



Review Essay Landscapes/Voices In/Of Transition/Transformation

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Krog, Antjie. (2003). *A Change of Tongue*. Johannesburg: Random House.

Pieterse, Edgar, & Meintjies, Frank (Eds). (2004). *Voices of the Transition: The Politics, Poetics and Practices of Social Change in South Africa*. Sandown: Heinemann.

As an educational researcher who frequently privileges narrative and fiction I was pleased to learn that Sello Duiker's (2000) acclaimed first novel, *Thirteen Cents*, was among the key inspirations for *Voices of the Transition* and for shaping the deliberative processes through which it was produced. An extract from Duiker's novel, presented as Chapter 10 of *Voices of the Transition*, begins as follows:

My name is Azure. *Ah-zoo-ray*. That's how you say it. My mother gave me that name. It's the only thing I have left from her ...

I live alone. The streets of Sea Point are my home. But I'm almost a man; I'm nearly thirteen years old. That means I know where to find food that hasn't seen too many ants and flies in Camps Bay or Clifton. That is if there aren't any policemen patrolling the streets. They don't like us much ...

I lost my parents three years ago. Papa was bad with money and got Mama in trouble. The day they killed them I was away at school. I came back to our shack to find them in a pool of blood. That was three years ago. That was the last time I went to school. (p.74)

Annette Gough and I walked and drove through the streets of Sea Point for several days in August 2004 but we saw and heard little of the Cape Town that Azure inhabits. Our temporary home was the secure fortress of The Peninsular All Suite Hotel, poised in postcard perfection between mountain and sea. Our privilege protected us from the hunger, dependence and desperation that street kids like Azure endure every day, and we were largely insulated from the people (be they pimps, paedophiles or the police) who determine at least some of the conditions under which such young people struggle to survive. Pieterse and Meintjies acknowledge a similar insulation from these circumstances in their Preface:

The story of Azure's tormented young life and brave endurance rang home with such ferocity that we immediately knew that much of what we do and talk about in the development sector in South Africa is in need of critique and replacement. The depth, nuance, relentlessness and minimalist beauty of the novel suggested to us that the author –

probably oblivious to the specialist discourses and institutions of development – had a far better grasp of what the challenges are in South Africa compared to the army of professional development protagonists in the state and civil society organisations. There was clearly a need to bring such intimate perceptiveness and compassion into dialogue with the stiff, procedural practices of the formal development sector. (p.xiii)

I would prefer to say that Duiker has a *different* (not necessarily ‘better’) grasp on some challenges of South Africa’s transition than, say, Crain Soudien, whose Chapter 8, ‘Fighting for a normal life: becoming a young adult in the new South Africa’, offers a very useful supplement to Azure’s story. Soudien is concerned with understanding the socio-economic structures and forces that produce the circumstances that Azure and many others endure, and his meta-analysis of a range of surveys, statistics and profiles clearly supports his contention that ‘growing up in South Africa is, for most, a journey of a dream denied, if not betrayed. Inspired by the vision of the new South Africa, the hope and faith of youth are tested each day as they and their parents struggle to make ends meet’.

Graeme Gotz’s Chapter 9, ‘Velaphi’s dreams’, immediately follows Soudien’s academic essay and precedes the excerpts from Duiker’s novel and, using a mixture of textual genres and styles, witnesses a particular young man’s troubled encounters with the criminal justice system between 1996 and 2003. Gotz produces a biographical collage of first and third person accounts of Velaphi’s experiences, together with excerpts from a variety of other contemporary sources, including an excerpt from President Thabo Mbeki’s 2003 State of the Nation Address, the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality’s *Joburg 2030 – Vision*, excerpts from legislation, a well-intentioned but patronising reference letter from an office-worker with whom Velaphi becomes acquainted, procedural notes on the activities of the South African Human Rights Commission and the establishment of an Integrated Justice System, etc. Taken together, these three chapters demonstrate that, notwithstanding the numerous post-1994 White Papers, change management exercises and performance targets, the brutal legacies of apartheid-era governmentality, continue to haunt the everyday lives of those who are poor and black.

Like much else in *Voices of the Transition*, the accumulated effects of these three chapters are much greater than the sum of their parts. Albie Sachs alludes to this quality of the book in his Foreword:

Let the reader be warned. This is not a ‘respectable’ book. If it was, it would deal solemnly with topics like the development of under-development, or the over-development of development, the variants are limitless. The pages would be filled with intellectual barometers and thermometers. Data would be captured, measured, analysed and evaluated. Master theories would be expounded, and accolades awarded or denunciations delivered. Ideology would be all, or nothing.

Instead, we have a book that glories in unpredictability and open-endedness. (p.vii)

Voices of the Transition is multi-dimensional, diverse and divergent: its 35 prose chapters include autobiographical vignettes, short stories, academic analysis and criticism, polemical journalism and

interviews, interspersed with poetry and photographic essays. This mixing of genres reinforces one among many of the book's powerful messages: that South Africa's political transition cannot (to repeat Sachs's words) 'be captured, measured, analysed and evaluated' by any single metanarrative or master theory but, rather, that a multiplicity of understandings and meanings of this complex social change can be constructed, reconstructed and deconstructed through a continual and open-ended process of juxtaposing snapshots, stories, experiences, perspectives and perceptions. For environmental educators in southern Africa, this is particularly apparent in the section that deals with the politics of state-craft and developmentalism, where Saliem Fakir's Chapter 13, 'Rejoicing or bemoaning the South African transition? The case of environment and conservation', immediately follows three poems by Sandile Dikene. There is both joy and gentle irony in the last of these, 'Love poem for my country' (p.111), as the following stanza demonstrates:

My country
is for health and wealth
see the blue of the sea
and beneath
the jewels of fish
deep under the bowels of soil
hear
the golden voice
of a miner's praise
for my country

On the very next page, Dikene's 'Love poem' seems to be contradicted by Fakir's blunt assertion that 'you cannot be romantic about [the South African transition]' (p.112), especially in regard to issues of environmental justice, rights-based approaches to development, and the conflicts and/or synergies between conservation and development:

One of the biggest challenges... is the use of environmental provisions by rich and in most cases white people to block low cost housing development, have squatters removed, or simply create buffers and conservancies to increase property prices and impose security cordons in certain areas under the pretext of environmental protection. Environment is a convenient deception: we are allured by its 'nice feel', but allow our innocence to be abused by dark intents in our society. There is a double layer of environmentalism that is beginning to unfold in South Africa, laced with racial overtones and new forms of economic exclusion. (pp.114–5)

I interpret Dikene's 'Love poem' as an alternative way of expressing South Africa's 'double layer' of alluring landscapes and 'dark intents' and it thus complements rather than contradicts Fakir's analysis. Fakir also provides a particularly astute discussion of the ways in which globalisation and South Africa's incorporation into the international community have influenced South African environmental movements. He argues that labelling South Africa's

‘compromise with capital’ as adopting a neoliberal agenda is ‘too superficial, dismissive and unsophisticated in being able to provide an understanding of how domestic and international policies and relations mutually reinforce each other’ (p.116). A few pages previously, another of Dikene’s poems, ‘Way back home’ (p.110), provides a humorous counterpoint to Fakir’s argument:

how much of a black comedy, really,
is Africa, to the unity of Nations?
How satisfying are potatoes as a relief measure
dished out from the gun greased hands...

Maybe
if we do a tango in Lederhosen
and karate seven times a day
the G-seven will give us G-strings
to enter Hollywood

The editors argue that the ‘undertow’ of *Voices of the Transition* is ‘a passion for the advancement of vibrant democratic politics within civil society and the state’ wherein democracy is understood ‘as a passionate, pluralist and contested engagement to interpret the everyday meanings and applications of values such as social justice, cosmopolitanism and sustainability’ (p.4). In aiming to enrich democracy through vigorous and rigorous debate (and, if necessary, dissent), *Voices of the Transition* shares an intellectual agenda with Yusef Waghid and Lesley Le Grange’s (2004) edited collection, *Imaginaries on Democratic Education and Change*, although each book anticipates somewhat different audiences, with the former explicitly addressing development professionals and the latter speaking chiefly to educators in universities and schools. Nevertheless, the overlapping professional interests of those who work in the development, environment and education sectors means that *Voices of the Transition* is a rich resource for environmental educators.

During 2003 Annette Gough and I were invited to reflect on the changing character of environmental education research in southern Africa as we had experienced it since 1998. Our response was to offer multiple readings framed by postcolonialism, changing epistemologies and methodologies, contexts of transformation and tension, the influence of international organisations such as the United Nations and its instrumentalities, and concerns about human rights and accountability. Our conclusion affirmed the postcolonialist trajectories of environmental education research in southern Africa and speculated on the distinctive possibilities that recovering *ubuntu* might offer to researchers in this region (see Gough & Gough, 2004). If we had read *Voices of the Transition* before writing our essay, I suspect that we might have added at least two other critical frames, each of which is signalled by discrete sub-sections of the book, namely, ‘The unruly phenomenology of memory and identity’ and ‘Shifting ideologies of developmentalism’.

Voices of the Transition provides ample evidence that changes in environments – be they in landscapes or cityscapes – are inseparable not only from ideological and institutional changes

but also from personal transformations. Many contributors foreground the emotional investments they and others have made in the interventions that produce change at both micro and macro levels. For example, in Chapter 20, 'Johannesburg: on being a native at home and abroad', John Matshikiza not only recognises the city's capacity to be appropriated as a metaphor for everything that is bad and/or good about South Africa, but also (as the editors point out) demonstrates its generativity as a point of departure for his searching reflections 'on identity, movement, African-ness, home, exile and everything in between... reminding the reader that this transition was not hatched yesterday, and that the transition does not belong to South Africans, but rather to the African continent and the world at large' (p.8). Matshikiza's chapter resonates well with my own feelings about the transition. As a non-native, non-resident who nevertheless feels increasingly 'at home' in South Africa, my engagement with political transformation in the region since 1998 has not primarily been altruistic – indeed I have explicitly rejected being positioned as a 'helper' (see Gough, 1998) – but, rather, is borne out of what Nancy Fraser (1993) calls an 'inclusive, universalist, global view of solidarity as shared responsibility... rooted in the fact that we inhabit an increasingly global public space of discourse and representation' (p.22). In other words, our interdependence within a common global knowledge economy provides a moral imperative for representing and performing educational research as a transnational practice (see also Gough, 2004).

Reconstructions of memory and identity are at the heart of Chapter 21, 'Insider reflections on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission', by former commissioner Russell Ally, but are amplified in much more intimate ways by Kopano Ratele in Chapter 22, 'Recovering the ordinary'. Ratele offers a deeply moving account of the impact of South Africa's transition on black men and their masculinity, revealing the fright and fear of black men of his own generation as they struggle to reinvent themselves in a context of endemic gendered violence. By way of contrast, Adam Haupt reveals a lighter side of transition in Chapter 25, 'Hip-hop in the age of empire: Cape Flats style', a tribute to the vitality and enthusiasm with which young people are able to generate distinctively local soundscapes from global sound waves. In Chapter 24, 'Shifting soundscapes and youth dance cultures', S'busiso Nxumalo provides a similarly upbeat account of the broader cultural significance of the emergence of kwaito – 'a kind of mid-tempo house style (around 100 to 120bpm) with an African twist' (p. 207) – as a symbolic reclamation of black identity following the release of Nelson Mandela. But this chapter has another twist: Nxumalo's coauthor, Dominique Wooldridge interweaves his kwaito story with a provocative account of the parallel development of white urban dance music, which she interprets as burrowing deeper into the suburbs as an expression of a middle-class disconnection with urban (i.e. black) cores.

If we (Gough & Gough, 2004) had added memory and identity to the critical frames with which we analysed the changing character of environmental education research in southern Africa since 1998 we would probably have had to conclude that not much has changed. Few environmental education researchers appear to have attempted the admittedly difficult task of confronting the traumatic effects of apartheid on the reconstruction of memory and identity and what this means for their work, although Le Grange (2004) has taken some welcome initial steps in this direction in his recent essay on racialised embodiment and environmental education. The reconstruction of popular media/culture in post-apartheid South Africa, and its

implications for the identities of young learners (see also Nadine Dolby, 2001), is similarly under-researched in environmental education.

With the hindsight enabled by reading *Voices of the Transition*, the second additional frame we might have used in our analysis is what the editors call 'shifting ideologies of developmentalism', especially in relation to the reshaping and remaking of South Africa's segregated and fragmented cities: 'South Africa has irredeemably become urban during the transition, a pattern that will continue into the future, despite the overwhelming rural bias that continues to dominate much of the political sentiment amongst the political elite' (p.9). We wonder if there might still be a subtle rural bias in environmental education/research that remains as a residue of its divided history? Saliem Fakir's chapter alludes to this possibility in his reading of the range of recent transitions in the South African environmental movement. At one end of the spectrum, the democratic political transition allowed social and environmental justice activists to expand their reach and influence, with many of them being involved in the initial crafting of the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP). Their concerns were both rural and urban, seeking to deracialise environmentalism and resolve environmental problems produced by apartheid policies, including the inferior infrastructure, services and natural resources available in black neighbourhoods and settlements.

On the other end of the spectrum, we have the traditional conservation and wildlife groups who steeped themselves in a protectionist model of environmentalism. It was always nature against people... In a sense, people became an endangered species as a result, because apartheid provided the rules and legitimised the exclusion and alienation of people from land and the natural resources that came with it. Perhaps South Africa was unique in that this classic form of environmentalism found succour and immersion in South Africa's racialised superstructure. It fed off it as the seclusion of land for the purposes of conservation would not have been this extensive had it not been for apartheid.

The majority of this group did not transform organically, but read the political landscape, and voluntarily chose to retrofit their discourse with that of the (new) dominant political discourse. All of a sudden, a group that had a fetish for animals and the wild were suddenly people-loving and showing a sensitivity towards social justice issues. Today they speak environment in development terms. (p.114)

The most eloquent contributions to rethinking urban development in *Voices of the Transition* are two photo essays. Cedric Nunn's 'Yeoville' richly illustrates the creativity of the ordinary people who are shaping the emergent cityscape of this Johannesburg suburb as the class (and racial) structure changes. Seopedi Ruth Motau's photo essay, 'Making an RDP house a home', is both a testimony to resilience and an invitation to rethink 'development'. As Motau writes in her brief introduction to her photo essay:

The waves of pastel coloured RDP settlements that clutch the outskirts of South African towns and cities also constitute the most blatant manifestation of continuities with the past because they intensify spatial segregation and inequality. In this vexing paradox are

the people caught in the vicissitudes of development; the people who have to make a life, nurture a family, make their way to jobs (if these exist), build new social networks and become part of a community – in other words – make a home on the dusty ‘clean slates’ that are RDP housing settlements. (p.267)

Other excellent contributions to rethinking the ideologies, institutions and practices of development include Jenny Robinson’s Chapter 29, ‘Communities to come: remaking cities in a new South Africa’ and Zarina Patel’s Chapter 30, ‘Environmental values and the building of sustainable communities’. More intriguing is Eve Annecke and Mark Swilling’s Chapter 31, ‘An experiment in living and learning in the Boland’, a case study of transformative politics – and personal transformation – in the heartland of Afrikaner conservatism. Annecke and Swilling tell us what is ultimately a success story about a Section 21 (non-profit) company, Lynedoch Development, set up in 1999. The local community leaders and the authors (both of whom are academics and development activists) constituted a board of management that was ‘inspired by the possibility of building an inclusive living and learning community that would demonstrate in practice what it means to live in sustainable ways’ (p.296). For me, the most fascinating aspect of their case study was their emphasis on storytelling, with subheadings such as ‘Storytellers and development workers’, ‘Telling the story’ and ‘Making spaces for stories’ providing the structural framework for their account. Their conclusion, ‘From a story to many stories’, locates their optimism about the future of innovative and creative development work in ‘our ability to tell and hear the stories of our changing times’:

In his novel *Astonishing the Gods*, Ben Okri tells the story of a man who thought he was invisible because all the stories around him were not about him. An extraordinary and surprising South Africa is becoming increasingly visible as the vast array of local stories are told. The challenge will be to defend the space for these stories, or live with the consequences of codifying a single official story. For us, building the story of Lynedoch has been an experience of becoming visible not because others believed our story, but because our story has created the space in which other stories can emerge. (p.302)

Creating a space in which other stories can emerge is also a central theme of Antjie Krog’s *A Change of Tongue*. For Krog, ‘a change of tongue’ is a literal truth: she published ten volumes of Afrikaans poetry (and two children’s books, also in Afrikaans), before moving into journalism. Her experiences in reporting on the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission for SABC radio and for the *Mail & Guardian* provided the raw material for her English prose debut, the multiple award-winning *Country of My Skull* (1998). *A Change of Tongue*, also written in English, explores issues of identity, belonging, change and personal transformation in South Africa, through personal narratives of individuals, families, groups, poets, officials and politicians. Krog shapes these stories – many of which are moving and/or amusing memoirs of (and meditations on) food, language, landscape and small town life – in ways that generate possibilities for other ways of being (past, present and future) within a country and a continent, as South Africans adapt to their new democracy.

Although Krog is the sole author of *A Change of Tongue*, it is as much about multiplicity – the innumerable ways in which we can speak and write the politics, poetics and practices of social change in South Africa – as is *Voices of the Transition*. But Krog's voice is more personal, more individual, and she foregrounds the embodiment of voice, identity and landscape to a much greater extent than any of the contributors to the latter book. This is clearly signalled in *Country of My Skull*, which invites readers to acknowledge the interconnections between the author's physical being and her country, the country of *her* skull. Yet an alternative reading of this title is that it invites readers to doubt her claim to an embodied identification with the country of her birth. The skull is the material site of human memory, which suggests that the country of her skull is internally created, an imagined (even imaginary) country. The text itself supports this reading, with its recurring theme of Krog's sense of alienation from the country of her family and childhood, and her fear that she may not be welcome in the 'New South Africa' of her imagination. As Carli Coetzee (2001) writes, this sense of alienation is further emphasised by Krog's choice of the cover image for the South African edition, a photograph by George Hallet of a landscape empty of any human presence:

No built structures are visible; in this sense, it is an image unlike those heroic landscapes by Pierneef, the painter associated most closely with Afrikaner nationalism, in which beams of heavenly light bathe the bright white homestead. Yet the landscape devoid of human presence is not devoid of ideological content, as has often been remarked. (p.687)

Thus, the landscape on the cover of Krog's book can be interpreted as a visual equivalent of what J.M. Coetzee (1988) calls *White Writing*, a literature of disembodied landscapes that reflects the concerns of a people no longer European, but not yet African, and that fails to imagine a relationship with South Africa's indigenous peoples: 'Official historiography long told a tale of how until the nineteenth century of the Christian era the interior of what we now call South Africa was unpeopled. The poetry of empty space may one day be accused of furthering the same fiction' (p.177).

But Carli Coetzee (2001) argues that in Krog's work this landscape comes to represent something new, different, and perhaps more ambitious in white writing:

Krog's country of her skull is a landscape from which she feels herself barred, as a white South African, on account of her whiteness, on account of the name of her father. It is a landscape familiar from her childhood, the landscape of the fathers and the brothers; but she can never again enter it. And at the same time it is a landscape into which she wishes to be invited by her fellow South Africans. But the figure in the landscape is distinctly different from [J.M.] Coetzee's lone figure unable to imagine another presence. In Krog's work, there is a self-conscious desire to address an audience that includes black South Africans... [But] the addressee of the text is not stable. At times it seems clear that the text invokes fellow-Afrikaners as readers, precisely those whom Krog wishes to convince of our/their guilt and complicity in South Africa's injustices, as recorded by the proceedings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. At other times, the text is explicitly

addressed to those whom Krog invests with the power to allow her into the country of her imagination and heart. (p.686)

This point about whom the book addresses is borne out by its conclusion. Throughout *Country of My Skull*, Krog emphatically asserts (and frequently reasserts) that she is *not* writing poetry. Nevertheless, it concludes (on p.365) with a poem written (significantly, given her prominence as an Afrikaans poet) in English:

I am changed forever. I want to say
 forgive me
 forgive me
 forgive me

You whom I have wronged, please
take me

with you.

There are a number of passages in *Country of My Skull* that provide clues to Krog's interest in the embodiment of voice in tongue. For example:

The word 'truth' makes me uncomfortable.

The word 'truth' still trips my tongue.

'Your voice tightens up when you approach the word "truth,"' the technical assistant says, irritated. 'Repeat it twenty times so that you become familiar with it. *Truth is mos jou job!*' ('Truth is your job, after all!')

I hesitate at the word; I am not used to using it. Even when I type it, it ends up as either *turth* or *trth*. I have never bedded that word in a poem. I prefer the word 'lie.' The moment the lie raises its head, I smell blood. Because it is there... where the truth is closest. (p.50)

Krog amplifies on her hesitation in a recent interview with *The Guardian's* Rory Carroll (2004) who quotes her as saying: 'I'm a poet. I distrust anything that starts with a capital letter and ends with a full stop because people don't think in full, clear sentences'.

Many reviews of *Country of My Skull* praise it for allowing the 'voices of the voiceless' to be heard, which is hardly surprising given that variations on the term 'voicelessness' have become veritable clichés in discussions of South African transition. But, as documentary movies such as Lee Hirsch's (2002) *Amandla! A Revolution In Four-Part Harmony*, amply demonstrate, black South Africans have always had a voice: what they lacked were sympathetic ears. Throughout *Country of My Skull* Krog rarely yields to the temptation of imagining herself as the heroic white journalist giving voice to the voiceless. Rather, she looks for ways to escape (or be released) from a prison walled by her name, race, lineage and tongue, and to find a voice in which she might be audible. Thus, for example, she recalls moments in which she sensed her

exclusion from the collective 'you whom I have wronged':

The proceedings are concluded with the anthem. I stand, caught unawares by the Sesotho version and the knowledge that I am white, that I have to reacquaint myself with this land, that my language carries violence as a voice, that I can do nothing about it, that after so many years I still feel uneasy with what is mine, with what is me. (p.285)

But Krog wrote her Afrikaans poetry while she was working in a black teachers college and she speaks some Sesotho, which allows her to experience a moment of inclusion:

The woman next to me looks surprised when I sing the Free State version of 'Nkosi'. She smiles, holds her head close to mine and shifts to the alto part. The song leader opens the melody to us. The sopranos envelop, the bass voices support... And I wade into song – in a language that is not mine, in a tongue I do not know. It is fragrant inside the song, and among the keynotes of sorrow and suffering there are soft silences where we who belong to this landscape, all of us, can come to rest. (pp.285–6)

A Change of Tongue narrates Krog's quest to find a voice – a tongue – within a particular community and a particular language. When asked in a recent interview about her choice of the book's title, Krog's (2003) response was that 'it deals with the fish on the cover that is a sole'. She explains the links between skull, tongue and sole (and perhaps even the obvious homonym of the latter – soul) in the context of elucidating the meaning of 'transformation'. Her explanation includes the following unsourced quotation from an email sent to her by Professor Guy Smith:

The chief characteristic of flatfishes like the sole is that one flank really functions as the underside of the fish... The juvenile fish are built perfectly normally and have to go through certain kinds of *transformation* and *metamorphosis* [my emphasis¹] before the function of the flank is determined. At the same time this is happening, other forms of morphological asymmetry take place. The eye of the underside migrates to the other flank, which will now be functioning as the upper side. The mouth becomes oblique, the nasal and gill openings are removed to a different position, various skull bones develop asymmetrically, and on the upper side a dark pigmentation develops. (pp.128–9)

As if to emphasise the parallels with South Africa's transition, Krog reiterates: 'The mouth becomes oblique, the skull changes, the upper side turns dark' (p.129). She reinterprets and extends these metaphorical connections in the interview (Krog, 2003):

The sole is born upright, and then to survive predators it has to go down to the bottom, and then its one side becomes the down side and the other side has to colour. Then the eye also moves over to the other side, the mouth changes, the tongue changes, and then the bone structure of the head changes, all in order to survive. So it's very much a change of sound, a change of speaking, a change of watching, seeing, listening, a change of

thinking, that all of us actually have to go through. We have to sound different, you have to translate each other's texts and thoughts, so that we can get a communal text to which everybody can relate. We don't have that at this stage.

My first impressions of *A Change of Tongue* were that it seemed to be the print equivalent of thinking out loud, a transcript of Krog's commentary on her own progress towards generating 'a communal text' (or at least a communal textuality). But I had second thoughts when I began to see resemblances between her text and what have been known since medieval and Renaissance times as 'commonplace books', bound volumes of blank pages that we are now more likely to use as scrapbooks. As Barbara Benedict (1996) explains, commonplace books are 'collections of sayings or verses transcribed from many sources into one text. Like printed anthologies, these collect and condense literature for private or classroom use, serving as cultural cribs and personal libraries' (p.1):

Commonplace books sanction the selection of passages made significant by personal experience and conscience. Many commonplace passages urge contentment and console the reader on the imminence of death, while also containing traces that indicate the particular character of the possessor...

While reorganizing printed literature to meet personal interests, however, seventeenth-century commonplace books also reflect its influence in defining personal morality even as they invite individual interpretation of textual meaning. (pp.10–11)

Although some parts of *A Change of Tongue* resemble contemporary journalism (Chapter 1 is a lively account of an interschool athletics meeting), others have the characteristics of commonplace books that Benedict outlines above. For example, there are numerous 'sayings or verses transcribed from many sources', including English translations of Krog's own early Afrikaans poetry and prose (such as pieces written for a school magazine), her mother's published short stories and humorous vignettes, emails from relatives and other acquaintances, etc. Krog makes it clear that a number of passages have been 'made significant by personal experience and conscience' and that they contain 'traces that indicate the particular character of the possessor'. She makes it equally clear that she has reorganised her textual materials 'to meet personal interests' and in many instances explains their 'influence in defining [her] personal morality'; she also demonstrates how her selections 'invite [her] individual interpretation of [their] textual meaning'. This is particularly evident in the chapter that recalls her discovery, in her early teens, that her mother writes humorous sketches for a magazine under her maiden name. Krog presents the transcription of her mother's (translated) account of the family's disastrous vacation in Cape Town some years previously in short sections interspersed with her recollections of how she initially responded to the story (including an angry confrontation with her mother about its fictional elements). The layout and design of the text at this point deliberately resembles a scrapbook. Sections of her mother's story are set in a smaller font, indented, and bracketed at upper left and lower right by a graphic symbol that recalls a photo corner mount.

One difficulty with commonplace books and scrapbooks is that they are composed principally to meet the personal needs and interests of their authors, and their mass production presumes that many readers will find similar pleasures within them. In Krog's case, as an already celebrated author, this may be a reasonable presumption. However, I was frustrated by some aspects of Krog's style, especially her disregard for the citation of sources. For example, Krog recalls an argument with a former colleague who, in the course of their debate, quotes from a book by Njabulo Ndebele (who, incidentally, is also a contributor to *Voices of the Transition*). It is a powerful passage, and I would have very much liked Krog to divulge its source. Such quibbles aside, I have few doubts that sharing the commonplaces of Krog's South Africa will richly reward the majority of her readers.

Finally, reading *Country of My Skull* and *A Change of Tongue* in close succession raises questions for me about the possible significance of the shift in narrative genres they represent. In *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, Mary Carruthers (1990) demonstrates how the illumination and calligraphy of mediaeval manuscripts were parts of memory systems. She argues that the medieval mind was memorial but that the contemporary Western mind is documentary. In memorial culture the mind was stocked with numerous sayings and stories and ideas clustered around various subjects that were absorbed deeply by memorisation and that then informed the production of images and thoughts. In each person these grew more from the conscious and unconscious workings of his or her own mind rather than from external authority, whether that be via empirical observation or an authoritative text. Carruthers suggests that text for us has become something like empirical observation, to be certified and verified by the science of text editing. But before the development of empirical ways of thinking, books stored temporarily the material that went into the permanent memory, whereas now memory stores temporarily what goes into the permanent written record. I suggest that by following her documentary text, *Country of My Skull*, with a commonplace book – a characteristic genre of memorial culture – Krog implicitly casts doubt on any text (including her own) that claims to document South Africa's transition authoritatively. In *A Change of Tongue* Krog performs the transformation of her memorial mind, and thereby sets an example that many other knowledge workers – including southern African environmental education researchers – might find it generative to follow.

Endnote

1 That is, Smith's emphasis.

Notes on the Reviewer

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