinds of sexual behavior, and perhaps somewhat illogically we discriminate degrees of seriousness” (227). After having interrogated Simon about the exact position of the boys heads during the act to make sure it was just mutual masturbation and not fellatio or anal intercourse, he qualifies their behaviour as “a serious misdemeanor but not, I am thankful to say, of the first degree of iniquity” (228), implying a hierarchy of homosexual acts which is also reflected in various penitentials of the church, where the punishment of homosexual behaviour varies according to the gravity of the offence (cf. Fone 124ff).

Simon is an outsider for various reasons. In addition to his descent, his preference of tennis over rugby as well as his habit of reading make him an outcast in “unliterary” (29) Verkeerdespruit, where rugby “was the official boys’ game” (147), because “it required that fine indifference to bruises and scabs that is the small boy’s first claim to manliness” (147) and, “woven into hegemonic masculinity” (Morrell 23) and as a “signifier of national pride” (Stobie 330), it “stressed physical confrontation” (Morrell 23) and promoted features such as the “willingness to take risks” (Morrell 15) or to have “little regard for the rights of others” (Morrell 15), which were features essential in the event of war, whereas tennis was referred to as “[t]hat sissy game” (147). At Wesley College, Simon becomes an outsider as he steps out of his rank by visiting an older boy (cf. 211), the organ playing hostel prefect Richard Hicks. When he is accused by an anonymous scribe of practicing “on Hick’s organ” (218), Simon, who is “particularly sensitive to the accusation, after [his] encounter with the stranger in Bleshonderbaai” (221), avoids Hicks, the friendship with whom is now tainted with the accusation of committing homosexual acts. Other than Hicks, who does not care what people think or say about him, Simon’s “own sense of [himself] seemed made up of other people’s opinions” (217). Simon stands “in awe of Hick’s indifference” (217), yet, at the same time he finds it “slightly irksome, as if it made [his] own anxieties and concerns seem petty, without liberating [him] into ignoring them” (217). His liberation is still hindered by his deeply ingrained respect for authority and apartheid societal values.

This attitude might explain why Simon tells on Hicks and Gott about their mutual masturbation in the chapel and why he wants his former friend Hicks to be punished. Simon’s behaviour, which might also be triggered by jealousy and Simon’s own feeling of guilt about his encounter with the *dominee* at Bleshonderbaai, is interpreted by the liberal headmaster as a result of Simon’s enculturation into apartheid society, where Simon, like everybody else, is corrupted by power and abuses it to harm other people only because he has it (cf. 231). In



addition to punishing his friends out of hatred and jealousy, Simon hopes that his own sexual misdemeanor at Bleshonderbaai “would in some measure be expiated by [...] delivering these other miscreants over to justice” (230), another indication of his religious and political indoctrination into homophobia. Simon refers to his own initiation into homosexuality, which happened at a much earlier stage in a cave at Bleshonderbaai.

## 2.4 Initiation into Sexuality

As *The Children's Day* is not only a memoir and coming-of-age novel, but also a coming-out novel, special emphasis lies on the analysis of Simon's initiation into homosexuality. Of the latter he is at first unaware, then in denial, and, only at the very end of the novel, he comes to accepting it.

Two dating experiences with girls are mentioned in the novel, both of which were quite painful for Simon. The first and only date with one Rowena Glenn was arranged rather for social reasons in the heteronormative apartheid era than out of real interest in the girl, since the school's film night as a “social function made a female presence necessary” (118). The date ended badly with Simon falling asleep halfway into the film when Rowena, who was interested only in what Simon's father did and where they lived, “lapsed into an aggrieved silence that somehow imposed itself even through the film” (118) after having found out that Simon's father was a magistrate in Verkeerdespruit.

His disappointment is even greater in the case of Juliana Swanepoel, who is the self-conscious daughter of the new teacher and the newly appointed Bantu commissioner and the object of Simon's devotion. Being a great reader just like Simon, they spend much time together and Juliana even talks about love. When she breaks her promise to go to the school party with Simon, he is outraged about her conduct and the fact that she is only concerned about herself. Her betrayal is a source of great grievance for Simon but one of satisfaction for Fanie and provides one of the rare occasions for the amused or even happy Fanie to smile, as can be seen in the photograph taken by a traveling photographer at the end of Standard Four (cf. 136).

While Simon himself is unaware of his homosexual orientation, several people around him seem to have a hunch. Trevor, for example, is correct in his assumption about Simon's sexual orientation when he defends himself for having taken Mary's job which results in Mary being removed to her “homeland”:

It's not my fault, is it, the *stupid* laws the Rockshitters make? I'm *sick* of them and their rules and regulations, their thou-shalt-not-blow-thy-nose-with-thy-left-hand

mentality. When you get older you'll realize that people like me and I wouldn't wonder you, too, are just as oppressed by their laws as Mary. (106, emphasis original).

So is the *dominee* in Bleshoenderbaai when he identifies Simon as a potential victim and decides to start cruising him in the dressing room (cf. 182f), and so is one of Simon's classmates who, as an anonymous scribe, accuses Simon in large capitals, written on the wall above the urinal, of having homosexual relations with the organ playing hostel prefect Richard Hicks (cf. 218).

Even Juliana Swanepoel notices the special relationship, not between Hicks and Simon, but between Simon and Fanie. Therefore, she suggests that Simon should ask Fanie to change places because the latter would do anything Simon asked him (cf. 127). Steve seemed to have been under the same impression when he told Fanie he should not hate Simon, since the latter had only told the police where to find Steve out of jealousy because Simon liked Fanie and would take care of him after Steve was gone. Steve even points out that Simon would not be aware of the fact that he liked Fanie.

It is also Steve with whom Simon gains his first homoerotic experience. Much to the distaste of their parents, the children of Verkeerdespruit dote on Steve, whose real name is Johannes Jacobus von der Westhuizen (cf. 26). The Coke-drinking big man with thick forearms, a ducktail hairstyle, jeans, tight T-shirt, leather jacket, and a motorbike (cf. 26ff) is "as out of date as everything else that ended up in Verkeerdespruit" (30), but to the children living there he seems like the sinister-stranger-on-a-black-horse movie character (cf. 31) and with his touch of illegitimacy and air of nonchalance he becomes a role model for the children as he represents a rebel against their parents and their "adult world of duty and obedience" (31). So, when Steve invites Simon to a ride on his motorbike and a swim, the latter is overjoyed. The swimming scene contains homoerotic images such as Simon's "belly rubbing against the skin of [Steve's] back" (36) when, both in the nude, the latter piggybacks him, and Simon is able to "feel the rhythmical contracting and relaxing of Steve's back and shoulder muscles" (31) under him. From the nineteenth century onwards, such bathing scenes have become "almost a cliché of homosexual literature" (Martin 20), since they offer "an opportunity to display the male body naked and to display men together, even touching each other, at the same time remaining totally 'innocent'" (Martin 20).

After the swim in the Modder River, when they dry their wet bodies in the hot sun, they sit next to each other, which leads to bodily contact and to shy Simon opening up to Steven and admiring Steve's masculine body:

I sat next to him, half leaning against his side. He put his left arm on my shoulder.

"Next time I'll teach you to swim," he said. "Really?" I asked, thrilled as much by the idea of a next time as by the promise.

The sun was warm on our bodies, and apart from the sound of a bird making a fuss in a *soetdoring* tree next to us, it was absolutely quiet. Steve's smoke drifted in the still air in front of us, the sweetish smell of the tobacco mingling with the scent of the first yellow flowers on the tree. He blew a smoke ring and we watched it hover in front of us before it gradually dispersed.

"Blow another," I said, and he did. The insubstantial ring drifting in front of us seemed to me the most perfect thing I had ever seen, but I was too shy to say so.

We sat for a while and then he threw away his cigarette, rubbed his hand across his stomach and said, "I'm just about dry, how about you?" "I'm quite dry," I said.

"Course you are. There's much less of you to get dry," and he ran his hand down my side. Then he got up from the ledge and stretched himself in the sun. I had never seen a grown man without clothes before, and I looked at the hair on his body and wondered why men got hair there, and what it felt like. I put out my hand and touched the hair on his chest. It was rougher than ordinary hair.

Steve said, "You'll have some of that too, one day. Plenty of time." But I looked at Steve's body, the broad shoulders and thick arms, the strong legs, and shook my head. I knew that my body would never look like that.

"Yes, you will," he said, misinterpreting my head shake. "It happens to everybody. It's natural."

I thought of Mr. Viljoen and Mr. Deyssel and Dominee Claassen and somehow I couldn't imagine that they had hair on their bodies, or that if they did it looked like Steve's. "It looks nice on you," I said, then blushed.

"Of course it does," he said, and put his hand behind my neck and pressed my head against his shoulder. "Time to go," he said. "Your old folks will get worried." (38)

Again, the scene contains homoerotic images of the two naked men touching each other and Simon admiring Steve's masculine body and paying him compliments, for the body is seen as the "major bearer of masculine value and symbolism" (Morrell 8). Furthermore, the scene has a romantic touch with the bird singing, the flowers blooming, and the perfect smoke ring drifting in front of the two men sitting side by side in the warm sun. However, the scene of joy and playfulness changes into something awkward and embarrassing when Mrs. Opperman and Simon's mother, both outraged and Simon's mother in curlers, appear on the scene and call Steve, who could have been Simon's sexual liberator and role model, a pervert who should stay away from Simon and threaten to call the police. Immediately, a scene of perfect innocence is turned into one of sexual perversion. With a scene reminiscent of slapstick comedy, comic relief is provided to take the sting out of the unpleasant episode. When Dumbo misinterprets Simon's

mother's imperative command and jumps into Mrs. Opperman's car "in a cowed sort of way and lick[s] the back of Mrs. Opperman's neck" (39) and nips her hand when she screams and slaps at the dog but misses him (cf. 39), he detracts from her dignity and moralistic self-righteousness.

After Simon's mother's threat against Steve, it is Fanie, who ends up on a joyride with Steve to another town and who is kissed by Steve, for which the latter is accused of abduction and child molestation and put into prison, where he gets killed. Simon's affection for Steve also manifests itself in Simon's jealous reactions when he learns that Steve has kissed Fanie (cf. 53) and when Betty confesses that she loves Steve (cf. 70).

Simon's initiation into sexuality happens only three years later at the age of thirteen during his vacation at Bleshonderbaai, where a stranger he meets in the dressing room takes interest in him and the fact that he reads Dickens' *Great Expectations*. "Simon initially misses the erotic overtones of the interest, but, like Pip finally learning who his secret benefactor truly is, Simon learns the nature of something he has not understood till then." (Brown, para 1) By appealing to his intellect, the stranger is trying to seduce him, and indeed, Simon's curiosity to explore his sexuality triumphs over shame, and Simon's bodily response to the stranger's advances (cf. 187) signals his interest. Encouraged by this, the stranger, who turns out to be a married man (cf. 192) and a prominent *dominee* from Pretoria (cf. 195), seduces Simon in a cave into mutual masturbation. All goes well until Simon, at the height of his sexual climax, bites the *dominee's* tongue as hard as he can. With the *dominee* crying out in pain and letting go of him, Simon falls forward into the sand, his body still performing its involuntary contractions (cf. 192). Being followed by the *dominee's* advice "never [to] give anybody a blow job" (193), Simon's initiation is laughable to the reader because of its situational comedy accompanied by amusing comments. Simon, however, who is "not able to separate sexuality from guilt" (Martin 30), rushes home in terror and spends a miserable night fearing that what he considers to be an atrocity might be revealed to his father (cf. 193f). This inner conflict and feeling of guilt caused by sexual desire might be interpreted as a result of his instruction in a religion that "make[s] the flesh into the root of all evil" (Foucault 19) and declares sexuality for non-procreative reasons a sin. In hindsight, Simon perceives the incident at Bleshonderbaai as a loss, "perhaps the greatest of all, though it was impossible to say exactly what I had lost" (177). His comment might refer to the loss of his innocence as well as to the loss of his childhood, since his admission reveals that he realizes that he is old enough to have lost something, a sure sign for his coming of age. Fanie's presence at Wesley College forces Simon

to relive the past in the present, a past that now seems to him “like a series of losses and betrayals” (177). The fact that the *dominee* as a married man is also a molester of boys might serve as an example to illustrate the distinction between homosexual behaviour and a homosexual identity, which are not necessarily and automatically the same (cf. Connell 147).

Loss, betrayal, and the past relived in the presence are recurring themes in Heyns’ novels, however, *The Children’s Day* is the only one of the three novels analysed, in which the story is told by a child narrator.

## **2.5 Narrative Situation**

With the novel being written in the liberal spirit of post-1994 South Africa, Heyns provides a critical perspective on the apartheid regime. However, instead of pointing the finger or exploiting the tragic potential of the era, he does so by means of structural irony. This structural feature “depends on a knowledge of the author’s ironic intention, which is shared by the reader but is not intended by the fictional speaker” (Abrams 143). An example can be found in the scene of Mary’s departure. When brought to the station and warned by Simon’s mother to look after her things, because “there are people on the train who will steal everything you have” (107), Mary naively responds by saying “I know. The train is not like Verkeerdespruit. There are bad people on the train.” (107) The irony of the scene lies in the fact that the “good” people of Verkeerdespruit, who, “informed by the public discourse of apartheid” (Wessels 60) and full of prejudice, “do not want their hair to be washed by a black person” (Wessels 60). They robbed Mary of her job as well as her home and family, so all that is left to steal for potential thieves on the train is a picnic basket filled with a roast chicken and hard-boiled eggs, which raises and answers the question about who the bad people really are: the supporters of the inhumane system who rob people of their livelihood for no reason at all, just because they have the power to do so, because they do not want their hair to be washed by a black women, rather than petty thieves on a train who might steal a picnic basket.

### **2.5.1 The Child Narrator**

Another example of structural irony is the protagonist narrator Simon. Heyns captures the everyday struggle of a child trying to cope with the apartheid situation and his own homosexuality in a heteronormative society. Other than Coetzee who tells his childhood memoir *Boyhood* in the form of a “narrative report” (Meyer 74) from a third person’s

perspective, Heyns uses a protagonist child narrator, Simon, who tells the story from his first person's point of view, thereby giving insights in his innermost thoughts and emotions. However, Heyns does not use the typical child-language, as can be found in James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, for example (cf. Joyce 3f). With Heyns, the naïve narrator is introduced as "a structural feature that serves to sustain a duplex meaning and evaluation throughout the work" (Abrams 142). An example thereof can be found in the scene where Simon goes to the headmaster to tell on his classmates whom Simon saw engaging in mutual masturbation in the chapel and whom he wants to be punished. The headmaster, Reverend Robinson, refers to mutual masturbation as "Plain Sewing", classifies it as a misdemeanour of a lower degree, and gives Simon the choice between pursuing his aim to get them punished and thus expelled, or not to tell anybody else and the headmaster simply giving them a telling-off. When Simon does not want to suppress his knowledge of Hicks and Krause's misdemeanour, the headmaster compares Simon's willingness to abuse his power to betray his friends to the behaviour of the participants of the Milgram experiment and to the people executing the commands to kill millions of victims in the Nazi death camps (cf. 231). He explains that such behaviour is the reason for "Things being as They Are" in apartheid society and that he will not tolerate tell-tales at his school. He even threatens to punish Simon should he tell anybody else about the incident. Simon does not understand a single word:

I felt as if I had been run over by a bus that I had in good faith been trying to board. I must have looked very miserable, for his manner became less stern.  
"I don't think you are an evil boy," he said almost gently. "But you have grown up in an evil society and you must be taught that it is evil."  
"Yes, sir," I said.  
"And the best way to recognize evil is to acknowledge its presence in oneself," he continued.  
"Yes, sir."  
"No, sir," he snapped suddenly, "you do not understand what I'm telling you. But one day you may, and I pray that it will help you. The reason for Things Being as They Are is seldom deliberate evil – it is lovelessness." He paused, while I stared at him blankly. "And there are as many forms of lovelessness as of love," he continued, more pensively again. "And I sometimes think that lovelessness is just the desire for love gone wrong. [...] The point is that your ... background has taught you to regard evil as normal. I want you to recognize it for what it is."  
"Yes, sir."  
"Do you have any questions, boy?"  
"No, sir."  
"Well, then. I trust that you have learned something from this unfortunate incident." He looked at me expectantly.  
"Yes, sir," I said, since that was clearly what I was expected to say. I hoped that he would be content with this rather bare affirmation, but he was not.  
"What?" he asked.

“What ... what, sir?”

“What have you learned from this incident?”

I sat in dumb mystification, trying to think of something to say that would satisfy Mr. Robinson. He was looking at me as if he were preparing to pounce again. [...] So when Mr. Robinson said again, “Well, boy? I’m waiting,” I said, “Yes, sir, please, sir. I learned what Plain Sewing is.” (232f)

In this passage, Simon represents the typical ingénu, the naïve narrator, “whose invincible simplicity or obtuseness leads him to persist in putting an interpretation on affairs which the knowing reader – who penetrates to, and shares, the implied point of view of the authorial presence [...] is called on to alter and correct” (Abrams 143). Other than the reader, Simon does not understand that the headmaster presses his students for solidarity and refusal of obeisance to the oppressive regime. The passage also exposes Simon’s capacity for betrayal. There may be various reasons why he feels compelled to tell on his friends. Two are named explicitly by Simon himself. First, he wants to clear his name of the accusations made by the anonymous scribe about his relationship to Hicks, since homosexual orientation would make him an outcast in heteronormative apartheid society, and second, he hopes that his own sexual misdemeanour at Bleshonderbaai would be expiated (cf. 230), as homosexuality was declared a deadly sin by the Church. Another reason might be his jealousy, of which he might not even be aware or of which he might be in denial, just as he is in denial of his own homosexuality. Whatever the reason, it is, in any case, the result of his upbringing in apartheid society and its set of moral and religious values. Simon’s innocence has been corrupted by the system up to the point of becoming a hypocrite. A case in point would be his blaming of Krause for Hick’s leaving the school although, if anyone is to blame, it is Simon, who told the headmaster about their deed.

However, there are also several passages, where Simon clearly sees the underlying meaning, for example when he understands that the Sermon on the Mount about absolute obedience and sacrifice is aimed at the preoccupied parents of the new recruits (cf. 196-197) or when he discovers “The Mystery” (154). Being sent to Mr. Viljoen’s office by the tennis teacher, who is enamoured with Miss Rheeder and suspects her to be at Mr. Viljoen’s, Simon suddenly understands the real nature of “The Topic” (149):

The door opened with disconcerting ease, and I found myself staring at Mr. Viljoen’s black toe caps. They were standing on his desk pointing neatly toward the door. His pants were on the floor next to the desk and he himself was lying face-down on the sofa, on top of somebody who was also not wearing shoes, for two barefooted legs were wrapped around his body. [...] Then I saw Miss Rheeder’s red shoes on the filing cabinet, next to a neatly folded pile of clothes. Mr. Viljoen seemed to be doing push-ups on top of Miss Rheeder, and he was making grunting noises. They had evidently

not heard me open the door. He changed position and I could see her face: her eyes were closed. Then she said in an out-of-breath sort of way, “This is better exercise than playing tennis with Nico van der Walt,” and they both laughed in that way that I could now relate to its source. I was in the presence of The Mystery. (153f)

Simon recognizes the way they laughed since he has heard it before whenever his classmates have made remarks about The Mystery, which have been cryptic to the sexually unknowing Simon.

A very clear insight is shown by the adolescent and more mature narrator in the scenes set in the present of 1968, but also in some of the flashback episodes, for example, when the thirteen year old Simon talks to the *dominee* about power. Simon surprises the *dominee* with his insight, when he states he wants to become a policeman in order to be on the side of power. What he has learned from the fate of all the outcasts of Verkeerdespruit, such as Steve, Betty, Mary, Mr. van der Walt, and even Dumbo, is that “if you don’t have it you lose” (185). The theme of loss and betrayal recurs several times throughout the novel. It spans from Simon being betrayed by Fanie, when the latter publicly accuses him of having frightened him into a fit (cf. 23), over Juliana Swanepoel who chooses Tjaart Bothma over him as a partner for the party (cf. 135), to Simon’s father who breaks his promise not to kill Dumbo (cf. 174), until Simon experiences “perhaps the greatest [loss] of all” (177) referring to his loss of innocence to the stranger at Bleshonderbaai as well as the loss of his childhood when he realizes that he is old enough to have lost something. It continues with Betty, who is used by Steve to pass as normal in a heteronormative society and who steals all her savings (cf. 69), and Klasie who is betrayed by Trevor who refuses to openly admit his love for him (cf. 116). Finally, Simon himself is capable of betrayal, first of his friend Hicks when he reports him to the headmaster (cf. 227), and then of Fanie when he denies his feelings for him (cf. 241f).

Furthermore, the child narrator “gives immediate insight into the nature of the character telling the story, and is both funny and ironic in the information that it ‘apparently’ innocently provides for the reader” (Mann 339), as for example in the passage where Louis van Niekerk deduces from the fact that Fanie’s father is the new barman at Loubser’s Hotel why Fanie is an only child, which was considered an anomaly in apartheid Verkeerdespruit where the four-child family was the norm. However, the sexually unknowing Simon cannot follow Louis’ deduction:

“Then that’s why he’s an only child.”

“Why?” I asked reluctantly, unwilling to give Louis an opening to show off his powers of deduction.



“Because his father’s a barman, of course,” he said smugly. “That means he comes home too late.”

I wanted to ask too late for what, but since that was clearly what Louis van Niekerk wanted me to do, I simply said “Oh,” and pretended to take a thorn out of my foot.  
(13)

“The child narrator is supposedly not complex enough, or sophisticated enough, to hide anything, so it tells the reader how things are in a naïve and free manner” (Mann 339f), as does the sexually unknowing Simon who does not understand the many references to sexual intercourse, made, for example, by his classmates Tjaart Bothma and Louis van Niekerk, who refer to potential sexual relations between Miss Rheeder and Mr. van der Walt as “indoor doubles” (149), or by the dominee at Bleshonderbaai, who refers to sexual intercourse when he tells Simon that “two people can play *bok-bok* quite well” (183). Simon’s sexual ignorance makes him an outsider to his classmates who laugh at him because he does not understand their allusions to sexuality. Simon’s classmates represent the typical male adolescents in heteronormative apartheid society, where manhood and masculinity were primarily established “through sexual relations with women” (Clowes 89) and sexual knowledge constitutes an important part in the performance of the gendered masculine role. The ingénu perspective of the child narrator is both naïve and honest, for Simon admits his ignorance when he calls Tjaart’s and Louis’s hysteria following his innocent comment “incomprehensible” (149) or when the *dominee*’s remark about *bok-bok* seems implausible to Simon, who looks at him sceptically (cf. 183).

However, “[f]ar from being undeveloped [...] the child’s view is often seen as one of clarity” (Mann 336), since it provides “acute observations on all the textures of society” (Mann 337), as can be seen in the passage where Mary is sent to her “homeland” because Trevor takes her job and Simon asks him to refrain from it (cf. 106) and, after Trevor has left Verkeerdespruit, Simon asks if Mary will come back now (cf. 117). Another example would be Simon asking his father, the magistrate, why Steve is sent to prison for kissing Fanie, while the sadistic teacher who broke Simon’s jaw is protected by the system and is just transferred to another school (cf. 87f). In these passages, the purity and moral neutrality of the child’s simple vision is juxtaposed to the complexities of society (cf. Mann 336). The child narrator represents the “uncontaminated potential in a context that is often loaded, guiding the reader to gauge the justness of a situation, social or otherwise” (Mann 337). This “allows a double reading for the adult to read between the lines and see the things that the child sees but may not as yet fully understand” (Mann 340).

What Simon does not fully understand, is in some instances “mediated for him by Betty” (Rosenthal para 5) during their Saturday afternoon sessions in Steyl’s café, as, for example, the reason for Mr. de Wet’s jealousy of Simon (cf. 81) or the reason for Miss Rheeder drowning her baby (cf. 145) as well as Trevor’s influence on Klasie and his mother (cf. 117). In other instances, Simon tries to gain more insight by eavesdropping on his parents (cf. 171f) or on the members of the OVV, the *Oranje Vrouevereniging*, at their special meeting with Simon hiding in the flowerbed outside the window (cf. 42).

Another aspect of the child narrator is its vulnerability. According to Mann, “the vulnerability of a child [...] draws the reader deeper into the story” (336). A scene to illustrate this point is the one of Dumbo being shot, which is perhaps the most tragic scene of the novel. Here, the reader “is made to experience the impact of [the trauma’s] brutal force through the eyes and heart” (Mann 344) of the betrayed child narrator, a narrative technique aiming at getting the reader emotionally involved.

### 2.5.2 Language

One important aspect of the child narrator already mentioned in the title of the novel is language. The title is taken from Robert Grave’s poem *The Cool Web*, “which deals with the power of language to demystify, to bring under control” (Wessels 60). While adults use language “to keep reality at bay, to distance and protect themselves from the immediacy, vulnerability, terror and joy that children experience, exposed as they are to ‘the wide glare of the children’s day’” (Rosenthal para 3), children have to face life “without the interface of definition by language” (Wessels 60). One example would be the scene with the stranger at Bleshonderbaai where Simon lacks the words to talk about his ejaculation:

“I don’t know what happened,” I said.

“You’ve bitten off my tongue, that’s what happened,” he said, rather thickly, wiping his mouth with a handkerchief.

“But this...” and I gestured at the mess as I struggled to my feet.

“You’ve come all over the place. It happens.” [...] It was some slight relief to discover that there was a name for what I had done – coming all over the place couldn’t be completely monstrous if it had been classified as a human possibility. (192f)

The fact that his experience has been categorized calms him down immediately. “Articulation in language is seen to overtake and overwhelm the immediacy of actual experience, of lived reality” (Wessels 60), as can also be seen in the passage where the children of the Standard Two

class go into hysterics when Fanie van den Bergh falls sideways off his desk and starts convulsing. Their horror “is abruptly assuaged” (Wessels 60) when the teacher finds “a category” (18) and announces that Fanie is having a fit: “The information calmed us immediately. We’d heard of fits. The horrible visitation had been named, explained, tamed in our minds.” (18) Their dismay “is contained by its mediation through language” (Wessels 61).

The other extreme, “excessive articulation” (Wessels 60), can be found in the adolescents’ preoccupation with The Mystery, in phallogocentrism, and in political discourse. The former is a frequent topic of conversation among the boys, although Simon discovers the real nature of The Mystery only when he catches the two teachers in flagrante. Before this discovery, his classmate’s allusions remain obscure to him. Another main topic of conversation is the penis and the size thereof. With the phallus being “a prime symbol of [...] masculinity” (Dover 174), its size is the subject of detailed discussion as can be seen in the scene of the tennis match, where the mere size of Fanie’s member suffices to distract Simon as well as the spectators (cf. 156f), or in the scene at Bleshonderbaai, where Simon and the *dominee* pay each other compliments on their penises which they call “very nice” (187) and “promising” (192), and where they discuss the size of Fanie’s penis and the importance of having “a big tool” (cf. 187f). The sheer number of different names for it shows its important role in male identity formation.

As regards political discourse, the discourse of state is “filled with the language of separation, service, obedience and communist threat” (Morrell 16) and of euphemisms and definitions provided by those in power to hide the inhumanity and injustice of regulations, as for example in the definition of “child molesting”, which makes Steve a social pariah who is denied housing and livelihood and who ends up being killed in prison, while the sadistic teacher, Mr. de Wet, is just sent to another school where he might break another pupil’s jaw. Another example would be the extensive definition of “sabotage” (88) or the use of the euphemisms “homeland” and “repatriation” for deporting black people to places they have never been.

Another means to ensure the power of the ruling class is the declaration of Afrikaans to be the official language in the predominantly Afrikaans Free State. Its importance as a symbol of power is shown in the passage where Betty as a matter of principle refuses to answer the switchboard in Afrikaans first, which leads to complaints of the town burghers (cf. 57ff). In addition to the role language plays in establishing a cultural identity, Heyns shows the role language and discourse play “in the deployment of ideology” (Wessels 60). One example of the language of power in racist apartheid society would be the use of the demeaning and offensive word “kaffir”, as blacks are labelled in Afrikaans (cf. Goldsmith 112f). The passage where

Simon's classmate calls Simon's dog, which he had bought from an African man, a "kaffir dog" (163) represents an instance of invasion of the language of power into "the private, domestic life of people in an ideologically driven society, shaping the thinking of the young and their ability to conceptualize" (Wessels 62).

What holds true for racism, holds also true for homophobia, where discourse is used for othering or even demonizing homosexual people by depicting them as child-molesting perverts or people apt to ridicule because of their clothes, styles, and gestures. Due to their perceived difference they do not fit into any of the established categories. However, the category "homosexual" fails to capture the great diversity within the homosexual subculture. The pederast *dominee* does not fit into the same category as the effeminate hairdresser or the manly homosexual who lives in a satisfying homosexual relationship or the adult affectionate for the youth according to the Greek model or Hicks and Krause experimenting with their sexuality. Even those subcategories are deconstructed by Heyns, as for example the effeminate hairdresser Trevor, who is not the stereotypical superficial camp person he seems to be at first glance. He loves Klasie but knows about the dangers of openly admitting it, while Klasie naively wants the world to know about their same-sex love, notwithstanding the intolerance to homosexuals in heteronormative apartheid society.

Categorization is an important aspect of language in a society where "[e]ducation is a matter of knowing the names of things" (213), as Simon's English teacher announces. While Simon is not able to name all things, he sometimes senses them and infers the true meaning, as, for example, when he senses the "obscure horror" (40) lurking in his mother's question about whether Steve had touched him, which he denies for he knows "that what [his] mother meant was not what Steve had done" (40). The lack of words due to the lack of categories and concepts provides one aspect of the unreliability of the child narrator, for example when Simon speaks of *The Mystery* because he lacks the concept of sex or when he uses the word "fit" (154) to describe Mr. Viljoen having sexual intercourse. The lack of knowledge of words also provides comic elements to the story, as, for example, when Simon talks to the headmaster about "mutual maturation" meaning "mutual masturbation" (cf. 227) or when he philosophizes on the meaning of "getting a reputation" (cf. 32f). Another aspect of categories Heyns plays on is the fact that people cannot relate to abstract categories but to real people. Transferred to writing, it is easier for the reader to relate to "Mary" than to "black people being deported" or to relate to "Simon and Trevor" rather than the abstract category of "homosexuals". Of course, this phenomenon can also be used in a negative way in ideological language, where people are categorized to

facilitate the process of “othering” and where lived reality is distorted by language to create enemies.

As regards Fanie, the common categories are of little help to Simon. Apart from being categorized as being “one of the poor children” (11) and an epileptic, the shy and serene Fanie is difficult to read for Simon. Therefore, their relationship is characterized by ambivalence. While at the beginning, Simon is nice to the newcomer in class, offering him white-bread sandwiches and helping him with his sums, their relationship takes a turn for the worse when Fanie wrongfully accuses Simon of having given him a fright (cf. 23) and when they start competing for Steve’s attention. While Fanie’s reaction to Simon being dumped by Juliana Swanepoel might have been triggered by Simon’s indifference toward him, Simon’s annoyance with Fanie might have been the result of his feeling of superiority. However, the power-dynamics change when Fanie expresses his sympathy after Dumbo has been shot, but their true relationship is only revealed in the very last chapter of the novel.

## 2.6 Ending

The concluding chapter is of dramatic intensity. It starts with Fanie laying claim to Simon on the day of the fateful tennis match due to their common past in Verkeerdespruit and with Simon realizing “what a constant if peripheral presence he had been” (71). Fanie, “the unwelcome envoy from [Simon’s] past” (72) represents the “gormless maladroitness of backwater living” (72) that Simon has tried to get away from by coming to Bloemfontein. It continues with Simon’s embarrassing defeat in the deciding match of the tennis tournament, where he is distracted by the movement of Fanie’s monstrous private parts in his baggy tennis shorts, much to the delight of the onlookers (cf. 156f). It is after this tennis match that Simon realizes why this apparently “insignificant sharer of [his] past should have an effect on [him] so disproportionate to his gifts or his actions” (177): Fanie forces him to relive the past in the present, a past that “seemed like a series of losses and betrayals with nothing to show for it except this clumsy boy who had beaten me on my home ground” (177). Simon’s embarrassment continues at the film show, where Fanie as a thoroughly indoctrinated Afrikaner, for whom “it matters a great deal that they are descended from the Huguenots fleeing Catholic persecution in France” (Rubin para 5), struggles to interpret the plot of *The Sound of Music* correctly. Simon shares enough of Fanie’s background to know that

in the popular mythology of paranoia that was called a primary education, Catholics were only slightly less sinister than Communists, and considerably more sinister than Nazis. He was clearly having problems processing a Catholic Julie Andrews. Then he

turned to me, and there was relief written all over his face; he had solved the dilemma: 'Is she running away from the nuns?' he asked. (238)

When the other boys laugh at Fanie because of his “idiosyncratic and unsophisticated interpretation” (Wessels 69), the furious Simon rushes out into the stormy night to extricate himself from the embarrassing situation, only to be followed again by Fanie to confront him “with his absurd claim” (241) that Steve told him that Simon liked him and would look after him after Steve was gone. Simon denies this and – in a final attempt to shake Fanie off forever – he adds that the latter has always been “nothing but a nuisance” (242) to him. However, Fanie insists that Simon would not know he liked him and takes Simon’s left hand in his right. Taken by surprise at first, Simon later is appalled by Fanie’s gesture and his own response:

For a moment Fanie’s hand in mine, trusting, imploring, reassuring – it was impossible to tell from its gentle pressure – made the whole terrible day fall into place, make sense, simplified into a kind of truce between my anxious present and that hungry past with which Fanie had confronted me so insistently all day, between the manifold betrayals of adulthood and the dumb gullibility of childhood. The offered hand asked, demanded, claimed nothing but to be accepted on its own terms, a pledge too inarticulate to betray or be betrayed.

Then I came to my senses and registered the enormity of Fanie’s gesture, the peril of being found in the rose garden holding hands with a Clutch Plate “You ... you ...” In my agitation I couldn’t find the words for what I wanted to say. But my education came to my aid with a formula. “You Clutch Plate pervert,” I said, pushing him out of the way. (242)

The scene shows “moments when instinctive and conditioned reflexes are in conflict” (Adams 111) within Simon. While Fanie is openly admitting his homosexuality and his feelings, Simon as a victim of the internalized oppression, which has been deeply ingrained by socialization and enculturation into homophobic apartheid society, is struggling to accept his own sexual orientation. “It is Fanie, not protected by language, Fanie who can barely put a sentence together, who nevertheless knows what it is that Simon needs to know” (Rosenthal para 9), even if Simon is not yet ready to accept it. In his sexual confusion, Simon strikes him under the chin, leading to Fanie biting his tongue and bleeding. It is only when Fanie runs off into the stormy night and seems to be struck by lightning that Simon’s own “homosexual impulses are recognized and given expression” (Martin 83). He runs after Fanie and tries to apologize, but Fanie is having another fit:

I knelt by him. I remembered that I must turn him on his side but I was entranced by the rhythmic convulsion so impartially suggestive of an extremity of pleasure and a torment of pain, the blind face in its transport of oblivion; the frail body punishing itself in its fierce assault upon the earth, the image of all love under the spell of the

passion it cannot tame or deny or even articulate. And as I knelt over Fanie van den Bergh the rain came. In the wind and the rain and the wide glare of the sky, I was enclosed, alone with Fanie. I put my hand over his mouth, wet with spittle and blood and rain, and I searched for the separation of his clenched lips, forced open the contracting mouth, felt for a moment the mutely writhing tongue, and waited for the agony of the jaws closing possessively around my fingers in dumb absolution. (243f)

Simon's attempt at self-repression eventually fails. "The word can finally be spoken; the truth can be told" (Martin 38), and Simon has his coming out at last, since he becomes aware of his sexual orientation and accepts himself as a homosexual. The scene bears a homoerotic element as well, for, in the course of the novel, "both epileptic fits and biting are associated with sensuality, eroticism, intimacy and love" (Wessels 69). One of those scenes would be the one already mentioned above, where Simon uses the word "fit" to describe Mr. Viljoen having sexual intercourse with Miss Rheeder (cf. 154). Another scene would be Simon's initiation into sexuality at Bleshonderbaai, where he compares his first sexual experience to a fit and bites the pedophilic *dominee's* tongue (cf. 192). Furthermore, there is the scene of Steve biting Simon's hand which gives Simon pleasure (cf. 27), and, of course, the one where Simon puts his hand in his beloved dog's bleeding, panting mouth after it had been shot (cf. 175) to be granted absolution just as in the very last scene of the novel where he hopes to be granted absolution by Fanie for his betrayal, i.e. for having denied their relationship and for having treated him badly. That moment and the personal affection that it implies suggest that they might fall in love despite the fact that, in apartheid South Africa, there is no social context which would happily contain Simon and Fanie as lovers, since there is no socially sanctioned form which would allow them to express their love openly in a heteronormative and homophobic society, where homosexual behaviour is criminalized and declared a sin.

## 2.7 Conclusion

With the novel being set in the 1960s, i.e. during the heyday of the apartheid era under the Verwoerd premiership, Heyns provides insights into the Christian Nationalist apartheid ideology and its values which were designed "to keep the white nation sexually and morally pure" (Retief 99) in order to maintain white supremacy and authority over blacks, coloureds, and communists. Heyns shows the characters in this unique context of the South African apartheid era, where homosexuality was seen as infectious and "the utter ruin of civilization" (Retief 102), and where institutionalized racism and homophobia influenced not only public but also private life.

By means of various homosexual characters, Heyns expounds the hostility and oppression homosexuals had to suffer under the apartheid regime. His homosexual representations range from the pedophile, child-molesting *dominee*, as well as the potential sexual liberator Steve and the effeminate Trevor, to “normal” manly homosexuals, and adolescents experimenting with their sexuality. Although Heyns draws upon stereotypes to characterize his protagonists, his representation of homosexual characters does not equal “a peepshow of freakish individuals” (Adams 57). Heyns deconstructs these stereotypes and stresses the ordinariness of his protagonists in order to show that homosexuality is not confined to effeminate, unclean, or strange creatures, and that “difference does not equal inferiority” (De Waal 233). His homosexual characters “are variously as comic, as pathetic, as wise, as foolish, as good and as bad – as human, in other words – as all of his other characters” (Adams 156). Heyns treats homosexual desire and love “in an ironic, unsensational manner, crediting it with equal power to damn or to save” (Adams 169), and he does so by means of structural irony instead of confessional gloom.

The structural irony is provided by the child narrator. The protagonist child narrator represents the typical *ingénu* whose perspective is both naïve and honest. This narrative technique allows the writer “to present events in at least three registers at once: Simon’s uncomprehending but faithful accuracy to events at the time; the point of view of social opinion, which Simon expresses as part of his own upbringing; and the point of view of grown Simon who has already learned the lessons he wants these childhood adventures to illustrate.” (Brown para 4) Heyns presents the absurdity and inhumanity of the apartheid values and regulations through the eyes of the naïve child, complemented by dialogues with other characters who provide a second perspective and additional insights, leaving the evaluation of the events to the reader. He challenges and deconstructs myths such as the equation of homosexuality with effeminacy, child-molesting, and perversion. Furthermore, he ridicules the reaction of the majority of the population who respond with panic and fear in general to difference and with moral panic in particular to any sexual orientation different from their own, but whose panic and fear immediately give way to tolerance if it suits their economic or personal needs or advantage, which illustrates their hypocrisy.

Central to the coming-of-age novel, which becomes a coming-out novel in the course of the narrative, is the relationship between the protagonist narrator Simon and his counterpart Fanie. Being the victim of religious indoctrination and his upbringing in the repressive heteronormative apartheid society and having been offered “no model other than that of the majority, who conform to the ways of the world” (Martin 75), Simon’s homosexual self is



characterized by sexual confusion and repression. He is first unaware and then in denial of his sexual orientation and, after having enacted his homosexual desire, he feels guilt-stricken and ashamed. Simon's homosexual desire is depicted in homoerotic scenes, stressing the bodily aspect and sensuality of homoeroticism as well as the potential for love and romance in same-sex relationships. His homosexuality is depicted as an alienating as well as an educating force (cf. Adams 113). Apart from the life lessons he learns from adults, his journey of self-discovery, starting out with unawareness and then rejection of his homosexual self, eventually leads him to acknowledge and accept his homosexuality (cf. Adams 77) and is mainly triggered by Fanie. While Simon is the privileged son of educated and liberal middle-class parents, Fanie is "the dull, neglected son of the local barman who needs help with his reading" (Wessels 68) and belongs to the category of the poor whites who depend on charity. Fanie is first dismissed by Simon as "just ordinary" (12) and "stupid" (16), however, with his "general air of being lost but not minding" (24) and his astute observation and unquestioning understanding of human behaviour (cf. Wessels 68), Fanie "succeeds in inflaming all the unanswered questions and unresolved issues that lie in Simon's memories of Verkeerdespruit" (Rosenthal para 7). By accepting his homosexual identity and being comfortable with it despite the negative effects of alienation in the heteronormative society, Fanie becomes a role model for the sexually confused Simon who goes through an identity crisis. Simon's epiphany comes as suddenly and as surprisingly as the bolt of lightning in the very last scene of the novel, when his mature self has finally progressed "beyond an adolescent fear that his sexual nature is sinful" (Adams 112), and he eventually "accepts the personal bonds between himself and Fanie" (Wessels 70). Simon's expression of love and loyalty seem to suggest that he has overcome the internalized oppression of his sexual orientation in a process of liberation and is ready to accept homosexuality as an element of his self-definition and that he has finally understood what the wise Headmaster of Wesley College tried to impart when he declared love and loyalty to be the solution to political injustice.

### **3 Lost Ground**

#### **3.1 Setting and Historical Background**

Published in 2011, the novel is set in 2010 post-apartheid South Africa in the fictional town of Alfredville, the main centre of a part of the Little Karoo known as the Ghanta (cf. Heyns, *Lost*

*Ground 5*)<sup>2</sup>. The present chronology of the story, covering a time span of ten days, is interrupted by flashbacks connecting it to the past of the 1988 South African apartheid era, when racism and discrimination against minorities grounded on gender, religion, and sexual orientation were supported by laws and the majority of the white populace. The legal and social situation of the apartheid era is contrasted in the novel with that of post-1994 South Africa, where the new Constitution forbids unfair discrimination by the state on grounds of race, gender, and sexual orientation, to name but a few. So, historically, the novel is situated within a period of important change in South African political life. It is exactly this difference that strikes the expatriate Peter when he returns to his hometown in 2010 and he realizes “this is not the Alfredville of my youth [...]: this is Alfredville with a gay hotel owner and his black partner and, until recently, a black chief of police” (25), all of which are things that would have been unthinkable in the apartheid South Africa of 1988.

However, the commitment to a discourse of human rights, expressed in what Trengove Jones calls “our experiment in constitutionalism” (135), does not reflect the whole reality of public life. There is still a wide discrepancy between the legal situation and the social acceptance and tolerance of the changes, which is also expressed in the novel. The term “after apartheid” is not equivalent to “apartheid-free” (Trengove Jones 135). The public perception of the mixed marriage between Desirée and her black husband might serve to illustrate this point. Although mixed marriages have been legalized by the Civil Union Act, the marriage between Desirée and her black husband is socially not accepted. Too deeply ingrained are the fear of turning native and the “anxieties over miscegenation [that still] drive much of white prejudice” (Goldsmith 117). Another case in point would be the reservations about a black chief of police or about the ability of leadership of blacks in general, as is expressed in the racist cliché that “blacks [...] can’t run a country” (19). Despite the constitutionally guaranteed equality, in reality the dichotomy between blacks “or ‘they’ as they are elliptically but pregnantly called” (19) and whites prevail in the so-called New South Africa.

### **3.1.1 Symbolic Geography and Sociocultural Background**

In an email to his ex-partner James, Peter calls Alfredville a “dorp” (19), a village, however not one with romantic “connotations of cricket on the village green and cream teas in the village tea room” (19), but an underdeveloped one with “connotations of dust and windmills and donkeys and hand-cranked petrol pumps” (19). Peter describes the Alfredville of his youth as

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<sup>2</sup> Page numbers here and in the following referring to Heyns, *Lost Ground*.

“a very small town in a very small country on a backward continent” (35), where nothing ever happened to him (cf. 35). At half past nine in the evening the streets were deserted (cf. 39). The Alfredville of the present has not changed much in that respect: the hotel bar closes at ten weekdays, while “[i]n London the evening has just begun” (44). As an emigrant who lives in London now he keeps comparing Alfredville to his place of exile. When asked by Nonyameko, Peter justifies his decision to emigrate in the 1980s with the fact that he “didn’t want to go to the army” (95). Leaving South Africa for good is a fate he shares with many others who decided to do “the chicken run” as Gray (59) puts it in his novel *Time of our Darkness*.

Another reason for his emigration certainly is his sexual orientation. In the novel’s symbolic geography, London represents for Peter the anonymity of a large city and a retreat from the discriminatory and oppressive climate of his South African hometown, where he had to conceal his sexual orientation for the sake of respectability. In London, “where everything was permissible and experimentation was encouraged” (199), he can “dissociate [him]self from the heterosexual patriarchy” (Heyns, *A man’s world* 115) and can live his homosexuality openly, whereas in South Africa he is still denying it, as he had to do in the past. In Alfredville, he still tries “to screen his homosexuality from the family gaze” (Adams 161) as he has done all his life because “there’s never seemed to be an opportune time” (35). Even when his parents met James in London, the topic was a taboo: “[I]f they wondered about him, about the tall, elegant Jamaican who seemed to share my life on an undeclared basis, they didn’t say so, and I didn’t volunteer any information” (35). From the psychologist Nonyameko he tries to hide his sexual orientation, too, at first, before he “lower[s his] guard” (111). The only one towards whom Peter admits his homosexuality immediately is the veterinarian Henk Pretorius, who is gay himself. Peter’s cautiousness is grounded in fact. The new legal situation does not reflect social reality. Social homophobia is still persistent and widespread in post-apartheid Alfredville. The same holds true for the veterinarian, who keeps his sexual preferences to himself for economic reasons since “Alfredville isn’t ready for a gay vet” (153) yet. Of course, “coming out to friends is different from coming out to workmates, and both are different from coming out to one’s parents and other relations” (Connell 232) and “may be done at different times” (Connell 232). The results may be uncertain or unpleasant and might range from “easy acceptance” (Connell 232) to “appalling emotional trauma” (Connell 232).

Furthermore, London represents a city of culture. Being the former colonial metropolis, it stands in total contrast to Alfredville, which is “in the middle of nowhere” (18), and where the most important cultural events consist in baking contests and rugby matches on the school’s rugby field (cf. 6). The cock crowing in the morning (cf. 45) might be seen as symbol

emphasizing the rural character of Alfredville. However, it could also be interpreted in a biblical sense as a sign for the betrayal of Bennie by Peter that is yet to come.

Despite the “backwardness” of the small town of Alfredville described in the novel, Joachim and his black partner Boris have succeeded in transgressing the boundaries of race and gender, although some people would prefer Boris to live in servants’ quarters rather than in the hotel (cf. 67). They live their gayness openly as a mixed couple, protected by the Constitution of 1996 and other liberal laws, and are even engaged to be married. This change from one of the most oppressive regimes to one of the most liberal constitutions worldwide represents a reversal of the symbolic geography Peter has known so far. In Peter’s mind, London is still perceived as being more progressive and liberal than Alfredville, notwithstanding the changed legal situation and the exemplar of Joachim and Boris. Despite his twenty-two years in sexual and national exile, he is still a victim of internalized oppression due to his subjective past experiences and his acculturation to the racist and homophobic South Africa of his youth, where staying in the closet was the safest option for homosexuals, which might explain why he still tries to keep his homosexuality secret in Alfredville.

Another interpretation would be to see his behaviour as signifying the difference between the legal situation and the social acceptance. The most liberal and progressive laws are of no use if they are not enforced because of unchanged societal attitudes and lack of acceptance. As difficult as passing a law may be, it certainly seems to be easier than changing long ingrained habits and attitudes. Even Peter, though gay himself, shows racist, sexist, and even homophobic attitudes, as is expressed in his email to his ex-partner James where he calls the gay couple Joachim and Boris “a queen and [...] his black consort” (20), or in the scene where he keeps calling Joachim by his former derogative sobriquet “Fairy” (21), or when he catches himself thinking of Boris as the “[p]oncy little queen” (115). Furthermore, he has not been able to free himself entirely of the long ingrained racism, as is evident in the scene where Nonyameko reads JM Coetzee’s *Diary of a Bad Year* and Peter finds to his dismay that he is “still racist enough to be surprised at seeing a black woman reading Coetzee” (25), or when he applies the old cliché of black women having “good posture because they grew up carrying pails of water on their heads” (25) to Nonyameko, who walks self-contained and with an easy grace. The equality stated in the laws has not been enough to overcome racist and sexist prejudices in public life, as the scene of Peter talking to Nonyameko shows. She assumes he is only talking to her in order to pick her up because, in her experience, “it is one of the few reasons for a white man to talk to a black woman” (27), which shows that “human relations in South Africa had [not] evolved beyond the racial impasse” (27). Although racism should be

taboo now and is referred to as “that kind of thing” (66), racist jokes are still being told and racist attitude is expressed in the apparently obligatory “but” following whenever a positive statement is made about black or coloured people, as, for example, when Boris talks about his interior designer as “a Coloured, *but* he knows what he’s doing” (23, emphasis added), or when he talks about the new guy at the Co-op as “Coloured and all *but* really jacked-up” (24, emphasis added). Another relic of a bygone patriarchal era is the menu without prices, given to women in company of a man, as it was assumed that the man would be the sole provider and therefore pay for the meal, “a totally sexist assumption” (94) according to Nonyameko.

Peter appears to feel ambivalent about “the old place” (77) that seems to be “the same and not the same” (77). The impressive legal changes do not necessarily show in everyday life. Although casino licences are now restricted to “previously disadvantaged [...] groups” (22), mixed marriages are allowed, and the police force is now run by a black captain, there was a lot of talk when Desirée as a white woman married the black Hector Williams, and some people wanted to run the black chief cop out of town (cf. 66). In the “New South Africa” (23), coloured women such as Angelina are still working six days a week as underpaid servants calling their white employer Master (cf. 82), and blacks are seen as being unable to run a country (cf. 19).

Another aspect of the symbolic geography is closely linked to the ex-pat plot. While in London Peter’s decision to emigrate in order to avoid conscription into the apartheid army “was regarded as an act of bravery” (200), in Alfredville Peter constantly has to justify himself for having “fucked off” (23), presumably because he was “[s]hit-scared of majority rule” (23), as Joachim puts it. When Joy and Bennie call Peter’s penis a “soutpiel” (43), a “salt penis”, they refer to English-speakers who can escape on dual citizenship passports, “as with one foot in Africa and one in Europe, their genitalia are left hanging in the sea” (Swart 80), whereas Afrikaners are “destined to stay in South Africa and thus [have] to prepare for war” (Swart 81), which fuelled resentment among the Afrikaners who considered such behaviour unpatriotic. Despite being born in Alfredville, Peter is socially excluded because he was not part of the Struggle for liberation. Having been in exile already, he “never learned the freedom dance”, as Mda (28) puts it. Another aspect of his emigration, as already mentioned above, was the fact that “coming out” was not possible or at least very dangerous during the apartheid era when homosexuality was criminalized, so that, “in the past ‘going away’ was the more likely starting point in the homosexual’s assertion of his or her identity” (Adams 56).

Peter’s emigration also raises controversies between him and his former best friend, Bennie Nienaber, as the latter still feels abandoned and reproaches him for having “buggered

off” (234) to England, betraying and deserting him. The topic of betrayal and loss is also expressed in the title of the novel.

### 3.1.2 Symbolism of the Title

The novel’s title *Lost Ground* may refer to the scene where Peter admits that he wants to see justice done because he “was never brave when other people were” (271), which leads Bennie to the conclusion that Peter wants to show his bravery now by turning him over to the police in order to make up “for lost ground” (271). However, the loss of trust and friendship is just one of several losses mentioned in the novel. In fact, the novel reads like a chronology of losses with Peter having lost not only his cousin Desirée and his best friend Bennie, but in the end, he also loses his identity, the control over his story, and his idealised past as is expressed in the epigraph of the paradise lost by Proust (cf. 2). The irony lies in the fact that, at the beginning, Peter feels that “nothing presents itself” (13) when he tries for an emotion, “a sense of recovering a lost past” (13) upon his arrival to Alfredville. He states that “Proust himself would have had a hard time with Alfredville” (13) looking for the lost past, while, in fact, throughout his stay, he is forced to relive the past in the present despite his wish to stay out of the story, a story he is so deeply entangled with just *because* of his past. His ex-partner James tries to warn him about the “embrace of the past” (137) which, according to him, is “a nostalgia trap” (137) on his “recherche du temps perdu” (113), referring to the impossibility to bring back the lost past, even more so after twenty-two years in exile, which have made Peter a foreigner in two countries. The topic of nationality and loss as parts of identity is also reflected in the narrative situation.

## 3.2 Narrative Situation

The narrative situation is characterized by a protagonist narrator who is an outcast in Alfredville for three reasons. First, he is an expatriate who emigrated to London in 1988 and returns to South Africa twenty-two years later. Contrary to his belief, coming back does not leave him cold, but affects him severely. More and more, his former best friend Bennie and their common past intrude on Peter’s consciousness, and the present chronology set in 2010 is interrupted by narrative flashbacks, which leads to an achronological narration and shows Peter’s entanglement in the story due to his relationship with his former best friend who is also one of

the main suspects in the murder case. Due to Peter's entanglement, the reality is very difficult to grasp and describe for him, resulting in a lack of clear plot lines.

Second, he is a journalist, a profession which is not held in high esteem, as the scene at Peter's aunt and uncle proves. As an investigative journalist trying to write about the political implications of the murder of a white woman by her black husband in the New South Africa, he is a very active character, always on the quest for truth, attempting to go beyond the facts to the underlying meaning. However, through his investigative actions he entangles himself in the story and influences it profoundly. In his matter-of-fact style he begins writing the story, assuming that there is something like a truth to be discovered. As a journalist he is used to seeing the world in black and white. In the New South Africa, however, the world is more complex and reality is blurred. The duty to make the truth known becomes a burden for Peter in the course of the novel, and instead of writing an investigative article about the political implications of the murder, he ends up writing his own story, which, as he finally decides, he is not going to write at all. Moreover, he ends up questioning the whole concept of writing stories which, as he eventually recognizes, are only arbitrary constructs. As a protagonist narrator he tells the story from his first-person point of view, which is supplemented by additional information provided by dialogues and epistolary elements such as emails to his ex-partner.

Third, his sexual orientation represents an important aspect of the narration. As a homosexual narrator, Peter can provide insights into the difficulties homosexual minorities face in apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa. Legally, the situation is clear: while homosexuality was forbidden and under punishment during the apartheid era, in the New South Africa the liberal Constitution forbids discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation. Socially, however, it is not as widely accepted as it should be. Even Peter, once called a *moffie* himself, still thinks of Joachim in a derogatory way as "Fairy Ferreira" (11) and of his black fiancé as a "poncy little queen" (115), expressing contempt for their effeminacy. Another aspect of his homosexuality is his relationship to his best friend Bennie. Peter himself calls his feelings for Bennie love despite the fact that he had forgotten about Bennie for the past twenty-two years. The first person narrator tries to explain his emotions and justify his decision and behaviour when, in 2010, suppressed emotions become visible. The resentments due to their unfinished business from twenty-two years ago may lead the reader to speculation about Bennie's latent homosexuality.

While Peter is used to wrap petty intrigues in irony in London, he fails to apply an ironic analysis to the unmediated emotion and passion experienced in Alfredville. Not able to cope

with the loss of his beloved friend, a loss which he might have caused himself, Peter collapses and is not able to find closure. The plot-driven story develops from a clear and simple Othello plot to a complex multi-plot tragedy, combining genres such as detective story, post-modern metafictional literature, memoir, and homosexual fiction.

### 3.3 Plot

The complicated plot makes a mockery not only of Peter's desire to find the truth in order to write a story about it but also of "the desire to ignore the past and live simply in the present" (Adams 168). With Peter coming back to South Africa after twenty-two years, everything that happens in the present is based on the past and the unresolved business between Peter and his then best friend. What starts out as a simple Othello plot, with Desirée's death serving as a "story opportunity" (102), turns into a tragedy of loss due to Peter's entanglement into the story. Just as James's Othello play in London with its transgression of race and gender, Peter's Othello plot falls apart in the course of his investigation, until all that is left in the end is for him to see the horror of his own doings like Kurtz does in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (cf. 97). Peter, starting out as a neutral character, becomes more and more involved in the story until it turns into his own story, dramatized by "the 'romantic fallacy' [...] of always looking back" (Adams 18) on an idealised past. When Peter eventually finds out the truth, he has to bear the burden thereof, for Chrisna blames him not only for Bennie's suicide but also for Desirée's murder. In the course of the novel, the detective story changes from a 'whydunit' to a 'whodunit' and again to a 'whydunit' at the double surprise ending.

#### 3.3.1 Detective Story

What appears to be a straightforward Othello murder plot and draws Peter's attention, not just because of his family relations with Desirée, but because he thinks he might be able to write a story about racial relations in New South Africa worth selling to *The New Yorker*, turns out to be a story that is not only about race so much as it is about his own homosexual past, and that results in a double surprise ending, inviting comparison to the one in Chaucer's "The Miller's Tale". Peter thinks the black Hector Williams is the essential element of the story (cf. 110), so does the reader. However, Hector Williams is an essential element with regard to the racist critique of the novel rather than with the detective story. Just as James's Othello play in London is changed by the director to an all-black cast, transgressing race and gender boundaries, with



Othello being the only white and Iago being a woman (cf. 113), Peter's Othello plot falls apart in the course of his investigation. Peter tries to accumulate detail and see whether a pattern emerges from it (cf. 116), but he fails in his quest to trace or establish the fabric of the story. With the alleged murderer being identified as Hector Williams, Peter does not want to write a 'whodunit' story (cf. 110), which is exactly what Heyns does. However, the motive, the "why", is equally important to the "who". You need a reason to get murdered, even in South Africa, as Nonyameko points out (cf. 101).

The Othello script, i.e. the pre-fabricated story of the "black beast" killing the innocent lady is deconstructed in the course of the novel, and the more it is deconstructed, the more Peter gets involved himself. At first, the circumstantial evidence against Hector Williams seems to confirm the pre-arranged conceptions of the world of the white populace, as is expressed by Desirée's parents when they stress the otherness of their black son-in-law. Banalities such as not putting your knife in your mouth, eating your salad on a side plate, getting up when a lady enters the room or the fact that Williams preferred his meat underdone or that he forgot to flush the toilet (cf. 89) serve as evidence to confirm their prejudice of blacks as being savage cannibals who "don't understand ordinary friendliness" (88) and lack civilized manners. Despite the presumption of innocence, most people in Alfredville think that Hector Williams is guilty, "[e]xcept of course the brown and black people. They can't think outside the race box, you know" (68), as Joachim puts it, apparently missing the irony of his remark. He even calls the coloured and black people paranoid because, according to his black partner Boris, "there's a story going round the township that it's all a pack of lies to get rid of Hector Williams" (69). Despite the legal situation, most people were opposed to the mixed marriage. Like Desirée's parents, they knew that "no good would come of it" (87), and Desirée lost a lot of so-called friends when she married the suspected ex-ANC terrorist Hector Williams out of boredom, as some people suspected, while others such as Mrs du Pisani trotted out the old cliché that "it is 'better' with a black man" (105), referring to the proverbial physical prowess and endurance ascribed to black men. This myth goes back to the late nineteenth century, when it became "medical consensus that the black penis exceeded the average white male member in length and girth" (Saint-Aubin 33), and "the 'massive proportions' of the black man's virile organs" (Saint-Aubin 33) were associated by Europeans in a pseudo-scientific way with insatiable sexual appetite as well as lack of morality and hence inferiority (cf. Saint-Aubin 24ff). Despite the legalization of mixed marriages in the New South Africa, Hector Williams and Desirée are reflected in the eyes of the inhabitants of Alfredville as "the 'black stud' and his 'fallen woman'" (Adams 46). The internalized prejudice draws on the myth of black inferiority which

served “to argue against the degeneration of the superior race through race mixing” (Saint-Aubin 28). However, “[i]nterracial sexuality meant sexual relations between black men and white women only, since sexual relations between white men and black women did not elicit the same repugnance and did not pose the same kind of threat” (Saint-Aubin 30). Peter finds that the process of “othering” continues in the “New” South Africa and “race relations are as bad as they ever were” (107).

Even the murder weapon, a statuette of Michelangelo’s David, becomes gossip fodder in the small town. Once a symbol for the people of Florence against oppression by aristocracy and ironically called a “cultural weapon” (106) by Nonyameko, the nakedness of the statue now becomes associated with perversion and scandal. When the press and magazines show full-frontals of the nude David, the nakedness scandalizes the culturally unknowing people of Alfredville, who have neither heard about its symbolism of fighting the oppressor nor about its symbolism of ideal male beauty (cf. 90).

However, most of the evidence turns out to be fabricated and Hector Williams is provided with an alibi by Henk Pretorius. Furthermore, many other people would have had a motive to kill Desirée. Nothing is as it appears at first sight, and Peter as the author of the story cannot grasp the reality in its complexity. When Bennie becomes the prime suspect of the murder, Peter is shaken and “trapped in his own compartmentalised ways of thinking” (Adams 43). To him, the black Hector Williams seemed more plausible as killer than his former best friend Bennie. Peter is no longer reporting a story but has finally become embroiled in it, and, eventually, he decides to turn his old friend over to the police, not knowing that his decision seals not only Bennie’s but his own fate. It is only when Chrisna confesses to the murder and blames Peter for Bennie’s suicide that Peter learns the truth about the murder, although he had the clue right in front of his eyes ever since Vincent had told him about the Nienabers’ dog waiting in front of Desirée’s house at the time of the murder. Other than “Sherlock Holmes who solved a crime on the basis of a dog’s *not* barking in the night” (109, emphasis original), and other than Bennie, who is more perceptive than Peter, the journalist missed the clue or rather misinterpreted it. The reference to another detective story is one of many metafictional elements typically found in a postmodern novel. Other metafictional elements would be reflections about storytelling, self-ironic comments by the author, and, following a tradition of homosexual writers, references to earlier and other gay writers. While such allusions once served as code references and fulfilled the need for communication at a time when homosexual writing was censored or even forbidden and homosexual writers felt excluded from the traditions of male heterosexual writing (cf. Martin xv), nowadays such references may be included to reflect the

homosexuality of the author and to honour writers who prepared the ground for future homosexual writers by giving expression to their sexuality in their work at times when doing so bore the risk of severe persecution.

### 3.3.2 Metafictional Elements

When the first-person narrator Peter, a journalist, returns home to Alfredville from his exile in London in order to write about the murder of his cousin by her black husband, he assumes his quest for truth to be an easy and swift task: “I must just get this story written and then bugger off” (19). However, contrary to his belief that his return to native soil is a “non-event” (95) that “leaves him cold” (95) and that “a story is what you make it” (188f), depending on the angle you choose, the story takes control of him, and his return to native soil results in an identity crisis.

In the course of his investigation, he gets more and more personally involved in the story due to his past, until he lacks control over it and ends up writing about his own story instead of writing about the murder from the safe distance of the impartial observer. In fact, he gets not only involved in the story but influences it profoundly. He is forced to relive the past through memories and actions until his past and present actions make him the main culprit of the story. In the end, he refrains from writing the story after all, because it is too much his own story to write (cf. 294). While he was once “put off by the self-consciousness” (65) and “solipsistic appropriation” (65) of South African novels, expressed in titles such as “*My Traitor’s Heart*” and “*Country of My Skull*”, leading him to ask “Can’t I write the country’s story without first making it mine?” (65), he eventually ends up facing the same pitfall he cannot avoid. Like the other writers before him, he cannot write the story from the safe distance of an impartial witness. No matter how hard he tries to keep his personal history out of it, he ends up writing about himself. Too great is his entanglement in the story due to the past he now has to relive. Thus, the novel contains a story about storytelling. This metafictional element is characteristic for postmodern writing as is the reflection on the impossibility to write about “the truth” in our complex modern world, as is expressed in Peter’s statement after having failed in his quest: “If all stories are arbitrary constructs, what is the point of writing stories?” (291). Thus, the story includes a story about how stories are constructed. When Peter realizes that the story is not going as expected and lost its punch line, he admits that this is the mark of a good story from the reader’s point of view, while as a writer he would prefer more control over it (cf. 208). However, the story got out of hand as soon as he mixed himself up in it or, as he sees it, as soon

as the leading part has been “inflicted” (209) upon him. Great is the temptation to let the innocent Hector Williams rot in jail rather than to spoil the story (cf. 186).

Another post-modernist aspect are the self-reflective remarks of the author, Michiel Heyns, which are expressed with irony, for example, when the psychologist Nonyameko guesses Peter’s profession and the content of his writing. According to her, he is not driven enough to be a journalist, so he has to be a novelist writing the “standard ex-pat” (28) story about “a man who is forced to revisit the past, or *confront* the past, more particularly his own tortured past, the torture usually figurative” (28, emphasis original). This passage contains a self-reflective element of the author, referring with self-irony to Heyns own attempt to do something different from the stereotypical South African trauma novels of exile and return, only to end up doing exactly the same. Just like Chaucer who apologizes in his *Canterbury Tales* for telling the boring tale of Sir Thopas only to tell the even more boring one of Melibee, Heyns’s protagonist denies writing an ex-pat story while this is exactly what he is doing.

Another example of self-mockery, with “the object of irony [being] the poet himself” (Martin 206), would be the ironic remarks about Stellenbosch, where Michiel Heyns worked as a professor of English at the University of Stellenbosch, when Joachim calls Stellenbosch “a nest of liberalism” (68), where Desirée “picked up all sorts of ideas” (68) from studying English there, or Desirée’s mother stating that Hector was no good company “for someone as cultured as Desirée, a degree from Stellenbosch and all those books” (88). It is interesting to note that the same University of Stellenbosch was “crucible of Afrikaner nationalism” in 1939, as is mentioned by Malan (30). Another case in point would be the ironic comment on the taciturn octogenarian novelist who has just published his first novel (cf. 46), for Heyns himself published his first novel very late in his age.

Such self-conscious and metafictional remarks represent a rejection of traditional storytelling, as do intertextual references, the latter of which remind the reader that any text “is in fact made up of other texts [...] that are ‘always already’ in place and constitute the discourses into which we are born” (Abrams 325). References to the French writer Marcel Proust are not just found in the epigraph but occur throughout the novel and refer to the themes of loss and reliving the past through memories. Another French writer is Gustave Flaubert, to whom James refers when he calls Desirée an “African Madame Bovary” (200) who just sat there like a passive victim of her situation “waiting for some man to take her somewhere” (200). With *Lost Ground* belonging to the genre of detective novels, Heyns also refers to *Sherlock Holmes* by Edgar Allan Poe, one of the most famous detectives in literature, as mentioned above. Furthermore, there are various references to other South African novelists, such as Antjie Krog

(*Country of My Skull*), Rian Malan (*My Traitor's Heart*), and J.M. Coetzee (*Diary of a Bad Year*), and of course to homosexual writers such as André Aciman (*Call Me by Your Name*). The theme of male homosexualities occurs throughout the novel and consists of stereotypical representations of various kinds of homosexuals and the deconstruction thereof.

### 3.3.3 Male Homosexualities

In the nineteenth century, the homosexual became a species, “a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology” (Foucault 43), while before “the sodomite had been a temporary aberration” (Foucault 43). Furthermore, the homosexual as a species is no absolute category but comprises various forms of homosexuality which are closely linked to different concepts of masculinities. In apartheid South Africa, hegemonic masculinity was synonymous with white heterosexual masculinity in a patriarchal society. Homosexuality was marginalized and criminalized. After the fall of the apartheid regime and with the adoption of the new Constitution in 1996, homosexuality was legalized and unfair discrimination by the state on grounds of sexual orientation forbidden. Ever since, homosexual writers have been able to come out of the closet and write openly about homosexual topics.

However, since “prejudice persists and in practice the discrimination against and the marginalisation of the gay community continues in most spheres of society” (Du Pisani 170), writers deal with the topic in different ways. Michiel Heyns shows stereotypical portraits of different homosexual characters only to deconstruct the stereotypes, resulting in portraits of homosexuals as ordinary people with strengths, flaws, and prejudices just like the heterosexual characters of the fictional town. The novel reflects the fact that “[t]he gay scene had been dominated by middle-class whites, but black homosexuals were now able to associate openly” (Bujra 216). During the apartheid era, “[g]overnments have found it useful to insist that homosexuality is an alien and non-African ‘perversion’” (Bujra 216) and its existence has often been denied, “despite it having been documented in many places” (Bujra 216). One such instance would be the practice of “boss boys” mentioned in the novel with regard to the farmer Isaak Retief, who preferred the “company of his ‘boss boy’, one Frederik Stoffels” (81), to that of his wife Rachel. The term “boss boy” refers to the practice of senior black miners having young men on the mine compounds as ‘wives’ who provided the seniors with both domestic and sexual services in exchange for often monetary rewards (cf. Moodie 303). Such same-sex relationships among African migrant men working in the gold mines were also called “mine

marriage and constituted an important aspect of a young boy's passage to full masculinity" (Moodie 306). However, situational same-sex activities among males were known to exist already in pre-colonial times in royal residences and within the military, while those encountered in mines and prisons are of more recent origin (cf. Sanders 101). This image of a homosexual black stands in contrast to the white man's myth of the blacks' "hypermasculinity" (Kimmel xiii), i.e. masculinity characterized by sexual potency, violence, and aggression.

Desirée's brother Bertus, on the other hand, represents the "new man" (Du Pisani 164) who is more responsive to new ideas and willing to criticize the Afrikaner position and practices (cf. Du Pisani 164). He shows the desire to break free from the existing stereotypes about the Afrikaner and to do his "own thing" such as, for example, opening a restaurant instead of taking over his father's garage (cf. 221) or having a black girlfriend (cf. 214), as his nickname Boetie suggests, for 'boetie', literally 'little brother', can be interpreted not only as the common form of address for the son of the family (cf. 299), but could also be interpreted as being the short form of 'kafferboetie' meaning "brother of blacks" or "nigger-lover" (Malan 29), which was once considered a grave insult among Afrikaners (cf. Malan 29).

Boris and Joachim, on the other hand represent the stereotypical effeminate homosexuals as their nicknames, "Fairy" (11) and "big cream puff" (156) for Joachim, the lonely outsider at school who was "excluded from the vivid companionships of boyhood" (72), and "poncy little queen" (115) for Boris suggest, in addition to their predilection for interior decoration, Joachim's tight trousers and loose wrist (cf. 10) and Boris's long eyelashes, brought to prominence by languid eye movements (cf. 16). As the derogatory sobriquets show, effeminate homosexuals are not held in high esteem, not even among other homosexuals, as Peter's prejudice against them proves. With their once outlawed homosexual relationship, based on mutuality and respect but with the occasional quarrel, and their engagement to be married, black Boris and white Joachim have transgressed the boundaries of race and gender and seem comfortable with the sexuality it represents. With their same-sex love now being legal, they dream of a traditional white wedding and honeymoon, following the bourgeois model of family and aspiring to live their homosexual relationship openly despite some racist people who would prefer black Boris to wear a uniform and live in servants' quarters rather than in the hotel (cf. 67).

Henk Pretorius also seems to fulfil some of the clichés about effeminate homosexuals such as being "not altogether comfortable in his own body" (120) and having a predilection for interior design as his sitting room shows, where each object has been selected with care and meticulousness (cf. 183). Furthermore, he fulfils the gay cliché of being a good listener, proven

by the fact that Desirée liked talking to him (cf. 70) and that he “promises to be a pleasant dinner companion” (142), as is assumed by Peter. However, contrary to Joachim and Boris, Henk Pretorius does not dare to live his homosexuality openly. An open relationship of the older man with the schoolboy Wouter might ruin his reputation and his existence, since, as a veterinarian, he cannot afford to lose his female clients who feel attracted to this handsome and intelligent man. The fact that Wouter is already legal does not prevent Henk Pretorius from being perceived as a child molester, as is expressed by Peter when he calls him a “pederast” (186), “having it off with Wouter next to the dam” (189). Despite the fact that Wouter, whose parents are very prominent and very proper, is legal and that, meanwhile, he is “batting for the other team” (186), Henk Pretorius fears that it would be the end of him if their relationship came out (cf. 185).

Henk’s character may serve to show “the sacrifice of personal fulfilment to the gods of conformity” (Adams 37) in an intolerant, homophobic society, where rights guaranteed by a liberal Constitution do not reflect social reality. For this reason, homosexuals have developed their own codes to recognize and communicate with each other secretly. One example of such a code would be the practice of cruising in order to identify like-minded homosexuals “without being observed by others around” (Martin 74), offering if not love, so at least sexual intercourse deprived of the usual rituals of heterosexual courtship (cf. Martin 74). This practice of secret codes is still employed, as homosexuality is socially still not fully accepted. When Peter follows the veterinarian down the main street, the latter infers Peter’s homosexuality from his body language but misreads the signals. While Peter follows the veterinarian to obtain information about Desirée, Henk Pretorius assumes Peter is cruising him for more fleshly reasons and plays along until the two of them end up discussing who was cruising whom. The practice of cruising and its interplay of visual recognition, hesitation, and response is described in more detail in *A Sportful Malice*.

Peter’s relationship with his ex-partner James, who went to Cambridge and is the son of an English stockbroking father and a Jamaican mother, represents the ideal and mature same-sex love, where the ex-partners, after a relationship of five years, still care about each other and offer to come to help when the other is in need, just as James does when he learns about Peter’s distress after Bennie’s suicide (cf. 280). Although Peter is overjoyed to hear James’s voice, he declines his offer, as he does not want to rehash their relationship out of pity (cf. 281). With James being an actor, his profession is one considered typical for homosexuals, as it belongs to those professions “in which women have been able to command a degree of personal autonomy without threatening male supremacy in the slightest, since ‘real men’, by definition, would

despise to be involved in them” (Britton 139). Being both black and gay, James is doubly marked. This is what he refers to when he talks about him having been the posterboy for politicised women who engaged themselves in anti-discrimination campaigns (cf. 137). Another prejudice against homosexuals is expressed by the thief with the Eastern European accent who stole Peter’s mobile phone and calls homosexuals perverts who belong to prison (cf. 113), missing the irony that the only criminal in this scenario is the hypocritical thief himself. Another aspect of the homosexual theme is the solidarity among homosexuals and the process of “othering”, resulting in stressing the dichotomy between homosexuals and heterosexuals, as is expressed in phrases such as “batting for the other team” (186) or “it’s a tribal thing” (18) for homosexuals to look out for each other.

The relationship between Peter and Bennie is the most complex one in the novel due to the unresolved business from their past. In their childhood, the model of hegemonic masculinity was the white, heterosexual, middle-class patriarch. However, “the traditional image of the ‘good father’ [...] is brought into question” (Du Pisani 164) when instances of domestic violence are exposed, as is the case with Bennie’s parents. Belonging to the category of poor whites and with his parents being drunkards, Bennie comes from a troubled home, where Bennie’s father beats his mother on a regular basis. Even Bennie gets beaten by him because he spends much time with Peter and his loving bourgeois family in a cultivated atmosphere, where he comes into contact with classical music and literature. What Bennie considers an achievement, is despised by his father, who reproaches Bennie for thinking he might be “too good for [his] family because the Jew chemist is feeding [him] and his moffie son wants go get into [his] pants” (56). For Bennie, however, Peter represents his hope and chance to overcome “the danger of moral decay” (Du Pisani 167) associated with poor white Afrikaner children from broken families. Their friendship begins with the sandwich episode at the school toilet (cf. 51f), where Peter saves Bennie from bullies by intervening and declaring Bennie to be “one of us” (52). While Peter admires Bennie’s “animal vitality” (53), Bennie needs Peter, for he gives him stability by taking him seriously and believing in him (cf. 234). Peter characterizes their friendship as “two lonelinesses merging into a more robust social unit, [...] a recognition by each of a quality in the other that he lacked” (53). This characterization alludes to “the Platonic theme of the quest for reunion of the divided self” (Martin 129), where “[o]nly the discovery of this other ‘half’ can restore the [lover’s] lost unity” (Martin 129). Their friendship was thus characterized by an immense closeness, as is recognized by Emmerentia Meiring, who once had a crush on Peter, when she says: “But you were always with Bennie Nienaber. No girl had a chance.” (181)



However, the two friends try to “construct their masculinity around sexual prowess” (Morrell 272), as the scene at the Ladies Bar proves, where they try to pick up Joy and her friend Doris in order to gain first sexual experience with girls (cf. 40ff) or, as Bennie puts it, “to move on to the big stuff” (37). Another case in point would be the scene at the school swimming pool, where they fantasize about girls and engage in masturbation, and eventually come within seconds of each other, a situation which Peter describes as “curiously intense” (59). The swimming pool scene, a cliché frequently applied in homosexual literature, comprises both homoerotic and romantic notions with the two naked bodies “[f]loating in the darkness, or in the light of half a moon or a full moon in the still heat of a Karoo summer night heavy with the scent of syringa” (59) and with Peter thinking he could not ask for more from life with Bennie’s body flashing luminously next to him (cf. 59), followed by sexual arousal and the intense experience of masturbating and coming within seconds of each other.

The bathing idyll offers “an opportunity to display the male body naked and to display men together, even touching each other, at the same time remaining totally ‘innocent’. The image became an icon because it combined the opposed elements of sexual attraction and moral purity” (Martin 20). The same holds true for the following episode told by Peter:

I reached out, grabbed his wrist, and pulled him out. He held back for a moment, then seemed to bounce out of the water, landing half on top of me. We balanced precariously face to face, then he put his arm around me and briefly leant back to break his momentum. He swung upright again, and we stood like that, clenched together, for a long moment, in a sudden tense silence. Then Bennie laughed, “Shit, we almost ended up on our arses there,” and let go. In silence we put on our clothes. (60)

In this scene, Bennie’s comment provides comic relief and thus exorcizes the spectre of homoeroticism that would haunt the “asexual integrity of men’s friendship” (Moodie 299).

The swimming pool scene also provides an opportunity for phallogocentric discussions. With the phallus being “a prime symbol of [...] masculinity” (Dover 174), its size is the subject of detailed discussion, for example, when Peter calls Bennie “being undersized and all” (58) or when they discuss their Physical Education teacher, who “was famous for the size of his equipment, which he didn’t mind displaying in the change rooms, and schoolboy lore had it that size was a result of regular exercise” (59). The practice is also discussed in the scene at the Ladies Bar, where Joy alludes to the phenomenon of boys “forever measuring themselves” (41) and where Joy and Bennie call Peter a “big boy” (43), call his penis “soutpiel” (43) and compare it to “boerewors” (43), after the farm sausage (cf. 299). Another instance occurs when Joachim

tells Peter about Desirée and wonders why she went for a black man when Cassie Carstens, who is “a big boy in every way” (67), also was after her, alluding to the cliché that black men might be even better equipped.

Another scene stressing the theme of homoeroticism is the one concerning Bennie’s Mosquito Garelli, when, sitting behind Bennie on the motorbike, Peter enjoys “the closeness of the physical contact, without pondering the significance of [his] enjoyment” (58). When Peter tries to characterize their relationship, he shies away “from giving a name to [his] feelings for Bennie” (58) and does not even want to call it a friendship but just admits that he likes Bennie’s company and enjoys his closeness. Peter’s affection for Bennie does not go unnoticed, as shows Bennie’s parents’ “slur upon [Peter’s] motives” (58). However, Bennie does not seem to be suspicious about Peter having a hidden agenda and is “entirely comfortable with being naked in front of [him]” (58). The scene shows “the tension between an apparent innocence and an innate sensuality, waiting for expression” (Martin 102). Bennie’s suspected latent homosexuality is alluded to when Bennie admits that he planned to run away with Peter’s cousin Desirée (cf. 269), who was a spitting image of Peter, just as he would have liked to run off with Peter twenty-two years ago. The scene suggests that Bennie was looking for Peter in Desirée, as she played him music and talked to him about the books she read, just like Peter did twenty-two years ago, and she even looked like Peter (cf. 267). Even the scene where Chrisna asks Bennie if he is thinking of Desirée while having sex with her (cf. 269) could also be interpreted as Bennie thinking of Peter because of his resemblance with her. Of course, “latent homosexuality is a very slippery concept indeed, considering its universality” (Martin 112). However, the fact that Bennie assumes that Peter has returned to Alfredville because of him (cf. 236) and, of course, the fact that Bennie commits suicide because he feels betrayed by the one man who believed in him and whose opinion mattered to him, seem to confirm the hypothesis about Bennie’s latent homosexuality.

Another case in point might be the episode at the dam. Once one of their most favourite destinations, the place evokes memories of their youth. However, as regards homoeroticism, the present is of much more importance. Having to swim in the nude because they did not bring bathing costumes, they inspect each other’s naked bodies. Their swim quickly develops into a race and results in a wrestling match with Bennie tackling Peter, grabbing him between his legs, and enclosing his groin (cf. 172f). With “the bathing idyll and the wrestling match [being] staple ingredients in literary treatments of homosexuality” (Adams 18), the scene shows physicality and bodily contact between the protagonists without “tainting” their friendship with homosexual acts. As the ideal male friendship was characterized as noble, i.e. “not expressed

in physical love” (Martin 97), the homoerotic scenes show “the ‘trap’ of Platonism” (Martin 122). As homosexuality was considered “higher” than heterosexuality, stressing the spirituality of the former, “the assertion of a homosexual identity was then at odds with the fulfilment of homosexual desire” (Martin 122), even more so during the apartheid era, when homosexuality was punishable with imprisonment.

The homoeroticism of the scene continues when they get out of the water and stand in the sun to dry themselves, assessing each other’s once so familiar bodies (cf. 173). Again, Peter’s penis becomes the topic of conversation since Bennie notices that Peter has been circumcised and, what is even worse in Bennie’s eyes, for, apparently, he considers it “unmanly” to do so, that Peter has discussed the matter with his mother (cf. 174). When they sit naked side by side on a rock, Peter is aware of their thighs touching, but does not want to move his leg (cf. 175), just as, later on, he does not want to be the first to start putting on his clothes (cf. 178).

However, in the following conversation, Peter soon realizes that it is “difficult to talk naturally after more than twenty years” (178). Suppressed emotions become visible, and the two former friends cannot just carry on their friendship from where it left off twenty-two years ago. Peter knows that “[s]imple sensations are no more to be recovered than lost friendships” (175), especially when Bennie, unhappy with his marriage and still suffering from the negative impact of his military service, feels sorry for himself and reaches out to Peter who does not want to take responsibility or to be “forced to deny [his] present in the name of an idealised past” (176).

Too different are the two former friends, whose lives have developed in different directions in those twenty-two years, in which Peter was not part of Bennie’s story and vice versa. Bennie, psychologically destroyed by the military service, struggled to build a life of his own in order to avoid becoming “a fuck-up” (233) like his brothers. So he became a police man and married the best friend of the woman he loved but who loved someone else. He tries to follow the model of hegemonic masculinity, but fails in the attempt. As Connell points out, “[t]he notion of ‘hegemony’ generally implies a large measure of consent” (185), but while many collaborate in sustaining and supporting those images, “the public face of hegemonic masculinity is not necessarily what powerful men are” (Connell 185) and only few succeed in living up to the model. The same holds true for Bennie, even more so as he seems to struggle to live with his true self, which might be a homo- or bisexual one. He ends up disappointed because a black man was made chief of police instead of him and he is unhappy in his marriage to Chrisna, whose handshake is strong as a man’s (cf. 125) and who bosses him around out of

jealousy to keep him under control because she knows of his affair with Desirée. She is dominant and demanding, tells him when to be home (cf. 131) and what to do (cf. 237), forbids him to smoke (cf. 175) and emasculates him like she emasculated their dog, trying to domesticate both of them (cf. 134), while all the time Bennie might have been in love with Peter, whereas Desirée, bearing a striking resemblance to her cousin, might only have served as a substitute for Peter. When Peter emigrated to England, Bennie took it personally and felt betrayed and deserted by the one person whom he believed to take him seriously and to believe in him (cf. 234).

Peter, on the other hand, with his father being a Jewish chemist and his Afrikaner mother a *boeremeisie*, comes from a middle class background. In his youth, he took everything for granted and was only concerned about his own welfare. In London, he was busy experimenting with his sexuality (cf. 199) and gave little thought to his former best friend, who seemed so remote and whom he missed “for a year or two” (199). Back in Alfredville, Peter’s unmarried state leads to speculation and provides gossip fodder (cf. 85). The fact that Peter has no family while Bennie is married and has two children can also be interpreted as “contrasting the traditional metaphor of homosexual sterility” (Adams 171) to the one of “heterosexual fruitfulness” (Adams 171), underlining “man’s worth as a procreator” (Behr 152) in heteronormative patriarchal ideology. Peter himself, who admits his homosexuality only to the psychiatrist Nonyameko and to Henk Pretorius, who is homosexual himself, wonders if he would have been the same person if he married Emmerentia or someone like her and if he would have been happy (cf. 182), i.e. if he would have succeeded in turning his homosexual self around to hetero- or bisexuality.

Having to relive all those memories from his past, Peter becomes aware of the place Bennie used to occupy in his life and now seems to reclaim (cf. 198), and it takes him quite a while to realize that he has loved Bennie all his life (cf. 274). Of course, an openly homosexual relationship would not have been possible back then in the apartheid era, when homosexual behaviour was punishable by law. The tensions and denials of their relationship are reflected in the ending of the novel which also shows the difficulty of establishing a connection between their present emotions and the past.

### 3.4 Ending

The ending of *Lost Ground* is reminiscent of the double surprise ending of Chaucer’s “The Miller’s Tale”, in which he combines two French fabliaux, “The Misdirected Kiss” and “The

Second Flood”, and is of a dramatic intensity. When Bennie commits suicide after having been confronted by Peter with his suspicion of Bennie being Desirée’s murderer, Peter as well as the reader is made to believe he killed himself out of guilt or to escape prosecution. It is only after Chrisna’s confession that Peter and the reader learn about Bennie’s motive for his desperate act. When they meet at Kanonkop, where they parted on bad terms twenty-two years ago, Bennie’s “primitivistic desire for a return to a simpler, childlike existence” (Martin 146) and the recollection of his childhood dream of Peter staying in Alfredville and sharing a common future are destroyed by Peter’s accusations, for Bennie realizes that he is going to be betrayed once again by the only man whose opinion matters to him. While twenty-two years ago he reacted to the betrayal by insulting Peter and just leaving him sitting there on Kanonkop, now Bennie’s despair, frustrated expectations, and hopes result in violence against himself. While Peter assumes Bennie’s guilt to be the cause for his desperate act, Bennie’s wife knows the true reason.

When Peter, not aware that she is in fact Desirée’s killer, comes to her after Bennie’s suicide to seek forgiveness from her as extension of Bennie in order to find closure (cf. 282), she confronts him not just with her confession but, above all, with his own deeds. She accuses him of having meddled with their lives, of having abandoned Bennie when he would have needed him and of having come back to torment him and to take him away from her, just as his cousin Desirée tried to do (cf. 288f). She blames him not just for Bennie’s but also for Desirée’s death. In her jealousy of Desirée, which she now transfers to Peter, she accuses Peter of having driven Bennie to his death “because you couldn’t face that he was happy without you” (290), as she says, while, in fact, Bennie was unhappy in his marriage long before Peter returned to Alfredville, as his plans to go away with Desirée prove. The fact that Bennie still cares about Peter although he left him twenty-two years ago, because Peter was “the first person who ever believed in me and he’s still the one man in the world whose opinion matters to me” (287), as he puts it, suggests that Bennie may have killed himself out of despair about the unfulfilled or seemingly unrequited love.

Furthermore, Chrisna questions the concept of innocence and justice, when she states that what Desirée got was justice (cf. 289), as she got what she deserved for her selfish behaviour, or when she states that the ex-terrorist “Hector Williams was not an innocent man” (289), as he “planted a bomb in a restaurant in Durban that killed twenty-six people” (289). She claims that Peter just wants to call it justice, because he needs to feel good about the mess he has caused, which would make him a hero in England, as she sarcastically adds (cf. 289).

Just as things seem to be falling into place, when Bennie becomes the prime suspect and Peter confronts him with his suspicion, things start to fall apart. Peter misinterprets Bennie's suicide as a confession until Chrisna confesses to the murder and blames Peter for both deaths. So, when Peter eventually succeeds in his quest and learns the truth, it is a Pyrrhic victory that comes at the cost of many losses: the loss of his former best friend Bennie, the loss of his identity, and the loss of his story. With Peter not being able to turn Chrisna over to the police, there is no poetic justice at the end. Neither are the bad punished, nor do the lovers live happily ever after, nor does Peter find closure. He is plagued by the possibility that he might have contributed to Bennie's suicide (cf. 283), a thought which haunts him, even more so, because he begins to realize that he has loved Bennie all his life (cf. 274) or as Peter puts it: "I lost something years ago that I haven't been able to replace, and if that something isn't altogether Bennie, it is what he represented to me then [...] [a]nd I, coming back, found what had been missing from my life, and I destroyed it." (274f). This insight shatters Peter's identity and he loses control of his life: "I have no volition, no identity even; I just feel empty, as if I never want to write another word." (291). Peter does not know how to deal with his losses. To come to terms with your grief is not equivalent with achieving closure, as Nonyameko points out (cf. 279). The impossibility of finding closure and the revelation of the meaninglessness of existence are further elements characteristically found in postmodern novels. Instead of finding closure, he has to live with the mess he has produced. At the end, he has reached the point "where irony breaks down and you look at the blood on your hands in horror" (296f). He is going to leave Alfredville, which to him has become a locality of grief, transformed by loss (cf. 277), forever, just to continue his "pointless existence" (291) somewhere else, where he might produce even more mess.

He does not even have a story to tell anymore, as he has, in fact, several stories, of which "every story has its own truth and its own moral, and they all contradict one another. Or, in a different sense, it's too much my story to write" (294). Having lost that "thin line between absolute control and a complete surrender to a horrific breakdown of reason" (294) called irony that helps to keep the horror in abeyance by lucid narration (cf. 294), he decides not to write the story after all, a story that now seems to him "like some foul relic of a disastrous exploit" (293). While writing it down should have made the horror more manageable (cf. 273), the opposite happens. The story triggers an overwhelming "violence of emotion [...], a flood of inarticulate horror" (297). When Peter feels the "relentless pull of losses, the losses [he has] caused and the losses [he has] suffered, the drift towards annihilation that nobody and nothing can stay" (297), it is the black psychiatrist Nonyameko who holds his hand and gives him

trauma counselling, a gesture and a situation that would have been unthinkable during the apartheid era. The experience of the horror defies understanding and reduces him to instincts and emotions, and he even cries like a distressed animal at the restaurant (cf. 297), unable to articulate his thoughts and feelings, so that all he can do is to “hold onto Nonyameko’s hand, for all the world as if I could thus anchor myself to some saving vestige of identity, as if her grasp could keep me from being swept away into oblivion” (297). This scene represents the typical ending of a postmodern novel, revealing “the meaninglessness of existence and the underlying ‘abyss’, or ‘void’, or ‘nothingness on which any supposed security is conceived to be precariously suspended” (Abrams 176). Counting his losses and with “nothing to go to” (278), Peter becomes “a striking image of loneliness” (Martin 118) and defeat.

### 3.5 Conclusion

With the novel being set in the “new” South Africa of 2010 and providing flashbacks to the apartheid era of 1988, it gives insights into an era of important change and contrasts the apartheid era with the post-1994 South Africa, where, despite the liberal Constitution of 1996 and other legislative concessions and despite a certain degree of tolerance, racism and homophobia are still widespread and complete equality and unthinking acceptance are still a long way off. Although mixed and same-sex marriages are perfectly legal in the new South Africa, they are socially not accepted. The same holds true for racial equality, as the example of the black chief of police shows. While the liberal Constitution might be effective in its fight against state and institutional homophobia, social homophobia persists within the general population and even among gay people themselves (cf. Ireland 49), as Peter’s expression of prejudice and contempt towards effeminate gays such as Boris and Joachim shows.

The lingering effects of homophobia and racism in the more progressive contemporary setting are presented through the eyes of the protagonist narrator, whose narrative perspective is characterized by both closeness and distance, the first due to his past and the family relations and the latter due to his triple outsider status as a gay ex-pat journalist who has returned to his hometown after twenty-two years in exile. Despite this triple outsider status, Peter is not the marginalized observer one would expect him to be but is represented “as a participant in a troubled society” (Heyns, *A man’s world* 121). The theme of “present meets past” does not only apply to the ex-pat plot but also to his personal relationship with his former best friend. Their troubled relationship is central to the “whodunit” or rather “whydunit” plot, since, contrary to Peter’s assumptions, the murder is not about race but rather about his unresolved past business

with his former best friend, whose latent homosexuality might have led to the affair with Peter's cousin, who resembled Peter in many ways, not just physically.

Heyns expounds the internalized repression and oppression homosexuals still have to face in contemporary society despite extensive legal concessions, and again his homosexual representations provide a wide range of homosexual characters: the effeminate homosexual couple, the vet as corrupter of youth, Isaak Retief and his "boss boy", the sexually experimenting adolescent Wouter, the presumably latent homosexual Bennie, and the 'manly' homosexual Peter and his ex-partner James. Henk Pretorius, who has to screen his homosexuality from his clients for economic reasons, and Peter, who screens his sexual orientation from his family for personal reasons, both represent the internalized oppression and "the sacrifice of personal fulfilment to the gods of conformity" (Adams 37) in a homophobic heteronormative society. Interestingly and surprisingly, it is the effeminate couple who seem to have managed to liberate themselves from "the burden of rigid moral codes" (Martin 99) and societal oppression, as they live their homosexual relationship openly and are engaged to be married.

The ending reveals the true nature of Peter's and Bennie's relationship which is central to the novel and which seems to be one of unacknowledged homosexual love, as various homoerotic scenes between the two protagonists suggest. Bennie, who has been successfully interpellated and corrupted by heteronormative patriarchal ideology, fights homosexual desire in order to conform to the expected model of hegemonic masculinity. Being unable to acknowledge and express his homosexual love he resorts to aggression, as the wrestling match at the dam shows. Just when he seems to find the courage to open up to Peter and to acknowledge his feelings for him, he feels once again betrayed by his former best friend, who suspects him of the murder, and in an act of sheer desperation Bennie resorts to aggression against himself by committing suicide, a typical ending of many homosexual characters in literature (cf. Fone 10f), as mentioned above.

The postmodern structure of the novel is not just reflected in the complex detective plot and the bleak and open double ending, but is also expressed in metafictional comments on story writing and Peter's loss of identity. In the course of his investigation, his role changes from witness to culprit and his story becomes one of loss, betrayal, and past relived in the present. It falls apart as does his identity, when he becomes aware that he was not as perceptive as he thought, neither regarding Bennie's role in the murder, nor regarding Bennie's role in Peter's own life. He realizes that he might be responsible for Bennie's suicide, caused by his selfish quest for the truth, the burden of which he cannot bear when he eventually discovers it. In the



end, there is neither poetic justice nor closure, just horror, void, and an uncertain future without his beloved friend.

## 4 A Sportful Malice

### 4.1 Setting

Published in 2014, the novel is set in 2013 and covers a time span of twelve days. What begins as a travel report starting at Stansted Airport with criticising the travel industry, and covers the journey from there via Pisa and Florence to the fictional Tuscan village of Gianocini, soon turns into a comedy of revenge. With two of the protagonists being of South African descent, the narrative contains various references to the country. Furthermore, the different concepts of masculinity and sets of values and beliefs of the two characters are contrasted. While Wouter represents the naïve and sexually inexperienced farm boy who is indoctrinated with Puritan beliefs and unaware or in denial of his homosexuality, Michael represents the calculating promiscuous camp gay who is always on the lookout for handsome young men to satisfy his homoerotic desires. Michael is half South African, half Italian, has studied in England and, being a literary scholar on research leave, is now on his way to Tuscany to finish his monograph on “Tuscan Appropriations in Modern Fiction”. He keeps comparing destinations, as, for example, when he is sorry he misses spring in Johannesburg when it is summer in Florence (cf. Heyns, *Sportful Malice* 47)<sup>3</sup>, or when he comments on Wouter’s desire for vengeance, which, as he finds, “showed more style than [he] had credited Pretoria with: it was almost Florentine in its vindictiveness” (62). London features as one stop on Michael’s journey where he visits the exhibition at the National Gallery of Caravaggio, who, according to Sontag, is one of “the mannerist artists” (Sontag 57) who set off the Camp mode of aestheticism as early as the 17<sup>th</sup> century “because of that period’s extraordinary feeling for artifice, [...] its taste for the picturesque and the thrilling, its elegant conventions for representing instant feeling and the total presence of character” (Sontag 57), and whose famous painting *David with the Head of Goliath* “is the central iconic intertext in Heyns’s novel” (Jacobs 2). The other iconic intertext of the novel is Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*, as the title of the novel and Michael’s identification with the play’s buffoon Malvolio at the end of the novel show. Cambridge represents another stop on his journey. It is the place of his higher education, where he once had an affair with his tutor “in the erotically charged ambience of St. John’s” (36). This can be read as an allusion to

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<sup>3</sup> Page numbers here and in the following referring to Heyns, *A Sportful Malice*.

Cambridge's liberating effect mentioned in Forster's novels (cf. Adams 135) which are part of Michael's literary analysis.

The two main settings of the novel are Florence and the fictional Tuscan village Gianocini. Florence is a place well chosen for a novel belonging to the genre of homosexual fiction, since Italy was once known as "the mother of sodomy" (Fone 192) and "sodomites" were once called "*Florenzer*" (Fone 192) by Germans. The main protagonist has been to Florence before but is not fond of the city, that "custodian of so much grace and beauty" (37) that is herself so "hard and charmless" (37). He complains about the heat, the noise, the dust, and the high number of tourists, though he is a tourist himself, and seeks "refuge from the frenzy and filth of high-season Florence" (39) at the Bargello, where the creations exhibited there are "charged with sensual energy" (39). In this sensual atmosphere, he starts his quest for an amorous or rather sexual adventure which continues at another art gallery, the Uffizi, or rather in its *gabinetti*.

In Florence, he stays at the Hotel *Il David*, named after Michelangelo's famous statue, which symbolizes the fight against tyranny in the Old Testament as well as the Florentines' fight against oppression by the aristocracy, but which can also be read as a symbol for ideal male beauty and homoerotic desire. Heyns, however, "transposes the religious subject [...] into a decidedly more secular one, and the symbolic import [...] into a comic mode" (Jacobs 4), as Angela's idea for Paolo to pose in the nude next to Michelangelo's David as a piece of performance art, painted white and carrying an AR-15 rifle, and Cedric's and Sophronia's comment thereon show (cf. 159ff). Another transposition of David into a comic mode can be found in *Lost Ground*, where Michelangelo's famous piece of art features as murder weapon, and where its nudeness is the source of speculation and scandal among the not so culturally interested inhabitants of the small town of Alfredville, who are unaware of its symbolism and meaning (cf. Heyns, *Lost Ground* 90). In his hotel room, Michael encounters a reproduction of the painting he saw at the London exhibition, in which Caravaggio represents David as a "fierce little boy, looking with disdain at the perplexed head of his victim" (70). The more complex symbolic meaning of the painting is pointed out by Jacobs:

The symbolic meaning of the painting becomes more complex with the knowledge that in the head of Goliath Caravaggio has painted his own self-portrait [...] Added to this is the general belief [...] that in David Caravaggio had portrayed [...] his 'boy' or 'servant', Cecco [...] The painting can therefore be seen to represent the ambivalent relationship of bondage and emancipation between apprentice and master. (Jacobs 3f)

The topic of ambivalent relationship between apprentice and master is mirrored in the novel in the relationship between Augustus and Marco as well as in the relationship between the elderly couple and their mentee Paolo.

Caravaggio's painting, however, could also be interpreted as "a double self-portrait in which Caravaggio depicts himself as both youthful beheader and aged victim, youth regards age – and vice versa – [...] in a complex optic of self-regarding which is ultimately controlled by the perspective of the aged painter" (Jacobs 4). The novel's counterpart of this self-reflective gaze in the painting would be Heyns's metafictional and self-reflective comments on literary analysis and scholarly work, for example, when Michael describes his insights: "[W]e literary scholars [...] see only what we have been trained to see by images previously mediated through literature and art. This however, is not going to look good as the crowning insight of my researches, so I'm toning this observation down" (146). Another example would be Sophronia's comment when she says: "I leave meaning to you literary scholars, who can't see a cow in a pasture without trying to interpret it." (199) Other instances of Heyns's self-mockery can be found in Cedric's comments when he questions the usefulness of Michael's work (cf. 105) and when he compares reading to "wanking", because the reader is "the only one getting any pleasure out of it" (17). Furthermore, he compares scholarly writers to bonking white mice who produce other squealing and bonking white mice who produce themselves little bonking mice and so on, and he wonders when the reading and the writing about the reading and the reading about the writing about the reading and so on will ever stop (cf. 105). Another example of ironic self-mockery can be found in Augustus's email to J, in which he comments on Michael's Facebook status which was updated "with every meal he enjoyed, his every trip to the supermarket, his every social engagement" (228), leading Augustus to wonder "that anybody could be assumed to be fascinated by the minutiae of the uneventful existence of a university academic" (229).

The theme of youth regarding age and vice versa found in the painting also features in the novel, for example, when the protagonist narrator admits that he would rather "drive five kilometres just to buy a loaf of bread from the dishy young baker at Gino's rather than from the morose sexagenarian at the 7 Eleven" (99), since buying a loaf of bread should also be "an aesthetic and not just a utilitarian exercise" (99). Another example would be his comment on his former tutor Hugh, now sixty, with whom he had a youthful dalliance seven years ago, when Michael states that those seven years make him thirty-two now and make for him the difference between the fumbings of youth and the certainties of adulthood, while for Hugh, it makes "the

difference between the last fling and the onset of the renunciations of old age” (36). The disrespectful language used to describe Augustus and Sophronia in his emails represents another case in point. His pejorative terms to describe them range from “half-senile” (99), “old codger” (99), “old hag” (179), and “granny from hell” (16) to “Weird Wrinklies” (113), to name but a few. This disrespectful language and his preference of youth for aesthetic reasons can be seen as an expression of a superficiality typical for his camp attitude.

The place chosen for his academic work is the fictional Tuscan town of Gianocini. After the incidents in Florence, i.e. the elderly couple’s inexplicable repeated appearance and Wouter’s attack on Michael, on which he comments that it would be “a bit ironic, really, coming all the way from South Africa to be murdered in Tuscany” (59), Michael is looking forward to the drowsy, little, idyllic hilltop town of Gianocini, where he doubts “much has happened since the twelfth century” (70). Not being a tourist town, Gianocini represents to Michael the real Tuscany, “unappropriated by the desires, imaginations and representations of outsiders, not having anything that could engage or stimulate the imagination of the culture tripper: no picturesque ruins, no resident saint, no birthplace of some great artist” (88). Coming from Johannesburg, “one of the most dangerous cities on earth” (115), it is the peacefulness of the town that strikes him: “cats dozing on doorsteps; doors ajar [...], keys [...] dangling in front doors [...] – What a change from the razor wire and armed response of South African suburbia! How pleasant to know you’re *safe!*” (81, emphasis original).

However, the mood changes after finding out that Augustus is his landlord. Having seen him and Sophronia already on the plane and in Florence, Michael assumes that they are stalking him, which triggers his paranoia, and the orderly streets of Gianocini suddenly become “a site of malign conspiracy” (100) and Augustus an “agent of dark powers” (101). Michael reflects on the situation: “It seems strange, does it not, that I, an inhabitant of Johannesburg, one of the most dangerous cities on earth, should feel queasy walking along the streets of a Tuscan village on a Sunday evening?” (115) As if foreseeing Augustus’s revenge plot, Michael feels a metaphysical queasiness, “a sense of dark forces abroad, seeking redress for centuries-old grievances” (115). What he described two days before as an efficient, “time-honoured kind of neighbourhood watch” (81), has turned into the perception of “a fully operational nest of spies, a kind of medieval CIA” (111), with the “Gianocini Glare” (96) substituting the razor wire and expressing the local distrust of outsiders. His paranoia is fuelled by the episode of the truffle hunters, where he mistakes their offering of truffles as a threat to kill him (cf. 143ff), as well as by the sight of the painting of David and the spear-flinging Saul, when Michael thinks to

recognize his own face in the face of David. This is one coincidence too many for Michael, who now perceives the once idyllic little town as scary, and walking the woods seems to him “as dangerous as walking through Hillbrow at 2 am” (143). What really frightens him, is the picture of Abraham and Isaac, when he recognizes his own face in the face of the terrified Isaac who, “cowering under his father’s hand, the knife at his throat” (189), is about to be killed and sacrificed, since there are neither the angel that stayed Abraham’s hand nor the ram that stood in for Isaac in the painting, hence “there’s nothing to stop Abraham from cutting Isaac’s throat” (189). The biblical theme of Abraham and Isaac also features in *The Children’s Day*. However, while in *The Children’s Day* the story is told by the *dominee* to remind the families of the new recruits of the necessity of sacrifice and unquestioning obedience to the authority not only of God but of the regime (cf. Heyns, *Children’s Day* 197), in *A Sportful Malice* the painting can be read as foreshadowing the “narrative beheading of Michael” (Jacobs 15). Assuming that Augustus entertains murderous fancies featuring him (cf. 198), Michael feels as if he is “losing it” (195), and he even begins to suspect Cedric of being involved in the conspiracy. Nothing makes sense to Michael anymore in Gianocini (cf. 200), and his growing paranoia even makes him “homesick for our security doors. Damn this crime-free environment. Anybody could murder you in your bed.” (197), as he admits in an email to J. However, his paranoid fear and the possibility that Paolo might also be part of the plot do not hinder Michael from trying to seduce the latter, camp and affectionate toward youth and male beauty as he is.

## 4.2 Sociocultural Background

The main protagonist, a white middle class male, homosexual and a literary scholar like Heyns himself, is half Italian and half South African. He grew up mostly without his abusive father and studied at Cambridge. Michael’s identity is characterized by his South African nationality, his profession as a literary scholar, his homosexuality, and his camp attitude. After Michael’s father had died of a heart attack, Meneer De Beer became his benefactor, seeing him through school and university, paying the fees (cf. 85). It was also Meneer De Beer, with whom Michael encounters his first homosexual experience in the suburbs of Cape Town at a Sunday School Outing (cf. 84). Despite his mother’s warnings against “strange men” (84) and her laundry inspections, the then sixteen-year-old Michael is vulnerable to the forty-year-old second-hand car dealer’s approaches, and describes his initiation as “not unpleasant but not earth-shaking” (84). De Beer represents the stereotypical image of the homosexual as corrupter of youth, an image that draws on the concept of homosexuality as a contagious habit. He is “murdered some

years later in Strand, by a young man who claimed he'd 'molested' him" (86), a tragic ending typical of many homosexual characters in literature "who met some ignominious end, often involving murder or suicide" (Fone 11). Michael describes his mother as a typical *boermeisie* who had plenty of Boer stoicism and who brought him up a Protestant, "which is an effective antidote to piety" (130), according to Michael. He describes his father as a full-blooded Italian picture framer with a particular interest in Caravaggio (cf. 129) who emigrated to South Africa when he was a young man (cf. 133), "reckless and irresponsible" (37), "a bully" (133) who is sensual, pious, and cruel, like Caravaggio's paintings (cf. 130). The influence of his father's abuse on Michael becomes evident when he admits he had suffered until recently from panic attacks when exposed to Italian, since his father spoke Italian only when he was "clobbering" him (cf. 129).

As mentioned above, and just as in the other two novels analysed, the protagonist narrator is homosexual. He represents the masculine homosexual who lives in a relationship where manly man loves equally manly man (cf. Fone 10), but he also shows some characteristics of a camp homosexual. He is arrogant and superficial, and has a "narcissistic vision of his own masculinity" (Adams 89), as his behaviour shows, for example, when he assumes that all men are potentially homosexual and prone to his advances. While he himself is thirty-two years old, he is interested in boys who are in their twenties and rejects a waiter, whom he assumes to be angling to exchange more than photos, for aesthetical reasons (cf. 39). His arrogance and superficiality also become apparent in his treatment of Cedric and Augustus whom he judges by their first impression as inferior beings, Cedric due to his class and Augustus due to his age. Michael could also be seen as the stereotypical homosexual corrupter of the young, following the Greek model of pederasty, "derived from Plato and [...] the classical ideal of the pupil, learning from his older lover" (Martin 87), with Michael being "ever prepared to educate the young" (65). However, his intentions are far from being strictly platonic. Promiscuity and sexual adventurousness are part of his identity. Ironically, he never succeeds in living it out, contrary to his partner J, with whom he lives in an open relationship. This open relationship is also acted out from his subjective perspective, as he takes every liberty to go on sexually adventurous quests, while he reacts extremely jealous when his partner J does likewise. His lifestyle, which is characterized by an "anarchic sexuality" (Adams 83) in which meaningless, casual sex is seen as "a mark of male prowess" (Bujra 220), around which he constructs his masculinity, can be read as the stereotypical promiscuous lifestyle ascribed to homosexuals (cf. Fone 414). Other than his apparently down-to-earth homosexual lover J, Michael's promiscuity renders him "unable to become a participant in love" (Martin 197).

The characters range in class from Cedric, who represents the working class, over middle-class Michael, to the eccentric upper class couple Sophronia and Augustus. However, despite the uppitiness and the genteel environment of the elderly couple and Sophronia's habit of reading *The Tatler* in order to consult it for spots to go in London to watch the nobbs, which to her is so much more entertaining than watching the yobs, since the former, to whom she refers to as "the witless and the chinless" (118), are "[m]uch less inhibited, and so much more inventively vulgar" (118), Michael assures Cedric, who cannot stomach their "airs and graces" (169), that "[t]hese people can be every bit as rude as you" (169). The elderly couple is further characterized by their morbid fascination with death, as is expressed in their entrance hall and living room full of dead animals, their paintings of skeletons, their maggot pit in the backyard, and their black Great Dane Thanatos, whose white mate Eros was shot dead by a hunter. The dogs are named after the Greek gods of death and love respectively. In psychoanalysis, Thanatos symbolizes the death instinct, as being opposed to Eros, the god of love and sexuality, who symbolizes libido and the life instinct (cf. Read 1300), an opposition reflected in the novel's characters and the topic of youth and age.

Cedric, the former wrestler and night club bouncer, represents "the antithesis of Michael's ideal of male beauty" (Jacobs 8). His "bulky" (26) outward appearance is complemented by various tattoos and T-shirts with slogans to express his identity. His East End vernacular, insulting language, and vocabulary loaded with contempt represent his class as do his overt belligerence, his swearing and cursing as well as his homophobic and sexist remarks. "[W]ith his mixture of belligerence, bigotry and ingenuousness" (Jacobs 9), Cedric belongs "to the very opposite end of the spectrum to Michael's refined gay sensibility" (Jacobs 8), for example, when he says about Pisa: "Pisser's a crap joint. All it's got is a wonky fuckin' tower and yer've got to queue for about seven hours to go up it." (72), or when all he remembers about Michelangelo's David is that it is "the bloke [he] saw in Florence [...]. The one with the small prick." (159). He came to Italy for the "prime Italian skirt" (27), but all he finds is a new mate, Giuseppe, who substitutes his former best friend Cyril, which means Cedric is "assertively heterosexual, but homosocial by preference" (Jacobs 8), so that when he states "a man must have a mate, don't he" (252), Michael wonders if this might have been "his coming-out speech" (252). However, despite his aggressive and misanthropic behaviour and his homophobic remarks, he is probably the most tolerant, broad-minded, and humane of the characters. Contrary to the so-called sophisticated people, he is always willing to "make allowances" (94) for all kinds of other people's preferences with which he cannot really identify, be it their sexual orientation (cf. 94), their artistic preferences (cf. 157ff), or just their basic flaws, as shows his

comment when he sets off to Porto Ercole to find the abandoned Michael, as Augustus reports it: “‘I reckon he was a right real cunt,’ he commented, with his customary penchant for the *mot juste*, ‘but I can make allowances.’” (243)

Michael as a university scholar represents the middle class. He belittles the lower classes and despises the upper class. With his gay partner, he models their relationship on the heteronormative ideal of a family, complete with a nagging mother-in-law and with dogs as substitute for the otherwise obligatory children. After his separation from J, he even demands to work out a custody arrangement for the dogs, as he suspects J’s new partner of having already alienated their affections (cf. 247). However, he remains an outsider to the heterosexual domain of the Family (cf. Adams 172), which shows in the episode of the neighbour in Gianocini who asked him about his family and “seemed to lose interest when [Michael] confessed to having neither wife nor children and abruptly shut her door” (86). The scene can also be read as contrasting the Italians’ famous heterosexual fruitfulness and importance of family with “the traditional metaphor of homosexual sterility” (Adams 171).

In addition to his camp attitude and arrogance, he is a bit of a show-off, ever prepared to throw in the occasional single foreign expression, such as “senza” (75) or “sans” (75), and intertextual references, for example, when talking about his “Machiavellian stealth” (75) or when the Tuscan forest seems to evoke thoughts about Lucy Honeychurch and George Emerson or Lady Chatterley and Mellors (cf. 142), to add colour to his language and to demonstrate his education and detached attitude. Even his two dachshunds are named after the characters Beatrice and Benedick of Shakespeare’s *Much Ado About Nothing*. His education and profession as well as his camp attitude are reflected in his narrative style.

### 4.3 Narrative Situation

*A Sportful Malice*, subtitled a “Comedy of Revenge”, belongs to the genre of epistolary novels, i.e. “the narrative is conveyed entirely by an exchange of letters” (Abrams 199) or, as in this case, an exchange of emails, in which the protagonist narrator gives his subjective impression of the world in the form of emails written to his partner J, which is why Jacobs employs the term “electronic epistolary novel” (16) to characterize the genre more accurately. The emails are all but one written by the main protagonist narrator Michael, but his accounts read rather like a diary, as J’s replies are not given in the novel. The penultimate email written by Augustus represents Michael’s narrative beheading (cf. Jacobs 16). It provides a second perspective and



gives insights into the second revenge plot. It differs in terms of style in so far as Augustus's more formal style, together with his sentiments, represents the older generation, and "provides a counter to Michael's camp tone and also a matching degree of ironic observation" (Jacobs 16). Augustus's hard clarity and superior, moralising tone is contrasted with Michael's narcissistic whimsy. Furthermore, Augustus's email contains a metafictional observation about electronic communication and social media (cf. Jacobs 16) which, according to him, make the "passivity of the aged the universal human condition" (213). He belittles the "tawdry and ephemeral self-promoters on Facebook" (214), whose profiles are self-portraits as well as self-advertisements representative of the phenomenon of "mass narcissism" (227), for which Facebook provides the ideal platform. Michael's "epistolary exhibitionism" (245) is also criticized by his partner J, who might prefer fidelity to honesty about Michael's conquests. Even an open relationship only works well until somebody transgresses the boundaries, and Michael realizes that even "at [their] age and in [their] subculture [...] total freedom does not guarantee a successful relationship" (246). It is also Michael's self-portraiture and his narcissism exhibited on Facebook that enables Augustus to plot his revenge so efficiently.

While *prima facie* Michael appears to belong to the category of liberated homosexuals, he denies his sexual orientation at first, lying to Cedric about it when he asks him in his direct manner if he is "a poxy poof or sumthin" (28). Michael justifies his outright lie as follows:

Now, I know that denial only feeds the prejudice to which it defers, and you know that if confronted on the matter at a dinner party or in a pub, I would have declared my sexual orientation as readily as it was questioned. But somehow, when put like that by somebody who looked like that, it was no longer a civilised conversational gambit or interested query: it was a challenge, clad in the full panoply of inborn, inherited and independently acquired prejudice, backed up with all the authority of bovver boots and head butts. Faced with this arsenal, I took refuge in the lie outright. (28)

Michael is well aware of the lacking social acceptance of his sexual orientation as soon as he leaves his middle-class environment, liberal constitutions and laws notwithstanding, and the Old Man's provoking regard seems to confirm his fear of social oppression, when Michael seems to recognize in the neutrality of the Old Man's face insult, lack of surprise, and "the implication that he would have expected nothing else of [him]" (28). In this, as in many other scenes, Michael tries to distance himself by the employment of irony, for example, when he admits that, when lying, he even managed "to inject some injured male pride into [his] denial" (28). Although his former Cambridge tutor Hugh warns him of "overestimating a proper English ironical distance" (36), irony is one of the four features being basic to camp, according

to Babuscio, the other three being aestheticism, theatricality, and humour (cf. Babuscio 119). According to Sontag, “[c]amp is the consistently aesthetic experience of the world [and] incarnates a victory of ‘style’ over ‘content’, ‘aesthetics’ over ‘morality’, of irony over tragedy” (Sontag 62). Furthermore, she states that camp sensibility is “playful [and] antiserious” (Sontag 62), and, indeed, it is Michael’s light-mindedness that Sophronia criticizes as being one of his principal failings (cf. 199), for example, when she plans on modelling Cedric’s portrait on Leonardo’s Annunciation, with Cedric in the place of Virgin Mary and the dog Thanatos as the Angel Gabriel, and Michael asks her, in mocking response to her pseudo-intellectual lecture on realism, if she will “give Cedric an expression of glad surprise, as if he’s just been informed that he will give birth to the Messiah” (199). Other examples of “Michael’s camp amusement” (Jacobs 10) would be his description of Salome in the painting as “contemplating the head of the Baptist [...] with a kind of shy pride” (49) or his comment on Botticelli, whom you can trust “to domesticate even a decapitation” (48), when he depicts Judith returning triumphantly with the head of Holofernes, with Michael describing Judith as “looking comfortably satisfied rather than victorious, as if after a successful morning’s shopping, complete with servant to carry home the gruesome groceries” (48). Another case in point would be Michael’s description of Wouter as having “a very attractive way of forgetting to close his mouth all the way: it makes him look a bit dim in a gentle sort of way, like a Della Robbia Madonna, if you can imagine a very masculine madonna” (64).

Some of Michael’s comments refer self-reflectively to his own camp sensibility, for example, when he responds to Cedric’s accusation of having got no feeling: “[D]on’t come on all sensitive on me, about us being mates all the way from Stansted. Listen, we poofs *invented* sensitivity. On us it looks good. But it doesn’t suit your style, so just leave it, will you” (208, emphasis original), or when he is confronted with Cedric’s unexpected vulnerability to his perceived rejection by Cyril, leading Michael to ask rhetorically: “[W]hat do we mere poofs know about the power of male bonding?” (110). The male bond between Cedric and Cyril and their good understanding is endangered by Cyril’s new girl-friend Cindy, who forbids Cyril to go to Pisa with Cedric by resorting to her own specific kind of blackmail: “[I]f ye’re reckoning to fuck off with that Cedric and leave me on me own you’d better find out how them poofs do it cos you ain’t gonna be doin’ it with me again this century, and I don’t want to hear nuffin about your sore arse neither.” (21) Her threat is grounded on sex panic scripts that “demonize sexual groups or issues through association with highly stigmatized forms of sexuality” (Irvine 20 qtd in Murray 130) and by employing “provocative language and symbols” (Irvine 18 qtd in Murray 132). The same sex panic script underlies the reaction of Mrs. Opperman and Simon’s

mother as well as the other members of the OVV in *The Children's Day* after Steve has taken Simon for a swim to the Modder River (cf. Heyns, *Children's Day* 38ff).

The protagonist narrator's subjective point of view is complemented by dialogues, reported by himself, and by Augustus's account of events in the penultimate email, thus providing the readers with a second perspective and informing them on other characters' opinions and sentiments. Furthermore, the camp focaliser is himself ironically brought into focus through the agency of Augustus and Sophronia (cf. Jacobs 13) when Michael starts suffering from paranoid delusions about being stalked by them and the cool mask of the arrogant and self-obsessed protagonist begins to slip and reveals his flaws and shortcomings as well as his dependence on Cedric. The comic scale of his paranoia even extends to his relationship with J when he almost works himself into a frenzy over the poor contrast he feels he will make with J's new partner Keith who is a medical doctor and might therefore be more appealing to J's Jewish mother (cf. 246). Furthermore, he is irritated by the fact that J takes Keith out together with his mother, while he never took Michael anywhere with her (cf. 195).

Another characteristic of the narrative situation are the recurring references to other gay or presumably gay writers such as Henry James, William Shakespeare, and E.M. Forster, to name but a few. Such references represent a tradition in homosexual writing. While in former times of censorship, such allusions served as code references within the gay community, nowadays they rather represent a homage to earlier homosexual writers (cf. Martin xiv), to acknowledge those who went before and paved the path for subsequent writers (cf. Martin xix). One instance of such references can be found in Michael's remark about his intention to make his trip with Paolo to the Tuscan seaside "a benchmark Tuscan appropriation" (211):

Skinny-dipping on a Tuscan beach with a Tuscan youth is what dear old Forster, and probably Henry James himself and I wouldn't be surprised DH Lawrence too, could only dream about. As so often, WH Auden, that brilliant old queen, found the words for their common fantasy, the throbbing void at the centre of all that sublimation: *the nude young male who lounges against a rock displaying his dildo never doubting that for all his faults he is loved, whose works are but extensions of his power to charm.* Paolo to a T. (211, emphasis original)

Such references can be read as expressing the writer's awareness of himself as homosexual and of the importance for the writer "to feel himself linked to a tradition and to acknowledge those who have gone ahead" (Martin 165). Of course, there are also references which have less to do with the earlier poet's sexual orientation than with the actual novel's plot, as, for example, the allusion to Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, which might have provided a form of inspiration for

Heyns, as is expressed in the title of the novel, *A Sportful Malice*, which refers to Shakespeare's character Fabian trying to explain and justify or rather downplay the way in which their revenge plot on Malvolio was carried out, when he says about the plot "[h]ow with a sportful malice it was followed may rather pluck on laughter than revenge, if that the injuries be justly weighed that have on both sides passed" (Shakespeare 5.1.344, qtd in Heyns, *Sportful Malice* 1), just as Michael downplays his revenge on Wouter when he perceives his revenge as "poetic justice" (54) and calls it "a practical joke" (60). Another reference to *Twelfth Night*, and the character of Malvolio in particular, can be found in Michael's last email, which he signs with M for Malvolio, to which he adds parenthetically Malvolio's quote in brackets, "the most notorious geck and gull that e'er invention played on" (Shakespeare 5.1.322-323, qtd in Heyns, *Sportful Malice* 253), thereby describing in a nutshell his own role in the novel's second revenge plot.

## **4.4 Plot**

### **4.4.1 The Revenge of the Spurned Lover**

What starts out with a strong gay storyline leading to the first revenge plot, changes in the course of the narrative to a second revenge plot, inspired by Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and, in particular, the character of Malvolio. Just like Shakespeare's Malvolio, Heyns's protagonist Michael is "sick of self-love" (Shakespeare 1.5.71). Being a literary scholar who works on a monograph about "Tuscan Appropriations in Modern Fiction", Michael is on a scholarly pilgrimage to Tuscany. However, just like the pilgrims in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, his pilgrimage is characterized by an atmosphere of worldliness. He is not strictly focused on his literary studies but is rather distracted by his quest for fleshly pleasures or, as he calls it, "explorations of a less professional kind" (7). Being thirty-two and gay, his focus lies on male youths such as the South African student Wouter. The well-mannered Afrikaans boy, who drinks no wine and has a *meisie* in Pretoria, with whom he shares "a faith in Jesus but not yet a bed" (83), comes from a prominent Pretoria family, with his father being ex-Broederbond and his mother dedicating her whole life to the family and the Dutch Reformed Church. Wouter represents the innocent farm boy who is in denial of his homosexuality and who is now overwhelmed by the sensuality of the paintings and statues of naked men on his first trip to Europe (cf. 63). In the sensual surroundings of the Bargello, the sexually inexperienced Wouter, who is influenced by his upbringing in an Afrikaner patriarchal family and his religious indoctrination, meets Michael, the stereotypical homosexual corrupter of youth, promiscuous

and predatory, trying to seduce young people and to find his “satisfaction in the moment rather than the future” (Martin 69). So, when Michael accidentally jostles Wouter while “circling the lustrous bronze figure of Verocchio’s strangely beguiling David” (40), a cruising scene ensues, which is theorised by Michael “in terms of its essential ambiguity” (Jacobs 4) as well as its excitement, and the role of gaze and signals:

We both apologised, and glanced at each other. As I caught his eye, flustered amusement instantaneously transmuted into an exchange of sexual intelligence, subtle yet unmistakable. I felt a quick surge of excitement, and sensed its counterpart in the blush of the other man, a bright-eyed, strong-limbed fellow whose confusion probably made him seem younger than his years [...] For a moment we stood, irresolute; then the blond man smiled, lowered his gaze, and turned back to the David [...] I loitered on, [...] pleasantly conscious of the lingering presence behind me. Positioning myself behind a display case, I surreptitiously examined him through two layers of glass – as he had no doubt already examined me. He was wearing a baggy T-shirt and three-quarter shorts, which lightly brushed the bulge of a calf that pleasingly matched the smooth curve of his forearm. And the shorts, though frustratingly loose-fitting, couldn’t quite hide the contours of what was clearly a well-muscled backside. I gradually gravitated towards the exit and the staircase, permitting myself a frank backward glance at the David and, as if incidentally, at the young Dutchman, who, adroitly receiving the signal, closed his guidebook and followed me down the staircase. (40f)

The description of the cruising scene is much more elaborate than those in *The Children’s Day* and in *Lost Ground*, and much emphasis is placed on the body and on the response of the eyes, offering if not love, so at least sexual intercourse, “[d]eprived of the usual rituals of heterosexual courtship” (Martin 74), a discreet ritual still familiar at times when homosexuality is legally but not socially accepted. The body as “major bearer of masculine value and symbolism” (Morrell 8), including homoerotic appeal and desire, represents indeed an important aspect of both masculinity and cruising. Michael is also attracted by “the strange dissociation of sensibility attendant upon cruising: normal life continuing, but through an erotically tinted filter, one’s awareness of the ‘normal’ heightened if anything by the excitement of the chase” (49). He points out the significance of the body in cruising, with the physical appearance being subjected to the cruiser’s gaze, as well as the significance of being able to interpret the signals received in order to decipher the unwritten code of what Michael calls a “discreetly predatory game” (41). The quarry and the pursuer engage in “an elaborate ritual of simultaneously leading on and being led” (Jacobs 5), since the point of cruising, according to Michael, “is not to force a reluctant prey into a compromising position, but to make him *want* to place himself there” (42f, emphasis original). However, their game of mutual pursuit ends in the middle of the Ponte Vecchio, where Wouter suddenly disappears, leaving Michael humiliated, disappointed, and

angry. He accuses Wouter of being a sadist or a masochist, who gets “more pleasure from frustrating the expectations of others than from satisfying [his] own” (44). Immediately, he yearns for revenge and regrets that “there is no way of getting even” (44) with Wouter, whom Michael accuses of having him led on deliberately and then having abandoned him, “no doubt glorying in his power to disappoint” (44). Thus, when they meet again the next day at the Uffizi in front of Botticelli’s famous painting *Primavera*, both admiring the “well-turned calf and muscular thigh” (48) of the jaunty Mercury, Michael feels ambivalent about whether he should engage anew in “one of the more piquant games of hide and seek” (50) through the galleries with Wouter, who “has the true cruiser’s eye for any new blip on the radar” (48), but who might slight Michael again as he slighted him the day before. In a scene reminiscent of Marlowe’s *Dr Faustus*, where the good and the evil angel fight over the temptation of Faustus’s soul (cf. Marlowe 1.70-77), Dignity and Pride fight with Reckless over Michael’s propensity to give in (cf. 49). Of course, Reckless wins the debate and another cruising episode ensues. It might not be a coincidence that they meet again exactly in front of Mercury, “the god of deception” (Smith 42), who is also referred to in *Twelfth Night* (cf. Shakespeare 1.5.76-77) and who bears a resemblance to Michael, as Wouter states (cf. 65), and not just a physical one, as Michael’s subsequent cruel act of revenge proves. Their cruising game brings them to the lavatory, which is no surprise, for latrines were known already in the 18<sup>th</sup> century underworld for their use “to recognize one another and to indicate sexual interest” (Fone 231) by means of “special codes, signs, and gestures” (Fone 231). However, what starts out as an erotic scene, ends up in an enormous heist (cf. 51f). The promise of an intense physical encounter is not fulfilled for Wouter. Instead of experiencing his initiation, Michael undresses him, touches him, but instead of seducing him, sweeps up his clothes, slips out, and leaves him standing “bare-arsed” in the cubicle of the *gabinetti* (cf. 50ff), where the young man then has a hard time, with the guards making fun of him (cf. 67f) and with having to offer sex in exchange for pants (cf. 68), while Michael “saunter[s] along, even finding time to pause in front of, at last, the elusive Caravaggios” (52) and takes pleasure in his own vindictiveness, as shows his ironic remark after having contemplated Caravaggio’s paintings of Medusa and of Abraham and Isaac: “How we have shrunk! We no longer behead those who spurn us, we just steal their underpants.” (53)

The episode starts out as a celebration of anonymous sex with its “abolition of distinctions of age, class, beauty, and gender” (Martin 20), but develops into one of revenge “as surrogate for sexual satiety” (69), and Michael wonders if “the urge to revenge [is] just another form of desire, almost sexual in its intensity, demanding consummation as urgently as lust” (69). Wouter feels betrayed by Michael, who could have been his liberator. Despite his initiation

into homosexuality, Wouter is still unaware or in denial of his sexual orientation. His internalized oppression due to enculturation into a patriarchal, heteronormative society and religious homophobic indoctrination breaks down to a certain extent once these influences are far away, as Wouter's confession of his sexual stimulation shows: "There were all these statues again, and I was checking them out, and then I saw you also checking them out and checking *me* out, and I thought, wat de fok, I'm far from home and nobody knows me here" (64, emphasis original), to which Michael answers that "you have to travel to find yourself" (64). Michael's comment might be interpreted as a reference to the fact that, "in the past, 'going away' was the more likely starting point in the homosexual's assertion of his or her identity" (Adams 56), while "[n]owadays this process is summed up in the gay liberation concept of 'coming out'" (Adams 56). However, despite his confession of his sexual stimulation, Wouter denies his homosexuality with the words "it's not like I'm a fokken moffie or anything, basically" (64). The use of the derogatory term "fokken moffie" might be seen as an expression of his conflicted sexuality, which is fuelled by his mother's words written in his guidebook that made him feel "so fucking *ashamed* of [him]self" (64, emphasis original). However, as guilt-ridden as he may be, in the end "shame gives way to curiosity" (Martin 11), and Wouter gives in to his desires, a fact that he then tries to justify or explain by alluding to the purpose of God's doing, as can be seen in the exchange between Wouter and Michael, ensuing after the furious Wouter attacked Michael at his hotel:

'Of course, last night I thought maybe I missed out on something, I was still feeling a bit ... you know, but then I read my Bible and I knew I did the right thing.'

'What part of the Bible did you read?' I couldn't help asking.

'There where it says, in Deuteronomy, about the consequences of disobedience, the Lord will smite thee with the botch of Egypt and with the emerods, and with the scab, and with the itch, whereof thou canst not be healed. It's all in the *Christian's Guide to AIDS* that that American group distributed on campus. [...] Ja, and this morning I was feeling quite kiff about myself, and then in the Uffizi, I was looking at that painting [...] and I suppose I was wondering what he [Mercury] would look like without his clothes [...] and then I thought he looked a bit like the oke I saw yesterday – that's you, I mean – and I was feeling quite, sort of, you know, confused [...] Anyway, so then I looked up and I saw you, and I thought maybe you'd been sent just then, you know, as a sign that it was basically okay.'

'You mean you thought God had decided it was okay for you to ...'

'Ja, because you know in that painting, it makes everything seem okay. As if it's natural.' [...] 'So you thought I was an agent of the Lord?'

'Ja.' He blushed again. [...] 'And so,' he continued, 'when you did what you did, I thought that was God showing me I stuffed up.'

'So he first sent me to fool you into thinking you were doing the right thing, and then he sent me to put you right?'

'I know it sounds stupid. But it's the only explanation that makes sense.' (65f)

This exchange shows the contrast between Michael's sophistication and Wouter's naivety and conflicted sexuality, as is pointed out by Jacobs (cf. 6). Furthermore, it shows the discrepancy between the naturalness of homosexuality, sexual orientation as an inborn quality, on the one hand, and its condemnation by the Church as being against nature, sinful and therefore punishable, on the other hand. While in the past, the Church relied on the story of Sodom and the punishment of fire for acts of "sodomy", recently AIDS has been added to the list of divine punishments. The absurdity of the religious influence is underlined by the fact that Michael is seen as a twofold agent of the Lord, at one time as the liberator, telling Wouter his desire is natural, and the next minute as being sent to put him on the right path again, which only makes sense to Wouter, who in his state of confusion interprets "the signs from God" as he sees fit.

Michael, however, to whom "lust is more respectable than remorse" (66), is portrayed as the stereotypical promiscuous homosexual. "[P]rompted only by lust" (Fone 103), he is obsessed with young men and sexual adventures and "willing to go any lengths to obtain his pleasure" (Fone 197). He is the stereotypical corrupter of youth who is "merely using the other as an instrument of his own pleasure" (Adams 200). However, when spurned by Wouter, he sacrifices "lust to revenge" (54) when they meet again. His yearning for revenge and the cruelty of the act itself parallel his bloodlust and his fascination with scenes of beheadings, as can be found in Caravaggio's paintings (cf. 48f), or as can be found in the episode where a guidebook entry evokes imaginations of two Florentine youths of different standings, aristocrat and rustic, engaging in sexual intercourse after having been turned on by watching a public beheading, with Michael comparing the fall of the executioner's axe to sexual pleasure and climax (cf. 41f). The scene also expresses the assumption that homosexuality unites people regardless of class.

When Wouter finally signals his inclination to continue where they left off, Michael does not pursue his initial quest for practical reasons rather than virtue (cf. 69). Furthermore, Michael loses interest in the insipid young man, who, "without the thrill of the chase" (82), does not set Michael's pulse racing. In addition, his rejection of Wouter is also based on Michael's fear that the inexperienced young man "might mistake his lust for love" (82), and, as he says, he wants to spare him the pain of rejection or rather he wants to spare himself "the inconvenience of dealing with his pain" (83). As he admits, he likes his "dalliances to be cut-and-dried, with no messy residue" (82), i.e. without any sentiments or commitments. With Michael's camp inclination to theatricality and excitement, he would have preferred Wouter



angry rather than subdued, since “red-blooded rage is so much more personal than amorphous goodwill” (82).

The Florentine cruising scene is narratively mocked and countered with Cedric following Michael through Gianocini “like a homeless dog that’s spotted a sucker” (92). Michael reluctantly leads him from the bus stop to his accommodation in what Jacobs calls a “parody of his earlier cruising in Florence” (9), with Cedric’s predatory game neither being discreet nor being driven by fleshly desire. Cedric is following Michael to “piss him off” in revenge for Michael’s betrayal, i.e. Michael abandoning him in Pisa as well as in Florence (cf. 90f). However, Cedric’s motivation for cruising might be perceived as morally more acceptable than that of Michael, who is driven by his sexual obsession with young men and his desire for obtaining temporary pleasures with strangers without commitment.

#### **4.4.2 The Malvolio Plot**

In the same spirit, he begins cruising a fellow traveller on the bus to Gianocini the very next day, the young Italian art student Paolo, whom he anatomises erotically (cf. Jacobs 6) in celebration of male beauty and masculinity, again emphasising the homoeroticism incarnated in the body of the young man, the aestheticism fuelling his libido (cf. 78). The instantaneous sexual attraction to a stranger is once again an expression of his stereotypical homosexual promiscuity, as is reflected in Cedric’s homophobic comment: “Bloody poofs [...]. All yer think about is screwing.” (207) So, when Michael sees Paolo again at the Glamour Bar and admires him, Michael’s gaze represents the male gaze on another male, one who “renders [him] restless” and whose “very obliviousness [...] riles [him]” (107). When they finally exchange glances, Michael, who prides himself on being able to read them (cf. 109), misreads the signs when he thinks to read more than curiosity in Paolo’s backward glance, which is just one example of Michael’s hubris, of overestimating his own capacities. So, when Augustus learns about Michael’s homoerotic fantasies of Paolo, he draws on them to exact his terrible revenge.

The elaborate second revenge plot is orchestrated by Augustus and was initially motivated by his desire to avenge himself on his studio assistant Marco for his betrayal through his son Michael. The irony lies in the fact that Michael’s father was an abusive bully Michael hardly spoke to. Although Marco betrayed Augustus for money, Augustus suspects that greed was not his only motive: “He could not forgive me my kindness to him.” (227), a motive also featuring in *The Children’s Day*, when Fanie accuses Simon, who had always been kind and

polite to him, of having scared him into an epileptic fit (cf. Heyns, *Children's Day* 23). Augustus stresses explicitly that his affection for Marco “did not derive from some more-or-less covert sexual desire for Marco” (218), naming same-sex desire a “sexual inversion” (218) and “strange passions” (218), a stance he underlines by stating categorically “I am not and never have been a member of your and your friend’s fraternity” (218). According to Augustus, his affection for Marco was based on his vitality, his sense of humour, and his wit. However, their relationship changed over the years, up to the point that Augustus began to resent Marco’s “young immunity, his total self-sufficiency” (221) and eventually expressed his desire for revenge in a painting of Abraham and Isaac that reveals the power dynamic in their relationship (cf. 223) and the mercenary nature of Marco’s dependence on Augustus (cf. 224) and, above all, Augustus’s capability of killing Marco, whom he loved so much that, “lacking any other means of possessing him, [he] was capable of killing him” (223). Hence, when Marco betrays Augustus’s trust, the latter plots revenge in prison for Marco’s deliberate and vindictive betrayal, or as Augustus rhetorically asks: “[W]hat force more vindictive than affection betrayed [...]?” (226). However, with Marco being dead and Augustus’s insight that “you cannot recover the past” (234), he decides to take revenge on Marco’s son instead, but in the course of his surreptitious shadowing of Michael and after having read his emails, Augustus’s motive changes. He now wants to punish Michael for his “arrogance, his manifest contempt for [him] and Sophronia, his prurient designs upon Paolo, even his callous treatment of Mr. Gully” (239), “his cocksureness” (233) and “heedlessness” (233) as well as “his supreme confidence in his own power to charm” (233).

Knowing about Michael’s fleshly interest in the heterosexual Paolo, Augustus takes the opportunity to get revenge on Paolo as well for his betrayal, disloyalty, and ingratitude, by blackmailing him into playing the bait for catching Michael. Despite Michael’s heated imaginings, the heterosexual Paolo is not in the least interested in him (cf. 235). On the contrary, Michael’s desire induces loathing and animosity in its object. So, Paolo starts acting out his part of the revenge plot with a blatant teasing game at the greengrocer’s store. The episode is full of homoerotic imagery, for example, when Paolo places a mushroom in Michael’s hand and describes it as being “firm but smooth” (204), melting in the mouth “like warm butter” (204). The episode also contains phallogocentric imagery, for example, when the intriguing play of feature gives Michael “a crowbar in [his] pants” (202), or when Michael describes his “hard-on [as] straining against the cotton of [his] chinos like a bull at the gates” (203), drawing on the “involuntary nature of sexual arousal – the brute response of the phallus to stimuli beyond conscious control” (Adams 101).

Such imagery also features in other episodes such as the one at the Gianocini public facilities, where “a primitive life-size drawing of an erect dick [is] labelled 22 cm” (88), prompting Michael to guess that it is “an advertisement rather than an over-optimistic demand, a self-portrait functioning as self-promotion” (88). Another example would be Cedric’s reaction to Paolo’s idea to pose naked next to the David statue as a piece of performance art, when he raises the issue that people might be more interested in the size of Paolo’s “todger” than in the message of his performance (cf. 159ff), not understanding Angela’s concept of the phallus as a symbol of fertility, violence, and destruction (cf. 160). Another case in point would be his description of Michelangelo’s David as the bloke “with the small prick” (159), emphasizing the importance of its size, given the fact that the penis is “a prime symbol of [...] masculinity” (Dover 174). Nudeness and the symbolism of the phallus also feature prominently in the ending of the novel.

## 4.5 Ending

Just as Malvolio is “tricked [...] into thinking that his mistress wants him to woo her” (Alexander 123), Michael is tricked into thinking Paolo might be interested in his advances. Michael, “the unconscious quarry” (231), thinks to see “honest lust [...] in Paolo’s every lineament” (211), yet another expression of his hubris, overestimating his power to attract. Being arrested in his fantasies of Paolo as his lover, he does not perceive the malevolent intentions behind Paolo’s changed behaviour. Hence, the unsuspecting Michael, looking forward to being rubbed with suntan lotion by Paolo, takes off his clothes, while Paolo, exacting Augustus’s revenge plot, gathers up the bundle of clothes, gets into the boat, and starts the engine (cf. 240f). The episode parallels the one in the Uffizi, where Wouter is left standing “bare-arsed” and humiliated by Michael, or rather the episode repeats itself in a farcical scene with Michael being in Wouter’s place. However, Michael’s own plot of revenge is overtaken by that of Augustus, Sophronia, and Paolo, as Michael’s fury and “visible detumescence [...], an inverse external indicator, as it were, of his growing anxiety” (242), are filmed by Paolo, hoping that it would make “an ‘awesome’ piece of performance art” which might “‘go viral’ [...] on YouTube” (242) under the title of “*Phallus Fallu*” (242). Stripped of his manly arrogance and of his shorts, his sexual equipment is exposed to criticism (cf. Adams 32). This public humiliation puts Michael firmly in his place, and he “is brought to see the flaws in his own performance” (Adams 164). Contrary to Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*, who swears revenge with his famous words “I’ll be revenged on the whole pack of you” (Shakespeare 5.1.355),

Michael shows insight into his flaws and realizes that he has been a tragic clown of lust and of his own “ill will”, as shows his last email signed with M for Malvolio, the literal translation of which is “ill will” (Smith 25).

After all their quarrels and discrepancies, it is Cedric of all people, who comes to his rescue when everyone else has abandoned him. Cedric’s persona is characterized by ambiguity and Michael’s relationship with him changes in the course of the narrative. Cedric represents a comic figure, the typical ingénu who communicates in clichéd terms, expressing his homophobic and sexist opinions in offensive language, employing stereotypes such as effeminacy and weakness to underline his homophobic views, for example, when he says about bouncing at “the poofster discos” (94) that it was “much less bother than the regular clubs, I reckon not so much tetsost’rone [sic] in the atmosphere” (94), or when he comments with profound disgust on gay marriage: “Jeez, you poofs. [...] Beats me how you can even joke about marryin’ another bloke.” (147) On several occasions he expresses his willingness to make allowances for people with homosexual orientation. This could be seen as Cedric expressing his tolerance of difference, however, it could also be interpreted as signifying homophobia as product of nurture and socialization (cf. Fone 7ff) which is based on the assumption that heterosexuality is the norm and therefore superior to homosexuality, for the latter of which you would then have to make allowances, since it is not usually accepted. Another aspect of his ingénu status is his challenging of absolute categories in Michael’s life such as the usefulness of Michael’s work, his sexual orientation, or the concept of dinner parties. Cedric’s outward appearance – he is succinctly described by Michael as “slab of brawn and bovver” (6) reminiscent of “a pit bull” (6) - and his offensive language are in marked contrast to his tenderness of heart, for example, when he misses his Maltese poodle or when he comes to Michael’s rescue. Michael discovers that the greatest part of Cedric’s belligerence stems from his insecurity, from his intimidation by the strange place and new situations he would have to face without the back-up of his mate Cyril. Underneath his belligerent façade and his political incorrectness, Cedric is honest and loyal, as Michael learns at the end of the novel. Rid of his arrogance and superiority, Michael realizes that Cedric is his only true friend in his misery, even if he refuses to touch Michael’s “todger” in the anointment scene (cf. 249ff), and in a humble way Michael is also looking forward to Wouter, whose friend request on Facebook he has accepted (cf. 134) and who might visit him in Gianocini (cf. 247).

The ending of the novel is reminiscent of the typical ending of a comedy, with the couples facing a happy future. However, just as “[t]he humiliated Malvolio is unmated”

(Alexander 123) at the end of Shakespeare's comedy, Michael is also unmated as he is well aware:

So Cyril will be okay and Cindy will be okay and Cedric will, I hope, be okay and Giuseppe will be okay and all manner of things will be okay, and no doubt you and Keith will be okay, and Beatrice and Benedick will be okay, and Augustus and Sophronia will probably be okay, and Paolo and Angela will certainly be okay – leaving me roasted to a turn but with me todger untouched. Every comedy contains a buffoon, I suppose, who is not coupled off at the final curtain. [...] All that comes to mind is: Now is the time to update my relationship status on Facebook. [...] M (for Malvolio, the most notorious geck and gull that e'er invention played on). (253)

In an act of self-reflexivity, Michael finally shows insight into his flawed behaviour and the response it evoked from the other characters. With self-reflexivity being a central topic of the novel, these lines could also be read as a metafictional comment on what the novel is trying to achieve. Michael has been betrayed by Paolo and his mentors, just as Wouter has been betrayed by Michael, which leaves both of them with their sexual desires unfulfilled. The ending also evokes “a striking image of loneliness” (Martin 118), with Michael being all alone among the happy pairings and with his relationship having been ended by J. The fact that Michael has been abandoned and replaced with Keith by J represents an additional punishment for his arrogance and his “unpleasant predatory egotism” (Atkin 87), comparable to that of Malvolio and bearable only because it is presented through the mask of comedy. Despite the fact that his humiliation and suffering, together with his sexual frustration impart a certain dignity to his character, the camp anti-hero amuses but does not really move the reader, as he might have got what he deserved and poetic justice is ensured. However, the reader's Schadenfreude might be somewhat lessened by Michael's insight into and acknowledgment of his flaws.

## 4.6 Conclusion

With Heyns's comedy of revenge being set in 2013 in Tuscany and representing characters of different nations and standings, each expressing their own set of beliefs and concept of masculinity, the novel shows how “globalization reconfigures and reshapes the arena in which these national and local masculinities are articulated, and transforms the shape of domestic and public patriarchies” (Kimmel xii), as is expressed in the character of the South African student Wouter, whose indoctrination with patriarchal heteronormativity, homophobia, and internalized puritan oppression breaks down once these influences are far away, initiating a

process of liberation from long-ingrained attitudes and beliefs, or in Michael's "mindless consumerism" (Stobie 329), who, being far from his partner in Johannesburg, tries to live his open relationship to the fullest while in Tuscany. However, even in a globalized and liberal context, there are limits to tolerance and liberalism, as Wouter's confusion and personal struggle and Cedric's, Paolo's, and the elderly couple's reaction to Michael's promiscuity and arrogance show.

The gay protagonist narrator gives first-hand reports of his fleshly quests or rather of the failure thereof in a humorous manner and with ironical detachment in his emails to J, thus providing insights into his camp self which is characterized by superficiality and predatory egotism, as his facile judgment, promiscuous lifestyle, and light-mindedness show. Michael is represented as the stereotypical homosexual corrupter of boys who, in his "pagan glorification" (Fone 113) of the male body, is "prompted only by lust" (Fone 103), without regard for other people's feelings, and whose arrogant, self-obsessed behaviour triggers the other characters' contempt.

His narrative counterparts are the naïve and sexually inexperienced Wouter as well as the belligerent Cedric. Wouter's sexual identity is characterized by sexual conflict. He tries to break out of his internalized oppression due to Puritan indoctrination and enculturation into a still heteronormative, patriarchal South African society but is betrayed by Michael, who could have been his sexual liberator. Cedric with his insulting homophobic remarks in East End Vernacular and with his tattoos and T-shirt slogans represents the working class and "the antithesis of Michael's ideal of male beauty" (Jacobs 8). Cedric is the typical ingénu who provides an outsider perspective on middle and upper-class behaviour and values, as, for example, when he questions Michael's work and lifestyle, or when he criticizes Augustus and Sophronia for their upper-class "airs and graces" and questions their concept of dinner parties. Furthermore, the uneducated ex-wrestler and night-club bouncer is the most tolerant and humane among the highly sophisticated group of people, who try to cover their rudeness by using snobbish language and who, like little children, plot their revenges. Moreover, he is the most honest among the characters and does not betray any of the others. He is ready to make allowances for all kinds of behaviour and is the only one who comes to rescue the abandoned Michael in Porto Ercole. So, his inclination towards homophobia and violence might be the result of his enculturation into a heteronormative patriarchal society, where violence and homophobia play an important role in the construction of masculinity (cf. Connell 12), rather than an inborn moral conviction. Despite Cedric's numerous homophobic comments, Paolo and

Sophronia are much more judgmental when it comes to Michael's promiscuity and arrogance, as is expressed in Augustus's email, where he questions Michael's behaviour, his narcissistic exhibition on Facebook, and the concept of an open relationship.

Central to the novel are the topics of cruising and self-reflexion, as is indicated by the symbolism of the Caravaggio paintings, stressing the homoeroticism of the male body and the importance of the gaze but also referring to the postmodern element of self-reflexivity and self-mockery in the novel, such as the self-mocking comments on literary scholars or the critical scrutinizing of the gay camp narrator. Furthermore, Michael's self-reflective final words might be read as a metafictional comment on what the novel is trying to achieve. Just like Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*, Michael is an "egotist who thinks far too highly of himself" (Atkin 84) and has to suffer for his arrogance and "smug self-satisfaction" (Atkin 86). However, other than Malvolio, who swears revenge for the betrayal, Michael shows insight into his own shortcomings and flawed behaviour. With Michael finally valuing Cedric as a true loyal friend and even considering a relationship with the once rejected Wouter, he seems to have learned the moral lesson he has been taught that loyal friendship and emotional commitment might be preferable and superior to a selfish promiscuous lifestyle from which he might obtain only temporary pleasure at the cost of hurting other people's feelings.

## 5 Conclusion

The settings of the three novels analysed range from the apartheid era depicted in *The Children's Day* to the New South Africa captured in *Lost Ground* and further on to the more globalized setting of *A Sportful Malice*. Thus, Heyns captures the unique situation of South Africa changing from one of the most oppressive regimes to adopting the most liberal Constitution in 1996. While the legal concessions have succeeded in ending state homophobia, social homophobia persists within the majority of the population (cf. Ireland 52), as "underlying social relations and even attitudes remain substantially unchanged" (Attwell & Harlow 2). Heyns provides insights into the lives of homosexuals in their respective contexts and shows their struggles of identity formation and against oppression in a heteronormative and homophobic environment, thereby "addressing the connections between personal stories and public histories, between the domestic space and the nation" (Attwell & Harlow 8). He does so by means of white middle-class homosexual protagonist narrators, who give first-hand reports of their everyday-life experiences. The first-person point-of-view lends credibility to their

reports and gets the reader involved in their thoughts and experiences. Their stories and especially their struggles against indoctrinated views, internalized oppression, and repression reveal that homosexuals have been and still are pathologised and stigmatised by political and legal authorities as well as religious leaders (cf. Stobie 322) and that the discourse of homosexuality is therefore inextricable from nationalism, church, colonialism, racism, and hegemonic masculinity (cf. Stobie 322), liberal constitutions notwithstanding. Society still seeks to stigmatise homosexuality “as utterly aberrant and extraordinary behaviour” (De Waal 236) by equating it with promiscuity and perversity and “seeks to censor homosexuality into invisibility” (De Waal 236), which is the reason why cruising and staying in the closet still represent an important practice in the homosexual subculture, since being too open about one’s homosexuality it is still perceived as a transgression, as is illustrated not just by means of Steve, Klasie, and Trevor, whose stories are set in the apartheid era, but also by means of Peter, Joachim, Boris, Michael, and Wouter, whose stories are set in presumably more liberal contexts.

By complementing the narrators’ stories with those of various other gay characters, Heyns provides a panoramic view of male homosexualities. His stereotypical representations of male homosexuals comprise pedophilic child molesters, corrupters of the young, adolescents experimenting with their sexuality, effeminate homosexuals, the promiscuous camp gay, as well as “masculine” homosexuals in mature relationships. However, Heyns does neither foreground the sexual transgression nor does he exploit the tragic potential of the topic, but deconstructs the stereotypes by depicting the individual’s conflict between desire and public mores. By presenting events from the gay first-person perspective and by means of irony, be it the structural irony provided by ingénu protagonists such as Simon and Cedric, or be it the irony provided by the fallible narrator in *Lost Ground* and *A Sportful Malice*, Heyns questions the conventional mores and attempts to contest the homophobic prejudices by destabilising the assumptions on which they rest (cf. De Waal 234), or he rather invites the reader to do so, as mentioned above in the analysis of the child narrator in *The Children’s Day*. Following the tradition of gay fiction, he does not only include references to other and former gay writers, but deals with topics typically found in homosexual literature such as phallogocentrism as well as homoeroticism and homoerotic desire, as is expressed in bathing, wrestling, and cruising scenes.

Although the three novels belong to different genres, the topic of formation of identity or the loss thereof is central to all of them. Closely linked to the topic of identity formation are the topics of loss, betrayal, and self-reflexivity recurring in all three novels. While in *The Children’s Day* Simon, whose coming-of-age story is characterized by sexual confusion, loss,



and betrayal, experiences an epiphany in an act of self-reflexivity triggered by his epileptic childhood companion Fanie, leading Simon to accept his homosexual self and acknowledge his love for Fanie, Peter's self-reflection triggered by Chrisna in *Lost Ground* causes the loss of his identity when his story of betrayal leads to many losses, including the one of his beloved friend, and he finally realizes that he has loved Bennie, whose death he might well have caused, all his life. Michael's perspective in *A Sportful Malice* is not as bleak as Peter's, for Michael's self-reflective act, triggered by Augustus's revenge plot, leads to insight into his own deeds and his behaviour which was characterized by arrogance, promiscuity, and disregard for other people's feelings but which might now change, as the ending of the novel suggests.

Heyns represents the homosexual characters as full individuals in a realistic and convincing manner. They are portrayed as being emphatically ordinary "to stress that homosexuality is not confined to rare creatures" (Adams 110). However, homosexuality is not idealised or represented as "an advance over heterosexuality" (Martin 85) either. The homosexual characters "are variously as comic, as pathetic, as wise, as foolish, as good and as bad – as human, in other words – as all of his other characters" (Adams 156) and are also "included as targets for the author's satire" (Adams 158). Thereby, he challenges "[t]he complacent, condemnatory attitudes of previous decades" (Adams 15) and "the rigid sexual categorisation society inculcates" (Adams 19). His characters suggest that there is a "fluid movement among and between forms of sexual behaviour" (Cohen 74 qtd. in Murray 120), which contradicts the dichotomist concept of homosexuality as being in opposition to heterosexuality.

By countering the process of "othering" with giving positive, realistic portrayals of gay life and problems in heterosexual environment (cf. Fone 12) and depicting homosexuality as "a legitimate sexual identity" (Fone 259), the novels encourage the reader to critique homosexual stereotypes and the concomitant panic (cf. Murray 120). Thus, they demonstrate literature's potential to be an effective means of propagating tolerance towards and acceptance of difference in general and homosexuals in particular, making homosexuality accessible and intelligible and challenging homophobia.

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## 8 Appendix

### Abstract

In der vorliegenden Diplomarbeit werden drei Romane des sich öffentlich zu seiner Homosexualität bekennenden südafrikanischen Autors Michiel Heyns analysiert: *The Children's Day* (2002), *Lost Ground* (2011) und *A Sportful Malice* (2014). Geschrieben im liberalen Geiste der Neuen Verfassung Südafrikas, erlauben die verschiedenen Settings, die sowohl die Ära der Apartheid als auch das liberale Neue Südafrika umfassen, einen kritischen Blick auf die jeweiligen Epochen und deren Umgang mit den verschiedenen Formen von Homosexualität. Obwohl die Romane verschiedenen Genres angehören, weisen sie doch einige gemeinsame Merkmale auf, wie beispielsweise die Erzählperspektive des homosexuellen Ich-Erzählers und die Themen Verlust, Selbstreflexion und Identität. Ausgehend von den Ich-Erzählern und den verschiedenen Settings, werden die literarische Darstellung des homosexuellen Erzählers im jeweiligen Kontext sowie der Umgang der heteronormativen und homophoben Gesellschaft mit den homosexuellen Charakteren und ihr Einfluss auf diese untersucht. Dabei zeigt sich, dass sich die gesetzlichen Zugeständnisse der liberalen Verfassung keineswegs zu hundert Prozent in der Gesellschaft widerspiegeln, die nach wie vor zu einem großen Teil von Intoleranz und Homophobie geprägt ist. Diese Diskrepanz zwischen homosexuellem Verlangen und den gesellschaftlichen Moralvorstellungen zwingt viele Homosexuelle dazu, ihre sexuelle Identität und somit ihr wahres Selbst zu verstecken und zu verleugnen. Heyns thematisiert diese Diskrepanz und dekonstruiert die stereotypische Darstellung der homosexuellen Charaktere, indem er deren alltäglichen Kampf um Identitätsfindung und gegen Diskriminierung und Unterdrückung mittels verschiedener Erzähltechniken wie Ironie oder dem naiven Erzähler aufzeigt, was dem Leser und der Leserin die Möglichkeit gibt, die erzählten Ereignisse aus dem Blickwinkel der homosexuellen Protagonisten nachzuempfinden und die Haltung der Gesellschaft diesen gegenüber kritisch zu reflektieren. Heyns Romane, in denen stets der menschliche Aspekt der individuellen Geschichten der Außenseiter in den Vordergrund gestellt wird, zeigen auf, dass Verschiedenartigkeit die Norm ist und dekonstruieren die Gleichsetzung von Homosexualität mit Effemination, Abnormität und Perversität. Sie lesen sich somit wie Plädoyers für Menschlichkeit und Toleranz von Verschiedenartigkeit, und tragen im Speziellen dazu bei, das Thema Homosexualität verständlicher und zugänglicher zu machen und zu normalisieren.